



Foreword to Sojourners: *The Family on the Move*¹

Ted Ward

Mission is central to the work of the church. Family is central to the *meaning* of the church. The relationship between family and mission is so intimate that each is enhanced by the other. Reflecting the Gospel's power to transform people and to bring purposeful unity, the missionary family is an important part of the witness of the Word. Incarnation of Christ into family is central in the work and witness of the missionary. The Gospel is evident in the family's redemptive responses to its own weaknesses and failures.

Once upon a time, not many years ago, printer's ink and preacher's points were mistakenly wasted on a non-Christian axiom: "Christ first, family second, self last." Half-truth at best, this scale springs from the wrong sort of outlook. To start with, though self-denial is an important Christian virtue (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Philippians 2:3-4,) self is also a valid point of reference for measuring love: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Self-loathing provides a poor base for evangelism. Was ever a soul won for Christ by a person who despised himself? More to the point of this book, the very idea that one's family should be subordinated to ministry springs from too small a view of one's ministry. The family is inseparable from one's ministry.

Becoming obsessed or off-balanced to an extreme is obviously hazardous, no matter which direction. Quoting various "proof-texts" is a popular way to slice ministry and family into a false dichotomy: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26 NRSV)

Far more pervasive in Scripture are the mandates and models for profound commitment in marriage and family. Consider Christ's dying for his "bride," the church. Consider the persistent image of the creating, nurturing, defending, and redeeming God, described to us as "Father." Clearly, to be Christian is to have both a high view of Scripture and a high view of family.

Sam and Ruth Rowen have lived their theology. They know who they are; they know their children as unique persons. They know the Lord Jesus Christ and his work in their lives. They know of their appointment to ministry abroad in that world. And none of these elements conflicts or competes with any other.

From the wisdom of the Word and from their experiences as parents and missionaries, the Rowens share here their family's love and philosophy. Even more useful to those who choose to build upon the Rowen family's experiences, the Rowens provide a series of thought-provoking exercises.

A quick glance through this book alerts you to the fact that reading the text of this book is only the starting place. The more significant insights will come as you go the second mile and use the exercises to reflect with care and prayer upon your own family situation and its potentialities for growing closer, warmer, and deeper—emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

The unity for which our Lord prayed in John 17 begins in the missionary family and then works its way outward through the rest of the family's ministry. The mission of the church of Jesus Christ deserves nothing less.

¹ Ted Ward. Foreword in Samuel and Ruth Rowen. *Sojourners: The Family on the Move*. Farmington, MI: Associates of Urbanus, 1990. Used with Permission