

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 2 - Issue 4

Fall Edition

What is God's design and calling for you as a husband?

One of the greatest needs within the family today is for men to stand up and fulfill their God-given responsibilities as husbands. As the man within your home, you have been entrusted with another person's life, your wife's, and to be faithful to that calling before God should be your greatest concern.

Have you ever wondered exactly what God's design and calling is for you as a husband? Do you know what your responsibilities are as a husband and how to fulfill them? Do you know, in a practical sense, what it means to be the head of your home? These are some of the questions I would like to deal with in this article.

First, with all the many voices speaking about marriage today, how can you be sure that you are acting correctly and fulfilling God's design for you as a husband? Is there any example you can follow to be sure you are in harmony with God's design? Yes, there is such a person you can follow that will forever be the model of what a man should be: Jesus Christ! Paul reveals this absolute for men when he wrote, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it...*" (Eph. 5:25). Here, Paul declares that Christ is our ultimate example of how to love our wives. Therefore, this is your calling before God. Love your wife as Christ loved, not just with words, but in giving yourself sacrificially as He did for you.

Before I explain in practical terms how His example should be followed, let me first deal with an issue that I know will be in some of your minds. When I have told some men that Christ must be their example, many have responded to me, "*How can I love my wife like Jesus*

Christ? I'm just a man, how can God

expect me to do what He did?" Yes it is true, you are just a man; but there is more. You must also remember, that if you are a Christian, you are a man enabled by His powerful Holy Spirit. God has chosen to fill you with His Spirit to bring about a supernatural work in your life. He has the ability to completely change you that you might be "*conformed to the image of His Son*" (Rom. 8:29). This is what will enable you to love your wife just as Christ loves. Be assured that what God commands you to do, He will also enable you to do.

Yet, God's purpose and plan to conform you into the image of His Son can only be accomplished by your complete surrender to His Spirit. Paul explained how this change occurs to the Corinthian church, "*We all... beholding... the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image ... by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, the transforming work of the Holy Spirit is what changes you into His image. This is how your Heavenly Father enables you to become the husband He is calling you to be. God's design is to first change you, then the changes He requires in your marriage will be a natural result.



Won't you bow before Him now?

But the question is, are you willing to allow the Spirit of God to transform you, or will you fight Him every step of the way? Have you fully surrendered

yourself to Christ to allow Him to begin to work? Completely yielding your life to the Father is where you must begin if you want to bring your marriage into harmony with God's design. This decision to surrender is not a one-time choice but a continual one. Paul said, the inward man must be renewed "*day by day*" (2 Cor. 4:16). If you are seeking God daily for His transformation and renewal in your heart, then begin by asking God to reveal to you specifically where and how He wants to change you so that you might more completely follow the example of Christ. Jesus said "*I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you*" (John 13:15). Therefore, let's look at the life of Christ. Let Him speak to your heart as you continue to read this article; allow Him to bring conviction and the desire for change wherever it's needed.

How can Jesus be an example to you as a husband?

1. He was under the authority of God. Jesus declared His purpose to be under the authority of the Father when He said, "*I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent me*" (John 5:30). Jesus was a man who continually submitted Himself to the Father, to serve Him and fulfill His purpose and plan; He didn't come to fulfill His own selfish desires. His life-long surrender to the authority of God was the key to His life and example. Jesus showed us by His example that a man must first be submitted to a higher authority if he is ever to fulfill God's design and purpose in life. People followed His leadership because they could immediately see that He didn't have a selfish agenda. Jesus spoke the words of God; not His own. He served others; not Himself.

Likewise, if you want your wife to follow your leadership, she must first see that you are a man under the authority of God. Does your wife see that your per-

She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14

sonal life is under the control of the Father? Is God's word and will the basis of your decisions, or does she see a man who makes decisions based on selfish motives for his own ends? Do you demonstrate a no-compromise lifestyle with this world, or does she see a man who covets things more than God and His kingdom? Before Paul ever taught on the responsibilities of the husband-wife relationship, he first declared this essential: reverence to the authority of God. He explains that both husband and wife must be "*submitting to one another in the fear of God*" (Eph. 5:21). Are you sincerely submitting yourself to God and do you reverence and fear Him? Only as your wife sees this will she willingly submit and trust your leadership in the home.

2. He was a spiritual leader. Jesus embraced leadership to provide salvation for the entire world. He came to pay the penalty for man's sin and open the door of fellowship with the Father. Christ didn't wait for the world to see its need and come to Him, He stepped forward and initiated contact with man and proclaimed the word of salvation. He led the way for each of us to be saved by His death and resurrection.

As a husband, you are also called to take spiritual leadership with your wife and family. Paul explains to husbands that Jesus gave Himself for the church "*...that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word...*" (Eph. 5:25,26). Here is your example. When Christ came to proclaim the Word of God, He was sanctifying or *setting apart* His people for a personal relationship with Himself. Are you following this example to set your wife and family apart? Does your godly influence truly make your home different and set apart from a non-Christian home?

How can you follow Christ's example of spiritual leadership and set your wife and family apart? First, you must have a passion for the things of God and especially the Word of God. Remember Jesus sanctified the church with His Word. Yet, before you can ever minister the Word to your wife and family, you must become a student of the Word yourself, and allow it to sanctify you. As you surrender to the Scriptures, spiritual leadership naturally follows because you are placing yourself under God's authority by yielding to His instruction. It then will become natural for you to initiate conversation regarding

spiritual things with your wife and children. As God speaks to you from His Word, you can share with your wife what you are learning, and ask her to explain what she is learning from her devotional time. As you do this the spiritual fellowship between you will blossom and grow. You can also sanctify your wife by initiating prayer with her and for her. James said, "*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*" (James 5:16). Do you believe this? If you do, make her your prayer partner. As you pray for one another and for others, the oneness God intends for your marriage will become a reality.

Spiritual leadership should also be taken with your children. At night when your children go to bed, as often as you can, lead them in prayer. In the same manner, several times a week you should lead a devotional with your children. If you are ever to impart to your children the importance of God's Word, they must see that you consider it important enough to communicate it to them. On Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, you can suggest going to church. As you take spiritual leadership in this way, you will not only be following the example of Christ, but you can be used of God to instill within your family's hearts a passion for Jesus.

3. He sought companionship. Jesus was also an example as He sought men and women out for real companionship. Jesus plainly declared that He came "*to seek and to save*" men and women who were lost (Luke 19:10). He first sought out twelve disciples that He might be with them as an example and teacher. Yet Jesus also called them His "*friends*" and they became companions for more than three years (John 15:14). Yet, Jesus had more than just twelve men in mind when He spoke of friends. He had all of those who would come to faith in Him through His disciples' preaching. Fellowship and friendship with God is the primary purpose of salvation. Paul said that we have been "*called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor. 1:9).

Likewise, fellowship and companionship with your wife is the primary purpose of your marriage relationship. The Scripture declares that your wife is to be "*your companion*" (Mal. 2:14). The Hebrew word for companion means one with whom you are knit together. She is to be

your best friend and closest companion for life. In the Old Testament, the Shulamite said of her husband Solomon, "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend*" (Song of Solomon 5:16). Husbands, are you following this example of Christ and pursuing friendship and companionship with your spouse? How can you do this?

Begin by looking for ways to spend time together, just you and her. You sought this companionship with her before you were married on a daily basis. You searched diligently for times to see one another while putting everything and everyone on the waiting list. But, men have said to me many times, "We never seem to ever find the time to be together anymore." You will never *find* the time, you must *make* the time to be together. It means reordering your priorities to put her first on your list today, not on the waiting list. You always have time for the things you really want to do. The question is, do you truly see this as an essential ingredient for a good marriage? Do you see your wife as the number one priority of your life? If you do, you will *make* the time for companionship and friendship will begin to grow again. Taking the leadership in your relationship will mean that you will initiate this action.

4. He was a communicator. Jesus further explained what you do with a friend and companion. He said, "*I do not call you servants...I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I Have made known to you*" (John 15:15). Jesus made it clear that a real friend and companion is worth communicating all you have in your heart. Obviously, from Scripture we see that Jesus did just that, He communicated with the disciples all that the Father had given Him because He loved them and treasured their friendship.

Men often complain that they just can't communicate the way their wives want them to. They say these things as if there is no hope for change, but this is simply not true. Men can be very good communicators if they truly want to be and are willing to ask the Great Communicator for help. Paul said, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13). Men, you can become the communicator your wife longs for you to be if you will allow Christ to teach and strengthen you. If you are not a very

communicative person, here are some ways that you can change this:

First, acknowledge that it is God's desire that you become a better communicator because this is an obvious reflection of Christ's heart. Then, ask God for His help and motivation. He longs to work *"in you both to will and do for His good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:13). Set time aside on a daily basis just to communicate with your spouse. Remember, you must choose to *make* the time to communicate, or it will never occur. For example, when you come home from work, before you read the newspaper or begin an evening in front of the television, begin a conversation with her. Go and sit in the kitchen as she is making dinner, or wherever she is, and ask how her day went. Then share how your day went. Talk over what God spoke to you that day in your devotional time. Discuss the plans for tomorrow and the weekend. Resolve any issues together that have come up that day with the children. If doing this before dinner is not a good time for conversation, wait until after you eat. Just be sure that before you begin *your* agenda for the evening, you seek to be a companion by communicating.

What you communicate while you are together is also important. Take the time to daily communicate your love for your wife. Jesus wasn't embarrassed or afraid to tell His disciples that He loved them. He said, *"As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you"* (John 15:9). How long has it been since you have taken your wife in your arms and told her how much you love her and how precious she is to you? If you don't verbalize your love, aren't you communicating that she is not very important to you? When you fail to spend time together to build companionship you are communicating to your spouse that your relationship is not as special as it was when you were dating. Renew your interest in her and the excitement of being together will be restored.

When you purpose to make your wife your companion and are spending time with one another, growth in communication is a natural result. The problem is that many times we allow other things to take priority in our relationship. Is she your first priority?

5. He was a servant to others. When Jesus bowed to wash His disciples' feet, He was taking the place of a slave. He

was demonstrating, in the most visual way possible, what it would require to be His follower. Jesus said that He came not *"to be served, but to serve"* (Mark 10:45). This was the heart of Christ!

Yet, many men object to taking this place of a servant in their homes. They declare to me, "I'm the head of my home and she is to be my helpmate; isn't she suppose to serve me?" No. That attitude does not reflect the heart of Jesus. In reality, both husband and wife are to serve one another. Paul said of all believers, *"...through love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13). Yet, as the head of your home, this essentially makes you the head servant...

Service to your wife is love *demonstrated* by such things as sharing in the household chores when your wife needs a break, caring for the children when she wants to go out with a girl friend, running an errand, or cooking a meal when she is sick. I use these examples because so often I have heard complaints from wives that their husbands refuse to do such things. How about you? Are you following Christ's example of service in your home?

6. He understood others. In every word Jesus spoke and every action that He took, you always have the sense that Jesus understood all things. Scripture tells us that because He came in human flesh He can *"sympathize with our weaknesses"* because He *"was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15). The word *sympathize* literally means to have compassion. Jesus understands all of the needs and struggles we have as human beings and has compassion on us as a result.

Understanding is also what the Scriptures encourage husbands to have toward their wives. Peter said, *"Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding..."* (1 Peter 3:7). This word *understanding* means to know something by investigation or inquiry. This means that if you are to follow the example of Christ and obey this command you must begin investigating and inquiring about your wife. By doing so you will gain tremendous insight and compassion for her and her daily needs.

How do you go about doing this? Understanding of your spouse is, of course, a life-long pursuit that is the result of lots of companionship time and frequent communication over the important as

well as the minor things of life. You must care enough to regularly inquire and investigate such things as how she is doing spiritually, what her personal struggles are, what her fears are; how you can help and better support her. This will entail active listening and remembering what she has said for future reference about her likes and dislikes, and for taking the appropriate actions to meet her needs.

Men have said to me, "I just don't understand her and why she feels the way she does." Have you ever said or thought this? If so, you need to get to work and begin to investigate and inquire in order to gain a better understanding. I am absolutely sure you can understand your wife. Why? Because the Apostle John said, *"...the Son of God has come and given us an understanding that we might know Him that is true"* (1 John 5:20). If God has opened your heart to know Him, by breaking through the misunderstanding you once had about Christ, He can surely open your heart to know and understand your wife. All you have to do is ask God to help you. The disciples did not understand some of the things Jesus taught them because they *"were afraid to ask Him"* (Mark 9:32). Don't let fear or pride hinder you from asking the Lord for a heart to understand your wife. Remember Solomon asked for an *"understanding heart"* for the people, and God granted it (1 Kings 3:9). Acknowledge to your wife that you need more understanding of her. Then, pray together that God would grant you both understanding hearts for each other. The result will be a house that is truly established and built to last. *"Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established"* (Prov. 24:3).

7. He honored others. In 1 Peter 3:7 the apostle goes on to say that you should not only dwell with understanding, but you should also be *"giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered."* What does it mean to honor your wife? The word *honor* means to esteem one as precious or valuable. Again, Jesus is the ultimate example of this kind of love and care by His life of service to others and His sacrificial death on the cross. He esteemed you and me as so precious that He gave His precious blood to redeem us to Himself (1 Peter 1:18,19).

How can you honor your wife in this same way? By giving of yourself in all of the ways I have described in this article: put Christ first as the authority in your life, be the spiritual example in your home, possess a servant's heart, communicate, be a companion, and gain understanding of her so you can meet her needs. All of these actions require unselfish love. This is how Paul defined honor in Romans 12:10. *"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."* Give her preference through your unselfish love, and she will surely believe you count her as precious and valuable.

8. He refused to use force. Jesus never forced His will upon anybody for anything because this would have been against the divine nature of love. Real love and force can never co-exist; they are mutually exclusive. Jesus always made relationship with Himself an issue of personal invitation and choice. The last invitation in the Bible declares, *"Let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22:17). The Father calls and then waits for you to come into agreement with Him concerning the truth. The Scriptures teach us that *"if we confess (agree with Him concerning) our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins..."* (1 John 1:9). Therefore, He will not force you to come nor will He force you to repent. With His love He draws you to come into agreement with Him just as He moved the people of Israel. *"I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love"* (Hosea 11:4).

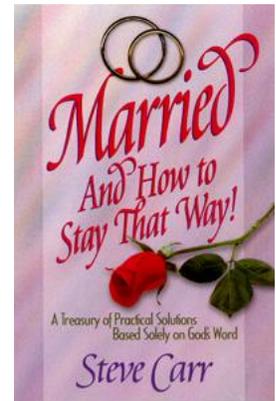
This is a critical part of Christ's example if you intend to be the husband God wants you to be. You cannot ever force your leadership upon your wife. She must willingly agree to submit to it just as much as you must willingly submit to Christ. So, ask yourself, why do I willingly submit to the leadership of Jesus? Is it not because of His tender heart of love toward you exemplified through His sacrificial life and death on the cross? Jesus doesn't have to force His will upon you because you are convinced of His unconditional love and patience toward you, His mercy regarding your failures, and His interest in you as His number one priority. You naturally want to surrender to Him and His authority over your life because you are absolutely confident of these facts.

Therefore, instead of forcing your will upon your wife, become an example of Christ's leadership and lovingly *seek agreement* with her over all the issues that divide you. Paul advocated solving problems in this very manner in the context of sexual issues. He told the men and women of the Corinthian church not to defraud one another *"except with consent..."* then, *"come together again..."* (1 Cor. 7:5). The word *consent* in this verse means to come to an agreement. Notice, Paul doesn't encourage the husband to force his will upon his wife to gain her consent. He wanted couples to lovingly agree together to find a solution. If this is the way you are to make decisions in the most intimate facet of your marriage, how much more should this be the rule in lesser aspects. Therefore, love seeks to find agreement and never uses force.

Husbands, if you will begin to follow the example of Christ and love your wife in this manner, her heart will safely trust in you and your leadership of the family. But, if you fail to possess these attitudes and actions, there will be nothing you can say that will cause your wife to follow your leadership.

Let me end by encouraging you to pray for God to change your desires and give you the attitudes that reflect Jesus' own heart. Jesus said, *"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"* (Matt. 7:8).

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