Living on Mission

Guests: Aaron and Jennifer Smith
From the series: Marriage After God (Day 3 of 3)
Air date: July 10, 2019

Bob: If somebody asked you if the two of you, as a couple, are in ministry, how would you answer that? Aaron Smith says we need to be rethinking our definition of what "in ministry" means.

Aaron: I want to elevate all the menial things that people think aren't ministry, because our life in Christ is ministry. We are the building blocks of the church with the things that God's given us—with the passions that He's created us with/with the special giftings and talents that we just naturally have, that someone might not even think is a talent. That's right where ministry happens.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, July 10th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. Every married couple that is in Christ is also in ministry. The question is: “What does that look like for us?” We’ll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. Would you guys say that, for most of your marriage, you have seen one another as teammates—that you've been working together for something bigger than just the two of you?—or has that ebbed and flowed? How does that work for you?

Dave: You know, I actually believe that's one good thing about our marriage—

Bob: Really?

Dave: —from day one.

Ann: Wait; there's only one good thing? [Laughter] What was that comment?

Dave: Well, there might be two.

Ann: Thanks, hon; that's good!

Dave: No; I mean, we talk so often about our struggles and—even when we were doing some articles on the Fox News thing—the comments that came in were: “Do you guys
have anything good in your marriage? All you talk about…” [Laughter] So when you said that, Bob, I thought: “Yes, from day one,—

Ann: Yes.

Dave: —I feel like she’s my best friend. I mean, yes; we struggled, but we are partners. We understood that from day one.

Ann: And we always felt like, “There’s a mission for us.” What we have found, lately—is because a lot of our friends are becoming empty-nesters—what they’re discovering is, “Wait, we had this mission of raising these kids together, and now we feel kind of lost.” I think couples are wondering that: “Are we supposed to be together? What does that look like? Is there a plan for us?”

Bob: I think back to when Mary Ann and I got married. I think we thought the mission was: “Have kids, and raise the kids.”

Ann: Right; yes.

Bob: Certainly, that’s a big part of—I mean, we had five kids; you guys had three kids—but when you have kids, discipling those kids is a huge part of the mission—

Ann: That is a call.

Bob: —and maybe the most important part of the mission that you’re in—but it’s not the exclusive part of the mission.

Ann: Right.

Bob: We have a couple people nodding their heads very vigorously as we’re talking about this. [Laughter] Aaron and Jennifer Smith are joining us, again, on FamilyLife Today. Welcome back, guys.

Aaron: Thank you for having us.

Bob: They’ve written a book that’s really all about this whole idea—it’s called Marriage After God. Aaron and Jennifer have a podcast; they both blog—you blog at Unveiled Wife, and you blog at HusbandRevolution.com. Again, we have links on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com if folks want to check out your blogs and your podcasts and all that’s available there.

Marriage After God really comes out of the fact that your early struggles in marriage helped point you to the fact that marriage was about something bigger than just the two of you. The thought that you need to do marriage with a bigger purpose/with a mission—that’s revolutionized how you do life together; hasn’t it?
Jennifer: Yes.

Aaron: Yes; in every aspect. When you realize that your unity with another person—this marriage/this thing that God invented on day six—you know, your perspective is no longer: “What’s going to make me happy?” “How can we just make our lives comfortable?” “How can we spend our money on us?” Everything now turns into: “Well, what does God want? What does He want with our marriage? How does He want us to raise our children? How does He want us to use our home, our cars, our money, our relationships, our resources, our education?”

We call this the toolbelt in the book; we explain that every single person in the body of Christ has been given a toolbelt to be used to build God’s kingdom.

Jennifer: It doesn’t matter what age or how long you’ve been married. You mentioned empty-nesters; but just as someone’s going into marriage, or maybe has been married five years, or is an empty-nester—the same message applies. We wanted to encourage couples to use their marriage/their team, as a husband and wife, to fulfill what God has for them.

Dave: Talk about that, because you have young kids.

Jennifer: Yes.

Aaron: Four of them, you know. [Laughter] Four of them, all under six.

Dave: How are you doing it, as a family, on mission?

Jennifer: I’ll speak for me. Understanding what you already mentioned, Ann, that I have just as much of a role to play as my husband does. Being at home with the kids, I am investing in them—and their view of God and our purpose, together, as a whole family—just as much as he does: working and, also, being dad and husband, and all the responsibilities that he has. It is a teamwork mentality that you need.

Aaron: When you realize that there’s a larger mission at hand and that God’s given us unique opportunities—you know, we talk often about the body of Christ and the hand can’t say to the eye, “I don’t need you.” We all have an opportunity/we all have a responsibility to invest in the kingdom of God with the things He’s given us.

In our marriage, our marriage is our first ministry. It starts there, and then our children are our second ministry. Then thirdly, our ministry in the body of Christ and, then, the representation that we are to the world. You can’t get that out of order—so my wife being at home and raising our children; me being dad, and working, and doing Bible time with the kids, and being a huge part of discipleship of their hearts—we recognize
that there’s an order to that. If you get it out of order, it doesn’t matter how much ministry you’re doing outside the home if the ministry inside the home’s failing.

**Bob:** You know the name, Josh McDowell—you’re familiar with that name?

**Aaron:** Yes; yes.

**Bob:** Josh is a writer and has been known, for years, as an apologist. We did an interview with him, years ago, and he made a shocking statement—he said: “I tell people, all the time, my ministry is number one; it comes before everything.”

**Aaron:** Yes.

**Bob:** And then he said: “My number one ministry is to my wife. My number two ministry is to my kids,” and gave the same kind of circles. He said, “That’s how I think about this.”

I thought: “He’s right. We need to view our relationship with one another as a ministry to one another; our relationship with our kids as ministry to and with them; and then in the church; and then outside of the church. I think those circles are helpful for parents.

Let’s just define what we’re talking about when we talk about mission and ministry; because I think most people think mission and ministry is what people, who are in full-time ministry, are supposed to do and the rest of us may have a ministry compartment that we pull out, from time to time—

**Aaron:** Yes.

**Bob:** —we get engaged in that. You’re saying all of life is about ministry. Explain: “What are we talking about when we talk about ministry?”

**Jennifer:** Well, if you are a Christian, your whole life is a ministry; right?—just like Christ’s life was a ministry.

**Aaron:** Yes; we’re actually, with this book, *Marriage After God*, we’re trying to break this mentality that we’ve gained. The natural progression of the church is that there’s these handful of roles, and those are the ministries. They’re necessary; but then we forget that we all, every single one of us, have been given gifts by the Spirit for the mutual upbuilding of the church and for the body of Christ. We don’t get to sit back and just watch someone else do it: “Unless I have this title…” “Unless I’m in this position…” “Unless I get a check for it, I’m not in ministry.” That’s a lie that Satan has perpetrated in the church—is that I can sit back and let other people do the ministry.

When we say, “ministry,” we truly believe that, as believers, our vocation—we call it, in the book, our “heavenly vocation”—is building the body of Christ.
Bob: Right.

Aaron: It starts with my marriage—we talked about it. If my ministry to my wife—that’s the first place I get to practice ministry.

Ann: How do you do that? How do you minister to Jennifer? What’s that look like, practically?

Aaron: Well, specifically, I’m called to love her as Christ loves the church; so my first role is a sacrificial love—it’s putting her first—above my children, above my work, above my hobbies. Those things don’t get precedent. It’s ministering to her on a daily basis—encouraging her, speaking the Word of God to her, preaching to her—the things that I would do to a stranger and would be called to do; right? If I don’t do it to my wife, what business do I have doing it to a stranger?

Ann: Jennifer, what’s an example? What’s something that Aaron’s done?

Jennifer: Well, one of the first things that I think of is just, at night, sometimes he’ll bring out the Word of God and just read something and make sure that I’m listening. If I’m on my phone, he’ll ask me to put it away; so just that leadership in that one single moment. It defines our marriage, and it encourages us in the Word of God; so that’s just one way that he leads me.

Ann: And you respond well—you’re not saying: “Don’t tell me what to do! I’m on my phone!”

Jennifer: No; I want him to do that.

Ann: Right; yes.

Jennifer: My flesh doesn’t agree sometimes—especially being with the kids all day—I want to justify and say, “This is the only time I get to be on my phone!”; [Laughter] but it’s so much more important to put it down and be with him, and listen, and be edified together in that.

Ann: Aaron, what’s something that Jennifer’s done that you think, “Wow; this is really”—like: “You’re ministering to me”?

Aaron: She’s constantly encouraging me on how I can disciple my children well, reminding me: “Hey, remember their hearts,” “How could you, today,…?” As a father, who—my mind is constantly on providing and other things/you know, ministry in the church—she draws me back and reminds me of my role as a father. She’s helping me in that way be a good discipler of my children.
Ann: And it doesn’t feel like nagging; it feels like encouragement.

Aaron: Sometimes, it does. [Laughter] This is the reality of—even if she is being naggy, I have to remember that she loves me and she’s on my team. The reason she’s saying it, in the first place—is not because she’s mad at me or because I’m failing—but it’s for the benefit of our children.

Bob: We have to give each other grace in the midst of how we live this out and learn, and grow, and get more mature along the way.

I think your point—here’s where all of us need to say, “The reason I’m here/the reason God put me on planet earth is to have a role in advancing His kingdom,”—that’s job one. Now, how that’s going to get lived out for each of us is going to be different, according to the gifts, like you talked about, that God’s given—the passions and desires. One person may say: “I want to do that by bringing an end to human trafficking,” “I want to do that by helping people who don’t have water in Africa have access to water.”

Aaron: Yes.

Bob: It’s going to be a myriad of different ways, and that’s the richness of the body of Christ—that it is a myriad of different ways.

But if we’re all thinking: “Okay; that’s job one. Now, in the midst of that being job one, how does that get lived out?” Well, first of all, there’s evangelism; discipleship in the family, as you said: “Let’s have the rings, right: marriage; then family; then our local church, and how we’re serving one another in the body of Christ; and then outside of that—how we interact with our world.”

You guys have settled in on marriage and family being the thing that you think God’s calling you to as your specific field of ministry. How did that emerge as: “This is what God wants us to be doing”? 

Aaron: We just said, “Yes.” It didn’t start off, thinking, “We’re going to have a ministry; we’re going to write books.” I just asked my wife, “Hey, you like to write,”—she has a gifting of writing. I said, “Why don’t you write to help you navigate things God’s teaching us?” I had a gifting in technology and creating blogs from the history of jobs I’ve had. I said, “I’ll make you a blog,”—that’s, literally, how it started.

Jennifer: So it’s Aaron’s fault. [Laughter]

Aaron: It just happened to be about our marital stuff, because that was the thing that God—

Ann: —you’re passionate about.
Aaron: —He used it in our lives.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: I mean, as a pastor, trying to mobilize a congregation—to do more than come and sit and be a spectator—but to be the army. I’ve always said, “Here’s how you know what your calling is, and you have a calling just like I have a calling.” People, again, think a calling is full-time vocational ministry—no; every believer has a calling. I always say this: “What’s in your heart? What’s in your hand?”—which means—“What are you passionate about? What are you good at?”

Aaron: Yes; it’s a tool.

Dave: You guys just illustrated it. You’re passionate about marriage and family; you’re good at these things—bam, there you go to do it.

I always say this—it’s a joke at our church now: “Oh, Wilson’s going to say his famous little statement again,” which is this—and you’re doing it; I hope we’re all doing it—“Make a dent where you’re sent.” You know, it rhymes, so—

Aaron: Yes.

Dave: —it’s cute.

Jennifer: It’s good; it’s good.

Dave: But here’s the question people ask whenever I say, “Make a dent where you’re sent.” They will come up—and I had to finish it—because I heard this so many times, “Well, I’m not sure where I’m sent.” You know what the answer is?

Aaron: “Where are you?”

Dave: “You’re sent where you are”; because they think: “Oh, I have to be sent to Africa,” “I have to be sent to be a missionary or a pastor.” No; you are sent to your neighbor to be the light of the world. You guys are doing that—it’s so beautiful.

If couples, and marriages, and families could get this idea that there’s a mission that God put us, together, to impact the world; but it starts with the neighbor next door. They don’t have to write a blog or a book—they may, if that’s what they’re good at.

Let me ask you this: “How have you seen God use you, locally?”

Jennifer: Well, I would just start with our friendships in the local fellowship that we’re a part of. They’re encouraged by us, and we’re encouraged by them—and being faithful to
building up those relationships. It takes those small “Yes”-es of spending time together or doing things for another—like babysitting, or providing food when someone’s in postpartum, or whatever those little things are. It does help build up those relationships; and it builds trust, and it helps model what the light of Christ is through our family.

Aaron: I would say that our life online and our life in person is the same—where integrity, and transparency, and the things that we talk about and share about and proclaim—it’s our job to live it. You can talk about it, and say it, and proclaim it, and not live it; and you’re a liar or a hypocrite. So, our heart is to live the way we preach.

That goes back to the way I’m loving my wife and the way I disciple my children—it’s my petri dish—it’s what God’s given me to learn, and grow, and be sanctified in how to minister for Him. So when I go to others and disciple, I’m going to disciple—with the same fervor, the same vigor, the same gentleness and truth—that I would disciple my child.

We need to recognize, like you said—where we are, and what God’s given us is what He wants us to use. We bring up the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 and the picture of the three servants that come to the master. This is Jesus telling this story. The three servants are called. He gives them: one—five, one—two, and one—one. He says, “I’m going to go away.” All of them are servants, and he gives each one of them according to their ability; so one’s given according to his ability, the other according to his ability, one according to his ability. The master comes back and asks the same thing of each one of them, “What have you done with what I’ve given you?”

We all need to take this. We do not want to be the one, who is given the one talent, and think to ourselves, “Well, I was only given the one and you’re a scary person and a hard master; and therefore, I did nothing with what you’ve given me.” We want to be faithful with what He’s given us.

I can’t say that Jennifer and I have been given five—it doesn’t matter. I’ve been given what is according to our abilities. That means that the Master intimately knows us—what we’re capable of and what we can do with His property. We’re stewards. My children, my wife, our fellowship, our neighbors, our home, our cars, our resources, our hard stories from the past—we’re all stewards of those things—and “How are we going to invest them?”

Ann: I’ve had a lot of women come up to me and say: “It feels like my husband’s doing this ministry—he feels called to this—I’m doing another ministry. It feels like we’re going separate ways. Does God have a mission for us, together, in marriage; or can our mission be in separate areas?” What do you think about that?

Jennifer: I think the important thing is that you guys are on the same page—that you’re communicating, that you’re praying about it, that you’re submitting it to the Lord, and that you’re not walking in it with discontentment or frustration that: “This person’s over
here, and I’m over here.” If you’re choosing to walk in different ministry roles—being supportive of each other doing that—or one person saying: “I’m going to pursue that later. I’m going to come join you and support you in what you’re doing right now; then maybe, if God allows it, I’ll come back to that thing.” The important thing there is just being—

Aaron: —unified.

Jennifer: —unified.

Ann: —and talking about it.

Aaron: Well, and if there’s contention or jealousy or it’s a combative relationship, where: “No; I’m doing my thing tonight, and you have to cancel yours,” or “I’m doing my thing tonight, and you have to cancel yours,”—they’re both wrong. There has to be unity.

If it’s two different things, that’s totally fine. This is not about, “We have one specific mission,”—no; the mission is God’s mission. It’s how we do it. You can do those two missions/those two ministries, wrongly. I quote Isaiah, “Don’t sacrifice—”

Jennifer: —“your marriage on the altar”—

Aaron: —“on the altar of ministry.” We can say—we’ve seen families do this: “I’m in ministry, so either get behind me or leave.” I’ve seen husbands leave to go do “ministry.” You know what? I don’t want to be that man, standing before God one day. I want to be the one that said, “I’m going to do it Your way, God.”

Dave: Here’s one other question; I’d love to hear you respond to this. Talk to the couple, whose spouse is not interested in ministry or God—he is or she is—they want marriage after God. Their husband’s not interested; their wife’s not interested. How do they negotiate that? What do you say to them?

Jennifer: Be praying for them, because their salvation is more important than anything at that point. Your ministry is their salvation, so it’s the way you interact with each other/it’s the way that you respond and love that person.

Dave: “But I’m so disappointed. What do I do with that?” Again, I’m talking for that, you know—

Aaron: No; you’re right. There’s this feeling of, “Well, see; I must have married the wrong person.” Well, you’re married; so we get to yield our hearts to what the Scriptures say about our marriage, not what we say about our marriage. Once someone gets ahold of God’s heart and says, “Okay; this is what God wants…” To be honest, if my wife
wasn’t a believer, and my heart was where it is now, the only ministry I would care about would be her.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Bob:** I remember sitting in a room—this was many, many years ago—with a Christian leader, who was explaining that her marriage was a source of great physical pain to her. It was impeding her ability to do the ministry that God had called her to. The conclusion she came to was, “So I must sacrifice my marriage in order to keep doing the ministry God’s called me to.” Well, she missed the whole point of what you’re saying, which is: “The number one ministry God had called her to was in her marriage and with her husband—even in the midst of that pain—to persevere, and to love, and to figure out how that’s going to work out.”

She had the wrong priority structure—and this was not a case where she was being physically abused—that’s not what we’re talking about. The pain she was dealing with was pain related to stress that she was feeling. It was kind of clinical pain that she was dealing with. I sat there and thought, “You’re trading the wrong thing.” In fact, what happened was—she did divorce her husband, and the ministry floundered. She lost her public ministry, in part, because she traded in the wrong thing.

**Dave:** You know, I have to be honest; there were many times, as a pastor, that I’ve felt like my wife and my kids are hindering my ministry: “They’re needy,” [Laughter] “They want me home,” “I have meetings,” “I have sermon…”—I’m not kidding—I had those thoughts!

What God reminded me is: “They are your number one disciples. You are not going to stand before God someday and be accountable for your church members, but you will be held accountable for your family.” Now, does that mean Ann’s not accountable for her own walk with God?—and my three sons? They are accountable, but there’s a sense that they are under my ministry.

**Bob:** It’s why God said, “Adam, where are you?” in the Garden, because He was calling Adam out, saying, “You were responsible here”; right?

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** Well, I think this has been helpful in clarifying for listeners, who are thinking about: “What’s our life supposed to look like? What’s our marriage supposed to look like?” There are some folks, who are just saying, “Our marriage is in such a mess that to think about ministry…” [Laughter] Part of what we’ve said to those couples is: “You can minister in the midst of the mess. Your marriage doesn’t have to be perfect and all cleaned up. Yes; you should be working on it and growing, but you know what? Part of the way you do this”—I’ll never forget a story I heard.
A couple had come to a *Weekend to Remember®* marriage getaway. They found Christ at that getaway. In fact, they were part of a motorcycle gang.

**Dave:** Hey, I like this couple. [Laughter]

**Bob:** So they thought, “We need to share this with the people in our motorcycle—but our marriage is such a mess, we can’t share it.”

We said: “No! Just go and tell them what you heard.” They went and did, and two things happened. First of all, many of their friends found Christ. Secondly, their marriage got *better* in the process of them just ministering in the midst of the mess. That’s part of God’s design for how their marriage was going to grow stronger—was for them to say: “Look, we’re in a mess. We don’t know the answers, but we think they’re here.” God opened folks up to that.

I really hope a lot of our listeners will get a copy of your book, *Marriage After God*, and really talk together about, “What’s God want for us, as a couple?”

Guys, thank you for being here. Thanks for sharing all of this with us.

**Aaron:** Thank you so much for having us.

**Jennifer:** Thanks for having us!

**Bob:** By the way, we are making your book available this week to *FamilyLife Today* listeners. Those of you, who have been listening to our conversation this week with Aaron and Jennifer, if you’d like a copy of the book, *Marriage After God*, it’s our gift to you this week when you help support the ongoing work of *FamilyLife Today*. Our radio program is listener-supported. It’s folks like you—regular listeners—who donate so that this program can continue to be heard in your community, on your local Christian radio station, or via the internet, all around the world. You make that possible when you donate to support the production and syndication of this program.

If you’re able to help with a donation today, we’d love to say, “Thank you for your support,” by sending you *Marriage After God* by Aaron and Jennifer Smith. You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-F-LTODAY to donate. Be sure to indicate that you’d like a copy of the book, and we’re happy to send it to you. Thanks for supporting the ongoing work of this ministry.

You know, I have to confess that, when I came to FamilyLife®, more than 25 years ago, I didn’t really understand how central marriage and family are to God’s purposes and plan for His kingdom on earth. That’s been made more clear to me through conversations like the one we’ve had today. David Robbins, who’s the President of FamilyLife, is here with us. This is a big idea that we need to understand. Marriage and family is a *big* part of God’s design for His kingdom.
**David:** I love the Smiths’ call to action for every marriage to be on a mission and just to simply start where you are. It reminds me of Acts 17:26, when it says, “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth; and God determines the allotted periods of times and the exact boundaries or locations of their dwelling place, so that some may come to know Him.”

Each one of us has been placed by God in our home, with our families, to have a profound impact inside of our home and, also, to be able to impact homes around us/to reflect Jesus to the world around us. Just start where we already are! He allotted those boundary places; He marked the time for us to live near people, or work with people, or go to an exercise class with the people that we’re around. Do it out of who you uniquely are: “Who are you?” and “What are the unique gifts you have?” Do it with the people that He’s already put around you.

You know, I just reflect on this conversation; and personally, I’m a little convicted—like: If I want to change the world, let me go home and let me love my family well. Out of that place, people will see Jesus and the ways of Jesus through us.”

**Bob:** We are ambassadors for Christ; aren’t we?

**David:** That’s right!

**Bob:** Good word. Thank you, David.

I hope our listeners can be back with us tomorrow. We’re going to talk about how important it is for us, as parents, to let our boys be boys. Mark Hancock from Trail Life USA will be with us, and we’ll have that conversation. I hope you can join us as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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