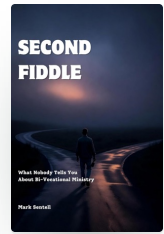


Second Fiddle

What Nobody Tells You About Bi-Vocational Ministry

MARK SENTELL



This book shouldn't take very long to read, but I know you're both busy, so if you can only read two pages together, these are them.

If no one plays second, we have no harmony. Leonard Bernstein was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. His answer: second fiddle. "I can get plenty of first violinists. But to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm... now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony." The bi-vocational pastor is the second violinist. The one who shows up faithfully, plays their part excellently, and makes the whole thing work. That is the calling. And it is extraordinary.

Not everyone is called to this, and you need to know if you are. You can will your way through a difficult season. You cannot will your way through twenty-five years. There are three tests.

Desire: not the desire to be a pastor, but a specific pull toward people who are far from God.

Affirmation: a genuine calling tends to be visible to others before you fully see it yourself.

Capacity: when you imagine doing this for twenty-five years, does it fill you with purpose or with dread? The person called to this will not say it is easy. They will say it is worth it.

Count the cost before you say yes. Jesus told of a man who sat down before building a tower and a king who counted his soldiers, then said, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." The costs are real: time, career, family, body, and heart.

Counting the cost is not pessimism. Know what you're signing up for. Then sign up fully. The yes you say knowing the cost is worth far more than the yes you say in ignorance.

This is not a consolation prize. It is a strategic deployment. Paul made tents. "And because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath" (Acts 18:3-4). Tentmaking gave him access, credibility, and freedom. Full-time pastors cannot cover every square inch of creation that Christ calls "Mine." Bi-vocational pastors can go where they cannot. And the church that doesn't pay its pastor can do something remarkable with its money: it can give it away.

The costs nobody talks about are built into the life. Both commitments are full-time, and the tension between them is the permanent condition. Make peace with the career you won't have: you are not building a career; you are building a kingdom. Nobody will ask about your heart, so soul care has to be carved out, not found in the margins. The loneliness is structural, so fight for friendships that are genuinely mutual. And the ego has to die. The servant who is surprised by ingratitude will quit. The servant who expected it and chose to serve anyway has been freed from needing the response.

Get there together, or don't go. If the two of you are not genuinely aligned on the calling and the cost, wait. "Two are better than one... For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Name the household division of labor. Look at your calendar and your wallet, because they tell the truth about what you value. And to the spouse: telling your partner what you see and

what you need is not nagging. It is an act of love. You are a genuine co-laborer in a shared calling. The bi-vocational ministry that costs a marriage is not worth the ministry.

Something is always in deficit, so protect the non-negotiables. The skill is in managing which deficit you are running and for how long. Whatever your schedule looks like:

1. Protect the early morning for God.
2. Protect the marriage with a weekly conversation long enough and unhurried enough to go below the surface.
3. Protect the Sabbath. It is a theological act of trust that the world does not depend on you to keep turning.
4. Ask for help. It is not weakness; it is honest leadership.

Then fill the rest as faithfully as you can.

Ministry is a marathon, not a sprint. The long obedience in the same direction produces credibility, perspective, and depth that cannot be manufactured any other way. They are only available to the person who stayed. “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). You are not wasting your life. You are spending it on something that will outlast you. Stay.

That is the book. The rest of it tells how a bar band and Saturday night bonfires became a church, and gives you the questions to talk through together before you say yes.

Free to share. Print it, copy it, hand it out, and use it in your church. Freely I have received; freely I give. “You received without paying; give without paying” (Matthew 10:8). If you'd like the whole book, it's at marksentell.com/books/second-fiddle, along with a free leader's guide.

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