

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## How Does a Husband Lead His Wife and Family?

One of the greatest problems facing many families today is the lack of leadership by the husband. Some husbands don't realize that God has ordained them for this role, while others simply don't understand how they should lead; still others simply refuse to lead. In marriage counseling I see this problem over and over again. Most of the men that I counsel do not realize that many of the serious problems that are occurring in their homes directly result from their failure to lead. It is clear that the lack of the husband's leadership in his home will definitely create a chain reaction of marital, financial, and parenting problems. Therefore, let us consider why husbands fail to lead and how they can begin to lead their wife and family.

## Why is there such a problem with men taking the lead in their homes today?

There are many reasons why men fail to lead; let me give you just a few. (1) Many times men did not see good male leadership modeled in their own homes as they grew up. (2) Some pastors do not teach about a husband's leadership role because they fear being charged with male chauvinism. (3) Many husbands are just lazy and would rather relinquish the leadership in the home to their wives. (4) Other husbands simply give up when their wives challenge them for the leadership of the home as their wives remind them of all their poor decisions in the past. (5) Other husbands are manipulated by their wives through tears, denial of sex, or constant verbal harassment to relinquish leadership. These are just some of the reasons I have found over the years that hinder men from taking the responsibility God has ordained for them as husbands. It is essential to understand that none of these reasons are valid excuses that God would ever accept for a husband not being the leader of his home.

## How can you have confidence that you are called to be the leader in your home?

Paul the apostle made it absolutely clear that the husband must take the leadership in his home when he wrote to the Ephesian church. He commanded: "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*" (Eph. 5:22-24). The word *head* in this passage means the chief or responsible one. Paul clearly stated the principle of a husband's responsibility to lead his wife. Furthermore, Paul used the example of Christ as the head over the church so we would all compare our actions with His. Therefore, if you want to be a follower of Jesus; husbands, look to your Master and Teacher as the ultimate example of what true male leadership should look like.

## What does it mean to take this position as leader in your home? What should you do?

**1. Leading by loving.** A husband's leadership in the home must first be firmly rooted in love. Why? Love is the core principle that should govern everything you say and do. Notice what Paul told the leaders of the Corinthian Church when they needed to take the leadership of their church. Paul told them, "*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love*" (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Therefore, if you need to turn things around in your home you must be strong, brave, act in faith and walk in love. You can be strong and loving at the same time.

Jesus is your ultimate example of a leader. He was strong and yet tender as the circumstances required. He could drive the money changers out of the Temple but hold a child in His arms or weep over Jerusalem. Therefore, let all that you do as a husband and a leader in your

home be done with strength, boldness, and with the tenderness of love.

**2. Leading by initiating.** The first thing love will motivate you to do is to become an initiator. Initiation is at the core of true leadership. A leader doesn't wait for others to give him an idea; he is the instigator, the one who takes the first move. God's love initiated a relationship with each of us and we have responded because of that love. "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus was the initiator.



*Are you leading your family?*

If you love your wife as Christ loved the church you will become an initiator in your relationship. What do I mean? You will initiate the spiritual tone in your home. You will initiate prayer and family devotions. You will be the initiator in problem solving and communication to deal with conflicts or how money is to be spent. You will initiate opportunities to spend time with your spouse. You will take the lead in these and other areas of your marriage because you are the leader. As you do your wife will come to realize, in a very practical way, how much you care about her and the well-being of your family. Your leadership will cause her to trust you.

**3. Leading by example.** Love will also cause you to lead by your example. Jesus believed that His example was critical and acknowledged this fact. He told the disciples: "*I have given you an example*

**"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14**

that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Paul followed Christ’s lead and also exhorted his followers to do the same when he said: “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1). Can you say these words to your wife and children?

Being an example is especially important if you desire your wife and children to have a sincere respect for you as the leader of your home. Do you want your wife and children to simply respect you because you are the head of your home, or because they see your godly behavior, loving actions, and walk of faith?

Consider then, are you leading by example in your home? Are you an example of godliness in your speech, patience, purity, faith, your pursuit of God, personal discipline, and your commitment to moral principles? Can you say to your wife and children, “*I want you to follow Christ just like I follow Him?*” And when you fail to be the example, are you an example of honest humble acknowledgement of your failure? Anyone can respect a personal and honest admission of failure. It is only when failure occurs and there is a cover-up that your family will lose respect.

**4. Leading in management.** Do you realize that as a husband you are to be the manager of your entire family? This doesn’t mean that you *do* everything in your family but you make sure it all gets done. Paul explained this truth of leadership when he instructed Timothy concerning the qualifications required for men to take a leadership role in the church. He taught, “*If a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*” (1 Tim. 3:5). The word *rule* is translated in the New American Standard Version of the Bible as *manage*. This is probably the best translation for this word.

You are the manager of your household just like someone who oversees and manages a business or company. To manage well, you need to have full knowledge of all that goes on in your home. This means you must be asking about the spiritual life of each person in your home, watch over the finances, oversee the discipline of your children, and make sure the practical things of the home are accomplished. Yes, this is a lot to take care of, but this is the responsibility of the head of the home. So, let’s look at some of these responsibilities in more detail.

**5. Leading spiritually.** How can and should you spiritually lead your wife and children? To accomplish this task you first must be a spiritually committed man. It is obvious that you cannot lead anyone anywhere if you have not been there first. This is what Jesus meant when He reproved the Pharisees saying: “*They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch*” (Matt. 15:14). Jesus was using an obvious metaphor to illustrate that these religious leaders had spiritual blindness and could not fulfill their responsibilities of leadership.

Do you have the spiritual eyesight necessary to lead your wife and children into the kingdom? Without knowing what the truth is, how can you lead them into the truth (Ps. 25:5)? To be this kind of leader you must do as Jesus commanded: “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matt. 6:33). Unless you take the lead to seek first the kingdom, none of the other aspects of your leadership will have any effect upon your wife or children. Why? Because they will see the contradiction between what you tell them to do versus what you are doing by your example.

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Is Christ really first in your life? Is He your first love (Rev. 2:4-5)? Are you a man who has given himself to the Word of God and prayer on a daily basis so you can lead your family into the truth? Are you a man who practices what he preaches? This is where true leadership begins and is sustained.

The simplest and easiest way I have found to minister to my wife and family on a regular basis is to follow a principle given by Moses. “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:5-7). When you sit at the dinner table, or drive in your car, or at*

bed time, share what God has taught you from your devotional time in the Scriptures that day. If God has planted His Words in your heart, share them with your wife and children. In doing so you are washing your wife and children with the water of Word of God (Eph. 5:26-27). This is how you can nourish them with the truth of God (Eph. 5:29; Eph. 6:4). When you sit, walk, and lie down are the times when you are together with your wife and children. Therefore, take these opportunities that you have when you are together.

**6. Leading morally.** Moral leadership naturally flows from the depth of your spiritual life. Without being fully committed to Christ you will have few unchangeable moral standards. Why? Unless your heart is anchored in the truth of God’s Word you will be led by your feelings, emotions, or the opinion of others. The Word of God must be the foundation for every moral decision that will be made in your life and home. This is the only way you can ever expect the blessings God has promised to be yours. Jesus expected that each of us would determine what is right and do it. He challenged the multitudes one day: “*Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right*” (Luke 12:57)? He wanted them to make moral decisions regarding right and wrong and then to live that way.

Consequently, are your moral decisions based upon your own selfish desires or are they based upon God’s truth? Is your life an example of moral compromise or of the godly standards that you declare to your wife and children? Do you speak the truth in love or do you shade the truth when it suits you? The answer to these questions will determine the moral leadership in your home.

**7. Leading in reconciliation.** Taking the lead in reconciliation after you have had a conflict with your wife or children is an essential aspect of moral and spiritual leadership in your home. Remember that Jesus took the lead to initiate reconciliation with you. He came to “*seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). To follow His example you must do the same. This is true leadership.

However, are you the one who walks away and slams the door behind you when a conflict arises? Do you go off to pout when your wife doesn’t agree with you? Do you harden your heart or manipulate the emotions of your wife or

children by your angry explosions or deadly silence? If you do, this is a sign of spiritual immaturity and childish behavior. You need to grow up and take the lead by humbling yourself to seek a solution. Take the first step by seeking reconciliation with anyone in your family when there has been a conflict. Jesus said, *"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matt. 7:5). In other words, according to Jesus it is hypocritical for anyone to look at another person's fault before we examine our own. Jesus also said, *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matt. 5:23-24). See also Matthew 18:15.

Is this the way you deal with the conflicts with your wife and children? Are you the one who takes the lead and steps forward first? Do you admit your fault and seek resolution or turn and walk away? Aren't you glad Jesus took the leadership in your life to come and seek reconciliation with you? Begin to take the leadership in this area of your home. You will be glad you did.

**8. Leading by your service.** Another very important aspect of leadership is being the servant in your home. Now you may be thinking to yourself, *Why should I have to be a servant if I'm the head of my home?* Look again to Jesus, your primary example! He demonstrated over and over again that He wasn't afraid to get His hands dirty and to serve others. After all, He washed the disciple's feet and they must have been quite dirty after walking through the Judean landscape! Notice what Jesus said after He washed their feet: *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him"* (John 13:14-16). Therefore, if your Lord and Master washed the disciples' feet then it is not below you or your position as the head of your home to do menial tasks around your house.

However, I hear husbands say to me, "I don't do diapers." "I don't do laundry." "I don't do dishes." I usually say to these men, "That is like Jesus saying, 'I don't do feet.'" Obviously, nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, these tasks are not your primary job, but when your wife is stressed at the end of her day and you sit in the living room and read the newspaper or play video games and refuse to help because you have "worked all day" you have failed as a leader. A leader will follow the example of his Lord and get up and serve.

**9. Leading in decision-making.** I have left this topic until the end of this article for a specific reason. I believe decision-making is one of the most difficult aspects of the husband-wife relationship. The reason it is so difficult is that if you are not taking godly leadership in the previous issues, then your wife will not respect you as head in decision-making. After many years of counseling, I have come to the conclusion that this is a true equation.

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### **Unless your heart is anchored in the truth of God's Word you will be led by your feelings, emotions, or the opinion of others.**

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However, if you take the leadership in loving, initiating, being an example in your spiritual walk, in ministry to your wife and children, by your moral lifestyle and service; then most wives will have no problem in submitting to your leadership in decision-making. Why? Because she trusts your spiritual insight, your care for her, and your ability to make unselfish decisions. She has already seen your leadership in a multitude of other issues. Therefore, first make the decision that you truly want to be the head of your home in all these areas before you tackle the decision-making arena. If your wife is refusing to submit to your headship in the home, determine if you are exhibiting leadership in all these other areas.

How is true biblical leadership worked out in decision-making? I suggest as the head of your home that you should first get all the information needed to make a good decision. Solomon warned, *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but*

*he who heeds counsel is wise"* (Prov. 12:15). *"He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him"* (Prov. 18:13). Do you seek out all the important information first? Do you hear all sides of an issue before you decide? Complete information is critical to all good decision-making.

Next, allow love to give you sensitivity and concern for other's interests rather than your own. Paul said, *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4). Are you considering the best interest of your wife and family or just what is easiest for you? The easiest way is not always the wisest way.

In addition, do you look for ways to compromise to enable you to find the middle ground with your wife? Your way will not always be the right or best way. However, finding agreement is not always possible, especially if the issue involves clear moral or biblical issues. If the issues do not involve clear moral or biblical principles then compromise is always a good way to find agreement. The best example of an issue where you should not dictate but find agreement is in your sexual relationship. Concerning this issue Paul said, *"Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control"* (1 Cor. 7:3-5). The word *consent* in this passage means agreement, and therefore, God is encouraging finding a middle ground with your mate.

Paul declared that there are things in the Christian life that can be a point of contention, but in fact have no spiritual or moral benefit whatsoever. He explained to the Corinthian church that *"food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse"* (1 Cor. 8:8). This was a serious point of contention among the believers in this church. Consequently,

he encouraged these Christians to find a simple compromise by choosing to lovingly restrain their desires and not take any action that might stumble their brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 8:9).

Most of the issues that couples disagree over reside within these peripheral areas. These are the issues in which you need to find compromise. Frequently I talk with couples who have explosive arguments over such things as: how will money be spent, how much discipline will be meted out to a child, or what the family will do on vacation. I am sure that if you unselfishly purpose to love, you can find a compromise and agreement over such issues.

If there is not agreement with your wife over what you believe is the correct decision, ask the Lord for insight and sincerely weigh what your wife has said. If there is no need for a quick decision it would be good to wait and consider the matter more fully in the Word, prayer, and counsel if necessary. If there is still no agreement after this process then in the final analysis it is your decision as the head of your home. Taking the leadership at this point is essential to keep your home from a stalemate and consequently inaction. But, remember your family has to live with your decision. So, choose wisely. Always consider that you will have to give account one day to God for your decisions. Why? You must give account because you are the head of your home or the chief responsible one. Is this not an awesome and fearful responsibility?

One last thought: There are times when you should not listen to your wife and she has no responsibility to listen to or submit to you. When would this ever be the correct response? When either one of you asks the other spouse to do something immoral. You should never listen to or submit to a request to do evil. Both husbands and wives have told me that their mate has asked them to lie on their tax return, to be involved in wife swapping, to cheat someone in business, or do something that was illegal. It should be obvious that these things are evil, and you should not participate in them.

### **What will motivate you to take your position as the leader of your family?**

It is not enough to know how to be the leader in your home. You can know all the truth in the world and if you don't

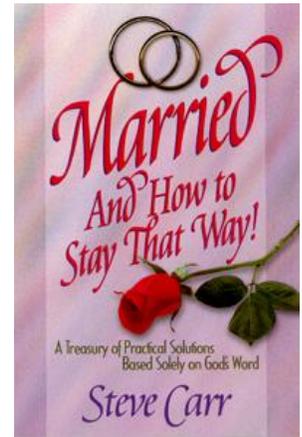
apply it in your life it is worthless. Jesus said in reference to being a servant, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). Men, let me say this as clearly as I can: you will be blessed and your family will be blessed if you become the leader that God has called you to be.

Do you believe God has called you to be the leader of your home? Knowing this truth in your heart will only come by hearing His voice calling you to take His commission to lead. This is how David realized his calling to be head over the nation of Israel. In his last words before his death, he revealed how the Lord raised him up to lead. "Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God' " (2 Samuel 23:1-3). These are some of the greatest leadership principles in Scripture. David realized that his calling to leadership over Israel was a result of God's anointing which allowed God to speak through him. God also spoke to David and commanded him to be just and rule in the fear of God. Note these three points: (1) God spoke to him to call him to this position. This is what gave him the confidence to take this leadership position. (2) He was to be just in all his decisions. (3) Only by having a sincere respect for God could he lead others in a just manner.

Do you want God to speak through you and use you as a godly man to lead your family? Ask God to speak to your heart and empower you with His anointing to be the man He has called you to be. Only then will you be just and lead your home in the fear of God. Why not ask Him now to begin His work in you?

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