

When God Calls You—But Your Spouse Disagrees

One of the most important and shortest talks I ever had with Bob Buford—later to be my boss—was in 2008. I'd come to his organization, Halftime, to find clarity about whether to leave my career in finance for a nonprofit. But first I found myself in a chair next to him. "Lisa's not where I am on this," I said referring to my wife. "I'm ready to go, and she's not there."

Bob never blinked. "Stop, then," he said. "Do nothing until you can agree."

Really? I thought. When I'm sure God's calling me? "It'll be a disaster," Bob said, and that froze me.

As all spouses eventually find out, that other person standing at the altar with you—the one putting a ring on your finger, as well—has interests and passions independent of yours. My passion is my work helping marketplace men and women find their Ephesians 2:10 calling. Lisa loves girls, pageants, the arts, dancing, acting. She's about seeing young girls fall in love with Christ and seize their potential. Needless to say, until I met Lisa, pageants were off my radar, but I can be interested if she is. And she puts up with my baseball, football and, for now, boxing.

For Lisa and me to be in step starts with my matching her pace—letting her agenda guide mine. One way to begin to do that is to know her agenda in the first place, to ask her questions and listen closely to what she says.

"What do you think?" is a reasonable conversation starter. And it's what she thinks that matters, not what I think. In making major career decisions, one of our Halftime coaches instructs each of his clients to go to their spouses with a three-part

question: What are your dreams for one year, three years and 10 years from now? And answer each one on three levels: 1) for you as a child of God, 2) for us as a couple and 3) for us as a family.

Get all nine responses and go to dinner, the coach says. After dinner, sit back and read through the answers. Unlike a workplace assignment with a hard deadline, he'll add, getting to a thoughtful response on these questions can take time. Wives especially, if they have poured themselves into raising kids, tend to bury their own dreams. Still, a marriage on life support is hardly a gender thing. Male or female, if you're an achiever, your drink of choice is challenge and success, feverishly hoping the next glass brings more joy or happiness. Welcome to sobriety.

It's a fact that hard-driving men and women can skip time-consuming conversations at home for more time at work. It's also true that when work is everything, the person at home can seem less valuable than someone able to push us up the company ladder.

At the same Halftime event where Bob told me to wait to match step with Lisa, he told the group that an all-time top decision in his life had been to come home every day and, for at least 15 minutes, hear about Linda's day; his job was to say nothing. At first, he wanted to break in with commentary and news of his own, Bob said, but listening is a muscle. As he grew familiar with Linda's days, the people in them, her challenges and decisions ... his interest genuinely grew. Linda felt the connection, too, and their relationship showed it.

For myself, when I talk about marriage, I tend to emphasize words like authenticity and openness because I'm a get-along guy. Instead of putting conflict on the table, I prefer for difficulties to stay under the rug. On those days when Lisa and I get it right, when we risk the hard stuff together, we grow from candor and forgiveness. (We also benefit from

knowing each other's hot buttons and avoiding them.)

One day a guy at our office went home and said, "Honey, I want to know your passions and desires for the rest of your life." Later as he spoke about it to us—his wife standing next to him—tears ran down his cheeks. It went that well. Since then this family's adult kids see their dad, 34 years into the marriage, honor their mom in a whole new way.

Not every honest conversation guarantees to transform a marriage. But until your spouse is for your decision, it's not God's call. My yearning to "do something" for God began in 1999. Not until 2010 were Lisa and I on the same page, and not until then did I fully sense God's perfect timing.

As a type A, I think I know when I'm ready to move. As a believer, I'm never free to act alone. Meanwhile, the journey to my spouse's endorsement—or not—prepares me for the final destination. We see that looking back. And in God's economy, all we do is better for it. {eo}

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