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Marriage in the Midst of Ministry



If you are involved in ministry, this download offers balance, perspective, and practical ideas for your marriage.

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Introduction



Putting Marriage First

By JoHannah Reardon

My husband and I have always been passionate about serving. We met in a college ministry and independently joined the staff of that ministry after college. Within a year, our friendship blossomed into much more and we married. So we began married life as co-ministers to college students, equally involved in the same ministry.



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Putting Marriage First

Eventually, however, my husband felt a strong call to go to seminary. After praying about it for a year, I was confident of that call also and we began a new ministry journey. He studied, and I helped support us as I raised our two children and became (surprise!) pregnant with our third.

Upon graduation, we started a church (emphasis on *we*). Although he had the paid position, I wholeheartedly gave enough hours to the establishment of the church to warrant a paycheck. Those were stressful but happy days—and we guarded our marriage tenaciously, knowing that unless that was strong, the rest of our ministry would be pretty weak.

However, when our kids began to grow, I sought paid ministry to help pay bills. For the first time in our married life, we were ministering in different arenas, and we found it much harder to find points of unity. But because we were so committed to our marriage, we worked hard at it, and have a great marriage in spite of our busy schedules.

In this download, we hope to help you figure out how to make your marriage a priority as you minister. These articles will bring you balance and perspective, as well as practical ideas for how to flourish in your marriage *and* your ministry.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor, KYRIA

Christianity Today

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Ministry Times Two



For Eric and Jennifer Garcia, serving together and having a good marriage aren't accidental—they're intentional.

By Dawn Zemke

They were the two people least likely to end up a married couple.

At least that's what Eric and Jennifer Garcia would have said when they were students in the same high school. Jennifer had frizzy red hair and braces and sang with the Songbirds. Eric was the good-looking, popular jock. Though they'd known each other since the fifth grade, they moved in very different circles.



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Only after they'd graduated from different colleges and returned to their hometown did Eric and Jennifer come to appreciate all they had in common—especially shared values and a deep commitment to God. Those elements formed a foundation that has sustained their 15-year marriage through the upheavals of career changes, four children, and eventually the daunting task of founding a ministry organization—the Association of Marriage and Family Ministries (AMFM).

Knowing each other well made for few adjustments in the first years of their marriage, when Jennifer was teaching school and Eric was working as a consultant for faith organizations such as Promise Keepers and Moody Bible Institute while running his own distribution company.

"We didn't have a big learning curve," Jennifer recalls. "Nothing rocked our boat. Until the kids came along."

A New Direction

Determined not to let work dominate, they set boundaries to guard their time as a family and as a couple—such as Eric's commitment to eat breakfast and dinner at home.

Eventually, Eric accepted a job in Arizona, and the Garcias moved to Scottsdale. After "church surfing," they found and fell in love with Scottsdale Bible Church. They wanted to get involved, to give back to God since he'd been so good to them. That's when they realized they wanted to do ministry together. And what better place than in the church's ministry to married couples?

That marriage ministry convinced Eric and Jennifer of the great need for the church even further to support and nurture married couples. "We saw what we thought were the healthiest couples, from the best families, and they were having problems,"



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Eric explains. "Yet they were saying, 'Everything's fine.'"

"They weren't processing their faith or their life together," adds Jennifer. "They were on separate tracks. And *we'd* lived that way."

During a leadership meeting a few months after they began working with couples, Wayne Lehsten, the head of the church's marriage ministry team, mentioned that he was taking a three-month sabbatical. His repeated attempts to find marriage ministry tools their church could use had been unsuccessful. During the sabbatical, Wayne planned to apply himself full-time to the task.

Eric reacted with disbelief. "I couldn't believe there wasn't an organization for that. I'd been consulting in the ministry community for 20 years. I was sure there was an organization for everything."

Determined to show Wayne that the sabbatical was unnecessary, Eric called his friend John Trent. Trent, the founder of StrongFamilies.com, confirmed Wayne's assessment: no organization existed for proactive marriage ministry training. He also admitted he was one of a group who'd been praying for eight years that someone would create such an organization.

In that moment, fueled by the needs of Eric and Jennifer's own church, the concept for AMFM was born.

"I went home all excited," Eric recalls of sharing his dream with his wife. "But Jennifer said, 'We're not doing it.'"

"Eric is an entrepreneur," she explains. "He's *always* coming to me with great ideas. We'd just finished piloting a new ministry with the married couples at our church. I wasn't ready to start another."

Over the next few weeks, as John Trent and Eric met over coffee, John would mention more "big" ministry names who would get behind the project. Eric would relay that information



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and reiterate his desire to start a national ministry for marriage and family church leaders. But Jennifer continued to say no.

"I saw such a need," Eric says. "But I'd committed not to do anything unless Jennifer and I were on the same page."

Both Eric and Jennifer continued to pray about the idea. Finally, when he approached her for the fourth time, she cautiously agreed. "I was still apprehensive," she admits. "But I told him, 'If we take baby steps, and God's clearly in it, then we can do this.'"

To avoid burnout, Eric and Jennifer set some strict boundaries—Eric wouldn't be gone for more than three days at a time, and they'd travel as a couple only once a month.

Ministry Shared

On November 11, 2003, having given less than two weeks' notice, Eric and Jennifer hosted an initial organizational meeting of 30 people involved in marriage and family ministry from all over the country. The premise of the meeting was simple: If there was an organization that could serve you, what would it look like?

The result was the creation of the Association of Marriage and Family Ministries—an organization dedicated to training, equipping, and resourcing local churches so they can build proactive marriage and family ministries.

"We're a 'train the trainer' model," Eric explains. "We introduce resource providers and educators to the church." They accomplish this through annual national conferences, monthly e-newsletters, and focus groups for 15 different family and marriage ministries—such as stepfamilies, parenting, and sexual wholeness.

"We're really about building relationships," Jennifer adds. AMFM is close to their hearts. And they are intentional



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about sharing completely in it. Though Eric is the visionary and main speaker, Jennifer has her own roles to play.

"I love the relationship part," she says. "I enjoy talking to people about AMFM and recruiting new members."

Their modeling of ministering as a couple has paid off: more AMFM conference presenters are doing so as couples, accepting the challenge of blending differing gifts into joint ministry.

Eric and Jennifer admit it isn't easy. But the blessings are plentiful. "We have so many things to talk about and collaborate on," says Jennifer, "whether it's meeting with other couples involved with AMFM or putting together outlines for speaking engagements."

"We have all these connection points," Eric agrees. "We're writing, speaking, rearing children, and sharing a house together. We know exactly what's going on in each other's lives. How many couples can say that?"

Yet they also recognize the need to insure the ministry never competes with their marriage. They have a mentor couple who touch base with them each month, asking tough questions about how each of them is doing. And Eric checks with Jennifer before every trip. If she says she needs him at home, he doesn't go.

Just as God has blessed their marriage, he's also blessed AMFM. In the three years since that first meeting of 30 people, their membership has grown to more than 1,000. And so have the number of lives touched by the organization.

Eric recalls one couple who'd been in ministry for 18 years. "They told me, 'Before we got your phone call, we'd made up our mind to quit. But you've opened a whole new opportunity for our area of work, and we're going to stick with it.'"

Eric and Jennifer stress that they aren't perfect, just



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blessed. "The bottom line is that God has been faithful," Eric says. "We've been fortunate to be placed where we are."

Their goal for AMFM? To train 10,000 churches in ten years, a 100,000 lay-leader army doing marriage and family ministry for their pastors in the local church.

It's an endeavor they never grow tired of, and one that has brought countless benefits to Eric and Jennifer, their children, and their marriage—the largest being their focus on serving together.

"This is exactly what God designed us for as a couple," Jennifer says. "We really are living our dream. It's not what we'd planned, but it's what God gave us. And it's wonderful."

For more information on AMFM, visit www.AMFMonline.com.

This article was originally published in MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, 2004.

Reflect

- *What boundaries have you set in place to guard your marriage from the stresses of ministry?*
- *What are some advantages to working together in ministry, rather than having just one partner involved?*
- *If your husband is not involved in your ministry, how can you include and update him in what you are doing to help bring unity to your marriage?*
- *Are there any ways you put your ministry before your marriage? If so, name three ways you can correct that.*

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Balancing Ministry and Marriage

We needed to understand each other
before we pursued our ministries.

By Simon Presland

Gary's side: I wanted to share a ministry

When Barb and I were first married, she was always the life of the party. She was bold and determined, and she really seemed to know what she wanted. When we became Christians seven years into our marriage, I thought God's pronouncement that "the two shall become one" included sharing the same church activities.



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Although I'd only heard Barb sing at home, I assumed that her outgoing personality, combined with my love for music, made music ministry a perfect fit for both of us. As I thought about us singing together in the choir, it seemed obvious that we both belonged in this couple-suited ministry. But the more I tried to show Barb the benefits of signing up, the more distant she became. She always seemed to be preoccupied with other things, and she avoided eye contact with me. I stopped asking how she felt about the ministry after she answered me one day by screaming, "Will you quit pushing me!"

After that, Barb found other interests. She started burying herself in books and Bibles and listening to different sermons and teaching tapes. But when I offered my point of view about what she was doing, she would get upset. I watched, confused, as the emotional walls between us grew higher. Trying to comfort Barb with a hug was like holding a block of ice. She may have responded physically, but her emotions were worlds away. For weeks, even the limited conversation that we held had icicles hanging all over it.

Barb's side: He was trying to control me.

Before becoming a Christian, I was afraid to show my real self to others. My boldness was a facade that I used to hide my insecurities behind. Born to laugh, Gary's ability to carry on a conversation with anyone always made me feel at ease with him.

After I became a Christian, though, God started showing me who I really was. No longer driven by the need to please people, I learned that I didn't really like crowds or big parties. Besides this, God gave me a hunger to study the Bible. I spent hours reading it, digging into reference books, and listening to teaching tapes. In a recurring dream I saw myself standing in



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front of people, teaching them from the Bible. When I shared this with Gary, he wasn't enthused. That hurt me.

Gary's mind was set on us ministering together. He tried convincing me that music ministry was best for both of us. When I told him I wasn't interested, he suddenly entered my world. He flipped through my notes, read my books, and shared his opinions about them with me.

I felt like Gary was trying to control me. Inside, I was seething with resentment, so I froze Gary out of my life. Since he worked a swing shift, I found all kinds of ways to avoid him. I often thought of saying something to Gary, but every time I tried, the words would get stuck in my throat.

What Gary and Barb Did:

Frosted feelings were damaging their marriage; it was time for some honest dialogue. Together, they decided to meet in their living room with a trusted friend—and full-time counselor—and pour out their hearts.

"That conversation took the pressure off us both," says Gary. "For the first time, Barb and I openly expressed our own side of the issue. With a third party involved, neither of us could interrupt while the other one was talking. We had to control our emotions and state our thoughts clearly."

"The key to resolving our conflict came when our friend discussed the importance of setting boundaries within marriage," adds Barb. "We learned that although Gary and I are one before God, it is still okay to be unique individuals as well. Having separate gifts and callings in our lives doesn't take away from the unity of our marriage. In fact, by encouraging each other to follow God's leading, our marriage can be strengthened."



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Balancing Ministry and Marriage

"I never really wanted to spend hours reading Bible commentaries any more than Barb wanted to sing in front of people," says Gary. "I finally accepted the fact that her desire was to teach, and I was content with music ministry. From that point on, as we stayed within our own callings, the icy feelings melted, and we started growing more strongly together."

"As we both follow God's calling, we now have a freedom to share how God is working in our lives and to be genuinely excited for each other," says Barb. "Our level of communication has deepened, and that has helped us to deal with other sensitive areas in our marriage. The encouragement we give to each other provides greater strength and unity between us."

"Aside from enjoying a newfound supernatural peace in our marriage," Gary says, "we've also discovered a greater joy in sharing other things as a couple. We now look forward to taking walks and going for bike rides."

Jealousy and envy still creep between them, though. For instance, Gary was asked to be a lead singer long before Barb was invited to teach at church. But instead of letting this cause division, Gary and Barb spent some quiet time together to find out how and when the disturbing feelings started. This approach enables them to deal with hurts and insecurities— together.

"We're so blessed that God's love has replaced our anger and resentment," Gary concludes. "We've learned that if we want our marriage to be the best it can be, we need to be at our individual best. And God is always more than willing to bless us when we are obedient to his ways."

This article was originally titled "Is God Calling Us Both?" and was published in MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, 2000.



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Balancing Ministry and Marriage

Reflect

- *Do you and your husband have different passions in ministry? If so, what are they?*
- *How do you and your husband provide encouragement to one another in your ministries?*
- *What activities outside of ministry can help bring the two of you together?*
- *How can you protect your heart against jealousy of your husband's ministry?*

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Guard Your Time Together

The busyness of ministry can be a death-knell to your marriage.

By James and Elizabeth Rock

Elizabeth's side: His work devours our time together

James and I met at Bair Lake Bible Camp in 1987. It was love at camp site. We were married five years later.

Since then, we've given 15 years of our lives to a camping ministry. Camp ministry requires a huge commitment of James's time and energy. Though it's been a joy, it's also a constant struggle for him to make time for me and our kids.

It feels as if too much of the year goes by, especially in the summer, when work steals our together time. The 12-hour-plus workdays seem never to end.



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Sure, I knew what we were getting into when we joined the ministry. But I'd hoped we would spend more time together, side-by-side.

Again and again, James will say, "I'll be home in ten minutes." Then something will happen at camp, and he won't be home for hours. The worst part is he always has great excuses: "I had to call a homesick camper's mom," or "A staff member was struggling and needed to talk."

How can I compete for his attention when I'm up against a hundred immediate ministry needs? I constantly feel as if I'm in the back seat, a low priority on his list.

Lately, his speaking and writing hobbies have become more like a second job. Now even when he's home, he's working on that stuff.

It feels as if I, and our time together, keep falling lower on James's list of priorities.

James's side: It's hard to know when to walk away

I love Elizabeth. I love our time together.

I also love my work at the camp. I wouldn't trade working with staff and campers for any other job in the world. But it seems something is going on every minute of every day that needs my attention. It's too easy to lose myself in the work.

It's not fair, but I constantly battle with the attitude that Elizabeth will always be there—in ten minutes, or tomorrow—but the work needs of the moment must be dealt with immediately. While I know that's not true, those thoughts constantly guide my quick, what-do-I-have-to-do-now decisions.

There's simply a difference in the urgency of work versus home demands. And I'm sure it doesn't help that I'm horrible at noticing whether a minute or an hour has passed.



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Guard Your Time Together

The reality is that this will never be a nine-to-five job. I can be at work anytime from 6 A.M. until 2 A.M. I know I need to get home more, but there always seems to be some new emergency, conversation, decision, or activity that draws me away.

What frustrates me is that I seem only to get an hour here or an hour there with Elizabeth and the twins. If we're lucky, we get one day a week of extended time together.

Honestly, I think Elizabeth might be too easy on me. She loves the ministry too, so she tends to let me off the hook for broken promises.

There has got to be a way she can help keep me in check.

What they did

Two years ago, a friend told James and Elizabeth that he and his wife had also struggled with making time for each other and had found help from a simple time-management chart.

On the chart, each day of the week is split into three sections—mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

At the beginning of each week, James and Elizabeth sit down and do their best to map out his time—when he's home, and when he'll be at work. During the busy summer, James must be home for a minimum of seven calendar sections—a total of two and a third days. Running in and out of the house for an hour doesn't count. He must spend one third or more of that day at home.

During the slower seasons, on the other hand, James must be home a minimum of nine sections, or three days.

"It's simple," Elizabeth says. "Within reason, no matter what comes up, James has to stop what he's doing and come home as scheduled."

The plan includes boundaries they've both agreed upon. For example, work is work. "Writing and preparation for speaking



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don't count as home time," Elizabeth explains. "Even if he happens to be at home while he's doing them."

A key benefit to this system is the built-in "excuse" James has when facing camp issues. "Now if something comes up when I'm supposed to head home, I'll say, 'Sorry, I can't help you with that right now,'" James says. "I explain that I have a prior commitment with my family and suggest we talk about it tomorrow."

At first it was difficult for him to tear himself away. Yet after his initial struggle, even his staff has gotten into the habit of asking, "Can we talk now, or are you on the way to family time?"

If an emergency forces him to change plans, James has to make up the time elsewhere on the calendar. So despite the schedule, there's room to change things on the fly.

"The simple act of planning is really what fixed our problem," Elizabeth says. "The time we spend with a white board helps us talk through the week."

"It forces us to communicate," James agrees. "Planning together ensures we keep the right priorities and expectations."

Sure, there are times when camp life overrides the plan, but now that they focus on needs and talk through the expectations, the ministry no longer seems to devour quite as much of their time together.

"James never seemed to have boundaries before," Elizabeth says. "It's so nice to know that he'll be home, that we can make plans, and that our time together is a priority." Although they remain committed to his work with the camp, James is able to show Elizabeth his commitment to her through taking the time to plan and follow through with this simple scheduling tool.

This article was originally titled "Last on His List" and was published in MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, 2006.



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Guard Your Time Together

Reflect

- *Do you think a time-management chart might work for you? Why or why not?*
- *If not, what other systems might work to help you make your marriage more of a priority than ministry?*
- *What excuses do you make for doing ministry when you should be spending time with your husband?*

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The Purpose-Driven Marriage

Use these five biblical purposes to give direction to your marriage.

By Rick Warren

I suppose you'd expect a man who's been married 30 years to a beautiful, intelligent woman would be able to share with you the intimate secrets to having a perfect marriage.

But I'm going to disappoint you! That's because my wife and I don't have a perfect marriage. Kay is without a doubt my best friend, and we have a wonderful relationship—but as far as a perfect marriage, well, there's no such thing.

What Kay and I do have is a marriage centered on Christ, specifically focused on glorifying God. We remain committed to each other because we remain committed to Christ and his work within us.



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The Purpose-Driven Marriage

No Easy Road

After three decades in ministry, I've noticed that it's not unusual for couples to float through their first year or two of marriage in a love-blinded bliss.

But frankly, that didn't happen for Kay and me. Our first two years together were the most difficult. In fact, we were ready to throw in the towel. If we both hadn't been committed to Jesus Christ and we both hadn't agreed that divorce was not an option, we wouldn't have stayed together. It was simply too difficult.

Kay even said that in those first few years of marriage, she often wished that one of two things would happen: either she'd be widowed, or God would change his mind and say divorce was now okay!

Since then, we've met many couples who were convinced their marital struggles meant there was no hope for healing. We can say from experience that's not true; there's always hope!

Part of the difficulty for Kay and me is that we were virtual strangers when we got married, but we began finding out things about each other immediately—like the fact that apart from our love for God, we were about as opposite in nature as two people could be.

We viewed life from two different angles and argued over just about everything. I remember Kay's father sat us down the night before we were married and said, "There are five areas where marriages usually have conflict: money, sex, in-laws, children, and communication."

He proved to be prophetic: Kay and I went five for five! We fought over every single one of those items.

Not only did we disagree over those things, we couldn't even agree about how to disagree! Kay is an intense person who needs to talk. My preferred method of dealing with problems was just to walk away. That was a volatile combination!



Marriage in the Midst of Ministry

The Purpose-Driven Marriage

The single factor that kept us married in those early years was that we agreed on one thing: divorce would never be an option for us. You can't leave the door open even a little bit, or eventually one of you will try to escape.

Because we knew we were in it for the long haul, we were forced to accept each other's differences. What else were we going to do?

Slowly, over time, God helped us not only to accept our differences, but also to appreciate them. Through the process we learned that any successful marriage is built upon the biblical truth that God designed each of us with five purposes in mind: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions.

In other words, until you realize *you* were placed here for God's purposes, then your life—and your marriage—will be difficult, complicated, and exhausting. But once you understand God's plan, your life—and your marriage—take on new meaning.

And once you and your spouse *both* get this—when both of you are living purpose-driven lives—then guess what happens?

Your marriage becomes a purpose-driven marriage!

Balancing Biblical Purposes

Here are the five biblical purposes you should keep balanced in your marriage:

1. You and your spouse were both planned for God's pleasure.

How would your marriage immediately change if you understood deeply that your spouse was created for God's pleasure? Or if your spouse understood deeply that you were planned for God's pleasure?

A man once asked Jesus, "What's the most important commandment?" Jesus replied, "I can summarize the entire



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Bible in two statements: Love God, and love other people!" (**Matthew 22:36–39**). That includes your spouse.

Life is about relationships, not achievements. First and foremost, it's about developing a relationship with God that will last forever—we call that worship. You also worship God when you love and sacrifice for your spouse (just read through **Romans 12** with a view of what its applications would mean to your marriage).

Any time you give pleasure to God, you're worshipping him, and the Bible teaches that loving your spouse—the mate God gave you for a lifetime—brings pleasure to him.

2. You and your spouse were formed for God's family. God made an incredible promise about the gathering of even just two believers: "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matthew 18:20, NASB).

So if both you and your spouse are believers, God is already in your marriage working to transform the two of you into a purpose-driven family unit! Isn't that incredibly great news?

But Jesus wants us to love real people—not ideal people—and your marriage is a lab for learning how to love like Jesus loves.

It seems funny now, but one conflict between Kay and me in marriage was over the really trivial issue of soap! For me, a hot steamy shower is a spiritual experience—right up there with eating fresh cinnamon rolls. I also happen to be a person who gets bored quickly, so I like variety; I don't want to use the same kind of soap all the time.

One day I told Kay we needed some different kinds of soap. But I said it in a way that sounded as though our marriage was a failure because we used the same kind of soap all the time. Three or four months later at Christmas, to "get back at me," she wrapped and placed 27 different bars of soap under the tree!



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My point is that within marriage, God has created an opportunity for us to develop a true intimacy and authenticity with another human being. God wants for you and your spouse to go beyond the superficial chit-chat that is, unfortunately, so common in many marriages.

To go this deep requires genuine, heart-to-heart, gut-level sharing, where you and your spouse get honest about who you are and what's happening in your lives. This happens when you both open up to each other and share your hurts, reveal your feelings, confess your failures, disclose your doubts, admit your fears, acknowledge your weaknesses, and ask each other for help and prayer.

3. You and your spouse were both created to become like Christ. As I mentioned, marriage is a laboratory for developing God's love in you. He'll use your spouse to build his values, attitudes, morals, and character within you.

Once you understand this, a lot of what happens within your marriage will begin to make more sense. When you start to ask, "Why is this happening to me?" The answer is—to make you more like Jesus!

In fact, the Bible teaches that God builds certain qualities within our lives by putting us in situations that make it difficult to show these qualities. In other words, for God to teach you real love, he'll put you around some unlovely people. For God to teach you real joy, he'll allow you to go through times of grief. To learn inner peace and patience, he'll allow storms of chaos and stressful situations in your life that test your patience and teach you to trust him.

In his book **Sacred Marriage**, our friend Gary Thomas makes the case that marriage was not meant to make you happy; it was meant to make you holy. That was an eye-opener for Kay and me. It made such sense. If God's purpose for each



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of our lives is to make us look more like Jesus, what better tool could he use than the marriage relationship?

Who better for God to use to chisel you than the person you live with seven days a week? When the difficult times come, you just have to realize you're being worked on! God is using each of you to shape the other person more and more into the image of Jesus.

4. You and your spouse were both shaped for serving God.

The Bible says, "God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God has made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing" (Ephesians 2:10, NCV).

We serve God by serving others, and we serve God by serving our spouse. God shapes us for service through a variety of methods, including our spiritual gifts, our passions, our abilities, our personalities, and our experiences.

In fact, God will use the difficulties in your marriage to shape you into an effective minister to others. Who could better help the parents of a Down syndrome child than other parents with a Down syndrome child? Who could better help somebody recover from the pain of an addiction, a business failure, or a prodigal child than a couple who has been through these things and emerged with godly insights?

Could it be that the part of your marriage you regret or resent most—that which you've wanted to hide or forget—is the very thing God wants to use as your ministry to help and encourage others sharing the same struggle? God doesn't just use our strengths; he uses our weaknesses, and even our failures!

5. You and your spouse were both made for a mission. Your marriage not only involves ministry, it also involves mission. Your ministry is to believers and your mission is to non-believers—allowing God to use your marriage as a means for telling others about his love.



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This may take many forms, from being a witness in your neighborhood to going overseas on mission trips together. The fact is, if you want God's blessing on your marriage, then you must care about what God cares about most. What is that? He wants his lost children found! He wants everyone to know him and his purposes for their lives.

If you want to see how much God cares about the people around you, just look at the Cross. With outstretched arms, Jesus says, "I love them this much!"

Marriage is a lifelong process designed to teach you to see the needs of another person as more important than your own. It's a difficult transition because it's not natural. It's not natural for me to look at life from Kay's point of view, and it's not natural for her to look at life from my point of view.

To think this way requires an intentional shift that can be made only through the power of God in your life. As you and your spouse make that shift, your marriage will become more and more purpose-driven—focused on the needs of others and balancing the purposes of worship, fellowship, discipleship, service, and missions.

The reward is greater than anything you could ever imagine. I've often thought what would have happened—or not happened—had Kay and I thrown in the towel many years ago. There would be no Saddleback Church, no purpose-driven ministry, and no "Purpose-Driven Life"!

God's plan for you and your spouse—for your marriage—is wider and deeper than anything in your wildest, craziest dreams. May our heavenly Father help you to catch this vision as you chase it into the future.

*Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California, is best-selling author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Zondervan). This article was originally published in *MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP*, 2004.*



Marriage in the Midst of Ministry

The Purpose-Driven Marriage

Reflect

- *Of the five areas where most marriages experience conflict, which one is the most difficult for you and your husband: money, sex, in-laws, children, or communication?*
- *Do you and your husband have genuine, heart-to-heart, gut-level sharing, where you get honest about who you are and what's happening in your lives? If not, how might you implement that?*
- *How might God use your marriage to make you more like Christ?*
- *How does your marriage communicate the gospel to those around you?*

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Bigger than Both of Us

How my view of our marriage
was radically shifted

By Carolyn Arends

For the first several years of my marriage, I was fond of paraphrasing C. S. Lewis on the difference between romantic love and friendship. "In *The Four Loves*," I'd tell whoever might (or might not) be interested, "Lewis points out that friends stand side by side and look out at the world, while lovers stand face to face and look at each other." I often cited this concept in support of date nights; there's nothing like candlelight and a little eye-gazing to bolster a marriage.



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But time, as the song says, goes by. Eventually, I found myself wondering just how many years of marital experience C. S. Lewis actually had.

Don't get me wrong, Lewis is still my literary hero. And my husband, Mark, still has highly gaze-able eyes. They're blue with gray flecks, or gray with blue, depending on his mood and the color of his T-shirt. When he's angry, his eyes turn cold; it's like the sun's been lost in cloud cover. But when he's content, his eyes are warm and alive, and I, to quote a hundred corny love poems, get happily lost in them.

Still, when two people are face to face for an extended period of time, they start to notice things. My husband, for example, has observed over the years that I'm never on time for anything, that I don't fold towels correctly, that I leave a trail of half-consumed Diet Pepsis in my wake, and that I'm incapable of backing the car into the garage in an appropriate fashion. (Three side-view mirrors have been sacrificed to date.) I, on the other hand, have come to realize that Mark never remembers to turn on his cell phone, that he keeps our bedroom at Icelandic temperatures, that he reloads dishes I've already placed in the dishwasher (according to his exacting specifications) when he thinks I'm not looking, and that he's unnaturally legalistic about backing the car into the garage. (Driving in nose-first works just fine, thank you, and not a single mirror need be lost.)

Every marriage has its quirks, of course. Two humans can cohabitate for only so long before weak spots and rough edges start to show. But add in a couple kids, stir in life's stresses and pressures, mix with some trauma and tragedy, glaze with the basic selfishness of human nature, and *voilà*—you've got a recipe for trouble.



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A Radical Shift

A few years ago, Mark and I cooked up some trouble that no amount of eye gazing could fix. Neither of us intentionally sabotaged our marriage, but over-extended schedules, miscommunication, and conflicting goals gradually boiled over into estrangement and confusion. I cannot remember a more miserable time.

One of our problems was that I was traveling too much, performing concerts around North America.

Mark felt abandoned: *Can't she see she's sacrificing the needs of our family for her ministry and career?*

I felt unsupported: *Doesn't he understand I'm doing everything humanly possible, burning the candle at both ends, in order to still be there for the family and live up to my spiritual calling and professional obligations?*

The only thing we could agree on was that we weren't meeting each other's needs.

I found myself on a flight to Chicago for yet another concert, hunched in my seat, staring out the window, trying to hide my tears from my seatmates. Three hours earlier I'd raced out of the house (late as usual); Mark and I had exchanged a cold good-bye. I felt defensive and hopeless and very lonely. I knew something had to change. Mark, preferably.

I'd been carrying a book around in my travel bag for months—*As for Me and My House* by Walter Wangerin. A friend had recommended it to me as her favorite tome on marriage, and I kept meaning to read it. I wrestled it from beneath the seat in front of me and cracked open the cover, skeptical about the possibility of finding any real help in the pages. But by the time the plane landed, my understanding of marriage had begun to radically shift.

The idea I'll always remember from Wangerin's book was his suggestion that there are three entities in a marriage: the



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husband, the wife, and a new, holy creation—the marriage itself. Wangerin pointed out that as long as the focus is on whether each individual's needs are being met, the marriage will be filled with defensiveness and accusation. But if the focus is on what a couple can do to best serve the marriage, to deepen and widen it and help it flourish, then both partners can work unselfishly to that end.

Crammed into the second-to-last row of a 737, I began to see that our marriage wasn't just about Mark and Carolyn. God had invited us to work with him in creating something new and precious; our relationship was a being that needed care. We wouldn't think of ignoring the children God had entrusted to us. Why had it been okay to neglect the relationship he'd given us? I'd been focused on the kids, on ministry, on work, and I expected my marriage to support and sustain me through a busy time. I'd forgotten that a marriage, like all living things, needs nourishment to grow.

I came home to a distant husband and a chaotic house, and I wondered how I was going to put my paradigm shift into any useful practice. But I haltingly shared it with Mark, and I saw a flicker of something in his gray-blue eyes. I think it was hope.

Pulse-quickening Questions

It took a long time to rebuild what we'd let fall into disrepair. We had to stand, side by side, and look at our marriage as if it were a fixer-upper we were going to remodel. I began to put better boundaries between work and family; Mark worked to move from a position of guardedness back into trust. Slowly we became a team again, aiming for the same goals. And one day, 18 months after my Chicago flight, Mark murmured as we drifted off to sleep, "Hey. Things are good." And, reloaded dishwashers notwithstanding, they were.



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But that's not the end of the story. In the intervening years, it's dawned on us that God calls us to look beyond ourselves not only to learn how we can serve our marriage, but also to discover how our marriage can serve the world. We're blessed in order to be a blessing; that's the way God's been running things since the days of Abraham and Sarah. Every good gift we're given—time, talents, resources—is meant to be passed on in some way. The gift of a good marriage is no exception.

So Mark and I have begun to ask some pulse-quickenning questions: How is our marriage adding to the kingdom of God? Who is our marriage blessing? What are we part of that's bigger than ourselves?

This new vision of what our marriage is even for works itself out in a variety of ways. During football season, it means that I take a larger share of the domestic load so Mark can enhance his work as a high school counselor by being a volunteer coach. During my own touring season, our roles are reversed. But the best times are when we get to serve, in big and small ways, together.

Holy Together

A couple of spring breaks ago, Mark took a group of 11th-grade students to Juarez, Mexico, to build a playground for children living in an incredibly impoverished area called The Kilometers. I came along, and we brought our young son and daughter as well. Conditions weren't the stuff of romantic getaways—we slept on the floor of a rustic church basement, listening to the scurry of cockroaches and the whistle of desert winds through the holes in the walls. Fine dining was not in the cards; almost every person on the trip became violently ill throughout the 10 days we were there.



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Still, there was an unmistakable sense of being a part of something holy. The high school students weren't church kids, but they met Mexican Christians who were deeply in love with Jesus, and they were intrigued. All of us wept for the indignities we saw, but we were thrilled to feel, in some small way, we were making a difference.

One night we worked on our job site long into the evening, spreading out newly poured concrete with rakes and shovels and dirty bare feet. Our backs ached, our eyes and skin stung from the constant assault of sand and wind. But a Mexican sunset is beautiful even in The Kilometers, and as pinks and oranges streaked the sky, I looked around for my husband. He was in a huddle of teenagers, all of them giddy with the power of doing something good. Our four-year-old was tugging on his sleeve, eager for him to meet her new Mexican friend. He was busy. But I managed to catch his blue-gray eyes, and for a long, romantic moment, he held my gaze. Then we looked out together, friends and lovers, at the work left to be done.

Carolyn Arends, singer and songwriter, is a columnist for our sister publication CHRISTIANITY TODAY. She's also author of Wrestling with Angels: Adventures with Faith and Doubt (Harvest House). www.carolynarends.com

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Marriage in the Midst of Ministry

Bigger than Both of Us

Reflect

- *How are you nourishing your marriage?*
- *Have you let any part of your marriage fall into disrepair? If so, what needs "remodeling"?*
- *How do you serve the world through your marriage?*

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Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further

Articles

Dynamic Duo—*Live the adventure of serving side-by-side.*

By Teresa Turner Vining, available on Kyria.com

Phil and Heather Joel—*A passionate pursuit*

By Dawn Zemke, available on Kyria.com

He Said, She Said—*"We were ships passing in the afternoon."*

By Melodie Wright, available on Kyria.com

In This Thing Together—*Sometimes patience comes only though compassion.*

By Ken Tada, available on Kyria.com

He Said, She Said—*I'm not really a workaholic.*

By Annette LaPlaca, available on Kyria.com

Books

Living in a Glass House: Surviving the Scrutiny of Ministry and Marriage by Donald Harvey, Gene Williams (Beacon Hill Press, 2002). Is your marriage buckling under the stress of ministry? Does your spouse resent the intrusions on family time? Are your kids rebelling against unrealistic standards of conduct imposed on them? The glass house of ministry leaves no place to hide. The high visibility of you and your family affects everyone in the household. Survival begins with accepting the fact that there is no escape. Yes, people are watching—but that's okay. Donald Harvey and Gene William give you insights on having a successful ministry and focusing on a healthy, happy relationship with your spouse and your kids.

Devotions for Ministry Couples by Stan Toler, Linda Toler (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008). Stan and Linda Toler know what it's like to serve in ministry together as a husband-and-wife team. They've been doing it for more than 30 years. In *Devotions for Ministry Couples* they offer couples advice on marriage, family life, parenting, rest, refreshment, spiritual growth, and other pertinent topics. Delivered with compassion and caring, their wisdom will help new and aspiring couple teams.

Bible Studies and Online Resources

Marriage Is a Partnership— These 6 Bible studies help couples grow in their relationship to God and get practical, biblical perspectives on money, differences, sex, and more. Available from ChristianBibleStudies.com.

Serving Alongside Your Spouse— This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership is designed to help you as you explore—or further discover—what it means to serve alongside your spouse in ministry. Available from Kyria.com.

Recalibrating Your Marriage— This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership offers you and your spouse—whether your marriage is in crisis or need of a simple tune up—the wisdom and encouragement to make your marriage a high priority again. Available from Kyria.com.

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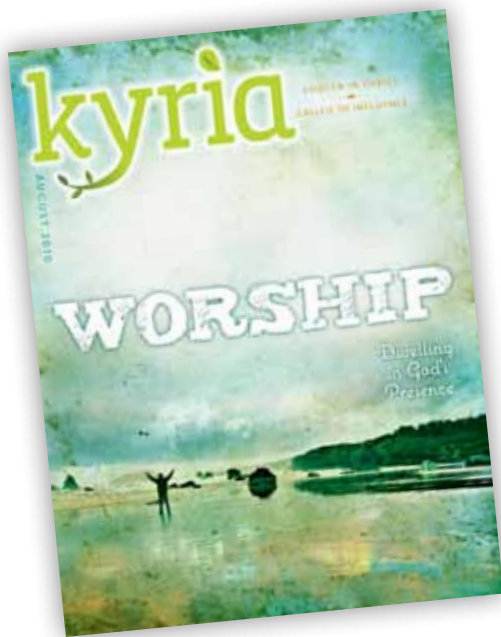
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