

– if you open yourself up to me, remove the fig leaves and let me in to your life, I promise you can trust me.”

So she trusted you. She took a huge risk and placed in your hands the ability to hurt her more deeply than any human being in the world. She trusted you not to focus your attention on her weaknesses and inadequacies. She trusted you to overlook and cover over her faults with the understanding that you were that trustworthy.

So are you now going to focus your thoughts on her weaknesses? Are you going to violate that trust, and humiliate her by staring at that which is most embarrassing to her? Are you so cruel that you would announce to her your displeasure in her inadequacies? Are you so heartless that even though you are the only human being the entire world that she would allow into her most sensitive points of vulnerability, that once in there you would mock and criticize? Is that how Christ loved the Church?

Is there any place for helping your wife correct her weaknesses? Sure. But as a general pattern, our goal is not to spend time thinking about the weaknesses and failings of the other.



5 Love Like a Man

The following excerpts are taken from part 6 of “Building a Joyful Marriage.” The full message is available on FoodForYourSoul.net

Male and Female

We live in a world that is advanced in some ways, and in other ways very backward and primitive. One example is their confusion over the differences between male and female. A woman who had a “sex-change” operation to become a man was in the news because she was pregnant and gave birth to a child after the operation. Every news article refers to her as a “him.” “First Pregnant Man” “Man Gives Birth” That may sell newspapers, but it’s not accurate. The headlines should read, “Confused Woman Gives Birth.” Sex cannot be changed. Even after the operation and hormone treatments, every cell in that woman’s body is still female. They all have 2 x-chromosomes. And every cell in a male body has an x-chromosome and a y-chromosome. To say that she is male because she feels like a male is very much like saying the earth is flat because when you look out your front door it looks flat. We live in a culture that does not even know what maleness and femaleness is.

What would you tell your 10 year old son if he asked, “What does it mean to be a man and not a woman?” It is very important that we know the answer to that question, because so many marital problems are the result of the effects of the curse on male and female roles. In fact, it was through an assault on those roles that the fall came about in the first place. The man was created to be the head. The man was created first. The man named the woman. The command about the tree was given to Adam. After the fall God came first to the man for an account. And both the man and the woman are together referred to as “man.”

Genesis 5:2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."

It’s no coincidence, then, that when the tempter wants to lure the couple to disaster he approaches the woman—even though Adam was standing right there (Gn.3:6). Imagine a military

Act like men!

general approaching an Indian tribe for talks, and as he approaches he ignores the chief and speaks to the second in command in the tribe who is standing right next to the chief. What would that say? It would demonstrate that he is attempting to bypass or subvert the first authority. The enemy wanted to overturn the God-ordained roles by making the woman the spokesman and the man a passive follower. The fall was brought about by Adam’s failure to be a real man, and Eve’s failure to be a real woman.

What is Manhood?

Strength

So what are the marks of manhood? It begins with strength. Adam’s wimpy passivity was the opposite of what he should have done.

1 Cor.16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm...; act like men; be strong

Manhood involves strength—particularly the kind of strength that can be alert to danger and withstand attack. Every cell in a man’s body is different than a woman’s. Our metabolisms work differently, our bones, tendons and ligaments have different density. Men have larger windpipes and bronchial tubes, and 30% more lung capacity, larger hearts, and 50% more muscle mass. Male skin has fewer nerve endings than female skin. This gives the woman a superior sense of touch, but enables the male to endure more wear and tear on the skin. And he has 10% more red blood cells which makes his injuries clot and heal faster.

If the woman is the “weaker vessel,” (1Pe.3:7) obviously the man is the stronger vessel. The man is to be the provider and protector, and so God provided men with the capacity for greater toughness.

Leadership

1 Corinthians 9:5 Don’t we have the right to lead a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?

Scripture repeatedly refers to the man as the head of the woman (1 Cor.11:3, Eph.5:23). That word refers to both authority and leadership. The fact that men are designed for leadership is reflected even in the differences God created in the male and female brain. Men’s brains are designed to react more quickly and to be able to make decisions faster. Men and women’s bodies react differently to stress, and are stressed by different things. There are psychological differences. God made men with a need for accomplishment. He made women with a need for healthy relationships and families ties. Women’s brains enable them to be more patient and

tolerant, which is more suited for child care and family relationships but less suited for leadership and decision making.

Human beings are like sheep—we need leadership. Without it we tend toward inaction. “What do you want to do?” “I dunno—what do you want to do?” “Whatever you want.” “I don’t care—it’s up to you.” “Shall we do this?” “Yeah, we could if you want. Or we could do that.” “That’s fine, I guess...” And by the time you’re done with the conversation there’s not time to do anything. But if there’s a real man in the conversation, he will take initiative and lead. If he’s a loving man then he will listen to his wife, find out how she feels and how strongly she feels it and why, and then, once he understands that, he will make a decision and take her by the hand and say, “Let’s go—we’re doing this.” When a man must be pushed into action by his wife, he is a boy, not a man. If the wife has to rouse the husband out of bed to go to church on Sunday morning, he is a boy, not a man.

Servant Leadership

Matthew 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them ... 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Some men think headship means he always gets his way, and the wife’s role is to serve him. That’s the world’s way and it is backwards. In the world, being a leader means being served by those under you. People open doors for you, get coffee, etc. In the kingdom, it is the leader who is the one who does the serving, and the one under authority who is served. When the disciples were gathered for a meal and the task of foot washing needed to be done, whose job was it? Jesus’ job. He was the highest authority in the room and so He was the most logical candidate to do the foot-washing.

Every wife should be eager to serve her husband just because she is a Christian. But for the husband serving is not only his duty as a believer, but it is also a function of his role in the marriage. The husband must be the greatest servant in the home.

Children are served and taken care of by their mother. But a boy becomes a man when he moves from being cared for and served by women to caring for and serving women. The husband who is mostly served by his wife is still a boy, not a real man.

Responsible for decisions that are made

Being in authority means you’re responsible for the decisions made in your realm of responsibility. Much is delegated. Don’t delegate enough and not everything gets done. Delegate too much and you abdicate your influence. But all the decisions, delegated or not, are your responsibility.

If there is a disagreement between you and someone under you, it's your decision whether you will go with that person's opinion or your own opinion. You may go with your wife's preference on a decision rather than your own, but if that decision turns out to be a disaster you don't hold your wife responsible. No "I told you so's." So if the husband is convinced there are going to be dire consequences for the family, or a certain course would not be pleasing to God, there are some times when he needs to just overrule his wife and say, "No, we are not going to do that."

Inspiring following

The definition of leadership is very simple: someone people willingly follow. A leader motivates those under him and opens their eyes to what's good about a certain course, and then he steps out and leads by example.

Assess your approach to leadership. Do you strive to discern God's guidance, and then find a way to present that to your wife that will inspire her heart to be enthusiastic about following you in that path? Always remember - you are not only her authority. You are also her leader. Learn what moves her heart and what inspires her and what motivates her. The goal is not just to make all the wisest decisions for the family. The goal is to lead the family in the wisest path, and to inspire them to joyfully follow.

So often a man will just sink down to the level of just trying to keep his wife from being in a bad mood. As men we are sometimes tempted toward harsh domination, but other times we're tempted in the opposite direction - toward wimpy, spineless, groveling appeasement. Neither one is spiritual leadership. Our wives fall prey to their special temptations from the curse of wanting to seize control, and instead of lovingly, gently helping her rise above that sin we cave in to it and even enable it - just so there will be some peace and quiet. That is not loving. It is actually selfish, because it's doing something that is not in her best interests just to make life a little smoother for yourself. That's the opposite of the selfless love of Eph.5.

Leading by Example

Just as Christ led Church by example, your wife & children should have a model to follow. They should know what it means to seek the Lord because they see you doing it. They see you on your knees, hear you pray, see how well-worn your Bible is, see you go straight to Scripture whenever you have a problem, see how important fellowship is to you in comparison with other things, see how you respond to people in need, hear you share the gospel with people, see how you behave in all kinds of settings, see what you watch on TV, etc.

Planning

To lead you must go somewhere. Make some plans. People put hours of careful planning into their business,

investments, vacations; but not their family. Some people put more effort into planning their landscaping or finishing their basement then they do their marriage. Failure to plan will result in a family that is disorganized, disheveled, frustrated, and aimless.

This isn't to say you make plans unilaterally. But it is to say you shouldn't always have to be cajoled into action by your wife for everything. Sit down together and set some spiritual goals. If you don't know where to start - try this: Figure out what two virtues you need to grow in the most at this time, and what two virtues your wife needs to grow in the most. Come to an agreement on that, and then spend some time and put forth some serious effort into setting goals and coming up with actions steps that will bring you to realize those goals.

The decision making process

When you need to make a difficult decision:

- 1) Realizes you are responsible before God for this decision.
- 2) Eliminate all sinful or foolish options by applying principles from Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, heeding advice from wise counselors, and paying particular attention to your wife's counsel. She has unique perspectives, so he listen with an open mind.
- 3) Discern how important this is to your wife, and what her fears are. Listen until she's satisfied that you have taken her words to heart.

Most of the time at this point you'll be in full agreement. But in those times when you're not, the husband must make the decision and then do everything he can to lead his wife in that direction. Be compassionate and understanding about her fears and misgivings. And if she is tempted to worry, help her find peace and comfort from God's Word. You can say, "I realize your objections may be valid. But I'm responsible before God to do what I believe He is leading us to do, and it would be wrong for me to do what I believe would hurt this family. And so I have to go this other way. But if it turns out you were right, God will take care of us. He will honor the fact that I did my best to follow His guidance, and He will honor the fact that you were submissive to my leadership, and He'll carry us through whatever disasters might arise."

Love like a man

So a man is to be strong and lead, protect, provide for, and serve his wife. But the greatest emphasis in the New Testament by far has to do with love. The New Testament message on marriage is not hard to summarize. Four words: *Husbands love; wives submit.*

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

25 Husbands, love your wives

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, ... be submissive to your husbands

7 Husbands, ... be considerate as you live with your wives

If the objective is to return to the ideal of Gn.2, why is the emphasis on love and submission? Why not say, "Just work hard at companionship, partnership, priority, oneness, and intimacy"? God didn't say that because the problem is not just the lack of those 5 things - it is the fact that the curse blocks us from them. The key to returning to Gn.2 is in reversing the effects of the curse in Gn.3. And the curse hit hardest in the area of love on man's side and submission woman's side. The curse on the marriage relationship results in the woman seeking to control her husband, and the solution to that is submission. For the man the curse results in his harshness, and the solution to that is love.

The three major passages on marriage in the New Testament cited above highlight three main emphases for masculine love: gentleness, selflessness, and self-interest.

Gentleness (Col.3:19)

The word translated **harsh** in Col.3:19 speaks of a bitter heart. Your wife pushes and pushes and finally it gets so exasperating that you give in to the flesh. For some men that means lashing out in an angry verbal response (or even physical abuse). For others it just means just turning off the spigot of tender affection.

And in many cases it's not even provoked by the wife doing anything wrong. You begin dealing roughly or coarsely with your wife not out of anger or exasperation, but just out of neglect or thoughtlessness. Your soft, tender affections toward her dry up and you begin dealing with her like you deal with another man. It is not that you're upset, you're just distracted with work or something else and you become self-absorbed in your own little world, oblivious to her needs.

Familiarity breeds contempt. You get so used to your wife being around that you start to treat her as common rather than as special. Some of us would be doing well if we were as nice to our wives as we are to strangers. A stranger walks in and you smile and give a pleasant greeting; your wife walks in and you act like you don't even see her. When a guest comes into your home, you offer them a seat, ask if they would like something to drink, you tidy up for them before they arrive, you pay attention to them. What if we treated our spouses like that? The more familiar we become with one another the less polite we tend to be. Gentle love will resist the slide toward treating your wife as common rather than as special. The way you greet her and look at her across the room and interact with her should be better than the way you greet strangers. Give her a bigger smile. Wink at her across the room. Find out ways that you can touch her that she especially likes. Where there is not intentional tenderness of affection going out from your heart toward your wife, what comes across to her is harshness and roughness.

Lack of gentleness will destroy companionship, because it will alienate your wife from you. Whether it is the extremes of physical abuse or the coldness and emotional distance of

neglect, it pushes her into a life of loneliness that is the opposite of the kind of companionship that God designed for marriage.

And if it destroys companionship it certainly destroys oneness and intimacy. Naked and unashamed is only possible when there is little risk of being hurt. The more painful it is for her to bump up against your rough edges the more she will have to protect herself from you. And that kind of defensive posture will destroy the possibility of naked and unashamed intimacy.

Sometimes men are annoyed at how fragile their wives are emotionally. But think about why God made her that way. The reason she is weaker is because God designed her to be a suitable helper for you. Part of what makes her suitable includes the kind of comfort, compassion, encouragement and strengthening that only a woman can give. And much of what enables her to be all of that for you is her sensitivity. It is that very sensitivity that leaves her so much more vulnerable emotionally. The tools that God gave her to make her a suitable companion for you are the very things that also make her more sensitized to pain and injury - both physically and emotionally. *She's weaker—for you!*

Female skin has more nerve endings than male skin. So if you take a nail and scratch a man's arm, and make an identical scratch on a woman's arm, the woman will experience more pain than the man. God gave her the advantage of having a superior sense of touch, but the drawback is greater sensitivity to pain. And certainly that is also true emotionally. God also gave her the advantage of greater emotional sensitivity. Women, on average, suffer far more emotionally than men. Think about that. She has to go through life with that kind of vulnerability - suffering more emotional pain than you suffer because God made her more sensitive for your benefit - so she can be a suitable helper. If your wife has to go through life that way for your benefit, the least you could do would be to be considerate and gentle with her! If you were at a dangerous construction site and the boss forced a fellow-worker to give up his helmet so you could wear it and be protected, and the fellow worker willingly does it so he is more vulnerable to injury now for your sake - don't you think the very least you could do is refrain from smacking him in the head all day long?

When you said, "I do" you were signing up to be her provider and protector. Imagine what it is like for her when you inflict pain on her. You are her protector. Think of what it is like for her to be sent by God into this harsh, cruel, hard world with acute sensitivity to pain only to have her protector in this life be the one inflicting pain on her.

It is a serious violation of trust when we are harsh with our wives. When you asked her to marry you, you were asking her to let you in to her most private weaknesses and to give you access to her most sensitive areas where she is most vulnerable to be hurt. In essence saying, "Don't worry. If you marry me