Leadership & Submission
– Sunday School Notes –

1 The Role Model for a Family

In the following months we want to study the issue of leadership and submission in the family. I chose the book “Husbands who won’t lead and wives who won’t follow” by James Walker as the basis for this study, but much of what we will learn here depends also on us sharing our own insights and experiences as we try to put the Word of God into practice in our everyday life.

Our starting point is Ephesians 5:22–23, in which Paul writes

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

Whether we like it or not, the Bible clearly tells us that there are certain roles in the family. The husband is supposed to be the leader and his wife should submit to him. Until a few decades ago, this concept represented the typical family. Unfortunately, however, it was probably also one of the most misunderstood concepts in the Word of God. Husbands viewed themselves as the boss who had total authority over everything in the family – everybody had to obey whatever they commanded.

This rather oppressive view of what leadership is about has led to a change in our society, which nowadays condemns almost any concept of leadership and authority in the family. Parents have little authority over their children and the roles of husband and wife are considered interchangeable. Every man who doesn’t see it that way, is accused to be a “male chauvinist” who probably abuses his wife. And women who freely submit to their husbands are accused of betraying the female world by diminishing themselves instead of standing up for their rights. A marriage is not considered anymore as the inseparable bonding of two people but as two individuals living together. No one, not even Christians, is unaffected by this viewpoint of our society. We encounter it every day when we talk to friends or co-workers, read books or newspapers, watch TV, etc.

This pressure from the outside world makes it very difficult for today’s men and women to take on their God-given roles instead of falling into extremes that God never intended. Men do not even know anymore how to define their leadership role properly and women do not know how to follow their husbands appropriately. The way we grow up does not prepare us for these roles anymore, unless we were fortunate enough to have parents who trained us to be leaders and followers in the biblical meaning of these words. So we are forced to find out ourselves and fail quite often – simply because we don’t know what leadership and submission is supposed to be.
This study – that is the Word of God, the book, and our shared experience – shall help us to understand the roles that God has given to us, how God designed us, and what our identity is according to God’s plan. And it shall help us to understand our own spouses better – how God has designed them and how they differ from us – so that we don’t try to conform them to our image how they should be.

1.1 The Husband – a Leader?

Before we can talk about how to lead, how to follow, and how to overcome difficulties, we first have to understand what leadership is about and what it is not. In many families we find either of the following extremes.

1. **Misunderstood Leadership:**

   Some husbands tend to dominate their wives, a behavior which is in sharp contrast to Galatians 3:26–28.

   For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

   We are all one in Christ! No person should dominate another.

   Others consider themselves as the final authority, the one who always has to give the directions in every minute thing. Another husband views leadership as being responsible for everything, They must do everything in the family that is of importance.

   Although the above characteristics have some similarity with true leadership, they miss the main point.

2. **Absence of leadership** is the other extreme. Many husbands withdraw into passiveness and let their wives take on all the responsibilities. Or they let the family be reigned by in-laws, which is even worse. In both cases, there can’t be much of a family unit, because the husbands to not add their share to the family.

What then is biblical leadership? In 1. Peter 5:3 we find a description of leaders of the church as being examples to the flock. Leadership means setting examples for others to follow. But leadership also means serving. In Matthew 20:25–28 Jesus says

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.
If you want to lead others, you have to ministering to their needs. Then they are willing to follow you because they know that their needs are taken care of. Finally, leadership means that a husband should *give himself up* for his wife, as Ephesians 5:25 – the often ignored continuation of our initial verse – points out.

All these qualities are not what people usually view as leadership, because they express humility, not domination, as key to leading others. Our role model is Jesus. He *had* authority, but never saw it necessary to claim it. If we want to be leaders, we have to follow in his footsteps, even though this may be difficult for us to realize.

### 1.2 The Wife – a Helper?

The obvious question at this point is why women can’t take this role in the family. Why can’t they be leaders? Or why can’t leadership be a temporary role in the family? After all – aren’t men and women equal?

For a short time (from the sixties to the mid nineties) society has believed that there are no essential differences between men and women, but that all the differences were merely the result of being raised in different ways. Even today, many people try to adhere to that opinion, although scientists have found more and more biological differences between men and women. Besides the obvious physical differences, which can hardly be denied, there are fundamental differences in the structure of our brains from the moment we are born. This doesn’t mean that one is superior to the other, but that men and women have different functionalities, because God created men and women to complement each other.

The Word of God is very clear about this. In Genesis 2:18–24 we read that God viewed man as incomplete without a *helper* and that he created woman exactly for this purpose – as the complement of the man. And

> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

They fit together so well that they can form a new unity.

Now the word “helper” has often been misunderstood as well. People believe it means that the wife is supposed to be the *assistant* of her husband, the one who only can do the minor tasks. In a sense, they consider women as *second-class* citizens, inferior to men and unable to live for themselves. Or they believe that helpers have to *obey* their leaders no matter what. And finally, some women interpret it conveniently as *not being responsible* for anything in the family, and let their husbands make all the decisions without voicing their own opinion.

But that is not what the word “helper” truly means. You can only be a helper to someone who *needs* help. In Psalm 70:5, the psalmist refers to God as his helper – and he surely did not believe this to mean that God is his assistant. No, as a helper you *enable* someone who is incapable of doing things without you. Helpers are not inferior but equal in both value and function.
So there is nothing bad about being a helper. It is actually a role that is to be highly respected and will be appreciated very much by husbands who understand how much they depend on their wives. Men and women can both accept their own roles, respect the role of their spouses, and be perfectly happy in it.

1.3 God’s Plan for a Good Marriage

But the word of God does not only talk about different roles in a family. It also tells us that God has a plan for a good marriage. In Genesis 18:24 and again in Matthew 19:4–6 we read that a man and a woman joined together become one flesh. Marriage couples two distinct individuals together in order to create a union, a new entity – something as inseparable as a physical body. Each partner is there to fill the other’s needs so that both can become complete in what they are.

This does not mean that either of the two will have to give up his or her distinct identity. On the contrary, a marriage enables a man to become as fully masculine as possible and a woman to become as truly feminine as possible. Each one fills the other’s weaknesses. In contrast to that you would have to fill these weakness yourself at the cost of giving up part of your identity if you live as a single person.

Many people believe that the opposite is true and that only as a single one would be able to live freely as a man or as a woman while in a marriage you would have to give up a part of yourself. But this is not so! Surely, in many marriages people give up a part of themselves without receiving anything in return and are quite frustrated about it. But this is because they have not understood what marriage really means and consequently chose the wrong paths in their marriage.

Fulfillment does not come from the freedom to do what you want. It comes from partnership and being able to depend on each other. In 1. Corinthians 11:11–12 we read

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

In many marriages I know wife and husband are afraid of being completely dependent on each other. They fear that the other might use them for selfish purposes or that they might not be able to manage life alone if something should happen to their spouse. These things may happen, if we depend on each other and give up our own identity – which is foolishness. But if we hold back and do not dare to depend on our spouse, if we do not fully trust our spouse, then we rob our marriage of what it could be.

Proverbs 18:22, 31:10–12 tells us how much we can find in a marriage.

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her
husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

If we begin to fully trust in our spouse and believe that God will remain true to his promises, then we will receive what we long for: comfort, companionship, and fulfillment. We can freely develop as man and woman and will in turn have enough strength to give our partner what she or he needs or desires.

A simple picture may illustrate that. Men and women are designed with certain strengths and weaknesses, with edges in their character and in a way perfect complements to each other. If we want to fill the needs of our partner and live a fulfilled marriage, we must accept that men and women are different and cannot take on each other’s roles.

1.4 Deviations from God’s Plan

If we swap roles or misuse our own one, we deny our mate the right to be as God has designed her or him to be. It is no wonder that this will create problems. If we ignore the uniqueness of God’s design for each individual, neither wife nor husband will find fulfillment in marriage. We are forced to perform tasks for which we were not made, and our own needs are not filled anymore.

It is better to accept the differences as God designed them. Men were made to provide, lead, and manage resources (Genesis 1:26, 2:15) – that is why they are stronger and focus more on “rational” thinking. Women, on the other hand are designed to nurture – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That is why they have so much more intuition and a much better grasp for relationships.

We will look at these differences in detail later, but the central message for us is

Accept that your spouse is different from you and be happy that this is so. Wives, don’t try to change your husbands, and men don’t block changes in your wife.

If we don’t follow this advice, if we want to take away the individuality of our partner, then we will either create a hole between us or cause a collision. Most likely both will happen.

1.4.1 A hole between us

If we expect from our wife to be strong in the way we may expect it from other men, she will easily feel overburdened, emotionally exhausted, empty, depressed – or at least very unhappy.

If a man is not allowed to provide for whatever reason, he may quickly feel worthless, because a major part of his identity is taken away from him. At first he might even
enjoy the absence of responsibility, but then he usually becomes lazy and – out of an unfulfilled need for competition – will begin to criticize his wife in everything. These two examples are generalizations of what individual couples will experience, but the above consequences will more or less become visible.

1.4.2 Collision

When we want to take away from our spouse what we desire to see changed, we are not attached to each other in a positive and strengthening way. Each partner will feel threatened and fear “the other tries to destroy my individual personality”. Both want to determine what is right for every little detail. “Things need to be done my way” is what they believe, whether they explicitly say so or not.

While almost every couple runs into a situation like that occasionally, we must not allow such a situation to persist. Otherwise it wears both of us down and leads to mutual frustration. We begin to feel worthless, because what we see as our own strength doesn’t seem to count much in the eyes of the other. The person who is supposed to build us up suddenly becomes a threat for our self-esteem.

There are are two common, unfortunately very wrong, ways to react to such a threat.

1. Rebellion: We resist, attack, or pull away.

2. Compliance: We give in and give up.

Both methods do not lead us where we want to be. It is easy to see in the first case but giving in is equally wrong if we give up as well.

The only fruitful approach is to accept God’s plan for our own role and to live it – regardless of the circumstances. This may not be so easy, but we need to change before our circumstances will change. We need to mature both as men and women instead of only reacting to whatever our partner says and does. This is what we want to learn during this study.

1.5 Overview

We will begin by looking at typical problems in a “real” marriage, so that we will be able to detect what is going wrong and why it cannot work this way. We will look at the constant battle for control, the differences in God’s design for men and women that so often leads to conflicts, and then at other natural causes for problems in a marriage. All this shall help us to understand the nature of these problems, so that we can apply Godly means to overcome them.

We will then look a bit closer at the specific design for mature men and women. We will illustrate how God wants us to be by looking at typical types of failures, that is at husbands who don’t lead and at wives who don’t follow.

In general, men need to learn to overcome their passivity at home. There may be various reasons for that: withdrawal out of lack of confidence, overworking, or the
fact that some men fail to grow up and try to escape their responsibilities. Men who are trapped in these types of failures may be good and faithful as Christians, but still a total failure as husbands and father. As a typical example for that we will look at David, who despite all his weaknesses when it comes to family relationships, still was considered by God as a “man after my own heart”. Women, on the other hand, need to overcome their desire and learn how to submit out of free choice. We will look at the subtle ways in which this desire expresses itself: hidden hostility in outward submission, busyness, open anger, and manipulation. All these arise from wrong convictions about how things should be run. And the only solution to that is to look at God’s truth and to trust that doing it His way will not lead the family into ruin.

Finally, we will look at the question of how to raise children that they may become true leaders and followers, so that their struggle in marriage may be easier than our own.

2 The Battle for Control

In the previous two sessions we have looked at God’s plan for a good marriage, the general principles of leadership and being a helper and that marriage unites a man and a woman in a way that each others needs are filled. This new union, which the bible calls “one flesh” is much stronger than the sum of both individuals and provides the environment for both partners to find fulfillment as man and women in a way that they wouldn’t be able to achieve as singles.

Today we want to talk about “the reality” of marriage, that is about causes for deviations from this ideal plan. Since we have the advantage of being God’s children, detecting the problems is the key to overcoming them. The greatest obstacle for us is not the problem itself, but the fact that we – that is at least one of the marriage partners – simply don’t see the problem and fool ourselves into thinking that everything we do is just fine.

But this is not so. Even if we do our best to follow God’s will, we often fail AND DON’’t EVEN NOTICE THAT. Let’s look at 1.John 1:8 – who can quote that by heart?

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”

This verse doesn’t just hold true in general. Nobody of us would claim to have no sin! We know our Bible too good to say this. But when it comes to the concrete situation, we fall into the trap and deceive ourselves. Let me rephrase the verse a little: “If we claim not to cause problems in our marriage, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”

You see? This sounds quite different. WE are the ones who are the reason why our marriages are not as God had planned them for us. And I am not speaking about us as
fallen human race in general but about each individual in this room, myself included. I cannot claim that our marriage does not have problems, and I cannot claim that I do not contribute to each of them – although often I feel totally innocent. So the first step to a solution is discovering and admitting the problem. Then we can work on it, that is we become ready to let the Holy Spirit guide us to a solution. So the purpose of this lesson and the following two is to make us able to detect what is going and why it cannot work the way we do it right now.

Today I want to look at the battle for control. Who determines how things are done in our family? How do we make decisions in our families – the big ones and the little ones? What happens if both partners have different ideas how things have to be done? It would be interesting to take a small poll in this group – so if you want to tell us about it, feel free.

Many marriage conflicts essentially boil down to the question of control. Who has the right to determine how to run the family? Both husband and wife have their own ideas about it and they don’t always agree. But how do we resolve such disagreements? Some Christians say: “As the leader of the family, the husband ultimately decides”. Other families have made the agreement that the wife takes care of the smaller everyday issues and the husband makes the major decisions. Strangely enough, however, there are never any major decisions to be made.

In both cases, the conflict seems to be decided. One partner has won the conflict and essentially runs the family alone. But this settlement has disappointing consequences for both sides, even for the apparent winner. If a wife lets the husband dominate her, she has become his tool, not his companion. And without a true helper, the husband’s real needs will not be fulfilled. On the other hand, a wife who has total influence over her husband, will find herself living with a partner whom she cannot respect. She doesn’t know if he really loves her, when he gives in or if he just wants to avoid conflict. So the first truth we learn from this is

**The battle for control has no winner**

Instead of letting on of us be in charge, we must accept that both husband and wife are responsible for the decisions that are made and that all decisions must be made in mutual agreement. This doesn’t mean that we don’t let our husband or wife decide certain things all alone, but this must happen as an expression of trust – which means that we are willing to back up whatever the decision will be.

This is quite easy to say and very difficult to do. It takes a long time for a couple to find a way which is best for them. There is no standard recipe for this, as each couple is different. But it is quite helpful to take a closer look at the danger signals when one partner starts controlling the other, so that we can see when we are going the wrong way.
2.1 False Leadership – Dominating Husbands

Let us first look at marriages with dominating husbands. In these marriages the wife plays a very unimportant role. She assists her husband, which he may appreciate, but her needs, desires, and soul are almost ignored. He makes the decisions and she follows, because that is her and his understanding of spiritual leadership.

So what is wrong about this? What biblical principles are violated in such a marriage? (we had most verses on the first day)

1. There is a notion of female inferiority, instead of equality in value (Gal 3:28)
2. Leadership is understood worldly – like the boss of a company, or worse, like in the military – instead of as servanthood (Mt 20:25-26)
3. There is no mutual submission (Eph 5:21)
4. Her needs and desires are ignored – this is not love (Eph 5:25)
5. His wife is not his helper but his slave. His real needs cannot be fulfilled anymore.

The problem with dominating husbands – and I speak only of believers here – is that they have a completely wrong understanding of certain words in the bible. The view submission as obedience to every word they say and they quote Ephesians 5:22-24 by heart and totally forget that the bible doesn’t end here. Sometimes they even consider this as biblical love, because – after all – as appointed leaders of the family they know better what is good for women. Often their wives share these misunderstandings and force themselves to obey even if they don’t feel like it – because they believe that this is what the Lord wants of them.

Others, dominate out of a feeling of insecurity. This may seem strange, but by controlling their wives they reduce the risk of being challenged in their opinions and decisions. Often, this behavior comes from experiences they have watched in others and want to avoid in their own lives.

Others, simply assume that it is their role as man to be always the active part. They views their performance as the only way of asserting their manhood. “A man is what he does” is their motto (open or hidden) and letting somebody else participate in their decisions would mean diminishing their role. They must be responsible – they alone.

Well, if we men are honest – that is what we think about life. And it is not so easy to get a Godly understanding of this responsibility.

So what are the danger signals that indicate when a man is too much in control? It would be interesting to let the ladies begin, because they usually see these tiny little indicators much better than we do.

1. She feels helpless and dependent.
   – She does not dare touch technical devices: he has the remote control, drives the car, ....
– He controls the money and every cent she spends
– She doesn’t dare to do things by herself (because her criticized too often)

2. He knows everything better
3. All ideas must come from him.
   Adopting an idea from his wife is a sign of her dominating him.
4. He is the center of the world – and has rational explanations for it
5. He is always strong, doesn’t show weaknesses
6. Whenever a problem occurs – he must solve it. (I admit, I have the habit of doing this) Open problems are a threat to his ego.
   Sometimes our wives just want our listening ear, our companionship – not our solutions (let a woman explain this)

So MEN, I hope you have noted this – keep these signals in mind and if you discover any of them in yourselves, then it is time to do something about it.

2.2 No leadership — When Wives Take Over

The situation can also be the other way around. A wife can dominate her husband but this is a different form of control than with dominating husbands. Usually it is the man who simply gives up his leadership role because his wife does not let him lead but always criticizes him. She may have her reasons for this. Often she is even right with her criticism and her husband knows that.

But whether she is right or not is besides the point. It is the criticism as such, that is discouraging. A man may ask himself why he should even try to lead if everything he does is wrong. Constant criticism is about the worst thing a wife can do to her husband. That’s why we find quite a few proverbs about this: Read Proverbs 27:15-16, 21:19

Here you see a husband who is about to give up. He isn’t perfect and he knows that. But hearing it from his wife every day is simply discouraging. So he begins to withdraw and lets his wife take over the responsibilities.

But – and this is what makes it so dangerous – his need for leadership, admiration, and success is completely unfulfilled. He will search for new ways to build self esteem. He may stay long at work and be in charge there. And when he comes home, he can be passive. Why should he do anything if it will be wrong anyway? That, of course, will create even more criticism and more withdrawal.

Many women have lost their husbands because they couldn’t control their desire to criticize every wrong they see. Nonchristian men simply leave after a while – usually because they have found a woman who seems to be more understanding. Christian men don’t do such a thing – right?? But even when they stay, you cannot call this a loving relationship anymore because the husband is not emotionally present anymore.
He has found other ways to control his own life but this life does not have much to do with his wife anymore.

On the other hand, his wife may notice that her husband does not disturb her order in the house anymore and be very happy about this. But she pays a very high price for it. In a working relationship both partners share the load equally and get maximal results.

\[ 5 + 5 = 12 \]

As the pastor mentioned last time, the result is even higher than the sum of both shares. But when the husband withdraws, he gives much less to marriage and brings less of his energy and creativity home. His wife will take the space that has become empty – most women automatically do that instead of trying her husband to fill that hole again. But this costs her more energy than it would have cost him and the result is still much less than before.

\[ 8 + 3 = 10 \]

So, yes, the family is still a functioning unit. Everything that has happened before will still be taken care of, but the quality is much less and – worse – the wife will quickly become quite exhausted – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When she finally discovers what has happened it is almost too late to change anything.

Why? She has no more energy left and her husband won’t take over any more responsibilities because his confidence is broken. He knows that he is a failure as a husband, but he doesn’t dare to do anything anymore because he fears her accusing finger.

So ladies, be careful — there are other ways of getting your husbands attention than criticism (we will talk about this later). Criticism is a sign of lack of respect and violates Ephesians 5:33. If you want to win your husband, if you want to get him involved – show him that you respect him. This will build up his self esteem, and he will have a greater desire to do something for you. But he will always do things differently from you – that is the way God designed him – and you need to accept that first. Only then can you expect a loving relationship.

In the next session we will talk a bit more about the differences between men and women so that we can understand each other better.

### 2.3 How to find an agreement

Let me wrap up this lesson by stating a few sentences that we should constantly remind ourselves of. They could be summarized as “don’t over- or underestimate your role in the family”.

1. I am not the center of the world – not even of my family. I could be terribly
wrong and need the help of my mate.

2. Others have the right to see and do things differently than I. If they do so, this does not usually endanger the harmony in our family.

3. I am NOT the one who knows what is best for my partner. I do not have the right or responsibility to change him or her.

4. I have the right to my own opinion and the duty to express it. If I remain silent, I am responsible for any damage caused by my partner’s decision.

5. We both are filled by the Holy Spirit, so we should be able to resolve differences in a godly manner.

3 Differences in God’s design for man and woman

Now let us come to the first step in building a healthier relationship between you and your mate, that is understanding the principal differences between men and women and accepting them as God’s design for a fulfilled marriage, not as threat to your own identity.

I think nobody really wants to deny that men and women are entirely different creations. We talked about the different design of men and women two weeks ago: the man is supposed to be the provider (Genesis 2:15), leader, and manager of resources (Genesis 1:26) while the woman is made to receive, respond, and to nurture life – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These differences do not only show in the ways our bodies are made, but even stronger in the way we think – that is in everything we do and how we approach the world.

It has been said that men and women are from different planets – men are from Mars and women from Venus. So it’s no wonder they behave very differently. Here are a few examples from a list that the pastor recently sent me.

DRESSING UP: A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the garbage, answer the phone, read a book, get the mail, etc. – and she will dress up differently all the time.
A man will dress up only for weddings and funerals. Otherwise he prefers to wear what he can grab.

BATHROOMS: A man has seven items in his bathroom – a toothbrush/paste, shaving cream, razor, deodorant, a bar of soap, shampoo, and a towel from the Holiday Inn.
The average number of items in the typical woman’s bathroom is 437. A man would not be able to identify most of these items.

MONEY: A man will pay $2 for a $1 item he wants. A woman will pay $1 for a $2 item that she doesn’t want.
OFFSPRING: A woman knows all about her children. She knows about dentist appointments and romances, best friends and favorite foods and secret fears and hopes and dreams.

A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house.

FUTURE: A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband.

A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

– that’s a bad one, but often true –

MARRIAGE: A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn’t.

A man marries a woman expecting that she won’t change and she does.

We laugh about these remarks but they are more serious than we want to admit. Let me ask – there anybody here who has NOT experienced one of these differences?

The differences between men and women are often a cause for major problems in a marriage because both partners assume that theirs is the only natural way a human being should behave and feel. Many husbands and wives believe that their mate somehow got a few details wrong, but that constantly exposing them to the “right way” would do it. They believe that the things that build them up, should also make their partners happy. They believe that they make themselves perfectly clear when they communicate. They believe that they can fulfill the sexual & romantic desires of their partner if they only extrapolate from their own feelings.

WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

Especially in these areas — self-esteem, communication style, and sexual & romantic satisfaction — men and women are fundamentally different. And we can’t assume that our partners will find fulfillment if we give them what WE like. If we ignore that, our marriage will soon be in serious trouble, because neither of us has the chance to play our own role and find fulfillment as a man or a woman. But if we accept it as a gift from God, then we can use these differences to complement each other’s weaknesses and to build a strong marriage.

3.1 Ways to build Self-Esteem

In Christian circles there is a great amount of misunderstanding about self-esteem. It is often identified with self-love or selfishness and this characterized as evil. But self-esteem is something different – it is the deep knowledge that we are valuable. Most people know this in a very abstract way (Psalm 139:14: I am fearfully and wonderfully made, Luke 12:24 (Sparrows)). But this knowledge is not deeply rested in our hearts, unless we are constantly reminded of our value, that is if we find outer indicators that show us visibly that we are valuable.

In young children, the ways to build such self-esteem, is centered around the visibility of God’s gifts: beauty, strength, and intelligence. But when we grow up, the value
that we assign to these gifts gradually diverges. For men, the value of beauty and also physical strength shrinks rapidly while beauty and remains important for women for a long, long time. That’s why we don’t talk about a lady’s age once she is above 25. But besides the value that we assign to God’s visible gifts to us, we also value our achievements very differently and thus try to reach different goals in order to feel valuable. So let me ask you, both men and women: what is it that builds you up?

ACTIVE PHASE: Divide the blackboards in two halves and summarize. Try to get men involved.

Roughly it can be said that a man’s self-esteem is built up by what he can do or in other words, his achievements in the outside world. In contrast to that, a woman’s self-esteem is built up by relationships she can nurture. That’s why the home and the family are so important for a woman while a man must be successful at work. Remember – the woman was designed as nurturer while the man’s role is the provider and leader. A man, who is successful at work and a failure as husband and father still views himself as success while with women it is usually the other way around.

A man must have authority over something and his work gives him the chance to see this need fulfilled. He must have the feeling that he is connected to some higher purpose and the family alone does not fulfill that need. But of course this higher purpose takes its toll on a man, because it is a world of constant competition either with other people or with goals that need to be met.

Many women see their husband’s involvement at work as threat to their marriage and do not understand that he is needy when he comes home after work. He cannot just turn the switch, forget about work, and immediately pour all his energy into the family. If a wife cannot accept his, her husband gets the impression that she does not respect him and does not care at all about this world that is so important to him.

Now you may say – a woman has her needs as well and she has waited all day long to share them with her husband. That is definitely her right, but she does not get these needs fulfilled if she puts demands on her husband the moment he enters the door. Instead – and this may sound strange at a first glance – the best way for a wife to turn her husband into a man who cares about her needs, is to to care for his! (Luke 6:38 ... Give and it will be given to you). Ask yourselves – how can I minister to the world that my husband constantly faces. Obviously you should not do his work, but he must know that you care even for that strange world. Pray for his job, and ask him what to pray about. Ask about what he is doing and how prayers were answered. It will only be natural that your husband will soon care more for what you experience, because now you are doing ALL things together.

By the way, a hint for men whose wives find it difficult to relate to their work: tell them a little more WHAT you are doing, what your typical day is about, and why sometimes it is so strenuous for you. If possible, show them your workplace. If you share more of your world, your wife will be more interested in it.
3.2 Communication style

The next major difference between men and women is the way we talk to each other and the way we listen. These differences are the source of a great amount of misunderstandings, sometimes with severe consequences. We thought that we have made ourselves perfectly clear and our partner reacts in a completely inappropriate way that we hadn’t expected at all. Sometimes we say something completely innocent and our partner almost explodes and we have not the slightest idea why.

How can this happen? To explain this I like to summarize a few insights from communication science. We have to realize that communication between two human beings is quite complex because it involves much more than just words with a clearly defined meaning. We actually communicate in three ways

Words we speak – Tone of voice – and Body language

Does anyone want to guess how much we express in each of these ways

Body language 55% – Tone of voice 38% – Words 7%

So the words that we speak actually account only for 7% of what we communicate. To illustrate that, people have made experiments where tone and words do not match. One of the most striking example happened in a church after the service. When the pastor asked “How are you?”, one person answered (friendly/happy tone) “Oh fine – I just murdered my grandmother” – and nobody noticed what he was really saying. Or how would you react, when your husband tells you (stretch out arms defensively) “I love you”? Would you believe him? These are very extreme examples but communication can become very confusing when words, tone of voice, and body language do not match – particularly if one of the latter ones is negative.

Another aspect of communication concerns the message itself. When we listen, we watch for three aspects, namely information about

- Facts (what has happened?)
- Relationships (how does this affect me/us?)
- and requests (what shall I do?)

In most cases we clearly understand what should be expressed because there is a cultural agreement how certain statements should be understood. If we hear “supper’s ready” we know that we are expected to come to the table. If someone asks us if we know what time it is, we know that a simple “YES” wouldn’t be the right answer. But sometimes our partner does not hear the message that we really wanted to express. For instance, when a wife shares a problem with her husband, she often only wants to be comforted, but he understands it as request to solve the problem. Or when a husband tells his wife, that he has read about an interesting job offer, she might already think about the consequences of moving to another city while he simply wanted to express that he found that ad interesting. Particularly in the last example,
you can’t really tell what the right understanding of the husband’s message is, because we can associate different meanings to the same words – and the way we do this may not necessarily be correct.

Men and women have different ways of expressing what they mean and different ways of understanding a message they hear. Well, I am sure you had your experiences with that, so let us summarize a few “typical male” or “typical female” types of communication.

**ACTIVE PHASE:** Divide the blackboards into men/women and note specific communication styles.

- **Men talk about facts and actions that need to be taken**
  
  *Men only hear the facts*
  
  Because of the focus on facts, men seem not to pay attention to the tiny details of daily life and do not talk about such issues. Especially they do not seem to be aware of problems that have no “logical” relation to an event or plan.
  
  *Men appear to listen well, you hardly see any reaction*

- **Women include emotional aspects in ALL their decisions**
  
  *Women hear emotionally*
  
  For men it seems that women do not to come to the point, because they dwell so much on “unimportant details”. But they also seem to react way before they have heard the full story.
  
  *Women usually give stronger feedback*, both verbally and non-verbally
  
  *Women often start a conversation with an “open question”. They have mastered the skill of queries that draw people out. For husbands who come home exhausted from work, this is more than they can handle.*

These differences are not to be weighed as more positive or negative. They both have their advantages and disadvantages. But problems come up if we don’t accept these differences as fundamental aspect of our mate’s personality. If we hear something that does not seem to be right or could even be understood as insult, then we shouldn’t assume that our parter had evil intentions – it could simply be a misunderstanding on OUR side. If we notice that our partner does not even understand the simplest thing that we are trying to tell him, it is not that he doesn’t want to or is to stupid – it is because we have different ways of expressing ourselves.

Many marriage problems just start with simple misunderstandings in a communication. I am sometimes astonished how a simple issue can stir up a serious fight, where each partner begins to choose words that are in no way uplifting. But this should not be so. **1.Peter 3:10** tells us

*KJV: For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.*
Let us keep this verse in mind the next time we run into a communication problem. React in a positive and uplifting way to clarify the situation, because what you heard might not be what your spouse has said.

For those who still find this difficult, here are a few hints that communication science gives us.

- **Practice ACTIVE LISTENING**
  Pay complete attention when you listen. Be open minded. Respond by giving verbal or nonverbal feedback. Be sensitive to the needs of your spouse. Try to listen for hidden messages but do not assume your right – check it out by rephrasing what you believe to have heard.

  Actually, it is quite an interesting exercise to do do the latter: Have one partner express something and let the other try to rephrase that until the first one agrees that this was exactly what was said. You will be astonished how grossly you may have misunderstood a message.

- **Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements.** “You” statements often close the door to further discussion and make your partner defensive while “I” statements open the door to a calm and open conversation. Just consider the difference between

  “I did not understand what you just said” and “You did not make yourself clear enough” or even “You never get to the point”.

- **Use uplifting words** (*Proverbs 16:21–24*)

There are a lot of good books and communication seminars that offer many helpful techniques for improving our communication skills, and I think even Christians can profit from a few practical hints.

### 3.3 Competition

The next difference is not really a major, but still a separate point: *men need success in competition*. That is part of their nature as provider and protector. They must feel capable of protecting their family in a hostile world. Women also feel the urge to compete but there are other aspects of life that are more important for them. They sometimes rather lose to keep a relationship intact. These differences are there for a purpose. We wouldn’t be able to fulfill our God-given roles if it would be otherwise. Of course, this built-in desire to compete can result in extreme, unhealthy competitions, even among Christians. When competition becomes pride and rivalry, then something is wrong about it. Then the efforts men put into competition become a threat to their marriages: he will be constantly exhausted and loses his ability to share feelings or to admit insecurities and failures – even to his wife. On the other hand, he
is emotionally dependent on his wife. But how shall he get his emotional needs filled if he does not share anymore?

So men, watch yourselves. Are there any signs of excessive competition in your life? If so, set your priorities right: you just have to be able to provide for your family and protect it – you don’t have to be better than others (read 2.Cor 10:12).

And for the ladies: if you notice that your husband doesn’t share feelings (anymore), don’t complain or draw things out of him. Instead you can help him to improve his communication skills about emotions – that is your God given strength. Be affirmative and create an environment where he feels secure – that is, where there is no need to be strong or to be able to defend himself. Men always have difficulties to share emotions – you are the only one who can make it easier for your husband.

You see, we always come back to the same distribution of roles and responsibilities between men and women. Without his wife, his helper and nurturer, the men will easily get stuck in undesirable extremes of male behavior. He is actually quite helpless. On the other hand, if his wife helps him to become the man and husband that God wants him to be, she will see her needs

Give, and it shall be given unto you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That’s again Luke 6:38 – we could make this our memory verse for this class.

3.4 Sexual & romantic satisfaction

Finally, let us come to a topic that can be a source of major disappointment in a marriage, because we talk so little about it. Sex and our approach to it presents another big difference between men and women.

Uh! This is difficult to talk about! We weren’t raised to discuss such things openly. I certainly wasn’t – not before I became a Christian and, with a few exceptions, definitely not afterwards. For some reason God’s perfect gift of sexual attraction and mutual fulfillment in a marriage is either associated with shame or viewed as too intimate to talk about – even among wife and husband. No wonder it becomes a source of problems – if we don’t even talk about it.

Well, of course we don’t want to discuss intimate details here – that would certainly break your privacy – but there are still obvious differences how a woman or a man wants to be treated to feel happy about her or his sexual life.

Let us start with a brief look at 1.Cor 7:3-5

KJV: Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

So a healthy sexual relation is central for a healthy marriage. A lack of it can lead to serious temptations and significant problems. God has given us the gift of sex in
a marriage as the closest possible union of man and woman. I was raised catholic and taught that the only purpose of sex is to have children – otherwise it’s bad. Particularly you shouldn’t experience any lust in it because lust is particularly evil. I have met older men who were proud of having slept with their wives only 3 times to have three children – I don’t know how they could suppress their desire for each other.

This is not what the bible tells us. Children are NOT the main purpose of a marriage, although a natural “byproduct”. They are not even mentioned in Genesis 2:24. Sex was created is for mutual fulfillment: a man is to enjoy his wife and a woman is to enjoy her husband.

BUT .... men and women enjoy sex differently. I am not an expert on this, but roughly, you can say that women rarely separate romance and sex, because sex is a reflection of how she feels about life. Many men can easily separate this and enjoy sex just for the sake of the moment. There is nothing bad about this – it is just different.

Personally, I find it difficult to separate sex from the rest of our marriage life. If there are nagging problems in the back of my head, if I had a tough day, if I don’t sense that Barbara is really romantically interested, or if we had an unresolved argument during the day – then I don’t feel any desire at all. I must feel balanced in myself and in harmony with Barbara. But I admit, it may be easier for Barbara to get me into the right mood than the other way around.

**ACTIVE PHASE:** -- does anyone want to comment what he or she thinks encourages desire -- or is an absolute killer?

Divide blackboard in two halves and start with a few examples, mark male/female

Encourager: balanced / feeling of harmony / some men say they like to be seduced (M)

Typical killer: dirty, smelling husband (F) / arguments / wrong time (too late/tired) / of course sickness / fear of failure (M) or not being able to satisfy wife (big problem sometimes)

But we do not only develop desire in different ways, we also have different objectives in a sexual encounter. The encounter itself is not the goal but it confirms our masculinity or femininity and it accomplishes the affirmation of our ego. This, of course is different for men and women.

I have to go a little by the books in this case because I noticed that I can’t generalize my own feelings to well. But I believe it is right to say that the ability to “perform sexually” is crucial for a man to feel as a real man – at least up to a certain age. Particularly when a man reaches “mid-life”, a good sex life gives evidence that he is still vivid and reassures him, that he is not too old yet.

For women, affirmation means having a feeling of closeness and love. You can’t have that in a brief sexual encounter, no matter how intense it may be. It is much more important to spend time together where this feeling of closeness and being loved can intensify.

**ACTIVE PHASE:** would any man or woman be willing to comment on this?

If we ignore the different objectives of our wives and husbands our sex life can become very frustrating, especially if we don’t know how to talk about this to each other.
Timing is crucial here, because sharing your needs in the wrong moment can sound like criticism. For a man this can be devastating because any criticism attacks his ego – but he needs his ego to be affirmed, not threatened, so he won’t react very gracefully if his wife brings up the topic in the wrong way.

On the other hand, the wife is probably the only one who can bring up the subject at all. But when she does, it must be in an affirmative manner and never express that he does something wrong. Instead of discussing what is wrong, let him know what you would like to have and discuss ways how he could help you to achieve this. Same content, but positive phrasing – that is the way to his heart. I know that sounds difficult, but after all, you want to see improvements – don’t you?

4 Natural causes for problems

Today we want to look at another “natural source” for problems in a marriage. This source has to do with the way we grew up, how our past experience has influenced the way we approach life today. We all have developed wrong thinking habits here and there. And we experience these habits as a wall that keeps us from being the wife or husband that God intended us to be.

So we want to talk about the building blocks of that wall, the pieces that we somehow managed to pile up on top of each other and possibly still add to that wall. Much of the insights that I will talk about today, have been discovered by psychologists or people who tried to unveil the “driving” of human behavior. These worldly sciences can help us to discover the origins for some of the problems we experience. But as Christians, we can do more: once we have acknowledged that we do have a wrong thinking habit, we can bring it before the Lord and ask him to change us. And God will do this, because he promised

\[ I \text{ will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. (Heb 8:10b) } \]

Wrong thinking patterns can be changed, because

\[ \text{The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, we have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2.Cor 10:4-5) } \]

So we cannot say “that’s the way I am, and I cannot change this”! We can change or thinking habits and take every thought captive – if we want to. We only have to admit that we need to change and some of our values need correction.

Understanding the origins of our current way of thinking shall help us to do so. Therefore we will talk today about the building blocks for wrong behavior that caused us to become passive husbands or unsubmitive wives.

I will look at three types of building blocks:
• Negative building blocks of the past and their consequences for today
• Trends in our current thinking pattern, and
• Current behavior that we use to keep the “wrong lifestyle” going.

4.1 Value Systems developed during Childhood

The roots of many of the ways we approach the world go way back to our own childhood. We have watched the marriage of our parents and decided how we want to experience marriage. We have noticed certain situations as painful for one of our parents and decided to avoid such situations in the future. We have admired many things that we saw our parents and expect our partner to be the same. We have noticed how our parents to things and decided that this is the only right way to do them. We have seen behavior that we did not like at all and decided to defend ourselves against such behavior, should we experience it in the future.

We can’t blame our parents for this, but we have to admit – they weren’t perfect. Even the best parents make mistakes when raising their children. And not all of us were so fortunate to grow up in a healthy home. We may have had dominating fathers or mothers who ran the family. We may have seen a lot of tension in our parent’s marriage, or even a divorce – a traumatic experience for most children. All this shapes our understanding of love – how we express it, how we expect it to be expressed to us, and what we see as signs for a lack of love.

And so we develop a value system, that does not always have to do with godly values. Here is a small list of typical consequences of our childhood experiences:

• Father dominates:
  Daughter gets hostile view of men, Son tries to imitate father

• Mother dominates:
  Son overvalues independence from women: keeps emotionally distant, does not want to show weaknesses, certain defensiveness
  Daughter

• Love was expressed mainly materially:
  Need to stockpile symbols, possession, status. Difficulty with simple lifestyle.
  Excessive generosity (?)

• Parents didn’t set limits (the word “no” wasn’t used):
  Problems with self-discipline, responsibility. Cannot manage resources.

• Parents never apologized openly:
  Cannot forgive, perfectionist, gifts may be viewed as admission of guilt
Parents are viewed as ideal:
Weaknesses in spouse are not accepted, failure is criticized

Family moves often:
Outsider role, Loneliness

Parent’s marriage visibly unsatisfying:
Problems with trust (doesn’t believe in chance for good relationships), tries to remain independent, does not open up
Focus on own achievements as substitute for love and source for happiness (success, strength, status, education, be “better” ...),
- that’s what I discovered in myself before I became a Christian -

All these are building blocks for wrong values that dominate our current way of life. Wrong values often lead to certain extremes in our life as adults. We dive into work because we believe it satisfies our needs. We accumulate possessions or just need to demonstrate to ourselves that we “can afford it”, or that we are better than others (richer, more intelligent, more beautiful, more meticulous, have a better taste ... you name it). By falling into these extremes we miss the true values of life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self control (Gal 5:22/23) – and are never really satisfied. We fall into the trap of the advertising industry and believe that our life is not fulfilled if we don’t have MORE than we have right now – whatever that may be – so we are never content. In no way we can accept a step backwards, a “less than before”. If we grew up with the wrong values, this is how we believe life should be. Of course, we would never admit that we believe in this MORE stronger than in the promises of the bible, but our actions show it nevertheless.

What can we learn from this? Wrong values have often long and bitter roots. We often only see certain behavior in us that we don’t like. But unless we recognize the wrong thinking habit that leads to this behavior we won’t be able to change it (I think our weigh-down workshop says the same about overeating). And unless we admit that we do cling to wrong values, unless we recognize them as sinful because they go against God’s standards, they will not go away. Only God can make us free – once we we admit our need for help.

4.1.1 Inadequate or missing role models for men

Among the building blocks that lead to wrong values there is one particular problem that has become stronger over the past decades – the lack of a proper role model for men. In contrast to the time of about 100 years ago, most children today don’t see much of what their fathers are doing. The watch them disappear in the morning and come home late in the afternoon – often too tired to communicate with them
Their father spends almost no time with them during the week, which means that they hardly know their father at all. Obviously they get a very incomplete picture of what a man does for the family. Their father is distant to them – it is the mother who really runs the family – that is the way boys and girls experience the family. It is even worse if both parents work hard. Children do not observe their fathers as leaders of the family and they have only a vague idea of them as provider with some responsibility. After all, they have no idea what it means that a job creates the necessary money to run the family. So boys grow up without the feeling that a man constantly works FOR the family and don’t learn what their future responsibility will be. Girls grow up without learning to respect the tasks that a husband filfills unseen – because they notice that mother does everything. (Well in some households this actually IS so). 

The consequence: boys grow up without knowing the proper role models for their future life, because no one shows them what a good father and husband is supposed to be – even if both parents consider their marriage as very happy. So boys develop their own role model and this may be quite different from the ideal. Similarly girls do not learn how to submit to a husband in a constructive way. 

If we grew up without role models, we need to learn this later if we want to have a successful marriage. We need to see that our own value system differs from God’s standards and that we have to adopt this “new” responsibility as only way towards a fulfilled marriage. This is a difficult process, but it will succeed once we admit that our current role models for wives and husbands are not correct. 

As parents, we can do something for our own children (we come to that later again): Fathers should spend real time with their children and let them participate in their everyday life. Show them, where you work. Tell them what you do and let them – if that is possible – participate in small pieces of it. Let them meet your fellow workers – if your children hear them praise your eorts, they will get a better feeling for what you do for the family and who you are. 

4.2 Loneliness: we need friends besides our spouse

The next building block has much to do with the mobile lifestyle of the western society. If you move often, you will experience difficulties in developing and maintaining friendships. What I mean by that is not just a loose friendship with people that you meet in church or at work, but a deeper relationship with people outside your immediate family that allows you to share even the “not so nice” aspects of your life and find understanding and comfort. It takes years to develop such a friendship and this is particularly difficult for men and women who spend most of their time trying to be successful. If you live in such a world and move every 3 to 5 years, it is very hard to have any true friends at all. 

We have experienced this a couple of times and still notice this as one of the greates
difficulties of living here in Ithaca. It just takes so much time to cross cultural differences, to find people that you find really comfortable with, and to get to know them in depth until you get to the point where you have the impression that you can talk about everything – I mean really everything that goes on in your life – and still find understanding.

For men it is even more difficult to develop deep friendships. We were not made to put relationships to the top of our priority list. So often the only friendships we have go back to the times of our highschool or college. And these friends seldomly live close to where we live right now, which makes it difficult to maintain the friendship. So many men have no real friends at all – I mean human friends, of course.

Women have it a bit easier to disclose themselves to their women. It is part of their nature to develop closer relationships and they feel the need to do so much stronger. But even for them, it is not so easy to develop new friendships and they experience the lack of friendships much stronger than men. So they probably go through a harder time when they move to another place, particularly when they come from a different culture and speak a different language.

The situation is not much different for Christians. Yes, we meet at church and have fellowship with others. But this is not the same as a friendship where you share a major portion of yourselves, talk about your inner feelings, tensions, hopes, insecurities, or failures. Christian men face the same difficulties as other men to let go of their sense of competition and their need to appear successful, and to open up before other men. But a man needs a best friend in whom he can fully trust.

Why is this so? Why are male friendships so important for us, even when we’re married? Isn’t it enough to have our wives, whom we entrust almost everything, and to discuss the rest with the Lord?

Well – it simply doesn’t work that way! What do we do when it was our wife who has hurt our feelings? Do we want to keep this all for ourselves? Yes – of course in the ideal situation we would all resolve the matter quickly with our wives and we don’t need anybody else – right?

Let’s face it! We can’t always do this – our emotional barrier is just too strong. Now, where do we turn to just to talk about this, if we have no male friend? Let me tell you one thing – a man without a male friend is very vulnerable. If he doesn’t have a male friend, he will probably end up talking to a woman about the problem.

Why?

Because women are more understanding – we men know that – and there is no feeling of competition when we talk to them. So if a man doesn’t have a close friend, he will find it easier to share his problems with a woman than with another man. And you can probably imagine the consequences: a man has trouble with his wife and talks to another woman who is so much more understanding. How many affairs have started just this way?

You can almost guarantee that trouble arises when married men talk to women about
their marital problems or vice versa. You’re emotionally mixed up already and the situation leads to even more emotional confusion. You will develop strong feelings toward the one who understands you – and this is not always good for your marriage. How many counselors, even pastors have experienced this problem.

In the Christian Group that I joined after my salvation we had a bit training in Christian counselling. And they have made it a rule that men should only counsel men and women only women. Although this rule sounds a bit too strict, it is very wise – too many people have fallen seriously into sin by ignoring the fact that human emotions are much more complex than they imagined. We shouldn’t play with temptation!

Thus having a male friend is very important for men – actually, a male friend can much better understand how we feel, when we express our difficulties to him, because he experiences life from the the same – the male – perspective. Once we crossed the barrier of trust, we will find out that we are not alone with our fears, insecurities, and uncertainties that our wives seem not to understand at all. A friend loves at all times, says Proverbs 17:17. By sharing with another man, we get a clearer perspective of ourselves. The more a man finds his feelings respected, the easier it will be for him to share himself and his feelings with his wife.

So women – the time your husband spends with his friend is very well invested and you should encourage your husband to deepen friendships with other men.

I think, the men’s prayer breakfast is a very good step in this direction. I know that some churches go even a step further and encourage their members to form microgroups of two or at most three men (or two or three women) who get together at least once a week and talk about all aspects of their life, spiritual insights, experiences, problems, and so on. This doesn’t guarantee that you find a good friend but the chances are pretty good if you stick to that habit.

### 4.3 The need to control

Now let’s come to the final brick – the need to control.

Once we have assembled all the other building blocks, once loneliness and wrong values dominate our life, we often come into the situation that we have to build more and more on top of them to maintain our life in an increasingly difficult world. We notice that it takes much effort to manage our life and we become quite desperate to maintain enough control over it.

How shall a man manage his family, if he has already so many problems with his own life? How shall a woman freely submit, if she doesn’t really know what trust is? In both cases, the man or the woman will feel a strong desire to control everything that happens in the family, because everything that is not under control poses a threat to their own feeling of security.

We already have talked about how useless the battle for control is – but if we don’t see that the problem is in ourselves, we will constantly make our partner responsible for
it. After all, it is our spouse who seems to make the control over our life so difficult. We surely notice a problem, but we ignore the fact that it has quite natural causes. So we try hard to get rid of the problem – the symptoms, to be precise, not the real disease. We search answers in the bible but find nothing specific enough. We try to discipline ourselves wherever we notice a wrong lifestyle. But we don’t go for the real problem, the wall consisting of many building blocks that we have erected in the past and are still building higher. That is, what we need to approach – we need to remove the wall, not what’s growing on it.

4.4 Do we need a crisis?

A man reaps what he sows, says Galatians 6:7. Not what we reap is the problem – it is the seed we’re sowing in our soul. If we sow wrong thoughts, surely the harvest we be a growing number of conflicts. We shouldn’t wait until this piles up so high that we are in a severe crisis! Yes – sometimes it needs a crisis to get our full attention, to make us understand how wrong and destructive our some of our beliefs and values are. But we don’t have to wait that long until we start working on ourselves. If we keep our eyes open, we notice where we have built our personal version of the wall that keeps us from being the wife or husband that God intended us to be.

So let us get into the habit of checking ourselves in the light of the spirit: do we feel the need to control things? Do we neglect building friendships? To what extent differs our value system from giving priority to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self control over all other things? Let us work on the causes and take down the wall again. And keep in mind – this IS easy: once we admit that WE are the ones who build the wall, we can ask Jesus to change our heart.

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
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 cam 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 no better than any ordinary men 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 man 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 as 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 husbands 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.
6 Hostile Submission

In our study of leadership and submission in the family we are currently looking at various types of men who don’t lead and women who don’t follow. Our purpose here is to recognize and overcome our own flaws and to help our spouses to become how God intended them to be. During the last two weeks we have talked about the passive, withdrawn husband – a man, who doesn’t accept his responsibilities as leader of the family because he lacks confidence.

The type of woman we want to study today is to a certain extent similar. It is the woman, who has a low self-esteem. But this time, it affects the one who is not supposed to be the leading partner but to be submissive. So the effects are different and often less visible to the outside. We’re talking about the woman who has given up her identity after she married; the woman who doesn’t believe that she can remain herself because she is married, and therefore hides her real thoughts, desires, and personality. She does what her husband says – or what she believes he expects – without letting him know whether she agrees with him or not. To her, this is what the word of God demands of her – full submission to her husband.

What is wrong with that? some of you may ask. Isn’t that what the Bible says? Doesn’t Ephesians 5:22 say

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

So aren’t wives expected to obey their husbands without complaining?

6.1 What is submission?

Over many centuries that has been the most common interpretation of this verse. But recall our very first lesson. What actually is submission? And what is it not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>true submission</th>
<th>false submission</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under his authority</td>
<td>blind obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a deliberate act</td>
<td>diminishing yourself (assistant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equal in value</td>
<td>giving up own identity (“mother”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative, supporting</td>
<td>husband has full responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared responsibility</td>
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1. True submission is a deliberate act. It is your own choice to submit, not something that is forced upon you. Read Philippians 2:6–8

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But made himself nothing, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
This passage talks about Jesus. Did anybody force him to go to the cross or did he do it out of his own will?

Jesus became obedient to God although he was equal to him. He decided to do so out of his own will. He could have done differently, but then we all would have been lost. So he knew what he was doing and why.

**Philippians 2:5** tells us that our attitude should be the same. If we submit to each other, we do so as equal partners and out of our own choice.

By the way, let us keep in mind that **Ephesians 5:21** says

> Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for God.

So it is quite clear that the next verse does not make the husband superior to the wife.

2. It is important that we do not give up our own identity when we submit. We are the ones who act, so we should carefully think through to what extent we follow the desires of our spouse. We should not just “obey blindly”, because we are still responsible for our own actions.

Blind obedience can be very dangerous. People who murdered Jews during the Nazi times later tried to excuse their actions by saying that they had no choice but to obey. They tried to deny the responsibility for their own actions by referring to the need for obedience.

This is a very extreme example, but I hope it makes clear that you are ALWAYS responsible for your own actions. Others may be guilty of issuing evil commands but the only one who decides to follow or not are YOU.

In the German Army this principle is now one of the first things you have to learn. Even in the army you have a duty for disobedience in certain situations. They have learned their lesson from the past and we should learn from it as well.

So, the consequences of submission often appear to be the same as obedience. But the difference lies in the motives. It doesn’t count *what* you do, but *why* you do this. Have you noticed that a marriage is very sensitive to the motives of actions? Have you ever noticed that your husband reacts somewhat strange, although you do exactly what he wants – just because he senses that your motive for following is not love but something else?

Unfortunately in many families – particularly among Christian couples – submission is rather a habit than a deliberate act of love. Quite a few women “obey” their husbands without being convinced about this. To them, this is the role God has given them. Often, they do not agree at all to their husband’s decisions, but they follow them anyway without disputing them. To some extent, they do not view themselves as equal and they are not really happy about it. They have the impression that they
are not really free to act as they think it best. But they are afraid of expressing this openly – either because they fear that their husbands would react badly to that or because they fear that this would be rebellion against God’s word. Often, this kid of submission leads to a lot of tension in the family, because the wife does not submit out of her own choice. As a consequence, she does not feel responsible for her actions and, even worse, she often does not like what she has to do. Because of the latter, we speak of hostile submission in this case.

6.2 Hostile Submission

The Bible gives us an excellent example of such a woman – it is one of David’s wives – Abigail – whom we meet in 1.Samuel 25.
At that time, Abigail was married to a man named Nabal. In Verse 3 we read that she was beautiful and intelligent while her husband was not the type of man that you would like to be around. David and his men had been living in the same area for quite a while and they had to a certain extent protected Nabal’s herds. Now as the sheep-shearing time comes, David asks Nabal to give him something in return but Nabal refuses in a very rude way. When Abigail hears about this, she secretly takes a lot of food and – without telling her husband – goes out to meet David. Now let us read Verses 23–28.

And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted on the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thy enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

Q: So, what kind of woman do you think Abigail was?
At a first glance we notice that she is humble and, as the King James Version says, “a woman of good understanding”. She did all she could to undo the rude behavior of her husband. So outwardly, she displayed a very attractive character and it is no wonder that David married her after Nabal died (Verse 39). But was she a good wife to her husband who certainly had many flaws?
Well, you might say that she saved his life, because David would surely have killed him. But let us look a little closer at what she does and says, we find out that this says quite a lot about her personality and her marriage.

**Negative self image:** Let us begin with her self image.

Women had a very low status at that time and Abigail surely viewed herself as an inferior being. This becomes very clear in her whole attitude toward David. But this view of herself had little to do with her real qualities, because she was intelligent and beautiful.

Many women today have a negative self-image although they are attractive and competent in many respects. But they focus too much on what they lack instead on the gifts God has given them. So they constantly suffer from a *feeling of inferiority* that has nothing to do with reality.

**Habit to blame herself:** Let us look at Verses 23–25. Abigail certainly knows that she was not responsible for Nabal’s stupid actions (25) but she does take the blame on herself.

Women with a low self-esteem often do that. They view themselves as the focus of attention, but in a negative way. If something bad happens, they believe that something they did must have been the cause. Isn’t that strange? Despite a feeling of inferiority they view themselves as the center of the world. Whatever happens, it has to do with them.

Largely, the focus is on the negative. Ten good things may happen but she picks the only one that is negative. That shapes her view of the past and of the future. Bad things are often anticipated because “*that is the way the world is*”. Strangely enough, they often experience more bad things than others, because their thoughts center so much around them. In today’s language such people are called *negaholic*. The only cure for them is to get a better grasp of reality – and to have it replace their twisted view of the world.

In John 8:31–32 we read

> If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

We will come back to this later.

**Martyrdom as a defensive weapon:** If you look at the situation, you cannot fail to sympathize with Abigail. She had deserved far better than this terrible husband and she makes it clear how much she suffers.

Women with a low self-esteem often use this behavior as a protective weapon. Martyrdom and helplessness are intended to make others feel pity for them. Many
men melt when confronted with this, so sometimes it seems to be the only way to attract attention.

But it also has the bad taste of manipulation in it so the reaction of others may sometimes be quite the opposite of what should originally be achieved.

**Marriage built by fear & distance**. What about her marriage?

It is obvious that her relation to her husband wasn’t very close anymore. Maybe it had never been but that is not really relevant. We see that she goes secretly around her husband, probably out of *fear*, because he was a rude man. And if you read how she speaks about him, you notice that she *certainly did not respect* him. He probably did not deserve much respect, but this is not a basis for a good marriage.

Making wide circles around your husband doesn’t solve the problem. Yes, he may have quite a few flaws. But if you keep distance, then you deprive him of the last positive influence he might get and the marriage will become only worse.

**Suppressed bitterness**: It is quite obvious that Abigail did not feel much for her husband anymore. Instead, her feelings were bitterness and even hostility (Verse 25). But as she distanced herself more and more from Nabal, she suppressed her feelings towards him and simply went around him.

No one can live like this for a long time. So Abigail, like many people in such a situation, expresses her feelings to a stranger instead to her husband. It is obvious that this is not good for her marriage.

Yes, there is a time to seek counseling if you cannot communicate with your husband. But this is not the same as letting your feelings slip out to co-workers or even total strangers, because it puts an even greater distance between you and your husband. Besides, it makes you open to the temptation for an affair.

So we see that Abigail’s attitude towards her husband was by no means positive. But it was not only a reaction to Nabal’s behavior but mostly based on her view of the world and her low self-esteem.

**Q: Do you think that changed after she married David?**

Probably not, because her attitude had little to do with the circumstances. All too often we believe that changing the circumstances would solve the problem. Many women believe that life would be better, if they could only change her husband.

But this is an illusion. It is not the circumstances that need change but our attitude. We need to see the world from a godly perspective. Fortunately, that is what God is working on in us.
6.3 Emotional Profile of hostility in submission

Before we look at ways how to overcome hostility in submission let us try to give a more general characterization of women, who do not submit out of their own choice but because they feel pressed to it. In addition to the symptoms we have already seen in Abigail – how would you describe the emotional state of a such a woman?

**Feelings of inferiority:** This is probably the most dominant symptom but also the one that is most difficult to discover because it is often hidden quite well. A person who feels equal in value submits only out of free choice or not at all. A person with a low self-esteem has much much more difficulties with saying no, so she often gives in without really believing that this is right.

**A Victim mentality** often goes hand in hand with that. In last sunday’s bulletin we had a nice description of this mentality. Let me read a few of the statements from that

1. *My future is determined by my past and my present.*
2. *Please make everything easy – I can’t take it if things get too hard.*
3. *I can’t help it; I am just addicted to grumbling, fault-finding and complaining*
4. *My life is so miserable*
5. *My problems are too great*
6. *Everybody else is better off than I am*
7. *I don’t get God’s blessing because I am not worthy*

A victim cannot influence his own life. Everything is determined byy somebody else or the circumstances. And usually he gets only the bad parts.

**Martyrdom** is a variation of that. Everybody should feel sorry for me. The hunger for love is stilled by others feeling pity, which really puts me into the center of attention.

**A self-blame strategy** often accompanies the feeling of inferiority. *If something bad happens, then something I did must have been the cause,* is the tape that is being played over and over again. Besides, self-blame is often used as protective measure. After all, If I blame myself, I won’t be attacked anymore.

**The overprotective mother** is a variation of that. She protects her children even against rightful complaints by taking the responsibility (or blame) for their actions. Unfortunately this often leads to a lot of problems with discipline when the children grow up.
**Negaholic:** Focusing on the negative is a typical behavior of people with a low self-esteem and closely related to the victim mentality. Whatever happens during the day, it is the Negative that is remembered. When making plans for the future, the thoughts center about the things that may go wrong. Negaholics have difficulties to trust in God’s promises because they are so contrary from their negative view of the world. Instead they need to build up a lot of worldly security, which seems more trustworthy than God’s promises.

I am talking about feelings here, not about abstract knowledge, but it is the feeling that dominates the thinking in this case.

**Workaholic:** Another way of proving ones worth in order to get out of a feeling of inferiority is being busy all the time. *Each work I do increases my worth a little, so the more I do, the more I am worth,* is the tape that plays. These people find it difficult to take a rest and to accept the fact that God loves them even if they work less.

**Perfectionist:** To many people one way to get out of a feeling of inferiority is to aim at perfection in everything they do. Any sign of imperfection shows that they are still not good enough. So they are constantly striving for a higher standard and pay attention to the slightest detail. This has obviously a lot of positive effects, but it costs an incredible amount of energy. Since perfection can never be achieved they are constantly busy and under stress (but for different reasons than the workaholic).

They will find it difficult to accept that God loves them even if they are not perfect, and they also find it difficult to accept people who chose to live at a much lower degree of perfection.

Recognizing these symptoms will help us to identify whether we we have problems with deliberate submission and true humility. Keep in mind that, although we’re mostly talking about women here, most of these symptoms also apply to men who have difficulty with **Ephesians 5:21**.

### 6.4 How to overcome hostility in submission?

All these symptoms point to a problem with our self-esteem or a feeling of inferiority. Overcoming these problems will therefore make us free to be truly submissive. And the key for that is *changing the basis for our convictions.*

How do you feel about yourself and why? Do you compare yourselves with others (women like to do that) who are younger, richer, more beautiful, clothed better, more intelligent, more spiritual ... and feel bad about that? How does that, what you feel relate to what God says about you?
Often we base our convictions more on our immediate feelings than on God’s truth. But listening to our – often false – believes can be very misleading and depressing. If instead we learn to base our convictions on truth, we will be able to overcome a low self-esteem and to submit without feeling pressed to it. In **John 8:31–32** we read

> If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

So knowing, what God says about us, will make us free. So what exactly does he say about you?

- **You are loved by God.** **1.John 4:7–8** tells us

  Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not does not know God; for God is love.

  **Jeremia 31:3** says

  I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you.

We belong to a God who loves us. You can accept this as a fact or – even as a Christian – choose to believe your circumstances clearly say that God does not love you. Which of the two is closer to reality?

- **God considers you valuable** and wonderfully made. We talked about that 2 weeks ago (**Psalms 139:14**)

  I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

- **You are accepted by God, so you are good.** **Hebrews 4:13–16** says

  Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We cannot fool God. He sees us as we really are. He knows every evil thought that goes to our minds, every bad thing we did and every good deed that we did not do. But he still accepts us, because he can relate to our feelings. He forgives us because we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He wants us to have fellowship with him, because he has a vision for our future. He does not see
our sins anymore but the good that is going to become out of us. In his eyes, we are already perfect – there is no reason for feelings of inferiority.

Some people still have trouble with accepting this emotionally. If you do, let me ask you a provocative question: How high do you set your own standards? Are they higher than God’s standards for acceptance? How well do people – including yourself – have to perform to be acceptable?

Think about this. Jesus attacked the pharisees for exactly that reason. Their standards were higher than God’s. That’s why they had all these religious laws that had little or nothing to do with God’s word. They built a fence around the spirit of the word and made it so high, that no one could keep it. No wonder that all the people felt so guilt-laden.

Think about it! You may have to lower your standards for accepting others and yourself, instead of running after an ideal that nobody can reach.

6.5 Daily habits to cultivate

These are the facts that we find in God’s word. Now it is easy to understand them mentally and to agree when you hear me “preach”. You may even repeat them to anybody else who asks you about them. But – how can you make these facts come to life? How can you adjust your feelings to what you know to be true?

Here are a few suggestions that make it easier.

1. Cultivate truth in daily living. The more you are in contact with scripture, the more scripture will affect your thinking. If you spend little time with God’s word, your feelings will always dominate. If you have God’s word all around you, you will eventually think in the same way.

So, spend enough time with God day by day – focus on passages like the above, which tell how high God values you. And eventually you will feel that these passages are meant for you specifically.

2. Learn to say no to others. Saying yes to God’s truth means being able to say no to others. How can you learn to make submission a deliberate act of love, if you do everything that others expect from you? People who can’t say no, are constantly under pressure and – after a while – don’t like at all what they are doing. So, occasionally you must say no instead of taking more and more burdens on yourself. Then you will experience that you can submit joyfully, when you decide to do so.

And by the way – you won’t lose any friends because of that. They will love you no less than before, probably even more. Those who don’t – these are the people you don’t need to have as friends. It’s a bit more tricky at home sometimes, but even there you have to learn to say no.
3. Learn to say no to yourself. This is often even more difficult because many people with a low self-esteem feel some kind of void in themself. They need approval from others to fill that void or have to give themselves little rewards to feel better. This can become an addiction: the little rewards – food, drinks, cigarettes (probably not here), overactivity, shopping – become necessary to deaden the pain. While in some cases the addiction is easy to recognize, there are many less obvious addictions, because our society tolerates them. I am still shocked by the number of excessively overweight people here in the US. Even our churches often find this acceptable – because it is neither smoking nor alcohol – but overeating and other addictions do not at all glorify God. In fact, I would say it is no better than getting drunk.

Proverbs 23:20:

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves with meat. For drunkards and gluttons become poor.

So, getting what your want doesn’t fill the void – it just makes it worse. You need more and more to get satisfied. And to yourself and the outside world you become less and less attractive.

So it is time to break with these habits and to say no to yourself, no to your feelings and desires. You need to experience that you are in control, not your feelings. As far as I understand it, our weigh-down workshops take exactly this approach: you don’t focus on the object of your desire, but on the fact that you don’t need them, to feel loved.

So the important thing is – saying no to your desires and filling the gap with God’s love makes you free – and you will actually feel much better afterwards.

These are three simple steps which will be very successful when you really begin to take them.

By the way, a husband can support your wife in her struggle for a better self-esteem. Show her that you accept her fully as she is right now – even if she can still improve a few things. Tell her how much you love her and why. What is it that makes her attractive and lovable. She needs to know, because she doesn’t see that. Encourage her to discover her strengths.

It pays off! The greater her self-esteem will be, the more energy she will have to take care of your needs – out of her own desire.

7 The Workaholic

Today, we want to talk about a different type of man, who is very active in the outside world but far from being an active leader of his family. And you may not be surprised to find that this type of man also has a problem with his self-image and his value
system. Actually, one might say that a wrong values or a false self-image are always the cause for absence of leadership or submission. Men and women who see themselves as God sees them, have accepted their role in the family and know how to fill them out.

So our topic today is the workaholic, the man who values work so high that gives it priority over almost everything else. Yes, women can be workaholics too, but there are many more men who fall into that trap than women. To a certain extent, a man is designed that way. He is the “doer”, the one who has to go to the outside world and provide for the family. He is the ones who is supposed to work hard (recall Genesis 3:17) to bring in the support for wife and children. But the workaholic is much more. He is so busy that he almost never has time for anything else. He uses all his strength to do a good job. And he sees that as his way of serving his family. But he hardly has any time for his family. He doesn’t have time to get in touch with his or somebody else’s feelings. So his wife often gets the impression that she is unimportant for his life – or even worse – that he doesn’t love her. Although this is very likely not the case, all his actions seem to point in this direction.

7.1 Why do men work?

So the crucial question for us is: what is the difference between a man who needs to work hard to support his family and a workaholic? Why do some men have a tendency to work much more than necessary? To find out, let us ask ourselves the question: why do men work at all? And let us try to separate these reasons into uplifting rerasons, and reasons that rather press men down.

1. Uplifting reasons to work
   - The bible commands us (Proverbs 10:4,......)
   - We work to provide for our family
   - .. to express who we are
   - .. to have a purpose for living
   - .. to leave our mark on humanity
   - .. to be part of a greater purpose
   - .. to achieve social improvement (higher living standards)
   - Working itself is satisfying

2. Other reasons for work
   - Work as indirect expression of our love
   - Work is a hiding place for our feelings
     - emotions that we cannot express
     - fear of failure
     - feeling of inadequacy as man
     - frustrations
   - Work is an excuse for not having to participate in other activities
The reasons in the first category are perfectly good reasons for us to go to work. In fact, when work becomes satisfying, then a man will return home from work happy and balanced. Of course, he may need a few minutes to relax and adjust and there will also be strenuous days at work, but in general he will have plenty of energy left for his family.

Not so the workaholic. His approach to work is clearly not a healthy one anymore because it lacks balance. What he finds at work is entirely different and often belongs the second category. Work gives him a chance to avoid dealing with his inner problems. Most workaholics are not even aware of these, but they drive them nonetheless.

So, the question is: *why is this so? Why do some men hide behind their work?*

We will discuss a few typical reasons for that and possible solutions that can help an overworking man to get back to a normal life. If you can spice what I am saying with examples or own experiences, please do so. It may open the eyes of some of us who are in danger of becoming a workaholic, if they hear about similar situations. Actually, I noticed that I am in danger myself, so working on this lecture was quite revealing – including the fact that I spent more than 8 hours to prepare it.

### 7.2 A sense of inferiority

One major reason for a man to overwork is a feeling of inferiority. Something in his past, maybe during his childhood, has left in him the impression that he is not as good as other people in what he does. So he tries to prove his worth to himself by reaching for higher standards – standards so high that he can never achieve them within the usual amount of time. He believes that the *quality* of his work is not good enough in comparison with others, so he tries to compensate that with higher *quantity* – more work, which shall eventually enable him to keep up with others. If he works more than others, the sum of all his accomplishments might be big enough.

This, of course, does not work, because no matter how much you do, you cannot really replace quality by quantity. We are rarely rewarded for the amount of time we put into something but mostly for the results. **1. Corinthians 3:13** tells us:

> Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.

So the attempt to work more in order to feel as a success is doomed to fail. His standards are so harsh that he can never really achieve them. He will never be satisfied with his achievements, so he will never dare to go away from work.

This situation is very typical in university environments and affects students, researchers and professors quite often. I have to admit that I have to be very careful not to fall into that trap because research gives you so many questions that you want to see answered and there seems to be never enough time to solve them.
The problem here is, however, not the amount of work that *needs* to be done, but what we *believe* how much we must be able to achieve. The reason is that men often define themselves by what they accomplish at work. As long as this is the central basis for our self-esteem, we will focus too much on the work that we have to do and too little on the real quality of life.

So the answer to this problem is to get a better grasp for reality. What is it that really counts in life? Is our work the center of our life or just the means for having a good life? Do our family duties keep us from working, or does our work keep us from our family duties? Do we feel acceptable only when we’re good at work or are there other things in life that make us feel valuable? If we think about it, we may realize that we probably associate too much value with our work.

If overworking is caused by a feeling of insufficiency, then the solution is very similar to what we discussed in the previous lessons. We have to **learn to base our convictions on truth** – on God’s truth, because this is the truth that will set us free. And what does God say about us?

He considers us valuable, he loves us, and he accepts us *as we are*. And this does not only have to do with our sins, but also with our accomplishments. God trusts us enough to give us a very important and valuable task – to be witnesses for him with our life. If he thinks, we’re sufficient for that, we should not set our standards higher. If we look at God’s word from this perspective, then we will find out that we don’t have to work as hard and as long as we do.

Yes, God expects us not to be lazy in what we are doing. But that doesn’t mean we have to be able to achieve the same as others. We just have to do a job as good as we can do it. There may be others who accomplish much more than we do – but that doesn’t make us insufficient.

Remember the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14–30**? God has give us different talents and expects us to use them. But what did he say to the servant who earned just another two talents? Did he say “*you lazy and wicked servant – why didn’t you bring me five more talents as the other one did*?”

No, he said “**Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord.**”. If God sees it that way, can’t we do so as well?

A wife who realizes that her husband overworks because he feels insusicient can do a lot to help him. If he feels accepted when he comes home, he will have it easier to realize that the biblical truth is reality even for him.

### 7.3 Excessively high standards

Another common reason for men to become workaholics are overly high standards. While this seems to be very similar to the character we just discussed, the motivation behind these high standards is different and reveals the “real workaholic”. His motto
is that of the perfectionist: “I must be able to do everything and this at the highest level of quality”. He always needs to show that he is better than others and that he can achieve much more than the average. So his work has become a real obsession. He attempts to accomplish what to most humans is simply infeasible.

Such a man has a full job, takes courses at the university to get a higher degree, exercises constantly to keep in shape, teaches sunday school, has a few voluntary offices – all at the same time – and .... he almost forgot ... a family.

Surprisingly he succeeds in many of the things he attempts but the success just drives him to higher, more impossible tasks. Besides, his achievements come at a high cost, because he is usually worn out from the many things he tries to do. Because he tries to be perfect in everything, he loses what is most valuable to him – his wife and his children. For him, all his toil is an expression of love, but in reality he distances himself more and more from his family.

A hopeless case?

No, but a difficult one, because his wife can hardly reach him once he has come so far. He must learn to let go, and accept imperfection in his own life. God loves him even if he is not perfect and so do his wife and children. His peers will respect him even if he can not do everything perfectly. He must learn to say no – to himself and to others. And then he will find out that happiness and fulfillment do not depend on achievements but much more on a balanced life.

7.4 Wrong values (‘making it’ / ‘being somebody’)

This brings me to another aspect: workaholics often have a completely wrong value system. Their world is centered around success, promotions, status symbols they can buy – that is, the fruits of their work that are visible to co-workers and other people. ‘Others must recognize me’, is their motto, and they seek attention by what they accomplish.

There is nothing wrong in getting some positive attention. We all need that from time to time. The only question is: do we depend on this? What is the basis for our standard of achievement? Is it based on the love of God, or do we – even as Christians – depend on the constantly changing values of the world around us?

The workaholic whose world is obsessed with the idea of “making it” or “being somebody” is an easy prey for commercials. The slogan “You deserve it” is made for him, because it immediately stirs the thought “If I don’t have it, am I not good enough”, and that is exactly what shall trap him.

A man who runs after these things, must learn to set his priorities straight. In Matthew 16:26 Jesus tells us

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

So, what do you gain by trying to get the recognition of others by what you accomplish
by what you can afford? You will be constantly under stress and cannot even enjoy what you achieved, because you always have to achieve more. And you will miss what is truly valuable in life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self control (Galatians 5:22/23). Jesus gives us a very easy recipe for a fulfilled life in Matthew 6:33

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

You have to learn that nothing else really counts. That is not easy if you got used to a different value system. But you will find that your life will have an entirely new quality if you really bibletry it out.

7.5 The wrong focus (long-term plans)

Another reason for overworking that is quite related to the above one is that men often focus only on the big picture, the long-term plan, and forget about the details of the everyday life that they have to live until they reach their goal. Some men work like crazy to be able to provide a safe nest for the family. They only look at that one goal that is so far in the future – to be rich enough to be able to start living.

If they really think about it – that is what they want: have a life in harmony with their family. But for some reason they think they cannot afford it now – and what is so bad about working terribly hard for a few years if that enables you to have a good life afterwards?

Well, what is God’s answer to that?

Look at Luke 12:16–20, the parable of the rich fool. Here you see a man who had it all planned out. He prepares a lot of provisions for the future thinking:

Then I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take life ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, you fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided?

You see what the trouble is? It takes terribly long to get to that final goal that you have in mind. And chances are, that you may never reach it. Some men have a heart attack in their late 40’s, you may have an accident, or your family may simply give up on you and leave you. What then? You reached you financial security but those for whom you prepared it aren’t there anymore.

Life is a journey, not a destination. We cannot waste all of todays life to have one in the future. Today is the day where we really live, not tomorrow.

So, again, it is time to set your priorities straight. There is nothing wrong with planning ahead. But the costs must be reasonable.
7.6 Avoid confrontation

Finally, and this is a very sad story: some men overwork to avoid confrontation with their wives. Men love competition but confrontation they really hate, because for them it is a win/lose situation. And most men have no desire to lose, nor do they want to make their wife a loser. After all, they have to live with her. But if a man has the impression that his wife disapproves of him for whatever reason, he gets the desire to stay away from home, because home is the place that makes him feel so incompetent as a husband, father, and provider. For him, this is a no-win situation. So – instead of coming home, where he expects confrontation – he puts more and more efforts into the world where he achieves more satisfaction – his work. This man is not a workaholic by nature, he is just trying to escape pain. So his wife can do a lot to change the situation. If he feels accepted when he comes home, he will quickly let go of his overworking, because home is where he wants to be. So, don’t complain that he works too much. Instead, let him feel that you value him – and he will be happy to come home much earlier than before.

8 Busyness: the Need to be Needed

So much for men who overwork. Now let us “flip roles” and look at women who are overloaded with the work they have to do. You know this type of woman, because you very often find her in church. It is the woman you can always count on. When you want a job well done, you go and ask her. She never turns you down and puts a lot of energy into that task, so the result is often even more than you expected. In addition to that she cares for her husband and her children, and she works. It is easy to like her, because she is so reliable and gets so much done. But when you take a closer look, you will notice that she is under a lot of stress. She hardly ever finds rest and – although outwardly she and her family are very happy – they really don’t have much time for each other. Some people use the word “quality time” at this point to cover up that something is wrong. They say “rather 5 minutes of quality time together than a whole afternoon spent without purpose”. There is some truth to that, but in reality this is a pretty bad excuse for our unwillingness to make time for your family. 5 minutes is definitely not enough, no matter how intense they are. How do you believe your kids think about it when they are left alone for 23 hours and 55 minutes per day? So, what about a whole afternoon of quality time?

The phrase “quality time” is probably the cause for many of the problems we have with overwork today. It is a very worldly term and we churches make the mistake to adopt it – and the thinking that goes with it. We believe we can have it all: a hard job, a family, several offices at church, and always be ready for additional voluntary tasks.
Of course we can’t spend much time on all this, so we try to do it more intense – at a higher quality. Our forefathers weren’t so stupid to even attempt all this. They knew that they were finite beings, created by God and not almighty themselves. Today we tend to forget that we have limitations.

And the consequence? We are constantly worn out – especially the women who work, manage a household, and are active in church at the same time. Many of them have difficulties to say no, when they are asked to do something. They need the feeling that others need them. They feel the urge to help others – even if that goes beyond the strength they have. Psychologists have developed the term *Helper-Syndrome*, to describe this type of woman – because eventually they reach a point where they simply have no energy left, and still don’t know how to say no to others.

### 8.1 What is the problem?

Before we look at the possible reasons for women to be that way, let us look a bit at the situation where they are in. The world has changed a lot in the past 50 years and with it the traditional view of women. A vast majority of today’s women go to work for various reasons. There may be financial reasons for that. Or there is the belief that without having a job you’re not really a person, because “being just a mother” seems not to be enough.\(^1\)

On the other hand, the traditional duties haven’t disappeared and women still feel their responsibility for the household. *Titus 2:4–5* says

> That they – *Paul is talking about the older women* – may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

A similar description can be found in *1. Timothy 5:14*.

So, according to God’s word, women are supposed to be managers of the home, and almost all women feel that way – whether they are Christians or not.

The trouble is, today they also work! So in fact, they have two jobs now. But many husbands don’t see a necessity to make their burden easier, because they do not feel responsible for the household. Well – *1. Timothy 3:4–5*, which states the qualities of an overseer, clearly states that a godly man must be able to manage his household well – which clearly states that the responsibility for the household is not only “a woman thing”.

Nevertheless, the woman is always the one who feels responsible – whether her husband fulfills his obligations at home or not. I know women, and statistics say that this is not an unusual situation, who have a much higher paid job than their husbands but still do almost everything in the household. As a matter of fact, they don’t even

\(^1\)Well, if you recall the long list of job titles associated with the word “mother” that we received on mother’s day, you know that “being just a mother” is in fact more than sufficient.
want their husbands to do more around the house. In addition to their success at work they want to keep what has always given them self-esteem – the ability to take care of their home and family. So even if they feel pressed down by the many things that have to do at home – they don’t want their husbands to interfere with that. Proverbs 31:10–31 is their motto – the woman who can do everything at once, is praised by everybody, and still looks beautiful.

8.2 Wrong beliefs behind busyness

The question is, of course – is that possible? Compared to biblical times there is so much where a woman can excel: A successful career, a happy husband, well-adjusted children, a trim figure, a gourmet kitchen, and a clean bathroom, and a meaningful ministry in the church. Can she really have it all at the same time?

The woman who tries to have all that is under a lot of stress. But she still keeps on going that way. Why do you think, does she do that? What are her reasons to accept the pressure and take more and more burdens on herself? What are her attitudes that create this stress?

1. Need to perform well
2. Need to prove something
3. Need to be active (rest is laziness)
4. Insecurity
5. “Everything depends on me”
6. Love tied to performance
7. “Why does this happen to me?”

1. Need to perform well

Women have a tendency to be more meticulous in what they do. They pay more attention to the details than men and that usually leads to fewer errors and better results. But Because they see all the details they are often less satisfied with what they do themselves. The have have a much more difficult time to “just get the job done” – they need to do it well. And this standard is often very high and that keeps them busy in everything they do.

To give you an example, I recall that Barbara and I had long disputes about her feeling a need for ironing every piece of clothing after washing it. Men think that in most case this is just wasted time – it’s going to wrinkle immediately anyway. Women have an urge to keep everything neat, even if it costs them long hours of work.

Other examples – to get the message?

So, the point is, there must be a balance between what you feel obliged to do and what you can do.
2. “Everything depends on me”

Many households are run by a woman with missionary instincts: *If I weren’t here then everything would break down.* This is a very common belief and often adopted by the world around them.

People keep asking me if I am able to survive while Barbara is away. Of course I can. Life is less fun without her but that doesn’t mean that I starve to death or that the household becomes a mess when she’s not here.

But – many women see that differently. They refuse help because they think that their husbands and children can do any meaningful task in the household. So they rule the kitchen and organize the closets and drawers of every member of the family.

Do you know what the result is? They actually *make* their family depend on them. The children grow up in the belief that mommy always runs after them cleaning up and organizing everything. They never learn to organize themselves. So when the time comes to move out they haven’t learned anything.

I think here at Cornell we get perfect examples of where this leads to. Student homes are often a mess because now there is no mommy to clean up after them. You wouldn’t believe how much chaos and dirt a young person can stand before he or she feels the need to do something. Particularly the young men are terrible. In our department we have a permanent microwave battle. People just heat up there food, take it out and leave – even if they created a mess. They have no idea how disgusting it is for the next person to find a microwave where tomato sauce and pizza cheese is spattered everywhere. They don’t even think about this because mother always did the job for them.

Women who make their family depend on them do not only suffer under a lot of stress but will also raise children (and possibly husbands) with no sense for cleanliness, order, or responsibility – and later ask themselves: “What went wrong? I did so much for them and look what has become of them”.

Instead of organizing your household perfectly you better spend some time to help your family members organize themselves. I am thankful that our mother trained us in these things.

3. Need to prove something

Some women enter the working arena with a desire to balance the scales of their life. Their sense of self-worth was hurt in the past. So now they must prove that they are worthy in a way for everybody to see. This is their way to get even. But of course, achieving visible success costs an incredible amount of energy.

4. Love tied to performance
Many parents make the mistake of withdrawing love from their children when they have done something wrong or not good enough. Children who grow up in such a world start to believe that love is something to be earned. “It may be different with God, but people only love me if I perform well”, is the tape they play to themselves over and over again.

If they don’t get the attention and affection they need (and that is usually a lot!) they conclude that they are not doing enough. So they try more and more – and it doesn’t work. In fact, their husbands may react very strange to their efforts because they see their wives do so many things they don’t care about – and have so little time for them as a person.

You see, this way of thinking is a vicious cycle. A woman who gets into this does more and more with less and less results as far as affection is concerned. Her marriage will become quite shallow as far as true emotions are concerned.
Women who tie love to performance probably also have difficulties experiencing the love of God. After all, God gives his love freely without asking us to perform well. But if we hold on to the belief that we must do well to deserve love, we keep all our senses shut for love that does not depend on performance.

5. “Why does this happen to me?”

A similar, somewhat more negatively oriented attitude is based on the belief that life should be trouble-free – at least for the Christian. If anything bad happens to a woman who has this attitude, she believes that she must have something wrong. “Why does this happen to me?” she asks herself. “What have I done wrong to get punished?” People who are often sick or permanently ill can easily fall into this trap if they are not firm in their faith. Jesus says in Matthew 5:45:

> for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

So we all get our share of bad things from time to time – although some get it a little more often than others. But this is besides the point. The crucial thing is that a woman with that attitude always believes that something is wrong with her whenever a tiny raindrop falls into her life. So she is trying to compensate that by doing better and better. This of course leads nowhere.

6. Insecurity

We all know that we are not even half as good as we appear on the outside. This is quite normal because it doesn’t make sense to let everybody know the bad things we did in the past, all the weaknesses we have, the temptations that still make us fall, the sins we still commit repeatedly, or even the normal failures where we don’t achieve what we tried to accomplish. It is sufficient that we know all that. Telling it to everybody else wouldn’t encourage them at all.

But sometimes we ask ourselves “what would all these people at church say if they really knew who I am”? Quite a normal question.

But for some women, this question becomes a threat. Which means that they take a lot of efforts to go into hiding. They feel so insecure that they assume that they are “just no good”, and it would be quite painful if others would find that out. So they try to do as many things as possible to please the people around them, so that they think highly enough of them. But they often attempt too much, that is they can’t reach all the goals they are setting for themselves. So the feeling of failure increases instead of getting smaller. But instead of seeing the futility of their attempts they try even harder, and harder, and harder ....

An unsettled conscience adds much more stress to their already busy days and estranges them from God and the people who give them the most support.

Do you recognize yourself in any of these character descriptions?
8.3 How to get out?

Don’t give up! None of these situations is helpless. The stress of life can be overcome. And astonishingly enough the way out is almost the same as for all the other types of people we discussed in the past weeks. There is only a tiny shift in the perspective. All you need to do is the following:

1. **Analyze:** What is it I am saying to myself?

   To reduce stress you must find out where it comes from. We all talk to ourselves. Our heart always gives comments to everything. Try to listen to these comments consciously. What are they saying? What makes them sound so believable?

   Try to recall a recent situation that made you feel angry, nervous, or depressed. What created the problem? And what did you feel at that time.

   Once you do that you will find out how little truth there is in many of the things you say to yourselves. It all sounds so plausible when you’re IN a situation. But brought to the light of day it is often just a lot of nonsense.

2. **See the truth:** What is God saying about it?

   After discovering your self-talk, compare it to the word of God. And you will find out what the truth about these things really is. **Philippians 4:8** states:

   
   Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

   If we would only follow this line of thought, then we are quickly out of all kinds of problems. Isn’t God’s opinion about us far more significant that what our boss, husband, children, friends, etc. think about us?

   Some of us see this differently and fix their minds only on people, especially those who think little of us, who criticized us, or left some negative impression. But how much has this to do with reality? Don’t we just create negative events ourselves because we listen too much to our self-talk than to God’s truth?

3. **Confess:** Where are lies ruling my mind?

   “Nicely said”, you may think, “but how do I get rid of these negative thoughts?”

   Well, the first step is to confess them as lies or – to be precise – as sin. Sin means deviating from God’s truth – confession means getting into agreement with God again. And the result:

   
   If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (**1.John 1:9**)
God will cleanse us from unrighteousness – and that includes the lies in our self-talk. We can replace these wrong thinking patterns by God’s way of thinking:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2.Cor 10:4–5)

Working on your mind is the most important area where we have to fight stress. But you should also change your outer circumstances to support that. Here are a few suggestions. Some seem to be obvious, but they are helpful nevertheless.

1. **Enjoy life**
   
   Life is a gift from God and is intended to have a certain amount of fun. Most people don’t have to be told this but some of us, particularly those under stress, appear to believe that enjoying life is something to be avoided. I know that there are extreme religious groups who teach that every kind of pleasure is sin. But there is nothing spiritual about withdrawing from all “earthly pleasure”. In fact, Paul instructs Timothy to

   Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy (1.Timothy 6:17)

   Most people take themselves much too seriously. But we do not serve a God who is opposed to fun. So, don’t wait until all the work is finished – learn to take breaks, rest and enjoy, and to have fun again.

2. **Have self-control / responsibility**
   
   People under pressure seldomly have any control over their own life. It is the outside world that dominates them. But you can change that.

   Begin with taking responsibility for the things you can control – what you do during the first 15 minutes of your day; what, when, and how much you eat – and actively control what you do. That means – you decide what you do or don’t do, not your compulsions or the problems around you.

   If you exercise self-control in the small things you will experience that God’s spirit rules your life again, because self-control is one of the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Self control in the bigger things will follow – don’t start with them first.

3. **Set valuable goals**
   
   A lot of our stress comes from the fact that we are running after goals that are not worth to be followed. We get burned out because we work for a bigger house,
try to keep it neat, want to impress neighbors, intend to secure a good life after retirement, and so on. We must ask ourselves, “are these really goals that we must achieve?” Often the answer is no – we find out that these goals come to us from the world around us.

Instead of adapting goals from others, we should set our goals ourselves. Ask yourself in prayer: “At the end of my life – what must I see to know that I have accomplished what God intended me to do?” If we look at our life from this perspective, many things that seem so desperately vital right now, become almost insignificant. If we really do that, many of the goals that put us under a lot of stress will simply disappear.

By the way, prayer is not only talking to God – we must use a lot of our prayer time to listen, that is to have our thoughts guided by him. Some people tend to forget that when they pray.

4. **Practice to say “no”**

Once we have identified our long-term visions, we must learn to live according to them. That means saying no to plans and dreams that do not bring us closer to this vision. These plans may be good – but they are not good for us. This includes also services in church. Although I believe that every church member should serve actively somewhere in church, that doesn’t mean you should accept every responsibility that is brought to you. Let us make wise decision how we serve.

For women, the need to say no usually begins at home. For instance, it is perfectly all right to have a 12-year old take care of his room, make his own sandwich for lunch, collect his laundry etc., or to ask your husband to take out the garbage, drive the kids to their various activities, and to spend time listening to the problems that are on your heart. After all, you are not the slave of your kids or your husband. And – we mentioned that already – it is good for them to grow up and to learn responsibility.

I know that this is difficult, but if you manage the household and have even a part-time job, you need to spread responsibilities instead of being the family slave.

5. **Let others help you**

When you try out all these steps, it is helpful to take someone else – a friend or your spouse – into confidence and ask for help. Building new habits is easier if you have someone to talk to about the small successes you achieve each day. The chances that you get rid of stress in a shorter amount of time will rise drastically, because

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. (Ecc 4:9–10)
9 A Portrait of the Man David

Today we want to take a closer look at David. Among all the people mentioned in the Bible he is probably the one we know most about – maybe with the exception of Jesus. Half of the book of first Samuel and the entire second book of Samuel describes David, his character, his family, his achievements, and his rule over Israel. When we hear the name David, we immediately picture the marvelous shepherd boy who faced the giant Goliath and was victorious. The bible speaks of him as the man an after God's heart (1. Samuel 13:14 / Acts 13:22). He was the man who brought Israel back to glory. Most of all, he is pictured as the trusting and faithful servant of God. Certainly, every Christian can learn from his example.

But, surprisingly enough, David is also one of the best biblical examples of a passive and preoccupied husband. We know so many intimate details of his family life to know that he was, in fact, in many respects a distant husband and father.

It is hard to believe that these two factors describe one and the same person, but David’s example is by no means atypical. There are many men around in this world who serve the Lord faithfully and are Christians that we can look up to. Yet, many a woman in this world had to go through the painful experience that sound doctrine and a strong faith alone does not make a good husband. She finds herself married to a man who loves the Lord but does not know how to love her. And the answer to that problem is not that her husband needs more piety or doctrine but that they both have to learn how God intends them to be and to work and live together.

David is proof that a man can make serious mistakes and be an absolute failure as a husband and father and still be respected by people and used by God. Looking into his life and the background that made him that way will show us that God often chooses to work and build with material that is quite poor from a human perspective, and that he can still use it to produce something magnificent. David wasn’t born a superhero of faith, but God made him one. That is what grace is really about.

9.1 The Character of David

So let us take a closer look at the character of David. What is it that made him stand out so much as a servand of God. What do we know about him? Let’s keep our Bible’s open in first and second Samuel.

1. Handsome, attractive (1.Sa 16:12)
2. Musical and lyrical talent (1.Sa 16:18, Psalms)
3. A firm trust in God (1.Sa 17:32–37, 45–46)
4. Faithful and reliable (1.Sa 22:40)
5. Loyal (1.Sa 24:10–11, 26:10-11)
7. Repentent (2.Sa 12:13, Psalm 51)

So he really shows character and a strong faith, much more than I can say of myself.

9.2 David’s weaknesses

But does all this make him a good husband? Unfortunately no, because he also had certain weaknesses, which sometimes resulted in sin and calamities.

1. David was, what we would call a womanizer:
   
   He could not be faithful to but one wife but was constantly attracted by women. The Bible reports that he had 6 sons from 6 wives already in Heron (2.Sa 3:2–5) and besides that he had Michal, and Bathseba, and many more (2.Sa 5:13-14).

2. David was an adulterer who did everything to cover up his sin (2.Sa 11)

   What David did to cover up his sin with Bathsheba is just absurd if you watch it from the outside. He did not only break the 6th, 7th, 9th, and 10th commandments, but he also abused the power of his office as chosen king of Israel. While reading this, I always ask myself – how in the world can a man with such a strong relationship with the Lord be so stupid and commit such incredible sins? Well, he was human, after all.

   Did this disqualify him as a Christian?  No!
   Did God take his kingdom away from him because of this?  No!
   But there was a penalty. The sword never departed from his house.
   Does that mean that God loved him less than before?  Certainly not!

   We should keep all these things in mind when we get upset about our president’s promiscuous behavior. Greater man than our president have fallen into worse sins, and they were still accepted by God. This doesn’t excuse anything but puts it in the right perspective. Only God can judge the heart. It is not up to us to make quick judgments about the sins of others. As long as it doesn’t disrupt our church we should leave the judging to God, keeping in mind what Jesus says in Luke 6:37–42.

   I had to make this little detour because Christians who have their doctrine right are always in danger of becoming a little judgmental.

Well, there is more about David.

3. He was a weak, a very passive father.

   David was not able to rule his own house. He would never have passed the qualifications for a deacon given in 1. Timothy 3:4–5. There are three incidents that make this very clear.
(a) In 2Sa 13:1–20 we see that his oldest son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister Tamar. When David hears about this, he is furious but does nothing about this (2Sa 13:21). He doesn’t punish his son, he doesn’t even confront him. So we ask ourselves – where is justice in the family?

(b) Well, the brother of Tamar, Absalom, seems to ask himself the same. When after 2 years there is still no justice, he finds an opportunity to murder his half-brother (2Sa 13:23–29) and then flees. David weeps about this but again he doesn’t do anything to resolve the conflict (2Sa 13:36).

(c) In the next chapter we see that Joab, his friend and commander notices that something must be done. He tricks David into letting his son Absalom return to Jerusalem (2Sa 14:1–20). But instead of straightening things out David first forbids him to come to him, and later, on his son’s request allows him to come. But he doesn’t resolve the issue – there is neither punishment nor forgiveness – he just hopes that the problem goes away by itself.

So as a father David is a total failure. He never actively controls his family but always just reacts to pressing events. But often he remains completely passive.

It is no wonder that his son still holds a grudge and thinks that his father is a bad leader. In chapters 15–18 we see how he rebels against his father and almost succeeds. But after doing a lot of harm and long battle, finally Absalom gets killed. And notice what David does. In 2Sa 19:4–7 you find him weeping for his dead son. His men have fought a hard fight to regain the kingdom for David, but all he does is cry for his son.

All this wouldn’t have happened if David had confronted his oldest son about the rape. His passivity cost the life of two sons and a lot of trouble for Israel.

So this is the other, the less shining side of David. What we notice here is not just a series of individual sins, but a weakness in David’s character. He can be extremely faithful, trusting, and self-controlled. But in the next instant he turns around and does the most stupid thing a man in his position could ever do (see also 2Sa 24).

In other words, he is just like we are and that makes studying him so interesting. God did not give us all these details for nothing. It was written up for us so that we can learn from his mistakes and find ways to overcome our own weaknesses.

So let’s try to find out what formed David’s character. How did he become what he was? If we understand the factors that influenced his beliefs — and by this I mean his beliefs about the everyday world — we may find the key to unlock our own misconceptions, bring them before God and allow him to change us into the husbands we should be. Obviously, we need the help of our wives for that.
9.3 How did he become what he was?

As usual, David’s home was the place that formed him. Home is the place where we learn who we are, what the world around us is like, who God is, and how we can make our own way through life. Most of our habits are formed in these early years and once they have formed they hardly ever change by themselves, because we are seldomly aware of the beliefs that continue to support them. Our actions are controlled by what we believe and unfortunately these beliefs are sometimes very, very wrong. The Bible does not give us a complete account about David’s childhood, but we know sufficiently much about his father and his brothers to recognize the influences on his personal life. How did his family treat him and what were the results?

1. We don’t know much about David’s family life but we certainly know something about the esteem he was given. The first time we read about him is in 1. Samuel 16, when the Prophet Samuel comes to Jesse’s house. David was the youngest of eight brothers and the only person absent during Samuel’s visit. He was out keeping the sheep.

Being the family shepherd was not the favorite job. Shepherding was dangerous – there were lions and bears around – and a job that most people looked down to. Shepherds were dirty, they smelled, and nobody liked to have them around. Compare this to how Jacob treated his youngest sons Joseph and Benjamin (see Genesis 37:4,12–13). In addition to having the dirtiest job, David was the missing man during Samuel’s visit. The great prophet visits the house and his family does not even think it necessary for him to be there. I wonder how David may have felt about this.

Home is supposed to be a place of value and love that gives you a sense of security and significance. It shall help you to develop a godly and healthy view of yourself. For David, this was certainly not the case and later it becomes quite obvious that he had developed a very low self-esteem during that time.

2. On the other hand, we notice that David – probably because his status in the family was so low – developed a great faith in the Lord. He almost had to, when he was out keeping sheep all by himself. He was small, he knew that he wasn’t strong, he knew that his family didn’t think he was important and probably believed that himself. So he turned to his faith in God and to prayers during his lonely days in the fields, which cultivated a walk with God that was closer than most of us may ever experience.

3. But the fact that he grew up in a home that almost ignored him taught David several lessons, that made him become the passive husband and father he later turned out to be. The lessons communicated to him were “Home is the place where they don’t want me”, “Home doesn’t meet my needs”, and “What I need
can only be found outside the family”. That is the way he experienced it for years and that is how he believed the world to be?

Do you think he thought differently when he grew up? That he was able to enter close relationships and liked to be with his family? There is little evidence for this. Men who grow up with these beliefs tend to build little castles for themselves – job, power, prestige, money, even church life – anything but the home they actually live in. That is where they build their self-esteem.

Unfortunately the reaction of their wives and children to this behavior will often only confirm their wrong beliefs and draw them even further away from home. The incident in 2. Samuel 6:16–23 is a good example for that. Michal’s strongly negative reaction to his “out of family activities” just made him withdraw more.

4. Neglect wasn’t the only problem in his family. Just consider what it means to have 7 brothers. Children, particularly boys, love to fight and test their strength in comparison to their siblings. There is a constant battle going on.

The rivalry in David’s family becomes quite obvious in 1. Samuel 17:26–29. David, being sent by his father to the battlefield to bring food for his brothers, begins asking around “What shall be done who the man that kills this Philistine”. Listen to his brothers reaction when he hears about this: “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the wickedness of your heart. For you have come down only to watch the battle”.

Sibling rivalry often results in a strong desire to succeed. Boys learn that they have to prove their worth, often at the expense of others. They have a strong sense of competition, which makes it very difficult to enjoy the success of others. In today’s society, it is very difficult to get out of this line of thinking once you got into it.

For David, this wasn’t much different. He had to prove himself over and over again in the outside world and that did not leave much space in his heart for his family.

9.4 Is There Hope?

Now, is there anything that can be done to undo what happened during childhood? Can husbands who grew up in situations become active leaders in their families? They certainly can.

We obviously can’t turn back the clock, but we can reset it and wind it up again. Great changes can be made if wife and husband work together in this. The husband must realize that home is the place where he is loved and valued as he is, and where his needs are filled. That takes some time but there a few things that you can do. We discussed some of them already in previous lessons and they apply to husbands and your children equally well.
1. First of all, it is absolutely mandatory to *stop the cycle of criticism*. Criticism just pushes him more into the feeling that home is not the place where he is wanted. If he has to defend himself whenever he is at home all is negative beliefs about home and family find confirmation and become even stronger.

The result? Instead of becoming what his wife wants him to be he will only withdraw and search for recognition outside his family.

2. Instead, *start expressing confidence in your husband*. It is surprising how much change can be achieved by expressing trust. If a man, or a boy, finds someone who believes in him, he will do a lot to keep it that way. He needs people who accept him as he is, so he will do almost everything to prove that their trust in him is justified.

3. Also, it pays to *know the life stages that you mate is facing*. Children and adults go through many stages of development in their life and each of these stages bring new hopes, expectations, challenges, worries, and fears. The problems of your husband may not be real for you but they are certainly real for him. His needs may be very different from your own desires but that doesn’t mean they are irrelevant.

   But how can you hear his cry for help if you don’t understand the situation in which he is? Much has been written about the mid-life crisis through which most husbands have to go. But there are other “age-related” crises as well. Many wives believe they know their husbands very well, but this is often not the case because the situation has changed over the years.

   We should take more time just to talk about the way we experience life and the pressures we face, to understand what they are doing and why — without giving our mates the impression that we want to judge their actions.

4. It is equally important to accurately *assess the talents and potential achievements* of our partners. Why spend years trying to have them develop a talent that will never be there to our satisfaction? If God has given your a husband with a sharp rational mind, don’t expect him to become a poet.

5. Also, you should *know what your own expectations are* and how you got them. Do you have critical thoughts about your spouse? It may be that you are simply unrealistic in your expectations. So it might be a good step to find out what they are.

   How do you want the people around you to be? And why is this so? Are you running after a still unfulfilled dream and believe that your spouse doesn’t give you enough to let you reach it? If so, is it more important for you to have this dream fulfilled or to have a blessed marriage?

6. Last, but not least, aim at *leaving positive impressions* on the lives of your family members. Don’t just give them your work or presents, show them your
love through prayers and words that express your highest hopes – not just for their success in life but also for their character and joy. The work you did for them will be forgotten, presents will disappear over the years, but the memories of the things you said will go on and on.

9.5 Can we Raise David’s Who Become Good Husbands?

Everything that we said above applies not just to our husbands whom we meet as adults, but to our children as well. We can raise David’s who also become good husbands. We are going to talk about this in detail when we come to the last chapter of this book. But there are a few things that we can learn from the example of David’s family.

First of all, be a role model for your children. What they see in you influences the way they will live their only family lives. As a father, let them see that you take a very active part in the life of your family. Don’t disappear at work and let your wife handle all the responsibility for the discipline and modeling of your children. Be genuinely interested in the little things that your children bring up. If there is a vacuum, it will be filled by others – by siblings, classmates, teachers, or TV heroes – and that is usually not the best education they can get.

If you raise several children, make sure that sibling rivalry does not grow in your family. Get involved. If you don’t intervene, their petty struggles will turn into a habit of fighting when they become adults.

You also need to maintain authority over your children, particularly over their attitudes. Be sensitive for attitudes of hatred and rage that are not expressed openly. You have to deal with that in a very loving way but you can’t let this develop.

Finally, make sure that love is expressed in your family. Some parents believe that discipline is all. Children need to know and feel that they are loved – adults as well. If your family talks about the fact how they love one another whenever there is an opportunity, you will very likely raise very “healthy” children who are much better prepared for actually living a marriage in a way God intends it to be.

10 Anger – the woman at war

Unfortunately, the situation in many families is quite the opposite. Instead of being loved, accepted, and valued highly by their wives – quite a few husbands experience that their wives have gone at war with them. Where there used to be love and respect there is now a constant confrontation and no more willingness to submit at all. Her feelings towards her husband are dominated by anger and she shows her hostility on all occasions.

As an example, let us look again at the confrontation between David and Michal in 2. Samuel 6:16–23, this time from the perspective of Michal. David just celebrates
the return of the ark of the covenant . . .

And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul’s daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

That already says it all. She despised her own husband. Her feelings for him have become so low that just by looking at his dancing she despised him. Now there may have been various reasons for Michal to develop negative feelings. Maybe she was embarrassed by his lack of dignity or he hadn’t shown the same enthusiasm for her for quite some time. None of these, however, are any excuse for this reaction. There is absolutely no justification for it.

I have to emphasize this, because many people—particularly women—try to excuse their negative reactions by somebody else’s behavior. They say that they can’t do anything about the negative feelings they develop. But the Bible says, you can. In Ephesians 4:31, Paul writes: Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. Your feelings about another person—not about what has happened but about the person itself—are entirely your responsibility. And don’t say you have no control them—you have if you only want to.

Let us go back to 2. Samuel 6:20–23 and look at the dialog that follows.

And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today

Notice the bitter irony that is intended to say You surely made an idiot out of yourself.

... disrobing in the sight of slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!

So instead of saying “I felt embarrassed by what I saw” she decides to attack his character. No man likes that and it is no wonder that David retaliates. He doesn’t even try to calm down his wife but instead chooses to attack her family and make an implicit suggestion that was surely meant to hurt her. There is no excuse for David’s reaction as well, but is makes absolutely clear that this wasn’t the first time where they had a conflict. And verse 23 makes clear that their relation didn’t get much better in years to come:

Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

So here we see a marriage with a lot of hostility between wife and husband. Has it always been that way? What do we know about the two?


And Michal Saul’s daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.
Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king’s son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife. And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul’s daughter loved him. 1. Samuel 18:20, 27–28

This was more than just a political marriage. She wasn’t given to David against her will but the Bible emphasizes that she loved him. This went even so far that she deceived her own father, when he tried to kill David (1. Samuel 19:11–17). She did everything for him at a time when he was a nobody.

But years later the situation had changed. There was brooding anger in her and a very strong reaction to a minor embarrassment. What turned this marriage filled with so much promise into such a poisoned relationship? Many answers to that question certainly apply to women today as well as they apply to Michal.

1. Certainly, it was a problem to be married to a man who is so much occupied in his own world, his job, his ministry, or in this case his kingdom. Michal had to realize that her husband’s passions were elsewhere and not really much with her.

2. This also applied to his devotion to God. As her reaction shows, she definitely felt excluded, shut out from his inner thoughts. Husbands should know that a ministry and devotion to God is intended to be inclusive, not the private affair between a man and God. It is the chance to let your wife get to know you as you really are.

3. David’s many wives were definitely a problem. How can you develop a close relationship with your wife when there are so many other people around that get so much attention from you?

So the passivity of husbands is one of the main contributing factors in the downfall of a marriage. Their wives feel neglected and they feel that they need to do something to get their husbands’ attention. And they do this by choosing the one and only approach that is certainly doomed to fail – by declaring war. They believe that if they are just loud enough, that if they attack often enough, then their husbands will realize the problem and change.

But – that is not how it works. Surely, the husband will realize a problem, but for him the problem is his angry wife, not the issues she is trying to communicate. The only thing that he will feel is the offense, the fact that his wife doesn’t accept him as he is. And, if he had any desire to make a change into her direction before, it is certainly gone after the attack. And even a man can’t just control his actions only by what he knows to be right. He must feel that it is worth trying – not that his wife will sit judgment over him.
Do you want to lose your husband? Go on criticizing him and express your anger whenever there is a chance. He may not go for a divorce — we Christians don’t do that [IRONY]. Husbands can stand a lot of pain before they do something. But he may simply withdraw from you completely and this is just the opposite of what you wanted. So let us take a closer look at anger.

What is it? What triggers it? And how can we deal with it?

10.1 What is Anger?

Anger is a feeling that is almost always triggered by outside events – but it also strongly depends on our current state of mind whether these events affect us or not. Often it all begins with a minor irritation. But the final reaction that results from it is a major catastrophe.

We all know situations like that. We have a very tight schedule and are already late. And then we simply can’t find the car keys or our reading glasses or anything else that we absolutely need right now. We storm around the room “Where are my keys?” and this soon turns into accusations “Who moved my glasses” – and in one moment the simple fact that WE misplaced something has created a situation that is absolutely miserable for the people around us. After the item has finally been found we’re usually quite embarrassed about our own behavior – and also too embarrassed to apologize – because it all began with the fact that we were too proud to admit that we were the cause of the problem that made us so angry and chose to blame others for it.

Our behavior while driving in heavy traffic is usually also quite revealing. Surely, some drivers can certainly upset you. The don’t stop at stop signs and red lights; they still keep on standing after the signal has turned green for 10 microseconds; they fail to use turn signals or don’t turn them off; they turn into the road right in front of us and force us to break; they go too slow in front of us and too fast behind us; and the worst of all is if we get into traffic jams. All this can turn a decent Christian man or woman into a fuming monster. We simply can’t accept that the mistakes or misbehavior of other drivers but fail to realize that we ourselves make mistakes as well which are graciously accepted by others.

There are many more examples of events that make us angry and not in all cases the reaction is as harmless as in these cases.

But if we look at them from a distance, we realize that anger, although stirred up by an outer event, is an emotion that is entirely under our control. We can’t do much about the irritation that we feel initially. There are certainly enough situations around us, that make us feel angry. But we can control whether this feeling can develop further in us or not. It is our choice whether we explode and lash out or not. I know, many people do not believe that – but did you ever realize how easily you could control your emotions when you’re standing in front of a person who had authority over you – and how little you control them in front of your husband? The Bible says
In your anger do not sin! ... and do not give the devil a foothold. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:26–27, 31, 32

Love is patient, love is kind ... it is not easily angered and keeps no records of wrongs 1. Corinthians 13:4–5

It is up to us to choose right or wrong when we feel the anger creeping up in us. Do we want to give the devil a foothold in our life? We certainly do if we allow him to play on the organ of our emotions as HE wants to. If we don’t want to control our emotions, he will surely do this for us. Do we want that?

I have to emphasize this over and over again, because many people simply do not want to take control over their feelings – as if this would be something unnatural and because they view their feelings as trustworthy source of information. They probably are to a certain extent – but you have to learn how to interpret them and that negative and angry feelings are definitely out of touch with reality.

There is NO excuse for what you do if you let yourself be guided by anger. There may be people in the world who know exactly which buttons to push to make you upset, and your spouse is definitely among them. And I know that keeping control over negative emotions is not easy when your spouse makes you upset. I personally fail often enough and I observed that women have even greater difficulties in that than men. But that doesn’t change the fact that we must learn to control our anger – or we will see no progress in both our faith and our marriage.

10.2 What Causes Anger?

Now that is easier to be said than done. Many people have tried hard to fight their own anger. We know that what we do is not right, but we seem to be unable to do much about it. If we want to find a solution for that, we need to understand where anger comes from.

We already noticed that anger is something that is going on within us. Our anger is still there long after the source of anger has gone. Anger is more than just momentary emotional outbreak. It more like hidden mine fields that were planted long ago and have lain forgotten. Nobody realizes that there is a problem until you step on it. But then the reaction is deadly.

Who planted these mines? You did it yourself as a means to protect yourself from the people that were closest to you: your father, your mother, your siblings, and your spouse. They all made mistakes in they way they treated you, but your reaction to these experiences eventually planted the mines.

If you grew up in a family where love depended on good behavior, then you probably react very strongly to anything that appears negative. And by focusing on the negative you will believe negative feelings more than the positive reality.
If you *never experienced forgiveness*, you will have a hard time to forgive the mistakes of others or to apologize for your own ones. So you will explode whenever your husband does something wrong and you blame all your mistakes on him as well.

Let us look at Michal again. What were the factors that eventually drove her to become the angry woman she was? We will find that many of these apply to numerous women who experience a lifetime of anger with respect to men.

1. Michal’s father, Saul, was a dominating but brooding man. His deep depressions where the reason why David showed up in the palace in the first place (1. Samuel 16:14–23). His opinions were the law. Few could approach him and you couldn’t be sure if out of a bad mood he was ready to kill you (1. Samuel 19:9–10). It is unlikely that he was any different in his family.

In homes, where Dad is a tyrant, a little girl spends her life in fear and develops a resentment at her future role as woman. She so much fears to be used that she will do anything to avoid it. Submission to a man is almost impossible, because that would give her husband a chance to use her as he wants to. There is little trust in men at all and a woman should do everything possible to *win* over a man – even if that means war.

2. Saul also placed little value in his younger daughter. He thought her love for David was only an opportunity for him to get even with his rival: I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, is what he said in 1. Samuel 18:21. I am sure that Michal sensed how little value she had as a person, and actually – what Saul said about her turned out to be quite accurate.

Fathers, be careful about what you say to your daughters – particularly when you need to correct them. They will take to heart what you say *about* them and your words too often become self-fulfilling prophecies.

3. Given the father she had, Michal was probably very sensitive about details that remind her of home. Many women do that. They constantly probe their husbands and watch for anything that could resemble negative events from the past. They simply cannot let go of the past – instead they continue to touch the “hot stove” of hurt that they already carry around for so many years.

4. For Michal the worst thing was to become the spectator in the life of her husband – powerless to influence his thinking or actions and mostly neglected by him, again bound to the palace as in the time when she grew up. The feeling of neglect was all too familiar but one that she thought never to have to accept again. So the time bomb was triggered and just waited for a moment to explode. *Neglect* is probably the strongest trigger for a woman to go at war with her husband. And while her methods certainly do not bring her husband’s attention
to the right issues, a husband who experiences the constant battle with his wife should reconsider his view of marriage.

Show her that you need her as a wife, not just as a housekeeper! See to it that you have a life together, where you share everything – your inner thoughts, your visions, the problems you’re facing, and your prayers.

And she needs you as well. In 1. Peter 3:7 men are encouraged to live with their wives in an understanding way. That means among others, that you should listen to your wife, ask her about her opinion, and take it serious.

To many a husband, this first means that he needs to understand the language of his wife, because – as you may recall – our ways of communicating are very different. It will take a full lifetime to figure out what your wife actually means when she speaks to you. That may seem too complicated but it is worth it. Because if you don’t, you will give your wives a lot of reason to be angry about a man who doesn’t care about her.

So a woman’s tendency to go to war with her husband may have many causes that go back numerous years. They cannot be taken as excuse for letting her anger grow – which is still sin – but will help husbands to understand the message behind it. They will also help husband and wife to find ways how to deal with this problem together.
10.3 The Woman at War

But before we think about possible solutions we want to take a look at the various patterns that a woman uses to act out her anger. Each of them is both designed as a means to get attention and as a means to defend herself. Usually, a woman will repeat the patterns that she feels most comfortable with and that have shown the best results from her perspective. Unfortunately, this perspective aims at short-term gratification with little thought for the long-term harm that comes from a slow erosion of her marriage.

10.3.1 The Challenger

Many women who go to war with her husbands decide to take the role of adversary. She decides to beat him on his own territory and begins to compete with him in the outside world. Like him, she sets up her own world, to be independent of him. Sometimes she takes a job – just to make sure that she does not depend on him. There is nothing wrong about a woman taking on a job. The problem is that in this case the motives are wrong. The job is not taken for the benefit of the family but for independence. The result of this step is, at best, decreasing trust and increased distance. But it often ends up in separation because wife and husband have nothing in common anymore.

But competition is not only seen in the workplace, but also in other areas of life. A woman who competes with her husband wants to do everything better than her husband. She tries to be perfect. She knows everything better, she is always right and never admits mistakes – instead she blames others for things that go wrong. She never forgives but brings up past events in all arguments. She constantly criticizes her husband, and passes judgment on about everything that goes on in the world. In a conversation she always has to have the last word.

These behavior traits, usually considered as typically male, seldomly occur in all variations at once, but none of them is really beneficial for a marriage – regardless whether they come from a man or a woman. But a woman who does these things not only shows disrespect for her husband, but also openly rejects God’s word: she doesn’t even try to submit.

The problem for her is that deep down inside she is extremely vulnerable, but too afraid to display any needs, fearing she could be rejected and that her weaknesses could be used against her.

10.3.2 Fire and Ice

A second strong weapon of an angry wife is to use the sexual relationship against him. Instead of letting it bring joy and fulfillment to both of them she uses it to humiliate and frustrate her husband, either by withdrawing from him or by stirring up his “performance anxieties”. For a woman, who feels out of control in most areas
of her marriages, uses the sexual relationship as a silent cry that should remind her husband that she too is a factor to be reckoned with.

Some men need this wake-up call and have to recognize that their wife is a person too. But this is not the way to express this cry for recognition. The sexual relation is the most intimate communication a couple can have. If a woman allows her unsettled conflicts to communicate a physical desinterest in her husband, further complications in the relationship will arise quickly. It is the wrong message she is sending. Her husband will seldomly be able to figure out the real cause of their burdened sexual relation if she doesn’t talk about the unresolved conflicts that make her withdraw.

Other women just go into the opposite direction. Instead of withdrawing they do about everything to humiliate their husbands, expressing their dissatisfaction with his ability to “perform” and satisfy in their sexual union. A particularly deadly form is to compare him with former boyfriends or mentioning “his” problem in the presence of others. Fortunately this happens extremely seldomly in Christian Circles but for a man this is the ultimate expression of rejection.

With the exception of joint counseling, there is absolutely no reason to talk to anybody else about your intimate life. And comparing your spouse with any other person in the world is totally out of question. And that includes drawing comparisons to the cooking qualities of your mother or qualities that you like more in another person you know. Your husband or wife may need some improvement but comparisons are not the right way to do that – it just creates a feeling of rejection. We all are very vulnerable in this.

10.3.3 Ridicule

A similarly deadly weapon is the use of ridicule as a means of humiliation. The ability to strike a verbal blow in an argument may help to silence your opponent, but does not convince him that you were right. He just gives up resistance.

Some people have sharpened the skill of ridicule and cutting remarks to perfections. They have become masters in the art of character assassination by constant practice. About 20 years ago I did this with a friend for about half a year and we both had a lot of fun – but only because we both knew what we were doing. Believe me, you become very creative after a while. But we also found out that it is difficult to avoid this practice in contact with others and that – apart from the sharpening the mind to react quickly – this practice was not beneficial in any way. So we agreed to stop this. I had almost forgotten by now until I prepared this lesson. The dangerous aspect about this practice is that it turns every relation into a combat. Only the strong survive and the weak crawl off to die. There is no space for a relationship of trust and respect, because you either can never take off your helmet or have already defeated your spouse.

A relationship between wife and husband should be based on love and mutual sub-
mission. Wives who are at war with their husbands show that they have little trust in them, no desire to submit at all, and no love for them – at least not the unselfish love that is so important to make a marriage grow.

10.4 The solution principle: look at the truth

But what can you do if you find yourself trapped in a warzone? How can we actually put an end to our anger?

1. The first step is looking at the truth and to admit that the problem lies in us. The real source of anger lies in ourselves, not in outer circumstances. We have to put aside the false notion that somebody else is responsible for our anger. We think too much about the object of our anger. But we should better ask the question: what does our anger say about us? What is it within us that triggers the emotional outburst?

If we accept the truth, this truth will eventually set us free.

2. Make it a top priority to control your anger, not just a pious wish that has little importance for you. Genesis 4:6–7 makes it very clear why this is necessary. Here, God asks Cain

Why are you angry. .... If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you but you must master it.

If you have problems with anger, add this to your personal prayer list. And let your spouse know about this. This already will build a lot of trust, because he now knows that you yourself want to achieve a change. He will surely try everything to help you in that.

3. Practice self-discipline. Ephesians 4:26 gives us some very valuable advise:

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Anger is valid, if its object is sin or injustice towards others. Jesus displayed “holy wrath” when he cleared the temple in John 2. But when anger is used as a means to protect ourselves – and this is what happens in 99% of the cases – it is sin and we need to deal with it.

Clarify a situation before the day ends, even if you feel your spouse was really the one who blew it. Don’t wait for him to apologize first. Don’t even try to find out who’s right. Settle the problem, pray together, and ask God for forgiveness – and mean it.
4. **Develop healthy habits:** Get into regular contact with the truth and make it reality in your life. Reading God’s word every day is an extremely important habit, but it should not stop here. Learn to trust God’s word in what it says about you. Cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving for exactly how God has made you. Psalm 139:14 says:

> I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are your works; and my soul knows it very well.

Convince yourself that God does not lie, when he says this about you. If you know that you are wonderful, you don’t need your anger to protect yourself.

Finally, express your genuine love to your husband and wife. If you do that, you can’t be holding a grudge at the same time. This needs some practice and attention to the details of love. Love requires accountability – you sometimes need to do “chores” that are not pleasant but necessary to keep the love nurtured. One of the best chances to express your love is after an argument. If you break the ice and express your love although you don’t feel like it and wait for the other to come to you, you will win the heart of your spouse quicker than by any other means.

## 11 The Escapist

Today we want to look at a problem that also affects both men and women, but becomes more difficult if husbands are affected. We’re talking about a person, who doesn’t want to grow up and, to a certain extent, still behaves like a child. He or she still lives in a world of fantasy that is dominated by feelings and a desire for romance and pleasure. He acts spontaneously without considering the consequences, and tries to avoid accountability and responsibility. Life is so easy if you don’t have any responsibilities. You can do what you want and somebody else is going to take care of the consequences. As a child, you have a certain right to this behavior. Your wouldn’t be able to develop creativity if you had to think through all the results of your actions. Besides, you lack the experience. That’s you have parents who train you and protect you if you really mess up. So you can enjoy the world and play.

But you’re also supposed to grow up, to learn from your experience and to live responsibly. That doesn’t mean you’re not allowed to have fun anymore, but you have to accept limitations. Paul says in 1.Corninthians 13:11

> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

As an adult you can’t just go on living as if life were just a grand game. There is nobody who will always clean up after you or pay for everything that you desire. You
can’t play with toys all day long, and what you say to other people will not be as
easily forgotten – particularly if it is something nasty. You now have a responsibility
for your own life and the life of the people around you.
But some people never make the transition from being a child to adulthood. The
attractions of life are so fascinating for them that they fail to see that having fun is
not all of reality. The only thing that grows is their desire for things or experiences they
want to have. They are controlled almost entirely by instantaneous feelings and not so
much by a rational understanding of the facts of life, which they consider so terribly
boring. They try to escape from a life that puts so many duties and responsibilities on
them and hope that in some magical way they can still be the child that everybody
loves.
To a certain extent, this is a characteristic of all men. Deep inside we are only big
boys. We are still fascinated by toys – it is just that the toys have grown with us
and are much more expensive now. We still need heroes to adore and identify with –
that’s why we get so excited about sports. We need to fight for a big cause but have
difficulties to take care of the tiny little details of life, particularly of those that do not
immediately affect us. We like to be leaders, but we don’t like the responsibilities that
come with that role. We don’t really want to grow up – and some of us never do.
The quest for fantasy and pleasure is part of what makes dating such men so fascinat-
ing and such a romantic experience. Living with them will always carry an element of
excitement. However, many women who are married to a man-child soon notice that
the romance becomes self-directed and that the fun has a bittersweet sting of reality
at the end. The excitement comes at a very high price and a disaster awaits those who
realize that too late.
Of course, there are also women who never really grow up and living with them
brings the same mixture of excitement and trouble with the facts of reality. But the
difference is that wives aren’t supposed to be leaders of the family and can thus gently
be directed towards more responsibility by a firm but understanding husband. But
how do you turn a man who tries to escape from the responsibilities of leadership into
an active husband without taking over his role as leader of the family?

11.1 A Character Study

If we want to turn men who try to escape from their responsibilities into active leaders
of the family, we first have to understand their character. What are the symptoms of
escapism and why do some men have difficulties with growing up?

1. Probably the most dominating symptom of an immature person is a chronic
irresponsibility. He can spend hours with hobbies, sports, and other things that
fascinate him or give him pleasure and totally forget the things he is supposed
to do. He tends to put off things until the last minute, hoping that somebody
else might rescue him.
He has plenty of excuses if he didn’t fulfill his duties. “I could not” is what he says, and he tries to blame the circumstances or somebody else for his unwillingness to take care of his chores. “This is not my fault” is what you get to hear.

The fear of being responsible for a failure and having to accept criticism is probably one of the driving forces behind this behavior. Better to do nothing than attempting something that doesn’t make fun in the first place and may go wrong. The lazy servant in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 is a good example for this type of mentality.

2. A lack of self discipline is also a very prominent feature of a person who doesn’t want to grow up. Self-discipline means putting on restrictions and that seems to be quite the opposite of having fun. Typical symptoms are overeating – often coupled with fruitless attempts to go on a diet; overspending, that is giving in the desire to buy things immediately if they appear appealing or being overly generous – a habit that is worsened by the use of credit cards; making promises that are not being kept later; putting off things and never having time for the important but not pressing thing in life; a chronic impatience with others who seem to steal his time.

Sticking to a decision or a promise, keeping records and balancing a checkbook, or a proper time management is just not what such a person likes to do because these things are so terribly rational and boring. As a result, the person dominated by feelings often fights weight problems, is almost always in dept, and hardly finds time for the daily devotions. Often he expects those who love him to rescue him from the mess he got in instead of doing something about it himself. After all, “if they love me they have the duty to care for me” is what he feels.

In all this an immature person tries to avoid the pain or discomfort that comes with having to say no to oneself. So he or she simply doesn’t do so and puts the responsibility into the hands of others.

3. Often coupled with that is an abracadabra mentality. Somehow, the escapist believes, somebody or something will come to his rescue. Living in a world of fantasy, he dreams of winning the lottery as solution for his overspending or finding the magical drug against overweight without having to eat less. He believes that love means unconditional support, which means that his family should solve his problems. If they don’t (or can’t) he believes they don’t love him.

Waving this magical wand of love may have worked during his childhood, where his parents might have expressed their love by taking every burden away from him. And although it doesn’t work anymore in the world of adults, he tries it anyway – because he fails to see that he has to assume his responsibilities himself now.
4. *Halfheartedness* is another characteristic of an immature person. He begins many tasks, but hardly ever finishes any of them if they make less fun than is comfortable for him. In his wishful thinking he dreams of achieving glorious results, but when it turns out to be less easy than he thought, he rather drops it ahead of time than trying to the end and possibly fail nevertheless. So he can always say “I could do it, if I wanted to”.

Behind all this there is a fear of failure and an inability to accept himself as he is. Instead he needs to keep up the self-image of a person with a great potential and this would be shattered by admitting a failure.

5. Finally, the escapist is very romantic. That is what makes him so attractive in the first place. He feels that he loves other people deeply – but his understanding of love is still childish, as he confuses love with what he feels for others. He may express this with actions that are very effectful, but he hardly tries to prove his love by what he does in everyday life. The tiny little practical things of the adult life don’t mean much to him.

But true love is expressed in caring for the needs of others – and viewing this as privilege, not as tedious chore. 1. John 3:18 says

> My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

The escapist’s conception of love is a very selfish one – the only thing that counts is that he has good feelings about the person he loves. But these feelings depend on the love he receives, not on the love that is in him. Real love is

> patient, it is kind . . . it is not easily angered, it always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, an endures all things 1. Corinthians 13:4–7

Most of all, feelings may change, but love never fails. So feeling love has little to do with what real love is all about. The step from this child-like love to adult love is what makes us mature – but the escapist has never taken this step.

Again, it should be noted that these symptoms can be found in women as well as in man. Living together with an escapist will always be interesting, but having an escapist as wife or husband leads to a very unequal relationship. You don’t really have a partner who complements you and helps you overcome your weaknesses. It is more like having a child that acts a bit like an adult, but – apart from his or her wishes and demands – has not really grown up yet.

### 11.2 Helping him without becoming his mother

The situation is particularly bad, if the escapist is husband, because in this case the family has no true leader. And it takes a lot of patience, love, and wisdom, to deal
with this situation properly. There are many wrong responses that women use in dealing with such a passive husband. Criticism, manipulation, or simply taking over the family is *not* what will turn your husband into an active leader of the family. But he will probably not be able to change all by himself and the question is how you can help him in doing so without becoming his mother. In the rest of this lesson we will discuss a strategy for dealing with an escapist husband. What is is that you can do to help him and what should you avoid?

- **One very important recommendation that counselors give to people who have to deal with an escapist partner is *not to deny* or ignore the problem. This is particularly important for Christian women, who sometimes tend to believe that submission and love is the same as putting up with everything their husbands do. They find excuses for his behavior, ignore his selfishness, rescue him from every situation that he managed to get himself into, and in all this dismiss the feeling that something is wrong.

  Denial is an attribute of an overprotective mother. It allows a man to continue to act like a child and does not at all help him to grow up. Why should he, if you constantly clean up the mess he created and always protect him from self-inflicted harm? If you truly love your husband, you must help him to grow up instead of preserving his current state of immaturity.

- **Complaining** doesn’t help either. Compulsive complaints and random punishment are typical reactions of overprotective mothers and something a child-man is probably accustomed to. Complaints will not change your husband’s behavior – all you will get are reflexes that he has rehearsed since childhood. He will either ignore your complaints completely or start becoming defensive if he feels his masculinity threatened. After all, he doesn’t want you to be the *judge* of his actions.

  It becomes even worse if he goes along with your judgment. In this case you receive the role of a puppeteer who tells him what he needs to do, how he has to feel, and what he is really thinking. You treat him like a kindergarten child and that is what he will be to you – a child, but not a partner who can nurture and guide you.

  So – never ever judge your husband or tell him how he should think or feel. There are only two possible reactions to that – opposition or giving in. And in both cases the long-term result is not what you wanted to achieve.

- **One thing that you should keep in mind is that men – in contrast to women – do not like to change. Stability is one of the dominating factors of our life. We want something that we can rely on, that turned out to be trustworthy and good. As a result, we gravitate to routine in many things we do or prefer.**
Of course, there are exceptions, but we do not like changes in the way we dress, what we eat, the arrangement of our home and in the routine of things we use to do. In the eyes of our wives it looks like if we don’t care – but why should we change something that has proven to be reliable? Women have a difficult time understanding that for a man change is often a threat to his feeling of security and not at all welcome.

So what makes a man change?

We only change when there is an urgent need for it, a situation that affect us so strongly that it is easier to change than to leave it the way it is. One husband put it this way “I change when the pain of change is less than the pain of the situation.” If we’re comfortable enough with the current situation, why should we change?

- To a certain extent, this is the key to the solution. A man-child is often too comfortable in his situation, if his wife protects him from the consequences of his irresponsibility. And if she criticizes him, the only changes you will see are directed at dealing with the pain of criticism, and not with his irresponsible behavior. So what can you do instead?

**Proverbs 22:6, 23:13** recommend to **Train up a child in the way he should go** and to **withhold not correction from the child**. To a person who hasn’t grown up yet, you have to apply the same principles. He needs to be trained to deal with reality. You have to let him face the natural consequences of his actions.

*Don’t cover for* him, but also don’t lecture him. He needs to find out himself after you pointed out a problem once. If he falls – let him experience the pain before you step in ad help him. And even then, don’t rescue him all by yourself. Let him figure out a solution and support him – but he is the one who needs to take action.

As an example I would like to read a passage from the book *(pages 100–101)* that illustrates these principles in a very practical way.

If you want to help your husband grow, you need to be firm and learn to control you own emotions instead of giving in to frustration over your husband’s behavior. Since you’re dealing with an adult and not with a dependent child, it takes a lot more courage and endurance to do so, as you may **have to face a few unpleasant consequences together**.

You may feel the urge to avoid some painful situations by doing things for which he is responsible. But consider the true costs. If you step in, you take the responsibility away from him and he will never learn. But if you endure, there is
a great chance that you will move towards a mature relationship and eventually see a change in your husband that you couldn’t achieve by any other means.

12 Manipulation

Today we want to study one last and very subtle form of unsubmitiveness that unfortunately is practiced by an increasing number of wives as a means to get what they want. Manipulation is the skill of getting other people to do what they might not have done out of their own choice. It is a secret approach – from an outside perspective it appears that the manipulated persons act out of free will. They are not forced to do so and so they carry the full responsibility alone.

This is why manipulation is so popular. You secretly issue commands for the other to follow, but if something goes wrong you don’t have to take the blame. After all, you didn’t tell him what do do – he himself decided that. If you’re subtle enough, nobody can see the secret strings you’re pulling. Our whole society, particularly politics and the advertising business, is based on this principle. You have to make people believe that it is good for them to elect you or to buy your products. And – since everybody tries to do that – you can’t just let the facts speak for themselves. You convince people by appealing to all kinds of motives, often those that have little to do with your political agenda or your product. So in politics you pick on your opponent and tell the people how bad he is – why a law-abiding citizen can’t vote democrat or why a person who cares for the poor can’t vote republican. That still doesn’t explain why voting for you is a good idea but it works. Similarly, commercials play with fear (if you don’t use Lysterine, then germs are going to kill you; if you don’t brush your teeth with whitening past you’ll become a social outcast), status (you need to have that new car; must wear these clothes); tempt you with offers that allegedly will never come again (if you don’t buy now ...). Charity organizations make you feel guilty if you don’t donate money to them – the trick is the same everywhere. If people don’t do what we want and if it is not possible to force them into doing it, we use the emotional remote control. It works almost always.

But using the same emotional remote control in the family is one of the best ways to destroy mutual trust and respect. Women who try to manipulate their husbands – and this happens far more often than the other way around – give up the closeness with their husbands that God intended and find instead a distance and lack of respect for their spouses and ultimately for themselves as well. They see the short-term gratification of getting what they want – but they fail to see the long-term damage caused by their behavior, namely the slow erosion of their marriages.
12.1 Bathsheba

One of the prime examples of a manipulating woman in the bible is Bathsheba, who had a great influence on David’s decisions but is never really mentioned to be very close to him. We are probably all familiar with the story in 2. Samuel 11 where David first commits adultery with Bathsheba and then – after she gets pregnant and he can’t find a way out – has her husband murdered. We all know that David is fully responsible for what he did. He sinned and he had to face the consequences.

But what do we know about Bathsheba’s part in the events? Was she really the innocent woman, who couldn’t do anything but follow the king’s command? Let us look closer at the description in the Bible. Let us read verses 2–5 and look at the events from Bathsheba’s perspective:

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

At first glance, we see a woman who was faced with the man who was the sole law in the country. Certainly she was powerless to stop his advances. But was that really so? Could David have committed adultery without her consent? Look at 2. Samuel 13:11-14 where David’s son Amnon tries to sleep with his step-sister Tamar. You see how Tamar tried to resist. Does the Bible anywhere mention that Bathseba tried to resist David? After all, what he proposed was clearly against God’s law.

Adultery is a two-way street. It involves consent and often a great deal of encouragement. What was Bathsheba doing when she was bathing in sight of the king? Do we really believe she didn’t know that she could be seen by him? Or that she didn’t know that David had a weakness for women? Why did she accept his invitation? Why didn’t she say no, when he wanted to sleep with her?

And finally – what was the purpose of that message to David, saying “I am pregnant”. Clearly she wanted him to deal with the situation. “Let David figure out a solution for that – I am not responsible for what happened and what he has to do”. And David falls into the trap. Instead of admitting his guilt he tries to rescue himself and Bathsheba – and we all know how that ended. Bathsheba’s husband is getting murdered and Bathsheba gets the king as her husband. Her manipulations have paid off very well.

But when we go on reading, which I strongly recommend, we see that the manipulations continue to the very end. Bathsheba doesn’t play a great role in David’s life. Except for the birth of Solomon she is not mentioned again until shortly be-
fore David’s death. But then her hour comes again. When we read 1.Kings 1 it becomes apparent that some time in the past she must have made David swear to make Solomon his successor as king. We don’t know how she managed to do that but usually Solomon would never have been given preference to his older brothers. Now as David gets weaker, one of his other sons gets ready to become king and again Bathsheba intervenes. She goes to the king and ....

And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my lord the king, thou knowest it not: And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders. 1.Kings 1:17–21

And the result?

And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day. Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever. 1.Kings 1:29–31

I admit, the prophet Nathan was involved in that manipulation as well and God permitted it to happen that way, but David would never had made Solomon king during his lifetime if Bathseba hadn’t played the “fear and guilt” card at this time. She got what she wanted, but the method she used was not what brought her closer to David’s heart.

Well, “sometimes men are just too dumb to see what needs to be done and all they need is a little encouragement” is the argument that women may bring up at this time. After all, David didn’t notice what had happened and his wife needed to step in. Wasn’t it for the best of them all that she did so?

That may have been true in this particular case, but for some reason, and I don’t mean to pick on you, women always seem to believe that they know better than their husbands what is good for them and for the family. I have seen quite a few women who believe that they are God’s chosen instrument to change their husbands for the better. They feel obliged to teach them manners, tell them how to dress, or what to do for the house. After all, the guys are really helpless if their wives don’t tell them
what to do – aren’t they? And isn’t it much better to help them silently to do what is good instead of having to go through the trouble of trying to convince them? Hey – we learned last time that men don’t like to change – isn’t it just better to direct them a little bit? Isn’t that true submission – to help a husband make the right decisions without threatening his leadership role?

This argument sounds convincing, because there is a certain truth in the observations that I just made. But does that justify manipulating your husband?

You may think that by pulling the secret strings you actually help your husband to do what is good. But what has this to do with submission if you make him do what you feel is right? If he is not convinced but does it anyway who then is the true leader in the family? And – don’t you think that even the most naive husband will eventually discover that he is being manipulated – and will try to create an emotional distance from you. Eventually you will lose him completely.

### 12.2 Forms of Manipulation

Most people can agree to what we have discussed so far. Manipulation is deadly for a relationship and should not be used as a means of gaining control. But the real problem is that many women fail to see that they actually use manipulation, because they don’t do this consciously. You will hardly ever find a wife who openly admits to manipulate her husband. But this doesn’t mean they don’t do it – they have just grown up so much with tiny little manipulations that they don’t realize anymore when they cross the border from encouragement to manipulation.

So let us look a bit at the various forms of manipulation. What means can a woman use to gain control over her husband?

**Sexual Manipulation:** The most obvious and commonly practiced technique is *seduction*. Women use sexual attraction to turn a men’s head around and there is hardly a man who can easily resist this form of manipulation. Bathsheba is just one example of a sexually manipulating women. History books – at least the better ones – are full with descriptions of women who gained great influence over men just by seduction. Rumors say that many actresses and models had to use sexual manipulation to climb up the career ladder and the same happens in many other professions or companies. You don’t have to sleep with a man to wrap him around your fingers. The intended payoff is often of material nature: gifts, clothing, jewelry, money, or a step forward in your career.

The ability to manipulate a man’s attention by sexual attraction is present in almost every woman from childhood on. As a young girl, you learn to be *cute* in front of Daddy by doing the little things that get his attention and applause. This will make sure that Daddy gives you the things you want and often spares you a punishment that you deserve for misbehavior. As teenager, you use the same gift to gain social approval and the admiration of your girlfriends over your
abilities to attract boys. Isn’t it nice to have so many friends and be the center of attention? This is the time where you train that gift and then ... you get married. Now you direct all your charm at your husband – it is only natural that you do so. But now the conditions have changed. What used to be a means to attract people is now supposed to be a free gift, something that does not expect an immediate gratification as response.

But at this point some women refuse to grow up. They are still like the little girl that sits on Daddy’s lap and expects something in return for being attractive. They haven’t learned that gifts are supposed to be for free – they consider their femininity something to be used and are “nice” only when they want something. There are two possible outcomes. Either they gain complete control over their husbands and make them their puppets which they can hardly respect. Or their husbands become unresponsive and unenthusiastic over time, because they have seen through the pattern and are tired of being used. In the first case, love has turned materialistic while in the second case the little girl has the feeling that love has grown cold because her tactics don’t work anymore.

In both cases she doesn’t experience true love, because her concept of love is still a childish one. She has never understood true love and cannot recognize it, even if her husband shows it to her.

Punishment: A second and equally strong form of manipulation is emotional punishment. Instead of gratifying good behavior you punish his wrongdoing. This often works quite well because a man tries to avoid pain and thus in the end does what you want. There are several common ways to punish a man ... an please don’t use that as recipe that you can try out after the service:

Shame: The greatest weakness of a man can be found in the area of his ego. He needs the feeling of importance and social acceptance. Many a wife has found out that her husband can be put to shame by exposing his weaknesses: his lack of thinking or consideration, a bad habit, an insecurity, his financial weaknesses. If you point that out at the right moment you can really hit him hard – particularly if you do this in public at social gatherings, in Sunday school, when colleagues are present or – even worse in moments when he is most vulnerable. Shame and embarrassment can be a very strong weapon and some women have perfected the skill of manipulation by using that weapon just in the right moments.

Flirtatiousness: Some women give their husbands the impression that despite the marriage vow they are not fully committed to them. They still test their attractiveness on other men and play the flirt game. She will certainly get his attention when she does so – whether out of his sight or in front of him – because to a husband a flirtatious wife is a public slap to his masculinity.
He can never be sure whether she is fully his or not. Some women like play with that lack of security and thus gain power over their husbands. Some even think that this is fun. But *Proverbs 11:22* says

> As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.

All the beauty and desirability of a woman if lost if her character doesn’t match her outer appearance. True beauty comes from the inside, and most husbands react to that form of beauty much stronger than to the physical appearance.

**Withholding love:** Some women have learned to use the “cold shoulder” as a means to communicate to their husbands that they have fallen into disfavor. Instead of telling them what is wrong they let them guess until they have found the reason. For most men this is so frustrating that after a while they give up trying. Withholding love is just a means to drive your husband away.

Withholding sex is an even stronger form of this. For the woman, the withdrawal is justified by a misbehavior of the husband. But for the husband, the message sounds quite differently. If she withholds sex from him because he did something wrong, she is telling him that she doesn’t really enjoy the sexual relationship with him but only uses it as a reward for “being good”. But sex was given by God to promote not just physical joy but also the oneness of wife and husband. And his instructions about that are very clear:

> Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. 1. Corinthians 7:3–5

If you withhold sex from your husband – for whatever reason – you drive a deep wedge between the two of you and the oneness intended by God cannot become a reality.

Shame, Flirtatiousness, and Withholding Love can be very strong weapons that will give you power over your husband. He will try everything to avoid the pain created by them and you will often get what you want – temporarily. But eventually he is going to hate you for using this method against him and distance himself emotionally from you. This will not only make your weapons less efficient but also destroy the closeness that you once had.

**False vulnerability:** A third form of manipulation used by women is to appeal to his role as protector. Men melt with tears. If you show your vulnerability they
will do what they can to protect you. There are women who have learned to use that. If they have the feeling that their husbands don’t do what they want, they let their emotions of frustration and anger grow until they actually begin crying. That surely gets the attention of their husbands and quite often a man changes his mind about a firm and wisely chosen decision just to see his wife happy again. Tears can be a very powerful instrument of manipulation, but they are a very deceptive form of communication. A woman who uses tears to her own advantage, will eventually be out of touch with her true feelings, particularly if she started that practice already during her childhood. She cannot distinguish between real emotional pain and anger or the pain of just not getting it her way. Even worse, it usually backfires after a while when the husband becomes aware of what she is doing to him. He will not react to your tears anymore but just become angry at you because you try again – even if the situation is really serious. You have played the card too often to make him believe it’s real.

Have you ever wondered why the reaction of your husband seems to be so cold compared to the earlier years of your marriage? The cause might be right here.

Martyrdom: Closely related to false vulnerability is the role of the righteous victim. Martyrdom extracts an emotional reaction from a man that gives some women the same feeling as being loved. Although pity can rarely be equated with love, some women – and strangely enough many older people as well – settle for the feeling that comes with the attention of pity. So they let others know how much they suffer particularly if they suffer because of something they do for you or something that you don’t do for them. And they don’t want to find a way out of their suffering – they only want to talk about it. They want to be martyrs, because that is they way to get attention. Don’t you ever dare taking their suffering away, because that will be shaking the very reason for their existence. Usually they find something else under which they suffer.

Wives who chose the role of the righteous victim often have a genuine sense of unworthiness and inferiority. Unfortunately, the attention and affection they’re getting from their husbands – and other people as well – will not be genuine and after a while people will withdraw from such a person because it is not easy to listen all this negative talk every day.

Guilt: The fifth common ploy in manipulation is guilt, a weapon that is practiced in some homes to perfection. With an icy stare, a silence, cold words, or long complaints and tears about the pain he has caused the offending husband is put in his place. However it is been done, he shall feel guilty about his actions. He is the sole reason for her emotional distance or the pain she is going through. He shall feel bad about that until he comes crawling back, apologizes, and does everything to make up for what he did wrong.
But guilt, like so many emotionally manipulative tools, is a negative reinforcer. It may produce behavioral change, but will also cause resentment and anger.

**Competition:** the last manipulative tool that women use against their husbands is *competition*. If she cannot get his attention with her looks, her cooking, or her need – maybe she can get it by being more successful in her job than he is in his. There is nothing wrong with women who take a job because it is fulfilling and enjoyable or helps to make ends meet. But it should never be used as a weapon to get your husband’s attention by letting him know that he is not as good as you are.

**Children:** can also be used in the manipulation game. An unhappy woman sees her child as someone who needs her while her husband doesn’t. The child loves her and gives her the attention she needs. She may even see the child as the bond that will hold her marriage together and bring the attention of her husband back to her. But that simply does not happen. A marriage is designed to hold children together, but children cannot hold their parents together. It does not work that way.

Usually, it is the other way around. The husband will notice the preoccupation of his wife with her child while she more and more excludes him from her affection. If there has been a distance between the two before, it will only increase.

In each of the above manipulation strategies, the changes in your husband will only be short-term. There is only one lasting effect, and that is the increasing distance between you and your husband. If you use these methods against your husband, you clearly express that you have little respect for him and you will never find out how important you really are to your husband. Does he love you for what you are or does he show attention only when you pry it out of him? How can you find out? How can you get his attention and affection without having to use the emotional remote control?

**12.3 How to create change without manipulation?**

The “right” tactics for creating a long-lasting change without using manipulation have to be based on a sincere respect for your husband. He is an independent person with a right to make his decisions without being under your influence. If you notice that you have gotten into the cycle of manipulation, then it is time for a change.

**Turn your back on manipulation:** The first step towards a healthier relationship is to completely turn your back on manipulation, that is admit the problem first to yourself and then to your husband, and then ask for his forgiveness and help. This may be an entirely unfamiliar situation for you but it will immediately communicate your respect for him. If your husband has become distant then just
the process of addressing the subject and accepting the responsibility for your past behavior will often already bring a refreshing newness into your relationship. But even if it doesn’t, even if you don’t see immediate success and if you have to carry on a one-sided attempt, there is still hope because you do what God advised you to do:

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 
1. Peter 3:1–2

Make a commitment to minister to him instead of managing him: The biblical understanding of marriage is that of mutual submission, not of one person directing the other. Instead of managing your husband, you’re supposed to minister to him – to be a helper that fills his incompleteness, a wife who is dedicated to her husband. But you can only do that if you’re really interested in him as a person. Did you ever ask yourself “What are my husbands greatest needs and how can God use me to supply them”?

Most women focus too much on the needs their husbands tend to ignore: the need to eat properly, to dress well, to show proper behavior in social contacts. These are real needs – there is no doubt about it – but hardly the ones that your husband cares about. Much more often they are your needs – you want to experience your husband in a certain way and that is why you work so hard to meet them. But if you do so, you start managing him again because you decide what is best for him.

If you really want to minister to him, you should find out what he cares about and see that these needs are met first. Instead of ministering only to his physical needs – what can you to minister to his soul and spirit? Don’t decide this all on your own – if you want to minister to him, you need to find out from him what he needs. And be assured – God has made you the right person to meet those needs.

If you let your husband know that you care about him, that you love him for who he is and don’t try to manage or change him, then he will let go of his distance. If he understands that you care about what is important for him and not just about how you want him to be, then he will be much more willing to find out what he can do for you. Luke 6:38 says “Give, and it shall be given unto you” – God will keep this promise if you trust him in that.

A particularly important way to express that you care for him is your style of communication. If you want him to understand your wishes and expectations – why don’t you try to express this in a way that makes it easier for him:
That is: tell him explicitly what you want. Don’t just vaguely let him know what you like – be specific. Even more, don’t just tell him all the things you don’t like and let him draw his conclusions from that – express your needs in a positive way. And give your input when it is time to make decisions or take action, not just a few weeks ahead of time. Men need a straightforward approach and you can achieve much more if you respect that – even if it appears less romantic.

Why? Shouldn’t he remember what you said last week? And isn’t it sufficient that you let him know how you feel about things in general? Shouldn’t he be able to draw the right conclusions from that and know what you need?

Many women believe that this should be so. But it doesn’t work that way, and there is a simple reason for that – best explained by a list that I received last week – the top ten issues that men understand about women.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 

Figure 1: The top ten issues that men understand about women

So what would you put in here at number one and two? . . .

Right! There isn’t anything that we can all agree to put in here. The thing is – men don’t think like women. Your husband can’t understand what you expect from him, if you don’t tell it to him on his terms. But if you do adopt to his style of communication from time to time, you can strengthen the bond of your marriage a lot.

**Affirm his ‘right’ choices:** If you have managed your husband for quite a while already, you will certainly have given him the impression that he can’t do anything that gets your approval. As a result, he may already have given up on even trying to please you – if he can’t do it right, why should he bother? It is time to reverse this process.

Most women are not aware that men need compliments as much as they do, even if the don’t show this very often. If – instead of making him feel bad about his misbehavior – you compliment him for the positive things he does you achieve two things at once. First of all, you communicate in a positive way what your needs are and secondly you express your genuine appreciation for what he does. For some women this may mean swallowing some pride, but – even if it may take a while – you will see the positive effects of this.
People may ask “isn’t that manipulation as well”? No! It is the opposite of it, because you only affirm the choices that he made all by himself and because you honestly express that you appreciate what he does for you.

**Appeal to his values:** In some rare cases affirming the right choices of your husband will not lead to the positive response, because he has hardened too much already. In that case it is necessary to take some time for a serious talk that aims at a complete new beginning.

This is the time when you need to carefully spell out your expectations and appeal to his values and to what he stands for. Men can deal with such a straightforward approach much better than with any hidden manipulation – particularly when you genuinely express that you believe in him – because the open request puts the ball into their court.

**A loving confrontation:** What, however, can you do if your husband doesn’t respond at all and if all the previous attempts lead nowhere? Most women then choose the path of confrontation. This is not a bad idea as such, but usually they choose the wrong method for that.

Often they confront their husbands with an uncontrolled emotional outburst. But this reaction does not aim at a solution but just expresses a desire to get even. Most men can’t cope with that. In Proverbs 21:19, 27:15 we find a typical male response of a man who goes through such an experience:

> It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.
> A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.

that is precisely what men do if you confront them with an outburst of anger – they remove themselves to a place of isolation.

The reaction is the same, if the wife chooses the low-level confrontation, better known as nagging. Nagging is the form of frequent confrontation that carries with it the notion that nothing will ever change. She reminds him over and over again of what he should do, but implicitly expresses the feeling that he won’t change. And this is exactly what will happen – no change and only withdrawal.

> It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a quarrelsome woman in a wide house. Proverbs 21:9.

So how can you confront your husband if you have to. How can you do this in a loving way. There are a few things you should keep in mind.

**Defuse personal anger:** before you start talking with your husband you must get rid of that angry self-talk in your mind. If you say to yourself “He will never change” or “He just doesn’t care about me” – then you will walk into
the conversation filled with anger and there is no way to achieve anything, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

God has brought you two together. If he managed that, he can also change your husband into the loving and active leader that you need. Don’t let your emotions betray you – there is always hope.

**Discern the legitimate needs of you and your husband:** The ability to approach other people with *their* needs in mind is both very disarming and also a mark of people who are committed to loving other people. If you ask yourself what your husband wants from you and your marriage, and how you can supply these needs, then you will quickly gain a hearing in a loving confrontation. Your husband is going to listen to you if you let him know that you care for his real needs.

But you must also be able to clearly lay out your own needs and what you expect from your husband. Your husband must be able to understand what you need. How should he do so if you can’t tell him that?

**Manage the crisis, not the husband:** Finally, you must be able to draw a line and let your husband know if things can’t be allowed to continue as they have been. You must clearly and lovingly set the boundaries that he cannot step over and be able to suggest solutions that can bring you both back to normal again.²

Many women view the above recipes as beneath their dignity. After all it puts a lot of burden on them and “if the guy loves me, shouldn’t he do all these things that I expect routinely”? While this rationale has some truth in it, it is not very realistic. Marriage is not only about what you can receive, it is about how you can minister. “Don’t ask what your husband can do for you – ask what you can do for your husband” – there is no way to get around this principle. If you want to win your husband’s heart, you have to minister to him instead of manipulating him. But if you do it God’s way, you will have a much better chance for success than if you try it your own way.

### 13 Raising Active Husbands and Submissive Wives

In the past lessons we have studied various categories of men who fail to be active leaders of the family and of women who fail to be truly submissive. We have looked at men who withdraw from leadership because of a fear of failure, at workoholic who never have time for their families, and the big boy who refuses to grow up and

²Boundaries are a whole topic by themselves and we will discuss this in detail in the class that we will begin next month. Setting boundaries is important in any relationship, to make sure that you take responsibility for your own feelings, values, and actions but not for those of your spouse or children. If you don’t set proper boundaries, you give up what makes you a complete person and rob your spouse of the mature companion that he or she deserves to have and prevent your children from growing up. Setting boundaries is not easy but necessary.
become a responsible adult. We have looked at hostile submission, the women who is constantly busy, the woman who is at war with her husband, and at manipulation. In all these cases we have discussed godly ways to overcome the problems that are behind these destructive attitudes and behaviors, so that we can grow both in our faith and in our relationship with our spouse. By now we all know that we are far from being perfect and how difficult it is to become the husbands or wives that God wants us to be. It is difficult, because many of our failures have their roots in our childhood and have been with us for decades. But there is a promise in God’s word: if we faithfully follow his advice, we will see a lot of growth in our marriage.

13.1 Stopping the cycle in our children

But most marriages are more than just a relation between man and woman, because they have a way of producing children. And here the cycle continues. Many of our problems today were more or less passed on to us from our parents. And we will pass them on to our children without even noticing. Children will closely observe how we behave and will develop a value system based on what they see in us. A passive father will very likely produce a son who will be a passive husband as well — in his way. Workaholics will produce workaholics — probably not in the first couple of years but quite likely once they hit 30. The older a son gets, the stronger you will recognize the father. It is similar with girls: if their mother plays the role of a doormat, they will never know in their hearts what true submission is. If they observe anger or manipulation, they will believe it to be a normal pattern of behavior. They are too young to realize the long-term destruction that comes with all this. **Deuteronomy 5:9** becomes strangely true even in our lives:

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for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.
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It is a simple fact: we reproduce after our own kind and give to our children what is deeply ingrained into us — both the good and the bad. Even if we swear to ourselves never to make the same mistakes with our own children, we will invariably find ourselves continuing the cycle. *Can the cycle be broken?*

Fortunately, for us as Christians there is another dimension to be considered. We have not only our physical parents but can also call God our father. And the stronger our relationship is with our heavenly father, the greater the chance to raise children who are different. As parents we have a tremendous influence over our children — and not only over them, but over their marriages, their children, and maybe even beyond that. If we consciously use that influence in a godly way, we can raise sons, who become mature, responsible, sensitivem and active leaders of the family, and daughters who
have confidence in relationships and can submit to their husbands without the need to dominate or manipulate.

How can we do that? How can we – despite all of our own failures – raise children who are healthy and whole adults?

Obviously we have to work on ourselves first, to make sure that they see in us that a good marriage is constantly growing and improving. The world will tell them the opposite, namely that a marriage will only be winding down after the first enthusiasm and is not meant to last a lifetime or survive major difficulties. They need your example to show them that a marriage can be different from what the world tells them – that difficulties and problems can be resolved in a way that strengthens a marriage and that the bond between you becomes stronger year after year. You can help your children only if you take care of your own marriage first.

13.2 Our responsibility: train up children

But there is a lot more you can do for your children. Proverbs 22:6 says

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The Bible tells us to train our children. What we teach them at a young age will have a lasting effect once they grow up. This fact holds true regardless who the teacher is. If we want our children to be raised in a godly way, we better make sure that it is us who have the strongest influence on them. If we neglect this duty, somebody else will determine which way they are going in the future – their teachers, their classmates, their friends, or – worst of all – television. If we don’t want this to happen, we have to take our responsibility seriously and invest time and energy into training our children. But what and how are we to teach them?

13.3 What are we to teach our children?

Let us try to list the things that we should teach our children to prepare them for a faithful walk with God and their family as adults.

13.3.1 An appropriate view of God

Many adults, even among Christians, have a very strange view of God. They either see him as the all-powerful, all-knowing God who mercilessly punishes every mistake they make – or as their buddy who lets them do whatever they want and rescues them in times of need. Both views are obviously wrong. But they are often formed during childhood already and depend particularly on the relation between the child and its earthly father.

Parents, especially fathers, have to help their children to get an appropriate view of God. Children should learn to respect God without being afraid of him. They should
trust in God without forgetting his authority and sovereignty. Teaching our children a proper view of God is no guarantee for their salvation but it certainly increases the chance that they will eventually commit their lives to him and serve him faithfully.

13.3.2 Obedience and submission to authority

Closely related to a proper view of God is obedience and submission to authority – that is to parents (Colossians 3:20, Ephesians 6:1–3, 1. Timothy 3:4), government (1. Peter 2:13–15), and everyone who has been given authority over them. Of course, they should also develop a sense for situations where they should not obey (e.g. because it contradicts God’s word), but they must learn that they cannot just break a rule whenever they don’t like it. Too many adults do not want to follow rules anymore but value their own personal freedom higher than anything else. We should teach our children that almost all rules, laws, and regulations are there for a good reason and should be followed even if they do not understand these reasons. If they do not like the rules, they may put efforts into having them changed (e.g. by asking their parents or sending petitions to the government), but they should not simply ignore them.

The material below is incomplete. I didn’t have the time to write proper text yet

13.3.3 Responsibility & Accountability

A child needs to learn that ownership and responsibility goes hand in hand. They have to take care of the things that belong to them, toys, homework etc. If they learn this with things, they will later accept responsibility for the relationships they live in.

Responsibility also means responsibility for actions and misbehavior. Don’t allow them to play the blame game. If they did something wrong they MUST experience the consequences, even if somebody else seduced or manipulated them into doing that. But make sure that they see that you take care of that guilt as well. (p192)

How do you teach that? Don’t take responsibility for what is not yours – that’s the issue of boundaries. Let them experience the results of their actions and prevent only the worst – the things that would cause lasting damage. Don’t clean up after them if they are old enough to do it themselves – it’s a boundary on yourself, as you have to withstand the urge to create a clean house immediately. Don’t give them more money if they spend their’s immediately. let them experience punishment if it is justified.
13.3.4 Integrity

13.3.5 Character

13.3.6 The difference between right and wrong

13.3.7 Values

Children must develop their own values, because that will be the basis of all the decisions they are going to make. Nothing is truly more their own than an idea that is the product of their own thinking. If your children get used to having all their opinions formed by somebody else – that is probably by you – they will later have a hard time finding out what they believe themselves and what they stand for. Their values will always follow the wind and there is no stability. They will follow trends or strong leaders – and we all know what disaster can come out of this when this goes to the extreme. We’ve seen it in Nazi Germany, we have seen it in many modern cults, and we will have the same when the antichrist comes.

But even worse is the disaster on the family level. Men without own values will be unable to provide leadership, women will easily become doormats who suppress their bitterness even in truly abusive situations.

Yes you have to teach your children values – but make sure that these values will be founded on an understanding of right and wrong. Don’t just tell them “do this”, “don’t do that” – tell them why you think so. And spend enough time to teach them that they understand what you mean. They shouldn’t live by the letter of a rule but by its spirit. If you do so, you write them “onto their hearts”. They will develop stable values and make the right choices by themselves without having to ask you all the time.

13.3.8 Confidence

Not self-confidence, but the knowledge that they are loved and always will be. The will make them healthy adults who can give commit themselves to others even when it hurts.

Confidence will lead to a dedication to truth, even if it is tough to accept. Men who lack confidence, will withdraw from their responsibilities in their own families.

Women who lack confidence, are afraid of confrontation and will resort to manipulation or a doormat behavior

Love and truth, learning to accept limits

13.3.9 Balance

don’t choose extremes, learn to weigh
13.3.10 Appropriate view of money

In particular your attitude towards money will have a lasting impact on your children. If money is at the center of your lives, either because you talk about it too much, spend a lot of money in front of your children, work overtime to have more, or give them money instead of your time – they will get the impression that money is what rules the world, that one is defined by the amount of money one has, that it brings security, satisfaction, friends, etc.

You have to make sure that your children have an appropriate view of money. It is a means for living, given to you from God – and you are allowed to enjoy it. BUT it is not as important as people, family friends, relationships etc. and it can’t buy them. The really important things in the world are not available for money.

Teach them to give. What they have is not theirs, but only entrusted ... You cannot serve God and the mammon.

13.3.11 Communication

Make sure that your children learn to communicate “constructively”. They must learn that communication is exchanging thoughts and emotions, and not just a means to give instructions or to set someone straight. For some parents this is all they do and thus their children develop a completely wrong impression of what communication is. They must learn that one can talk about everything, but in an edifying manner – and you have to set an example. Share with them more than command, share your thoughts and feelings.

And also teach them to listen. Many people believe communication is just talking or making words. They can express themselves elegantly and talk constantly. But they hardly listen, as if they wouldn’t care. Listening means you let the others finish what they wanted to say and don’t interrupt – well, yes there are some extreme cases where this is necessary. And you don’t make up your answer before the other is finished either, because you might misunderstand as long as only half the message has reached you. How much hurt could be avoided if this simple rule is respected.

But listening means also responding. Being silent and not telling what you think leaves the other person with a feeling of insecurity. You should at least give the feedback that you understood and that it matters to you.

Again, you have to set an example.

13.3.12 Healthy family relations

Isolation breeds lonely, independent, self-centered people – characteristics that will drive your spouse crazy – but appear highly valued in our society.

Make sure that your children learn how to relate to you and their siblings. That they value the closeness and appreciate each other.

That will also avoid isolation from you later,
13.3.13 Social contacts

play and share with others, don’t compete and isolate

13.3.14 Resolving conflicts

Make sure your children learn how to resolve conflicts. Teach them how to forgive and accept forgiveness. Then they believe in relationships even in difficult situations. They don’t give up, when the difficult times set in. They don’t want a divorce when problems come up.

HOW: set an example. Let them see how you deal with conflicts – that you admit guilt and forgive, even if that may take a while. You children will later remember that you did have problems – and won’t be shocked when they have to go through problems themselves – but most of all will they remember how you worked on solving them and that gives them a lot of hope.

13.4 How are we to teach them?

Now that we know what we want to teach our children the next question is how to do that.

13.4.1 Spend enough time and attention

Probably the most crucial thing in today’s society. Committing time to a child says “you are important”, committing undivided attention says “what you think and feel is important”. Listening to your child is one of the greatest gifts you can give.

Children learn what is significant by observing what is important for their parents. If we don’t have time for them, they will know that everything else in the world, our job, hobbies, TV, newspaper, books, household – you name it – is more important than people.

In particular your attitude towards money will have a lasting impact on your children. If money is at the center of your lives, either because you talk about it too much, spend a lot of money in front of your children, work overtime to have more, or give them money instead of your time – they will get the impression that money is what rules the world, that one is defined by the amount of money one has, that it brings security, satisfaction, friends, etc.

Many parents make this mistake today. They give their children money instead of time. That just teaches them the wrong things. If you spend time with them instead, they will see that people, communication, caring for someone gives true satisfaction.

And forget about the idea of “quality time”. Yes, the time you spend with your children should be quality time, but this is NO EXCUSE for squeezing everything you do with your kids into a small amount of time, which you then call quality time. Kids don’t know quality time – they know time and see that you don’t give it to them.
13.4.2 Be an example

13.4.3 Show unconditional love

The family is the place where children need to experience unconditional love and acceptance. That will increase their confidence and trust, and also make it easier for them to develop a mature faith. This is important for boys as well, because they need to know that home is the place where he finds people to depend on who respect him, so he doesn’t have to look for other means of assurance like acquisition of things or work achievements.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. (Colossians 3:21)

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

13.4.4 Live truth

Love shouldn’t be just a warm and comfortable feeling – it has to be embedded in a sense for reality and truth. Children have to be protected, but they must not grow up in a fairytale world. They would be completely unprepared for the world they have to live in once they leave the protection of your home.

The right mixture is important.

Exposing children to love without truth makes them deceptive, manipulative. Exposing them to truth without love makes them critical and cutting.

13.4.5 Set limits and boundaries

Don’t take responsibility for what is not yours – that’s the issue of boundaries. Let them experience the results of their actions and prevent only the worst – the things that would cause lasting damage. Don’t clean up after them if they are old enough to do it themselves – it’s a boundary on yourself, as you have to withstand the urge to create a clean house immediately. Don’t give them more money if they spend their’s immediately. let them experience punishment if it is justified.

Don’t allow them to play the blame game. If they did something wrong they MUST experience the consequences. Be strict, but remain loving.

Kids need to know their boundaries, they are going to test them.
13.4.6 Give direction

Have a stand on issues, make them understand, instead of forcing them to adopt them. Otherwise, once they leave the house they will abandon them immediately. You see that with many students.

Yes you have to teach your children values – but make sure that these values will be founded on an understanding of right and wrong. Don’t just tell them “do this”, “don’t do that” – tell them why you think so. And spend enough time to teach them that they understand what you mean. They shouldn’t live by the letter of a rule but by its spirit. If you do so, you write them “onto their hearts”. They will develop stable values and make the right choices by themselves without having to ask you all the time.

13.4.7 Challenge

Even NY State ads point that out. Kids need to be challenged to grow. They don’t do it themselves.

13.4.8 Openly resolve conflicts yourself

they must see that there is a way out and a nice way to do it.

13.4.9 Give them positive things to remember

For healthy family relations: establish family traditions and special family values.