

Most Valuable Partnership (Part 1)

By Stephanie Wolfe

"The two become one flesh" . . . it isn't until years later we discover which one!

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. - Eccl 4:9-12

Two are better than one. Why? Because the Bible says so! I'm with God on this one. Having one thousand dollars in my hand would be awesome, but having two thousand dollars in my hand would be TWICE as awesome! I know you are also thinking, "But sometimes two is more trouble than one." More trouble can bring more growth. It's all in how you look at it. For the sake of our topic today, let's look at why two are better than one in the ministry partnership -- something I call MVP or Most Valuable Partnership.

(I know that women also serve as the pastor with the husband as the spouse. This article easily translates either way. I am writing from my personal vantage point as a pastor's wife, not to be gender specific.)

My husband is more valuable with me than he is without me and I am more valuable with my husband than I am without him. The Bible also says, "Two have a greater reward for their labor." In other words, two can accomplish more than one. It goes on to further clarify the thought with, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." Most pastors wouldn't have made it through seminary without a loving, unselfish, determined, capable wife who worked full time, organized their life, put food on the table, clean clothes on their back, and bore their children! Plus you weren't always this wonderful!

She is in your corner! She will always vote in your favor. She believes in you when the board doesn't. She lifts you up when everyone else is bringing you down. She calls you up, when others are calling you out! She goes to bat for you when maybe you should be thrown out of the game. She holds you close when the congregation misunderstands and pushes you away. She fills you up when you are empty, and laughs with you when you are being silly.

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. Two are more powerful than one. There is strength in numbers! I experience this while riding my horse with my riding buddies. When I am alone on a ride, I am slower, more cautious, and even somewhat timid, but when we are all together, I am bolder, more confident, and willing to take more risks.

We see this factor in our country's war on terror. Our President uses words like alliance, coalition and federation. Together we make a greater force. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Jesus makes the union of partnership a three-fold cord! An unbeatable trio! The threefold cord is much harder to break than a single or even a double thread! Man, woman, and the Lord Jesus make up a powerful partnership.

Half of anything isn't sufficient! One shoe, one mitten, half a pair of glasses...Ministry is no different. But Pastor, both you and your spouse have to see the value of two! Without this partnership, you lose power. A mediocre ministry is often the sign of a mediocre partnership. A ministry team is only as successful as a ministry marriage.

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ and the Global Pastors Network, printed these statistics gleaned from various sources from across denominational lines, such as *Pastor to Pastor*, *Focus on the Family*, *Ministries Today*, *Charisma Magazine*, and *TNT Ministries*.

- 1500 pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches
- 4000 new churches begin each year, but over 7000 churches will close
- 50% of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living
- 80% of pastors and 84% of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors
- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression
- 80% of seminary and Bible students who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years
- 80% of pastors' spouses feel their spouse is overworked
- 80% of adult children of pastors surveyed have had to seek professional help for depression
- 85% of pastors said their greatest problem is they are sick and tired of dealing with problem people, such as disgruntled elders, deacons, worship leaders, worship teams, board members, and associate pastors
- Almost 40% polled said they have had an extramarital affair since beginning their ministry
- 50% of pastors' marriages will end in divorce
- 80% of pastors' wives feel left out and unappreciated by the church members

After first reading these statistics, I wanted to run from ministry, but now they make me want to fight! I have heard it said that Ministry is the toughest job you'll ever love. I couldn't agree more. It keeps me focused on the most important role I play in my partnership role -- that of an intercessor. It also reminds me of the greatest responsibility that I have is that of an example. My sons have followed their father and me into full-time ministry. This is, of course, the more rewarding tribute to our ministry home, but at the same time, it is a constant reminder of our role in the lives of the ministers who come after us. If we have fulfilled our responsibility well, these young men and women have the potential to become more powerful and more successful than us and we have a divine responsibility to share, encourage, build, empower, and model unity/partnership for them. I would fight for a successful "Ministry Marriage Partnership" if only for them. We have the privilege to raise the next generation of God's people!

As a family, and as partners, we must learn integration or suffer disintegration. This means we must train while we minister and parent while we serve, but more importantly build our family and teach family-building to others. It must be a priority -- not just in word, but in deed.

The key to a powerful ministry partnership is to first understand God's purpose for it. What did He say about partnership, why did He say it, and how should it affect my role as a minister?

Here are some other tips to help you in your endeavor to become and MVP:

1. Validate your wife and her role as your partner in ministry.

Church has a way of invalidating the pastor...and even more so the wife. If your wife doesn't feel valuable to you and to the ministry the two of you provide, one of two things is possible. One: She will force her own way to acceptance or position. Two: She will back off (feeling almost invisible) and carry resentment that can bring destruction.

2. Create and proclaim a "team model" between husband and wife.

No matter what role she holds or what ministry she performs, include your wife in your comments about the success of your ministry. (You can take the blame for the failure, though.)

3. Wage war against the enemy, not each other, or the flock of God.

The enemy has formulated a calculated, diabolical plan to destroy you and your ministry. Like a lion patiently waiting...seeking ...crouching...he is watching for that opportunity. If you are wise, you won't give him one. We are to be a shining example of Christ-like partnership. We are either a shining example or a horrifying warning. Choose to be a shining example. Remember, the enemy takes everything - giving you nothing in return. God give you everything - taking nothing in return. Be vigilant, like a warrior protecting the gate to his village.

4. Find rest in each other's arms and together in the arms of the Lord.

Trust your mate and don't fear her gifts and abilities. She is your completer, not your competitor. Your wife is one of the greatest assets to your ministry. There is no one on your team that cares more about it than she.

5. Set boundaries and live by them.

Protect each other. Remember, given the right set of circumstances any of us are capable of anything. If you don't believe it, just ask someone that lived like they didn't believe it.

6. Do ministry together!

Enjoy the life you share. It's the only one you've got, so make it a success. Remember, the callings of God are irrevocable, so you will be doing this a very long time. When my husband steps up to the pulpit to deliver God's message, we stand there together.

Continued – Part Two

Stephanie Wolfe is the author of Mentoring Women a 12-month resource for churches to develop women in the area of spiritual maturity and character development. She is the author of Ahhh, the Ministry! – For pastors' wives, from a pastor's wife who understands pastors' wives. For more information concerning her numerous women's resources or to contact her to speak for your next conference visit her website www.innerbeauties.com or call 678.714.7008.