



challenging your man to

Robust Christianity

by kimberly wagner

Often we attempt to encourage our men but come on so strong that it seems like nagging. Rather than cheering on my man, it can easily become more like ordering him around. If the men around us have lost the joy of manhood, their confidence to lead, and the desire to cherish us, it may be that we have stripped them of their courage. That's when it's time to find creative and supportive means to bring out the best in him.

Men are created as protectors. As a result of emasculation, bitterness, resentment, or other heart issues, a man can lose his desire to live out his calling. He can become passive, wimpy, or angry. But if a woman will approach her man with a sincere appeal for help and protection, she can inspire and motivate him to step up to the plate and pick up his role again.

Keep in mind that your husband's devotional life, process of growth and spirituality will look different than yours, but be honest with him about your need for him to serve as your spiritual leader. Just letting him know that you need him to step into that role may give him the confidence he needs to move forward. But if he makes an attempt and you shut him down with criticism or voice disappointment, he may not venture out to lead again. Encourage small steps. Try loving suggestions that appeal to his chivalrous heart.

If your husband doesn't regularly pray with you, ask him occasionally, "Could you pray with me about this? I'm really struggling with. . ." Give a specific need and issue an opportunity for him to step into the role of champion. Don't use the request for him to pray as an opportunity to bludgeon him with things he needs to change, or ask him to pray because you're struggling with him, ways he's failed, needed improvements, etc. Ask him to pray for you because of specific needs in your life, not his:

- I've recognized I need to grow in the area of . . . will you pray for me?
- I'm struggling finding time to fit it all in, will you pray for me to have wise time management skills?
- I'm having a hard time keeping my cool with the kids lately—it seems like everything causes me to blow up . . . will you pray for me?
- It's getting close to my time of month and I really don't want to turn into a witch this time . . . will you pray for my emotions?

Letting him hear your heart of struggle and appealing to him for help can be a huge source of encouragement for a man who may have the false impression that you really don't need his help. Ask him to pray with you, not just promise to pray for you later. No matter how small his effort, let him know (repeatedly) how much it means to you to know he's praying for you.

You may have dreams of your husband leading you and your children in nightly devotions, while he has plans to camp out in front of the TV until bedtime. Don't demand for him to conform to your vision. Make praying for his spiritual hunger and growth a priority (privately), but don't put on pious airs that indicate you're more "spiritual than him." Encourage his hunger for the Word in small ways:

- Occasionally (not with regularity or in a way that overwhelms him) share with him an interesting verse or one that you find encouraging and ask him his thoughts.
- If he's a reader, buy him interesting books that will whet his spiritual appetite.
- If he's willing, ask him if you can share a message or an inspiring video clip that you came across that you thought he might like (again—this is only occasionally, not in a preachy, suffocating way).
- Ask him if he would mind reading a chapter from the Bible at the end of mealtimes as a way of finishing off the meal with the family. Perhaps couch it playfully with a smile. "Trade off—I'll feed you a good meal physically, if you'll feed me and the kids a chapter of Scripture."

Anything that he's willing to do, any small steps he takes, needs to be followed with huge amounts of approval and appreciation from you. When it comes to influencing your husband to godliness, there are no pat answers or easy solutions. Many men feel intimidated by the daunting idea of being a "spiritual leader" and have no idea what that means or looks like.

Be patient.

Be kind.

Be loving as he finds his way.