



Roles in Marriage

Hello again! I hope that each of you had time to think about the lesson from last week.

The three main points were:

1. God specifically designed marriage to be a covenant relationship,
2. We need to exhibit extravagant love to our spouses, and
3. Moving closer to each other takes a conscious effort.

You should have completed the Love Language on-line quiz and determined four actions to speak love to each other. Most importantly, you should have spent time daily in reading the Bible together and praying with each other.

We ended last week by briefly touching on keeping the little foxes out of your marriage. Little foxes are all those small things that do great damage to your relationship over time. It's easy to identify the big targets like adultery or abuse; but too often the small everyday things go unnoticed until great damage is done.

This week we are going to focus on the fox of Biblical roles in marriage. This is a sensitive topic for many individuals; I know for us, it was an area my wife struggled with for the first year or so of our marriage. Society tells us that you have to watch out for yourself, but as you discovered through the scripture readings last week, God's design is that we love each other and watch out for the other person first. This attitude allows God's assigned roles to work. Listen with an open heart and be prepared to struggle with some of the ingrained thoughts we all have developed around this topic. Remember, God created marriage and He knows how it will work best - we need to learn from the Master as we try to replicate His plan.

The two main roles boil down to the leader and the supporter. The problem most people have right off the bat with this model is the assumption that one role is more important than the other, and that simply isn't true. That initial flawed thinking then bleeds over into area of

self-worth. Most people come to the faulty conclusion that the leader is the more important role, so whoever is the leader is the more important person. The supporter is the one stuck without a voice and is less important; and people will do almost anything to avoid winding up in that role! That type of distorted thinking is supported by most popular television shows and magazines - but that is not how God designed the roles, that is a prime example of how humans have ruined His plan.

God places equal value on men and women, husbands and wives. People have gotten that messed up since the fall in the Garden of Eden. Throughout Old Testament history and into the New Testament, women were treated as second-class citizens. Laws and customs often dictated that they were unable to own land or even agree to something without a man there to give his permission. It got really bad for women who were widowed; they were totally at the mercy of others. Women were seen as insignificant by society, and in some cultures that still holds true today. I know that isn't how God feels about women; I know because I've watched how He treats them.

When Jesus showed up on the scene, He didn't shun women. He accepted them and interacted with them, even though the cultural customs saw that as taboo. He showed them honor, even the women who were prostitutes and completely rejected by society. Jesus is God and His actions showed us that God values women, all women, as much as he does men. He isn't going to design a marriage to work in a way that is dishonoring to women or short-changes them. If you need more proof, check out the Bible for yourself. See how Jesus treated the woman at Jacob's Well in Samaria; her story is in John chapter 4. Or how he accepted Mary Magdalene in Luke chapter 8. Check out the tenderness He shows to Mary and Martha, two sisters who lived in Bethany, their story is in Luke chapter 10. Jesus shows us that God loves and honors women, regardless of how people have managed to distort that truth.

In God's eyes, men and women are of equal importance - they are all His sons and daughters. He doesn't have a warped value system that penalizes or rewards based on gender - He gathers us all together in His arms and expects everyone to be treated as royalty. That being said, just because we are of equal value, doesn't mean that our jobs are identical. Think about any organization, in order for it to function well it has to have different people doing different jobs - and that's how it is in marriage.

God designed marriage to be a partnership with a leader and a supporter, and He designed the man to lead. That is not to say that he gets to do whatever he wants to do. Godly leadership is very different from what most people think of when leaders come up. That's where my wife struggled. Because of her past experiences, male leadership conjured up images more along the lines of Hitler and Mussolini than Jesus; unfortunately that's where many men get it wrong too. Leadership isn't dictatorship. Godly leadership always takes into primary consideration God's will, then the well-being and needs of the wife. Because of that, it can't be a solo performance - husbands need to seek input from God's Word and from their wives when decisions need to be made. However, the fact remains that in the end, someone has to make the final call and that job goes to the husband. That really is only fair, ladies, because the husband is also the one who has to answer to God for the decisions that are made. The challenge that men face is in making the decision that is going to have the best long-term solution, rather than the decision that will make things easier right now.

Godly leadership can also be defined as servant-leadership. Men are to lead, but from the standpoint of being a servant of God as they care for their wives. God commands husbands to love their wives. That's because He knew that men tend to get caught up in the tasks of this world and forget to show their wives the love they have for them. That love is essential for wives to function in their God-given role. Men have to keep that as a constant reminder to themselves because the success of the leader/supporter model hinges greatly on the wife feeling completely loved and cared for by her husband. The man may be tasked with and held accountable for the decisions and direction the family is going, but the wife has an equally difficult job.

Wives are asked to support their husbands, even when they don't agree with what the decision is. That doesn't mean that they are to blindly do whatever their husbands ask - women are first accountable to God and should never act against His will. It's pretty easy to know what to do when things have a specific right or wrong path; it's apparent that murdering someone is a bad decision and shouldn't be supported. However, most decisions aren't that cut-and-dried. The challenge that women face is when the decision is neither right nor wrong by God's standards; and the vast majority of decisions that need to be made aren't sinful, regardless of which way you decide to do things. For instance, God doesn't

really care if you live in Kansas City or move to Washington; the decision of where to live is one that has to be weighed by motives, benefits, costs, and a host of other things. Those are the decisions that wives have to support, regardless of if the decision is the one they were hoping for.

Husbands have a huge impact on their wives ability to support those decisions. When a wife knows that her husband has her interests first in his heart, she can trust that her desires are taken into account in the decision that he is making. This happens when he consistently demonstrates his love and care toward her. But ladies, this isn't a one-way street! God commands you to respect your husband, even when you don't agree with him and even when he may be behaving in ways that don't deserve respect in your opinion. That means that you can and should give your input toward a decision that needs to be made, but once a decision is final you need to figure out how you are going to be supportive of it.

Since wives are to respect their husbands, that support needs to be given with a positive attitude. Anyone can go along with things in a grudging manner, just picture the sullen teenager on a car trip here - everyone may get where they are going, but it isn't going to be a pleasant ride. What God is expecting is that you move with the decision more like dance partners would. Instead of making it difficult to move forward in the chosen path, wives are to figure out how they can make the changes needed as easily as possible. That includes preparing well and creating an environment that is non-threatening. Ladies, your husbands have enough people waiting for them to fail, they don't need you to be one of those wolves in the pack. They need to know that you are on their side regardless of how hard or messy things get. They need to know that they are coming home to a loving and peaceful home. Many times the Bible references quarrelsome wives as being as irritating as a drip and points out that it's better to live on the roof of your house than inside it with an unpleasant wife. I don't think those are attributes that any wife wants to have attached to her.

Men, you aren't off the hook yet. When you have made the final decision you are to deal with your wife in a loving manner. That means that when she is having difficulty accepting the decision you have made, you must do everything in your power to make accepting the decision as easy for her as possible. Being a loving servant-leader looks like explaining patiently, yes maybe for the tenth time, why you made the decision. It means hearing her fears regarding the decision and validating her feelings while limiting the dangers that she

perceives.

The true definition of manhood is being a loving servant-leader to your wife. Never does a man get to display a superior attitude and say something like, “Because I’m in charge that’s why.” Your wife is your precious gift from God, not a slave. You are to treasure her and keep her safe because you will one day have to answer to God about how you took care of His daughter.

Women, if you want your husbands to love you and serve you the way that God intended, you also have a responsibility for helping that process. You have to do everything in your power to demonstrate your support for him. He has a huge load to carry with many responsibilities; he needs to know that you, as his teammate, aren’t sabotaging his efforts.

There is a balance that happens when both husband and wife function the way that God intended. Women are able to feel safe enough to live in the submissive role of supporter, and men are empowered to take the lead in their families without fear of mutiny. We know that in the real world, things get messed up.

Dr. Eggerichs refers to a phenomenon called the Crazy Cycle. This starts happening when both parties are functioning out of whack with how it should be. Many times this is the result of one mistake that is met by the other party with an equally bad response. That response triggers another negative action, which feeds into more bad choices. The result is a downward spiral of wrong behaviors that is hard to break because neither person has a reason to trust that the other won’t hurt them. If past mistakes have left you in a place that everything is out of balance, there are certain things you can do to correct this free fall.

The first thing each of you must do is to examine your heart and the heart of your spouse. What I mean is, really think about whom each of you are as far as your character goes. Is your spouse really hard-hearted, seeking only his or her own good? Does he or she really not care about you? What do you really believe about what his or her motives are? What about yourself? How have you been self-seeking lately? What you need to seek forgiveness for? What do you need to have clarified?

The next step you will need to take is asking for and granting forgiveness to each other. If you are on the Crazy Cycle, each of you has contributed to the problem and each of you has to accept responsibility for your own part in it. Last week you looked at several scriptures having to do with forgiveness; God expects us to forgive each other. Forgiveness

doesn't mean that you forget what happened, but that you release the other person from the debt of their actions. That means you can't bring it up or hold it against them.

Finally, one of you is going to have to be the more gracious person and take that first step. If you have been on the Crazy Cycle for a while, at first this will feel awkward, like any new skill. You may feel like you really can't trust the other person to not hurt you, and if there has been a breach of trust you are right, it will take time for that to heal. You need to be patient with each other and keep reacting with love and respect. The more often you practice that and see it work well, the more momentum you will build up. As you move forward, that momentum will propel you forward through the more difficult times.

When we live our marriages according to God's plan, things just work. It doesn't mean that everything is easy because we live in a fallen, sinful world; however, it does mean that things are simple. He lays out for us what we need to do; we just have to trust that He has our best interests at heart. That's pretty easy to believe when you look at everything He has done for us already.

The big take-aways from today are:

1. Men and women are of equal value in God's eyes, but have different roles to fulfill
2. Men are tasked with leading and loving their wives
3. Women are tasked with supporting and respecting their husbands

You will work on fleshing out exactly how this will look in your marriage as you work through the project and the devotions this week.

Now, let me close our time together in prayer. God, thank you for creating us as your precious children. Thank you for designing us to be able to fulfill the roles you created for us in marriage, even though it is unfamiliar by the world's standards. Open our hearts to our spouses and help us to work for the marriage that you want us to have. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Next week we will talk about some things you can do to improve communication in your marriage. Have a blessed week.

