

How to Balance Strength and Vulnerability in Your Marriage

I got married more than a year ago, but the lessons I've learned in this short time feel like a lifetime's worth. From learning to be selfless to learning how to lead, it's true that marriage is part of the life-changing process in our lives.

And I think I've learned what it really means to "show your strength."

There is one lesson in particular that I'm continually learning, and that's the balance between strength and vulnerability. As a husband, when do you show your strength? And when do you reveal your weaknesses? When faced with trials and difficult circumstances, when do you stand strong, and when do you show your vulnerability?

When my wife and I were going through premarital counseling, she expressed what she thought a man should be—the kind of man she wanted follow, respect, and love. And it came to what she saw in her father. Basically, she wanted a man who was stable and strong—a sturdy tower of strength and security in the midst of life's storms.

Now, this was not the kind of example of manhood I grew up with, so I've since tried to spend as much time as possible with my father-in-law, trying to learn this lesson of strength vs. vulnerability.

Here are a few things I've learned thus far:

1. Know the source of your strength before you show your strength. My strength comes from God and Him alone. My wife is

not my strength. My success is not my strength. My health and the way I look are not my strength. God alone is my strength. And He's your strength too. It is in all those other things that we get to show and give our strength.

I am not to approach my wife looking for assurance, validation and strength as a man. As John Eldredge wrote, "Femininity cannot bestow masculinity."

2. Empathy is not a license for hysterics. When my wife is worried about something and brings that to me, she is looking to be understood. But in my empathy, that is not a license to be hysterical with worry or ignore her emotions or even preach at her "Don't worry." In her search for being understood, she is not looking for a companion to share in her worry; she is looking for that unwavering tower of strength in the midst of the storm. And it is my job as her husband to say, "I understand your concern, babe, but everything will be all right. We will get through this together. It will all work out. And we'll be OK."

3. Vulnerability means admitting when you're wrong. In an effort to show your strength, don't get so stubborn and bullheaded that you refuse to acknowledge when you're wrong. Strength has to do with being an emotional tower that doesn't lose it under pressure. It has nothing to do with being right or wrong.

I have to keep coming back to this lesson over and over. My tendency as a man is to be right, to have the answers and to fix the problems. But it's so rare that those things are actually needed. Therefore, I'm constantly responding to situations with the wrong outlook on what my strength should look like, and inevitably I spend a lot of time apologizing.

4. Vulnerability means knowing when you're reacting out of weakness. Whenever I find myself swaying or even crumbling beneath the storms of life (aka overreacting), I try to step

away from the situation in order to examine the place from where my emotions are coming forth. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's from a source of weakness.

Once I figure that out, I have to come back to my wife in humility, explain the situation to her and ultimately ask for her forgiveness. It's hard to do. The tendency in every man is to cover up our weaknesses and pretend they don't exist. Somehow we've bought into this idea that having a weakness (aka something you suck at) means you're somehow less of a man. But if we can overcome that lie and take the time to explain our vulnerabilities and weaknesses to our wives, then they might fall in love with us all over again.

Right now, those times when I react out of weakness happen more often than I'd like, but with God's strength and guidance, I look forward to being the strong emotional tower my wife desires.

What are your thoughts on the topic? How do you balance the show of strength vs. vulnerability in your relationships?

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