



Always two steps behind Jamie

I've found my place, behind my husband, is one of safety

Editor's note: It was bound to happen. This month Jamie Buckingham came down with a severe case of writer's block. So his wife of 27 years—Jackie—has come to the rescue with a column about their relationship from her perspective. Jamie will be back next month.

For years I have had to put up with a husband who walks several steps in front of me.

No matter whether we are taking a walk down our front drive to the mailbox, making our way through a crowded convention hall, leaving church and crossing the parking lot to the car—I'm always at least two steps behind my "in-a-hurry husband."

When I first complained about this, several years ago, Jamie quickly pointed out this was an accepted practice in the Orient. He reminded me of having dinner with a famous Korean pastor in a posh restaurant in Seoul. When the meal was over the pastor headed for the door, his wife a good ten steps behind. The only time the husband stopped was when he reached the door—waiting for his wife to catch up so she could open it for him.

Jamie's not quite like that. He's just pre-occupied. And in a hurry. And besides, he walks faster than I.

Maybe I'm slow because of the kind of shoes I wear—shoes made for standing and sitting, definitely not for walking and certainly not for the kind of walking I have to do to keep up with my husband.

But it's more than that. Jamie's legs are longer than mine. When we both walk at our natural pace, he simply goes faster, as a horse walks faster than a pony. To stay together either he has to slow down—or I have to trot. And up to this time, neither of us has been willing to adjust our gait.

So, I walk behind.

Jamie is goal-oriented. By that I mean when we hit the sidewalk he doesn't like to stop. I like to look in shop windows. When we walk into a department store he heads immediately for the place he intends to go—underwear, automotive parts, light bulbs or shotgun shells.

Me, I love to linger. I always pause and look at the first thing I see when I come

through the door—usually something flimsy and feminine, or something for the grandchildren. When I look up my husband is five aisles away, striding militantly past all those beautiful lamps and bedspreads, his eyes fixed on the hardware shelf like a batter trying to stretch a long single into a double.

All the while I'm back at home plate, chatting with the umpire about uniform styles for next season.

The same is true when we take one of our "strolls" in the woods, or down a deserted beach. There are occasions when he walks beside me, holding my hand—but only when he needs to talk from his heart. The rest of the time I stroll, he marches, or jogs.

On those occasions when we take our walks together, I do it alone. The best I can enjoy of my husband is his backside—which at 49 years of age, is not necessarily the most attractive part.

This used to irritate me. In fact, there were times when I would drop behind on purpose, just to make him slow down and notice me.

One time, on a long walk through the North Carolina woods, I waited until he had marched around the next bend in the trail, then I turned around and went back to the house. He showed up 30 minutes later, marveling how I had gotten in front of him and beat him home. He never seemed to realize he had taken "our walk" by himself.

Poor thing, he always has his mind on other things.

The problem is intensified when we take a drive together. I've learned to keep pencil and paper handy, for he is constantly asking for a notebook to jot down ideas that come to him—while we're speeding along the highway or making our way through city traffic.

One day last month, as we were driving across the state to a meeting in Sarasota, I had to hold on to the steering wheel and guide us along the interstate highway for ten minutes while he wrote down dozens of ideas for a new book he is working on.

I suggested it would be much easier if I drove—and he wrote. But the idea of

me being in the passenger seat somehow makes him feel he is in control—even if I'm the one with my hand on the wheel.

So, I have resigned myself that when I walk with Jamie, I will always be about two steps behind. Although there have been times when I felt he had left me to make my own way through life, I now realize we are, in a real sense, together. He's leading the way. I'm following in his footsteps.

I used to complain about that. But when I stopped to pray, I heard God telling me I was right where He wanted me.

Ever since I was a sophomore in high school I've had but one desire—to be Jamie's wife. I didn't want to boss him, I just wanted to be what God intended a wife to be: "A companion for him, a helper suited to his needs" (Gen. 2:18 TLB).

To accomplish that I need to stay right where I am—just a couple of steps behind my husband.

A friend of ours jokes that while he's the head of the family, his wife is the neck who turns the head.

Jamie's the head of our family. But I am more than the neck. I'm also the backbone that keeps him standing, the heart that keeps him feeling, and the hand that often pulls his foot out of his mouth.

Walking behind my husband is an ideal place. From here I give him little shoves—to encourage him when he hesitates doing what God has told him to do.

It is also from this perspective that I am able to nudge him in the right direction—when he is tempted to stray off the path. Little nudges from behind, I have discovered, are far more effective than playing the role of the bossy wife who tries to change her husband's direction by nagging and complaining.

My place, behind my husband, is also a place of safety. Jamie is always "out front." That means he's like the first duck off the pond, he's the one they shoot at. Back here, in his shadow, I feel safe.

So, my husband walks in front of me. That makes it easier for me. Even as I do the nudging, so he goes before, protecting, checking for danger, and fighting off the enemy who, if he got to me, would destroy us both. ↵