

## **Your Husband's Two Biggest Fears**

**You can do something about your husband's twin fears.**

**In fact, he will never get over them without you.**

By Priscilla Shirer

Throughout the last several years, I've enjoyed the distinct honor of sharing a speaker's stage with two beloved authors and Bible teachers—Kay Arthur and Beth Moore. And during one of our recent panel discussions before thousands of women, Miss Kay summarized a huge dose of marriage reality into so tight a capsule that any of us could swallow it and keep it down.

She said that men possess two great fears:

the fear of being found inadequate

the fear of being controlled by a woman

... which lead them to the following attitudes and aspirations: Your man wants to be your hero. He wants to feel like he is worthwhile to you and needed by you. He desires more than anything to see a look of love and admiration in your eyes. He wants to know that you celebrate him, depend on him, feel privileged to be married to him, and expect great things from him.

Let's see what these twin fears in our guys' lives have to do with us and what will happen if we try to alleviate them.

His fear of inadequacy

Your husband desires to know more than anything that you trust him, that you believe he has the wisdom and talent to succeed. He is fulfilled when he senses that, despite his inadequacies, you see the possibilities and potential God has given him as your provider and protector. He likes knowing you're praying for him, rooting for him, assuring him that he still has what it takes to be the man of your dreams. When he feels genuinely affirmed by you, it makes him want to live up to your trust in most cases. Then even when he falls short, it will be apparent that his desire was to meet your expectations. You'll see in his eyes that he was trying to please you.

This alone should be some cause for your continued trust and appreciation, as opposed to blanket disapproval (which we are often notorious for offering). When he starts to sense that all you ever think he can do is to be sloppy, forgetful, unimaginative, irresponsible, weak, indecisive, and clueless, he will become less inclined and motivated over time to prove you wrong. He knows you'll only find something to be critical of anyway.

I know your man's not perfect. Not even close, you say? He knows it too. He's not delusional. He knows he's flawed, even if he's not quick to admit it out loud. But just like you and me, he is not to be defined by his imperfections. He has been divinely wired to be a leader, father, and provider for your family. And the last thing he needs or wants is a wife who doesn't believe it, who's always correcting him, unwilling to either recognize or support these qualities in him.

A voice of support, confidence, and encouragement from you is electric to him. It quells the continual struggle against any sense of inadequacy that smolders inside of him. When you pull him aside to pray for him, when you tell him he's been on your mind, when he sees in your eyes that you're proud of the man he's becoming, it's like a shot of pure adrenaline to his system. It's the soft warmth of security that comforts him from the ridicule of a harsh world and the internal jeering of his own insecurity.

Sure, there are times for talking plainly and honestly about things he needs to improve and watch out for. But probably not right now in the heat of the moment with that disappointment written all over his face. And probably not until he already knows for sure that your basic default is to love and take delight in him. An overall demeanor of gratitude will go a long way whenever the occasional reality check is called for.

If you're like me, you have an inclination to be overly critical of your husband's actions. But if your husband is anything like mine (and I suspect he is), he bristles at being corrected, criticized, and mothered by you. It makes him feel belittled and insignificant. Beaten down and discouraged. And even if you think that's the way he ought to feel about himself after what he's done and not done for you and your marriage, this sets a man up to be even more damaging and destructive to his entire family. It's not good for anybody.

Men, honestly, even with all their complexities, are really very basic and uncomplicated. Our cutting, nagging comments can wound them deeply, especially when the disapproval builds up over time. What we think of as no more than a little

jab about a specific incident becomes a stabbing wound that leaves a hole in their manhood.

Yet equally as powerful are our simple, honest, even offhand compliments that can make our husbands feel like a million bucks. When we make it our business to remind them of their position in Christ and the potential and possibility that lies within them—not because we're patronizing them but because we truly believe it—they feel on top of the world. One man told me that a little compliment his wife paid him one morning as he was leaving for work caused him to have confidence in his abilities all day at the office. It pays for us to choose wisely what we say and how we choose to say it.

Now perhaps your husband has consistently proven that he's not worthy of your trust. He's been careless with money, drawn to addictions, perhaps even unfaithful to his marriage vows. The reason you can't ascribe high value to his character, you say, is because he hasn't shown you very much of it. And you're right—his carelessness, laziness, or lack of integrity is not your fault. You are not responsible for what he's done and is doing, even if you've been less than careful about loving him well and feeding his ego.

But even you—even now—can resolve to affirm your husband and to promise that your trust in him is not gone forever. It may need to be reconstructed with the aid of outside help and ongoing accountability, but he needs to know that your heart's desire is to reestablish confidence in him.

So even in the most minor of baby steps, will you begin inching forward in your visible signs of trust and affirmation toward him? Will you allow him the new (or at least long-forgotten) experience of walking into the day with his wife's love and esteem trailing behind him? Will you look him in the eye and tell him you're not devising a plan B, a fall-back arrangement in case he doesn't ultimately pan out—that he is your one and only plan A?

And now, to the second of his fears.

His fear of being controlled

Males and females have equal value, but we are not the same. Your standards and opinions are different from his, perhaps in many areas of potential contention. But that doesn't mean his way is necessarily wrong. It's just different, though equally as crucial and valuable to the successful outcome of the situation. If you try to

control him and force him into your way of thinking, you will break something that probably doesn't need fixing, just understanding and valuing.

When your husband feels

like he's being controlled, he will eventually shut down completely, relegating his role of leadership to you, since "you seem to be doing such a good job at it anyway." The result is a shadow of the man you once knew and loved—a deflated, disinterested slacker who makes few decisions and shows little initiative. Then, in the vicious cycle created by this marital dynamic, you become increasingly overwhelmed, frustrated, and upset because you feel like you're bearing the burden he should be carrying—when in actuality, it's the very burden you snatched away from him because you didn't like how he was doing it.

But if, on the other hand, he doesn't feel like he's being bullied out of his God-given position as the leader in the home or held up to your overbearing, micromanaging scrutiny, he'll not only be more likely to settle in to his potential but also to seek your help and willingly relinquish certain responsibilities that you're clearly more equipped to handle. In other words, he won't mind admitting that you're better than him in a particular area. So some of the things you've been vying to claim more control and influence over may come back to you without a fight—as if it was his idea all along—once he doesn't feel like he has no choice but to abdicate.

And you know what? This could also rebound to you in the areas of intimacy and romance. A man who feels controlled by his wife loses much of his desire for being tender toward a woman who sounds, acts, and treats him more like his mother. No wonder he doesn't look dreamily into her eyes or spark romantic endeavors with her the way he used to do when she just wanted to be his sweetheart and allowed him to be her champion.

I've never seen a car whose engine started just because the driver was sitting behind the wheel, demanding that it move forward. Certain things need to happen before she can get the car to go—key in the ignition, maneuvered into the right gear, gently pressing on the accelerator. Men aren't "turned on" by a demanding, screaming wife who doesn't recognize their value and significance but by wives who know the strategic steps for getting them started. Control and intimacy are on opposing, collision courses that will inevitably banish passion to the long-term parking lot, eventually rusting out, in need of major repair. Backing off your

husband helps him feel more confident, more fulfilled. And the result is a guy who loves being around you, enjoys long talks with you, and remembers how to romance you.

Helping him overcome

Two fears. Fear of inadequacy and fear of being controlled. You can do something about them both. In fact, your husband will never get over them without you.

But with you ... who knows?

You are the "suitable" helper (Genesis 2:18) the Lord has given him to assist him in realizing that with God's help he can be proficient, honorable, trustworthy, and fully capable of becoming the man God intends him to be despite his fears.

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Next Steps

1. Have you been overly critical of your husband's actions or tried to force him into your way of thinking? Ask God to help you be the "suitable" helper (Genesis 2:18) that your husband needs.
2. Listen as Priscilla Shirer, a wife and mother of three, challenges women to embrace the season of life they're in, whatever that may be, and resist the urge to hurry through today on FamilyLife Today®.
3. Priscilla Shirer challenges all women to be intentional about embracing and thriving in God's beautiful and eternal calling on their lives in her book *The Resolution for Women*.

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