



An Egalitarian Marriage

Description

By Julie-Anne Laird



One morning, 19 years ago, I frantically rang Andrew as I stepped out of the lift at Latrobe Uni. "Andrew, are you still here? I think the baby's coming." Andrew had driven me to work that day, as I was 40 weeks pregnant with our 4th child (although not sure why I went to work!!). We both worked for Latrobe Christian Union. I worked one day a week and Andrew 4 days and this was my day to work. He still had our other 3 kids in the car and thankfully hadn't left yet, so he raced me into the hospital. 2.5 hours later we met our youngest son Bradman. Having a fourth child turned out to be a turning point in our marriage.

I think our marriage looks like many other marriages. We bring our personalities, our strengths, our own personal faith and our wholehearted love into a marriage, and this is impacted by our family of origin, our sinfulness, and all the complexities of us as human beings. Andrew married a capable, strong and driven woman and I married a reliable, compassionate, steady and funny man. I knew, as

soon as I met him, that he was the sort of guy I wanted to marry and we could serve God well together! I wanted an equal. I didn't want our marriage to be 'she or he wears the pants'. I wanted it to be us bringing our best before God and into the marriage.

Initially Andrew and I didn't really have a theological stance on men and women in ministry. We just knew we wanted to serve God in any way we could! Over time our views strengthened to be more egalitarian as we read the Bible, articles and books.

The most significant differences I could see about us being egalitarian was that our focus was on gifting and our stance was unity. How we made decisions was a clear and conscious choice that we both wanted to be doing what God wanted. If we didn't agree we wouldn't move forward and we would keep praying and asking God to make it clear to both of us and for us to be on the same page. Of course, more minor decisions really depended on who 'cared' the most or who was the more 'expert' in that area.

The turning point in our marriage happened as we wrestled with how we were going to 'do it all'? I felt torn about the ministry I was doing in our Church, and doing ministry at Uni, plus looking after 4 children, when we both needed to be at Uni sometimes. Andrew blurted out something that I had no idea was coming. He said, 'Julie-anne, you are truly gifted at ministry and I want to support you to do it full time!' I was surprised and felt a bit torn because the evangelistic gifts I had would easily lend itself to staying home with the kids, having people over all the time, running the P&A group at the school as well as the Playgroup at Church etc. Yet, as Andrew pointed out, Uni ministry had lots of gifted Bible teachers, but they didn't have heaps of gifted evangelists. Also Andrew was really enjoying being with the kids and actually having time with them.

We eventually worked out a solution we were both happy with. We would both work 3 days a week and then we were able to have 4 days at home with the family and be able to be involved in our local church. Andrew started up his own business, which grew to 3 days quickly, and I went to 3 days in ministry. I would look after the kids while he was involved in the local church, on vestry, preaching, working etc and he would look after the kids during the week while I did University ministry and other voluntary things. We also had to have the conversation about it being equal at home with the duties as well. I didn't want to spend my days at home catching up on all the housework. Andrew rose to that challenge and it was incredibly freeing for me knowing I could go to work and not worry about things and I wanted to give Andrew that as well.

The thing that surprised me was people asking about how I felt about Andrew giving up ministry? We hadn't thought about it like that. Our thinking had been, how could we support each other to serve God in the best way possible! Neither felt more important than the other. If Andrew was prepping for a sermon, I would take the kids out for the day and if I was at a camp, Andrew would step up and look after the kids for the whole week. We just kept talking and working out how to do it together. I don't think this is unusual in a marriage or family but it did look different as a woman in ministry. I really didn't know many married women, with children, who did this and it felt pioneering in some ways.

We all theologically believe men and women are equal before God (Gal 3:28) and we all want each other to thrive to become the person God wants them to be. The problem is when this isn't going well; where there's an abuse of power, or disrespect, or selfishness that insidiously works out in marriages or one person makes the decisions. We all want a marriage where we're treated with respect, love, generosity and kindness (in fact all relationships should operate like this). So really we

should call all marriages egalitarian because, as Christians, we want the other to flourish in the gifts God has given them and for God to be first in their relationship, and we want each to love Jesus with all our heart and to serve Him until the day we die!!



Julie-anne is the Director of Missional engagement for City to City Australia three days per week and would love to see real gospel movement across Australia. She has a real heart for people to know Christ and would love to see Churches doing this better.

For the last 20 years, she has worked with AFES helping students reach out to the Uni Campus at both Melbourne and LaTrobe. She is the Chair of Lausanne Australia and has been a Victorian Coordinator for Arrow Leadership for the last 12 years. She is also the Young Adults Pastor at their local Church, All Saints Anglican Church in Greensborough, Melbourne.

Julie-anne is married to Andrew (not Andrew Katay, nor Andrew Laird who works for CBF, very confusing!) and they have 4 young adult children who are only 5.5 years apart (what was she thinking?!).

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