

Leadership is the Top Stumbling Block in Marriage

The issue that causes the most problems in marriage is leadership. That is, according to an international research by psychologist Dr. David Olsen on roles in marriage, which indicates that 93% of couples state that the Number One stumbling block for married couples is “We have problems sharing leadership equally.” The couples’ concept of leadership in marriage affects conflict resolution, involvement in household chores, parenting, career paths, financial planning, and much more. It is my opinion that there is far too much emphasis on who is in charge in marriage and not enough emphasis on “let’s work together.” companionship, togetherness, and oneness. Whenever a male in a relationship or a husband makes the comment “who’s wearing the pants around here,” that is a sure sign of a misconception about marriage, which often evokes tension that can lead to abuse. It is an insult to a woman’s dignity and value.

I’ve discovered that the majority of modern Christian women are not looking for men to lead them in marriage. They are looking for men to lead **with** them. They are uncomfortable when there must be a designated someone to have the last say, or last opinion, just because that someone is a male. This causes tension in marriage or makes it difficult for couples to experience optimum marital health. We have not taught husbands and wives to negotiate, so they resort to what appears to be easy--a power-central structure: Husband leads, wife follows.

SET UP FOR ABUSE

Society has for centuries set up women for emotional and physical abuse. Many women themselves are maintaining and defending the status quo, which leads them down the painful path of abuse and sometimes death. They tell their daughters and grand daughters to unquestioningly “respect your husbands,” “they have the last say,” “don’t hurt their egos.” Thus, when an intelligent woman, who knows she has the freedom to think on her own, questions or seeks to dialogue with her husband, her opinions are squashed simply because she is the wife.

Too many men have been taught to use women, and too many women have been taught to depend on men like needy, mindless females, sapping them of their true worth. We must remind men and women that in marriage and society, God gave men and women, husbands and wives, equal voice, vote, and power.

EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE

One area in marriage that really tests married couples’ concept of oneness is the management of finances. In The Bahamas, we have a recipe for disaster in couples’ finances. Women are taught that their income is for themselves, and not for their family. Husbands are taught that they are responsible for taking care of and providing for the family and all the household needs. They do not let their wives know their incomes, and their wives are to take care of them like maids in a hotel. There is no teaching about equality, sharing, combining of incomes and assets, or working together. Some wives have a false sense of security because they can keep all their income to do as they please, while their husbands take care of all the household bills. This false sense of security blows out of the window when the wives realize that they really do not have much power in making what they feel should be joint decisions in the home. Their names are not on any assets, and soon they realize that there is an imbalance of power. Then the war brews, and oftentimes volcanic eruptions of angry words lead to fear, depression, embarrassment, and marital breakup.

SHARING HOUSEHOLD CHORES

In the book "Empowering Couples," Dr. David Olsen states: "Women clearly have been the recipients of an unfair division of labor in the home. In fact, in only 20% of dual-career marriages . . . did the men share housework equally with their wives. . . . One study found that single mothers spend an average of 16 hours per week on chores while married mothers spend an average of 20 hours per week." Why is it so difficult to get men and women to work together in the home? Why are so many men still requiring their wives to serve them, cook for them, wash their clothes, and clean the dishes, simply because they are their wives? I believe that good Christian women or men would enjoy doing these things not out of requirement but out of love and a healthy understanding of equality in marriage. If a husband wants his wife to serve him, he must also be willing to serve her the same way--wash and fold up the clothes, clean dishes, iron, and cook, babysit, clean the floors, take the children to the doctor, change the diapers, etc. If he does not like to do any of these things, then it is unfair for him to expect his spouse to do all of these things. Both should share the burden out of love and consideration for each other.

HAPPY VERSUS UNHAPPY

Dr. David Olsen's research goes on to indicate that marital satisfaction is not possible when couples depend on the concepts and practices of the "good old days." Let us review the findings. The research indicated that when both husband and wife perceive that marriage is equalitarian (equal power, vote, and voice), that more than 81% of the couples are happy and 19% unhappy. When the husband is traditional (there are fixed roles based on gender and tradition) and the wife is equalitarian, 50% of the couples are happy and 50% unhappy. When the wife is traditional and the husband is equalitarian, only 37% of the couples are happy and 63% unhappy. When both husband and wife are traditional, only 18% are happy and 82 percent unhappy.

The real issue of leadership and roles in marriage is that of power. Power is perhaps the "major impediment to the achievement of marital equality," says Olsen. Whether it is wife-dominated power or husband-dominated power, it is not healthy in a relationship. Men have to release themselves of the pre-occupation of power and leadership. Until that happens, we will continue to have spouse abuse.

MEN AND WOMEN TO LEAD TOGETHER

I encourage pastors and men who train men to become whole and to teach men that they are not to compete with women, but to compliment them. Do not teach them that "they must take over" from their wives. That is a reversal of the problem. Do not teach them that male leadership is a divine right or prerogative. That is not Biblical. God gave both men and women dominion over the earth, not each other (Genesis 2). Teach them that sin has skewed the balance of power and Jesus came to restore in us His image. This includes the restoration of power in marital relations and among all people. We are all equal at the cross. **Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. Send your questions to question@soencouragement.org or call 242-323 8772 or write P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, The Bahamas or visit the website at www.soencouragement.org**