

Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

Review of previous week

In the past weeks before the long break we have spoken about God's principles for a good marriage and the role models for wives and husbands. We have also looked at the question why we fail to meet these principles. We have discussed the issue of control and how to overcome the desire for domination. We have looked at the differences between men and women and why it is so important to accept these as positive instead of considering them as a threat. Finally we have talked about the building blocks for value systems and habits that are not good for a marriage – such as childhood experiences and our reaction to them and our current behavior and the thinking patterns that result from that.

All these were fairly general considerations. Our goal there was to get a better understanding of the general principles that help us to overcome problems and to build a marriage that is even better than the one we have right now.

From now on we will address more specific issues and consider various types of men who don't lead and women who don't follow. Our purpose here is not only to recognize and overcome our own flaws but also to help our spouses to become how God intended them to be. So when we talk about passive men today, we do not want to criticize their behavior anymore but we want to understand the reasons why they are that way and how their wives can help them to become leaders again. So today's topic is

5 The withdrawn man

Many wives struggle with the fact that their husbands have become quite passive in the family. They, that is the wives, look for inspiration, guidance, and directions in which the family should go – but there is simply nothing. The husband is silent at home and doesn't react to requests. He does not seem to participate in the family life anymore but is instead almost addicted to the TV – in particular sport events are more important to him than family issues. So instead of being the leader of the family he is rather an additional burden for it. Many women complain about that and there is no doubt that this is actually true: a lot of husbands are in fact extremely passive at home.

This should not be so but it doesn't help to say to these men: "You're supposed to be the leader – so get up and make yourself useful." Of course, this is what eventually should happen and many wives try to achieve this by presenting all kinds of tasks for their husbands.

But it doesn't work that way!

First of all, it makes the wife the leader of the family and here husband merely someone who follows orders – if he doesn't resist and withdraw completely. He may do some more in the household but he is even further away from being the leader. Secondly, the wife would completely lose the respect for her husband. His role in the family is not important anymore and he could as well be replaced by somebody else. So pushing men to become leaders is not the solution to our problem.

5.1 Understanding the reason: lack of confidence

Instead, we have to look at the reasons *why* the husband is so passive. By God's design, he is the doer – the outgoing person. So what made him withdraw from this role? Usually, there is only one reason – a lack of *confidence*.

Men *love* to give directions. Even if they are not in control – they love to see things done according to their own designs both at home and at work. But if their confidence was shaken or their self-image was wounded, they fear the responsibility for possible failure more than they value the opportunity to give directions. Many men are already in this state when they marry because of unresolved childhood experiences. Others experience failure at work during the time they are trying to build their career. It doesn't take too many incidents to shake the confidence of men. And men with a low self-esteem usually don't want to take any more responsibilities. So they let their wives take over and give their directions from the background by criticizing the events at home – it is much easier that way, because they are not responsible anymore.

You may notice that this also happens the other way around but this is not our topic today.

As a result, many wives believe that their withdrawn husbands are totally confident in themselves, because they also seem to know better, and that they are clammed up because they don't need anybody else.

Quite the opposite is true.

The withdrawn man needs his wife desperately because she is probably the only one who can help him to *build up his confidence* again. If home is a place where he finds even more pressure than at work, he will continue to withdraw. So it is never a good idea to seize your husband the moment he comes home from work and force him to think about family issues. Yes – it is important that he becomes active for the family, but you won't achieve this with putting him under pressure. If you want him to lead the family – give him time to unload the burdens from work first. Home should be the place where he feels secure, where he knows that he is accepted as he is, and where he knows that his wife listens to his needs.

Many women may now ask: “How should I listen to a man who doesn't talk?”. Good question. You can't listen to a stone. But you also can't get anything from a stone if you put pressure on him. You can't force him to talk. But remember – communication is not just words. You can communicate a lot without talking, and if you pay attention

you may notice that your husband talks a lot – nonverbally. And if you show him that you care for him, he will open his lips.

What is it that you should listen for?

Withdrawn men – I mentioned this before – fear failure more than anything else. Failure causes pain for them and they try to run away from that pain. Even men with a great faith in God may experience that. As an example, look at **1. Kings 19**.

You probably know the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. If not, read 1. Kings 18 at home – it is quite fascinating to read. In this chapter Elijah had had a great victory over all the prophets of Baal. He had demonstrated that God is greater than anything else in the world and that he, Elijah, had a very close relationship to this powerful God. But immediately after a victory there is always a new attack from Satan that tries to undo it – we Christians should always watch for that. In Elijah's case the new attack came through Queen Jezebel. She became furious about what had happened and threatened to kill Elijah. Now Elijah could simply have trusted in God again – after all, who is Queen Jezebel compared to the mighty God?

But suddenly Elijah became afraid. Apparently he doesn't have a clear message from God about this and is afraid to fail this time. So he runs away, and runs, and runs until he is exhausted. Let us read verse 4

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Elijah had very high standards, realizing that his fear made him no better than any ordinary man was a true sign of failure for him. And he gives up. Instead of recalling the great things God had done through him, he only sees his fear and his failure. "God – take my life – I can't bear the pain", that is his way of trying to escape the pain.

Fortunately God didn't let him have his way. Instead of punishing him for his lack of faith, he built up his trust again by demonstrating his presence in a little whisper – and then allowing him to go back and do something meaningful. God was committed to help him – help him to overcome his own weakness.

In the same way a wife can help a husband who has lost his confidence. Try to find out what made him run away? What is it that he fears? Where does he feel threatened? And even if that threat doesn't seem to be very real to you, accept it that it is very real for him. *I recall that at the end of my studies my greatest fear was not to receive an A+ in all the exams. Most other students would have said: "If that is your only problem, you're a lucky man" but at that time that problem was very real to me and a B in one of the exams would really have knocked me down.* This is just an illustration – you may not be able to understand that the fears of your husband are something that anybody could be afraid of but you should show him that you take his feelings seriously. Only then will he be able to talk about his fears.

Before we talk about ways that help a withdrawn men to become a leader again, let me mention that some men, who fear or experience failure, react in a way that is hard to recognize as “withdrawn”. Instead of becoming silent, these men try to reassure themselves at home by being very demanding and critical. This doesn’t appear to express a lack of confidence, but in fact it is just a cover-up. Watch for the symptoms:

1. *He becomes less and less considerate*, because he does not notice your appreciation anymore. If he doesn’t see his actions appreciated, he fears you don’t really like them, so he stops them and does not attempt new ones.
2. *He only accepts ‘safe’ tasks* where he is sure to succeed and pull back from others.
3. *He reacts defensive to all suggestions that require a change* – because he only hears the message “they way you are now, you’re a failure”.

Confident men don’t do that. They can accept change as necessary for growth. They can accept the fact that not all they do will be perfect and that it is still necessary that THEY do it. They become more considerate over time, because they KNOW what is good for you.

So how can you help your husband to become more confident again?

5.2 Build up his confidence

You can start by expressing YOUR trust in him. If he notices that YOU believe in him, that YOU believe that he can overcome the current obstacles in his life, that YOU believe that he will do things right – then he will feel safe enough to become active again for the family. Your reaction to the behavior of a withdrawn husband is very critical. You are probably the only one who can change anything.

“*Why me??*”, you may ask, “*What about MY needs? Who will take care of them if I put even more energy into a passive man?*” From a human perspective this question may be justified, but remember Luke 6:38 “Give, and it shall be given unto you.”

If you don’t build up your husband again, who is going to do it? If his confidence is shaken, he won’t be able to get out of his passivity? He needs help – from you! And if you build up his hope again, you will get back much more than you invest. You will get a husband, who dares to lead again because he knows that his family trusts him. Of course, you must really believe in him.

How can you do that? Here are a few suggestions

1. *Keep a prayer diary* and you will notice how God answers prayers. That builds up your own hope and you can remind your husband of all the positive answers whenever this is appropriate.
2. *Acknowledge that EVERYTHING your husband does, has a potential future value.* Even if it seems not related to the current needs of the family, try to see what it could be good for – and let him know that you see that. For instance, if your husband prefers to construct things instead of helping with the immediate

household, acknowledge that these things will be useful. (That doesn't mean you shouldn't encourage your husband to help you in addition to what he likes to do.) I spend quite some time on tiny details, recording expenses and comparing to budget plans, planning travel routes for our trips etc. and Barbara, although she sometimes thinks that this eats up too much time, occasionally mentions that it makes her feel safer that everything is "under control".

3. *Watch for things he did in the past* and how they pay off now – and let him know that you noticed. That will build him up, particularly when many other things outside seem to fail.

If you go these simple steps, your husband will begin to feel useful again. If YOU believe in his future and his worth, he will do so as well after a while, because you have *shifted the focus* from the things he does NOT do to what he CAN do.

If you find this difficult because your husband is such a couch potato, then your eyes need adjustment first. Ask God to make you see what your husband does right. And even if this is a small thing, even if it is long overdue – acknowledge it, because a small success can lead to a series of larger steps. God has a vision for your husband – it is time that you and your husband get the same vision. I know people who have successfully done this: they had to start with acknowledging success in really trivial things like "took out the trash without dropping anything" to get out of this *loser image* they had of themselves. But soon they saw a lot of progress in major areas a well.

What else can you do?

Remember the time when you first met. What were his qualities that you liked so much back then? Isn't it a fact that most, if not all of them, are still there?

Focussing on his good points is one way to live **1. Cor 13:7–8**: Love always trusts, always hopes, always endures – and never fails. If you see his qualities again, it will be much easier for you to believe that he will eventually succeed to be a good leader of the family and that your needs will be filled again.

5.3 What can you do until you see this hope fulfilled?

Probably you will feel an emotional gap yourself already. You may doubt your own worth if your husband cares so little about YOUR needs. If this is so, it is time to walk closer with God and listen to HIS voice more often.

If you *spend more time with God*, you will notice that his voice will have a greater influence on your thinking than the lack of attention that you feel. As a result you will realize again how valuable you are, because God's voice will constantly remind you of this fact. Read the famous **Psalms 139:13–14, 23** and other that show how much God loves his children and that he considers you worthy of this love. If you expose yourself to these words more often, you will FEEL loved and your emotions won't be dominated by a negative reaction to your husband's passivity anymore.

Well, God loves your husband too – he won't let your husband fall. Christ has full confidence in him – so much that he lets your husband's life be a witness for Him. That takes a lot of vision. But if Christ has confidence in your husband, so can you. Let us look at **Luke 22:31–32**:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

If Jesus had confidence in a Simon Peter who was going to deny him completely, he surely has a vision for your husband. Your husband may go through a time of inner or outer trouble but God already sees how he gets out of this again. So you can develop *a Godly perspective for your husband's future*. Look at what he is going to become and you will trust again.

From a human perspective, all this may seem like a strange, unrealistic answer to the problem. Millions of wives have tried to solve the problem by pushing their passive husbands a little more – which seems natural but almost never succeeds. Building up hope and confidence is really the only way that succeeds. If you have a Godly perspective of your husband's future, then he will soon have the same perspective, because he will pay close attention to every expression of trust – he needs that, particularly when he knows it is true.

5.4 What can a husband do himself?

Now, you husbands – you can also do something to overcome your own passivity.

1. *First, recognize it!* Do you spend most of your free time with activities not related to your family? What about the TV? Would you shut off a major sports event if your family needs your attention or do they have to wait?
2. If you don't know it already find out *why you are afraid of taking responsibility*. Are there any events or past experiences that made you fear possible failure in the future?
3. *Spend time with God and listen particularly to uplifting things*. Right now, don't just look for correction, laws and rules that you fail to follow. You can look at that later again. Right now you should focus on passages that express God's love to you. He believes in you – do you have higher standards than God? He made you a leader, because he knows you can do it.
4. Listen to your wife, particularly when she tries to encourage you. Usually her observations about what you can do are quite accurate. Even if you don't hear this very often – she trusts your leadership. And if she complains, it is only because she doesn't want all your talents go wasted. She wants to see that you do what you can do best. You just have to leave your fear of failure behind and get started – and you will see that you do quite a good job.