

4 Things I Wish I Knew Before Doing Ministry With My Spouse

For many Christian couples, when they imagine marriage they picture walking hand in hand as they do ministry together, “changing the world one heart at a time.” At least that was the picture we had when we were engaged. We both loved Jesus, loved people, and loved each other. That should be enough to guarantee ministry success as a couple, right? Well after over a decade of joint ministry, let’s just say that there were some things we wish we’d known...

1. My spouse will often do it “*wrong*”

By the time we began leading ministries together we both had experience doing this – but independently. Now, there was someone who was always there, and who *always* had a point of view. This person would inevitably do tasks that the other was historically responsible for. While we loved the many gifts the other possessed, we now had to watch our spouse do something we would usually do – but *their* way. Otherwise known as, “the wrong way.” Because different is often mistaken for wrong.

This sometimes led to one of us stepping in and taking over, or micromanaging the other person into eternal submission. However, to be successful we had to acknowledge that *my way* wasn’t the only way. We had to learn how to make room for the other person to bring the things we loved about them to the spaces we *both* had been called to. For if you don’t make room for your spouse to be fully themselves, don’t be surprised when they stop having a desire to enter that room completely.

2. Sometimes one person can get all the credit

Getting it *wrong* isn’t the only thing your marriage will face in joint ministry. Oftentimes, one of you will get credit that both, and maybe even the other, deserves. I know, I know, we don’t do ministry for the praise of man. That being said, it can be very difficult to be overlooked or dismissed. There have been many times when one person got recognition for something we both were responsible for. This can happen when one person is seen as “the brains” of the organization, or one is more extroverted, or when one of you plays a role that has you up front more than the other, making you the face of every positive movement that takes place in the ministry. To put a lot of effort into something and always be seen as an “accessory” to your spouse can quickly kill any sense of purpose.

This was sometimes challenging for us early on. Slowly we learned the importance of celebrating the incredible gifts and contributions of each other both privately and publicly. However, you can’t celebrate what you don’t know. We realized that one of the reasons we hadn’t done a great job of celebrating each other’s strengths, was because we hadn’t taken the time to adequately explore and identify those strengths. So we took the time and began the journey. We found that personality tests and strengths’ tests were great tools for this process. Two of our favorites are the Enneagram and Strengths Quest. This exploration gave us language to accurately celebrate the other because if we can’t consistently be an encouragement and support for each other both privately *and* publicly, how can we expect anyone else to

be?

3. Conflict is Inevitable... How you manage it matters

Feeling constantly corrected, dismissed and invisible are quick ways to experience conflict in your marriage when you're doing ministry. Something we wish someone told us, was that even if you are doing "The Lord's Work" together, you will still have some of your most ridiculous arguments as you are getting ready to do ministry. There were a few car rides where the Wonderful Rose of a spouse The Lord had given us, felt like the thorniest thorn in a field of thorny thorn-bushes. Then we would pull up to our destination mid-argument and not only be expected to do ministry *together*, but to do it with loving smiles on our faces. Conflict is a natural process in a relationship.

However, we had to remember that conflict shouldn't stop us from doing what God had called us to do. So we would have to put a pause on that disagreement, and walk in our calling. But the key was *never* to mistake that pause for a resolution. Unresolved conflict leads to bitterness, which leads to resentment, and resentment when left unchecked spreads like a virus threatening the life of any relationship. So no matter how well the rest of the day went, we would still make the time to resolve what happened earlier. Yes it means upsetting the apple cart for a moment, but a moment means little in light of a lifetime.

4. Your first ministry is *Your* home.

And finally, your first ministry is your home. It's very easy when doing ministry with your spouse to forget the person you're actually doing ministry with. When you're out there making a difference in everyone else's life that sense of purpose can blind you to the fact that you stood before God and made a commitment to minister to your spouse first. The problem is that the people you are ministering to did not make that same commitment to your spouse. You can't expect them to make the needs of your family a priority.

This makes it your responsibility to set healthy boundaries for your marriage. These boundaries can limit the access people have to you and your family or restrict how much time you spend serving. They can even encourage you to take a break from having conversations about ministry. It isn't selfish to take time to focus on each other. Your ministry will only be as impactful as your marriage is strong.

When all is said and done, remember that you and your spouse have been called to accomplish something together that you couldn't accomplish apart. God has a joint purpose for you. So take the time to discover that calling, then boldly, walk in it.