

Helping a Man Thrive in Marriage

If you help your men thrive in marriages, if you help the men of your church do really well, your church is going to do better. One of the key issues in pastoral care and marriage is leading your men to have great marriages. How would you do that? What —as a pastor—what are the key things you're going to help men to do to be great husbands? First of all, every man needs his own walk with God. You can do counseling and you can do everything under the sun to talk about marriage and better marriages and here's the principles of communication and here is this and that and the next thing. But if that man does not have his own walk with God, it's like you're building all these things and still on shifting sand.

His love for his wife comes out of his love for the Lord. You're helping him to find that humble masculinity where he's fully a man but there is that Christ in him, that masculinity that's just not unbridled masculinity. If he can thrive as a man, and let's just say even as a single, maybe you're doing pre-marriage counseling, and the guy comes before you. "I'm going to come to church and everything because Joan wants me to come to church." That's very dangerous because if he is not thriving or walking or connected to God, it's going to be hard for him to really be the leader and thrive in marriage.

In some ways as it says in Ephesians 5:8, this principle cannot be violated. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." Before we talk about a man in marriage, that relationship with God, that home discipleship, that personal man home discipleship is vitally important.

The second thing I've noticed about men thriving in marriage is a man needs to stay busy. I want to talk about the distinction between work and job. A lot of times especially in various cultures and places and economies, jobs could be more scarce than other times or they could be out of a job. What often happens I've seen is that a man can go idle. A man can just watch TV or a man can just be on a computer. You know what I have found is if a man is going to thrive in his marriage, he has got to stay busy.

I want to talk about the work and job distinction. Let's say a man's job is eliminated for whatever reason. There is always work up there even while he is looking for that next job. There is work in the

church. There is work around the house. There is work. Stay busy. So many times in our culture, when a man loses his job, he lost his work.

What you want to encourage your men even if they're not working at a job right now that Ecclesiastes 11:6 really applies. "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well." What I would encourage men who are unemployed is volunteer. Find a connection. Get your foot in the door. Take a low paying job for a little while. Somehow, keep a man busy.

Now, one of the things you got to help a man to know is who is that he's married to. Who is a woman? Who is she? One of the points that help men see is that she is a spiritual being that she has relationship with God or not. She is a dominion seeker. In other words, she too, whether it's having children or whether it's working, she has that dream, that calling at home, her work, her life. She's relational.

I'd even say relationally more sensitive than maybe the guy is; whereas guys, our sense of relationship in some ways are a lot more shallow in comparison to a woman. For a woman, the quality of relationship means a lot. If she feels she's in poor relationship with you, the man, her day will be ruined. Whereas the guy, we can sort of like we're not happy that the relationship suffers a little while but we can easily put that out of our mind often.

Intimate sexual. Now, on this, who's a woman? A woman is not usually just going to go right to the bedroom. There is much more of an emotional or romantic piece. That's just how she's hardwired. You can fight it all you want but understand she is woman. Now, I understand that different women experience these things differently. I'm talking in general language here. Understand that your wife is a little girl at heart. She wants to have fun and play, and at times she wants to just be that little girl. She wants to be protected. She wants to go out on the playground with you. I don't care what age. Never forget that.

As you're a pastor or Christian leader, what is it that you want your people to understand that wife needs from her husband? Well, let's just go back to basics. Number one, a man who takes spiritual initiative of his vital walk. Psalms 112, I love that passage. "Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears

the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” The Bible is clear. Be that kind of a man. Help your men to own their walk. “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in His command.” That respect, that opening God’s Word finds great delight in His command. A woman needs a man who is walking with God.

What else does a wife need? A wife needs affirmation, love, faithfulness from her husband. Proverbs 30:21 I think is a very compelling and powerful message. “Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress.” Another word, husbands. Your wives need to know your loyalty that your love, faithfulness your loving faithfulness, your love and faithfulness, your affirming of her as your wife. I’m talking to the men. Men, this is what as a pastor and leader needs to help a man see.

A man can destroy their wives’ emotional well-being in twenty-five seconds of critical, negative talk that just puts them down. Pays attention to “You’re not as young as you used to be. Is that a curve I see that’s grown by your stomach? You know, you better go on a diet.” All of that stuff, that critical attitude. What a wife needs from her husband is affirmation, love, faithfulness. If husbands get that right, so many of their wives will do anything for their husbands.

What a wife needs from her husband? Active communication is the next thing. Sharing your feelings, guys. As pastors and leaders, somehow finding maybe it’s a support group or a way for the men to actively learn how to communicate. It says in Colossians 3:9, “Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices.” There’s an emotional line that men can do to their wives where they say one thing but they’re not really communicating what they really believe and feel.

In pre-marriage counseling, this is really interesting. In the first year of marriage, husbands find out that they’re not communicating in the same emotional plane with their wives. So in pre-marriage counseling, to back that up, I always try to help the young men or the man learn how to communicate some of his emotions. As we talked about earlier in this class, emotions in themselves are not bad. Maybe men are not going to totally comfortable with emotions. But there is still that comfortable

feeling to say what they mean and to say what they feel and to then also be able to receive a wife's communication without freaking out and shutting off because it was all emotional.

A wife needs the husband to see her as an indispensable partner in the marriage. That's the next thing. What do wives need from a husband? That the wife is considered an indispensable partner in the marriage. Genesis 2:23, 24, the Man said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman for she was taken out of Man." That passage is very powerful. Later in the passage, it talks about a Man leaving his father and mother and being united with his wife and they will become one flesh.

There's a partnership that is designed by God. This partnership is so strong and if you're married to her and you kind of see her as "Well, she's independent" or "She's not really in my life but she is just kind of nice for the bedroom" or "She does the dishes" or "She cooks," you miss out that you are in a sense a kingdom business now and you have a new partnership and that woman is with you until your last breath in the days of this Earth. It's like an attitude. It's a commitment, an attitude. A woman knows and feels if they are not a partner with you.

What else does a wife need from her husband? Safety and security. It says in Ephesians 5:28 in the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it." I've seen that recently. There are husbands out there who "Let my wife work" or "I don't know. She wants to do there..." They just take the responsibility of safety and security and sort of like "Whatever. I don't care." And they stop trying. As a pastor and a leader, we want to keep encouraging the men of our church to rise up to provide safety and protection to their spouse—and I'll even take this one further—to their whole family. That protection motif is not just for the wife. It's for the whole family.

What does a wife need from her husband? Well, here's another one. Relational sizzle. That also promotes sexual response. Kevin Leman wrote a book called *Sex Begins in the Kitchen*. We also see that in Colossians 3:19, "Husbands, love your wife." Here's that second part. "Do not be harsh with them." In the Greek, what does "harsh" mean? It means be in a relationship with them. Let your words be more gentle, romantic. A woman sees sexual intimacy much more through the eyes of the quality of your relationship and that's just the way it is.

So if you would like to have a lot of sexual intimacy with your wife, these things we just talked about and as pastors, communicate that to your parishioners that the relationship is to be fun in so much as you can make it that way. Relational sizzle. Don't just buy her flowers at her 25th anniversary. Do things sort of random and communicate.

One of the things that I bought from my iPhone. It's an interesting thing. If you go over here, it's called Love Tips. It's for a guy. It really is good because it will say various things like "Say I love you or I miss you." It's simple. Why do I need to say it? But you know what? If I look at my daily iPhone reminder, I will remember that and I'll say those little things and I see what a difference those little things make. As a pastor, we can help our men do these little relational sizzle things.

Let's now talk about some practical steps for helping men to thrive right in your own church. Well, help the men start men's meetings. I tell you, you get men together and one of the things they talk about is how they can be better husbands and they confess some of their struggles and their walls. If one of them has a struggle with pornography, if men are sitting together and they're talking, it's fascinating how they can talk to one another and there's an encouragement to stay true and pure and all those things. That's great. Get your men together.

Get men involved in ways that help them thrive in your church. In another class I teach, it's called *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. It's a whole book about how churches are often tailor made right now for the feminine and there are a lot of things that the masculine don't really get involved in. Start thinking about how can men get involved more in the church? What are the things that men really thrive in? Great book to read. *Why Men Hate Going to Church?* I highly recommend it.

Hold a men's retreat and go through the material that we just talked about in this session. Take the slide show. You just put it up in the Internet. Put it up and say, "I'm taking this class and here are some things. Let's talk about them." Create men mentoring relationships in your church where you have older men and younger men and you see a man who's struggling or a newly married man. Maybe as church leaders, as a pastor, elder or leaders, intentionally say, "Which younger men need a mentor?" and then assign some of the older men that have strong relationships to hang out with the younger men.

The bottom line in this whole enterprise is we find ways for men to thrive, to encourage them to love being married, to take their vows seriously, to get with other men to encourage them as well. If men thrive in their walk with God and in their marriage, your church is going to thrive in ways that you can never imagine.