

Overcoming the Failures of the First Husband

At the beginning of human history God committed to Adam, the first husband, a specific responsibility: “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it*” (Genesis 2:15). The English does not convey the full meaning of the word translated “keep.” It comes from *shamar* whose basic meaning is “to guard” or “protect.” The Modern Hebrew word for “night watchman” (*shomer*) is derived from this root. God held Adam responsible to *guard* the Garden. Guard it from what? Guard it from the entrance of any “*beast of the field*” (Genesis 2:20) that had no place in the Garden.

The very next chapter reveals that Adam failed in his responsibility. The serpent, a “*beast of the field,*” made his way into the Garden. Then Adam failed in his next obligation – to protect his wife from Satan's cunning attack. Scripture does not reveal where Adam was at that moment, but it is clear that he left Eve on her own. At that point Eve added her sin to that of her husband. She entered into conversation with the serpent, succumbed to his deception and ate of the forbidden fruit. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate of it, too. This reveals that the first two sins in human history were sins of *omission*. Adam failed not in what he did but in what he failed to do (Adam failed in what he did not do.)

Sins of *omission* then led to sins of *commission*. The third sin was committed by Eve, who was deceived by the serpent and ate of the forbidden fruit. She also involved her husband by giving him some of the fruit to eat. The primary sin of the man was the sin of *omission*; he was delinquent in his God-given responsibility. Then Adam's sin of *omission* opened the way for Eve's sin of *commission*. People tend to think of sins of omission as less serious than sins of commission. But this is not Scriptural. In Matthew 25:31-46 *Yeshua* gives a prophetic parable concerning the judgment of the *sheep* and *goat* nations at the end of the age. To the goat nations He pronounces one of the most fearsome judgments ever to be uttered: “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Vv. 41). What did those nations do to incur such a horrific judgment? The answer can be given in one word: *nothing*. They gave no food, no drink, no clothing; they showed no compassion. For those sins of omission they were condemned to everlasting punishment.

The double failure of Adam and Eve set a pattern that has been repeated in every subsequent generation. The primary, characteristic sin of men is a sin of omission, not of commission. They fail in their responsibility—first to their wives, then to their whole families. The characteristic sin of women is to go beyond the limits of their authority and to usurp the functions of men. The aggressive feminist movement is merely the latest in a long series of unhappy consequences of the continuing failure of both men and women. It is important to see, however, that the initial failure of men opens the way for women to move out of their places and usurp the functions of men. The number one problem of Western civilization, in my view, is delinquent husbands (men), just as the number one problem of delinquent children is delinquent parents. The failure of both Adam and Eve marred the perfection of the relationship that God planned for them to have toward each other. Nevertheless their failure did not set aside the basic principle on which God intended their relationship to be built. We could call theirs a relationship of *initiative and response*. According to this pattern, Adam, as husband, was responsible to take the initiative, and Eve, his wife, was responsible to respond.

In our contemporary culture, however, there are many other aspects of the relationship between the sexes in which the principle of initiative and response has been set aside or even turned upside down. Men have failed in their basic responsibility and women have taken over the male role. The inevitable outcome, whether in a family, nation or civilization, can be summed up in one word: *confusion*.

The Husband's Responsibilities – Areas in Which He Should Take the Initiative

1. Love Your Wife: This is not a suggestion or recommendation. It is a command, clearly stated in Ephesians 5:25: “*Husbands, love your wives...*” To put it simply: If you do not love your wife, you are disobedient to Scripture. The same verse also tells you the way to love her—“*...just as Messiah also loved the congregation and gave*

Himself for her.” We notice that this kind of love is not a “taking love” but a “giving love”—actually a self-giving love (self-sacrificing love.) It is the husband who should take the initiative in giving himself to and for his wife.

2. Receive Input: The husband should always make room for his wife to speak her **mind** freely and be sensitive to what she is thinking or feeling, even when she does not express it in words. Her unspoken feelings are often her deepest, and tones of which her husband needs to be most aware. Communication failure is probably the most common single factor in the breakdown of a marriage. A husband also needs to remember that the wife has her own special kind of wisdom: “*intuition.*” He may work out some conclusion by a laborious process of reasoning, but when he shares this with his wife, he may be surprised when she responds: “*I knew that all along.*”

3. Make Decisions: Once there has been free and respectful communication between husband and wife, they come to the place where a practical decision has to be made. At this point it is his responsibility to make the final decision. Often when there is good communication the wife is happy to let him bear this responsibility.

4. Initiate Action: Generally this follows as a logical consequence of the decision making process just outlined. But normally the person responsible for taking the practical steps to carry out a decision is the husband. The husband may need to delegate (based in part on spiritual gifting) many practical daily tasks to his wife, but he should be careful to shoulder a reasonable portion of their shared responsibilities as a couple.

5. Nourish and Cherish: One word should describe the attitude of every husband toward his wife: *special*. Every husband should say to himself, *my wife is special. There's no one else just like her.* For this reason he should relate to her in a way that he relates to no other woman. This does not apply merely to their sexual relationship; it should apply to the way he thinks about her, the way he talks about her, the way he treats her. This is what we see in *Yitzchak & Rivka*. In Eph. 5:28-29 Rabbi *Sha'ul* says that a man should love and care for his wife in a particularly personal way: “*Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the Congregation.*” The two words *nourish* and *cherish* suggest an attitude of intimate concern that includes attention to what might appear to be small details. A husband should be concerned about his wife's health, her appearance, the way she does her hair, the perfume she uses. Everything that concerns her should concern him. She should always have the confidence that to her husband she is the most important person in the world.

6. Give Praise: In our Shabbat tradition the husband describes and extols the character of the virtuous, or excellent wife by quoting from Proverbs 31. It points out her many achievements; then it closes with words of praise: Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “*Many daughters have done nobly but you excel them all.*” (Prov. 31:29-29) Some husbands are stingy with their words of praise. That is false economy! They would be surprised to discover how much a wife longs to be praised—and how she responds to it. Giving praise to your wife is one of the best investments you can ever make. If a man has a faithful, committed wife, there is no way he can ever offer her in money what she is worth. You see: “*Her worth is far above rubies*” (Vv. 10). The least a husband can do is offer his wife words of heartfelt praise.

A Final Challenge

An experienced minister was once asked about someone, “*Is he a good Believer?*” He replied, “*I don't know; I can't tell you yet. I haven't met his wife.*” That was a wise answer because a husband's success is seen in his wife. Why not apply this test to yourself as a husband? Perhaps you need to focus less on yourself and more on your wife. Ask yourself (and her) the following questions: *Is she secure and fulfilled? Do I feel proud of her?* If the answers are yes, you are on your way to being a successful husband. But if there are obvious areas in your wife's personality that are incomplete, or if she shows strain or insecurity, you need to check on your performance as a husband. Recheck the list of your responsibilities as a husband. If you see you have been delinquent, repent before the Lord and ask Him for the grace you need to do better.