

TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE

FINDING A SHARED MINISTRY

by Karen Holford



When Bernie and I were very new in ministry, we were sent to an isolated church that was going through a difficult time. Soon we were overwhelmed and discouraged. It felt like nothing we did was ever right or good enough.

Then our friend Jeff called us. We'd gone to seminary together, and now he was preparing several couples for marriage. He invited us to work with him on a weekend of seminars for engaged couples. We had a toddler and a crazy busy life, but we went along—often writing our next seminar while Jeff was presenting his! At the end of the weekend we were exhausted, inspired, and invigorated.

Completely unintentionally, we had stumbled across our shared ministry! Twenty years later we are still regularly involved in couple and family ministry. Our own marriage has inevitably been enriched and strengthened by preparing seminars, taking further studies, and learning from the couples we counsel. The demands of ministry could easily send us off in different directions, but we reconnect deeply several times a year when we minister to other couples.

Ministering together is not for every ministry couple. It has profound challenges as well as joys, and working on a shared project isn't always easy. We may still find ourselves doing some of the work alone, we may still struggle with our different ideas about how and what we should do, but many couples are finding that even a small shared ministry can enhance their closeness and happiness.

DISCOVERING GOD'S UNIQUE MINISTRY FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

Take a piece of paper each and write seven lists.

1. **My spiritual gifts:** These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in the Bible, such as being generous, teaching, being kind and merciful, serving, leading, etc. Read Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, then list the gifts you believe God has given to you.
2. **My natural talents:** These are the special gifts that you were born with and nurtured over the years, such as being able to sing or play an instrument, writing, public speaking, financial skills, creativity, etc.
3. **My skills:** These are other skills you've learned and practiced over the years, such as being able to fix a car, grow vegetables, decorate a home, ride a bike, cook, etc. They aren't spiritual gifts or talents, but they are very useful skills that you have learned over the years.
4. **My education:** You have learned how to do some things because of your education and training background, such as nursing, teaching, accounting, creating a web site, leading a choir, etc.
5. **My interests:** These are the things that interest and inspire you. Again, they may be similar to things you have put in the other lists,



KAREN HOLFORD has been married to Bernie for 28 years. They say, “OK, there are times when trying to minister together drives us both a little crazy because we’re so different! But some of our closest and happiest moments have been when we’ve been ministering together and feeling totally part of God’s plan.”

but there may be some interests you have that don’t fit under any other category, such as an interest in health, learning about other cultures, traveling, community affairs, reading, etc.

6. **My passions:** These are the things you feel passionately about. Maybe it’s working with children, or sharing your faith, or health ministries, or serving the poor, etc.
7. **My ministries:** These are all the ministries you have enjoyed over the years. Perhaps you enjoyed working at a summer camp or helping disabled people get out and about. Maybe you enjoyed creating a prayer room at a retreat or being the hostess at an evangelistic event. List the ministries you’ve been involved with that left you feeling fulfilled in some way.

BLENDING YOUR GIFTS

Now look at each of your lists and prayerfully consider what God has given you. Pray that He will guide you to fill an important need in your community or circle of influence. Look for any common threads in your lists, such as passions and skills for working with children, or running a cooking class, or developing an outreach web site, or running family life seminars.

As you discuss and explore your unique blend of gifts, talents, interests, skills, passions, education, and ministries, you may discover some ministry that excites you both. Maybe, like us, you’ll minister a couple of times a year at a marriage retreat. Perhaps you’ll work together in a Pathfinder class for an hour a week. Maybe you’ll go overseas and build schools for one week a year.

COUPLES MINISTERING TOGETHER

Steve and Meg are passionate about making church a place where children and families want to be and where they are always learning about Jesus. Meg is especially good at finding fun ways to involve the children in Steve’s worship services.

Paula loves teaching children about health and making it fun. Her husband, Bob, is great at playing the guitar and writing easy-to-learn songs. So they visit local schools during health-emphasis weeks, helping children to learn about healthy choices and teaching them fun songs to reinforce their message.

Now it’s your turn. How could God show His love for the world through your unique couple ministry?

6 REASONS FOR SHARING A MINISTRY

1

Ministering to others can bring you closer together as you talk, make plans, pray, work, and celebrate the joys and challenges together.



2

It may be better for you to share a joint ministry, and work together, than for each of you to work in isolation with separate ministries, which can more than double the time you are apart from each other.

3

Doing something kind for others is one of the best ways to experience joy, peace, and love for yourself, too.

4

Discovering a shared ministry leads you to fill a unique role together as part of God’s purpose for your relationship.

5

The enjoyment and sense of purpose you have in your shared ministry can help you to weather the storm when you face challenges in your local churches.

6

You can spend time together working on projects you enjoy, and your spouse can still count it as ministry time!

