

Well, we're at it again with the "About" series of the Whitestone Podcast—yeah, that's where we profile a person who's interesting and likely very valuable for us to think about and reflect upon. But, in this case today, this is about a couple...and it's highly personal to boot. However, I assure you these two people are powerful examples of Christians in this era truly living for Christ and His grand purposes.

So, this episode is about Howard Cummings and Margie Cummings—the parents of my wife, Cathy. So, you might think this podcast is simply a tribute to family—and it *is* a tribute of sorts. But the truth is, Howard and Margie were exemplary as Christians who lived out unusually impactful lives for Christ at every level. And the way they responded to God is worthy for every Christian to consider. So...here goes!

Howard Cummings and Margie Cummings were married for 69 years. And what they did was excel at living out a sort of Venn diagram! That picture of two interlocking circles is exactly what a Christian couple's ministry anchoring two effective individual ministries looks like...yes, a wife living out her own identity in Christ well, her husband living out his own identity in Christ well—and the two together living out their shared ministries in Christ well! And that's exactly what Margie and Howard did—fulfilling all three parts of that Venn diagram superbly! And they did that as relatively anonymous yet very impactful Christians. Yes, fame itself was simply not part of the focus in the least. So, let's profile a bit about that Venn diagram...yeah, that's an amazingly fruitful mix of *them...and* of just *him...and* of just *her*. All three!

Howard Cummings attended college where he was in the nationally-broadcast Revivaltime Choir. He then transferred colleges to Minneapolis, and while preparing to be a pastor there, he ministered in a traveling quartet called Mission-Aires. Margie Cummings graduated from an academy that was also in Minneapolis, where she then started her ministry working for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association—that's because Graham's headquarters were in Minneapolis in that era. And while they were both living there, Howard met Margie, they fell in love, then they married June 24, 1955. A uniquely impactful adventure had begun!

The great path taken was that Howard and Margie Cummings were highly effective ministers of the Gospel their entire 69 years together. Their 48 years of pastorates were in Newcastle, Wyoming, when Howard also led the youth ministries of the Wyoming District of the Assemblies of God for a time; Huron, South Dakota; then 27 years in Aurora, Colorado, during which Howard also served for a time on the Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Board.

Clearly, the Cummings' most intimate impact was in their pastorates—many lives were changed and disciplined! But, beyond that, Howard lived and breathed a missions focus driven by his burning passion for the lost worldwide. In their Aurora pastorate, global missions support and activity by that local church was a cornerstone: the extending God's great love through Christ! Missionary couples routinely preached and taught there many times each year—and Howard led the church in giving each a standing ovation!

And here's the thing: while there were some missionaries who were single, the majority were indeed husband and wife teams treated as a productive couple in fruitful service—yet each person was treated as a missionary with their own niche, too...you know, like a Venn diagram! Yes, that would be specific individual impact by the husband...specific individual impact by the wife...and—often the largest part of the Venn diagram, the center part—would be their yoked-together impact. Yeah, both spouses independent and spouses together were treated as missionaries. As part of that strategy, that local church in Aurora, Colorado financially supported hundreds of missionaries...year-in and year-out! Hundreds!

So, right here, we're compelled to give some essential context for global missions in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—a period of time when hundreds of millions of new believers were added around the world! That was largely rooted in a few leading, missions-oriented denominations and a pocketful of other global ministries pursuing advancement of Jesus's Great Commission with deep passion and perseverance.

By any measure, these decades were one of the greatest periods of Gospel response in the history of the Church. And Howard was robustly leading that local church into the heart of all that—yes, befriending and exhorting and supporting missionaries being sent with the goal of bearing fruit around the world!

And fruit abounded! That local pastorate devoted a significant portion of the church's resources each year for global missions—yes, a consistent commitment recognized far and wide by denominational leadership and, of course, by grateful missionaries worldwide. And some of the most engaged in that missions strategy were those believers *in that local church itself* who were giving sacrificially year-in and year-out to global missions...helping build churches abroad...and themselves ministering to visiting missionaries!

In an earlier Whitestone episode, I related a story of a Christian giver who borrowed thousands of dollars at a local bank as the last necessary link for completion of a growing church in Asia that greatly needed the facility. That unheralded giver was Howard...*and his Margie*...and that wasn't the only time! Hey, I learned more about truly Biblical personal finance in that worldview and those actionable events than from supposed Christian financial experts with ideas more grounded in Ben Franklin than the Apostle Paul.

But that isn't the whole Cummings story, not even close! In dozens of countries around the world, Howard and Margie ministered in tandem for over five decades to numerous missionaries and local pastors as well as countless other believers. In these faraway places, the Cummings focused on preaching, teaching, training, encouraging, fellowshiping, and praying for all kinds of needs...*and dreams!* They both came brimming with empathetic experience, wisdom, love, and a heart for fearless yet sometimes discouraged carriers of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Howard and Margie were often quite accurately called *missionary pastors*...they both dearly loved those missionaries and ministries flourishing in so many places.

Now I still must pause and emphasize that the universal church over the centuries has—far more often than not—been very ingrown, focusing primarily on personal, parochial, worldly issues. Still, the Great Commission has always been obeyed by a few—from Paul and Barnabas and the church at Antioch on to today. And with modern air travel, great technology, and awareness of the need by billions of unreached people for Christ, how can it be that Christians ignore Jesus's command to go forth and make disciples?

Now back to the Cummings. Along the way over the years, Margie also had her own individual ministries: teaching children's church, playing the organ, leading women's ministry, and captivately teaching adult Sunday School classes for years. But her ministries were beyond church and vocational matters, too: Margie was an incredible wife, mother, grandma, and grandma great. Never lagging behind, Howard also was a very devoted husband, father, grandfather, and papa great. Both were highly generous and loving.

The year 2024 started sleepily, of course...but our families' attention was immediately refocused on New Years Day—Margie was experiencing significant pain. We went to an ER, but a verdict came later: stage 4 cancer had eaten away her backbone and spine—resulting in unimaginable pain the cancer doctor himself said he had never seen before. Then, a kind of blur set in: prayers, doctor's visits, meds, the moving of Howard and Margie from their home of 46 years to a care facility for which the family is forever grateful. Our beloved Margie passed on August 29. *But the good news is, Margie is with her Lord and Savior, Jesus!*

And in the very next days, Howard developed several huge medical issues himself. And just two weeks after Margie passed—almost to the hour—*Howard himself also went to be with his Lord, Jesus!* Margie was 88, Howard 89. But the clear record shows two lives very well lived for Christ! Yes, in all her individual roles, Margie was exemplary! And in all his individual roles, Howard was exemplary, too! But *together*, in the middle of that Venn diagram of service to Christ yoked in marriage and vocation, *together they were stunningly effective in local churches and around the world!* Yes. "Well done, good and faithful servants!"

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Do you think Christ views believers' marriages as yoked in service to Him, all the while with each marriage partner also ministering as a distinct individual representing Christ to others? Discuss.
  
2. What are all of your specific roles in your personal full-time ministry, yes, where you represent Christ at all times (e.g., marriage, family, worker/professional, neighbor, believer)? How are you doing in each? In each of your roles, are you working with others or are they more individualistic at the core? Discuss.
  
3. Do you personally have a believing neighbor or pastor or missionary or coworker who has touched your life for real betterment? Who is it, and how so? Have you told them...thanked them?