

3 Keys to Leading Your Wife When You Think You Have It All Together

Some spiritual lessons come from years of experience, trial and wisdom. Others come from desperation, repentance and a realization: “Quick, I’d better write this down before I forget it!”

What I’d like to share falls into the second category.

The way I’m wired in the flesh, I tend to think that I’m always right or that I have it all together. (This is hardly news to anyone who knows me.)

And being born and raised in a solid Bible-believing household, that nasty part of my personality has had an undesirable effect on my spiritual life.

Now, add just about a year of marriage into the mix—and along with it, a commitment to spiritually walk *together* with my wife—and it’s a toxic combination for my flesh.

Most of the hard lessons I’ve learned in life have been through external humbling. I suppose I’m just that dense. But as I learn to give my godly wife the benefit of the doubt, God has graciously shown me some things that have held me back from leading our marriage by the Spirit—and how to reverse them.

1. Seek the Root in Your Wife

One way I must begin filtering every deed, decision and idle word is with this test: *will my actions increase or decrease my wife’s ability to abide in the root of Christ?*

This is not a one-size-fits-all prescription for every

situation, because ultimately, no man can control the state of his spouse's heart (or anyone else's heart) before God. That is within only the Holy Spirit's ability and the other person's responsibility.

But at the same time, I believe God will hold men responsible for the health of their wives' spiritual life. As spiritual leaders, we men are to help cultivate our family's rootedness in Christ.

This sounds simple enough. But unless I seek to know my wife's spiritual condition inside and out, I could unwittingly place all sorts of stumbling blocks in her path with the Lord.

Here's an example: For some time, my wife and I have had a heart for world missions. Not that we have really been involved in missions before. But we agree that the need is great and that we should remain open. So why don't we pursue the mission field right now in some reckless way? Personally, I could probably manage in such a setting. Maybe. (Maybe not—those things have a way of revealing all your spiritual weaknesses.) My wife, by contrast, has a good handle on the weaknesses she wants to overcome, and she knows that she's not ready. We have areas of our individual lives and marriage that we need the Lord to minister to and heal. So for us at this moment, we have no peace about ministering overseas because it would not necessarily help my wife's vital connection to the vine right now.

Not every case is the same. But the point is, there are plenty of impactful, well-meaning, ambitious things I could attempt "for the Lord" that sound good. But just because something sounds good—even very good, like missions—I still must ask: would it help or hurt my wife's walk?

In recent days, I've seen a deep, gracious part of God's heart. It's this: While He zealously covets our obedience, precious little does He desire obedience *without* us being in

intimate, abiding relationship with Him. And while God doesn't always call my wife and I to be comfortable, He will never call us to anything that will necessitate us being further away from Him. We often fall away from Him, but that's never His doing or desire. His will is always for us to abide. Obedience is the result.

Has the overall conduct of your life brought your wife closer to the Lord? Has your ministry service been simply weight upon her back, or has it deepened her ability to feed off of Christ? Do you enforce external standards on your life and marriage at the expense of your wife's individual relationship with the Lord?

Your link to the vine is your top priority. *Her* link to the vine should be your second top priority.

2. Spot the Spirit in Your Wife

Just as there are varying dynamics between members of the church, your spiritual connection to your wife can take many forms. Different gifts fill the body. Within the body of Christ, some men are eyes, while their wives are ears; others are hands, while their wives are feet.

True, this kind of diversity can mean big potential for conflict. But this diversity also opens up a deep mystery that applies just as much to church fellowship as it does to marriage: unity in the Spirit.

Let's face it. None of us follows the Spirit as much as we should. We all need to be challenged to give more and more control over to Him.

Enter: your spouse.

Spiritually speaking, maybe you think you're more mature than your wife. Ask her, and you might find out otherwise! Either way, chances are she's given parts of her life over to God's

control that you haven't yet, or vice versa. It's virtually guaranteed.

That means that no matter how different your personality and gifts may be from your wife's, the fact that you share the Holy Spirit means you are never at a loss for ways to "stir one another up to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:22).

But discerning the work of the Spirit in your spouse is discipline.

If you're a hard-wired "hand" in the body of Christ (whatever spiritual gift you might equate that with), your flesh might be so bent on seeing your wife develop that gifting that you start to pressure her and quench the Spirit's work in her life elsewhere. You may even miss out on seeing the Spirit do something else in her life that you *didn't* expect!

The Spirit bears unique fruit in the life of each believer. Perhaps when you were single you began to associate being Spirit-filled with being a bold evangelist. But if your wife isn't up on a soapbox every Saturday afternoon, that doesn't mean she's not walking with the Spirit. Perhaps her biggest gift is encouragement, and maybe you're a terrible encourager. Learn from each other. Make fruit-of-the-Spirit salad.

Get used to your wife experiencing the Spirit's leading in a different way than you do. Sure, there are always the essentials of a Spirit-filled life—the killing of sin, the heart-cry of "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8)—but if you don't understand her gifting and who she is, you could be blinded to the Spirit's way of manifesting in her life. And that's too good to miss.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would put you both on the same page in the important matters of life (He will). Pray that He would give you sensitivity to see the unique ways He works in her life that would normally escape your notice.

3. Share the Yoke With Your Wife

You may have heard Paul's admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This passage teaches us a lot of things about mixed-faith marriages, but there's another application we often miss: if you and your wife are both believers, then the yoke is to be *equal*.

If I looked at the vocabulary you use daily to describe the different spheres of your life—marriage, ministry, work, hobbies, children, etc.—which modifier would appear more often: *my*, or *our*?

If you want to spiritually lead your wife, stop thinking in terms of "my ministry," "my goals," or "my career," and starting thinking in terms of *our*. We. Us.

Neither one of you "owns" the Holy Spirit, no matter which one of you is more "spiritually mature." The Holy Spirit *owns you both* if your trust is in Christ, and the only people stopping either of you from walking with Him daily are yourselves. After all, the Holy Spirit is not a force; He's a Person. He gives gifts "as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

When it comes to your personal *and* combined relationships with God, have you yoked yourself with your wife? Are you carrying her cares as Christ carries yours? Have you poured yourself into her and built her up as your helpmate?

I suppose I'm still technically considered a "newlywed" since we're going on one year this month. So perhaps these lessons I've learned aren't worth much to some people. We're obviously still learning, working, and growing together. It's not always easy. But as God has humbled me and bound us together in the Spirit, it's been more rewarding than any words could describe.

Lead your wife spiritually, and be led yourself by the Spirit, and watch God use your marriage for His glory.

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