“COMPLETE – DON’T COMPETE!”

THE BIBLICAL ROLES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE
WRITER’S NOTE

I first started working on the roles of Husband and Wife over 35 years ago as our children began moving into marriage age. While my parents seemed to be good role models, it was obvious that I did not know, nor could I pass on to others, what the Bible had to say about marriage. So just as my wife and I had sought a church home when we began to raise a family, so did I now seek God’s wisdom for our marriage, and to pass on to our children.

Today, after 58 years of married life, and observing marriages over several generations, I am more firmly convinced than ever that God does have a plan for our lives, and that He gives us many guidelines and instructions about the roles He calls us to fill, including the roles of Husband and Wife.

As I studied, lived, and taught about these roles, many people helped me expand and better understand what God had in mind for this deepest of all human relationships. I am deeply indebted to them all. With gratitude, and thanksgiving to God, to my wife, and to all our children and grandchildren who have displayed such a high view of marriage over the years, I now renew these thoughts and pass them on once more to all who want to enjoy the “mystery of marriage”.

Marvin J. Martin
September, 2006
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I. THE GOAL

“...and the two shall become one flesh.”
(Ephesians 5:31; Genesis 2:24)

This is a message which is unashamedly in favor of Christian marriage. It is written out of a deep desire to help those of us whom God has called into marriage to live out our biblical roles as husbands and wives, and thereby build strong lifetime unions for God’s glory, for our enjoyment, and for the well-being of ourselves, our society and future generations.

This booklet does not have all the answers. In fact, it does not even discuss a whole array of issues that are important to marriage and our life in Christ, such as our relation to other family members, principles of finance, sexual intimacy, and many other vital subjects. But it does try to put together one piece of the puzzle; i.e.: What really are the biblical roles of husband and wife? How are males and females to “fit” together in the institution we call Christian marriage?

Many of the conclusions that we reach will not be popular in today’s culture. However, the real test is whether they properly reflect balanced biblical teachings. As always, each reader has the responsibility to study what is said here and to test it against the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the counsel of other godly Christians. Only the Scriptures are totally correct and infallible. Hopefully, what is written here that is of God will be heard and applied, and what is not will be silenced and discarded.

Marriage is, of course, a mystery (Ephesians 5:32). It is discussed, analyzed, sometimes idealized, and sometimes disparaged. But, like the union between Christ and His church, it remains a mystery that we never completely comprehend or understand. Yet for all the dimness surrounding it, and despite the current attacks upon it, the institution of marriage remains the bedrock of all other human relationships. How we treat one another in this most intimate of relationships designed by God will flow and ripple out into all other relationships and institutions in which we are engaged.
At a time when lifelong marriage appears to many to be an illusive, almost unreachable goal, it seems imperative that we study carefully God’s Word which ordains this relationship to determine how He tells us that marriage can best succeed. **We need this understanding, not only for our own happiness, but for the support and well-being of all future generations.**

All marriages, of course, are made up of imperfect people—and two imperfect people can’t make a perfect marriage. However, there are many **good** lifetime marriages. Admittedly, they are often battle-scarred veterans who have withstood attacks from within and without, but they, and many of those around them, would conclude that their marriages are good, not perfect, but wholesome and good. This doesn’t happen simply by chance. Rather it seems to come from God’s grace and the application of His Word. Thus, while we see increasing marriage failures in a part of our society which is not following Christ and His principles, we also see strong, reasonably successful marriages developing among those who are willing to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and to apply His principles to their lives and marriages. Unfortunately, many marriages in past generations have succeeded because God’s principles were applied through the **traditions** of Christian faith rather than because there was any **personal relationship** with Jesus Christ or a personal understanding and daily application of God’s Word. Today, many are abandoning even these traditions! Therefore, unless future generations become aware of their need to have a personal relationship with Christ and to put into practice the lifestyle spelled out in the Bible, many of their lives, including their marriage lives, will likely end in failure from an eternal prospective.

It is for that reason that this booklet has been written. For some, it may discuss principles that are unpopular and difficult to accept. But much of Jesus’ teachings are hard. He notes at the end of His great Sermon on the Mount that “...**small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**” Then He makes the following conclusion about our lives and our homes:
“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

(Matthew 7:24-27)

Because many are not following biblical principles, our homes are now crashing at an unbelievable rate as 1 out of 2 marriages crumble and fall! Hopefully, followers of Christ will increasingly turn and build their homes on the Rock of Jesus Christ and His Word and thereby produce fruitful, lifetime marriages, rather than continue down the road to destruction by following the traditions and false wisdom of the world that surrounds us.
II. THE ROLES

“...male and female He created them.”
(Genesis 1:27)

Some of the most helpful portions of Scripture that speak specifically to the roles of husband and wife are found in Genesis 1-3; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1Peter 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7 and 11:1-16; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; and Proverbs 31: 10-31. There are many themes and principles which need to be applied from these Scriptures and from the totality of God’s Word as well as the counsel of other godly Christians in order to produce godly marriages. However, one theme that seems to need to be studied, discussed and applied more specifically than has occurred in the past is that husbands and wives should complete, not compete with one another in our marriages.

God has designed separate, but related, roles for men and women in much of life, including our marriages. We need to accept the roles God has given to us and learn to complete, not compete with our spouses. Honestly helping one another to succeed in our biblical roles as husbands and wives can help build successful, enjoyable, fruitful marriages.

It seems incumbent upon us, therefore, to understand, accept and apply the unique biblical roles of husbands and wives to the marriage relationship. There appear to be four principles for men and women that can help strengthen our marriage relationships and help them to succeed. These are not legalistic rules, but broad principles that appear as themes throughout the Bible. As one observer put it, “These are God’s ideals, not his requirements, for marriage.” There are many more principles, of course, but these four seem especially important. They are hard and costly, but they are worth the effort. They are summarized by four steps for each of the partners:
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In the following pages, we will look at these counterbalancing principles of **LEADING** and **FOLLOWING**, **LOVING** and **RESPECTING**, **PROVIDING** and **INCREASING**, and **PRAISING** and **GLOWING** as they help to provide the basis for lifetime, fruitful, enjoyable marriages.
STEP 1

“LEAD AND FOLLOW”

Lead

“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

(1 Corinthians 11:3)

God in His sovereignty has assigned roles, including strengths and limitations, to all His people. While we are equally valuable in His sight, our functions vary. He assigns our locations and our times (Acts 17:26). He makes the blind and the deaf (Exodus 4:11). He knows us before we are born (Psalm 139:13-16). He makes us male and female (Genesis 1:27). He not only assigns our mental and physical characteristics and abilities, but also distributes His spiritual gifts upon us as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Leadership in the Bible

Despite the tremendous societal pressure against this position today, the Bible reveals that the role of leadership during Bible times was usually, although not always, men’s responsibility. For example:

1. God made man first, then woman, and decreed that man would “rule over” his wife. (Genesis 2:7, 18-23, 3:16)
2. It was Eve who was deceived and first ate the forbidden fruit, but because Adam followed his wife rather than exercising the responsibility of leadership he had been given by God, Adam, not Eve, has been credited through history as the person responsible for man’s fall. (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12-21)
3. Virtually all Old Testament Jewish leaders (in their families, tribes, nation, temple, and synagogues) were men.
4. All Books of the Bible—both the Old and New Testament—appear to have been written by men.
5. In the New Testament, all the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus were men.

6. The responsibilities of New Testament “elders” were directed to men (1 Timothy 3:1-7) who were also to manage their own families well (v. 4-5). (See also Titus 1:6-9)

7. The role of the wife as a “helper” rather than “head” of the family is a consistent theme throughout both the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1).

While there are occasional references to Godly leaders such as Deborah, the Judge, and to prophetic gifts used by a few women (such as Miriam, the sister of Moses, in the Old Testament (Exodus 15:20) and Phillip’s daughters in the New Testament (Acts 21:9), the great preponderance of evidence seems to make it clear that men carried most of the burden of leadership in both Old and New Testament times.

**Defining Leadership**

In order to understand the role of the husband as the “leader” of the family, let’s first define this term. The world often equates leadership with power, prestige and privilege. The Bible says leadership requires service. Jesus compared these two views this way:

> “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”
> (Matthew 20:25-28)

Leadership is not the same as command. Command is the legal authority that forces a subordinate to obey. The Centurion understood this principle as he said:

> “For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘do this,’ and he does it.”
> (Luke 7:8)
Military officers can command their subordinates, parents can command their children, and supervisors can even command their employees, as long as the law (including the law of the institution) and public policy are not violated. Command, therefore, depends upon authority. Those under such authority are required to obey.

**Servant Leadership**

By contrast, biblical leadership depends upon an individual being so attractive that others want to follow. Leaders neither drive nor abandon their subordinates: they serve them.

As we analyze the question of leadership, it causes us to ask, “Who was the greatest leader who ever lived?” The answer, of course, is Jesus Christ. Over one billion people follow Jesus Christ today. Not because they are required to do so, but because they desire to do so.

What is the quality that causes so many to submit and to follow Him? At least part of the answer is found in John 13. It was the night before Jesus was betrayed. John recounts how Jesus began to wash His disciples’ feet. When He came to Peter, this Apostle responded as we probably would if our “leader” began to serve us in this menial fashion, and he told Jesus, “…you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus said unless He did, Peter couldn’t have any part of Him, so Peter acquiesced. When Jesus had completed His servant’s task, He told His Apostles that they called Him “Teacher” and “Lord,” and so He was, but that He had done this service as an example and they should do likewise.

The message is clear: Those who lead must serve.

**Be Strong Enough to Lead**

It requires strength, courage and self-sacrifice to lead. But it will set the tone for everything else which occurs in our marital relationships. Unless the husband is strong enough to lead, the wife cannot follow. The wife intuitively knows her husband must be
strong enough to lead, so she may test him to determine whether she is safe in her role as “helper,” or whether she needs to take charge in order to protect herself and her children.

As one husband put it, “Your wife will fight you for the leadership of your marriage, but be terribly disappointed if she wins.”

Husbands must lead.

**How Does a Real Leader “Lead”?**

- **Makes time for people** – We are attracted to those people who have time for us. One individual, speaking about the person who had the greatest impact upon his life, said, “He always had time for me.” If husbands truly want to lead their wives, they must make time for them.

- **Finds ways to serve** – Leaders serve those who follow them in order that the followers may succeed in the work they are called to do. The paradox is that, while the wife is to be a “helper” to the husband, she often cannot succeed in this unless he first serves her. We will discuss at length below the ways in which husbands provide for and protect their wives in order that wives can succeed in the work they are called to do.

- **Stays in front and in motion** – We cannot lead from behind or sitting down. It requires that we be in front and that we be in motion. This is called the “point” position in the military. It is the person who often gets “shot at” first. It is the person who leads the way in difficult situations rather than allowing their subordinates to lead. Jesus repeatedly said, “Follow me,” as he demonstrated the way for us. Husbands have this same obligation and opportunity with their wives and family.

- **Cares about those who follow** – There are all kinds of leaders: fiery and quiet, athletic and intellectual, bombastic and deliberate, but they all have one thing in common if they are successful leaders – they care about their followers. While followers want to know that their leaders love Jesus, they also want to know that they care about their followers. As one wife said, “I don’t want you to do it just for Jesus, I want you to do it for me.” All followers need the assurance that they are deeply loved.
Both Moses and Paul exhibited an almost unbelievable amount of love for their followers: to the point that they were apparently willing to lose their own eternal salvation in their great desire for their followers to receive the salvation and love of God. For example, when the Israelites sinned, Moses said to God:

“*But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.*“ (Exodus 32:32)

And Paul, speaking about the Jews who would not accept Christ said:

“For *I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race . . .*” (Romans 9:3)

Leaders who exhibit this kind of care toward their followers can expect their followers to follow them.

**Learn to Follow – The Model**

This brings us to an interesting point. As the roles of husbands and wives and the four elements of LEAD, LOVE, PROVIDE, and PRAISE and their counterparts of FOLLOW, RESPECT, INCREASE and GLOW were being discussed by a group, one of the participants said, “Actually, the husband must be in the same position to Christ as the wife is to the husband.” What an astute observation!

When we superimpose this concept of the husband’s submission to Christ on our diagram, it causes it to look like this:

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<tr>
<th>CHRIST</th>
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<tr>
<td>(HUSBAND)</td>
<td>(WIFE)</td>
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<td>LEAD</td>
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</table>
Unless the husband is willing to demonstrate this submission to his leader, Christ, he creates rebellion among those who should follow him. One wife made this clear to her husband as she inquired, “Do you know when I became willing to follow you?” “When?” he asked. “When I saw you follow Jesus!” she responded.

Thus, when we look at each element of the wife’s role, it is clear that husbands are to carry out this subordinate role to Christ before they exercise the role of leader in their families. For example:

**Follow.** Jesus said:

> “Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'” (Luke 9:23)

**Respect.** Scriptures are replete with the theme of fearing (respecting) God. For example:

> “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”
>  
> (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

**Increase.** God, at the very beginning of the world, gave mankind the responsibility to increase and to subdue what He had handed to them.

> “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”
>  
> (Genesis 1:28; see also Genesis 9:7)

**Glow.** All of us ultimately would like to glow and reflect our Maker. We would be like Moses when he came down from God’s presence with his face so radiant that he veiled it:

> “When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord’s presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.”
>  
> (Exodus 34:33-35)
Or Stephen whose face shown like an angel as he proclaimed Jesus immediately before he was stoned to death (Acts 6:15).

Husbands, therefore, need to follow Christ, then be a model of His humble, servant leadership to their wives. Both husbands and wives can then exercise such servant leadership to their children.

Follow

“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.”

(1 Corinthians 11:11)

Submission in the Bible

This brings us to the question of wives following and submitting to the leadership of husbands. There is no question that this is a great theme of the Bible. For example:

“To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’”

(Genesis 3:16)

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”

(Ephesians 5:22-23)

“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

(Colossians 3:18)

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”

(1 Timothy 2:11-12)

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives. . .For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands . . .”

(1 Peter 3:1,5)
“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”
(1 Corinthians 11:3)

“Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”
(Titus 2:4-5)

These are not isolated, out-of-context statements, but a consistent theme.

But is it a proper position for wives today? Is it demeaning to be a follower? To analyze this issue, let’s look at several questions.

**First, are followers less valuable?**

Jesus Himself pointed the way on this issue. He demonstrated the difference between function and value. Functionally, Jesus subordinated himself to God the Father to carry out His role on earth (1 Corinthians 11:3). But this subordination did not lower His value, as shown by the Scripture which tells us that Jesus contains all of God (Colossians 1:19).

Followers are not less valuable than leaders.

**Second, is it “unfair” for wives to have the role of “follower”?**

God assigns as He wills. He emphasized men’s inability to have children when He asked Jeremiah the rhetorical question:

“Ask and see: Can a man bear children?”
(Jeremiah 30:6)

By contrast, Jesus in speaking of a woman’s role in bearing children said:

“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.”
(John 16:21)
A man will never feel a child in his womb nor know the deep pain followed by the marvelous joy of birth of a new life into the world. Never will he hold a child to nurse at his breast as his nourishment flows into and gives life to his child. Is God unfair to men (or to women who are unable to bear children)? No! No matter how much we protest and complain, we cannot, nor should we desire to, change our God-given physical body.

By the same rationale, God is not unfair to the wife when He assigns to her husband rather than to her the pain and joy of leadership while ordinarily giving her the pain and joy of bearing children (1 Timothy 2:15). Neither a husband nor a wife is less valuable than the other. They are only carrying out their different functions. They are not meant to compete with one another by both leading or by both giving birth to children, but rather to complete one another by carrying out their separate roles.

**Third, is it beneficial for wives to follow?**

Husbands and wives are different in many ways. Yet, they are joined. 1 Peter 3:7 (RSV) says that they are “joint heirs of the grace of life.” Like joint tenancy in property holdings, a husband and wife are two and yet one.

Husbands and wives have so much to give and to receive from one another. But part of what God has for a husband he must receive through his wife. Part of what He has for her will of necessity flow through her husband. How tragic if either of them attempts to compete with the other’s position, rather than functioning in their own position and blessing them both.

Take, for example, the way we look at life. In general, husbands seem to look outward, to see into the distance, like a telescope pointing outward toward infinity. By contrast, the wife traditionally looks inward as if looking through a microscope for the details. While he is usually concerned with long-term goals, she is often making sure the family is well clothed and cared for today.
But, we ask, which way is infinity further—outward through the telescope or inward through the microscope? Both are infinite. And, which is more important—to see infinity outwardly, or inwardly? Both are equally valuable. But what a tragedy if husbands and wives compete by both seeing life only thorough two telescopes pointed outward or through two microscopes pointed inward. If they compete, they do not complete, and both are poorer. Ultimately, their dissatisfaction can lead them further apart. How wonderful if they complete one another by each looking through their respective lenses and sharing what they learn.

**Finally, what about interdependence?**

The real answer, of course, is not independence of husbands, nor dependence of wives, but interdependence of husbands and wives. 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 says:

“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”

How ironic! The first woman came from man. Every other man has come from a woman. God has not made us independent nor dependent. Instead, he has made husbands and wives interdependent.

1 Peter 3:1 of the Living Bible encourages wives to “fit in with” their husband’s plans. As a young couple approached an onlooker one day, he realized that they actually “fit together” physically. The man had broad shoulders and narrow hips; the wife was just the opposite. “Why?” the observer asked himself. Then it became clear to him. A function of the wife is to “carry” men from gestation through birth and infancy. The responsibility of men is to “carry” women when they are grown.

**Oneness**

God does not want competition between husbands and wives. He states in both the Old and New Testaments that He wants oneness:
“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

(Genesis 2:23-24)

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”.

(Ephesians 5:31)

He wants us to have the fullness known in no other way than can happen in marriage. It is so sacred and wonderful that only the analogy of Christ Himself and His own bride can show its riches and fullness (Ephesians 5:22-32).
STEP 2

“LOVE AND RESPECT”

Love

“However, each of you also must love his wife as he loves himself . . .”
(Ephesians 5:33a)

The key to the Christian life is love. When we submit ourselves to another, or, as it has been said, “put ourselves under the protection of another,” such action calls forth in them a desire to love and care for us. True, it can also give them the opportunity to use and to abuse us. But those who are controlled by the spirit of God will see the opportunity and responsibility to love and care for their followers—whether it be their wife and children in the family, employees in business, members in the church, or citizens in government. Leaders in each of these institutions will have to account to God for their use of this responsibility and power (e.g., Hebrews 13:17; Colossians 4:1).

Defining Biblical Love

There are many discussions about “love” in both the Old and the New Testaments. But what is biblical “love” and how does a husband practice it with his wife? In response to a question, Jesus summarized the Great Commandment of the Old Testament as follows:

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37-39 Emphasis added)

But when He Himself was preparing to leave His disciples, He gave them a new Commandment which characterized the boundless, sacrificial love of Christ.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
(John 13:34-35 Emphasis added)
The definition of this new boundless love that we are to emulate is found in 1 John 3:16:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

(Emphasis added)

And it is this same boundless love that Paul uses to describe a husband’s responsibility to his wife:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

(Ephesians 5:25-28 Emphasis added)

The husband, as the leader of the family, is to lead in demonstrating this kind of love. It is not that he is not to respect his wife. To the contrary, as Peter says in his first letter:

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

(1 Peter 3:7)

But this respect for a wife is not listed first. Instead, it seems to be the result of recognizing and accepting the responsibility to love and care for this partner who, because of God’s design, has been called to function as the “weaker” vessel who subordinates herself and is willing to make herself vulnerable by childbirth (if that is God’s plan for her)—unable to defend herself because of the awkward disability that carrying, bearing and caring for children will bring.

**How Do Husbands Give Themselves Up for Their Wives?**

The question is often asked, “How does a husband “give himself up” for his wife?” Much of this comes by “Providing” for and “Praising” his wife, as we will discuss below. But there are also some other practical ways. For example:
Be There!

Bread-winners can become so caught up in their role as achievers in the work world that they abandon the role of loving their families. A young woman was once asked, “How do you know if someone loves you?” She quickly responded, “If they want to be with you.”

The answer is sound. One of the ways we demonstrate our love for anyone, including God, is to spend time with them.

Spending time physically is not enough. As one wife said, “I would rather he were not here than to be here when he’s not here.” In other words, one of the ways a husband gives himself up for his wife is when he gives her his whole self when they are together. When he listens to his wife, not out of duty, but out of interest. When he is interested in what his wife is interested in. When he weeps as his wife weeps and rejoices as she rejoices. In all these things, a husband demonstrates that he is laying down his life for his wife.

Be a Lover

1 Corinthians 13 is the great New Testament chapter on “love.” Verses 4 to 7 provide a broad checklist for husbands to use as they lead in demonstrating love for their wives. This “love list,” like the activities of the “godly woman” spelled out in Proverbs 31, is overwhelming and impossible for any one person to perform. However, it’s not impossible for God to perform through us. God is love. If we concentrate on giving ourselves up and allowing Him to live and act through us, He can bring this quality of love into our marriage. By His grace, then, a husband needs to try:

1. **To be patient** with his wife (and others). It is easy to be impatient, especially with a “subordinate.” When waiting for dinner at home or leaving for an evening out, is the husband disgusted because of delays, or does he thank God for the privilege of learning the godly quality of patience?

2. **To be kind** to his wife (and others). The quality of kindness relates to feelings. By nature, women often seem to be more sensitive than men. A
husband’s actions (and inactions), his choice of words, and his tone of voice, often tell her sensitive ears and eyes whether he is being kind or callous.

3. **Not to envy** his wife (or others). Husbands need to release their wives to be the persons God called them to be. Writings in the New Testament do not seem to give the husband the right to command his wife to submit and follow his directions. Instead, the burden seems to be on the wife to submit voluntarily in obedience to God’s command.

4. **Not to boast** to his wife (or others). It is easy to become a bore. All it takes is constantly telling others about our abilities and successes. When we truly love others, we try to give ourselves up and concentrate on helping them to succeed.

5. **Not to exhibit pride** to his wife (or others). Pride may be a man’s greatest enemy. Husbands are anointed with leadership, not to be called “great,” but to serve those who follow. If husbands forget this, they may treat their wives as less valuable. They also may, unconsciously, pressure them to act in a way that will elevate the husband’s position in the eyes of the world. Paul says it this way:

   “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

   (Philippians 2:3-4)

6. **Not to be rude** to his wife (or to others). Leadership brings the opportunity to feel much more important than we are. What a husband does in the world may sometimes seem more important to him than the home-centered activities of his wife. If that happens, he can push his wife into a “less valuable” role. Then it can become a way of life as he feels the importance of his role gives him license to be rude to others, including his wife.

7. **Not to be self-seeking** from his wife (or others). Being in the lead can tempt us to seek the best for ourselves. What an ungodly life and improper
example and model is displayed when a position of leadership is used to enhance the leader’s own comfort, security, pleasure or position.

8. **Not to be easily angered** by his wife (or others). It is easy to display anger against or in the presence of those who are weaker and won’t retaliate. By contrast, we exercise great self-discipline, we “count to ten,” and we control our anger in the presence of those who are stronger or more powerful. How sad the increasing tendency of some men to verbally and physically abuse women and children rather than to love and care for them and to serve them so they can succeed in life.

9. **Not to keep a record of wrongs** with his wife (or others). Twice in Hebrews, the Old Testament is quoted to show that God actually **forgets our sins** (Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17). If God does this for sinful husbands, how can they do less for their wives? Saying we will “forgive” but we will “never forget” is a contradiction in terms. Love cannot be complete until we forget and no longer discuss nor dwell on past wrongs. As the Lord’s Prayer states, “Forgive us as we forgive others.”

10. **Not to rejoice in evil but in the truth** of his wife (or others). Sometimes we use other’s mistakes as an excuse or justification for our own bad thoughts, words or conduct. We begin to think negatively and dwell on the percentage of each other person which is imperfect—rather than praising the good and helping them move closer to the image of Christ. When a husband sees his wife as a creature whom God is bringing to perfection, he is motivated to do all he can to help her succeed, just as he wants her to help him be successful in order that they may mutually enjoy one another and that God may be glorified through their marriage.

11. **To protect** his wife (and others). If a wife is truly a husband’s jewel and his most important person, he will go to all possible lengths to protect her.

12. **To trust** his wife (and others). Most of us react the way we are treated. If we mistrust, we build suspicion and doubt in the other person. If we trust, it
can usually become a self-fulfilling prophecy that produces the best that was in the other person.

13. **To hope** for his wife (and others). As the leader in marriage, the husband can often set its tone. If he looks confidently toward the future, he builds confidence and hope in his wife. By contrast, if a husband despairs and dwells in doubt and gloom, he can expect his wife to react accordingly.

14. **To persevere** with his wife (and others). One of the great hallmarks of lifetime marriages is perseverance. As one person put it, “We are still married because we decided to be.” Or, as another one stated, “Divorce was never an option.” There are times in every marriage when separation and divorce could be sought under our current lax divorce laws. But we do well not only to persevere, but never even to contemplate divorce, since such thoughts have a way of leading to action. If divorce is not an option, it makes marriage commitment much more a matter of fact, rather than a burden.

Only a few things are eternal and totally reliable. One of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:8 in the New International Version says, “Love never fails.” In the Revised Standard Version, it is translated, “Love never ends.” Both are right. How wonderful to know that the love of God that flows from Him back and forth through a husband and wife is something that is totally reliable and will last forever. How wonderful to know that this love can go through eternity with both a husband and wife, and that they can go through eternity together through the grace and love of God. How wonderful that He gives us a foretaste of heaven now through giving and receiving love, beginning with the love of a husband for his wife that He compares to Christ and the church.
Respect

“. . . and the wife must respect her husband.”
(Ephesians 5:33b)

Motivated by Love

Looking forward, we are motivated by either hope of gain or fear of loss. In the spiritual realm, that means heaven or hell. Looking backwards, we are motivated by gratitude or revenge. Of all these, the most mature motivation seems to be gratitude for what we have already received. Thus, we do not work for Christ in order to receive our future salvation, instead we submit our life to Him to use us as He will out of gratitude for the great sacrifice He has already performed for us and all the rest of mankind.

The same would appear to be true of motivation between husband and wife. While we are tempted to act right in order to receive a future reward from our spouse, the most mature motivation is to act out of gratitude for the past. Thus, a Godly wife who sees her husband love and give himself up for her as Christ did for the church is deeply stirred with gratitude. She is a natural reactor. She usually responds as she is treated. If she is driven or abandoned, she can be expected to act with resistance or independence; but if she is loved, as Christ loved the church, it will ordinarily bring forth in her an overwhelming sense of gratitude and respect. She will usually come to respect and love her husband, not to compete or to fight with him, because he first loved her.

It is interesting that in discussing the husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 5, 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3, nowhere does it command the wife to love their husband. A wife’s desire to love her husband will usually flow automatically from receiving love from him. In speaking of God’s love, the Apostle John said, “We love because He first loved us.” (I John 4:19) The same is surely true of love between husband and wife. As the leader, the husband is commanded to love his wife. She in turn is to respect and ultimately to love him in return. In addition, Paul explained to Titus that wives are to be trained by older women to love their husbands (Titus 2:4), probably because true Christian love may take years to develop and mature.
Many wives, of course, love their husbands long before the husband loves them. Yet that doesn’t appear to be God’s best plan for a strong marriage. Instead, men are commanded to lead in loving and giving themselves up for their wives and families. Their failure to do so has been one of the great complaints and rationale for women needing to step into the male role, as they are now increasingly doing in single-parent families and in business, church and government. Because men have sometimes abused their wives and children or abdicated from their responsibility to lead or to love those who follow them, many women have had no choice but to accept the responsibilities God designated for men as the head of the household. But this is second best!

**Man’s Great Yearning**

Men seem to need respect from their wives even before they need love. Men can be encouraged by the respect, or greatly damaged by the lack of respect, given to them—especially by their wives. Husbands need to know that their wife, as their closest confidante and most important critic, respects what they are doing in life. Women receive a sense of fulfillment (and great respect in earlier generations) from having children. But men have no children to come from their bodies. While men may deeply love and care for their children, they can never have the same sense of physical oneness with them as mothers who spend nine months in total physical union with the child, and then bring forth into the world an infant whom they cuddle and feed, often from their own bodies.

For this reason, men desperately need their wives’ respect about the work that they are doing, just as she needs encouragement in the role of a wife and mother that God has given to her. One discouraged husband almost abandoned his God-given gift of teaching God’s Word as he cried out, “I think I’ll quit teaching. My wife seems embarrassed or on edge about everything I say in class.” Another husband seemed almost to “wilt” as his wife publicly criticized his incorrect language in a small crowd at a party when she said, “Oh he always talks like that. He never uses correct English.”

A too common complaint among men seems to be: “I can’t ever please her.”
Respect Toward the Office
For these reasons, a wife should cultivate the habit of respecting her husband, not because of his actions, but because of his office. He, like the judge in the courtroom, or the ruler of a church body, deserves respect simply because he is the husband, appointed by God to lead his family. Treating him with respect enhances and affirms his office and his ability to carry out his role. Disrespect can cause him to lose his self-esteem and never become the husband he could have been. If this happens, everyone loses: the husband, the wife, their children, their extended family, friends, and society as a whole.

Criticism and Control
We should be very careful about criticizing others (Matthew 7:1-5). This is especially true for wives, who need to help meet their husbands’ need for respect.

Neither should wives attempt to control their husband’s future. Some women seem to see (like Michelangelo) a statue of David in the block of granite who is called their husband. But a wife cannot force this figure into existence. Instead, she can only respect and patiently encourage and help him as he emerges and blossoms through God’s grace to be the husband God had designed.

This doesn’t mean that she is not to reprove him. Few people love us enough to tell us for our own benefit where we err. Husbands desperately need this kind of honest reproof, especially from their wife, who knows them best. The key seems to be whether or not the statement is made for retaliation or for the success of the hearer. And the tone and tenor of the reproof is often the way the reprover’s true attitude is revealed.

Be Careful about the Counsel of Other Men
Men may find it difficult to compete with other men for their wives’ respect. Negatively comparing a husband to another man can be destructive. In addition, wives receiving counsel from other men may cause problems. Perhaps that’s why St. Paul instructed Titus to teach the older women who in turn could train the younger women how to love their
husbands (Titus 2:3-5). Such training is an important ministry for older women that badly needs to be accepted and taught, rather than placing the full burden of such training on already overworked pastors and other professional counselors.

**Be Wives and Not Mothers to Husbands**

Some women, unfortunately, attempt to extend their “mother instinct” to the relationship with their husbands, and sometimes an immature husband will feel comfort in this child role. It has been said, “A woman should be careful of becoming attached to a man looking for a mother.” It may provide an outlet for certain emotions, but it probably won’t be the basis for a strong marriage.
STEP 3
“PROVIDE AND INCREASE”

Provide

“After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.” (Ephesians 5:29)

Motivating Husbands to Provide

It is difficult for women to understand or comprehend how much a man wants to provide for a wife who follows and respects him. It arouses in him all the manliness he possesses. He becomes far greater than he felt he could become because he realizes she is dependent on him to care for her. There are many needs a husband can provide that will strengthen a marriage.

Economic Needs

A wife who was trying to implement biblical teaching in her life told this story:

“Shortly after my husband and I became Christians, I knew that I needed a particular item, as my old one was wearing out. In the past, I had tried to convince my husband to get me the very best possible, but in our economic condition, it was always modest. This time, I decided simply to rely on him to provide for me as the Scriptures had commanded. When he asked me what I wanted, I told him I was just looking for him to provide as he thought best. To my surprise, he brought home a beautiful new gift which was much more than I would have requested.”

She had learned a valuable lesson. A Godly husband wants to provide the very best he can for a Godly wife who respects and follows him. It gives both of them pleasure when this happens.

Unfortunately, as women pursue careers outside the home, they become more and more economically independent, and there is less reason for the man to feel a responsibility to provide for her. In fact, in the short term, her working relieves his economic burden, and he can begin not only to condone but to encourage it. As he does so, they receive short-term economic help, but they may sow the seeds for later difficulties. Not that Godly
wives are not to have wealth, nor to be income-producers. Jesus himself was supported by
as well as the “proverbial Godly woman” in Proverbs 31 that we will discuss later, both
make it clear that Godly women often have engaged in producing income. It seems,
however, the question is whether or not she majors in being a wife (and usually a mother)
while carrying on some economic activity as a minor part of her responsibility in
conjuction with the home, not in competition to it.

- Occupation. A husband must, of course, be prepared to provide for a wife when they
become married. When a father answers the questions, “Who gives this woman to be
married to this man?” it signifies the passing of responsibility to the new husband for
the provision and protection of his new bride.

In this modern world, it means the husband must be trained so that he is ready, willing
and able to provide for the economic needs of himself, his wife and their family.
While this may mean some initial sacrifice, it will pay large dividends in maintaining a
lifetime marriage relationship. As Proverbs says:

”Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.”
(Proverbs 24:27)

- Home. If a wife is to center her career at home, the husband needs to provide a
dwelling and furnishings as tools for her work. Just as he needs tools for his vocation,
so does she for hers. Because of current market values, many can often begin, at least,
by renting rather than buying—and not be saddled with the problems of sale in our
mobile society.

- Debt. There are many areas in which economists disagree. But one area of increasing
agreement among those who proclaim themselves to be Christian financial advisors is
the undesirability of debt. In our government, our businesses and our personal lives,
we have placed enormous burdens on ourselves through massive debt. Proverbs 22:7 says:

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.”

We have moved from being the largest creditor nation to the largest debtor nation in the world in just a few short years. Bankruptcy courts are full of companies and individuals seeking relief. Husbands need to protect themselves and their families from debt.

- Allocation of Finances. Husbands should take great care to reach agreement with their wives on each area of financial responsibility and the funds needed by the husband and the wife to carry out their responsibilities. The husband should then be sure that the funds are always available on or before the date scheduled. Being erratic will produce discord and disharmony.

Spiritual Needs
As an individual drove near a large church, he stopped at the traffic light to let church members who had just left their service cross the street. As he watched, he realized that the large majority were women. It was a graphic example of the historic problem in many churches in which men abandon church and leave spiritual leadership to their wives. This was confirmed as he spoke with the pastor of another group about leadership in their church, who said, “Let’s face it. It’s the women in church who get things done.”

The husband was commanded to be the head of the wife (1 Corinthians 11:3). This includes the responsibility for spiritual matters as well as physical matters. When husbands take the lead in prayer, Bible study and devotions both at home and in church, it provides a sense of security that the wife needs if she is to function effectively as a wife and mother rather than competing with her husband because he fails to carry out his responsibilities.
Physical Needs

• **Sex.** 1 Corinthians 7:4 says:

  “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.”

As the natural pursuers and aggressors in sexual matters, husbands seem to need little encouragement about leading in this area. Unfortunately, they may lead abruptly, and miss the subtlety of long-range physical relations that can culminate in enjoyable sexual activity for both sides.

Husbands need to lead in physical matters between husband and wife in areas other than sexual activity. Wives need attention and companionship both before and after physical union if the true oneness spoken of in Ephesians 5:31 and Genesis 2:24 is to become a reality.

Malachi 2:14 discusses “The wife of our youth.” When husbands are young and courting, they often provide attention, companionship, flowers, gifts and romance to capture the girl they want. These must all continue for a lifetime (although probably not with the same white-heat intensity) if we want our marriages to last for a lifetime.

• **Protection.** Rape and assault against women of all ages is becoming rampant in our society. If a wife is truly as her husband’s own body and the person whom he most cherishes, then he will want to protect her. Husbands should take the responsibility to make their wives as secure as possible. This includes 1) cars that don’t break down, 2) traveling with their wives or being sure they have traveling companions, 3) avoiding nighttime travel in dangerous areas, 4) providing secure homes with neighborhood watches, security systems, or other ways in which they can be secure.
Emotional Needs

When a wife determines (often in opposition to the tremendous pressure of society and her own need for fulfillment) to submit herself as a wife and mother in order that strong, lasting families can produce the fruit that God wants, she needs much encouragement. Wives need the same applause, appreciation and sense of accomplishment that the workplace provides. If women are going to be willing to remain in the role God designed for them as “helpers” and mothers, then that role must be placed back up on the pedestal of honor it held in earlier times.

Future Needs

Leaders have been described as those who see further into the future than others. When Thomas told Jesus that he didn’t know where Jesus was going and that he (Thomas) didn’t know the way, Jesus responded, “I am the way...” (John 14:5-6) In other words, Jesus seemed to be saying, “Follow me, Thomas. Your direction and security are in me. I hold your future in my hands.”

In a sense, wives who follow their husbands are in this same vulnerable position. They look to their husbands not only to provide for today, but for the future. As a result, husbands need to be like Jesus, who said he was going “to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2) They need to prepare and to plan so they can provide for the needs of their wives when the husband is gone or unable to provide.

This means establishing a cash reserve for rainy days that come into every family; life, medical and disability insurance; provision for education and retirement years; wills and trusts; and living wills and written instructions concerning assets and suggestions on how to proceed upon the husband’s death or incapacity.

Families, like other institutions, have both internal and external responsibilities. Cities have a mayor (outside) and a city manager (inside). Businesses have sales and public relations (outside) and production and employee relations (inside). Families have
husbands who are responsible to provide and to protect from the outside, while the wife securely builds a family from the inside. These responsibilities overlap and are interdependent, but each carries out a primary role while helping the other succeed in his or her primary role. In this way, they complete rather than compete with one another in their marriage. Again, reversal or abandonment of these assigned roles may give some short-term satisfaction and bring some success in single-parent homes and in the outside institutions of business, church and government, but these may prove to be counterproductive if our goal is lifetime, fruitful and fulfilling marriages.

**Increase**

“But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

(1 Timothy 2:15)

In the beginning, God made the world and all that is in it. Then He handed it to mankind and told us to increase (Genesis 1:28). This is what happens in fruitful marriages. Husbands begin the process and wives then increase what the husband has begun. Just as we need to be grateful to God for His provision, so should a wife be grateful for that which she receives from her husband and she needs to tell him so. The world is often a jungle. A husband survives much better when he is thanked, sincerely and often, for his efforts.

Let’s look at some of the areas where wives can increase what their husbands initially provide.

**Children**

The most basic “increase” is children. The husband provides the seed that is planted in the wife. Her egg then unites with this small deposit. She feeds it, cares for it, and in nine months she brings forth a child.
• **Biblical Examples.** The Scriptures are full of examples of Godly women who are extolled and remembered throughout history because they were wives and mothers. Sarah followed her husband Abraham, and in old age she brought forth a child. She and her husband became the mother and father of millions of descendants. Hannah prayed for and then gave back to God’s service her son, Samuel, who led and counseled the early Jewish nation. Loyal, dedicated Ruth sought out and submitted to older Boaz to become the great grandmother of King David. Elizabeth was described at length as the mother of John the Baptist. Most revered of all was Mary, the mother of Jesus, who accepted the seed from the Holy Spirit and brought forth the one we call Savior and Lord.

By contrast, only a few women in all the Bible (e.g., Judge Deborah in the Old Testament and tentmaker Priscilla in the New Testament) seemed to receive recognition and a place in God’s Word based primarily upon their outside careers.

• **“Nations in Their Wombs.”** Biblical women, like Rebekah, seemed to understand they carried whole “nations” in their wombs (Genesis 25:23). Today, women are being encouraged not to receive their fulfillment as wives and mothers from the patient increase of a small seed into mighty nations of God, but rather to receive fulfillment by being mighty persons themselves. Then, if there is time later in life, they can consider having a child or two for their fulfillment. Since it is difficult to handle all three areas of career, wife and children, women increasingly jettison the role of wife to concentrate on career and motherhood, not recognizing that we are increasingly producing generations of matriarchal units that flounder again and again, and we wonder why.

No longer are women generally encouraged to be the increasers and the womb of the future, instead they are often encouraged (by many Christian as well as non-Christian parents) to live for themselves for now. **But the inescapable fact is that the future of mankind lies in the wombs of the women of each generation.**
Obviously, it takes more than two children for couples to “increase.” Yet, much of the industrialized world is producing less than two children per couple, so that many nations are not only not “increasing,”—they are not even reproducing themselves!

- **Physical and Spiritual Children.** This is not to say that all of us should have physical children. Many who are married are unable to have children. Some of these will adopt, others will not. Others, like Paul, remain single and celibate, a role that is also honored and extolled by God (1 Corinthians 7). However, all Christians, whether or not they raise physical children, are to be involved in helping to bring forth and to raise to maturity the family of God (Colossians 1:27-29). The Bible says:

  “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”
  (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Each generation must decide for itself what it will sow and reap. If we live only for the current thrill of consumption and winning and receiving recognition in today’s world of business, government, sports, and even the formal church, then that’s what we will receive. But if we sow and reap both physical and spiritual children, we can someday say with the Psalmist:

  “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.”
  (Psalm 127:3)

Man’s society says, “Compete and consume now”- but this produces death when our generation is over. God’s society says, “Serve and increase.” This produces life and the generations multiply as we were commanded.

**Homes**

Wives carry on the basic functions of increasing not only in the conception and raising of children, but in all of life. The husband works and provides, and the wife increases for the benefit of the husband, the wife and their family. Food is turned into meals, cloth into
clothing, and a house into a home. In short, wives take all types of seeds that are provided by their husbands, and they produce gardens.

Again, neither of us is independent; we are interdependent. It isn’t that wives never produce money or husbands never work at home, but each spouse seems to have a biblical primary role in most fruitful lifetime marriages. How poor the marriage would be if both decide to become the “provider” with the result that neither has the time nor the energy to be the “increaser” and carefully nurture seeds into gardens that the whole family can enjoy.

Proverbs 31 is probably the most concentrated example of a Godly wife and mother. One woman said it made her tired just to read it! It is obviously a composite portrait; a goal that probably is never fully realized by any one wife any more than the composite “Lover” of 1 Corinthians 13 can be fully realized by one individual husband. But both provide excellent specific suggestions to show us better how to live out the roles of husband and wife.

As we read these verses, it is clear that a Godly wife is not a timid, withdrawing underling, but a strong partner in the family enterprise. Listen as she is described:

- Verse 10 - she is worth more than rubies.
- Verse 11 - she has the full confidence of her husband.
- Verse 12 - she brings her husband good, not harm for a lifetime.
- Verse 13 - she sews.
- Verse 14 - she shops.
- Verse 15 - she rises early to provide food and to direct her servants.
- Verse 16 - she purchases land and plants.
- Verse 17 - she works physically.
- Verse 18 - she buys and sells.
- Verse 19 - she makes clothing.
- Verse 20 - she helps the poor.
- Verse 21-22 - she makes clothing and bedcoverings for her family.
Verse 23 - her respected husband is an elder at the city gate.
Verse 24 - she makes and sells clothing to merchants.
Verse 25 - as she works for her family, she is clothed with strength and dignity and she is not afraid of the future.
Verse 26 - she speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction.
Verse 27 - she is busy as she watches over the affairs of her household.

It seems clear that a wife’s work is concentrated at home as she “watches over the affairs of her household...”

In the New Testament, Lydia, before acknowledging Christ, was a “dealer in purple cloth.” Obviously, she was a businesswoman. It isn’t stated, however, whether she was married, had children, or what she did as her principal occupation after the conversion took place (Acts 16:14). Priscilla was a “tentmaker” with her husband Aquila, and worked for a time with the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:3). Again, it isn’t clear whether they had children, nor whether or not this was a home occupation. However, Paul’s instruction to Titus concerning the way older women were to train your Christian wives is clear:

“Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the work of God.”

(Titus 2:4-5)

God also gave special instructions and provision for the care of widows (but not of widowers) in both the Old and New Testament (Deuteronomy 14:29; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). This seems to indicate that the principal vocation and means of sustenance of wives (but not husbands) was inside of marriage, since the church and relatives were to care for older widows, and younger widows were to remarry. By contrast, the “church” today seems largely to have abandoned widows’ physical support, just as many husbands have abandoned their wives’ physical support. As a result, modern wives, including many Christian wives, are now encouraged to pursue vocations and careers outside the home since there is no provision by the family or the church to care for them when they are
widowed. Instead, our society encourages women to work outside the home so they themselves can receive additional income now and broader pension and Social Security benefits when they become older or widowed.

This brings us to an interesting question. Can wives, “have it all”; i.e., a husband, family and career, during their lifetime? Obviously, none of us can have everything. However, it appears that wives may (if they are patient and do it in tandem) have a husband, then children, then their career. Of course, after children are raised, older women still have the responsibility to continue to increase by “train(ing) the younger women to love their husbands and children . . .” (Titus 2:4). But this may also be a time when older wives, relieved of the pressure and demands of young children, can effectively carry on careers of their own outside their home.

There do not appear to be biblical answers to this question. Perhaps we are going to have to look in the future at the examples of Christian marriages in which wives have pursued a later career to determine whether or not later generations were strengthened or damaged in the process.

One fact is clear. We need older women to train younger women as described in the Scriptures. Increased discipling and mentoring is going on among some older and younger Christian men based on such verses as Paul’s instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2:

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

It seems that a wonderful “Titus 2” career is also available to older women who are willing to train and encourage younger women so that they, too, can have successful marriages.
STEP 4

“PRAISE AND GLOW”

Praise

“Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.”  
(Proverbs 31:28)

The Standing Ovation

When women FOLLOW, RESPECT and INCREASE as spelled out in God’s Word, then men are prompted to “rise up and call them blessed.” Perhaps you have wondered about the custom that used to be observed (but which is now considered increasingly archaic in the modern competitive world) where men and children would rise up when a woman entered the room. However, after we read the work and service this proverbial Godly woman renders for her husband and family, it is easy to understand this custom of past years that marked deep respect for such a wife and mother.

But not only should husbands “rise up” for their wives, they also need to “praise” them. Wives need to be assured often of their husband’s love, gratitude and respect. The work world provides paychecks, perks, service pins, pensions, and other “strokes” to constantly assure workers how much they are valued. There are often exciting people to meet, interesting work to do, and sometimes places to go.

By contrast, a career as a wife and mother can appear and actually become somewhat drab, lonely and unrewarding. Recently at a business dinner meeting, two young professional women were discussing the role of motherhood versus their outside careers. One shared how she was eagerly looking forward to getting a “nanny” for her new child so she could return to work. Both readily agreed that the work world was far easier and more attractive than “staying at home with the kids.”
No longer does the world suggest that being a wife and mother is a worthwhile, lifelong career. No longer is it enough to be a wife serving her husband and children so that they may succeed. Now the goal, in many Christian as well as non-Christian homes, is for the wife to succeed in a career outside the home. Fathers and mothers proudly proclaim their daughters’ college degrees and working titles—while the divorce statistics continue to climb.

As society increasingly encourages outside careers for both sons and daughters as the chief purpose and goal in life, the role of wife and mother deteriorates further. Marriages are delayed. Casual living arrangements between men and women increase. Homosexuality is increasingly alleged as normative. Childbearing is delayed, often until the late 30’s which leaves little time for raising a family of any size. Families continue to shrink and God’s multiplication is thwarted as we “chase the wind” of outside careers. By contrast, too few of us praise the career of wife and mother that has no degree or title placed on it by the world.

In earlier years, “Mother of the Year” was a coveted front page award. Today, it seldom makes the news on any page. If the Christian community truly believes that God has a wonderful, unique and satisfying role for wives and mothers, then girls and women must be assured of this at every occasion. In Bible times, it was a mark of God’s great favor when women were granted children. While women were seldom extolled in Scriptures for being leaders or carrying on outside careers, Godly women were praised throughout God’s Word for their careers as wives and mothers. This biblical practice should be continued today.

Ways to Praise

We all like to receive praise for a job well done. It spurs us on to greater effort. Some time ago, an employee told her employer, “You’re going to work me to death if you don’t stop telling me what a great job I’m doing.”
Wives, too, want and need to be assured their role has eternal significance and that it is respected and appreciated. Here are some of the specific ways this can be done:

- **Wedding Anniversaries.** If marriage is the entrance into a woman’s most significant role in life, it needs to be commemorated and never overlooked. Special events, cards and gifts are a constant reminder that the husband and family consider marriage of extreme importance, and each year this should be a heightened experience, far more important than company recognition for years of service which she might receive if she were employed outside the home. Such wedding anniversaries proclaim to the world that this is a lifetime union.

- **Gifts.** Remembrances remind a wife that she is not forgotten. She is appreciated. She is special. Children need to be taught not simply to receive, but to give. As they see husbands praise, recognize and give to their mothers, so will these children learn to expect this kind of atmosphere when they are grown. For some reason, jewelry often seems special to a woman. Perhaps it proclaims to her that she truly is “worth far more than rubies” when the “rubies” are given to her.

- **Homes.** Wives make a house into a home. As wives carefully nurture flowers and other living plants and provide curtains, furnishings and other items of beauty both inside and outside the home, it becomes apparent how drab life would be without their loving touch. Wives need to be encouraged and praised, not scolded, for money, time and effort spent in homemaking. Jesus’ commendation to the woman who poured the expensive ointment on him made it clear that doing something “beautiful” for God pleases Him (Mark 14:6). When a Godly wife provides beauty for her family, she surely is doing it also for God and pleasing both. If a woman can be fulfilled by a career decorating other people’s homes and receive praise for her work, but she never receives praise for the work she does within her own home, why wouldn’t she want an outside career?

- **Meals.** Recently at a church retreat, panel members were asked about family traditions they felt were important. One of the panelists pointed out the deterioration of most modern mealtimes and the chilling effect this is having on the family. In this age of “fast food” and separate careers, we see husbands, wives and children who often eat alone or with others outside the family. When at home, each person often makes
exactly what he or she individually wants, and then eats alone at the counter or in front
of the TV without speaking.

What a difference from the old-time family meal! There is no tradition more significant in
maintaining family life than families gathered around a meal table for good food and
fellowship. First we learn submission as we eat what we are given. Next we learn
togetherness as we speak and listen to one another. Finally, we learn gratefulness as we
thank God for His overall provision, the father for providing and the mother for increasing
into the meal that we enjoy together with the fellowship of a family gathered together in a
loving and caring relationship.

Husbands need to praise their wives when they take the lead in carrying out this difficult
task day after day.

The list of items for which wives should be praised goes on and on. One good method is
to use the checklist provided above on pages 35-36 showing the activities of the proverbial
godly woman in Proverbs 31. After each of these items, husbands should say, “Praise
her.”

**Winning Words**

Many husbands find it difficult to verbalize praise for their wives. Words often seem
awkward and almost insincere. Yet, it is essential if the role of wife and mother is to be
encouraged and increased. Too often, men can be like the reticent husband who, when
pressed, told his wife in exasperation, “I told you I loved you when I married you, and if I
stop loving you, I’ll tell you that, too.”

If lifetime marriages are to continue, husbands need to praise their wives for the Godly
work they perform. No man, woman or child should have any doubt that followers of
Christ consider the role of wife and mother of eternal significance and that we praise this
career for women above and beyond any competitive career the world has to offer. It has
been said that men are reached through their eyes and women through their ears. It is not enough, therefore, simply to show wives that they are loved. They must be praised verbally.

**Glow**

“...and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

(Ephesians 5:27)

**Don’t Distract with Verbal Noise**

While it may be difficult for many husbands to speak out, it is sometimes difficult for some wives not to speak! Listen the next time you ride in an automobile with two or three couples to determine who carries the conversation.

Peter cautioned wives that their husbands are often won through their eyes, not their ears:

> “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”

(1 Peter 3:1-2)

It is so tempting for wives (because they, themselves, seem often motivated by words) to use words in an effort to motivate or change their husbands. However, to a man (who often seems motivated more through his eyes than his ears), his wife’s pleas may become mere nagging.

Wives who attempt to persuade or motivate their husbands by their words are often ineffective. A careful review of the proverbial Godly woman in Proverbs 31 reveals that she engages in works versus words by a ratio of 12 to 1! And the only reference to her words reflects that she uses her tongue very carefully when she speaks:
“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”
(Proverbs 31:26)

When her husband then praises her, it is not because of her conversation (or her beauty), but because of her God-centered attitude and actions:

“Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.”
(Proverbs 31:29-31)

Prayer and Prophecy

The Bible makes it clear that many women have been gifted in the ministries of prayer and prophecy (Exodus 15:20; Acts 21:8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). But the Bible also seems to draw a distinction between prayer and prophecy as opposed to teaching and exercising authority over men. When women take on this latter role, husbands often feel encouraged to abdicate from their responsibility of leading and speaking out. Paul instructs Timothy that this should not be, as he says:

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”
(1 Timothy 2:11-12)

He then explains why women should practice the art of submission and quietness as he concludes:

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.”
(1 Timothy 2:13-14)

This is a hard teaching. It goes against the grain, particularly in the modern scene. However, God’s ways often seem contrary to man’s ways and we often believe that our “natural instincts” are right. But Proverbs 14:12 warns us:
There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

If our goal is to build strong biblical lifetime marriages that will also be a Godly example to future generations, then we need to carry out the words of Scripture, not our own natural inclinations. Just as husbands have the hard task of learning to LEAD, LOVE, PROVIDE and PRAISE their wives, so wives need to learn the difficult response of quietly GLOWING, after they have learned to FOLLOW, RESPECT and INCREASE what their husbands provide.

God is in the business of transforming us into his image. Wives who develop a quiet inner beauty, accompanied by Godly works, can and do have a profound effect on their husbands, children and others far more than they affect them by their words alone.

Don’t Distract with Visual Noise
Did you ever buy a diamond? Do you remember how the jeweler made the sale? First, he carefully unwrapped a piece of black velvet and laid it out under a particular light. Then, he dramatically unwrapped the gem and laid it carefully and deliberately on the cloth. It sparkled and shown in all its brilliance—solitary, beautiful, almost awesome in quiet splendor.

By contrast, look sometime in a variety store window where cheap articles are displayed. They are surrounded by tinsel and cheapness. A diamond would be lost and never seen nor appreciated in this kind of setting. Surely the same analogy holds true with wives. Satan always has a substitute for God’s commands and provisions. In this case, Satan’s substitute seems to be for women to use artificial tinsel and gaudiness rather than Godly femininity in an effort to be seen and get man’s attention. But God’s genuine women are like jewels who reflect the quiet beauty of the inner spirit. Paul writes to Timothy:

“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with
good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."
(1Timothy 2:9-10)

God is not a killjoy. He isn’t attempting to make women drab and unattractive. Instead, he wants their true beauty to be seen. This can’t happen if they are overshadowed by gaudy clothes and excessive jewelry. God wants us to hear the pure music of their lives, not to be visually distracted that we miss the inner beauty. Peter said it this way:

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”
(1 Peter 3:3-4)

“Radiant” – “Without Spot or Wrinkle”

Paul, in Ephesians 5:27, notes that the church, as the wife of Christ, is to be “radiant.” This is also true of earthly wives. How it pleases women when they glow as a radiant bride, and how a loving husband is thrilled and pleased by this beautiful, radiant woman he presents to himself “without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.”

This is an important point. The modern trend is to try to be wrinkle-free, spot-free and blemish-free all our lives. Physically, we use vanishing cream and “facelifts” to try to beautify our dying physical bodies. Without discussing the merits of this kind of “holding action,” it seems important that we hear the following spiritual truth recounted by a man in his later years:

“When I was a youngster,” he said, “I noticed my father had wrinkles, small black and brown spots, and other blemishes on his skin. Now, I look and see that I have them, and so does my wife. But if I see the beauty of my wife through her quiet inner spirit, she is wrinkle-free, spotless, and without any blemish.”

“If we depend upon physical attraction and youthful beauty, then the longer we live together, the less attractive our wives (and ourselves) become. But, if we look at their quiet inner spirit, they can become radiant and beautiful, without any wrinkle,
spot or blemish. And I can tell you that after more than forty years of marriage, my wife is more beautiful to me today than at any time in her life. In fact, even her physical face and form have a beauty that comes from her works which praise her and form her quiet inner spirit that deeply and overwhelmingly pleasure me.”

**Be a Jewel**

It seems appropriate that a Christian wife should be referred to as a “jewel.” After all, she is “worth far more than rubies.” (Proverbs 31:10)

“But remember,” said an individual during a discussion of the roles of husband and wife, “a jewel has no internal light of its own. Instead, it reflects the light which shines upon it.”

If a wife is to glow and become radiant, and in so doing please herself and those around her, she must, figuratively speaking, reflect the light from her husband’s love and attention. When husbands and wives compete with one another at any level, the light of marriage sometimes seems to grow dim—and too often grow completely dark. What a waste!

By contrast, there is nothing so satisfying to wives, husbands, their children, friends and society as the glow of a Godly wife showing forth the radiance of true Christian marriage!
III. THE WALK

“Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.”
(1 John 2:6)

If we are to enjoy good, lifelong marriages, husbands and wives should strive not only to carry out their own unique roles, but also to walk together under the Lordship of Christ into the oneness He has prepared for them. Together, a husband and wife can form something of beauty before God and man.

We have listed four simple but awesome steps that can help husbands and wives “complete” rather than “compete with” one another:

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<td>PRAISE</td>
<td>GLOW</td>
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As each partner faithfully walks through these steps, the marriage seems to become a living entity as shown by the following illustration:

- In your mind, draw an arrow from LEAD to FOLLOW, for until a husband leads, a wife cannot follow.

- Next, draw an arrow from FOLLOW to LOVE, showing that when the wife follows, it causes her husband to look around and see this person placing herself under his protection, which brings forth in him a love and willingness to give himself up for her.

- Then draw an arrow from LOVE to RESPECT, showing that when the husband loves and gives himself up for his wife, it brings forth her respect for him as a husband.
Next, draw an arrow from RESPECT to PROVIDE, because a husband who looks around and sees his wife following and respecting him, wants to provide for and protect her as his cherished bride.

Once he provides physically and spiritually for his wife, she can then increase what he has begun, so draw an arrow from PROVIDE to INCREASE.

After she increases what her husband provides, it brings forth his praise for her godly works, so draw an arrow from INCREASE to PRAISE.

Finally, as he praises her, she becomes a radiant bride, so draw an arrow from PRAISE to GLOW.

No longer are these two competing individuals. Instead, by “submit(ting) to one another ...” (Ephesians 5:21), and carrying out their biblical roles, such a husband and wife have so integrated their lives that they truly have become “one flesh.” As a result, God is glorified, the partners receive joy and fulfillment, and society and future generations are blessed.
This brings us, however, to the final question we have silently asked ourselves throughout this discussion:

**How do we, as fallible, but sincere, followers of Christ, successfully walk through these steps in order to reach our goal of “oneness”?**
IV. THE HOPE

“For it is by grace you have been saved ...”
(Ephesians 2:8)

At the beginning of this discussion, we observed that no one was perfect, that two imperfect people could not make a perfect marriage, and that good, lifetime marriages seemed to flow from the grace of God and the application of His Word. We have discussed at length God’s Word and its application. This is our goal, and we need to work toward building marriages that are as perfect as possible. But we are, and will always be until we join our Lord in Heaven, imperfect. Therefore, let’s conclude by discussing God’s grace in marriage.

For reasons only He knows, God has chosen to work through frail, imperfect men and women to carry out His perfect will. Abraham lied about his wife and half sister, Sarah, to protect himself, but became the father of millions. Jacob, the deceiver, became Israel, the father of a holy nation. Moses, the murderer, became the leader chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egypt. David, after having been chosen by God, committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged to have her husband killed in order to cover David’s sin. The Apostle Paul, before his conversion, joined in the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. And Peter after his conversion and after walking three years with Jesus, denied his Lord three times.

None of us will be able to perform perfectly our roles in life, including the role of husband or wife. But despite our frailties and failures, by God’s grace, His great work can be done through us.

Some of us will find certain areas discussed above manageable and other areas will be very difficult. What is easy for one may be difficult or almost impossible for another. But we can be sure of this: God’s grace is sufficient to make marriages wholesome and good,
even though rungs in these four-step ladders we have discussed are broken or even missing!

One wife, after years of praying for God to change her husband in a particular area, finally cried out in desperation, “Please God, if you won’t change him, then change me!” Sometime, later, her husband came to her and asked her to pray that he would change—in the exact area of her frustration!

God can change us. He can also change our marriage partners. Often He changes both of us by “sharpening” each of us through the other.

He knows our hearts. His final goal is not perfect marriages, but perfected people. Even if a marriage fails, that still is not the end. God is in the business of bringing beauty out of ashes. Just as we have watched God redeem the lives of His saints such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Paul and Peter, so will He redeem us if we are willing. This may be through a wholesome and good marriage (which obviously is what we would prefer), but it may also be out of the ashes of a broken marriage. But it will only happen if we follow Him and abide by His Word!

So whatever your circumstances and challenges may be, remember this: God loves you. He will care for us and help us to be and to do what He had planned as we submit to Him and follow Him throughout our lives. He says to us today, as He did to His prophet Jeremiah:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

(Jeremiah 29:11-13)

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