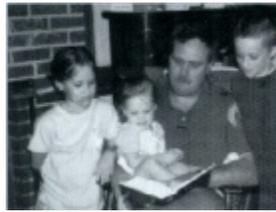




Why Won't He Lead At Home?



'Lord, give us men with willingness to lead at home.'

PCA News - As Children's Ministry International (CMI) does "Covenant Life Conferences" seminars around the country, one theme emerges time after time – the lack of spiritual leadership by the husband/father in the home. A constant lament of believing wives about their husbands is that "he is so reluctant to do anything in a Christian leadership way at home". Let me explore several reasons why this might be so and some possible solutions. Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 clearly state that husbands should take a loving leadership role in the Christian family. Why does it appear that husbands are not exercising this leadership? A simple answer is that men probably never saw biblical leadership exemplified themselves in their fathers. Consequently, they are clueless as to what headship in the home means, beyond being the provider/bring home the bacon/primary breadwinner. This type of role, by itself, is devoid of spiritual nurture and Christian leadership.

Another simple answer is to blame radical feminism for emasculating the modern man, demanding that he become an obsequious, warm and fuzzy partner that is ultimately disposable.

Although these two theories are certainly relevant, I think the true reason lies in the area of competency for the man and shame in not being able to measure up to what he knows he should be.

The Children's Catechism asks, "Of what were our first parents made?" Answer: "God made the body of Adam out of the ground and formed Eve out of the body of Adam." Man came from the soil, the earth. His

proclivity is to the soil from whence he came, literally, to work and be in the dirt. Taken another step, he is to be the chief provider and leader. He is the head of woman since she was taken from him and was made (originated from) him. Her inclination is to the relationship with Adam. As a result of the fall, man now rules over her in an unnatural and unloving way, despite her desire for a relationship with him. Her desire continues to be for her husband's intimate relationship, yet man continues to be alone, with his work to be done. It is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), yet he struggles in developing relationships with his wife and retreats to his inclination to work. It appears that human relationship building is harder for men than women. Being competent in an area is easier for man to grasp and work towards.

It is in the home where human relationships are all important. Women have an advantage here; the man may feel inadequate because he is away at work all day. In an agrarian society the husband and wife worked together on the land. But in a more urban culture, the man may retreat to an area in the home where he can feel competent. The man may feel more comfortable by being the "king of the castle," assuming nothing more than the economic provider role. By doing things around the home he can avoid relationship building in which he may feel inadequate.

For the first 12 years of my marriage I often talked about how important it was to have "family devotions," yet I knew that my wife would and could do them better. We never did them. When I finally was convinced that it was important for me to lead, even if my Bible knowledge and presentation were clearly inferior to my wife's, I plodded on ahead. Unknown to me, our pastor (who knew my wife's personality well) advised her to take a ministry of silence in my early efforts in starting a family altar. Instead of criticizing my meager attempts (my kids often remind me that those early devotions were as dry as dog bones midday in the Sahara) she wrote down her concerns and placed them in her Bible and prayed that I would keep the vision. A year later she found those notes and in tears realized that God had answered most of her concerns in ways that only could bring him the glory.

I must say that men are fragile when it comes to their perceived competencies and inadequacies. When they know they are weak and then are criticized for it, especially by a spouse, retreat is a strong impulse. Men will try and find a way to be competent, if not at home than at work, on the sports field, or in the bar. So men strive to be competent in their dirt/mud-playing.

Perhaps this is why in Ephesians 5, one task the wife is given is to respect her husband. By respecting him, she does not point out weaknesses in a critical way. She respects his position even if he is not wholly fulfilling it. When a husband loses his respect at home, he is very apt to find it in other places.

How then is the husband to take the spiritual leadership role at home?

1. Mentoring. The church can help with mentors. Mature elders and deacons must take the lead. Sermons and classes can point out how a man can minister to his wife and family by becoming a shepherd/leader.

2. Priestly leadership. There are many helps for doing family devotions (CMI has a family devotion guide to assist here). There are other great books about strengthening one's marriage and taking responsibility. (Check out the PCA Christian Education and Publication Bookstore for many helpful books.)

3. Loving leadership. The wife must be careful not to assume the role of leader because he won't. Pray, pray and pray that when the husband is convicted by the Holy Spirit to become more involved as a leader in the home that he won't be met by a critical spirit or correcting word from the wife. There is a time for a ministry of silence and prayer. (Of course, this does not mean to be quiet when sin is taking place.)

4. Acknowledgement. The man must realize that he is weak in this area of spiritual leadership in the home. He may be dogged by fear of rejection and incompetence. To overcome this, he must rely on the Holy Spirit. He can confess this inadequacy to his wife and the two of them should pray together that God would equip him and give her patience.

None of this will be easy in a world that doesn't have time for such perceived frivolities. Our full schedules become cruel taskmasters that we can hide behind and the years quickly pass by. 'Lord, give us men willingness to lead at home.'

REACHING is published by Children's Ministry International, Incorporated. The newsletter is distributed to missionaries, parents, children, prayer and financial supporters, and field directors.

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