

The Men Speak Out

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

I decided to email some men I know to ask them how we as women can affirm and encourage them to express godly masculinity in the home and church? This is what they shared with me.

Express encouragement/belief in him

- Say "Thank You" more frequently and mean it.
- She would often tell me, "You are a man after God's own heart." That might at first seem like flattery because no one deserves to be told that, and I am obviously nowhere near that, but that is where the power is. It encourages the areas God is showing Himself in my leadership, and it gently shows me the areas that I am struggling to reflect Him in. When I would hear that from her I would feel such love and encouragement but also such a sweet, soft, well . . . rebuke.
- Compliment him when it is appropriate to do so. Men like to know they are doing a good job-even on smallish things.
- My wife's father left the family when she was 5 years old, and the scars from that episode carried over into our early years of marriage and how she responded and respected me as her husband and the leader in the home.

In the early years of our journey with the Lord, we had a friend who challenged her to see the good in her husband. She admitted that she could not see the good in me which also reflected her lack of respect for me or the position of the spiritual leader in our home. She had a strong will or personality, which is not a bad thing if surrendered to the Lord. The challenge from our friend was the beginning of the breaking process in her life and the fresh start in our relationship as she began to see me in a different light and the good God had placed there. She was then able to accept me and my leadership and to trust me as her husband and as a man made in God's image and not necessarily that of her father.

- My wife grew up in church and I did not. After my conversion I was so ignorant of the Word that she kept me in a state of feeling ignorant and not able to lead her because of her knowledge -- there were even times my simple prayers were not

good enough for her. She would actually voice this to me in subtle ways. Along with her very controlling personality, I felt helpless! For many years, until God changed her heart, I stayed discouraged and did not want to even attempt to step up to the plate.

Communication

- Encourage women to say, "I am called to affirm and encourage you as you seek godly masculinity, and to honor and support God-ordained male leadership in the home and in the church. You may never have heard me say anything like that. But, I want to learn what this means ... for you and for me. You may not believe me that I want to affirm and encourage you/us in this. You may not believe that I want to honor and support you and this. You may not believe it because I've not said it ... nor have I acted like I want it. But, I am changing-or want to change-and I do want this for you and for me. So ...
 - I repent. My sin has been against you. More, it's been against God. I haven't seen this as rebellion or sin, but it is.
 - Please be patient with me. My eyes are opening. I am afraid of saying this because it's not the way I've been raised' it's not the way most people think, and I don't want to be doormat.
- I am going to re-affirm this regularly with you. I will ask you regularly things like:
 - 'How did I affirm/encourage/honor/support you this month? What did that do for you?'
 - 'Can you gently tell me how I didn't affirm/encourage/honor/support you this month? I promise not to become defensive or angry.'
 - 'Are there any ways I am discouraging you from embracing your role? Is there anything I am doing that makes you feel disrespected?'

Listen!

- Listen to your husband until he is finished explaining or addressing an issue before offering your opinion.

Extend grace

- Be a dispenser of grace! There is nothing that will cause him to respond and grow to greater levels of leadership than when he sees his wife at home and ladies at church respond in grace when he makes mistakes . . . If a man genuinely desires to be a godly servant leader, it will be easier for ladies under his authority to follow him. But if he is not consistently living this way, women can best help by showing grace, because grace melts a cold heart!

Let them lead

- When [my girlfriend] would step out in front of me and begin giving leadership . . . it would make me feel inadequate, and would cause me to get lazy and even more passive. I know a lot of women can think quicker than us men, so it's so easy for them to take the wheel and it's easy sometimes for us guys to let them have it so we can avoid the pressures of leadership and decision making.
- [from a wife] This issue was huge in the early years of our marriage. Initially, he was a "reluctant" leader, so it was challenging for me to surrender my natural inclination to "take over." I felt like things were falling through the cracks as I "waited" (and sometimes they did). At times I felt like I was being foolish for not "making things happen." But as I quietly waited, I saw the Lord transform him into the fantastic leader that he is today in our home, marriage, and in ministry.
- Men lead where they believe they are competent. Even if they aren't competent, they will strike out boldly if they think they are. Having someone who follows or agrees will add to our confidence. It doesn't have to be done blindly or in every instance, but it needs to be an established pattern. Continual disagreement and questioning will cause us to second guess ourselves. Seeds of doubt lead to hesitation and procrastination. Eventually, avoidance sets in. Why try if you are only going to fail? Show trust in a man's leadership abilities.
- (please hear in this a gentle tone) From a man's perspective, one of the things I've noticed when leading mixed small group Bible studies or Sunday school classes is the quick answer that the women often give when a question goes out to the group. I think most of the time, men are inward processors. Most men in the group will not instantly jump to speak to get ahead of the ladies. If there's more than one of these ladies, they can consume the "air-time."

One thing that will discourage men from stepping up to the plate and expressing godly masculinity is for the women of the group to be too quick to speak their minds. I've seen very godly women sit quietly, knowing their husband can share gems of wisdom, if given an opportunity. It's not that the women don't have wisdom. But if the men are to be encouraged to lead, they will sometimes need the ladies to be quiet.

- Expect leadership from the men. Discuss this with your husband and let him know the trust you have in him and his decisions. Encourage leadership by a willingness to follow and the expression of trust as you do so. Express admiration and appreciation for your husband's leadership and heroism in facing the world for your sake. Commend your life to the Lord and submit to your husband's leadership knowing that ultimately it is the Lord that is leading you through your husband. Follow your husband in success and failure. Let him lead, despite your apprehensions concerning his chosen course of action (I am not advocating a mindless following, but a willing partner, who is forthright with opinion and insight,

but is finally able to leave the final decision to her husband).

- How to discourage men from taking leadership: Assume leadership when no man steps forward to lead. Instead, begin praying for the Lord to provide and ordain male leadership. When no male leadership arises, examine your own heart for symptoms of pride and disobedience that would prevent a man from taking the risk of being your leader.

Release expectations

- [from a wife] There is one thing that really stands out to me when I think of his leadership. I had to be willing to let him lead in his own way...using his own style. One example: When he decided that we would have "family devotions" each night, I had in mind some deeper, strong biblical teaching, etc. But that first night when the family gathered, he pulled out *The Call of the Wild*- a book about a dog named Buck. I was quite surprised, but at that moment I surrendered to the Lord and thanked God for his leadership ... wherever it would take us.

Long story short, he went on to read through scores of books through the years. Few were "Christian" per se, but he would glean biblical principles and values from every page, and the children LOVED it! They looked forward to their father's leadership every night, and today they and their families are all walking with the Lord. (PTL!)

If I had had my way in our "evening devotions," I would probably have killed their delight and sucked the joy right out of everything!

I had to learn that when I prayed for him to be my leader, I had to be willing to let "nothing happen." Then I had to be willing to let him lead with the style and techniques with which HE felt comfortable.

Heart attitude - humble, gentle, gracious, contented

- Ask women to become shapeable—not defensive, combative, angry.
- What did my wife do that made me feel supported in the midst of obscure ministry and low income. Beyond being a verbal encourager, her contentment in the midst of difficulty was my greatest affirmation. To have a happy and joyful wife always gave me hope, even in the midst of my lowest times. Her continual gratefulness kept me afloat when I could have felt like a failure. I don't think women realize the power a joyful contentment is in encouraging their husbands.