

by
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Who am I, O Lord my God, and what is my house that you have brought me thus far. — 2 Samuel 7:18

Upon Leaving: Thoughts on Marriage & Ministry

For several years, my wife Margaret has lived with constant pain. This is due to fibromyalgia, a disease that gives pain to many muscle groups and for which there is no known cure. Over the years we have tried the recommended medical options and alternative suggestions with no improvement. We have also prayed daily, and several times with friends, for Margaret's healing, but the Lord has not granted relief. In fact, over the last two years her condition has worsened. It is difficult for her to climb stairs, painful to do simple household tasks, and even painful to walk. But you won't hear Margaret complain; she hardly ever speaks about it.

Her pain tends to increase and decrease in unpredictable ways, but we know that it is aggravated by cold weather, as in Chicago winters, and by the humidity, as in Chicago summers. In August of 1998, some friends invited us to take a vacation at their second home in Mesa, Arizona. We took them up on the offer, and we found that Margaret felt much better in the hot, dry climate of Arizona. We returned several times in the winter and the spring. One occasion I recall is riding bikes together; it was her first bike ride in twelve years. "I had forgotten how much fun this is," she said.

"Margaret, it would be great for us to move here but there are no jobs for me," I said. "There is no seminary here and frankly I'm not trained to do anything else." Then a few days later we were looking through the Yellow Pages and she said, "Wayne, there's something here called Phoenix Seminary." Well, eventually I phoned the Academic Dean Steve Tracy, and asked if someday he might have an opening for someone to teach Systematic Theology. Last September we were more seriously talking to the seminary when we again traveled to Arizona.

On September 19, 2000, when we were in the middle of this thinking process, I came to Ephesians 5:28, "Even so, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies." If I were living with the pain in my body that Margaret is living with, I thought, would I move for the sake of my health? Yes, I would. So, if I were to love my own wife as I love my own body then shouldn't I move for the sake of Margaret? It seemed an unmistakable implication of this verse. Later that morning I asked Margaret, "If I were living with the same kind of pain that you live with do you think that I would want to move?" She didn't even answer; she just laughed. She knew I would, and so I was convinced that we should move.



(L-R) Grant Osborne, **Wayne Grudem**, Walter Liefeld, Doug Moo, Don Carson of the New Testament department of decades past.

But Margaret wasn't convinced. She did not believe that physical ailments were reason to give up a ministry that God was blessing here at Trinity. I realized the situation we had reached was God's blessing on our marriage: I wanted to move for her sake, and she wanted to stay for my sake. God was allowing us to replay a decision-making process by which we had moved to Trinity in 1981. At the time, I thought that God wanted me to teach at a seminary, and though I had asked Margaret what she thought, I did not honestly listen. I think that I failed to understand that though the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23), a well functioning head has ears. Perhaps if I had listened more, and involved her more in the process, many of the details of the decision would have been different.

She said she was willing to go to Trinity back in 1981, and we did go, but she was hurt deeply by the decision-making process. And we paid a price over the next several years in our marriage relationship. At one time we went to a Christian marriage counselor, a woman whom we both trusted, to talk through and pray through our situation. It was interesting, that the President on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the co-author with John Piper of a book titled *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, the scholar who had published more technical research than anyone in the world on the meaning of the word "head" in Ephesians 5:23, went to a marriage counselor for help in working through his own marriage relationship. But it worked out, it was settled, and we were thankful for God's blessing on our time at Trinity.

Now, twenty years later, God was allowing us to work through it again, and I was listening, and caring for Margaret; the head had ears. I said to Steve Tracy, "I think it would be right for us to come, but I am not going to force that decision on Margaret." And he said, "You know, Wayne, the faculty have been talking, and we think we would like you to come as research professor with a reduced teaching load. We think that your writing ministry is a stewardship that we want to nurture and encourage." When Margaret heard that, she thought that this would be an enhancement of the ministry God had given to me. And she said, "OK, I'm willing to go."

Now we were both willing to go, but was this what God wanted? Is it his will for us to go? We continued to pray, we sought counsel from friends, we talked day after day, and we continued to get more information, but we weren't sure. Then one day we were walking in the block around our house and Margaret said to me, "You know what? I've decided what I think about this question of whether to go to Phoenix Seminary. I've decided that I am going to trust you to make the right decision." At that very moment, I felt the heavy weight of that responsibility, but it also felt very right and very biblical.

I called Phoenix Seminary and said I would come in good faith for a full interview. One thing led to another. I was honest with them about my wife's health and the reason for possibly moving. As we talked it seemed that there were many ways in which God had prepared this seminary for me. I've now signed a contract and I'm going to be teaching there this fall. I'm sorry to leave Trinity, but I'm excited about a new opportunity and I sense that God is leading us there for reasons we do not yet fully realize.

I want to suggest four lessons I've learned through this experience.

Lesson 1: "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). I don't believe there is any conflict between following Ephesians 5 and following God's call for your ministry. In fact, 1 Peter 3:7 says that if I don't live with my wife in an understanding way, giving honor to her as a woman, then my prayers will be hindered. I could have the status of being a tenured professor at Trinity, but God would not be pleased because I would not be living biblically. And what blessing would there be in that?

Lesson 2: Don't be surprised when God moves his people around. In Genesis 12, God sent Abraham from his country and his house to the land he would show him. God sent Moses into the wilderness. God sent Joseph and Mary into Egypt. God sent his Son to leave his heavenly home to live as a sojourner among us, one who had no place to lay his head. Again and again in Scripture God moves his people around. Don't be surprised if God moves you around; we are strangers and sojourners on this earth.

Lesson 3: Don't look at the size or status of the ministry, but look at God's call. Every ministry has its own kind of temptation, and the temptation of size and blessing is the temptation of pride. "Clothe yourselves with humility because God opposes the proud" (1 Peter 5:5).

Lesson 4: If you look with the eyes of faith, you can often see the hand of God directing your life. As I began to look my perspective began to change. I had thought that Margaret's illness was perhaps an attack to dislodge our ministry, but now I see it as something God allowed in order to bring me to a new ministry. Look at your life through the eyes of faith and you can often see God working in small situations.

Finally, I want to say thanks to God. He has given me a wonderful privilege of serving at Trinity for 20 years. He has given me another privilege of serving him in a new place. And throughout it all, for 31 years now, he has given me the privilege of being married to the most wonderful wife I could imagine, a wife who deeply loves God, who prays, and who loves me as well. Margaret, I love you so much and I thank God for you. And so I say with David, and I hope all of you can say this as well, "Who am I, O Lord my God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far" (2 Samuel 7:18)?

To God alone be glory.

