

Flourishing in marriage and ministry

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INTRODUCTION



We always said we would never write a book on marriage. There are far too many already, and we have really very little to say that has not been said at least once. Yet in our defence, this book is a little different. It is not a book about marriage. Neither is it a book about ministry – there are also many of those. Rather, this is a book which we hope is unique: it is a book about the two together. Its focus is not marriage nor ministry, but marriage *and* ministry.

It is worth saying, right from the outset, that our story will not be your story. You can read a little more about our story at the end of this short book, but suffice it to say that your family home will look different from ours: you probably don't have three daughters, and you certainly don't have our three daughters! Your ministry situation will be significantly different from ours. You certainly don't share our particular besetting sins, nor have to work through some of the joys and pains we have had to address.

In other words, this book can only ever be a beginning. We want to get you started to think about some of the issues, but we cannot do the work of application to your specific situation. Only you can do that. For this reason, we have included a workbook at the end, which you could work through together as a start. We also want to encourage you to have another ministry couple that you can pray and talk with: such friendships are invaluable as we seek to minister for the long-term.

Here are some pointers on how to use this book. The first chapter is the longest but we want to encourage you to make your way through all of it as it contains principles to which we will return time and again. It is the least practical of the chapters, but contains the underpinning on which the practical needs to build. We want to ask you to read all the rest of the chapters too. It would be easy, for example, especially if you are struggling, to jump straight to the chapter on pressures or priorities. But to do so and omit the section on privileges would be a mistake. The only way to approach marriage and ministry wholeheartedly and positively is to think about it in its entirety. Too much focus on the privileges without an honest assessment of the pressures will lead to unrealistic expectations. Too much focus on the pressures without remembering the privileges will lead you to self-pity and a begrudging spirit.

There are exercises to do as you go, which means this is less of a book and more of a workbook. If that kind of approach puts you off, then this is not the resource for you. But if you are committed to allowing God to transform you, you will – we trust – find this book a help along the way.

Of course, this is not the last word on marriage and ministry. There are many others who are more experienced than us, and wiser to boot. But we have written this book because of a deep concern about the state of many ministry marriages. It is only by the grace of God, by prayer and by careful planning that our own marriage and the ministries God has entrusted to us have not ended in disaster. So our prayer for you as you read this short book is the same prayer we pray for ourselves: may this be a beginning, and in the glorious grace of Christ Jesus may he take you through to the end.

To the praise of his glorious grace.

Adrian and Celia



PRINCIPLES



OUR HAPPY DAY

The two of us don't always remember things equally clearly. We both remember getting engaged, of course, but one of us remembers the specifics better than the other. One of us can't even remember the precise year. Nevertheless, one thing we *do* both remember is that there was a romantic meal at which we agreed to get married – which we did. The actual day, like many marriage days, was a bit of blur. Again, some details are clear: it was 10 August 1991. Others are more hazy. But we both remember this: we each said, 'I do', and meant it.

But here's the thing: a casual observer might have thought it was all down to us. We agreed to get married. We turned up on the day. We made our promises. At one level, all of this is true. However, in the sovereign goodness of God, we can say something more significant: it is God himself who joined us together. It is this truth which we want to briefly explore in this chapter.

Perhaps more than any other part of this short book, this section will be more of a ministry of reminder. We expect – or at least, hope – that what we want to show you here about marriage will not be new to you.

It should have been part of your marriage prep and, in all probability, is part of the marriage prep you've conducted for countless other couples.

Nor will what we have to show you about ministry be earth-shattering. It's just the same material you've heard many times before. And we need to say right up front that this is not going to be a comprehensive analysis of either marriage or ministry for, as we've already stated, there are plenty of other books that already do that.

However, we do need to establish some baseline principles, so even if this is familiar territory, stick with us. Why? Because just as God joined us together, so he also joined you together: and this truth is at the heart of the ministry and season to which he has called you.

START AT THE VERY BEGINNING

Apparently, according to Maria in *The Sound of Music*, the beginning is 'a very good place to start'. For Christians, that means beginning in Genesis. There are many different ways we could establish some basic principles about marriage; what we're going to do is to pick one Genesis idea and trace it through into the New Testament. It won't take us long, but along the way it will help us work through some fundamentals that every married Christian (and arguably every Christian) needs to know.