

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

What direction are you headed?

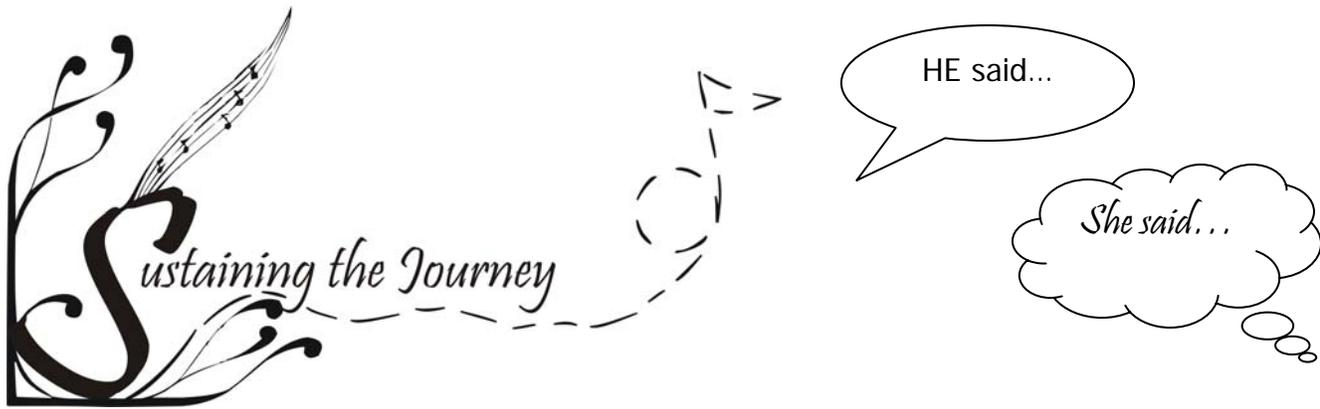
Mary's perspective:

Anyone who knows me may find this title amusing, given I'm directionally challenged, but humor me... (And, for the record, twice in the past three weeks when Bob and I were chatting on the phone during our morning drive he actually interjected in the conversation, "wait, where am I? I think I missed a turn...")

I occasionally find that, when I'm supposed to recognize a message, I get hit over the head with it. Little things in the day will bring it to mind, whether we're talking about remembering to stop at the store on the way home, or whether it's a message of a more spiritual nature. I've recently experienced yet another example of this.

As life flows with its ups and downs, I find that it is helpful - particularly when I'm struggling - to surround myself with positive inspiration. So recently I've been reading one of those self-help books before I go to sleep, hoping the suggestions may take root in my brain. The message of this book is clear and consistent: You're either moving forward or backward. We make thousands of decisions every day, and each step takes us either closer to our goal or farther away from it. The actual goal doesn't matter - it can be to lose weight, or get a better job, or perhaps improve your relationship with your spouse/children/parents/God. Every choice you make either brings you closer to that goal or farther away from it. In addition, your thoughts guide your words, and your words guide your actions, and your actions determine your character - so train your thoughts to only reflect the best vision of yourself.

The author of the book says each time you're faced with a decision, to imagine the best version of yourself and ask, "is this in keeping with the best vision of me? Which option will take me closer to my goal?" This makes sense to me, although it can be a challenge. Like, I KNOW I want to lose weight, but french fries sound so GOOD right now!



Another day, I was reflecting on the Sunday scriptures, and one of the sources I was reading echoed the notion that the choices we make, no matter how insignificant they may seem, shape our character either for better or for worse. Every course of action we take determines in what direction our life will be headed.

Okay, so now what? I began to think about the small decisions I make throughout the day. Whether it's the radio station I choose, or the food I eat for breakfast, I make lots of choices. So how can I make my direction in keeping with God's plan for me?

For one thing, I choose to be positive (at least in my best vision of myself). I occasionally listen to a radio program whose tag line is "contagious encouragement". It's mostly music, with some stories/interviews interjected - but they all have a positive theme. It starts my day on a good foot.

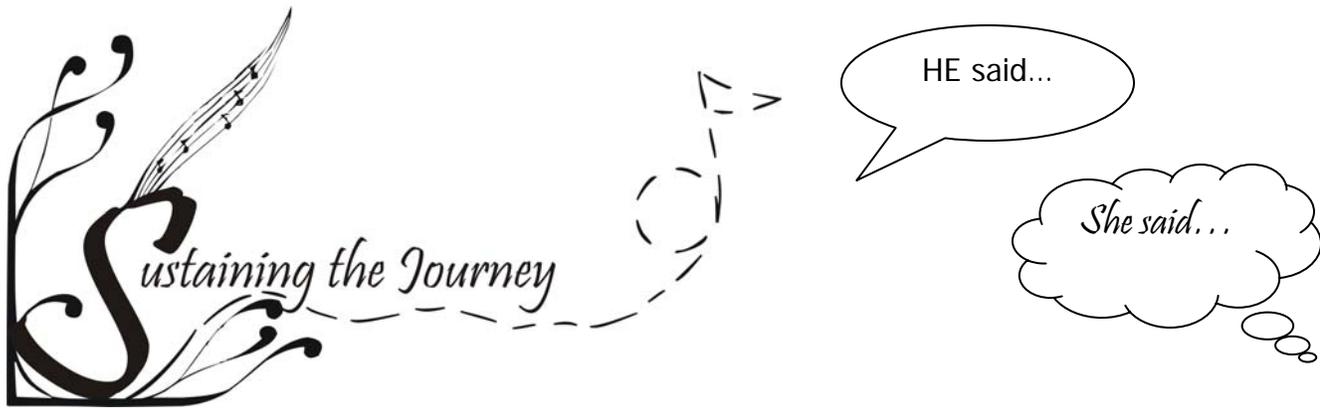
I try to be attuned to the path in ministry where God has plopped me. Bob often says if you're on the right path, things come into place easily. If it's a real struggle, maybe you're not quite on the right path. So when opportunities like speaking engagements, leading workshops, or providing music for events present themselves, I generally make myself available because God has a plan in it.

Back to the whole question of direction, I've been brainstorming other ways to keep moving forward. Everything from choosing to eat a healthy breakfast, to surrounding myself with positive friends, to seeking inspiration and making time for quiet contemplation...all of these make my life better. Bob has introduced a program called "Faith Shots" - kind of a 10-minute refresher on different aspects of our faith. I think that's a great concept, and a positive way to move forward on the path of growing in relationship with the Almighty. I try to walk regularly, for exercise. In recent weeks, when my daughter's illness or work necessitated skipping my usual 12 miles in the park, I noticed a definite negative impact. In those times, I was clearly moving away from a goal - whether the goal is weight loss or muscle strength, or mental clarity (all of the above!). Seemingly little choices each day turned me away from the goal.

We are at the start of another Lenten journey. So what direction are you headed?

Bob's Perspective:

In order to discern and follow a particular direction, we must establish realistic, attainable goals. Goals challenge us, provide us with direction and purpose, and give us great satisfaction when



attained. Without realistically attainable goals, we tend to wander through life aimlessly, randomly and with the feeling of a lack of purpose.

That being said, the *perfect attainment* of all the goals that we set before ourselves is nearly (if not practically) impossible. There are, at times, bumps in the road or major potholes. No matter how hard we try or how diligent we are in our efforts, unforeseen circumstances beyond our control can cause major detours to occur, thus delaying or outright preventing us from arriving at the *planned destination*. In these cases, it is essential to remember that ***the destination is never more important than the journey***. Many of history's greatest explorers and researchers have happened upon some of their most significant discoveries while searching for something entirely different. Sometimes goals are just not meant to be fulfilled in the way we originally planned. Many times, we have to find and celebrate the subtle joys for at least some improvement or enlightenment attained through the pursuit of a goal that just might not work out *perfectly*. *All goals eventually do work out* - just not usually perfect or as expected.

For those who meander through life, rather than develop and work to attain applaudable goals that are beneficial to others as well as to themselves, the journey is only about "self." They follow one thin path - discounting all others for the sake of their myopic point of view. Because their growth is only a facade, *they lack inner strength*, therefore not allowing themselves to truly change and grow. In colloquial terms, they talk the talk, but they don't walk the walk. Eventually, they find little or no joy or satisfaction in what they have attained, because their goals (if any) are either too thin or without true merit. Inevitably they wonder further and further into darkness and fade away.

For those who constantly develop new goals, beneficial to others as well as themselves, the path is not easy. However, it is much more satisfying in the long run, bringing joy as well as a sense of peace, purpose and fulfillment to their lives. Their growth is *first and foremost internal*. They constantly discern and struggle within themselves and amongst others in the attempt to make sense out of all those things that lie somewhere between light and darkness. In the midst of those gray areas, they learn from their mistakes, make repairs as needed, adapt to various situations, and truly continue to lead themselves and others toward the light - which is the most attainable and satisfying of all goals.

A final thought from Mary:

Goals are like prayers... The answer may not be what you had hoped, but there are lessons on the journey. Hence, why our ministry is **Sustaining the Journey...**