

Undermined Efforts

Case Study Discussion

SPEAKERS Brent Schoof | Rev. Hendrik Alkema | Richard Suter

Andrew has always been a gentleman. Study in faith. Careful with his words and committed to his family. In recent years, he has felt the call to take a more active role in leading at home. With a teenage son, he wants to model godly responsibility. Teaching him to help around the house, encouraging service, and leading the family in prayer. But it often feels like his efforts fall flat. His wife, Annette, is capable and outspoken, and she has a way of questioning Andrew in front of the children. When Andrew asks their son to do something, and that points out what he did wrong, or quietly redoes the task herself. When Andrew suggests an idea for family devotions, she corrects him or offers a better way. Her comments are rarely harsh, but they leave Andrew discouraged.

And he worries that his son is learning to dismiss him too. Andrew doesn't want to lash out in anger. He loves Annette deeply and values her gifts. Yet he longs for her to support his leadership. Rather than undermine it. He wonders how he can show compassion to his wife. While helping her to see the effect her words have on him and on their children.

So we're going to start our panel again off with the same question. When you hear this case study, what comes to mind? Just outline your broad thoughts on how you would approach this, based on your experience. I'll start with you, Brent, we'll just move along the panel to open. Thank you. First of all, I think pointing out some positives that we see in this, in sort of contrast to what we had in the first case study, is: look, there's no hostility here, no outright hostility, I should say, between the and the husband and the wife.

Andrew seems sincere in where he wants to head in life, and it seems capable in managing the household. All Right. Of concern would be the aspect of the interactions in front of the children. But then going back to Andrew, again, self-controlled. So yeah, positives overall are that there's no overall tension in the household. Yeah, where to go from there? How would you approach when you're talking about it from a pastoral point of view as office bearers? Yeah, when you bring in the gospel or, first of all, when you've had the conversation between the two of them and where you're going to go from there is not coming in with the Bible and telling them how they need to be doing. What they need to be doing.

Using the Bible for restoration to getting them to understand their roles in marriage. Leave it at that for now. Uh, I would say first of all, I'm not going to set myself up as any fountain of wisdom here. I don't think I'm any kind of expert, and I'm to use a baseball analogy. I'm glad Richard is here to bat cleanup, so he can correct anything we get wrong. My second comment is sometimes in life you come across things that seem so familiar and they just sort of relate to your life. And I read this case study. And I thought, 'No, that's not my life at all, actually.' No.

So no, my dear wife is not like Annette at all. We do have a situation where two people are struggling. They want to serve the Lord. They want what's best for their family and their children. I think that is a positive. When I looked at this case study, I thought, 'Well, we have the sphere of roles here—the role of mother, the role of father.' But when I read this case study, just looking at it, at the struggles, I thought, 'Well, it's actually also a sense of identity. Is Annette's sense of self-identity wrapped up in why she's behaving the way she is? Is she struggling with her own identity? And probably for Andrew as well.

So that's sort of the initial thought I had here.' Yes, there's behavioral issues, but deep down, and that kind of gets to the iceberg analogy as well, what is behind that and their sense of self-worth? I think that's probably the deeper issue here. I'll leave it at that. Thanks for throwing me under that bus there. It's an interesting one. I'm very glad

that she's not harsh with it. And I just want to reflect on the fact that it seems like he has decided, after the oldest son is a teenager now, to become more involved in the leading of the house. That implies to me that she's been doing it herself for at least a teen time. And so he's coming back in. It's like FIFO.

She's learned how to operate the system without him there. And now he's back in, and he wants to start asserting his leadership. and her identity is going to be challenged there because she's got a ship that runs well because she's organised it that way and now there's an interloper. who's mashing it up. So. her identity of holding it together is now under threat. And of course he wants to do the right thing. I felt that as I read through the case study that he needs to learn how to lead his wife first. There's nothing stopping him being an example to his son. But does he have the skills to sit down with his wife and express the things that he's thinking and feeling and work them through with her?

And I'm going to take Christian's advice about spending time not solving problems but listening, and so I've determined that I'll spend a minute a day with my wife. And that should do it. The problem with that is that the best relationship researchers in the world, in my opinion, John and Julie Gottman say that a husband needs to spend nine hours a week with his wife doing this. And if you're anything like me, you're probably thinking, 'Where am I going to get an extra day a week?' My life doesn't have room for that. But God's call is to be the one who is the nurturer and protector of our life. And if that takes nine hours a week, and it's not just sitting down having deep and meaningful conversations, just so you don't panic.

It's doing things with her as a team. Demonstrating to her that you're on her side, that you do hear her and that you can work together with her. So there's a challenge there for him to start doing that with his wife. Now in my own marriage, I know that it takes about five to ten years for my ideas to be adopted by my wife. So you have to be patient. And you have to love and nurture through those frustrations that you have when you think this could just be fixed. Right now. It may take time, so you love and nurture. That was a my first responses. Thank you. What I forgot to do at the start is to introduce Brent.

We've been obviously introduced to Hendrick and Richard before, but just on my left is Brent Schoof, member from Free Reform Church of Albany. It's very interesting that the highest voted question at the moment on the Slido is how do you lead a capable woman? I'm going to throw that to you, Hendrik, because we have clearly seen that you have a capable woman. I'm not making a judgment on. on Richard or Brent's wives. I'll let them follow afterwards. Thank you. I just have to be careful that I have the answer that she told me to say. When I look at this case study, leading a capable woman, I mean, consider yourself blessed when you have a wife who is capable.

And I think the role of a father, the role of a husband, is to enable those who are entrusted to him by the Lord to blossom and to flourish, to grow, to be healthy and secure in who they are as God. God's children and to really develop their talents and use them to the best of their ability. So I think, if you are in a leadership role, as Andrew is here, you want your wife to flourish. You want her to be able to lead devotions and to do all kinds of things. In that sense, you're looking at an overall picture. Overall, are things healthy in the family? Overall, is the name of the Lord being honored? I think that's sort of the problem with this case study here.

The roles are not in the right They're not happening in the way that the Lord wants them to happen. If Andrew is being undercut by Annette, it's not right before the Lord. That's the first problem. And so, how do you have a wife who is capable? I think, if things are going well, the roles are the way they should be. Let her blossom, let her use your talents in some ways, become less so that she can become more, so that she can grow and give glory to God in the talents that she has. So I don't think that's a problem. We shouldn't feel threatened as men. It's not about us. It's about the glory of God. So I think be thankful. Let her blossom as long as things are being handled in a godly and scriptural way.

As I was going through this case study and then listening earlier to Kristen and just what Richard spoke at the end there, I also think that I wouldn't be surprised if, in amongst this room, brothers, there's many of us that see us in this case study where we do have—there are many, many capable wives out there. And then to add, what are they doing in their lives? They're out there. Can I suggest that, maybe, weekly, fortnightly, they're meeting out there with other sisters and having good, healthy, godly conversations. And they're getting deeper and meaningful with each other. In our last gasp, are we doing that with our wives? On a regular basis. As often as she is doing that, with her friends.

And then, by the grace of God, we will yes. Our relationships with our wives will flourish. Relationships with other friends will flourish. And then, yeah, as Hendrik has just said, and she will be able to flourish in her role. But give her time and speak with her honestly. Have those good, honest, healthy conversations with our wives. and end, and ask them the questions that Kristin. Yeah, there was a couple of questions she put in the last presentation. Really ask them what's going on in their lives. What's their challenges? What are they struggling with on a day-to-day basis? And then the next highest voted question is from, I assume, from a young man or someone who wants to give some hints to a young man in the audience.

And there are plenty of them here. So plenty of us are married. We have wives, we have families, but there are a lot of young men here. So what can they do to ensure they don't end up in this situation? I might throw to you, Richard. I would say be secure in their identity in God. because if they're not, If I'm not. I will feel condemned when my wife tells me straight facts. So if she says, 'I asked you to do one, of course, this is autobiographical,' then I will feel condemned. So all I asked you to do before you left the house was pull the plug out of the sink so the dirty water would go out, and you didn't do it.

And what I hear is, you're a useless person because you can't do the simplest thing. And we could have a conversation about this which we did for 90 minutes. Because I couldn't care less about a plug. And for some reason it's still going on. And I'm not hearing her heart here, and I still didn't get it for three weeks after that. and that is. She was saying, if I can't trust you to do a small thing, can I trust you to look after me and to do a big thing? And so the issue is usually not the thing that's being addressed. exactly, but it's deeper. And so to find the heart of the issue, I'm going to help you here. This is worth your price of admission.

If you are facing a wall of words and you try and answer a word but the barrage of words doesn't stop and if you hear a topic and you address the topic because you think I bought those bricks that I said I was going to build a wall four years ago, I now bought the bricks so that's not a topic anymore but the words keep coming at you. Ask this question. What is it that you fear? And that goes straight to the heart. And you will hear what her fear is. Well, if I can't trust you to do a little thing, I'm afraid I can't trust you to do a big thing. So ask that sort of question. I don't think I answered the actual question. Peace. Advice for young men. Okay. Be secure in yourself. What to do and what not to do. Yeah. What to do and what not to do.

Cherish the girl before you're married.

I think you know what I mean by that. If you don't. Do not use or abuse her for your own desires.

What not to, what to do. Learn who she is. Because the biggest problem, when you get married, is that you both have a set of expectations that you assume will be met when you get married. So I have my idea of what the right marriage will produce for me. She has an idea of what the right marriage will produce for her. I look at her, I think she's pretty, she's got a good sense of humour, I actually like her, she happens to like me. That's amazing. So maybe she's the one that's going to make my ideas of marriage come true. Now she's got her own ideas. About what the right man will make the right idea of marriage for her. And she looks at you and says, 'Okay, he needs a haircut, but he's got a job.

That's good. He's got a car. He doesn't live with his parents. His car smells good.' I like the camera. And maybe he's the guy that can make my expectations come true. But you never discuss the expectations with each other. And so you get married and then that doesn't come to pass and you start to punish each other because you're not meeting. The desire that you had for marriage. So before you get married, what do you do? Find out what your expectations are, your own and hers, and talk them out ad nauseum. Because this is the rest of your life. Make sure that you can do that with her. Don't assume that everything will be fine just because you get married. I just add on, would touch on. Young married or, you know, speak to them. Brothers amongst us that might be getting married soon, Lord willing. Times change—you, you are moving into a new phase of your life, you can have a lot of mates around you. But for me, the best mate in my life is my wife. She becomes the person in your life. She becomes your focus. Yep, you can still have a lot of good friends, but you need to spend time there.

Is, I'll throw this to you, Hendrick, is it giving up leadership to allow your wife to make calls about the household she's on? I'm reading straight from the, I find it an interesting question to ask. Are they putting Hendrik's name at the front of the question? I'm detecting a pattern here up here. No, it's not. I'll not be specific to our situation at home. But I would say you know what is the nature and this relates to the to the young men as well. What is the nature of godly leadership and, and godly leadership is not domineering. We do marriage classes and sometimes we talk with young couples and say, well, let's talk about prayer. Who's leading prayer? And sometimes the young man says, well, I do because I will be the head of the household.

And I think. Okay, is that the scope of what you understand leadership to be? It is about service. It's about enabling those, and I mentioned this already, enabling those under your care to flourish. Jesus showed leadership. And he was washing his disciples' feet. Whoever would be the greatest among you must become the least. And in the household, I think it is a beautiful thing when you have a wife and a mother, or when the mother of your children and your wife is very accomplished and can do things very well. That's when I look back and I say, 'Wow, I see my wife leading devotions with the children. I'm thankful.' My job sometimes I feel is I'm looking at the overall picture. Is the Lord pleased with how things are running here?

And when it comes to a lot of things around the house, a lot of things with the children, I'm so thankful that I have a godly and capable wife. That's a reason for thanksgiving, not a reason to feel threatened or diminished. Brent, I'll start with you on this one. We have obviously a situation here where not everything is perfect. How do we support Andrew in this situation to make things or to improve things? From a speaking from office bearers point of view, initially, obviously, you're going there as two brothers, the traditional way we do things around here. But moving forward, I think there very quickly comes the point where a brother's going to pull. and your side. and have a good, honest chat with him.

At the same time, I'd hope that most of our churches have got some sort of women's mentor leadership fellowship group in amongst us. and one of those capable sisters should be called along as well to be meeting together with this couple. and then and then sitting down and having conversations. and then, as been spoken about before, then where you're using the gospel to to help teach. the roles within marriage. Yeah, ultimately to strengthen our relationship. There's been a highly voted question around Neurodiversity. We can have a shepherd or sheep that have conditions like ADHD or autism. They struggle with empathy or compassion as a result. Maybe, to you, Richard, given your professional background in this, how do you encourage and support someone who struggles to do that?

Very, very difficult for a wife with an autistic husband who doesn't pick up emotion or express it easily. extraordinarily difficult. What I do when I'm talking to such a husband is I try and give him a new toolbox, and if you fall in that thing, then you might need a new toolbox yourself. And that is to say that when you're at work, you know what you need to do, you know what your tasks are, and you know the tools that you have for that task. And what often happens is the guy tries to apply those same tools at home. He does the spreadsheet in his head, gets the flow chart going. Not to say, here's an example that's true.

This guy said, 'I've got this flow chart in my head, I work it down.' If she asks me a question and I work out that there's no wind for me, I don't say anything. And not a good relationship-building strategy. But he's using his workbench for that. He needs to know that when he gets home, God's work for him at home, which is his primary work as a husband is to love and nurture and protect his wife and children.' and the toolbox for that is to learn how to listen and understand his wife, and to give time and attention to his children now, if he can understand. You know, the Asperger's people, especially extraordinarily intelligent, they can apply these principles quite well.

So although the heart, the emotion isn't in it, the actions are because they understand what their task is now. and that is to spend X amount of time with their wife, listening and understanding, and with their children. So that hasn't addressed ADHD in there. but that's just one example of neurodiversity and how to approach it. There's obviously clearly a balance here. Again, the question kind of reflects that. And it says in both discussions, it seems that relinquishing control and having no needs is compassionate. But intentional leadership and at times control is good. We have a short period of time left. I don't know who would like to take that one on first. It's the balance between control, compassion, or what people are seeing— a balance between control and compassion and intentional leadership.

Yeah, leading with control. Just very quickly I'll say that if control is for the sake of control, it's going to be damaging. If control is for the sake of the safety and nurturing of the family, it's going to be good control. I would just like to emphasize the truth of what the Lord calls us to be and how he calls us to live. That's what's at stake here. In this scenario, I talked about identity. I think that Annette is struggling with her identity. That's why she's lashing out, denigrating her husband. But the truth of who she is— a valued child and a loved wife— has to come out. The truth and the truth of who this Andrew is as a father, as a husband, and those proper roles.

And I would say a text that I think is so important in our relationships, Ephesians 4:15. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow in Christ. That's what we're called to do. Grow. Grow in the truth. Speak gently, which is an element of compassion. Speak gently. Grow in the truth. And in that way, God will be honored. Again, the question of how to lead early in the relationship. So for young men, if it's not something that's natural or something they desire to do, how can young men grow into that? I might start with you, Brent. They need to be, we need to be intentional about it. I've often said in some of my chats with young guys, and this is purely on a totally practical, basic level.

You know, you get to dinner time and it's time to read the Bible. Don't wait for your wife. 2. be the cue that she says, 'Oh, we've got to read the Bible.' It's time to read the Bible and get one of the kids to go get the Bible. No, no, you, husband, intentionally make the point: kids get the Bible. It's time, time for red devotion. It's time to read and pray. It is a small step that God will lead. Will help you grow and take further steps to lead. But be intentional about even the small steps. Thank you. Just equip yourself to do that. There's plenty of resources, podcasts, and Bible resources. You guys have got heaps of them. Just use them. Just learn. Dedicate yourself to learning so that you've got something to apply and you don't feel like a fish out of water all the time. Alright, I think that brings us to the end of the time that we have here. A big thank you to you, brothers, for joining us for discussing this.