



Godly Marriage

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Session 1 - Why Marriage?

An International Need

Everywhere I go, I am asked if I can teach about Godly Marriage. I am told by pastor after pastor that no matter the group or the country, that this is one of the greatest needs facing the church today. It seems that few men or women have had good examples to emulate as they were growing up. When someone becomes a pastor, not only do their marriages struggle, but they have so little clear teaching to offer those who attend church.

Are there other teachers addressing this topic within the country? I am told that while there are a few, they do not teach the biblical truths in the way that I teach them, nor do they have the history of success in their families that I have.

How is Your Marriage Doing?

Let me ask you, and please don't raise your hands.

- How many of you would say that you have a great marriage?
- How many would say your marriage is one that honors God and is an example to others?
- Would your spouse agree with you?
- Men: Would your wives say that you are a man of God, and that you love her as Christ loved the church?
- Men: Would they say that you are a man that any woman would be blessed to have as a husband?
- Women: Would your husband say you are a woman of God who honors and respects her husband?
- Women: Would your husband say that you are a woman that other women should learn from?

God's Goal for Marriage

God wants your life and your marriage to radiate your love for the Savior. When it does, people pick up on the consistency between what you are saying and what you are living both spiritually and subconsciously. People sense that there is truth to what you preach because you are living it. This sense of your integrity will cause them to listen closely to all that you say from God's Word, because if you are living it, then they can, too.

Conversely, if you talk about love, joy, peace, kindness, and all the fruits of the Spirit, but your marriage is in shambles, then people will discount what you talk about because if you can't live it out, then neither can they.

When your life and marriage radiate joy, then clearly, you are living what you are preaching, and you are someone worth listening to. This is why James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (*New International Version*).

Older women teach the younger ones - to expect.

Older men - teach younger people this is true.

Wives - step out in faith, believing God will bring your husbands.

Younger women, listen carefully. Expect this type of man, I teach my daughters.

God's Method for Impact

God has established a three-fold method to demonstrate to the world that you are worth listening to. He laid it out for you in Titus 1:6. "An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious" (*New Living Translation*).

Area #1 - Personal Life

Area #2 - Married Life.

Area #3 - Children

Your position as a pastor gives you an opportunity to influence, either for good or bad. With a personal life that is godly, a godly marriage, and children who are in order, you will have a powerful influence for good. Please note that the verse does not say that an elder's children must follow Christ. Though we can lead the way, none of us can force anyone else to believe. That is up to each individual. But, we can raise our children to be obedient as they watch our example of what a follower of Christ should be. Then, it is up to them and the Holy Spirit in their lives. I deal with this far more in detail in my seminar on Raising Godly Children.

That is exactly why our pastor training seminars are all about these three areas, first and foremost. This is God's requirement and desire for your life and marriage. When we train, we don't start with theology, bible study practices, leadership, evangelism, or any of 100 things I

was personally taught in seminary. We start where God started - Your personal life. Your married life. Your family life.

God's Reasons to Focus on Three Areas

1. *Your relationship with God*

These areas impact your relationship with God. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, *so that nothing will hinder your prayers*” (emphasis added)(*New International Version*, I Peter 3:7). This is how much God values a good marriage. Without harmony between you and your spouse, your prayers will be hindered.

2. *Your ministry*

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (I Peter 3:15-16). Nothing could be clearer. Our lives are to be models of upright living so that when we take the truth to those within and outside of our churches, they will have nothing to use to discount what we say. Without a consistent life, people will sense your falseness and not listen to what you say.

3. *Your descendants*

“And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (*English Standard Version*, Genesis 22:18). The principle of righteous living was established by God in the very beginning. When we obey God, not only are we blessed, all those around us in the nations are blessed as well.

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (*New International Version*, Proverbs 22:6). And where it starts is with your children. They will live out what you teach them, train them, and model for them. The principle is clear: What you live, your children will live. What they live, their children will live.

To see where your ministry comes in relationship to everything else, here it is in picture form.



The Enemy's Goal

Since we know these truths from God's Word, what is the enemy's goal in order to defeat God's design? "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (I Peter 5:8). The word *devour* doesn't mean "destroy". It means to swallow down so that you become a part of him and his plan. That is his goal. He can't defeat God, and he knows that. He also knows that he cannot take away your salvation. The only thing he can do is devour your ministry and the effectiveness you have in the world.

He achieves his goals like the serpent in the garden of Eden. Remember, that the serpent "was more crafty" (Genesis 3:1), more shrewd than any of the other animals. He was so crafty that he was able to trick both Adam and Eve. Notice, he didn't kill or destroy them; and in your life, he doesn't want to kill or destroy you or take you out of the game. Oh no. He has something far more destructive. He wants to devour you by polluting you, stunting your growth, and making you ineffective and a detriment to the Kingdom. That is how you become a part of his team and not the Savior's.

Bottom Line

If your walk with God is good, your married life harmonious, and your children are in good order, then go forward in the ministry. If one or more of these areas is not in line, then you have already succumbed to the brilliant scheme of the enemy who will use your personal, married, and family life, not just to slow down and shrink your ministry, but to bring shame to the name of Christ.

Many will declare that those outside the home don't really know about the state of their marriage and how they are raising their children and certainly not about their personal walk with God. Don't believe that. How many of you have ever seen two young people who were just married? Can you tell they are in love? Of course. Do they have to tell you? Of course not. They radiate love in their actions, body language, looks between each other, their words, and tone of voice. It is all communicated to you subconsciously, and you know it more surely than if they had told you with words.

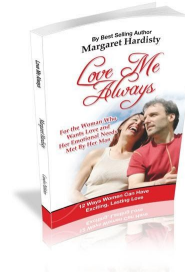
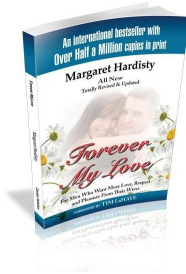
It is the same with your relationship with God, your spouse, and your children. If you are in love, you act one way. If you have had a fight or are angry, you act another way. You can fake your actions for a short period of time, but never convincingly because it is almost impossible to change from your subconscious communication. These are the things that people read. They know what is going on in your home because you tell them without words. If those actions without words line up with the gospel of love, joy, and peace that you are preaching, then they will listen. It is that simple.

This is why God says that elders and leaders must have their walk with God, their marriages, and their children in order.

My Family Heritage

So, where did I learn all this? Why do I have a place to speak and teach on this subject? Let me introduce you to my parents.

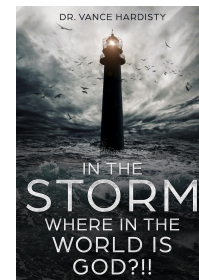
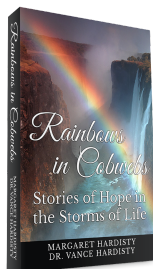
My Mother and Father



My mother and father were married for 57 years before my mother passed away. Their love was evident to everyone. They weren't perfect and had their share of problems, but my father treated my mother like a queen, and my mother loved and respected my father above all men.

Her books came into being after listening to what was happening in the marriages of other women around her. When she compared how my father treated her and the love they shared, she decided to write her first book, *Forever My Love - What Every Man Should Know About His Wife*. That book became an international bestseller, with over 1,000,000 copies sold in eight languages. She went on to write many books on marriage, and my father and mother spoke around the United States and were on radio and TV for years, teaching and training.

My Marriage



When I got married 35 years ago, it was just natural to treat my wife as my father treated my mother. Did I do it correctly all the time? Not at all. There were days, months, years where both my wife and I learned to love each other better, where we worked to overcome foolish things we did and behaviors that hurt our marriage.

And that is how this seminar was developed. From watching 92 years of successful marriages - 57 of my parents and now 35 of my own, counseling uncounted numbers of couples and studying, speaking, and teaching on marriage for decades. From all of that, I distilled the most important things you can know and do to have the godly, joyous, passionate, and loving marriage you have always wanted.

Where It All Begins

But my experience is not where I start as I teach you about marriage. Since both my parents' marriage and my marriage were based on biblical principles, that is where we start. Scripture will be the foundation of everything. This is not American, African, Indian, Asian, or any other culture's truth. This is the advice that God gave that all of us have the opportunity to follow and discover a loving, peaceful, wonderful, passionate, and exemplary marriage. If your culture conflicts or disagrees with the truths in this seminar, and it will, then your culture disagrees with God's Word, and it is wrong. At each point, you will have the choice to follow God's advice or the society which surrounds you.

And when your marriage becomes better or when you turn a bad marriage around, it will be because you used the truth of God's Word. When you counsel, teach, or share with others, it will be using the truth that God has given you through His Word. God's Word is our primary guide. And as we study it, we will see all the practical ways that you will be able to go home tonight and make your marriage one that lasts for a lifetime.

The Foundation

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

No matter who we are as followers of Christ, each one of us has died to self, and now it is Christ who lives within us. Our calling now is to show Christ to the world. First and foremost, our calling is not to be a pastor, preacher, teacher, or even father, mother, husband, or wife. All those things are merely the positions we fill as we show Christ in our lives to a lost and dying world. Let me say it again. You are no longer alive; it is Christ who lives in you.

“The reason we cannot please the Lord while failing as a husband or wife is that our Christianity is directly related to the way we treat our spouses. Our marriages are an outpouring of our relationship with Christ...Since our relationships with our spouses are our most important earthly relationship, what we are as spouses is a reflection of what we are as Christians” (LaPierre, 2).

A husband is to love and cherish his wife not because she is perfect or because she treats him the way he wants to be treated. A husband loves and cherishes his wife because he loves Christ. Likewise, a wife submits to her husband not because he is a wonderful spiritual leader or because he loves her the way she wants to be loved. A wife submits to her husband because she wants to submit to Christ. A husband's love and a wife's submission is not a test of their obedience to their spouses. It is a test of their obedience to the Lord.

At the foundation, marriage problems are a symptom of our problems with our relationship with Christ. The closer we follow the Savior, the more time we spend in His Word, and the more attentively we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the more aware we become of what we can do to love our spouse as Christ would.

God's Promises

There are some powerful promises that God has made in His Word that give us foundational principles for our marriages.

Principle: *God has equipped you and empowered you to be a godly husband and wife.*

“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

In the midst of our frustrations, struggles, and attempts to communicate with our spouse, it is tempting to think that you will never get this right, and neither will they. But God has promised us that He has given you what you need to be the godly man or woman needed to make your marriage the best it can be.

Principle: *God promises that he is working behind the scenes in both of you.*

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

When all else seems to be stagnating, and nothing seems to be improving with either you or your spouse, remember, God is at work to change them and change you.

Principle: *There is a deep rich inheritance in your spouse.*

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Ephesians 1:18-19a).

Many of us have fantasized about an attorney calling us up and telling us that we have inherited a vast fortune of money from someone, and all we have to do is collect it. And yet, God has told us that within the person we have married, there is a vast treasure, a rich inheritance, set aside just for us. And if we will view our spouse, their talents, and gifts as this rich treasure in our lives, it will change our marriage.

Principle: *You get out what you put in!*

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (II Corinthians 9:6).

People love to apply this principle to money, but it applies to all areas where our effort is required and especially to relationships. If you pour little into your partner, you will receive little in return. The responsibility is yours.

The Indwelling Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit plays a powerful role in our marriage. Because we are all in the process of becoming more like Christ, and because that means that we must daily die to ourselves, the still small voice of God the Holy Spirit is vital. Here are just a few of the things that he promises to do in your life and the life of your spouse:

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

In the midst of living, the words of Christ brought to our minds by the Holy Spirit, provide direction.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (*English Standard Version*, John 16:13).

How often we wonder what is the best thing to do, say, or think. We talk to our friends, family, and others for guidance. But our first conversation should be with our Savior, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us into what He would have us do, say, or think.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (*New International Version*, Romans 8:26).

When we are at the end of our patience, and when all else seems lost, we have the assurance that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us, for our spouse, for our marriage.

Why is Marriage So Hard?

Though marriage is a joy, all marriages, even the best ones, will be hard work at times. It is only natural.

Gender. Personality. Race. Upbringing. Experiences. Education. Talents. Skills. Abilities. Gifting. Likes and dislikes. Communication style. Friends. Family. Work.

All these things go together to make us what we are as unique, wonderful, and sometimes difficult to get along with individuals. Much of what makes you you is opposite to that of your partner. Often, those were the initial reasons why you were attracted to them. Yes, you had similarities. But the dissimilarities were the things that helped make you complete. Those differences are what bring the spark, the life, the challenges, and the opportunities for growth.

At the same time, those differences are what can bring tension. The very thing that you so loved about that person can, if you are not careful, be the thing that irritates you the most after a few months or years. When this happens, you can spend your time wishing your partner was different, that they would change. You can spend your time trying to change them. You can fight, worry, nag, and get angrier each day, but all that rarely accomplishes anything but making things worse because fundamentally, your partner probably won't change, and that is OK. God can use them just as they are.

Your job, your biggest job, will be to focus on the things you love, to focus on the reasons you fell in love with that person in the first place. If you do, then all the little issues that could cause problems will fade into the background.

The Potential for Marriage

Yes, marriage is hard work at times. But what happens when you do what God has called you to do? What happens when you set your demands and expectations aside and love as Christ called you to love? What happens when your marriage is good?

Men: “The heart of her husband trusts in her” (*English Standard Version*, Proverbs 31:11a). There is nothing more glorious to experience than a woman who you can trust. You trust in her love. You trust in her work. You trust in her words to you. You trust her to know you as you truly are and still love you. You trust her to be there for your entire life. You trust her to pour herself out to you and pick you up when you are down. You know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that there is nowhere in the world that you would rather be than having her by your side. That is a wonderful marriage.

Women: “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). There is nothing more wonderful than having a man who would die for you. A man who thinks about you first, who sacrifices himself so that you can be the woman

God has called you to be. A man who builds you up and encourages you. A man who boasts about you to his friends, telling them that he has the most incredible wife in the world. A man who would do anything for you because he loves you more than life itself. That is an incredible marriage.

Warning!

Few people realize that marriage actually comes with a warning. Throughout Scripture, both husband and wife are given instruction, but only one is warned. So men, listen up:

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (I Peter 3:7).

Men, we are the ones warned. So, let’s take just a moment to go through what it is that God is saying to us in the verse.

“Understanding” First, you are to live with your wife in an understanding way. That word *understanding* means that you are to have knowledge of your wife, both general and intimate. Your wife is not to be a mystery to you.

“Live with” Second, you are to live with her. This phrase means that you are to know everything about her. Pastors know they are supposed to have a deep knowledge of Scripture, and so you study, read, memorize, and discuss it. But you are also to be an expert when it comes to your wife. No one should know her as you do. Her likes, dislikes, favorites, music, movies, and food. You should know her almost better than she knows herself.

“Honor” Third, you are to give her honor. The word means *price*. You are to recognize your wife’s value, all the things that make her so wonderful. Then, you are to honor her, which means you must know how to honor her.

“Fellow” Fourth, you are to regard her as your partner. She is not a subject, not a child, not someone to subdue, not someone to serve you, not someone to work in your ministry, not someone to take care of your kids and home while you do the important things in life. She is your partner, the one with whom you pray, strategize, plan, prepare, and execute the calling of God for both your lives here on this earth and in the Kingdom.

“Heir” Fifth, you are to regard her as an heir to Christ’s throne. In the sight of God, you and she are not seen differently.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:16-17).

She is an heir to the throne, and in eternity she will rule, just as you will.

“...if we endure, we will also reign with him...”(II Timothy 2:12)

That woman in your house is a future queen, a queen in the making, a queen in training, and for eternity, she will be ruling at the behest and command of God Almighty. You must not be unkind, bully, intimidate, nor treat a future kingdom ruler badly. You honor, work with, consult, encourage, and build that lady up.

“Weaker” Sixth, you know that she is weaker. Morally? No. Intellectually? Hardly. Spiritually? No. We cannot view women like this because we are all aware of women, maybe your wife, maybe your mother, or grandmother, who were brilliant giants of the faith. How are they weaker? Physically. As a result, you are to use the strength that God gave you to protect her.

“Woman” Seventh, the phrase “*since she is a woman*” is only used once in Scripture. It means “*the feminine one*”. As a man, you are to honor this feminine nature within your wife. “This was a radical teaching in the world Peter lived in. In that ancient culture, a husband had absolute rights over his wife, and the wife had virtually no rights in the marriage. In the Roman world, if a man caught his wife in the act of adultery, he could kill her on the spot. But if a wife caught her husband, she could do nothing against him. All the duties and obligations in marriage were put on the wife. Peter’s radical teaching is that the husband has God-ordained duties and obligations toward his wife” (Guzik).

“Prayer” Eighth, to ignore this guidance given by God is to see your prayers hindered. Look at your ministry. Is there no power? You might want to check and see how you are treating your wife.

Key Takeaways Session 1

1. You learn from those you watch. If you had no one to watch, then you be the first so that your children can watch you and how you treat your wife and their mother.
2. Satan’s first line of attack is against your personal life, your marriage, and your family life.
3. Your calling is to show Christ to the world.
4. God’s promises to empower us to do what He has called us to do by giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us.
5. No matter your background or your experience in marriage to this point, because of God’s guidance and His work within you, you can have a God-glorifying, wonderful, passionate, and joyful marriage.

Key Verse: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (I Peter 3:7).

Key Action Steps

Go. Go and meet with your wife.

Talk. Tell her how you want to be a man of God, one that loves his wife as Christ loved the church.

Ask. Ask her how you are doing as a husband and where you could improve.

Write. Write down the things she says. Pray about them and take action.

Session 2 - Respect And Love

Introduction

In this session, we have very clear steps for both husband and wife. Please do not go home and hand your spouse a list of what they need to do. Instead, I want you to make this about you and promise me that you will live out your part of this teaching for at least a month before you say anything to your spouse.

Men, let your wives see the love of Christ, as expressed in you, through your new behavior. If you already do some of what I teach, then I ask you to redouble your efforts. I can promise you that at the end of the month, your spouse will be wondering what in the world happened to you. They will be eager to know and learn if there is anything they can do to return the blessing you have become in their lives.

Women, let your husbands see the respect you have for them as the men that God has placed in your lives. If you already show him respect, increase what you are doing. Overwhelm him so that Christ's love will flow from him to you.

Men, for decades, my mother taught in person and through her books that the Bible teaches that you are the key to the happiness of the marriage. It is true that God has appointed you as the leader. By definition, that means that you set the tone for the marriage. You, by your behavior, beliefs, and how you treat your wife, will destine your marriage for joy or sorrow, passion or boredom, love or apathy, and caring or selfishness. Does your wife have a part in this happy marriage? Without question. But you are the leader. Promise yourself today that you will make your home one of joy, happiness, and an example for all who surround you.

God's Advice

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (*New International Version*, Ephesians 5:33).

Men: The word for love used in this verse is *agape*. Interestingly, women are never told to love their husbands in Scripture. Yes, men need love, and women need respect. But God is highlighting the foundational need of each person in marriage. For men, it is respect, and for women, it is love.

We've often heard this word. If you are a pastor, you probably have taught on this word. But let's make it personal. The love you are to have for your wife is to be a life sacrificing, soul baring, give everything, bear everything, believe all good type of love. Many in the time of Jesus didn't even think that this love was possible for a human being to have for another. But here God commands us, as husbands, to love, to *agape* love, our wives. And as we do, it is to be our family, our children, and the society around us that are stunned by the evidence of God's presence in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Women: The word respect is *phobeo*, usually translated fear, or in the case of God, Christ, and husbands, it means "a deep reverential respect". This is the type of respect that transcends misunderstandings and expectations. It is the type of respect that goes beyond hurts, needs, and desires. It is a respect that permeates all actions and words.

Men and women, if this is all you learn from my entire seminar, but you act on it, your life and marriage will change.

Not an Exception

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct" (*English Standard Version*, I Peter 3:1-2).

For those women here with unsaved husbands, this call by God for respect is still valid. In fact, it is more so. Peter says that it could be the path for your husband's salvation.

The Path To Change

By default, because of our personalities, desires, likes, dislikes, and habits, we give what it is that we want the most from the other person. If your marriage is going to work, you must learn to think about what you give your spouse in a different way. This is why it is so important for you to know your spouse intimately. When you do, you can give them what it is that they want and need, not what you want and need.

The Result

By default, we want to love someone who is lovely and respect someone who is respectable. It is human nature to give to those who deserve it. But God has loved us when we

were totally undeserving and has asked us to do the same. And here is where the miracle occurs. The man who loves causes his wife to become more lovely. The woman who respects causes her husband to become more respectable. Our spouses, our children, and most people become what we believe them to be, and they live up to how we treat them.

The Reason

We know we are to water plants because that is what they need. Paul told men to love their wives because that was what they needed. Women were told to respect their men because that was what men needed. It is that simple.

Scientific Research

John Gottman, Ph.D. in his book, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: and How You Can Make Yours Last*, spent 20 years working with over 2000 couples. As he did his research, he was particularly interested in the couples who had been married between 20 and 40 years. These were the marriages that clearly had found a way to last longer than the vast majority of marriages. What he noted was that in all conversations between husband and wife, in all the answers they gave him and the people who interviewed them, the undertone in all the communication between husband and wife was that of love and respect. Gottman also noted that the opposite of love and respect was not hate and anger, it was contempt. And contempt was the most corrosive of attitudes that husband and wife could have for each other.

Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, who wrote the book *Love And Respect*, says this "We believe love best motivates a woman and respect most powerfully motivates a man. Research reveals that during marital conflict a husband most often reacts when feeling disrespected and a wife reacts when feeling unloved. We asked 7,000 people this question: when you are in a conflict with your spouse or significant other, do you feel unloved or disrespected? 83% of the men said "disrespected." 72% of the women said, "unloved." Though we all need love and respect equally, the felt need differs during conflict," (Eggerichs, "About Us").

The Spiral

My wife and I have discovered that you choose to create a spiral up or a spiral down. A spiral up with love and respect, or a spiral down with contempt, disrespect, and anger. It is your choice. Men, the more you love, the more she respects. Women, the more you respect, the more he loves. Or, you can choose the opposite, which results in a terrible marriage or divorce. I say it again - it is your choice.

The Safeguard

For women who have been struggling with the respect and/or submission issues, the command to respect your husband is preceded by the command for husbands to love their wives. Though wives must submit, husbands can never be tyrants. This is the balance in the relationship. However, for husbands or wives who are caught in a dysfunctional relationship, God does not excuse men from loving or women from respecting because their spouses are not living up to the calling God gave to them. It is during those times that we love and respect and leave the results up to God, trusting Him to work.

Men

Biblical Principles

“25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (*New International Version*, Ephesians 5:25-33).

Vs. 25 - “*Husbands love your wives...*”

In Greek, there are four words for love. *Eros*, which refers to the earthly, physical kind of love. *Storge*, which is the love between family members. *Philia*, which is the love shared between two friends. *Agape*, which is heavenly and godly.

Agape. We’ve said it was selfless. It is also not spontaneous. Not dependent on whether it is deserved. It is self-denial for the sake of another. It gives and does not expect repayment. It gives because it loves, not to receive. It loves completely and fully, without reserve, whether the object of love deserves it or not.

So what is a husband’s responsibility? Basically, this verse could have read, “husbands, continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of your wives.” Oh, wow, that is rough! How many husbands expect their wives to serve them? To look after their needs? It looks like they never read the advice given by God Himself. Husbands are to practice self-denial for the sake of their wives. OK, doesn’t that sound a lot like what Christ did for us? Yes. And that leads us to the next phase.

Vs. 25 - *“Just as Christ loved the church...”*

You may use the excuse, "But she is unlovable. She is a wretch, a whatever..." But that excuse cannot work. And that is exactly the point. We are to love our wives as Christ loved us. When you were a nasty, rotten, sinning, angry, disgusting wretch on the way to hell, cursing God - HE LOVED YOU! He loved you not because you were lovely, but in order to make you lovely.

Vs. 25 - *“And gave Himself for her.”*

The world comes along and interprets marriages and relationships based on a selfish and sinful approach to life and love. They tell men how they should treat their wives, and it is easy to see the results of the world's advice by all the unhappy, abusive marriages and the rampant rate of divorce. God, however, turns the world's wisdom on its head and gives us the true meaning of love, marriage, and living in a glorious relationship.

Vs. 28-29 - *“Love your wife as your own body.”*

Please note that the passage did not say *"in the same way"* as you love your own body. When God used the word *"as"*, He did so because the phrase with that word is much more intense.

1. As Eve was from Adam, and literally a part of his body, so you are to consider your wife a part of your own body.
2. If your wife is a part of yourself, you cannot detach yourself from your wife emotionally, psychologically, or physically.
3. As a husband, you must realize, even though you may not feel it at times, you and your wife are not two individuals but one.
4. This view of your wife goes way beyond the feelings that the world says make a marriage work. This is about your mindset. It is about how you approach your wife, speak to your wife, treat your wife every day, just like you treat yourself.

Vs. 28-29 - *“He who loves his wife loves himself.”*

And because your wife is part of you, when you love her, you also love yourself. But you can also say it in the negative. When you neglect her, abuse her, treat her poorly, you neglect, abuse, and treat yourself poorly, and that will come back to hurt you both.

Vs. 28-29 - *“Nourish...”*

Once you understand biblical unity, and you understand that it is for your own good that God calls you to treat your wife with love, you will nourish and cherish your wife. You will treat her as the most precious person in your life because she is a part of you.

Here is a breakdown of the advice the world gives men and what God says:

The focus of marriage

The world tells men to say, "It is all about my headship and your submission." (Ironically, that is not just the statement that men make around the world. Where feminism has swept through a country, it is the women that declare the exact same thing.)

God tells men to say, "It is all about humility, laying down my life, and sacrificing for the benefit of my wife."

Headship in marriage

The world tells men to say, "I am your head, so you take your orders from me and must do whatever I want."

God tells men to say, "I am your head, so I must care for you and serve you."

Submission

The world tells men to say, "You must submit to me, so here are the things I want you to do for me."

God tells men to say, "You must submit to me, so I am accountable before God for you. I must care for you and serve you."

Loving Your Spouse

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

These are arguably some of the most powerful words in Scripture. Nothing else you do in life matters if you do not have love. Though you might have read this passage dozens, even hundreds of times, I want you to read it again. Don't think about how you can preach it, teach it, or tell others about it in counseling. I want you to bring up a picture of your wife in your mind, then when you read "love is patient", I want you to change it by putting your name and your wife's name in the verse. So, I would read "*(Your name)* is patient with *(your wife's name)*". When you have read each phrase, stop and ask yourself, "Is this true of how I treat my wife? Do I need to be better at this?"

If you need to work on one of these aspects of love, make a note of it.

“Patient”

Meaning - You do not lose heart, you bear offenses and injuries that others give to you, you are slow in avenging, you persevere patiently and bravely.

Application - When your wife is not doing her part, you still love her. When she doesn't change and mature as you hoped, you still love her. When things go wrong, or when she does not treat you the way that she should, you still love her.

“Kind”

Meaning - You are mild, and you use kindness when dealing with your wife.

Application - No matter the circumstances, you have no harshness. Your words are soft and gentle, your actions are gentle and kind. Nothing you do or say should ever cause fear in your wife.

“Does not envy”

Meaning - You are not jealous. You are not to be heated with envy, hatred, or anger. You are not fiercely protective or watchful of your own rights or possessions.

Application - You always want the best for the other person. You rejoice when something goes right for them and when they are honored by others, even if it means that you are not recognized. The important matter is that your wife is lifted up.

“Does not boast”

Meaning - You do not put yourself on display.

Application - Remember that bragging builds you up, but love builds your wife up. Because you love your wife, you don't brag about the good things you do. Instead, you wait until those good things are discovered by others. You don't put your good deeds on display.

“Is not proud”

Meaning - You do not puff yourself up with pride.

Application - Because you love your wife, you have an honest opinion of who you are. This means that you realize and are willing to admit your weaknesses and recognize that without Christ, you would be in hell. You also realize your strengths, and instead of being proud, you are humbled and praise God for the gifts and abilities He has given you.

“Does not dishonor others”

Meaning - Your actions are filled with honor.

Application - Because of your love and your inner character, you always do what is for the good of others, protecting their reputation. You act in such a way so that your wife can be proud of who you are.

“Is not self seeking”

Meaning - You are not looking out for yourself.

Application - Because you love your wife, you look out for her and what she needs. You are constantly thinking, “How can I bless her? How can I give to her?”

“Is not easily angered”

Meaning - It is hard to make you irritated, provoked, or angry.

Application - When insults, pokes, jabs, attitudes, comments, and problems come your way, you do not flare up in anger. You may correct them, but because you love, your first concern is not yourself, but the other person, and you know, above all else, that God has all things in His control. You know that your anger only brings fear in others or damages your relationships and does not show the presence of Christ in your life.

“Keeps no record of wrongs”

Meaning - You do not remember the bad things.

Application - You do not take into account a wrong suffered in the past. You have a short memory where bad is concerned. You do not hold a grudge. Instead, you forgive easily and forget. Your love refuses to allow wrong things done to you to come between you and your wife.

“Does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth”

Meaning - Just exactly what it says.

Application - Your love produces within you a character that rejoices with truth, love, and goodness in life, and is sorrowful when you encounter evil. This example is what all those around you see, and many will emulate.

“Always protects”

Meaning - You cover or hide the faults and failings of your wife.

Application - No one is perfect. Love keeps those failings secret and never allows others to know. This is not referring to abuse and adultery. This is referring to those character flaws or the argument that you and your wife had that are easy to talk to your friends about. Those are the things that stay just between you and your wife because you love her.

“Always trusts”

Meaning - You always think the best and place your confidence in your wife.

Application - Your love knows that your wife will do what is right and loving. Even if that trust is betrayed, it can be restored in time.

“Always hopes”

Meaning - No matter what things look like, you believe in your wife with joy and confidence.

Application - Even when your hopes are not yet realized, you know that God is at work in your wife and that He will create within her the image of His Son, Jesus.

“Always perseveres”

Meaning - You endure, you are solid, you are someone your wife can always count on.

Application - Through ups and downs, disappointments, and struggles, the love you have for your wife says, “there will be a better day, and I will not falter because I will be that man that my wife can always rely on to be there for her.”

Now, take the chart on the next page and do two things.

First, I want you to take some time alone with God and go through each of these descriptions of love and rate yourself.

Second, I want you to sit with your wife, turn off your phones, and set aside a time when you will not be interrupted. Then ask her to rate you on each one of these items. If she rates you low, please ask her to explain. Just listen and take notes. DO NOT try to defend yourself. When she is finished, thank her, tell her you love her, and then go talk with God about how you can improve your love for your wife.

I Corinthians 13	What it means	I rate myself 1 - Not good 10 - Great	My spouse rates me 1 - Not good 10 - Great
Patient	Bears offenses, long spirit		
Kind	No harshness, words gentle		
Is not envious	Love seeks best for other person		
Does not boast	You don't put self on display, you build your spouse up		
Is not proud	Not arrogant, you have an honest opinion of who you are		
Does not dishonor others	You honor your spouse and protect his/her reputation		
Is not self seeking	You focus on others		
Not easily angered	You let things roll off your back and are not easily bothered		
Keeps no record of wrongs	You easily forgive and forget		
Does not rejoice in evil but rejoices in the truth	You hold nothing over your spouse's head and believe the best		
Always protects	Conceals the other's faults		
Always trusts	You know the other one will do what is right and loving		
Always hopes	You see the future as if it were really true		
Always perseveres	Endures through the ups and downs		

Loving Unconditionally

Loving unconditionally is extremely difficult. I wish I could tell you that it is simple, but it's not. Even though you have given your life to Christ and determined to follow Him and to love your wife as He loved the church, there are times when your sin nature still raises its ugly head, and you will have to act the opposite of how you feel like acting, to be the man that God has called you to be.

However, there are things that you can do to make it easier. Things that you can do train your mind to think as Christ would.



What you think

For the first 3 months, set aside one week each month and let your weekly devotions be about studying the passages that we have just studied. Let the truth of God's Word sink into your heart. Let those truths frame your perspective on what your responsibility is to your wife.



What you say

1. *Share your heart.*

Scripture: "My beloved spoke and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me'" (Song of Solomon 2:10).

This is about the inner you. You cannot be the tough guy, the one who has it all together, the boss, the ruler, the leader with your wife. This is about being vulnerable.

So, what do you actually say to her? Share what happened in your day, your concerns, fears, joys, feelings, and your heart. Ask her opinions. She may not know everything about your job, but she is wise. She will have a different perspective and loves you. When she gives her opinion, listen to her. Then after you share about your day, ask about her day and listen to everything she says. Don't offer advice unless she asks for it.

Remember, how you say it is as important as what you say. Did you hear the gentle, sweet words that were filled with grace in that verse from the Song of Solomon? That needs to be how you communicate with your wife.

If this is a struggle, then you need to ask yourself why you aren't open and honest. This is your wife. She is your partner. Are you hurt? Are you angry? Is there a lack of trust? If there is, then these are issues that need to be worked through in order to have that relationship you have always wanted.

The bottom line is that you should treat her like she was the most special woman in the world - every single day.

2. *Apologize often*

Scripture: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (*English Standard Version*, Psalm 51:3).

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23).

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (*New Living Translation*, James 5:16).

In every conflict, there are always two people. Whether you play a small or large part, you have some blame. In the family, however, when there are children, every argument has more than just two sides. The children are always impacted. Anger and frustration spill over into their lives as well. Not only will they see and hear when you apologize, they will learn from you and begin to emulate you not just as children, but when they grow and have families of their own.

When you say you are sorry, you need to mean it. Here are some words to use when you apologize:

"I'm sorry, please forgive me."

"It was my fault that..."

"The reason I did that was because I..." (If you use this one, don't make excuses for what you did or blame your wife.)

Again, remember that how you say it is as important as what you say. "A soft answer turns away wrath" (*English Standard Version*, Proverbs 15:1). In order for your words of apology to be believed by your wife, you must have three things:

A soft tone. You know the one. It is gentle, kind, caring, and compassionate.

A loving look. Your face and eyes need to show love for your wife.
An open body. Don't cross your arms or legs when facing her.

When you apologize, don't expect or insist that your wife apologizes for her part. Just leave that in the hands of the Holy Spirit who is working in her life.

If this is a struggle, then you may find the answer in one of these:

Fault - If you believe that it was all her fault, then you will struggle to apologize. No argument is one person's fault. All participants have some responsibility. What was yours?

Pride - If you can't apologize, is your pride in the way? You can offer all sorts of excuses. You can say that your side wasn't that bad. You can say that your wife did this or that, which really offended you, and you are hurt. What they did doesn't matter. How they made you feel doesn't matter. The only person you can change is you. So focus on what you did wrong and be willing to admit it.

Respect - Are you afraid of losing your wife's respect if you apologize? The opposite is true. Your wife's respect and the respect of everyone who knows you will soar because you were strong enough to take the lead, admit you were wrong, and apologize.

Relationship with God - If you allow your relationship with your wife to deteriorate over something about which you are unwilling to apologize, this will cause a shift, a break in your relationship with God.

Healing - Your confession and apology, no matter how hard it is to say, will bring healing to your relationship. The question only remains: Will you be obedient and mature and do what God has called you to do?

The bottom line is that apologizing establishes respect within the marriage, sets the tone for the marriage, is an example for kids, and establishes peace in the house. That is a powerful motivation for overcoming whatever would prevent you from apologizing.

3. *Say "I love you"*

Scripture: I Corinthians 13

Everyone's actions must also be accompanied by words. Yes, your actions speak louder than words, but if your actions flow from your heart, so will your words.

Most of the time, you can simply say - "*I love you*". That is sweet, simple, and to the point. However, there are other ways to say I love you so that these words don't become routine. Say:

"I love you because..." and then tell her something that she does or something about her character that is wonderful to you.

"I love her." This is what you say to your children or your friends when she can hear you. It will mean a lot to everyone.

"I love her because..." and then go on to talk about something that she does or something about her character that is wonderful to you. Again, these are things you say to your children or friends when she can hear you.

You know the answer to *"why do you love me?"* If she asks you that question, you can tell her all the things, and the list should be long, that you love about who she is and what she does.

You know the answer to *"why do you love her?"* If someone were to ask you why you love your wife, you should know all the wonderful things about your wife that you can share with others.

Remember to say these things with love. They can be spoken sincerely, joyfully, seriously, softly, loudly, sweetly, but always in love.

Do you struggle to tell your wife that you love her? Then these might be stopping you:

You don't want to be vulnerable. OK, I understand that, but vulnerability is the key to a rich and blessed marriage.

You don't say much to your wife. Well, this is the time to say something important and say it regularly.

Are there things that you don't like about your wife, so you struggle to tell her you love her? Focus on the things that you do like, the things that are wonderful about what she does and who she is.

You had a poor example. Many men did, but now is the time to change things for you, your wife, and your children. You can undo the damage and begin saying these simple words to your wife and your children.



What you do

Scripture: I Corinthians 13

If you love someone, and you say loving things, it will lead to loving actions. What are those actions?

1. *Your heart is for her only*

Sometimes it is easy to stay physically faithful in a marriage, but your heart is not totally in love with your wife. A man whose heart is in love with his wife will do these things:

- You will be loyal to your wife in front of other people and in front of the kids. Your words and actions will tell everyone that you are married and in love and that you think she is incredible. We've already mentioned the words you can use, but what kind of actions show this love? If you are talking in a group and she approaches, you turn to her and give her preference. When you see her across the room, you meet her eyes with a look of love. When she comes into the house, you put down what you are doing to greet her. You put your arm around her. You hold her hand. When you are sitting next to her, your body is turned slightly towards her. All these things may sound small and insignificant, but they are the body language that your children, family, and friends read, which tells them that you either love your wife or you don't.
- When you are with other people, they see who you are looking at. When a pretty woman walks into the room, they can see whether you look at her or at your wife. After the first glance, your eyes should only be for your wife.

Men, it is difficult not to look at beautiful women. God made us as men to be attracted to beauty, but he put restrictions on those attractions. We know that we are not to have any physical relationships outside of marriage. But Job 31:1 says, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman" (*New International Version*). And Jesus followed that up in Matthew 5:28 by saying, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The eyes are the gateway to the soul, and the enemy knows it. He knows that men can be caught in the trap of looking at women, whether that is in person or on the internet. The United States, Great Britain, and India are the three largest porn consuming

countries in the world. Other countries have easy access to the same information and pictures, and pastors are not immune. Remember, Satan doesn't care how he gets you to set God aside, he only cares that God doesn't come first in your life.

Pornography can be addicting. It releases massive amounts of dopamine into the brain, which makes you feel great - for a short time. The problem is that we also have the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and He will never allow us to have a habit that violates His Word and harms our relationships.

For most men, the habit of viewing porn is very hard to break. If you are not struggling with it, you will have many men in your congregation who will. The solution to any habit or addiction is simple, though it is not easy. First, you must recognize that you have a problem. Second, go to God and ask His forgiveness. Third, find a brother or mentor who will keep your confidence and will also keep you accountable. Fourth, enroll in a program like Dr. Carolyn Leaf's program 21 Day Detox (<https://21daybraindetox.com/>). This powerful program, based on God's Word, will help you to use the truth that God has given to retrain your brain and rid yourself of harmful addictions.

2. *Greet her*

This sounds so basic, so ridiculously easy that most men can't believe that it can make a difference. But this is one of the first things to go when a relationship has been around for a while, and people start to get comfortable with each other. You must keep up this habit, whether you have been married for 6 days or 60 years.

When do you greet your wife? When you wake up, when you leave for work, when going on a date, when you come home in the evening, when she shows up at church.

What do you say when you greet her? Look her in the eyes and tell her, "I love you." You can say other things, like "I missed you", "So good to see you", "Oh, so glad you are home", "Wow, such a privilege to come home to see you". All of those, said in the right way, say, "I love you". This little practice will keep your marriage fresh.

I can hear men saying, "What, every time I see her or leave her? She knows I love her, why do I have to keep telling her?" Because you do. Because you value your marriage. Because you want your kids to see you in a wonderful marriage. Because you want your marriage to stay fresh and vibrant. Yes, do it every time!

Is there something to do? Yes, there is. When you leave or see her again, part of your greeting should be a kiss and a hug. I realize that there are some societies where kissing and hugging is not something that you do in public. So, make sure you kiss and hug her at home and any place where it is private. And when you are in public, you can

reach out and take her hand, or slip your arm around her. Men, you need to do this, not just for your sake but for your children and grandchildren!

After greeting her with words and a hug in the mornings, spend a few minutes asking her about what she is going to do that day. Listen and remember what she says.

In the evenings, after you have greeted her, sit down and spend 10 - 15 minutes finding out what happened during the day. It doesn't matter if you are tired. Sit down, turn off your phone, turn off the TV, look at her, and listen to what she shares. Ask questions. Sympathize. Nod your head. Smile. Have a conversation. And afterward, you can have dinner.

All of that goes into greeting your wife each and every day from now until one of you goes to be with the Lord.

3. *Listen to her*

Listening is an art. Do it right, and your wife will feel deeply loved. Miss this, and all your time "listening" to her will be wasted. Your wife needs the emotional release that you give her when she talks, and you listen. When that need is met, she feels loved. "When a man refuses to listen as his wife talks, that symbolizes to her that he does not love her or care about her needs" (Eggerichs, 250).

That may sound crazy to you. Most of your male friends would never say that they felt that way, and they don't. Most of them don't want to talk that much. They get tired of talking. Most women do not, and while it is important for your wife to have her women friends, it is also vital that you learn to listen to her and listen well. So how do you do that?

Lean. Lean into her with your body. If you are sitting, lean forward from the waist. If you are standing, incline your body and head in her direction. This body language says, "I am interested in what you have to say." Most businessmen understand this because they do it each time they are looking to make a sale. But most men don't apply it to their wives. Don't be one of those men.

Interested. You need to be thinking that you want to hear what she has to say. If you aren't, then you need to remember that this is your wife, your partner in the Kingdom of God, the woman who shares your life and helps you raise the children. If she talks about the children, these are YOUR children. If she talks about the laundry, that is YOUR laundry. If she has a problem with the neighbors, those are YOUR neighbors. And this is YOUR wife. Listen to every word.

Hear her. As you are listening, don't just pay attention to the words. Listen to what she is really saying, feeling, meaning. You will know this by paying

attention to her tone of voice, her body language, and the amount of time she spends talking about any one topic. That will tell you how important that subject is to her and if it is important to her, it should be important to you.

Ask. Love says that this conversation is all about her, so ask questions. Try to find out more about what she is talking about. Don't try to fix things or give answers, just listen and continue to ask questions.

See her. When she is talking, look her in the eyes periodically. Your eyes will tell her whether you are really listening. When most men talk, they don't like to look at each other in the eyes. In fact, most men like walking and talking because they don't have to make eye contact. Not so with your wife.

Focus. When you listen, don't do anything else, and don't let anyone or anything else interrupt. Put your phone away. Turn off the TV. Tell the kids to go play outside or don't interrupt you. This is mommy and daddy time.

If you do those things when you talk with your wife, not only will she love you all that much more, but she will also brag to her friends about how incredible you are.

4. *Date her*

A date is several hours that you set aside each week where you spend time focusing on each other, talking about life, and assuring her that she is the most important person in the world to you.

So here is what makes up a successful date:

Plan it. You want her to know you thought ahead. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but you don't want to look at her each time and say, "So, what do you want to do?" Several days ahead of your date, take a few minutes to think of doing something that both of you enjoy. Sometimes, you can do what you have always done, and other times you want to think up something different and creative.

On the date. When the time for the date arrives, both of you should either turn off your phones or commit to only taking absolute emergency calls.

Treat her like a queen. That can mean so many things, but here are some things that every man should do, no matter what country you are from:

- *Open the doors for her and let her go in first.* When you get in a car, go into a restaurant, or enter any building - even when you get home. The only time you would not do this is if you think there might be a danger, then you go first to protect her.

- *Eyes only for her.* If there are other people where you are, you don't look at pretty women. You only have eyes for her.
- *Hold her chair.* When you get to a table, and she is going to sit down in a chair, stand behind the chair, pull it out a little, and let her sit down, then scoot the chair in gently so that she doesn't have to pull it into the table beneath her. After she sits, you can go to your chair.
- *Offer your arm.* When you are walking along the street, offer your arm for her to hold on to.
- *Offer your hand when she gets up.* If she is sitting and goes to stand up, you stand up first and then offer your hand so that she can grasp your hand and pull herself up.

Your goal should be to spoil her like you would the most important woman in the world. Does she need your hand to get up or your arm when you are walking? Does she need you to hold her chair and open her doors? Of course not. She is a strong, dynamic woman of God. But when you do these things for her, they say, "I am willing to go out of my way to make you feel special." If these things don't apply in your country, there are other things you can do and must do. Look for the opportunities to show her that she is special.

Listen to her. Your date will give you several hours of time to talk together. Go back through everything that I have said about listening and apply all those steps to the time you spend listening to her on your date.

Pray together. During or at the end of your date, find time to pray for your kids, friends, neighbors, work, and anything else that God lays on your heart. This can be a short or long time, but it tells her that you have not forgotten what is most important in your relationship - God Himself.

Men will tell me that they don't really have time to spend each week on a date. Work, projects, church, demands... every excuse in the book has been used to not go on dates. Why? Besides the Savior, this woman is the most important person in your life. The people in your church will come and go. Your children will leave the house. Your friends will move. But your wife is till death takes one of you to heaven. Make time! The world will not quit spinning, and people will not lose their way if you turn off your phone for 3 hours to pay attention to your wife. Make a date each week, spend a little time preparing, do what I suggested on each date, and I can promise you that every year your time will not get boring, it will get better.

As I write this, I have been married for 35 years, and I can tell you that I look forward now, almost more than when I was first married, to times when I can be alone with my wife. She's my best friend, my trusted partner, and I hope I have another 35 years with this incredible woman.

Impact

It would seem that date nights are all about the relationship that you and your wife have together, but that is not true. Date nights are about:

Your children. Your children? Yes. When mommy and daddy set aside time to be with each other and children are not allowed, but mommy and daddy come back happy, smiling, and more in love than before, your kids will love it. Even at an early age, they know about divorce and unhappy families, and when you continue to go on dates, they will celebrate because it makes them feel secure knowing mom and dad are never getting a divorce. And, when they get married, they will go on dates with their spouse and have happy marriages.

Your community. If you thought that dating was private, think again. Your friends, family, neighbors, and people in your church will know that you have time set aside for each other, and they will celebrate. They will know that this date time has something to do with the happiness you share together and learn from your example. And because dating takes dedication and a vision for future impact, they will respect you deeply for your commitment to each other.

5. Romance her

Men, I am not talking about sex. Sex is a part of romance within marriage, but romance is not primarily sex. Romance is an everyday thing. It is all the little things that you do every day. It is not for special times or date times or when you want to have sex. Romance is a lifestyle and a necessity for every woman. What you discover is that the more you work on giving your wife the romance that she needs during the week, the more she wants to make love to you.

What is romance?

Simply put, it is everything we have talked about so far in this seminar and everything that we have yet to talk about. Romance is sharing your heart. Romance is apologizing. Romance is saying, "I love you". Dates are romantic. Romance is praying together. Romance is listening. Romance is greeting her every day. Romance is all those things and more.

The results of romance

Romancing your wife can lead to so many incredible benefits that will fill your life, marriage, and family.

Closeness. Most obviously, there is the closeness that develops between a husband and wife who like being around each other.

Loyalty. When two people are truly in love, rarely does the idea of betrayal ever occur to either one. Why? Because why would you betray your best friend.

Trust. One of the most powerful results is that trust is extended. Trust throughout the relationship, covering everything. Because best friends who talk about everything share their deepest joys and concerns and love each other just as they are - there is a level of trust that most don't have.

Passion. When your wife feels loved because you have romanced her, she will want sex, passionate sex. If you haven't romanced her for years, then this may take some time to become a part of your relationship again, but it will happen.

Action step - Making it practical

Though romance can be all these things, romance must also be intentional and targeted to get exactly what your wife likes. To be intentional, you will need to make a list and put some things on your schedule. Put together two lists. The first list is all the things that you can do around the house that she will love. How do you know she will love them? Because these are things that she has mentioned, and you have probably ignored because you didn't have time for them. A new shower curtain. A shelf that is loose. Windows that are dirty. Boxes that need to be put away. A wall that needs painting. Bushes that need pruning.

If she hasn't mentioned anything, you can always ask her for some suggestions. "Sweetheart, is there anything around the house here that I can do?" When you get a list put together, do one every week. When new things come up, don't roll your eyes or give a deep sigh, just smile, put them on your list, and tell her you'd be happy to do it.

Now for the second list. Think of at least 10 things that make your wife feel special and say, "I love you" to her. For my wife, it is when I make her tea in the morning and sometimes cook dinner at night. The tea is easy and doesn't take much time, but every time I bring in a container filled with hot tea and milk, just the way she likes it, I see that smile that tells me I have shown her love the way she wants it. Then, on some days she is working late and I am home early, instead of doing more projects, I will stop and fix dinner so that when she comes through the door, the table is set and the food is hot. You should see her eyes light up and she walks over to me and gives me a hug and kiss that I wouldn't miss for anything.

I realize that in many cultures, the husband who does the cooking is very unusual. All the more reason for you to do that every once in a while. If your wife does not appreciate you cooking for her, there are plenty of other things you can do that she will

appreciate. Find out what they are, the big things and especially the small things, and put them on your list and add a few of them to your schedule each week.

For your wife - That Is Romance!!

Women

Men Need Respect

Scripture: “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

What does the word “*respect*” mean in the biblical text? The word is usually translated “*fear*”, or with God, Christ and husbands, it is “*deep reverential respect*”. Some will counter this and say that husbands are told to respect their wives in I Peter 3:7, but that is not accurate. I Peter 3:7 uses a completely different word that is better translated “*honor*”, “*deference*”, or “*reverence*” as for a valuable person and partner.

So while a husband is to respect his wife, he is never commanded by God to have the “deep reverential respect” that God tells wives to have for their husbands.

As with the command that God gives to husbands - that they are to love their wives - and there are no conditions or qualifications, so too, you as a wife are to respect your husband regardless of whether he deserves it or not. For most, this seems like an oxymoron. In every society, as we grow and mature, we are taught that respect must be earned. We can't demand respect from others, we have to deserve it. Yet, God does not say you as a wife are to respect your husband because he is anything in particular. It is enough that he is your husband.

I fully realize that there are some husbands who don't deserve respect at all and all husbands who don't deserve respect some of the time. But God never gives you an out or an excuse. And the reason is obvious. If a husband had to deserve respect all the time, no husband would ever be worthy of respect any of the time because all fail.

As a result, you are to respect your husband simply because Christ commands it.

For some, that is reason enough. For others, that is incomprehensible and a constant source of irritation. But the truth of the matter is that Christ's commands are never burdensome (I John 5:3). All His commands are for our good. All His commands are a blessing. Do we understand them all? No, but we know that God has promised good to those who obey.

How can you respect your husband? What exactly does it mean for a wife on Monday to wake up and spend the week respecting her husband? What are the ways that a wife can show her husband he is respected? What does “deep reverential respect” actually mean on a day to day basis?



What you think

Acceptance

You accept the man that God has created your husband to be. That means that even with all his flaws, you accept him. I know this sounds like you are giving up, but that is not true. It means that, at the present time, you may not respect everything about your husband. Still, you trust that God is creating in him the person of Jesus and that he is becoming the man that God intended him to be. It may take time, but you believe and rejoice in the process. You believe that God is faithful to His word, Philippians 1:6, and He is answering your prayers. The power of this is that your husband will sense this subconsciously. The feeling of acceptance will come across loud and clear. It will allow you to transition from someone who nags him about his faults to a loving wife who is praying for the man God has given her.

Affection

You are either leaning into your husband or away. You know what I mean. When you are in love, and you really like a person, you lean into them when they are close to you. And when you lean in, he senses that you like him. His mind realizes that you want to be with him. The most important aspects of affection, just like acceptance, will be communicated subconsciously without saying a word. It is the looks, the small touches, the tenderness, taking his hand, and looking into his eyes with love. All of these things say that you want to be around him.

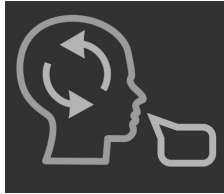
Admiration

You might have chosen to marry your husband, or it might have been an arranged marriage. Either way, you married him, and there were things that you admire about this man at one time or another. Along the way, however, you might have discovered other things that were not so admirable. But, are the things you admired and loved about him still there? I'm sure they are. Your job is to focus on those things and let the other things that you don't like fade into the background.

Appreciation

Thank God for the man that He has given you. The man with all his strengths and weaknesses. The man you accept, have affection for, and admire. Appreciate that this man has chosen to spend the rest of his life with you. Appreciate that you have children

together. Appreciate that this man will help you become more like Christ as you learn to love each other more every day.



What you say

Scripture: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

What you say to him, he will become. If that sounds incredibly powerful, it is. Whether you realize it or not, your words can make your man feel like the most incredible man in the world. Your words can make him willing to walk across a crocodile-infested pond just to get you a cool drink. Your words can make him want to swim across the ocean just to please you.

Please understand the power you have. Your man wants to please you. He wants to impress you, to be your rescuer, to be the one you look up to. He wants to make you happy and filled with joy. He wants to be the man you brag about. This is why your words are so important. Many men are not very good at reading their wives’ minds. They can only go by what you say. And when you tell him he’s the greatest, not only does it make him feel great, but he wants to do more, so he can be even greater. When you tell him how much you appreciate all the things he does around the house, he wants to do more. When you tell him what makes you happy, he will look for ways to do more of those things. It is the way that men are built.

At the same time, the opposite is also true. Your words can wound, hurt, destroy, and crush your man faster than almost anything else in life. Criticism doesn’t motivate a man, it breaks him down. Harsh words don’t spur a man to change, they make him want to quit. Disdain sucks the life out of your man and leaves him wounded and bleeding more quickly than any knife ever could. The wound from a knife will heal in weeks. The wound from your words might last a lifetime.

It is not just your words. It is also your tone and body language. You can say the most wonderful words, but in a biting, nasty tone, and destroy your man - the same with your body language. “I love you” with arms open and outstretched is radically different from “I love you” with your arms crossed and a frown on your face.

If you want your husband to know that you respect him deeply, then make sure that your words, tone, and body language all say the same thing.

What to say to show respect:

Thank him. Thank him for his work. Thank him for his accomplishments. Thank him for what he does for you. Thank him for what he does for the kids and for others. Thank him for protecting the family. Thank him for providing. If you take a few minutes, you can come up with many things that your husband does right, and these are the things you want to highlight and thank him for.

Express. Express your faith in him. Tell him how much you believe in him for what he does, what he has done, and what he will do. Express your admiration for who he is and what he does. Tell him how much you and the kids look up to him. Tell him how much you love being his wife.

If you do what I have said above, it will fill your husband with joy. It will make him love you all the more and trust you with his thoughts and ideas. If your husband begins to talk with you, set aside your chores, sit down, look him in the eye, stop all your work, and listen. Listen to his work stories, his victories, and his complaints. Listen as he shares his heart. Treasure the fact that he has enough confidence in you to share his inner thoughts. Value them and protect them.

There is one area where you must be especially careful, and that is when he shares his dreams. Not the dreams that he has at night, but the dreams of what he wants to do, where he wants to go, and what he wants to accomplish. When he shares these things, he is opening up his soul to you. Make sure that you never laugh at them, put him down for his plans, or tell him that he will fail.

When do you thank him and express your faith in him?

In the morning, when you wake up. Before he leaves the house. When you speak to him on the phone. At night when he comes home. In bed, before you fall asleep. In front of children, so they can hear what mommy thinks of daddy. In front of friends, when he can hear you talking.

Why is this so important?

When you speak like this to your husband, it is encouraging him and helping him to be the man God has created him to be. You are not simply feeding his ego, you are helping him see what sometimes he cannot see and might have a hard time believing. You are also helping your children see their daddy the way that God sees their daddy. You are helping your children to be proud of their father, which will cause them to grow to be strong, dynamic men and women.

What are the results of your words?

Words cause change. Just as your children, your employees, and your friends will aspire to become the good that they hear you say, so will your husband. There will be times when you wonder if this is really true. You will doubt that anything you actually say makes a difference, but I can promise you, on the basis of the

Word of God and the studies that scientists have made, that your words will make changes that will be seen for generations. Make sure that your words are carefully chosen to build up and encourage.

Warning

This actually leads us to a powerful warning from the Word of God. “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark” (James 3:5).

Never have a two-inch conversation with your husband. This is the conversation where you are mean, hurtful, and nasty. Where you mock and belittle your husband, and he walks away feeling like he is two inches tall. It doesn't matter how strong you think your husband is. You can tear him to shreds and leave him bleeding on the ground and hurting more deeply in 10 seconds than anyone else in the world.

Let me say this very directly. Ladies, you have the power: the power to build up or the power to destroy. Any man who is being honest will tell you that he may appear strong and in control, but you are the one who holds the key to his strength. Use your power wisely to build up, encourage, and work with Christ to create a new creature in your man.



What you do

Scripture: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (*English Standard Version*, Ephesians 5:22-24).

For some, submission is an easy principle to accept. For others, there is a tremendous struggle around the idea of a wife submitting to her husband. Since I cover submission in depth in another session of this seminar, we will simply say that for now, this is a biblical principle that should guide your actions.

What do you do daily in order to treat your husband with respect?

1. *Treat him like a man*

God has said that your husband is the authority in the home. How do you support this? Tell him you understand what God has established, that you accept it, and you will support him as the head of the house. Tell him he has 51% of the authority and 51% of the responsibility because God has given him this responsibility. Tell him that you know that because he loves you so much, if it was needed, he would die for you so you will respect his God-given authority. You tell him this even if you are an incredibly successful woman. You might be stronger in character. You might be smarter. You might earn more money. But your willingness to be obedient to the order that God has established will set the tone in the house for blessings.

Many women are married to a man who doesn't act like a man, some or much of the time. Instead, he acts like a child, a spoiled teenager, or a jerk. You've heard women with two children say, "Oh, I have three children: my son, my daughter, and my husband." What a terrible shame. If you treat him like a child, he will continue to act like one. If you treat him like a man, he will begin to act like a man. It may take him a while, but he will eventually become the man that you believe him to be.

2. *Make decisions wisely*

If he is the leader in the house, then let him lead. Yes, most decisions will be team decisions. Only a foolish husband would not consult the wise woman that God has created you to be. But if the two of you disagree on something and the decision has to be made immediately, then tell him that he is the leader and should make the decision and you will support him. With this attitude, it will stun you how often he will come to you for advice because he no longer feels threatened or challenged.

When a decision has been made, praise his good decisions and be gracious with the bad ones. Learn together for the future. You won't have to remind him. Let him remember that you told him something different and he didn't listen to you. The fact that you don't use "I told you so" will make him love you that much more.

3. *Make him your hero*

In life, around the house, with the children, in the neighborhood, there will be many things where he can rescue you, fix something, or help others out. Your man wants to be your hero. Let him.

Wait, you say. I can do all those things myself! And you probably can. After all, you are a strong, independent woman who is smart, wise, and talented. I know you can do most things on your own. But your husband already thinks you are incredible. You don't have to prove anything to him, and this is not about you. This is about him. This is about lifting him up, encouraging him, building him up, and making him confident in your love. So find things that only he can do and ask him to help. Let him be the hero.

And when he is, point out how he helped you to others, especially your children. You want your children to believe their father is a hero.

4. *Seek advice*

Here is another area where you might already have the answers. And this is not about trying to look dumb in front of your husband. This is all about creating a bond in a relationship that will last for generations. So, even if you think you know the answer, remember that he will have a different take on things, a different perspective. It may help you and it may not, but it will be worth listening to. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (*New International Version*). Let him be the iron that sharpens you. Listen to his input, then thank him for his advice.

5. *Make love well*

“Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (I Corinthians 7:5).

On our wedding day, one of my wife’s closest friends came to her and said, “I have one piece of advice - make love well.” My wife has lived up to that, and it has become one of the greatest joys that we share. This is so important that I have devoted an entire session to sex within marriage, so we won’t spend a long time on it here, except to say that for a man, it’s physical. A man needs physical release through sex. Most women do not have this same need, and so it is difficult for them to understand. But a wife who refuses to make love to her husband is essentially saying to him that she doesn’t care about him or respect him and is punishing him by withholding from him what he can only receive from her.

The wife, who realizes a man’s needs for sex and determines to learn how to make love well, will reap incredible rewards. As you meet his need for sex, both on the physical and emotional levels, he will meet your emotional needs for kindness and love. As a woman needs to feel close to have sex, a man needs to have sex in order to feel close. When a woman takes care of her man’s body, she opens up his emotions and spirit. When a man takes care of his wife’s emotions and spirit, he gains access to her body (Eggerichs, 250).

My wife can still remember when she heard Dr. Laura Schlessinger tell women that sex is not a punishment. The woman who makes love to her husband also gets the reward of closeness and an orgasm. That is a good thing!



What a wife says to others

Some may ask why I have included this section for women and not for men. The fact is that few men sit down with their friends and talk about all the things that their wives are doing right or wrong. It is just not something that they do. But most women will say that they spend quite a bit of time discussing their husbands with their friends. With that in mind, there are some ideas that should guide the discussions you have with your friends when you are talking about your husband.

There are also some exceptions to this section that I list at the end. Don't miss those.

A godly woman is trustworthy.

Your man should know, without question, that you will always speak well of him to others. And if you have had a fight or if he has failed you or if he has made a mistake, he doesn't have to worry that the next time you meet with your friends, they will find out everything that he did wrong. Please know that his reputation can either thrive or die with you and the words you speak to your friends. He should know that when you talk about him, you tell all the good things about him, and the bad stuff never leaves the home.

A godly woman is protective.

When you talk to others, remember that this is your man! He may not be perfect, but he has committed his life to you. Defend him. Proactively protect him. If someone runs him down, you can graciously, strongly, and lovingly correct them. If they are correct in their criticism, you can agree, and then immediately go on to tell them of the great things your husband does.

A godly woman is complementary.

You know what he does right, so graciously brag about your husband and what he does for you, your children, friends, and relatives.

What a wife should NOT do

Second-guessing

You know how it goes.

He is helping you with the dishes, but he isn't doing it just right.

He is taking you into the city, but he didn't go the right way.

He is talking to the kids, but he isn't saying it the right way.

So you correct him.

Regularly.
And in the process, you destroy your man.

It is one thing to help and give advice and counsel, especially when your husband asks for it. It is another thing to second guess him on everything and especially on things that don't matter. All the things I listed above. Who cares if it takes a few minutes longer, or the dishes aren't quite right? What really matters is that your man knows you believe in him, and when you second guess him, that says you don't trust him or believe in him.

Controlling

Nothing is more emasculating to a man than a woman who takes control away from him, without talking it over first. If you are a controller, please be very careful. If the two of you have talked, and he wants you to take over the control of something around the house or in business, then that is fine. But to take it over because you think you can do it better and faster is harmful to your marriage.

Both my wife and I are controlling individuals. That can be a wonderful thing or wreak havoc in a relationship. We have solved the problem by talking through the various areas of life and figuring out who does what better. Then, she runs those things she does well, and I do the things I do well and everything that falls in the middle we do together.

Children

When you are upset, it is easy to use the children as a weapon against your husband. It happens when you are angry, frustrated, or hurt. So you vent in front of the children, telling them all the things your husband is doing wrong. This is terrible manipulation that will tear down your marriage and ruin your children. When you do this, you are pinning him where he can't defend himself without telling the children everything that you have done wrong and basically creating a war between you and him, harming the children in the process. They don't know enough to defend their father when you criticize him, and it will destroy their respect for him. You may think this is the way you can get someone on your side, but the long term damage to your children is immense.

Body language

You know the language you use to tell him, without using any words, that you think he is a jerk and has disappointed you. That look on your face. Folded arms. Tapping foot. Turning your body away. All of it screams, "You are a terrible husband and father!" You use it because it is an effective weapon. The problem is that it is destructive to your marriage.

Tone of voice

I don't need to say much here. You know that tone that is a weapon - withering, hurtful, belittling, scornful. Fill your voice with love and respect.

Complaining to others

Don't vent your frustrations to your friends. It will destroy their respect in your husband, and your words will not stop with them. Your complaints, blown out of proportion by you because you were mad at the time, will then be inflated by your friends and spread to the next set of friends. They will inflate the story for the next set of friends until your husband's reputation is damaged beyond repair. This is why God hates gossip. There is an old saying, "If you tell your friends that you and your husband had an argument, by next week, the church will think that he hit you and threw you out of the house."

Lastly, some of you have male friends, perhaps at work. NEVER confide in a male friend about any struggles that you and your husband have. The only thing he should hear is about your husband's strengths.

The results of respect

1. Your husband will become more strong and confident.
2. He will begin to be comfortable in his masculinity so that he will be able to focus on being tender, loving, and giving, especially if he has attended this seminar.
3. He will never be worried about protecting his ego and proving he is the man of the house. You do that for him.
4. He will strive to become what you respect, admire, appreciate, and love about him.

Caveats

Abuse. Physical or emotional abuse to either you or the children. Abuse must never be covered up. Seek counsel. Find help. Get protection.

Adultery. If he has violated the marriage covenant, you have two godly choices. You may seek to restore the marriage, or you are allowed to pursue separation and divorce.

Advice. Marriages often encounter problems that are not abuse-related, but still, you cannot find a solution together. Never gossip about those problems with your friends. Instead, talk to an older, mature woman friend. You are looking for solutions, not looking for an audience to air your husband's failings.

Neglect. I am not talking here about his neglect of you, I am talking about your neglect of him. If you haven't respected your husband in years, don't expect him to respond the moment you decide to start respecting him. You will have to go all out for some time before he trusts that you have really changed. But keep giving, placing his needs above your own, and in time, you will win his confidence, and he will begin to give back what you need.

Effective Communication

I have a much more complete section on this topic in the session on Handling Conflict, but I want to give you the most important things in this overview.

Scripture:

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (I Peter 3:7).

“‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’” (Matthew 19:4-5)?

While we all know it, it bears repeating - there is a vast difference between men and women. They think, process, and see the world differently. But how exactly does that impact the communication process between husband and wife?

Actually, as pastors, you already know the basics of communication, and those basics apply not just to your audience but to your husband or wife.

The goal of all communication?

To be heard and understood. It is that simple. Nothing else can happen without these first two. If you are trying to move people to action, you can add two more steps - persuade and motivate. But before you get to these, you must be heard and understood.

The work

As pastors, when we speak to our audiences, we give them grace. Some of them are uneducated, lost, poor, rich, educated, sinful, all with different backgrounds. As communicators, we understand that, so we plan our communication to take into account as many of these things as we can. We modify our approach, words, tone, and we work hard so that we are understood because the people, who sit in our churches, either need to know Jesus or need to walk more closely to Him.

Do we grant the same grace and spend time preparing to communicate key truths and ideas to our spouses?

The problem

And that actually ends up being the problem. We don’t do what we already know works in almost every situation. We don't apply what we already know. Often couples

accuse each other of communicating in a way that the other can't understand. But that is usually because we don't follow the basics of communication that we have already used with people in our audiences. Here are the mistakes most often made:

Assumptions. We assume that our spouse should understand us, and we assume that we understand them. It is an honest mistake. If you have been living with someone for years, you should know them. But, if you get to the place where you are not communicating effectively, check and see if you really understand how your spouse is feeling and thinking.

Preparation. Because this is our spouse, and we assume they understand us and we understand them, we don't prepare for what we want to communicate. The result is that we don't take into account what she/he is feeling, what they are going through, what their fears and hurts are, etc.

Emotions. When we are upset or irritated at our spouse, we don't invest nearly the time that we normally would when communicating the truth to a stranger on the street. We simply let our words gush out, thinking only about ourselves and not the one whom we committed to love for the rest of our lives.

Focus. We focus on our own needs and simply overlook the needs of the other person. Men, your wife needs love, she is not trying to be disrespectful. Women, your husband needs respect and is not trying to be unloving. It just comes across that way because of hurt and frustration.

And these mistakes are the tools that the enemy uses to blunt, ruin, and hurt our ministries. Don't allow him to make you a less kind, less loving, less patient, less gentle man or woman of God with your spouse than you are with the man or woman who attends your church or the people you have met only once at any random store.

The solution

1. *Stop.* Seriously. Stop. Do not start talking when you are upset and irritated.
2. *Think and pray.*
3. *Focus on your spouse.* Effective communication is based on what the other person needs. To meet those needs, you must know how they feel so you can understand how they are going to receive what you have to say. Each person has the responsibility to realize that what the other is saying is not necessarily what they mean. A husband's communication is often tinged by his need for respect. A wife's communication is tinged by her need for love.

When things go badly, someone has to be mature, step back, and say, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you, I missed something here. What did I say, or how did I say it that hurt you?"

Men's default communication

Women, men usually mean exactly what they say, and they don't use the more indirect style of communication that is often used by women. Therefore, when you communicate with men, speak directly, simply, and tell them exactly what you mean and what you want. As long as this is done lovingly with the right tone and body language, this is a sign of respect, and your man will deeply appreciate it.

If a man asks, "How do I look?" He wants to hear something like, "Incredible, I hope everyone knows that you are with me, and I get to show you off." Straight and to the point."

If a man asks, after preaching a message, "So, how did I do?" The answer is, "I am so proud of you, great job, you are my man!" or, "You are usually right on, but point number three didn't seem to tie in. Otherwise, everything was great!" Clear and concise. Did you see in the second example how you surrounded the critique with two statements of respect?

After your answer, some men will ask you questions to clarify, but that is how you start the communication process with them.

Women's default communication

Men, women want your words to reflect the love that you have for them. That means that you must surround the cold hard facts with lots of words that let them know that you love them and you think they are incredible. You must also realize that once you state the facts, sandwiched in love, you must be willing to talk through just exactly what you meant. And sometimes that will take a long time. Though you thought what you said initially was completely clear, your wife will want to hear it several times, each time surrounded by the words, tone, and body language that says you love her.

So a woman will say, "How do I look?" The answer is "more beautiful than the day I met you. That dress is just the right color for you. I'm sure the other ladies will think you look wonderful, and I want you to be close to me so that everyone will know that you are my wife." She will respond, "Do you really think so?" The average man will say, "I just told you, didn't I?" But the smart man will say, "Oh, absolutely! The dress really looks tremendous and flatters you. I am such a lucky man." And she will say, "Oh, you are just saying that." And the smart man will say, "No, dear, I really mean it. You are incredible, and I love you more each day." After a few more sentences back and forth, you will be ready to leave.

A woman who just made a presentation will ask, "How did I do?" A smart man will say, "Sweetheart, I love you so much. You did such a good job today!" She will respond, "Really, what did you think was so good?" A smart man, "Well, I particularly liked the opening introduction where you talked about the little girl. And then when you

gave the third point from Ephesians 3, the audience really seemed to respond very well.” She will respond, “Really, how do you know?” A smart man, “I saw Sister so and so taking notes and nodding to her husband. Then, I saw Brother so and so smiling and laughing. It was really good.”

This conversation may go on for another 15 minutes, working through each detail. That’s ok, that is how many women like to communicate, and men, it is your responsibility to know that and give them what they need.

The essentials of communication

I am going to give the essentials of communication as it applies to your spouse. If you think through these things each time you talk, pretty soon, you won’t have to think through them anymore, because you will know your husband or wife in such a way that you will know just what to do to be heard and understood.

1. *Know your spouse*

Research. If you don’t know what he/she loves, then find out! Find out what your spouse thinks and what is important to them. Don’t assume you know, ask questions. Lots of questions. Find out their favorite music, food, time of day, activity, colors, locations... become an expert on your spouse.

Listen. Your spouse will tell you or others around you what they are concerned about and what is important to them. Just because you are married doesn’t mean you should stop listening. In fact, the opposite is true. This is the one you vowed to love before God. Listen all the more closely so you can hear their thoughts and heart.

What language do they use? This is not a foreign language, this is how they hear what others are saying. Do they want to spend time going through each point or do they get right to the point? I have described how most men and women communicate, but that is not true 100% of the time. Find out how your spouse likes to communicate. In my full marriage seminar, 11 Steps To A Godly And Glorious Marriage, I have detailed the love languages your spouse uses to communicate.

Know your subject. If you are going to talk about something important to you and might be a source of irritation for your spouse, then know what you want to communicate and what you want your spouse to hear before you start talking. What is your goal? Do you want your wife to just hear what you have to say or do you want your husband to change something that he is doing? Your goals will determine how you talk and what you talk about.

Know your timing. There are many times when your spouse is open to talking and listening and other times when they are busy, preoccupied, frustrated, tired, hungry, or any number of things that make it impossible to actually hear you. Don't ask to talk about an important topic just before you have to rush out the door to go to church. While this may seem obvious to most, sometimes our emotions cause us to blurt things out at very inopportune times.

2. Remember the non-verbals

As married couples, we sometimes forget to check on our own non-verbals and continue to read those of our spouse. But your non-verbals will communicate far more than your words, and your spouse's non-verbals will tell you whether they are listening to what you have to say or have tuned you out.

Body. Arms and legs crossed say the person is closed to listening or is defensive. Scowl says disagreement, everyone knows that. But how about a far off look in the eyes? That says they are thinking of something else and you've lost their attention. No eye contact means they are uncomfortable with what they are saying or what you are saying. The list goes on and on, but if you ignore these key things, you will not be heard or understood as well as you could be.

Voice. The tone of voice being used by both of you is a message. Irritation. Contension. Love. Kindness. Doubt. All come through loud and clear in the tone of voice.

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We pray that this publication has been a blessing to you.

Please visit our website, www.vancehardisty.com. Here you will find other helpful teaching materials on marriage, family, parenting, and godly living.