

Afraid You'll Leave Your Mate Behind?

More and more women today are sensing a call of God on their lives—a call to draw closer to the Lord, to grow spiritually and to minister in His name. But many hesitate to respond to that call.

“What will happen to my marriage if I become more spiritually mature than my husband?” wives often ask. “Will I become the ‘spiritual head’ of our family and be out of God’s order?”

“I want my husband to be the spiritual leader in our home, but he is not taking on that role for himself,” others say. “What do I do with my call while God is working in my husband?”

I believe God is pleased to know that such issues concern His spiritual daughters. You probably know at least one woman who did not ask these difficult questions—with disastrous results in her marriage.

Each of us needs to ask the tough questions and find the answers that fit our particular circumstances. Only then will peace, mutual love and respect be maintained in our marriages while we grow and minister in the Lord.

The guidance for this challenge, as for all the challenges we face, is in the Word of God. Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (NIV).

In other words, your situation is not as unique as it seems; according to the Bible, it has already been experienced by at least one other woman! God had the answer then, and He has your answer now.

As you begin your quest, an important scripture to consider is

1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." You are never alone! God is always with you. He loves and protects you and cares about you and your marriage.

According to the dictionary, "to care" means "to have strong feelings for." That's something to remember and meditate upon: The God of the universe has strong feelings for you!

And because God has strong feelings, you do too. After all, you were made in His image. It's no surprise, then, that many emotions rise to the surface when you feel a tension between your marriage and God's call on your life.

Taking the Risk

Fear is perhaps the most common of these emotions. And it's a valid one because following your destiny in God can be risky for you and your husband.

You may not understand all that's happening to you and in you. What you do with your time may change. Activities that used to hold your interest may no longer do so.

Instead of watching television at night, you may find yourself choosing to read the Word and other books for self-improvement. Instead of shopping during the day, you may prefer to have a small group or Bible study meet in your home.

You may change your circle of friends. Your appearance may even change as you begin to honor God with your body, His temple.

It is especially important that you remain intimate and connected to your husband during this time. He may or may not accept some of the changes he sees in you.

Even these healthy kinds of changes can be perceived by some men as threatening to the marriage. But by developing a humble spirit, you will ultimately add to your inner beauty, causing your husband to appreciate the changes he sees in you and

lessening his own fears about your relationship.

The wrong response to fear is to try to control or manipulate the timing or degree of your husband's spiritual growth. If you do that, you will be out of alignment with God's design for a godly wife. And depending on your husband's temperament, you could cause him to rebel and retreat even further from God or develop an "Ahab nature."

You remember Ahab, the cowering, ineffective husband of Queen Jezebel in the Old Testament. In his book *The Jezebel Spirit*, Francis Frangipane describes a husband with the Ahab nature as a man who never truly exercises his spiritual authority.

Frangipane writes, "The man who cannot govern his household in godly, protective authority will not exercise his spiritual authority elsewhere." That's the exact opposite of what you want!

God's solution to fear is not for you to push but for you to put your faith in Him. If you have allowed fear to govern your behavior, repent and ask God to increase your faith. Believe in God's sovereignty and timing, trusting that He will work all things for your good. His Word says that God's plans for you and your husband are not to harm you but to give you hope and a future (see Jer. 29:11).

Dealing with Anger

Another common emotion is anger—anger directed at your husband or even at God for not seeming to act on your behalf. Hebrews 6:1 tells us that God's desire is that we all become spiritually mature.

You see other husbands growing spiritually. So why is your husband the one dragging his spiritual feet?

Many Christian women have confided to me that their husbands won't pray with them. Many have said they've had to take responsibility for family devotions—otherwise there would be

none. And week after week, many women have had to bring their children to church by themselves.

How easy it is for anger to build up in such circumstances! But over time, anger can be stored and, if not resolved, turn into resentment and bitterness. When that happens, aggressive behaviors, either passive or overt, can begin to destroy the unity and intimacy that God intended for your marriage.

Again, we can go to God's Word for insight. Ephesians 4:22-33 says that we must not sin in our anger but rather be "made new" in the attitude of our minds. We must "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger" and "speak truthfully" to our neighbor. And in this case, your husband is your closest neighbor!

If you have spoken the truth—without anger or rage—about God's desire for your husband's spiritual maturity and his response is not what you had hoped for, you can find further instruction in 1 John 3:18: Love him "with actions and in truth."

Addressing marriage in particular, 1 Peter 3:1-6 says that you can win your husband to Christ by your godly actions and behavior—by living a pure, reverent life; by exhibiting a gentle and quiet spirit; and by remaining hopeful and not giving way to fear. Obeying God's commands with a heart full of love pleases Him. In this attitude of faith, humility and love, you can "receive from Him anything" you ask (1 John 3:21-22).

No Comparison

Sadness and rejection are two more common emotions experienced by women who are not able to share spiritually with their husbands. The grief and pain are very real, to be sure.

There is a special closeness, a deep connectedness, that comes in a marriage when a man and woman are growing together in the

Lord. When that's not happening in your marriage, observing other couples who seem to share spiritual intimacy only adds to your hurt.

It doesn't help to deny the truth. You must face the pain of grieving to ultimately regain hope and joy.

How you respond in your particular situation is critical. Each marriage is unique. There is no point in comparing your marriage with another. In fact, God tells us not to compare ourselves with others (see Gal. 6:4).

Instead, ask yourself these questions:

- * Are you listening for the Lord's voice? What direction is He giving you?
- * Are you interceding for your husband and your marriage?
- * Have you called on other godly women to pray for your situation?
- * Have you sought godly counsel from your pastor?
- * Is there a trusted Christian male friend who could begin to mentor your husband? Some men may not know how to get started on their spiritual journeys and could use the encouragement of a fellow journeyman.

The Spiritual and the Natural

God's will for you and your husband is that you be united—"one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Spouses are to be in mutual submission (see Eph. 5:21).

Yet I have known Christian women who believed the Lord was calling them into ministries that would take them away from home for days and weeks at a time. Their husbands and children were not convinced that the Lord had called them out.

The women went anyway. Unfortunately, some of these women

began to experience major spiritual and natural battles in their homes.

This is not always the case, of course. There are those who have genuinely received a call from God and whose families support their efforts and accommodate the women's commitment to follow the Lord. But in order to "live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received," it is important to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1,3).

God may indeed be calling you. Perhaps He is giving you a vision of things to come. Just as we anticipate the birth of a baby by preparing for its arrival, you can begin to prepare for what God is birthing in you spiritually. Then when the time is right, you will be ready.

As a young woman, I knew God's will for my life was to minister to my husband's and my children's needs. I knew God would not call me to a ministry that interfered with my primary calling as a wife and mother.

I ministered at the local level, serving in the church nursery and teaching Sunday school. Today our children are grown, and I am able to accept ministry opportunities on a broader basis. I know that my obedience to the Lord during the early years pleased God and prepared me for my current ministry.

Another woman I know made a decision early in her marriage not to leave her husband behind spiritually. She was concerned that the spiritual distance would create competition or separation between them on a natural level.

Instead, she determined to wait on the Lord to touch her husband so they could then journey together in the spiritual and the natural. Her obedience to the Lord brought blessing, as Deuteronomy 5:29 promises.

She prayed mightily and kept loving her husband

unconditionally. Today, 10 years later, her husband is a deacon in their local church, and they are serving the Lord in ministry together. God is faithful!

Of course, some situations are extreme. Personally, I have not known many marriages in which the husband completely forbid his wife to go to church, bake cupcakes for a bake sale, help a widow or orphan, cook for a sick neighbor, read the Bible, pray, or speak words of godly encouragement to others; but they do exist.

If you are living with an abusive spouse under that kind of control, talk with your pastor and seek professional help. More than the spiritual aspect of your relationship is suffering.

Prepared by Love

If that's not your situation, however, you can be sure your husband's heart is being prepared right now for spiritual growth and maturity as you and God love him with perfect, unconditional love. Remember, the Lord desires fellowship with your husband more than you desire it for him! And God wants your spouse to love and serve Him, just as you do.

God has a plan for your life and for your marriage. If He has indeed called you to a specific ministry, He is working out the details; you don't have to force it to happen. Your life, your marriage and your ministry are in His capable hands.

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