

Listening to Your Spouse

Dear Scott,

As you begin your ministry, I would like to pass on some helpful advice that I received when I first began pastoring—listen to your spouse. Listening to my wife has not only increased my understanding of people and situations, but it has also saved me from some serious blunders. Let me explain what I mean.

First, my wife has a great sense of intuition when it comes to people's motives, especially women's motives. When I was in seminary, I heard stories about women who were attracted to pastors, but I never thought much about it. Cindy, however, is very much aware of the possibility that other women might find me attractive (I suspect it has a lot more to do with the role I fill than with my personality or looks). I don't fully understand it, but she is able to intercept subtle communications from other women and to quickly detect when motives are questionable or simply impure.

Cindy seems to have built-in radar, which sets off a warning signal when someone begins to demonstrate an inappropriate interest in me. I'm totally oblivious to these warning signals—or I don't want to admit it to myself because such attention can be flattering. After her intuition proved to be accurate on several occasions, I was convinced she knew what she was talking about. I asked her to please let me know when her radar goes off, and to help protect me from any possible situations and persons which could compromise my integrity.

She has eagerly complied, and I've been able to take evasive action to protect myself from potentially dangerous situations.

Second, my spouse seems to have a sixth sense about persons who will serve well in various ministry positions, as well as persons who will not. This especially applies to leadership roles in the church. During the early years of my ministry when she would express a reservation about someone serving in a particular position, I just thought she was trying to tell me what to do. Even though she would give me specific examples based on her interaction with that person, or observations from that person's interactions with others, I chose to exercise my executive privilege. After all, I was the senior pastor!

About this time, I heard a conference speaker say that male pastors need to listen to their wives regarding whom to recruit for ministry positions. His statement caused me to have flashbacks. I began seeing faces of people I had invited to a ministry who did not fit the role for which I had recruited them. Sometimes the person's spiritual gifts and abilities did not match the ministry role. Other times there was a personality mismatch or personality weakness that restricted their individual effectiveness or even caused problems. As I pictured those people, I could hear my wife expressing her reservations. Even though my male ego tried to resist admitting she was right, I knew if I was going to be an effective leader who surrounded himself with the right people, I needed to tap into her wisdom.

Since then, there have been a few times that I have not heeded Cindy's advice. I knew I was taking a bit of a risk. However, I thought that I could either

manage the person and any situations that developed, or that the person had hidden leadership ability that my wife simply wasn't seeing. Despite my optimism, her insight continues to be extremely accurate.

Third, my spouse has helped me work through my feelings when people choose to leave the church. People change churches all too often in today's world, and it always hurts me when they do. While people will say it's not personal when they leave, I often feel otherwise. Cindy has helped me sort through my feelings. Sometimes it is personal. The individual involved just doesn't like me. Most of the time, however, there are other reasons. By talking me through these situations, my wife has helped me work through my disappointment and feelings of inadequacy so that I can move forward in ministry.

Fourth, my spouse has helped me evaluate various ministry opportunities that we've been offered. My first invitation to serve came when we were in seminary and I was looking for ministry experience. I didn't think the church position was the best fit, but I felt like my choices were limited. Against my better judgement, I was about to accept it. My wife was able to convince me that a bad ministry fit does not yield good experience. As I reconsidered the opportunity, it dawned on me that she understood my gifts, abilities, and temperament better than I did. I declined the position.

Now, more than twenty years later, I realize Cindy saved me from making a bad decision. Declining that ministry opportunity soon led to my first, and thus far, only pastorate, which has lasted over 19 years. During this time, there have

been several enticing ministry opportunities presented to me. She has helped me sort through each one and seek the mind of God.

Scott, God has given you a wonderful wife who complements you well. Remember that together you are in the Lord's service. And since spouses do not have the same experiences, spiritual gifts, and abilities, they bring a balancing insight and perspective to each of our ministries. So let's keep listening to our spouses. And I believe we will exalt them for their tremendous contribution to our Kingdom partnership.

Sincerely,

Doug Talley

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A man's greatest treasure is his wife—she is a gift from the Lord . . .

Her words are sensible, and her advice is thoughtful.

Proverbs 18:22 & 31:26 (CEV)