

Fellowship In Marriage

by Lloyd Biddle

In July this year, I had the opportunity to minister, for the second time, at The Jesus Coffeehouse in Bloomington, IL. The Coffeehouse is a non-profit missionary outreach located in the heart of the city. The two-story building from which the founders, Tom and Bonnie Lentz, operate the ministry serves as a house of prayer, a fellowship hall, a church and a sanctuary for the people who come there looking for help, hope and love from people who care. On Saturday nights from about 7pm to 10pm, The Coffeehouse host's Christian musicians from around the country who come to Bloomington to minister to the crowd that gathers there each weekend. On Sunday, Tom and Bonnie have a "Preach and Eat" service for their congregants. The service is an awesome time of prayer, praise, proclamation of the word, worship, and the sharing of a good meal in Christ's name. My wife, Debbie was the guest artist on Saturday, July 21st and, the next day, she led the people in worship before I shared the gospel and a little about Reasonable Service Ministries and its married couple's ministry.

In general, when I preach the gospel, my sermons are scripted word for word and I preach referring to the manuscript as needed during the message. I believe that preparing the manuscript carefully gives the Holy Spirit something to work with when I rise to preach. When I began talking about my marriage to Debbie during our visit to The Coffeehouse something rather unscripted came forth. I told them that I had come to Bloomington not only to spread the gospel but also to increase the strength and success of my marriage. "Something special happens", I told the listeners, "when Debbie and I go out and minister together." I couldn't explain well, while we were in Bloomington, what is so "special" about that experience, but I now know what it is. What happens is we grower closer together and share the unspeakable joy of intimate communion that the scriptures call "fellowship" when we serve the Lord together.

Fellowship is an intimate relationship between associated individuals. It is partnership and mutual participation or communion. What makes the fellowship between Debbie and I so special is that we are closely associated in two major ways: 1) in Christ, and 2) in matrimony. Because we are both connected to Christ, we have eternity in common. We have one Lord, one faith, one Spirit, one baptism, and one purpose (to love and serve Christ). Our mutual connection to Jesus is a source of great joy to us. Some of our best times in life together have been when we are worshipping God together.

About 5 years ago, we left our two boys with their grandparents to attend the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA) in Detroit, MI. The GMWA is a gospel music conference that is attended by musicians, songwriters, industry professionals, and fans from all over the U.S. and several foreign countries. Debbie goes every year to stay current on what's happening in the area of her

music ministry and the industry. For us, the midnight musicals are the highlights of the conference. For several nights of the conference, we worship God in song and praise with thousands of other saints as various artists take turns singing about the glory and goodness of God. We focus all our thoughts and energy on worshipping God while the Spirit of God refreshes us with His presence and His glory. When we feel God's presence in this way, we know that we are experiencing a foretaste of heaven together and realize that this unity in worshipping God is the reason God made us.

The second major reason our fellowship is special is because we are one flesh. Our bodies belong to each other; our hearts and minds are intertwined in such a way that we share each other's joys and pains, revelations and uncertainties. My wife is very busy these days raising our sons, serving at church, traveling to do her music ministry, and taking care of me and our home, among many other responsibilities. When she has time and a little extra money, one of the things she likes to do is go to the spa.

For years, while on vacation she would ask me to go to the spa with her for a massage, or some other fu-fu type service, but I would always tell her no. She would rave about the private pools, the special service, the fancy products and the more she talked them up, the less I was inclined to go. However, about two years ago, while we were celebrating our anniversary in Marco Island, FL, she finally convinced me to give it a try. She set up a massage for both of us at the hotel spa one morning.

After the massage, we spent half the day at the spa lazing around in the private pool, sipping fruit-flavored water, eating oranges and apples and flipping through fashion magazines. I am almost ashamed to say it, but I had a great time. Since then, I have been going to spas with her all over Illinois and Wisconsin and wherever we go on vacation. In the end, I think I enjoy it because I get to do something relaxing and fun that we both can enjoy together. I really enjoy the fellowship.

In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul gives us 4 key principles that we can apply to increase the joy of fellowship in our marriages and in our Christian lives in general.

The Holy Bible, New King James Version

Philippians 2:1 through Philippians 2:4

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem

others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Paul tells us to be:

- 1) Unified in Christ;
- 2) Like minded;
- 3) Humble;
- 4) In service to others.

The key to having good fellowship with your spouse is to have an authentic and abiding relationship with Christ. When I use the word authentic, I am talking about a relationship with Him that began with your repentance and acceptance of Him as Lord and Savior and His gift to you of the Holy Spirit. Only with the Spirit's guidance and direction, can you learn what it means to love God and love people in the way in which Christ intended.

Being like-minded with your spouse springs from being unified with Christ. In order to for you to be truly like-minded in the way God intends, both you and your spouse must know Jesus and be growing in Him. For this reason, the scripture tells us in passages like 2 Corinthians 6:14 (*“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*) to only marry in the faith. If you are married outside of the faith, don't despair. Your marriage is holy because of your faith in Christ. God calls you to love and serve your spouse well so that, perhaps, your spouse may come to faith in Christ.

Our unity in Christ allows us to make important decisions on issues like our budget, financial giving, church participation, child rearing, and roles and responsibilities in marriage in a peaceful manner. The peace and unity comes from the fact that we both share a biblical world-view.

We have a humility that allows us to put our own wants and desires aside for the benefit of each other and our family. What we may want to do at any given time takes a backseat to what we are doing for Christ to build a strong family of faith.

And, we serve each other in selfless ways. Recently, my wife and children moved with me to Madison from Wadsworth, IL where we lived within a few minutes of her mother, father and sister, so that I could take a different position with my company. It took Debbie a little while to adjust to Madison. In fact, she is still adjusting. But, both of us realize this is the place God has called us to serve during this season of our marriage. When we recognize that we are living to serve Jesus and are actively doing His will, we experience intimate fellowship and abounding joy. When we focus on serving Christ, we recognize that we are partners in ministry, partners in love and partners in eternal life. This is the special fellowship we enjoy in marriage because we are in Christ.