

Married to selflessness

August is the month of my wedding anniversary, and I was reminded recently of one of the conflicts we had within the first couple of years of our life together.

We were both in jobs that we didn't like, living in a city that we didn't like. When a friend called about a job opportunity that would employ both my wife and me, I couldn't believe it. The arrangement sounded perfect. I couldn't wait to tell her.

But when I told her about it, she thought it sounded terrible.

What was wrong with her, I wondered?

We had a real dilemma. Who was right?

I was absolutely convinced that this was the answer to my prayers of needing an escape from a rapidly deteriorating situation at work. She was equally convinced that this was the kind of assignment that would make her miserable. It might be a good match for my gifts, but it wasn't for hers, she said. We were stuck.

We decided to take a few days to think and pray about it, and ask for direction from God. At first I prayed that my wife would see the light and stop being so stubborn and see things the right way (which, of course, was "my way"). I can't tell you how she prayed.

Eventually, my prayer shifted a little. It was no longer a prayer of pleading that she would give in, but it became a prayer of direction for what would be the best thing for the two of us. The prayer evolved into what would make the two of us the best people, and what would be best for our marriage?

Within a few days my priority shifted from what would be best for me, to what would be best for her and for us. I felt that God was showing me that I was being selfish. I needed to put my wife

first. Taking this new opportunity was not in her best interests. She didn't think it was right. I needed to honor that and keep looking for something where both of us had confidence.

We had a meeting at our kitchen table. She went first.

"God showed me that I was putting my own priorities first," she began. "I was being selfish. I want God to use you in the best way possible, and if that means I need to set my own wishes aside, I am willing to do that. I think we should take the new job."

At first I was confused. What? She pretty much stole everything I was about to say. Is it plagiarism if someone says something as her own words if you were about to say the same thing? Eventually I said virtually the same thing she had said to me, which made me sound lame, because she had already pretty much said it. So we had a new dilemma. Now what do we do?

We didn't go. And that was the right decision. I recommended someone else for the job, and it was perfect for him and his wife.

Frederick Buechner said that "A mar-



riage made in Heaven is one where a man and a woman become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone. When Jesus changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, perhaps it was a way of saying more or less the same thing."

God became human to make his love more tangible. Marriage continues that incarnation. Marriage mirrors Christ's selfless love. Family life in general is a series of small surrenders that move us to become advocates for one another, where we take delight in letting someone else's life be more important than our own. As author Anne Lamott says, married

life is one spouse secretly thinking he or she got the better deal.

I know I did.



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is "God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a Chaotic World."