of Effective Ministry Part 5: Cooperative Spouse

My Mom ...

Friend and Fellow Servant

By Paul M. Blowers

lelling the story of my mom as a servant minister alongside my pastor dad, I will forsake most, if not all, objectivity. How can one get any "critical distance" from a mother like her?

Besides, she rarely had much critical distance from me either. My brother, Phil, and I could do wrong in her sight, but it was always overshadowed by what we did right. So now it's my turn to extol one whose love for Jesus Christ has permeated every aspect of her life. I lived a significant chunk of my life with this woman and saw her up-close in every sort of circumstance, the triumphs and the tragedies. My debt to her example of faith is profound.

Preparing for Service

My mom grew up in a small Christian church in the community of Quaker City in southeastern Ohio. She was an only child who, despite having loving parents, knew much sadness in her youth because of turmoil in the extended family. My dad and I recently went through some of her high school memorabilia, and I was surprised to find that Mom was far more accomplished (in the arts, in sports, etc.) than I ever knew. Of course, in her humility she would never have told us about all the accolades.

Her mother died during her senior year of high school, two weeks before the graduation at which she



Russ and Marian Blowers in 1995.

was honored as class valedictorian. Afterward she gave up a music scholarship at a nearby college to stay home and care for her widowed dad.

My mom did what thousands of young American women did in the postwar 1940s. She married a returned GI and birthed a couple of baby boomers in the 1950s. My dad will be the first to admit that. at the time of his return from the war, he was a functioning pagan but very much open to the Spirit of God. Mom discipled him in the Christian faith, served as his early spiritual mentor, and was at his side as helper and encourager through a 46-year ministry in Indianapolis at the East 49th Street (later East 91st Street) Christian Church.

Gloriously Simple

Mom was the epitome of the unpretentious servant of Christ. She had no visions of grandeur, of basking in the light of a "megachurch" ministry. She was a very simple and uncomplicated person-gloriously so. She was extraordinarily bright, an accomplished musician, and could easily have soared through collegiate and graduate education. Doubtless she could have become a professional organist or music teacher.

Some might say she lost out on

a career. She never saw it quite that way. She was preoccupied with the immediate ministry in which she found herself, raising two boys and serving as her husband's soul mate, confidante, sounding board, cheerleader, benevolent critic, friend for life, and encourager.

Servant ministry was at the core of her being. My brother and I were more than once censured for invading a yield of warm cookies destined for the sick and aged in local nursing homes. In one such establishment, she was one of the very few "regulars" who attended to people who rarely if ever had a visitor, even from their own family. Some of my earliest memories are of ac-

and deep compassion. There were not a few kids "with problems" who caught her attention and received her special tenderness. Certain kids were seen as behavioral challenges (a euphemism for "holy terrors"), but always my mom found a place in her heart for them. Her maternal instincts cast themselves broadly and widely. She delighted in the simple rituals of teaching memory verses or Bible songs and laying the early groundwork for lifelong Christian discipleship.

To say that Mom was simple or uncomplicated as a servant minister alongside my dad is *not* to say that she lacked depth. She was a theologian in her own right, wise in the of God, is a special object of God's dignifying grace and therefore a worthy object of our Christian affection.

On one occasion, when my brother and I were quite young and my dad was out of town, there was a knock on our door in the middle of the night. Other mothers might have panicked. Mom peeped out the window and saw the familiar but troubled face of a man from our neighborhood who was down on his luck and stone drunk.

He sat down on our front porch, and Mom, rather than turning him away, began to console him through the window screen. That dark night he poured out his trou-

bles to her, after which she prayed with him and sent him on his way. Once sober again, he was apologetic but also deeply grateful.

Strong and Stabilizing

My brother and I over the years came to refer to Mom as the "soft rock" to whom we, like so many others in and out of the church, could turn for her strong faith

and stabilizing wisdom. Her spiritual antennae were always primed and ready as she nurtured us and so many others in the demonstrated fruits of the Spirit.

My Mom had no interest in "competing" with my Dad in the spotlight of his ministry. She was thoroughly comfortable with being an anchor behind the scenes. In doing so, however, she commanded not only great respect but a truly authoritative witness for those who trusted her judgment and wanted to emulate her Christian virtues.

She reached out so very often to the "little people," the "salt of the earth" kind of folks who did not draw attention to themselves and who might have been passed over by some. Lonely widows, likely to be left

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companying her on her missions of mercy and watching wrinkled faces light up when she entered the room.

In her own home, she gracefully and effortlessly modeled Christian hospitality. We seemed to have a parade of diverse people—from around the corner and all over the world—as guests at our table. Great and festive meals were often produced with little advance warning in order to host someone who, perhaps once a stranger, quickly became a dear friend through table fellowship. Mom both warmed, and was warmed by, those who enjoyed her spectacular meals on Lord's day afternoons.

For 45 years Mom was the superintendent of the Primary department (grades 1-3) in Sunday school, to which she devoted enormous energy ways of the Christian life through her own experiences of suffering and her disciplined personal habits of prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.

Our family was graced in the early 1960s by the brief life of a little sister with Down syndrome. Melinda Ann lived only nine months, in which my mom, torn by grief and often bathing little "Mindy" in her tears, never lost a beat in upholding her family and serving others in the church.

That experience bore much fruit in later years, as Mom and Dad were able to minister to many families who had tasted the joys and sorrows of having a child with mental retardation. Mom resonated my Dad's frequent statement that "God doesn't make any junk," that every human being, created in the image

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out of holiday celebrations, were quite often guests at our Thanksgiving table or at our Christmas Eve gatherings of family and friends.

My teenage daughter recently wrote an essay published in our local newspaper in which she held up her grandma as her model and mentor. Leslie reflects on how her Grandma's hands—now revealing the crippling effects of Alzheimer's disease-bespeak a life of Christian servanthood:

Gnarled by age and stiffened by strokes, the hands rest one across the other atop the petite woman's chest. Fingers worn by years of hard work remain tightly clenched into two small fists, rarely opened until gently pried apart as the woman sleeps. Rosy red polish decorates the smooth nails,

meticulously painted there by a visiting granddaughter. Tissue paper-thin skin stretches delicately across the silent hands. Tiny brown age spots dance around the raised maze of blue veins. A tarnished gold band dotted by a simple diamond sits confidently upon her finger. These hands have seen life and all it has to offer. These hands are my grandma's....

... I look at my hands-strong, able, and willing to work. My goal for myself becomes striving to discover what these hands can do. The impurities on my grandma's hands are perfected by the legacy she has left behind and the imprint she has made on others' lives. . . . *

All who have come to know this woman, Marian Blowers, especially her husband, will testify to a life of gentleness, grace, compassion, wisdom, strength, and especially now, courage. Disease may have seized her memory, but it can never seize the spirit of one who so long ago became a captive of the love of Jesus Christ, and who poured forth that love to countless saints and sinners

If her role as a preacher's wife appears "traditional," let that description imply not a quaint or old-fashioned image of submissiveness, but the fact that she has handed on a well-tested tradition, a living legacy of faith, commitment, and the kind of Christian character of which the church is made.

'Elizabethton (Tennessee) Star, 19 November

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