

# The Roles of Husband and Wife



## The Key to a Successful Marriage (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today. My talk today will be the last in my series on "The Key to a Successful Marriage." In my previous talks, I have explained that according to God's plan or pattern, marriage is a covenant in which each party lays down his life for the other and then lives out a new life through the other.

Yesterday I dealt with the theme "Counterfeits that Cheat Us"—human substitutes that do not produce God's result. Today I am going to talk about the roles of husband and wife, the special contribution that each party makes to the total relationship. Of course, I am going to speak merely in brief outline, but I believe it will be helpful.

I will begin with the role of a husband. As I see it in Scripture, the husband has three basic responsibilities toward his wife: first, to be a head; second, to provide; and third, to protect.

Let's talk first about the headship of the husband. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul says:

> "The man [that is, the husband] is the head of the woman [that is, the wife]."

What does it mean to be a "head"? I would say that it implies ultimate responsibility for decision and direction. Obviously the figure "head" is taken from the physical body and in the physical body, as I understand it, the way God has ordered it, decision and direction come from the head. Through the nervous system and in other ways, all parts of the body can communicate with the head but the head is responsible for making decisions and deciding on direction. Now I believe that is the ultimate responsibility of the man—to make decisions and to decide on direction. And I believe, in this area, the initiative should be with man.

Let me speak to you very frankly and plainly for a moment. In the physical relationship, God has so ordered it that it cannot work unless the man takes the initiative. That's a simple fact of nature and physiology that cannot be changed. I believe that is a pattern for what God intends in every aspect of the

relationship—the initiative should come from the man.

Now let us talk about the husband as provider. 1 Timothy 5:8. Paul says:

> "But if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."

That is very strong language, to say that somebody is worse than an unbeliever and has denied the Christian faith. What kind of person is Paul speaking about? He is speaking about a man who does not provide for his wife and family. It is a sad fact but there are quite a large number of people who are going about teaching the Scriptures, preaching and putting on what I would call "a spiritual act" but when you go back to the root of it all, they haven't made proper provision for their own families. And the Bible says that is worse than being an unbeliever.

Provision, of course, is primarily financial. We use the phrase "the bread-winner." It is a little out of date but it is still applicable. However, I do not believe that a husband's provision for his wife is limited to finance. I believe that he is responsible for her total well-being: physical, emotion, social and cultural—that he has to see that all her legitimate needs are met. Paul said in the passage we quoted earlier that the wife is the husband's glory. In other words, if you want to know how successful a man is, look at his wife. She's the evidence. And when a wife is fully provided for in every area of her life—physical emotional, social and cultural—she will indeed be her husband's glory.

The third responsibility of the man is to protect. In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter says:

> "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Now that is one of the passages where the Bible goes contrary to most people's thinking because the attitude of natural man is, well, if someone is weak, you dominate. You can get your way, you can force your way through. But the Scripture says, just because the woman is weak, that is the reason not to dominate but to honor.

And Peter says that husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life—joint-heirs. This is very significant because in the legal system of the Bible day, when two people were joint-heirs, neither of them could claim the inheritance apart from the other. Their claiming their inheritance depended upon them operating together and moving together into their inheritance. This is true of husband and wife. There are many things in God's provision which a wife or husband cannot claim on their own. It's only as they learn to flow together and to harmonize that the full provision of God is made available. So it is a husband's business to protect his wife, to stand between her and every pressure, every blow, everything that would break her down. And let me say to you husbands, the more you protect your wife, the more joy and satisfaction you receive in return from her. It pays husbands to invest in your wives.

Turning now to the wife: What is her contribution to a successful marriage? In the first place, in Scripture where God introduces the theme of marriage in Genesis 2, He describes what He intends the wife to be: a helpmeet or (in modern translations) a helper. I do believe that sums up in one word the real purpose of God for the wife. It is to be her husband's helper. I suggest there are two primary ways in which a wife can help her husband. The first is to uphold, the second is to encourage.

How can a wife uphold her husband? Well, I think that the easiest way to understand that is to picture the physical body. As we have said, the head is the directive, decision-making part of the body and yet the head never holds itself up. The head is totally dependent upon the rest of the body to be upheld and sustained and nourished. And there is one particular part of the body that is closest to the head and has the direct responsibility for upholding the head and that is, of course, the neck. I suggest to you wives that, in a certain sense, you should picture yourself the neck, the part that is immediately responsible for upholding your head, your husband. And if you find that a little, maybe, undignified, just bear in mind what somebody once said that it is the neck that determines just which way the head will turn. There's a lot of truth in that.

Secondly, your next function, and it is very closely related is to encourage. I can't tell you how important it is to a man to be able to look to his wife for encouragement. I can remember times in my past, in my ministry, when I felt I was a failure. And a lot of other people felt I was a failure, too. But I thank God that my first wife, Lydia, never, in any way, suggested to me that I was a failure. When I was down, she lifted me up. She encouraged me. I can remember one time I came to a point early in my ministry when I felt I never wanted to preach again. I went to bed totally discouraged. I woke up next morning feeling fine, ready to go. My wife had spent the whole night in prayer for me. I cannot thank God enough for a wife like that.

Now, wives, if you are going to encourage your husbands, there is a certain thing you will have to practice and it is called self-denial. Suppose you are sitting there feeling blue, mopey, dissatisfied, discontented with yourself, your husband, your home, your children, your car, but you know your husband is discouraged, too. What are you going to do? Are you going to tell him just how bad you feel and just how blue you are and just how much you need encouragement and help? Not if you are a good wife. That is where you have to deny yourself. You have to suppress your own discouragement, your own negative emotions, and just devote yourself to encouraging your husband; telling him what a fine husband he is, how much you love him, how much good he's doing you. Just pick out everything you can that is good and focus on it. You say, "Well, that's asking a lot." Maybe, but I'll tell you something else: You'll get a lot out of it. Because in the last resort, you'll reap what you sow into your husband.

So then, those are the responsibilities. The husband's responsibility, threefold: to be a head, to provide, to protect. The wife's responsibility summed up in the word to be a helper, and two primary ways of helping: to uphold and to encourage.

Now, closing my talk today let me just point out to you the two common basic failures of husband and wife. When a marriage fails it is usually because either or both have failed in these ways.

The common failure of the husband that is very common in our culture today is to abdicate his responsibility—not to be the head. Sometimes this can be done in a very quiet and negative way that doesn't appear but nevertheless, it is a failure.

The wife's common failure is just corresponding, it is to usurp responsibility—to take over headship. And there is a great danger of a vicious circle where the husband continually abdicates and the wife continually takes over, more and more responsibility. The only way that they can receive the needed grace is through the covenant commitment that God makes the basis of marriage.

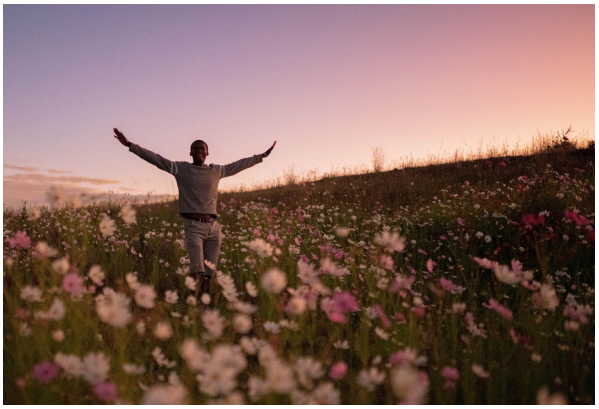
Now it's time to close. I trust my talks this week on the marriage relationship have helped you. I'll be back with you again next week at the same time Monday through Friday. My theme will be the key to successful relationships. Stay tuned now for some important announcements; in particular, how you may obtain a copy of my book, The Marriage Covenant. This will help you to understand more thoroughly the vital truths that I have been sharing with you this week. It can mean for you personally the difference between success and failure in the most important human relationship of your life.

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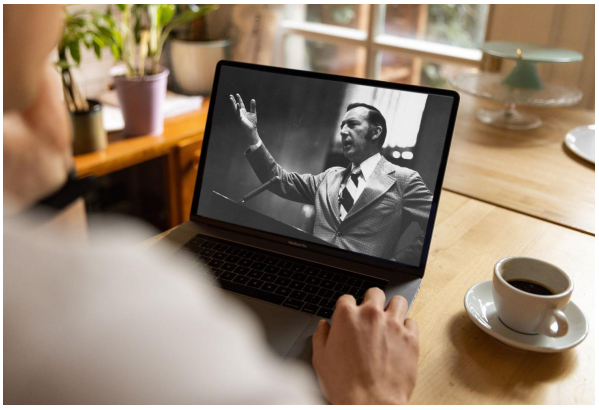
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