

IS A HUSBAND'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE?

<https://fiercemarriage.com/is-a-husbands-failure-to-provide-grounds-for-divorce>

[00:00:00]

Ryan: With all the confusion around rules, around what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, now, I don't feel confused when it comes to these things. Biblically speaking we're not confused. The culture, however, is confused about these things. And I think what happens is there... That's the, I think, the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's been happening over decades in eroding the biblical/classical roles between a husband and a wife.

One of the ways that this has cropped up, and we see this among wives that write in, is they don't feel as if their husband is providing adequately for them financially. And then the question is, what is the recourse? What can they do? And we actually had a question come in recently where a woman has asked, is that grounds for divorce? Now we're gonna read her question, but I think this will be a helpful topic. Now, whether or not you feel this in your own life, I would be willing to bet there's someone in your life that might be feeling it. So whatever we cover today will be helpful for you to that end. So we'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:03] <music>

Selena: So I feel like that was a big opening.

Ryan: Oh, do you? *[Selena laughs]*

Selena: And I'm like, does that really confuse? Why? What? Roles? Clarify. Bring some clarification.

Ryan: Okay. So men that are unable to provide, why? I think back 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, you know, go decades back, any man who's married would've said, "I'll do anything it takes to provide the life that my wife needs, the life that my children need."

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: Whereas nowadays, it's like you'll get, you know... maybe there's not such a drive to provide. There's not a conviction to provide in that way.

Selena: Right. There's just a constant... I've seen this, you know... you can see it among friends of husband jumping from job to job for various reasons of "I just didn't feel like it was for me. I felt like I was overqualified."

Ryan: Sure. Yeah.

Selena: And I'm like, "If you're not putting food on the table for your family, then that's a problem. *[laughs]*. It's a question of priorities and-

Ryan: It's a problem. But that's kind of a black-and-white example. Like if your kids are starving, your wife is starving, yeah. I mean, there's scriptural clarity around that. Meaning that you're worse than an unbeliever is what Paul says to Timothy. But what if it's more nuanced than that? Or the wife is forced to work because the husband has a job that pays too little and therefore the wife can't be home with her children, with the baby. That's what we're gonna talk about today.

So if you don't know who we are, I'm Ryan. This is my lovely wife Selena. We're the Fredericks. We do Fierce Marriage, Fierce Parenting, all things fierce. There's nothing on the internet that is fierce that doesn't involve us. I'm kidding. *[laughs]*.

Selena: I was like, "Once again, another big leap here. Reign it in, buddy."

Ryan: Hyperbole is becoming a good friend of mine. But anyway, thank you for joining us, giving us your attention. We pray that it's fruitful for you. This came from a listener. So if you want to ask a question, we love those because they help us keep a pulse on what we can digest through, process through to help you tangibly.

Selena: Yeah. And chances are you're not the only one wondering these types of questions. And the conversations typically cover quite a few other questions and conflicts as well.

Ryan: Yeah. So to ask a question, you can do that. Just go to fiercemarriage.com/ask. You can fill out a form, you can text it in, or you can call and leave a voicemail, which those are delightful *[Selena laughs]*. And if you leave a voicemail, we might actually play it on the air, so to speak. *[Selena laughs]*. Let's move on.

So anyway, here's a question that came in. This came from Anon. This is Selena's good friend, Anon *[both laughs]*. Deep tracks right there.

Selena: Deep tracks.

- Ryan:** If you didn't know, that meant anonymous at one point in time, which I thought was hilarious.
- Selena:** Like 200 episodes ago. Anyways.
- Ryan:** All right. Why don't you read that, Sel?
- Selena:** Sorry, I thought it was 1 Timothy. From a listener, our listener Anon-
- Ryan:** Actually hold up because I... good. Because I want to read this verse first. I'm sorry I didn't read my own rundown. *[Selena laughs]*. I want to read this verse first. And as a listener, I want you to process through this question in light of what this passage in 1 Timothy says. Okay? Because this will bear weight on us. 1 Timothy 5:8 says this: "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Okay. So think about that in light of this question from Selena's friend, Anon.
- Selena:** "My husband and I got married young, probably too young. He went to welding school and I assumed he would be able to provide for a family with that career. Five years later, he is not using his welding education and is at a job that makes considerably less than I do. I'm stuck at a well-paying job with good insurance, but I feel like he does not feel the need to provide for us and make it possible for me to work less and be at home more with our 18 month old. We're at the point where I'm now considering divorce because my husband does not provide for us. I feel partly at fault because I guess I didn't make it clear before we got married that I had this expectation for him. He just doesn't show the drive to even want to provide more. Is this grounds for divorce?"
- Ryan:** So we're gonna parse through this, reading that in light of our passage in 1 Timothy. What this woman is writing into, and this is why we're addressing this is, because I feel like this is something that many women face at some point in their marriage. And tragically I think there's a dearth of men in society that provide full spectrum leadership, headship, care, provision, priesthood over the home. I'm just gonna say this. We are what you would call older millennials. So we're technically millennials. The generation behind us... what is it? Gen Z? is that right?
- Selena:** Sure.
- Ryan:** I don't remember. You know, there's kind of this... I don't know, there's this weird kind of relegation of responsibility that seems societal society-wide. Meaning we have friends who are hiring men who are in their early 20s up

into their late 20s, maybe even mid-30s, where there's this really weird sense of entitlement. The lack of drive to be a problem solver, to take ownership, to go over and above, to do what it takes, that's an attitude that is-

Selena: It's pervasive,

Ryan: ...rarer and rarer to find someone who's willing to do what it takes.

Selena: Oh, sorry. I was saying it's pervasive to find the entitlement.

Ryan: Yes. Okay. We're on the same page. So I think that filters through to some young men in their marriages in that they'll think, "What? I've got a job. I showed up. I worked 40 hours, now I'm home. I deserve to sit and play video games. I deserve to sit and do whatever the hobby is. I don't need to go over and above." And of course I'm painting with broad strokes, but to hopefully make a point. Hopefully this will be instructive.

So I want to walk through the statement. So she started with this. She said, "My husband and I got married young, probably too young." Is that true? Did they get married too young? Now, what is too young? This is worth discussing because right now, believe it or not, the average age for marriage for a first marriage is 28 for women and it's 30 to 31 for men.

Selena: Right. It's gotten much older just I think in the last - what? 30 years if not less?

Ryan: Yeah, 30 years. So back in 1990, it was 24 for women. So it's gone from 24 in 1990 now to 28 for women and for men it's gone from 26 in 1990 to 30 to 31. So it's four years further.

Selena: Wow.

Ryan: In 1960, so you go back another 30 years, it was 20 was the average age for women to get married, and 22 was the average age for men to get married. So what's too young?

Selena: Right. And I think it might just be a maturity question.

Ryan: Right. And it's not the crux of what we're addressing here, but I just think that's interesting because we're giving a talk next week to middle schoolers about marriage. And that's one of the things we're asking about. Like, how do we know when we're ready to...? It's a Christian high school or Christian middle school. So they want to know like, what's Christian dating and how do we do that?

Selena: How old should I be? What's a good age to start dating and that kind of thing? But I think you can sense kind of the frustration. She feels some regret here. She feels like it's not everything that she was hoping for it to be. She's frustrated with the choices that he's made right now and that they're making together, you know, apparently.

Ryan: Yeah. So were they too young? Who's to say? I tend to think it's a moot point that you're married and this is the card that you've been dealt/you've dealt to yourself, the covenant doesn't change because we got married too young.

Selena: Right. You definitely don't want to be keeping score of those things, right, of like, "Okay, here's another mistake. Here's another mistake. Here's another thing I wish I wouldn't have done." Because all you're doing is perpetuating down the path of "well, we should be divorced like this." You're just heading down there faster minimizing it.

Ryan: Good. The second piece that she's asking here is, the husband is making less than she is expected him to make, and it's less than she makes and it isn't the career that they had agreed on. In other words that she was assuming, now whether or not they agreed on it, we don't know, he was gonna be a welder. And welders make, I don't know... Welders probably make north of \$40 an hour.

Selena: And they probably invested money for him to go as well.

Ryan: Exactly. So is that a problem that that expectation has been broken? I would say to intrinsically no. Although if you've not communicated through it, then yeah. That's-

Selena: Right.

Ryan: ...the lack of follow through.

Selena: Well, why has she seen it as a problem and why is he maybe not seen it as a problem?

Ryan: Why doesn't he have a job in welding? That's one question. And based on her question, the way she's worded it, I'm assuming it's because he hasn't pursued one as opposed to maybe there isn't one nearby available.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: There isn't one available. Welding's a pretty universal need, you know, in most industrialized cities. So I would tend to think that you can find a job welding if you want to.

The fourth thing is, or the third thing she wants him to provide so she can quit her job and be home with her child. Is that a worthy desire?

Selena: I mean, biblically speaking, yes.

Ryan: Yeah, absolutely. The role and responsibility of a mother is to be with the children raising the children. And we are pretty hardcore about that. Again, there are exceptions. There are I think-

Ryan: The norm is women at home raising the children. Like that's the biblical norm that we see. I think that's the societal norm we should shoot for. Feminism be tossed aside, the norm should be what I just said. And the husband should be out on the front lines earning and providing and protecting in that way. So is that a worthy desire to want to be home with her child? Absolutely.

And frankly, as a husband hearing this, my knee-jerk reaction was that is a desire that he should want to fulfill for his wife. In other words, if you were working and we had these babies at home and you were leaving every morning, I could see it in your eyes that something was dying inside every time you had to walk out that door to go to the job, presumably some sort of office job where you're sitting in a cubicle, where you're answering to your boss-

Selena: Oh my goodness.

Ryan: ...I would want as your husband to bend over backwards to try and make the financial ends meet so that you could leave that job. Now that's a lifestyle question too.

Selena: Absolutely.

Ryan: Because if we're house poor or we're car poor or we're lifestyle poor because we want to have all the toys or we want to have the RV or we want to have the... You know, stuff's expensive.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: We need to get a van because we're that category now. We have four kids. We want to be able to take, you know-

Selena: We're suburban

Ryan: ...our kids friends to places or we want to invite the neighbor kids to church.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: But we were looking at vans and we don't have a van yet because... I mean, there are cheaper vans. We liked one of the nicer vans, but the nicer vans cost like 80 grand [*Selena laughs*] and was like not in the cards.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: But if you were to pull the trigger on that and all of a sudden you have a \$1,200 monthly payment or \$1,000 or whatever, look, that's a lifestyle thing that, okay, so if I can't afford to let my wife stay home, but we're affording something else that maybe is dispensable... Let's get rid of dispensable. Let's modify things. So anyway. That's just what occurred to me is if I'm a husband and my wife's asking for this, like as a husband, like step up, do what you can.

Which based on this question, I get the indication that he's not doing what he can. The fourth thing is, and this is where we get to the crux of it, she's considering divorce because he has not provided in this way.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Is this okay?

Selena: You kinda have to read between the lines obviously in a lot of these questions. Because it felt like a big jump. Like, "Hey, he doesn't have a good paying job so I'm thinking of divorcing him." Well, ah, that feels like there's a lot of different parts that we didn't address or they haven't addressed. You know, have you talked about these expectations that you had going into marriage? Have you expressed that you want to stay home? I mean I'm sure she probably has done this. Have you talked about the wedding? That's the question. Have you talked about the things that matter? And biblically speaking though, you know, it really is not grounds for divorce.

Ryan: No, no, it's not. I'm want to be crystal clear on that, that we don't have any biblical grounds to say, you're not giving me the lifestyle that I want. I mean that's what this is.

Selena: Well, to be a mom-

Ryan: ...because it's a lifestyle to stay home.

- Selena:** Yes. Yes. Not as a-
- Ryan:** And it's one that's biblically informed.
- Selena:** Yes. That's what I meant. It's not like she's wanting to stay home and kids go to school and she can... Yes.
- Ryan:** But as a couple, that couple has to work this out, whatever that means, to get to that place. We don't have a biblical imperative that says, husband, if you are not working a job that pays well enough for your wife to not have to work, then you're sinning. We don't have that imperative.
- Selena:** Mm-mm.
- Ryan:** We can infer that that's the direction we should head. But that being said, I think the ideal is for him to step up. Now that's the crux of this. That's the main point that she's asking about is I feel as if this is a good desire, a good biblical desire, my husband has not followed through on some things that we decided early on. And that's maybe not the problem. I think the bigger problem is that he doesn't show any desire to want to change the situation or to make good on the perceived promises.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** And to me that's the big problem. Now is she at fault because she didn't communicate her expectation to him early on?
- Selena:** There's a lot of things that I wish I would've communicated to him early on.
- Ryan:** She's at fault but she can communicate it now.
- Selena:** Yeah. You can only know so much. So I don't think that's a... You know, definitely not okay for a divorce. It sounds like maybe he's, you know, kind of, he might be neglecting her in a bit. Like he doesn't care. I don't want to say neglect. I don't want to throw that term out.
- Ryan:** It's really hard to tell because we don't know him, we don't know the situation. So we have to imagine what are the situations. She wrote this question in a moment of feeling flustered and he is trying, but maybe not as hard as she thinks he should. That's one way to look at it.
- Selena:** Right.

- Ryan:** Or the other end of that is she's written this in and she's just at her wit's end and, you know, is just kind of throwing your hands up. Like he is not responding to my requests to move this direction and he's just coming home and seems to not care about us. You know, he's found a cushy job that is... You know, I'm picturing like, you know, working maybe be at retail hourly job. Well, you can't live on that.
- Selena:** Right. Right.
- Ryan:** In a trade, if you've advanced in the trade and you're a good worker, you can make a living in a trade, whether you're framing or roofing or welding or whatever that is. But you can't make a living on a retail minimum wage type job. And the only reason you have that is because you've just lost your sense of ambition and you've lost your sense of conviction for what your life is to be spent on. I don't know, as believers, I think, are we gonna be wage people... The term that comes to mind, and it's controversial, but be a wage slave in that I'm gonna give you my life in exchange for \$15 to \$20 an hour. I'm gonna give you eight hours a day, and I get my 30-minute lunch. I think those jobs are good, but I think it's-
- Selena:** Next season, I think.
- Ryan:** Yeah. As an endpoint, I think that leaves a lot to be desired. So is his lack of provision to her expectation grounds for divorce? Like we said, no. But he's not off the hook.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** He's not off the hook. So let's read this verse again. 1 Timothy 5:8. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives..." again, he's speaking to the men. "...for his relatives and especially members of his household..." That would include anyone who works within the household, that would include obviously the children and of course the wife. "If he has not provided for them, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."
- Here's where I want to finish this, and this just occurred to me, is I think this verse is speaking to this husband because he's not providing for his children according to this verse.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** His children need their mother based on what we just said. The mother needs to be home. We're home educators. We've done a whole series on this on the parenting side. I don't think there's a biblical imperative for every family to

home-educate. I do strongly think there's a biblical imperative for every family to have a Christocentric education. Because when you talk about Paideia what it means to raise children up and then nurture and admonition, that's a whole life and worldview, that's an enculturation.

So if I'm not able to provide for my children the educational opportunities in the home or the home nurturing that would be the best for the children, then in that sense, I've failed in some sense.

Selena: Right. Well, in this case too, you have an 18-month-old, so you are either gonna be paying for daycare or you're gonna be home with them. And-

Ryan: Or you have a family member that steps in-

Selena: Or family member. Right.

Ryan: ...daily or if she's got a part-time thing where she works from home or something, she's able to make it work. Obviously, we can't know for sure. But here's the big broad strokes I want to touch on as we close this episode out. Husbands are called unequivocally to be the providers for their households. Provision is more than finances. I'm to provide spiritual headship. I'm to provide generously leadership.

One term that you hear thrown around is servant leadership. I prefer servant lordship. That's a term that I got from... I forget the author, but it's a book that was released by Ligonier. Servant Lordship, which is meaning I'm reporting to God on how I am serving my household as the head of this household.

I am to provide safety for my family, a place to flourish, you know, a roof over our heads, heat in the air, clean air at that, clean water, you know, whatever it takes for my family to flourish, and then obviously financially.

So if you're looking at your family, as a husband, and any one of these core provisional things aren't being met, then as the head of the home, God is looking to you. He's looking to you. And if you're not providing those things, and this work gets really dark and I think very frightening for that husband, if you're not providing those things and you're coming home and you're sitting your butt on the couch and you're cracking open a beer and you're turning on the TV and you're doing that seven days a week, five days a week, or you're getting off work and you're going to the bar and you're dropping 30, 40 bucks a night drinking beers with the guys while your wife's at home... I'm not saying this is happening in this situation, but that to me is frightening for that man. Because not only you're not providing, but you're now stepping into neglect. Okay?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: And you're stepping into, I think, a case can be made into abandonment. And biblically speaking, you might be, and I wouldn't say this on a broad level, but you might be getting into a biblical definition of abandonment, which is biblically grounds for divorce with careful shepherding with a pastor and things like that.

So my encouragement to this wife would be, you know, if you've talked to your husband, you've nagged him, divorce is not on the table, you have no other recourse, go to the elders of your church. Obviously, you're praying. Pray for your husband's heart to be softened. Love your husband. Love him like you've never loved him before. Truly.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: It's gonna be hard but love him, encourage him, be his wife, be his helper. If he's not responding to your love, he's not responding to your encouragement, your help, go to your pastor, go to your elders, explain it to them, "My husband is... Here's the situation." Have them go through this conversation with you. And it's their job then as elders to bring him under spiritual discipline and say, "Listen, you're not providing for your wife in this way." And they'll be able to know you, they'll know him, they'll know the situation. This is all assuming that you're part of a church. And this is why church is so important.

If you're not part of a church, then you don't have that authority structure, you don't have that submission to men of God who are in submission to Christ and they're shepherding over you. So that's all very, very important. And there are things that we have to assume. So that's another red flag. If you're not in a church, then time to get into one. And that takes time, of course, which means that there's gonna be some more trials ahead. So I hope this is helpful. Do you have anything else to add?

Selena: No.

Ryan: Did I miss anything? *[Selena laughs]*? Am I gonna get in trouble?

Selena: Later on?

Ryan: Later on-

Selena: Yes.

- Ryan:** ...when the internet sets me ablaze.
- Selena:** They might.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Big, serious stuff, to be honest. I'll just leave it there. Divorce, you guys, is far uglier than I think people realize when they're going through something like this.
- Selena:** Yeah. It seems like a quick fix, but it really never is.
- Ryan:** It never is. And you know what, how is a divorce gonna fix this?
- Selena:** Especially when kids are involved. Yeah. Because I mean, you're still gonna have to work.
- Ryan:** And more. Like, you're gonna lose whatever his income is and you might get child support. But I mean, if the... anyway
- Selena:** Shouldn't go down the road.
- Ryan:** Shouldn't go down that road.
- Selena:** It's not grounds for divorce.
- Ryan:** And we don't make decisions based on pragmatism. We make them based on obedience to scripture. But I'm just saying like, think this through to maybe five years down the line. Now you've got a child by a father that's not there. And I mean, this sends well for no one. So divorce is never the ideal. God hates divorce. And at all costs we want to bring ourselves under the submission... to submit to God in the covenant of marriage and exercise biblical love the way that Christ has loved us.

And if you don't have that, if you don't know how Christ has loved you—that's a fast segue—let me tell you, He has loved you to the point of death, even death on the cross because He wants you to be reconciled unto the Father. He knew He was the only way that that could be possible. So he died the death you should have died. He rose again. He didn't state dead, but He brought with Him the keys to death so that you wouldn't have to die if you placed your trust in Him. We want you to do that.

If you don't really know what that means, find a friend who's a Christian, ask them to pray with you, to read scripture with you. Start with the book of John. Get to know what the Bible says. Find out who Jesus is so you can place your trust in Him. Find a church that preaches from the Bible. If you don't know

where to find that, we have a website that would give you a few more steps. Go to thenewsisgood.com. And of course, the good news is the good news that Jesus Christ came. It's not good advice. It's good news. It's done. It's finished (tetelestai) as Christ said on the cross. It is finished.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: And it's finished for those who place their trust in Him. And we pray that you would do that. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your word that is instructive. Father, I pray for the wives right now, specifically the wives that are struggling with feeling the lack of provision, perhaps feeling neglect, perhaps feeling emotional abandonment, vocational abandonment, if I can say that. Lord, I pray that you would comfort them in the middle of their struggle, in the middle of their storm. You would remind them that you are the Lord of the storm. You're even the Lord over this. Lord, I pray that they would trust you more through this.

God, I pray that you would soften the hearts of the husbands who are maybe sitting in the seats of this husband where they're providing, but maybe not in a way as well as they could. Lord, I pray that you'd call them up to that standard and they would do so and they would step up, Lord, by your power. More than anything, Father, we thank you for your goodness, for your grace, for your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: We haven't said it in a little while, but our patrons are the shield of the bull work protecting us from the violence of the markets. *[both laughs]*. Books sometimes sell, books sometimes don't sell. And so if you feel like partnering with us, we would be honored. We ask two things. You pray about it. And then if the Lord leads you, that's a big if, if He leads you that you would just follow through obediently. And the way that you would follow through is you go to fiercemarriage.com/partner.

Our patrons are the reason we're still here. I wrote them a note last week to that effect, and I just have to say it on the podcast, thank you, patrons. So if you're thinking about that, we'd be honored. Fiercemarriage.com/partner.

With that, this episode of Fierce Marriage is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in seven days. Until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - 1 Timothy 5:8

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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