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What is the husband's role in marriage?

BY DENNIS RAINEY

The Scriptures clearly give us the model for being a man, a husband, and father.

We have all heard jokes about “who wears the pants in the family.” Yet leadership in the home is no laughing matter. During the last few decades our culture has redefined the meaning and responsibilities of men and women in society and in the home. Many men are confused and insecure. Consequently, they do not lead effectively, or they do not even try.

Fortunately, the Scriptures clearly give us the model for being a man, a husband, and a father. I call that model the “servant/leader.” When correctly interpreted and applied, this model not only results in freedom for the husband and wife, but will also help you work better as a team to combat isolation and conflict in your marriage.

1 BE A LEADER.

The teaching of the New Testament clearly shows that women are to be respected, revered, and treated as equals with men. When husbands, particularly Christian husbands, do not treat their wives as a precious gift from God and helpmate, they can cause those wives to search for ways to find significance and value as persons, often outside God’s will. God has placed the husband in the position of responsibility. It does not matter what kind of personality a man may have. I believe our wives want us and need us to lead. You will not lead her perfectly, but you must care for your wife and family by serving them with perseverance.

2 LOVE YOUR WIFE UNCONDITIONALLY.

Your unconditional acceptance of your wife is not based upon her performance, but on her worth as God’s gift to you. If you want to love your wife unconditionally, always be sure her emotional tank is full. One of the best ways to do that is to affirm her constantly. Let her know verbally that you value her, respect her, and love her. I have discovered that I simply cannot do that enough.

3 SERVE YOUR WIFE.

According to the New Testament, being head of your wife does not mean being her master, but her servant. One of the best ways to serve your wife is to understand her needs and try to meet them. Do you know what your wife’s top three needs are right now? What is she worried about? What troubles her? What type of pressure does she feel? Learn the answers to questions like that, and then do what you can to reduce her worries, her troubles, her pressures.

To be a leader, a lover, and a servant is to accommodate your life to the gift God has given you—your wife. Give up your life for hers and, at the judgment seat of Christ, He will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”



What is the *wife's* role in marriage?

BY BARBRA RAINEY

The confusion in today's culture about "roles" in marriage compels us to understand what the Bible says about the unique responsibilities God assigns to a wife.

Perhaps more than at any other time in history, women today need a clear understanding of how they should relate to their husbands. In fact, the significant social changes brought about by the women's liberation movement over the last few decades have led to such confusion that the very idea of "roles" is repugnant to standard." It's important for us to look clearly at what the Bible says on this subject. The Scriptures are clear about the unique responsibilities God assigns to a wife.

1 BE A HELPER TO YOUR HUSBAND.

While all of us are called to be helpers to others, the Bible places a special emphasis on this responsibility for wives. Genesis tells us that God decided to make a "helper suitable for [man]" (Gen. 2:18). It is interesting to note that the Hebrew meaning of the word helper in this passage is found hereafter in the Bible to refer only to God as He helps us. The fact that this same word is applied to a wife signifies that we women have been given tremendous power for good in our husbands' lives.

2 RESPECT YOUR HUSBAND.

When you respect your husband you reverence him, notice him, regard him, honor him, prefer him, and esteem him. It means valuing his opinion, admiring his wisdom and character, appreciating his commitment to you, and considering his needs and values. Every husband wants his wife to be on his team, to coach him when necessary, but most of all to be his cheerleader. A husband needs a wife who is behind him, believing in him, appreciating him, and cheering him on as he goes out into the world every day.

3 LOVE YOUR HUSBAND.

A good description of the kind of love your husband needs is "unconditional acceptance." In other words, accept your husband just as he is—an imperfect person. Love also means being committed to a mutually fulfilling sexual relationship. Surveys show that sex is one of a man's most important needs—if not the most important. When a wife resists intimacy, is uninterested, or is only passively interested, her husband may feel rejection. It will cut at his self-image, tear at him to the very center of his being, and create isolation.

4 SUBMIT TO THE LEADERSHIP OF YOUR HUSBAND.

Scripture make it clear that a wife should submit voluntarily to her husband's sensitive and loving leadership. Therefore, as I voluntarily submit to my husband, I am completing him. I am helping him fulfill his responsibilities, and I am helping him become the man, the husband, and the leader God intended him to be. Building oneness in marriage works best when both spouses choose to fulfill their responsibilities voluntarily, with no pressure or coercion. To become the servant-leader God has commanded him to be, Dennis needs my gracious respect and submission. And when Dennis loves me the way he is commanded to, I can more easily submit myself to that leadership.



Steps for *resolving* conflict in your marriage

BY DENNIS RAINEY

There is no way to avoid conflict in your marriage.
The question is: How will you deal with it?

Few couples like to admit it, but conflict is common to all marriages. We have had our share of conflict and some of our disagreements have not been pretty. We could probably write a book on what not to do! It's important for us to look clearly at what the Bible says on this subject. The Scriptures are clear about the unique responsibilities God assigns to a wife.

Since every marriage has its tensions, it isn't a question of avoiding them but of how you deal with them. Conflict can lead to a process that develops oneness or isolation. You and your spouse must choose how you will act when conflict occurs.

1 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES KNOWING, ACCEPTING, AND ADJUSTING TO YOUR DIFFERENCES.

One reason we have conflict in marriage is that opposites attract. But after being married for a while (sometimes a short while), the attractions become repellents. You may argue over small irritations or over major philosophical differences in handling finances or raising children. You may find that your backgrounds and your personalities are so different that you wonder how and why God placed you together in the first place. It's important to understand these differences, and then to accept and adjust to them. Just as Adam accepted God's gift of Eve, you are called to accept His gift to you. God gave you a spouse who completes you in ways you haven't even learned yet.

2 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES DEFEATING SELFISHNESS.

Maintaining harmony in marriage has been difficult since Adam and Eve. Two people beginning their marriage together and trying to go their own selfish, separate ways can never hope to experience the oneness of marriage as God intended. Marriage offers a tremendous opportunity to do something about selfishness. The answer for ending selfishness is found in Jesus and His teachings. He showed us that instead of wanting to be first, we must be willing to be last. We must love our neighbors (our spouses) as much as we love ourselves. To experience oneness, you must give up your will for the will of another. But to do this, you must first give up your will to Christ, and then you will find it possible to give up your will for that of your spouse.

3 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES PURSUING THE OTHER PERSON.

Living peaceably means pursuing peace. It means taking the initiative to resolve a difficult conflict rather than waiting for the other person to take the first step. To pursue the resolution of a conflict means setting aside your own hurt, anger, and bitterness. It means not losing heart. My challenge

to you is to “keep your relationships current.” In other words, resolve that you will remain in solid fellowship daily with your spouse—as well as with your children, parents, coworkers, and friends. Don’t allow Satan to gain a victory by isolating you from someone you care about.

4 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES LOVING CONFRONTATION.

Wordsworth said, “He who has a good friend needs no mirror.” Blessed is the marriage where both spouses feel the other is a good friend who will listen, understand, and work through any problem or conflict. To do this well takes loving confrontation. Confronting your spouse with grace and tactfulness requires wisdom, patience, and humility. Here are a few other tips we’ve found useful:

- » Check your motivation. Will your words help or hurt? Will bringing this up cause healing, wholeness, and oneness, or further isolation?
- » Check your attitude. Loving confrontation says, “I care about you. I respect you and I want you to respect me. I want to know how you feel.” Don’t hop on your bulldozer and run your spouse down. Approach your spouse lovingly.
- » Listen to your spouse. Seek to understand his or her view, and ask questions to clarify viewpoints.
- » Focus on the problem, rather than the person. For example, you need a budget and your spouse is something of a spendthrift. Work through the plans for finances and make the lack of budget the enemy, not your spouse.
- » Above all, focus on understanding your spouse rather than on who is winning or losing. When your spouse confronts you, listen carefully to what is said and what isn’t said. For example, it may be that he is upset about something that happened at work and you’re getting nothing more than the brunt of that pressure.

5 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES FORGIVENESS.

No matter how hard two people try to love and please each other, they will fail. With failure comes hurt. And the only ultimate relief for hurt is the soothing salve of forgiveness. The key to maintaining an open, intimate, and happy marriage is to ask for and grant forgiveness quickly. And the ability to do that is tied to each individual’s relationship with God.

Forgiving means giving up resentment and the desire to punish. By an act of your will, you let the other person off the hook. And as a Christian you do not do this under duress, scratching and screaming in protest. Rather, you do it with a gentle spirit and love.

6 RESOLVING CONFLICT REQUIRES RETURNING A BLESSING FOR AN INSULT.

Every marriage operates on either the “Insult for Insult” or the “Blessing for Insult” relationship. Husbands and wives can become extremely proficient at trading insults. Many couples don’t seem to know any other way to relate to each other.

What does it mean to return a blessing for an insult? To give a blessing first means stepping aside or simply refusing to retaliate if your spouse gets angry. It also means doing good. Finally, being a blessing means seeking peace, actually pursuing it. When you eagerly seek to forgive, you are pursuing oneness, not isolation.



Steps to defeat *isolation* in your marriage

BY DENNIS RAINEY

Every marriage, no matter how good, needs a plan to combat isolation and to bring about intimacy.

Isolation is a disease that afflicts every marriage at some point. A husband and wife slowly drift apart in ways they don't even recognize at first. Signs of isolation include the following:

- » A feeling that your spouse isn't hearing you and doesn't want to understand
- » An attitude of "Who cares?" and/or "Why try?"
- » A feeling of being unable to please or meet the expectations of your spouse
- » A sense that your spouse is detached from you.
- » A refusal to cope with what's really wrong: "That's your problem, not mine."
- » A feeling that keeping the peace by avoiding the conflict is better than the pain of dealing with reality

Every marriage, no matter how good, needs a plan to defeat isolation and to bring about intimacy. Isolation is like a terminal virus that invades your marriage—silently, slowly, and painlessly at first. By the time many couples become aware of its insidious effects, it can be too late. Your marriage can eventually be crippled by boredom and apathy, and it could even die from emotional malnutrition and neglect.

1 LEARN ABOUT GOD'S BLUEPRINTS FOR MARRIAGE.

To mirror God's image. Your marriage should reflect God's image to a world that desperately needs to see who He is. Because we're created in the image of God, people who wouldn't otherwise know what God is like should be able to look at us and get a glimpse.

To mutually complete each other and experience companionship. You need each other. You recognize that now. But if you build your marriage according to God's blueprints, as the years go by you will really appreciate the genius of how God has custom-made your mate for you.

To multiply a godly legacy. A line of godly descendants—your children—will carry a reflection of God's character to the next generation. Your marriage is far more important than you may have ever imagined because it affects God's reputation on this planet. That's why it's essential for you to set Jesus Christ apart as the Builder of your home.

2 REAFFIRM YOUR COMMITMENT.

Many marriages today are insecure and crumbling because the husband and wife have stopped accepting each other. They have stopped trusting God. Instead they are focusing on their differences and weaknesses. When a husband and wife truly become united and become one flesh, they experience what I call "oneness," which is the opposite of isolation in marriage. This is a true unity of body and soul, a total commitment to God and to each other.

3 DEAL WITH YOUR SELFISHNESS.

Marriage offers a tremendous opportunity to do something about selfishness. Someone may say, "There is no hope." Barbara and I know there is hope because we learned to apply a plan that is bigger than human self-centeredness. Through principles taught in Scripture, we have learned how to set aside our selfish interests for the good of each other as well as for the profit of our marriage. The answer for ending selfishness is found in Jesus and His teachings. He showed us that instead of wanting to be first, we must be willing to be last. A marriage is built when two individuals deny their selfishness and yield to Jesus Christ for the purpose of loving and serving their spouses.

4 BEGIN TO PRAY WITH YOUR SPOUSE.

Praying daily together has helped Barbara and me resolve conflicts and keep the communication lines open. Most importantly, it has demonstrated our dependence on Jesus Christ as the Lord of our family. God intends for marriage to be a spiritual relationship consisting of three—not just a man and a woman, but the two of them and God, relating spiritually and remaining committed to the other for a lifetime. Wouldn't it be natural for God, the One who initiated the relationship, to want a couple to bring their troubles, worries, and praises to Him on a regular, daily basis?

5 DEVELOP YOUR RELATIONAL SKILLS.

Most of us need training and practice to develop skill in practical, yet vital, areas of marriage, such as: adjusting to your differences; resolving conflict; listening to each other; speaking the truth in love; communicating expectations; and forgiving each other. Your determination to improve your skills in areas like these will show just how serious you are about revitalizing your marriage.

6 SPEND FOCUSED TIME TOGETHER.

We need to pause once or twice a year to rest, count our blessings, and dream some dreams. Barbara and I take what we call planning weekends. This time away together is effective in keeping our communication current, and it's just plain fun. Without any of the everyday distractions, we can concentrate on romancing each other. I can give Barbara flowers and speak tender words. She can give me undivided attention as I unwind and share from the heart. We can stay up talking, munching snacks, and listening to music, and know we don't have to face a demanding schedule the next day.

7 ATTEND A WEEKEND TO REMEMBER® MARRIAGE GETAWAY.

This is one of the greatest investments you will ever make in your marriage. Over the course of this weekend you will learn more about God's blueprints for marriage, you'll come to a fuller understanding of biblical roles for husbands and wives, and you'll hear practical principles for improving your relationship. And you'll learn all of this during a weekend away from all the distractions of everyday life.

8 START OR ATTEND A COUPLES' STUDY USING THE ART OF MARRIAGE® CONNECT SERIES.

The Art of Marriage Connect Series is a group of FamilyLife Bible studies created for several couples to go through together. They are designed for a home-based small-group setting in which couples discover God's blueprints for marriage. Becoming part of an Art of Marriage Connect group would be a great way to develop relationships with people in your church who can grow with you in your marriage and even become accountability partners for you.

9 DEPEND ON GOD'S POWER TO BUILD YOUR MARRIAGE.

Why aren't more marriages successful? The problem is that believers who enter into marriage don't use all of the resources and tools God makes available to build oneness in their homes. God's ideal plan is that both partners in a marriage know Him personally, that they are first part of His family before they try to build a family of their own.



How to increase *romance* in your marriage

BY DENNIS RAINEY

Five tips to put some spark back into your relationship.

A TV talk show host was interviewing one of Hollywood's biggest male stars, a man known for his prowess with the opposite sex. At one point, the host asked him, "What makes a great lover?"

"Two things," the actor replied. "First of all, it is a man who can satisfy one woman over a lifetime. And it is a man who can be satisfied with one woman for a lifetime."

What a great answer!

The foundation of a marriage is a solid commitment of unconditional love. Romance is an outward expression of that love. It is the fire in the fireplace—the warm response of one spouse to another that says, "We may have struggles, but I love you, and everything is okay."

Romance and Excitement

I find it interesting that God found romance and sex so important that He dedicated an entire book in the Bible, Song of Solomon, to encourage us to experience it. Although the Song of Solomon has spiritual meaning and application, it is considered by a large number of scholars as primarily God's description of what a romantic, sexual relationship between man and wife should be like.

Throughout the book, the lover (Solomon) and his beloved (Shulamith) talk enthusiastically about romantic and sexual love. They obviously enjoy each other's bodies.

Romantic love is part of God's character. He made us in His image, and He gave us emotions. Just as He woos us to follow after Him and express our love for Him, so a husband and wife attempt to win each other's affections. I think in many regards husbands and wives are modeling what God is up to as He pursues individuals.

Rekindling the Fire

You can't expect the intense feelings of engagement and early marriage to last. But one thing should not change, and that is your commitment to each other based on the covenant you made before God. As you actively choose to love, based on this commitment, those romantic feelings will return.

If you want to put some spark back into your relationship, I have a few tips:

1 SEEK TO MEET YOUR SPOUSE'S ROMANTIC NEEDS.

This means becoming a student of your spouse and learning what pleases him or her. Meeting your spouse's romantic needs involves more than understanding male/females differences. It also means remembering what pleases him or her. And it means sacrificing your own needs to meet those of your spouse. Selfishness and romance do not mix well.

2 MAKE ROMANCE A PRIORITY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

Everything of value or that requires a time commitment finds a place on your schedule. Romance should, too. Sit down tonight with your spouse and your calendars. Find a time in the next two weeks for you two to go out. This also means making time in your schedule for sex. One reason so many marriage beds are frozen over or boring is that couples "just don't have time" for sex.

3 MAKE YOUR HOME—AND ESPECIALLY YOUR BEDROOM—A CREATIVE SETTING FOR SEX.

Your bedroom needs to be a private, secure, romantic hideaway, not a place where the husbands rebuilds his motorcycle or the kids gather to play games.

4 LOOK FOR CREATIVE WAYS TO COMMUNICATE LOVE AND COMMITMENT TO YOUR SPOUSE.

When two people are dating and considering marriage, they often come up with a variety of creative ways to woo and attract each other. They talk on the phone, they send notes and flowers, they plan special outings. Isn't it a shame that this courtship fizzles within a few months of the wedding ceremony? We should court our spouses with the same enthusiasm.

5 PLAN OUT SOME SPECIAL DATES OR WEEKENDS TOGETHER.

We're amazed at the number of couples we meet who rarely spend meaningful time together. Many couples say they haven't been on a date in over a year. Even more shocking is the fact that some haven't been away alone together overnight since their honeymoon! How long has it been for you?

Men, will you take initiative to pursue your wife romantically? Wives, will you truly love your men? Rekindling the romance in your marriage doesn't require a lot of money, and it often doesn't even take much time. What you do need is the commitment to do it. Like any good fire in the fireplace, it needs attention and fuel. The warmth is worth it!