

Voices: My father's gift—a practicum for ministry

December 5, 2018

I found myself at age 35 in a hospital hallway waiting my turn to visit my 92-year-old friend, Frauken, who was in the ICU with pneumonia. As I waited, my mind entered into the graveyard of forgotten memories.

The graveyard of forgotten memories

Two months earlier, I sat in my office at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, across a desk from Greg Garrison, a reporter with AL.com there to [interview](#) me about my book, [Now that I'm Called: A Guide for Women Discerning a Call to Ministry](#).

Poised and ready for my interview, I was caught off-guard by a simple question: "What does your dad believe about women in ministry?"

To Garrison, this was an obvious question to ask. My dad has been a Southern Baptist pastor for most of my life. Given my age, my calling, what Baptists generally believe about women in ministry and now my book, one could assume my dad and I have had this conversation. However, I'd never asked my dad or myself the question.

"I don't know," I responded immediately.

Entering the graveyard of forgotten memories, I wondered: "Have I buried a conversation with my dad about his view of women in ministry? What did he believe?"

A special kind of ministry practicum



Kristen Padilla with her father, Mark Lindsey (Photo: Kristen Padilla)

The summer before my sophomore year of high school, during a summer camp called Super Summer, I surrendered to a call to vocational ministry. Upon returning home, I announced the call to my parents and then my church. Looking back, I realize I wrestled with a call to ministry for years.

If I was a boy, I would have announced my calling boldly and unreservedly much earlier, perhaps as early as age 10. By age 8, I cried to my parents, “Why didn’t God make me a boy so I could be a preacher?” I didn’t despise being a girl. I just felt called to something off limits to girls.

As I tiptoed through my forgotten memories, searching for a buried conversation with my dad or even one-off comments he made about women in ministry, I uncovered some memories I didn’t expect to find.

I was 5 years old when I first met Geraldine. She and her husband were members of the small, rural East Texas church my father pastored.

My first memory of Geraldine was in her home. My parents took my sister Kim and me one evening to visit Geraldine on the eve of her heart bypass surgery. While Kim and I were playing, I studied the way my dad spoke to Geraldine and placed his hand on her shoulder to pray.

This first memory faded as another emerged. Walking down a sterile hospital hallway with my mother and sister to meet my father, we passed Geraldine's sobbing husband, barely able to walk, borne along by a nurse on each side. His sobs shook my little frame.

"Geraldine died during surgery," my dad said. Wide-eyed, I watched as my father tried to comfort and minister to Geraldine's bereaved husband.

That memory faded like smoke, and a new one took its place. We were in our small, country church for Geraldine's funeral. Once again, I watched and observed my father minister to the family.

These memories about Geraldine were just as much memories about my father. Geraldine and her family happened to be the first family I remember watching my father minister to in a time of great need.

This memory propelled me down a lane I wasn't expecting to travel. While searching for a dogmatic conversation about women in ministry, I found memories revealing a father who gave me a rich practicum for ministry.

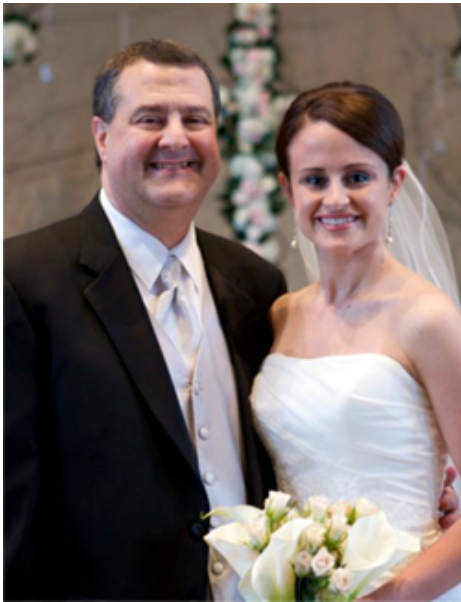
My father's gift

Much of my childhood was spent on ministry errands with my father in others' homes, hospital rooms, funeral homes and the church. Year after year, I observed firsthand how to preach, to study Scripture, to pray and to minister in a thousand ways.

Many times, after picking me up from school, my father took me on a hospital visit. These visits were special because I could watch dad up close.

I learned what to say to someone who is at death's door.

I realized quickly as one memory dissipated into another that shadowing my dad all those years was like being enrolled in a special school for ministry, with him as my teacher and mentor.



Kristen Padilla with her father, Mark Lindsey (Photo: Kristen Padilla)

As my mind came out of the graveyard of forgotten memories, a nurse came out and said, “She’s ready.”

It was a strange experience as I stepped up to Frauken’s door. All I could see was my father. Was I ready for this? What would I say?

I rounded the bed on her right side and smiled. Tears in her eyes, she whispered through labored breathing, “I’m glad you have come.” I reached for her hand, remembering my dad always touched his people—no matter what diseases or infirmities they carried.

As I visited with Frauken, words of Scripture and comfort I remember my

father saying made their way to my tongue. The visit was rehearsed in the best sense. It wasn't pretend or manufactured. Instead, I was prepared for this moment.

Two weeks later, I put on my black dress and black shoes and drove to the church where Frauken's memorial service was held.

I didn't conduct the service. I'm not ordained. But as a woman who is called to ministry—and who is trying to find a place in vocational ministry—I'm thankful for a father who prepared and taught me by example how to be a Christian minister.

I still don't know what my dad believes about women in ministry. Perhaps we'll have that conversation after this article. It is possible his purpose in bringing me along as he ministered to Geraldine and others wasn't for the sake of my calling and training in future ministry. Still, what he did—perhaps more than what he said—is one of the greatest and most significant gifts for my formation as a Christian minister.

Dad, thank you for 30 years of faithful gospel ministry—preaching week in and week out and serving at the feet of others like our Lord Jesus. You've served mostly in small churches and in not-so-glamorous ministries. You've never pursued fame or recognition, but have served with the purpose of glorifying God and leading people to repent and be saved. Remember: God looks with favor on the lowly and exalts those who are humble. Thank you for the loving example you've set for your family and your people. Keep up the good fight. Run the race, for there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to you on that day (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Kristen Padilla is the author of Now That I'm Called: A Guide for Women Discerning a Call to Ministry. She is a writer, Bible teacher, wife to a biblical scholar, mom of one, and on staff at Beeson Divinity School of

Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. She occasionally blogs at kristenrpaddilla.com.