

I. WIFE'S ROLES

Perhaps more than at any other time in history, women today need a clear understanding of how they should relate to their husbands. In fact, the significant social changes brought about by the women's liberation movement over the last few decades have led to such confusion that the very idea of "roles" is repugnant to some. They feel as if somehow they lose their identity and their freedom if they adhere to some type of "outdated standard."

It's important for us to look clearly at what the Bible says on this subject. And while the Bible doesn't apply our modern word "role" to marriage, the Scriptures are clear about the unique responsibilities God assigns to a wife.

A. Be a helper to your husband.

While all of us are called to be helpers to others, the Bible places a special emphasis on this responsibility for wives. Genesis tells us that God realized it wasn't good for man to be alone, and that He decided to make a "helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). It is interesting to note that the Hebrew meaning of the word helper in this passage is found hereafter in the Bible to refer only to God as He helps us. The fact that this same word is applied to a wife signifies that we women have been given tremendous power for good in our husbands' lives. God has designed wives to help their husbands become all that God intends for them to be.

B: Respect your husband.

In Ephesians 5:33, Paul says, " ... the wife must respect her husband." When you respect your husband you reverence him, notice him, regard him, honor him, prefer him, and esteem him. It means valuing his opinion, admiring his wisdom and character, appreciating his commitment to you, and considering his needs and values.

Our husbands have many needs. The macho man who is self-contained, independent, and invulnerable is a myth. One day Dennis gave me a list of what he considered to be some of the primary needs most men have:

Self-confidence in his personhood as a man

- To be listened to
- Companionship
- To be needed

To me, meeting these needs is what respecting your husband is all about. To bolster Dennis's confidence, for example, I try to encourage him by being his number one fan. Every husband wants his wife to be on his team, to coach him when necessary, but most of all to be his cheerleader. A husband needs a wife who is behind him, believing in him, appreciating him, and cheering him on as he goes out into the world every day.

C. Love your husband.

Titus 2:4 calls for wives "to love their husbands." A good description of the kind of love your husband needs is "unconditional acceptance." In other words, accept your husband just as he is—an imperfect person.

Love also means being committed to a mutually fulfilling sexual relationship. I realize there is a whole lot more to love than

sex, but we are looking at how to fulfill God's command to love our husbands. Therefore, we must look at love from their perspective, not just our own.

Surveys show that sex is one of a man's most important needs—if not the most important. When a wife resists intimacy, is uninterested, or is only passively interested, her husband may feel rejection. It will cut at his self-image, tear at him to the very center of his being, and create isolation.

My husband's sexual needs should be more important and higher on my priority list than menus, housework, projects, activities, and even the children. It does not mean that I should think about sex all day and every day, but it does mean that I find ways to remember my husband and his needs. It means I save some of my energy for him. It keeps me from being selfish and living only for my own needs and wants. Maintaining that focus helps me defeat isolation in our marriage.

D: Submit to the leadership of your husband.

Just mention the word "submission," and many women immediately become angry and even hostile. This controversial concept has been highly debated and misunderstood.

Some husbands and wives actually believe submission indicates that women are inferior to men in some way. I have known women who think that if they submit they will lose their identity and become non-persons. Others fear (some with good reason) that submission leads to being used or abused.

Another misconception is that submission means blind obedience on the part of the woman. She can give no input to her husband, question nothing, and only stay obediently barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.

What does God have in mind? Here are two passages from Scripture:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. —Colossians 3:18-19

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. —Ephesians 5:22-30

These Scriptures make it clear that a wife should submit voluntarily to her husband's sensitive and loving leadership. Therefore, as I voluntarily submit to my husband, I am completing him. I am helping him fulfill his responsibilities, and I am helping him become the man, the husband, and the leader God intended him to be.

Building oneness in marriage works best when both spouses choose to fulfill their responsibilities voluntarily, with no pressure or coercion. To become the servant-leader God has commanded him to be, Dennis needs my gracious respect and submission. And when Dennis loves me the way he is commanded to, I can more easily submit myself to that leadership.

I do this with an attitude of entrusting myself to God. In one of his letters, Peter told us that even though Jesus suffered terrible pain and insults, He did not retaliate "but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). When you entrust your life to the Father, it's much easier to be the wife of an imperfect man, particularly when you may have disagreements.

A special note: Some of you may live with abuse or in excessively unhealthy and destructive conditions in your marriage. At times, it may be inappropriate or even life-threatening for you to apply unquestioningly the principles of submission. For example, if you are being physically or verbally abused, you need to take steps to protect yourself and your children. If you are in that situation, please discerningly seek out your pastor or someone wise who has been trained to help with your specific issue.

Loving, forgiving, and submitting do not mean that you become a doormat or indefinitely tolerate significantly destructive behavior.

II. HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER

If you have ever sewn a dress, or attempted to sew one, you know how a pattern works. The pattern is made of many pieces, some large and some small, none of which accurately resemble the finished product.

When you lay out the pattern and cut the cloth, you do not have a garment but only some scraps of cloth. When it is properly assembled and made usable with buttons, snaps, or a zipper, these pieces make a complete dress.

Every pattern has pairs of parts: two sleeves, two bodice pieces, a front and back skirt, and even the collar and facing pieces are usually in twos. A marriage is very similar. God has designed a master pattern for husbands and wives that, when followed, will create a whole, usable, beautiful marriage.

In the same way a dress can be made in a variety of sizes and colors with numerous differences in detail from one pattern, so my marriage may look different from yours. As we acknowledge Christ as Lord of our lives, we must work out our marriages according to God's plan. The key is for each wife to follow God's plan, know her part, and work to fit in with her husband's responsibilities.

III. REFERENCE

- From FamilyLife.com
- Portions of this article were adapted from *Staying Close*, by Dennis and Barbara Rainey, 1989, Word Publishing