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If Only He Knew

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1

HOW TO DRIVE YOUR WIFE AWAY WITHOUT EVEN TRYING



*You husbands in the same way,
live with your wives in an understanding way.*

1 Peter 3:7

At the other end of the phone a quivering voice said, “You’ve got to help me. She has a court order against me.” George was coming to me for help after his relationship with his wife was already in shreds. “We’ve been married over twenty years, and she won’t even let me back in the house. I can’t believe she would treat me this way after all I’ve done for her. Can you help us get back together?”

Before I answered his question, I wanted to talk to his wife.

“There’s no way you can talk to Barbara,” he said. “She wouldn’t talk to you. The moment you say you’re representing me in any way, she’ll hang up on you.”

“I’ve never been turned down by a wife yet,” I assured him, “so we might as well see if this will be the first time. Would you give me her phone number?”

To be honest, as grim as things sounded, I did wonder if she would be the first wife not willing to talk to me about her marital strife. But my doubts were unfounded—she was more than anxious to discuss their problems.

“What would it take for you to be willing to let your husband back into your life? What would have to happen before you would try to rebuild a marriage relationship with him?” Those were the same questions I had asked many wives who claimed they didn’t want their husbands back.

Her response was typical. “I can’t possibly answer that question. He’s the worst husband in the world, so I wouldn’t think of taking him back. I can’t stand his personality or his offensive habits anymore.” The court order would take care of him, she told me. “Just keep him away!”

I gently asked her if she could tell me the things he had done to offend her. When I heard her response, I said, “It sounds like he hasn’t been a very sensitive and gentle husband, has he?”

Once again I asked her to stretch her imagination and think about what changes would be necessary before she would take him back.

There was plenty of room for improvement, she told me. First, he was too domineering and critical of her. Second, he tried to control her every move with a possessive grip. Third, he trampled her sense of self-worth with constant ridicule. And fourth, although he always had time for business and other interests, he seldom took time to listen to her. On top of all that, he spied on her and didn’t give her any freedom.

“Don’t get any ideas, though,” she told me at the end of our conversation. “Because no matter what, I won’t stop the divorce.”

When I relayed these complaints to George, I knew I had touched some sensitive spots. He defended himself and accused her. I let him rant for a while before asking, “Do you want your wife back?”

“Yes, I’d do anything to get her back,” he said.

“Good. I’m always willing to work with someone ready to re-adjust his life. But if you’re not totally serious, let me know now. I don’t like to play games.” Again he committed himself to change, but his commitment didn’t last beyond my next statement. “We’re going to have to work on your domineering and possessive nature. It shows you don’t genuinely love your wife.”

He fumed, spouted, defended, and fought so much I began to wonder if he really would commit himself to the necessary changes.

“I’ve never met a more belligerent, stubborn man in my entire life!” I exclaimed.

Suddenly subdued, he responded, “That’s not my nature. I’m usually rather submissive inside. Maybe I’m putting up a front because I’m really not a pushy person. I feel like people run all over me.”

“I don’t think you and I are talking about the same person,” I responded. “If I were your wife, I’m not sure I could bear up emotionally under your domineering personality.”

That stopped him long enough for him to give our conversation some serious thought. After talking to his friends and even praying that God would help him understand, he returned to my office able to confess his faults and ready to change.

“If you really want to love your wife, then you need to begin right now, at the divorce trial,” I said. Now that we were on the subject, he mentioned that he needed to get a lawyer because she had one.

“No,” I cautioned him. “If you want to win her back, you need

to forget about a lawyer this time.” (I don’t always recommend this, but based on their personal background, I felt he would stand a better chance of regaining her love without legal counsel.)

“You’re crazy,” he said. “They’ll take me to the cleaners.”

Feeling somewhat defenseless, he reluctantly agreed to forfeit legal counsel.

Two of his friends and I waited in the courthouse for the closed-room session to end. He came running out of the courtroom bellowing. “She wants 20 percent of my retirement . . . 20 percent! No way I’m gonna do that!”

Once again I asked him, “Do you want your wife back?”

Again he nodded yes.

“Then give her 25 percent,” I told him. I reminded him that *now* was the time to respect her and treat her sensitively. Later, he emerged from the courtroom a divorced man, but not for long . . .

Several months later I ran into him at the grocery store. “My wife and I remarried,” he said triumphantly. “I thought you were crazy when you first told me the things I should do for my wife . . . there was no way I would ever be able to do them. It took sheer willpower at first. I only did them because you said that God rewards those who seek him and follow his ways. But you know, it’s really amazing. After doing them for three months, I actually enjoy them.”

He continued to give examples of the new ways he was treating his wife. Like the time she took a business trip and he wrote her a note telling her how much he wished he could be with her. Inserted in the note were extra money and directions on how to reach her destination.

George has finally realized that his wife is a special person who needs tender treatment, almost as if her forehead were stamped “Very Important—Handle with Care.”

He has discovered the secret to renewing any strained relationship—honor. But before we discuss rebuilding a failing marriage, let’s examine two major reasons marriages fail.

High Expectations and Limited Training

The first reason marriages fail is that we tend to enter marriage with storybook expectations and limited training.

I once asked a college student what kind of man she would like to marry. “I’d like for him to be able to tell jokes, sing and dance, and stay home at night.”

“You don’t want a husband,” I told her. “You want a television.”

Her visions of a husband reveal one of the most common reasons marriages fail. We marry with unrealistic expectations and few, if any, caring skills. In fact, most of us are rather fuzzy when it comes to our mate’s real needs or desires.

Isn’t it ironic that a plumber’s license requires four years of training, but a marriage license requires nothing but two willing bodies and sometimes a blood test? Since most of us bounce through the educational corridors without any basic communication courses, many men marry with absolutely no knowledge of how to build a meaningful relationship. In short, most men have no idea how to love their wives in a way that makes both of them happy.

I once asked five divorced women, individually, “If your husband began treating you in a consistently loving manner, would you take him back?”

“Of course I would,” each replied. But, unfortunately, none of them had hope that her husband would ever be like that.

Because I knew one of the men personally, I had to concur with his wife’s hopelessness. If he were willing to try, he could win her back. Unfortunately, he wasn’t interested in learning.

“What he doesn’t realize is that most women are as responsive as puppies,” one woman told me. “If he’d come back and treat me with tenderness, gentleness, and understanding, I’d take him back tomorrow.”

How sad that we men don’t know how to win our wives back or even how to keep from losing them. How can we win their affection, their respect, their love, and their cooperation when we don’t

even know where to begin? Instead of trying to learn what it takes to mend a cracked marriage, most of us, out of desperation, jump on the divorce bandwagon.

We violate the relationship laws inherent in marriage, and then we wonder why it all goes sour. But we wouldn't wonder if the law of aerodynamics sent a one-winged airplane plummeting to the earth.

Imagine yourself an aerospace engineer working for NASA. Your job is to put several people on the moon, but something goes wrong halfway through their flight. You wouldn't dream of walking out on the entire project because something went wrong. Instead, you and the other engineers would put your heads together, insert data into the computer, and . . . voilà! You would work night and day to try to discover the problem and make all the vital adjustments to get that spacecraft back on course or help the astronauts return to earth. If the project had failed altogether, you still wouldn't forsake it. You would study what happened and modify it to avoid similar problems in the future.

Like the spacecraft, your marriage is subject to laws that determine its success or failure. If any of these laws are violated, you and your wife are destined to crash. However, if during the marriage you recognize which law or principle you are violating and make the necessary adjustments, your marriage will stay on the right course.

Ignorance of the Differences between Men and Women

I would venture to say that most marital difficulties center around one fact—men and women are different. The differences (emotional, mental, and physical) can be so extreme that without a *concentrated effort* to understand them, it is nearly impossible to have a happy marriage. Freud once said, “After thirty years of studying women, I ask myself, ‘What is it that they really want?’” If this was his conclusion, just imagine how little we know about our wives.

You may already be aware of some of the differences. Many, however, will come as a complete surprise. Did you know, for instance, that every cell in a man's body has a chromosomal makeup entirely different from those in a woman's body? How about this next one? Dr. James Dobson says there is strong evidence indicating that the "seat" of the emotions in a man's brain is wired differently than in a woman's. By virtue of these two differences alone, men and women are miles apart emotionally and physically. Let's examine some of the differences between men and women.

Mental/Emotional Differences

1. Women tend to be more *personal* than men. Women have a deeper interest in people and feelings—building relationships—while men tend to be more preoccupied with practicalities that can be understood through logical deduction. Men tend to be more conquest oriented—competing for dominance—hence, their strong interest in sports such as football, boxing, and NASCAR.

Why would a woman be less interested in a boxing match? Because close, loving relationships are usually not developed in the ring! Also, watch what happens during many family vacations. He is challenged by the goal of driving four hundred miles a day, while she wants to stop now and then to drink coffee and relax and relate. He thinks that's a waste of time because it would interfere with his goal.

Men tend to be less interested in and knowledgeable about building intimate relationships, both with women and with other men. For example, women are the primary consumers and readers of marriage books. They are usually the ones who develop the initial interest in knowing God and attending church. When a man realizes that his wife is more naturally motivated to nurture relationships, he can relax and accept these tendencies and *choose* to develop a better marriage and better relationships with his children.

As a husband, do you realize that your wife's natural ability for

developing relationships can actually *help* you fulfill the two greatest commandments taught by Christ—loving God and loving others (Matt. 22:36–40)? Jesus said that if we obey these two commandments, we are fulfilling *all* the commandments. Think about it. Your wife has the God-given drive and ability to help you build meaningful relationships in both these areas. God knew you needed special help because he stated, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper [and completer] suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18 NIV). If you let her, your wife can open up a whole new and complete world of communication and deeper relationships.

2. Women become an intimate part of their surroundings. Dr. Cecil Osborne, in his book *The Art of Understanding Your Mate*, said women become an intimate part of the people they know and the things that surround them; they enter into a kind of “oneness” with their environment. Though a man relates to people and situations, he usually doesn’t allow his identity to become entwined with them. He somehow remains apart. That’s why a woman, viewing her house as an extension of herself, can be hurt when it’s criticized. A man may not realize it, but when he yells at the kids for something they did, his words affect her deeply as well.

Women tend to find their identity in close relationships, while men gain their identity through vocations.

3. Women often need more time to adjust to change. Because of a woman’s emotional identity with people and places around her, she needs more time to adjust to change that may affect her relationships. A man can logically deduce the benefits of a change and get psyched up for it in a matter of minutes. Not so with a woman. Since she focuses on immediate consequences of relocating, for example, she needs time to overcome the initial adjustment before warming up to the advantages of it.

4. Women tend to express their hostility *verbally* whereas men tend to be more *physically* violent.

Physical Differences

Dr. Paul Popenoe, founder of the American Institute of Family Relations in Los Angeles, dedicated his most productive years to the research of biological differences between the sexes. Some of his findings are listed below, along with their effects on us.

- Women have greater constitutional vitality, perhaps because of their unique chromosomal makeup. In developed nations, women normally outlive men by four to eight years.
- Women's metabolisms are usually lower than men's, making weight control more difficult for women.
- Women's bodies have several unique and important functions related to childbearing: menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. Their bodies release more of the hormone oxytocin, which is related to bonding and empathy.
- Men produce more testosterone, which is related to aggression, focus, independence, and drive.
- Women's blood contains more water and 20 percent fewer red blood cells. Since the red blood cells supply oxygen to the body cells, women tire more easily than men. For example, when the working day in British factories was increased from ten to twelve hours under wartime conditions, accidents increased 150 percent among women, but not at all among men.
- On the average, men possess 50 percent more brute strength than women (40 percent of a man's body weight is muscle, while muscle is only 23 percent of a woman's body weight).

There are many more examples, of course, but even these few differences underline how the physical differences between men and women can cause strife in a marriage. A man who expects his wife to have the strength and endurance that he has is not only ignorant but foolish. And a woman who resents her husband's focus and drive to succeed is fighting against his basic biological nature.

Sexual Differences

A woman's sexual drive tends to be related to her menstrual cycle, while a man's drive is fairly constant. The hormone testosterone is a major factor in stimulating a man's sexual desire.

A woman is stimulated more by touch and romantic words. She is far more attracted by a man's personality, while the man is stimulated by sight. A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted.

While a man needs little or no preparation for sex, a woman often needs hours of emotional and mental preparation. Harsh or abusive treatment can easily remove her desire for sexual intimacy for days at a time. When a woman's emotions have been trampled by her husband, she is often repulsed by his advances. Many women have told me they feel like prostitutes when they're forced to make love while feeling resentment toward their husbands. However, a man may not be aware of what he is putting his wife through if she feels he is forcing sex upon her.

These basic differences, which usually surface soon after the wedding, are the source of many conflicts in marriage. From the start, the woman has a greater intuitive awareness of how to develop a loving relationship. Because of her sensitivity, she is initially more considerate of his feelings and enthusiastic about developing a meaningful, multilevel relationship: that is, she knows how to build something more than a sexual marathon; she wants to be a lover, a best friend, a fan, a homemaker, and an appreciated partner. The man, on the other hand, does not generally have her instinctive awareness of what the relationship should be. He doesn't know how to encourage and love his wife or treat her in a way that meets her deepest needs.

Since he doesn't have an understanding of these vital areas through intuition, he must rely *solely* upon the knowledge and skills he has acquired *prior* to marriage. Unfortunately, our educational system does not require a training program for a husband-to-be. His

only education may be the example he observed in his home. For many of us, that example may have been insufficient. We enter marriage knowing a lot about sex and very little about genuine, unselfish love.

I am not saying men are more selfish than women. I'm simply saying that at the outset of a marriage most men are not as equipped to express unselfish love or as desirous of nurturing a marriage into a loving and lasting relationship as women are.

Differences in Intuition

Norman was planning to invest more than fifty thousand dollars in a business opportunity that was a "sure thing." He had scrutinized it from every angle and had logically deduced that it couldn't miss. After signing a contract and delivering a check to the other party, he decided to tell his wife about the investment.

Upon hearing a few of the details, she immediately felt uneasy about the deal. Norman sensed her uneasiness and became angry, asking why she felt that way. She couldn't give a logical reason because she didn't have one. All she knew was that it just didn't "sit right." Norman gave in, went back to the other party, and asked for a refund. "You're crazy!" the man told him as he returned Norman's money. A short time later, all of the organizers and investors were indicted by the federal government. His wife's intuition had not only saved him fifty thousand dollars, but it may have kept Norman out of jail.

What exactly is "woman's intuition"? It's not something mystical. According to a Stanford University research team led by neuropsychologists McGuinness and Pribran, women do catch subliminal messages faster and more accurately than men. Since this intuition is based on an unconscious mental process, many women aren't able to give specific explanations for the way they feel. They simply perceive or feel something about a situation or person, while men tend to follow a logical analysis of circumstances or people.

Now that you know some of the differences between men and women, I hope you will have more hope, patience, understanding, and tolerance as you endeavor to strengthen and deepen your relationship with your wife. With this in mind, let's look at some of the serious consequences of allowing a poor marriage to continue its downhill slide.

Serious Consequences of a Poor Marriage

First, a woman desires love from her husband. A poor marriage can cause a woman to develop any number of serious physical or mental ailments requiring thousands of dollars' worth of treatment. If your wife is seriously depressed, overweight, or constantly coming down with the latest bug, one cause of her problem may be a poor marriage.

Second, when a husband mistreats his wife, their sex life will suffer. To make things worse, the man then might turn to adultery or porn to meet his sexual needs and may find himself trapped in addictive behaviors that are extremely difficult to overcome without extensive counseling.

Third, a husband's lack of love for his wife can drastically affect their children. Like their mothers, children might suffer physical or mental illness as the result of a poor marriage. Rebellious children are more likely to be found in the home of a man who does not know how to lovingly support his wife. And because children model themselves after their parents, their future marriages are in danger of suffering the same negative patterns that they witnessed in their parents' marriage.

Fourth, when a man settles for a poor marriage, he is forfeiting his reputation before all the world. He is saying, "I don't care what I promised at the marriage altar; I'm not going to try any longer." By refusing to love his wife as he should, he is telling those around him that he is self-centered and unreliable.

The Hardest Change You May Ever Make

I am not trying to force you into the “perfect husband” mold. I don’t know *any* perfect husbands. However, I do know some who are learning how to respond to their wives’ special needs.

I do want to help you learn how to love your wife more effectively and consistently. At first you may feel like you’re learning to walk all over again. Weeks, months, or even a year may pass before you reach your goal of consistent loving behavior. After you learn to make progress, you will gain confidence. Soon you will be right in the midst of the kind of marriage you never thought possible.

Remember—you may feel it’s impossible to change lifelong habits, but it’s not. It usually takes four to six weeks to change a habit. So I hope you will decide to try to change yours. For some men it may take the accountability of a small group or the support of a pastor. However, I know from experience that the rewards are well worth the effort.

The Secret to a Fulfilling Marriage

What is the secret of a fulfilling marriage? Hard work and persistence! Sometimes in the middle of a conflict with Norma I really want to give up. But that’s only how I *feel*. Often I’m tired, run down, under too much stress—consequently, the future looks bleak. That’s when I rely upon knowledge, not feelings. I act upon what *will* strengthen our relationship, and in a few days I see the results. In fact, I usually feel better the next day and have renewed desire to work on our marriage. So I never give up. No matter how I feel, I keep acting on the secrets of lasting relationships that I’ve learned from the Bible.

Remember, *you* are the one who gains when you strive to have a loving relationship with your wife. My wife has told me dozens of times that when I treat her well I’m the one who wins. My loving care

motivates her to do extra things for me, to respond gladly to my needs and desires, but her response has never been my main motivation. The strongest motivation for me has been the *challenge* and *rewards* of living my life as outlined in Scripture. For me, it's following the two greatest teachings of Christ—to know and love God and to know and love people (Matt. 22:36–40). All the joy and fulfillment I have desired in this life have come from these two relationships—with God and with others (Eph. 3:19–20; John 15:11–13).

These relationships are so important that I added to my life another motivation—perhaps the best motivation for me. I allowed a few other couples to hold me accountable for loving my wife and children. They have the freedom to ask me how we're doing, as a couple and as a family, and I know they love me enough to lift me up when I fall. And I always try to remember that love is a *choice*. I choose to care about my relationships. That same choice leading to great rewards can be yours.

My wife and I have committed the remaining years of our lives to the study of skills needed to rebuild meaningful relationships. I have personally interviewed thousands of women about what actions of their husbands tear down or build up their marriages. Basically, this book is a summary of my findings. Even now, some thirty-plus years from the first draft of this book, we have ministered to over a million men worldwide, calling them to an all-out commitment to their families.

Your wife may be a career woman without children or a busy homemaker and mother of three. Whatever the case, I believe you can *customize* the general principles in this book to build a more fulfilling relationship with her.

Before reading the next chapter, take this short marriage checkup quiz to determine how healthy your marriage is at this time. Then, when you have pinpointed your strengths and weaknesses, read the rest of the book, taking the steps that are necessary to strengthen your relationship. Some of the ideas for this checklist are from Dr. George Larson, a psychologist who has done extensive work helping

people develop good relationships. He believes, as I do, that good relationships don't just happen. They evolve and are sustained only when people know what they want and how to get it.

Marriage Checkup Quiz

1. Do you make your wife feel good about herself?
(yes ____ no ____)
2. Do you value the same things in your wife that you value in yourself?
(yes ____ no ____)
3. Does your face spontaneously break into a smile when you see your wife?
(yes ____ no ____)
4. When you leave the house, does your wife have a sense of well-being, having been nourished by your company?
(yes ____ no ____)
5. Can you and your wife tell each other honestly what you really want instead of using manipulation or games?
(yes ____ no ____)
6. Can your wife get angry at you without your thinking less of her?
(yes ____ no ____)
7. Can you accept your wife as she is instead of having several plans to redo her?
(yes ____ no ____)
8. Is your behavior consistent with your words?
(yes ____ no ____)
9. Do your actions show you really care for your wife?
(yes ____ no ____)

10. Can you feel comfortable with your wife when she's wearing old clothes?

(yes _____ no _____)

11. Do you enjoy introducing your wife to your friends or acquaintances?

(yes _____ no _____)

12. Are you able to share with your wife your moments of weakness, failure, or disappointment?

(yes _____ no _____)

13. Would your wife say you are a good listener?

(yes _____ no _____)

14. Do you trust your wife to solve her own problems?

(yes _____ no _____)

15. Do you admit to your wife you have problems and need her comfort?

(yes _____ no _____)

16. Do you believe you could live a full and happy life without your wife?

(yes _____ no _____)

17. Do you encourage your wife to develop her full potential as a woman?

(yes _____ no _____)

18. Are you able to learn from your wife and value what she says?

(yes _____ no _____)

19. If your wife were to die tomorrow, would you be happy you had the chance to meet her and to marry her?

(yes _____ no _____)

HOW TO DRIVE YOUR WIFE AWAY

20. Does your wife feel she's more important than anyone or anything else in your life other than God?
(yes _____ no _____)

21. Do you believe you know at least five of your wife's major needs and how to meet those needs in a skillful way?
(yes _____ no _____)

22. Do you know what your wife needs when she's under stress or when she's discouraged?
(yes _____ no _____)

23. When you offend your wife, do you usually admit you were wrong and seek her forgiveness?
(yes _____ no _____)

24. Would your wife say you praise her at least once a day?
(yes _____ no _____)

25. Would your wife say you are open to her correction?
(yes _____ no _____)

26. Would your wife say you are a protector, that you know what her limitations are?
(yes _____ no _____)

27. Would your wife say you usually consider her feelings and ideas whenever making a decision that affects the family or her?
(yes _____ no _____)

28. Would your wife say you enjoy being with her and sharing many of life's experiences with her?
(yes _____ no _____)

29. Would your wife say you are a good example of what you would like her to be?

(yes _____ no _____)

30. Would you say you create interest in her when you share things you consider important?

(yes _____ no _____)

If you answered “yes” to *10 or fewer* questions, then your relationship is in major need of overhaul.

If you answered “yes” to *11–19* of the questions, your relationship needs improvement.

If you answered “yes” to *20 or more* questions, then you’re probably on your way to a good, lasting relationship.

For Personal Reflection

1. What two main responsibilities are required of every husband? See 1 Peter 3:7.
2. What is the biblical requirement to love? What do these verses have in common: John 15:13, 1 Corinthians 13:5, and Philipians 2:3–8?
3. What do we gain from loving others? See John 15:11, Galatians 5:13–14, and Ephesians 3:19–20.

2

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FEELINGS GONE?



But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV

“I don’t love you anymore,” Sandi said casually, shocking Jim out of his intense interest in a baseball game on TV. “I want to leave you, and I’m taking Jamey with me.”

Since Sandi and Jim believed themselves to be sensible, educated adults, they separated calmly and agreed on a settlement without dispute. Jim, in his “maturity,” even helped Sandi pack. Then he calmly watched as she and his daughter left his house for good. But he wasn’t calm on the inside. He couldn’t keep food down for the next month, and it wasn’t long before he developed shingles and boils. His physical problems were only symptoms of a much deeper

problem—a lack of *knowledge* and *interest* in building a lasting marriage relationship.

Fortunately, Jim was able to win his wife back with genuine love. It took a year, but Sandi was finally convinced by the changes in Jim that their marriage deserved another try. Jim got a second chance at his marriage. Unfortunately, not all men do.

Just what did Jim learn about love during a year of separation from Sandi? He learned that a successful marriage, like any other worthwhile endeavor, takes time, intention, and study.

Who would think of allowing an untrained man to climb into the cockpit of an airplane and tinker with the gauges? Or who would allow a novice to service the engines of a modern jet? Yet we expect men to build strong, loving relationships almost without any education at all. Great marriages require great education. You first must discover the essentials of genuine love, then practice them until those skills are sharp and natural. Soon your awkwardness will give way to masterful ability.

Remember the couple I mentioned in the first chapter? By the time George finally asked me how he could win his wife's love back, she had already obtained a court order to keep him away from the house. The divorce was pending, although he desperately wanted to salvage their marriage of many years. I can remember telling him, "It'll be difficult. But I assure you, as long as she isn't in love with another man, what I'm going to share with you will work."

At first, he felt awkward using the techniques I shared with him. He had to begin at zero and slowly learn to talk to Barbara, to be tender, and to care about and understand her feelings. He didn't know her special needs, that she longed for comfort and not lectures when discouraged. But in time, he did learn, and he did win back his wife. He said he couldn't believe the gestures that once felt so awkward were now an enjoyable part of his life.

For example, most men who did not grow up in warm, loving

homes tend to struggle with hugging. For these men, hugging can feel uncomfortable. Yet I have made it one of my missions in life to teach aloof men how to be warm and learn how to hug. What at first feels awkward becomes second nature for many men who keep at it. The same is true of just about any marital skill.

“It’s just not worth it,” one husband said when I told him how to save his marriage. “Don’t you see, I don’t like her anymore. She bugs me, and I don’t even want to make the effort to build what you’re talking about. I just want out.”

“What’s the matter between the two of you?” I asked, trying to find out why his love for her had vanished. “Why can’t you extend yourself toward her and try to build a loving relationship? Why don’t you want to?”

“Well,” he confided, “several things she has done have hurt me so much that I just can’t try anymore.”

The next day at lunch he named seven things his wife had done, and continued to do, that made him feel like leaving. To his amazement, we were able to trace each area he hated in his wife to an area he saw lacking in his own life. Once he understood this, he asked, “What kind of man would I be to dump her when I’m contributing to what I dislike about her?”

A marital relationship that endures and becomes more fulfilling for both the husband and the wife is no accident. Only hard work makes a marriage more fulfilling five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years after the honeymoon. I enjoy my wife’s company more than ever, and I’ve been married for over forty-five years! And do you know what? It gets easier on most fronts, but I confess, it still takes effort to stay in unity, harmony, and oneness. We’re still learning and practicing more and better ways to live in a win-win relationship. There’s no such thing as finally reaching a place of total relaxation and just letting the relationship slide. There will always be work involved, but it’s more than worth it for not only my own health, but also for Norma’s well-being.

The Three Essential Kinds of Love

Nearly every man enters marriage believing his love for his mate will never fade. Yet in the United States, for every two couples who marry, one will divorce. Why? Because we have believed in Hollywood's version of love. But it doesn't take long to discover that mere passion, which revolves around sexual gratification, is not sufficient in itself to establish a lasting relationship. Unfortunately, too many couples begin their marriages thinking this type of love is all they need.

There are at least three kinds of love, each unique. Of the three—affection, passion, and genuine love—I believe only genuine love provides an adequate foundation for a secure relationship. If a relationship lacks genuine love, it will most likely deteriorate. One of the most exciting virtues of genuine love is that it can be developed within your character without the help of affectionate feelings. Before we look at genuine love, however, let's first consider the other two types of love.

Affection

Here we're talking about the "I like you" feelings we have toward the opposite sex—the kind of love that pleasantly stimulates all five senses. She smells good, feels good, sounds good, and looks good. She is pleasant company because she makes you feel happy. You love her like you love pizza or you love country music.

Many relationships begin with this type of love. We all notice attractive features in others. Soon we find ourselves enjoying the parts of their lives that make us feel good. We get to feel strong rewards just by being with them.

Though this love is the foundation for many marriages, it doesn't always withstand the pressure of time. After two or three years, the wife changes her lifestyle and hairstyle while her husband opts for new cologne and different political views. The older they get, the more they change.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FEELINGS GONE?

We all change to some degree each year. The danger arises when we base our love on changeable characteristics we found attractive on the affection level. Our feelings grow colder and colder until finally we wonder what we ever liked about our mates in the first place. So we're off to look for someone new to love. We miss those old "reward feelings" when we're with her. It's easy to see why affection love has trouble maturing and lasting over the years.

Passion

Passion works harder on the emotions than affection. It's the type of love that keeps the heart working overtime: "Hey, you really turn me on!" The Greeks called it *eros*—a sensual and physical form of love that often produces ardent physical involvement before and after marriage. Eros love heightens our senses and stimulates our bodies and minds. It's the kind of love that hungers for the other person to stimulate and satisfy our sexual urges. This love is certainly found in marriage, but if passion exists without genuine love, usually lust gives way to disgust and repulsion, as it did with King David's son Amnon, who hated Tamar after he raped her (2 Sam. 13:15).

Genuine Love

Genuine love is completely different. It means, "I see a need or desire in you. Let me have the privilege of assisting you in meeting it." Instead of taking for itself, genuine love gives to others. It motivates us to help others reach their full potential in life.

Most important, genuine love has no qualifications. It doesn't say, "I'll be your friend if you'll be mine." Nor does it say, "I want you to be my girlfriend because you are beautiful and I want people to see us together," or, "I want to be your friend because your family is rich." This love does not seek to gain, but only to give. Don't you remember those junior-high crushes when you said, "Well, I'll like her if she likes me, but if she gives me a bad time, I'm dumping her." Genuine love has no such fine print.

Some time ago I found one of the secrets to remaining in this type of love. It's honor. I decided to highly value my wife, holding her in high esteem. Other than God himself, I honor and value her more than anyone or anything else in this life. She is my treasure, and as Jesus noted, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21 NIV).

The Lowest Level of Maturity

The ability to love in a selfless way is dependent upon your level of maturity. The emotions listed below are typical of immature love. Check the ones characteristic of your life.

- Jealousy* is caused by a fear of losing something or someone we value because it or they meet our needs.
- Envy* springs from a desire to possess what someone else has. We imagine that if we gain what he or she has, then we'll be happier.
- Anger* results from the inner turmoil and frustration we feel when we cannot control people or circumstances. We cannot have what we believe will make us happy or our goals are blocked.
- Loneliness* results from a dependence on other people for our happiness.
- Fear* results when we imagine or perceive that our needs or goals will not be met.

If you want to continue this exercise, you should make a list of incidents that have triggered each emotion you checked. Then ask yourself, "Why did I feel the emotion? Was I focusing on what I could *get* out of life or what I might *lose* in life?"

All these emotions are characteristic of immature love—a desire to use other people for personal happiness, a hunger for pleasure without regard for the cost. This same immaturity is behind the abuse of alcohol, drugs, and sex and the weakening of all our relationships.

The Highest Level of Maturity

I believe the more we help others achieve their full potential in life, the closer we are to maturity. Demonstrating a selfless desire for others to gain is the strongest base for building lasting relationships. How can you go wrong when you develop a love that is primarily concerned with building a deep and lasting marriage? Or you have a love based on identifying your wife's specific needs and then looking for creative ways to meet them? This kind of love cannot fail!

Take Her Viewpoint into Account

What do you think is the major stumbling block for most husbands in developing a lasting love for their mates? I have found that it is failing to meet a woman's needs or desires from *her viewpoint*.

When Anna told him she felt unloved in certain areas, Mike was dumbfounded. "What do you mean?" he asked her.

"Well, for years you have been a great husband and a very helpful person, and you've done a lot of nice things for me," she explained gently. "But sometimes you do things I don't need. I'd appreciate it if you'd find out what is important to *me*."

A man's brilliant idea for showing love can backfire. Like the time I decided to have our house painted as a special surprise for my wife. What was special to me wasn't so special to her. Although she appreciated the paint job, she would have much rather had a new kitchen floor. When I realized that, I stopped my projects long enough to buy her a new kitchen floor. Then we made a list of priorities from her point of view. They were quite different from mine!

By the way, when you use your energy to satisfy your marriage relationship from *her* point of view, you'll find that your wife will bend over backward to try to make you happy. Thousands of wives have told me, "When I see my husband making me first place in his life, caring for my deepest relational desires, I can't wait to do the

same for him.” So don’t stop treating her well for fear that she won’t return the favor. If you are consistent and persistent in your loving deeds, she eventually will.

Doing things for others *our* way is a selfish, immature form of love. My heart goes out to those wives who have received pool tables for Christmas, tickets for a trip to the fishing swamps of Louisiana, or invitations to the Motorman’s Ball.

If you’ve never done so, find out what *your wife* needs to feel fulfilled. Then look for special ways to fulfill her needs. At first she may not believe your caring attitude will last. Don’t despair. It takes a long time to develop a sturdy relationship.

Many wives are cautious at first when they see their mates becoming more caring. Like the joke about the husband who went to a lecture on marriage, then surprised his wife at their front door with a huge hug, a box of candy, and a dozen roses. “Oh, this is terrible,” she said, weeping. “The baby cut his finger, I burned your dinner, the sink is stopped up . . . now *you* come home drunk!”

Don’t be surprised if your wife doesn’t understand your actions at first. It took at least *two years* before Norma could see the changes in me after I promised her that I would start loving her better. Now she knows I am committed to spending the rest of my life developing our relationship and getting to know her new needs as they change.

Learning how to love your wife in a mature way is like raising a productive vegetable garden. Our first year in Texas, we decided to grow a vegetable garden. After we dug a small plot, I dumped nearly half a bag of fertilizer on it and let it sit for three months to be sure I’d have a lush garden. But something went wrong. When the carrots came up, they were a little brown around the edges. All the tomatoes began to rot on the bottom before they ripened, so we had to pick them while they were green. None of our beans survived above the half-foot level, and our cucumbers bit the dust.

I was truly puzzled until an expert gardener told me I had “burned” my vegetables with too much fertilizer. My intentions were

good, but my knowledge was limited. If only my vegetables could have talked. If only the beans could have said, “Hey, you up there! You put way too much fertilizer in this garden, and we’re having a tough time. The chemicals are killing us, and if you don’t do something about it, we’re all going to die.” If my vegetables could talk, I could have the world’s greatest garden.

A husband can fail in much the same way if he doesn’t know exactly how much of each “love ingredient” his wife desires. Fortunately, unlike vegetables, my wife can talk. I can ask her just *what* she needs, *how much* she needs, and *when* she needs it.

(Wives, if you are reading this, let me assure you that we as husbands generally *do not* know what you need. So we ask you to help us learn by telling us your needs in a gentle, loving way. Let us know when we aren’t meeting your needs—but not in a critical way that could cause us to lose interest.)

Since understanding and meeting your wife’s needs is the golden key to a fulfilling marriage, the rest of this book deals with that subject.

Your Wife’s Needs

I believe a woman needs to be in harmony with her husband through a deep, intimate relationship. She needs comradeship, harmony, and a feeling of togetherness.

To satisfy your wife, I believe you need to make a dedicated effort to meet each of her needs explained below and expanded in later chapters.

1. Your wife needs to feel that she is very valuable in your life, more important than your mother, children, friends, sports activities, hobbies, employees, or job.
2. When your wife is stressed out and hurting, she needs to know that you are willing to share an intimate moment of comfort without demanding explanations or giving lectures.

3. She needs open or unobstructed communication.
4. She needs to be praised so she can feel a valuable part of your life.
5. She needs to feel free to help you without fearing retaliation and anger.
6. She needs to know that you will defend and protect her.
7. She needs to know that her opinion is so valuable that you will discuss decisions with her and act only after carefully evaluating her advice.
8. She needs to share her life with you in every area—home, family, and outside interests.
9. She needs you to be the kind of man her son can follow and her daughter would want to marry.
10. She needs to be tenderly held often, just to be near you, apart from times of sexual intimacy.

When her needs are met, a woman gains security and glows with a sense of well-being. Some of her glow will rub off on you, especially if you are responsible for it in the first place.

Three Safeguards

I hope you will practice these three safeguards with each chapter you read, since the ideas I put forth are general in nature.

First, discuss each chapter with your wife to see where she agrees and disagrees. Think of her as a flower. All flowers are beautiful, but each needs a specific amount of sunlight, nutrients, and water to flourish. You need to discover who she really is, especially as she changes from year to year.

Second, after she has shared her unique needs, rephrase them in your own words until *she* says you have picked up her meaning. For example, work at discovering what your wife means when she

complains, “You said you’d be back in a *little while*.” A little while might mean thirty minutes to her and two hours to you.

Third, it is important to remember how much you both differ as male and female. In general, a wife is naturally more sensitive and more aware of relationships than her husband. Try to understand that she will probably feel, see, and hear more than you. When your wife says something to you, allow it to sink in. Make an extra effort to understand your relationship *as she sees it*.

One Hundred Ways

The rest of this chapter is devoted to showing you one hundred ways you can love your wife *her way*. Discuss this list with your wife. Ask her to check the ones that are meaningful to her, and then arrange them in order of importance to her. Use the list as a basis for learning her views. I know your relationship will be greatly strengthened as you learn how to use these suggestions:

- Communicate with her; never close her out.
- Regard her as important.
- Do everything you can to understand her feelings.
- Be interested in her friends.
- Ask her opinion frequently.
- Value what she says.
- Let her feel your approval and affection.
- Protect her on a daily basis.
- Be gentle and tender with her.
- Develop a sense of humor.
- Avoid sudden major changes without discussion and without giving her time to adjust.
- Learn to respond openly and verbally when she wants to communicate.

- Comfort her when she is down emotionally. For instance, put your arms around her and silently hold her for a few seconds without lectures or put-downs.
- Be interested in what she feels is important in life.
- Correct her gently and tenderly.
- Allow her to teach you without putting up your defenses.
- Make special time available to her and your children.
- Be trustworthy.
- Compliment her often.
- Be creative when you express your love, either in words or actions.
- Have specific family goals for each year.
- Let her buy things she considers necessary.
- Be forgiving when she offends you.
- Show her you need her.
- Accept her the way she is; discover her uniqueness as special.
- Admit your mistakes; don't be afraid to be humble.
- Lead your family in their spiritual relationship with God.
- Allow your wife to fail; discuss what went wrong after you have comforted her.
- Rub her feet or neck after a hard day.
- Take time for the two of you to sit and talk calmly.
- Go on romantic outings.
- Write her a letter occasionally, telling her how much you love her.
- Surprise her with a card or flowers.
- Express how much you appreciate her.
- Tell her how proud you are of her.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FEELINGS GONE?

- Give advice in a loving way when she asks for it.
- Defend her to others.
- Prefer her over others.
- Do not expect her to do activities beyond her emotional or physical capabilities.
- Pray for her to enjoy God's best in life.
- Take time to notice what she has done for you and the family.
- Brag about her to other people behind her back.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with her.
- Tell her about your job if she is interested.
- Take time to see how she spends her day.
- Learn to enjoy what she enjoys.
- Take care of the kids before dinner.
- Help straighten up the house before mealtime.
- Let her take a bubble bath while you do the dishes.
- Understand her physical limitations if you have several children.
- Discipline the children in love, not anger.
- Help her finish her goals—to pursue hobbies or education or career.
- Treat her as if God had stamped on her forehead, "Handle with care."
- Get rid of habits that annoy her.
- Be gentle and thoughtful to her relatives.
- Do not compare her relatives to yours in a negative way.
- Thank her for things she has done without expecting anything in return.
- Help with the housecleaning.

- Make sure she understands everything you are planning to do.
- Do little things for her — an unexpected kiss, coffee in bed.
- Treat her as an intellectual equal.
- Find out if she wants to be treated as physically weaker.
- Discover her fears in life.
- See what you can do to eliminate her fears.
- Discover her sexual needs.
- Ask if she wants to discuss how you can meet her sexual needs.
- Find out what makes her insecure.
- Plan your future together.
- Do not quarrel over words, but try to find hidden meanings.
- Practice common courtesies like holding the door for her or pouring her coffee.
- Ask if you offend her sexually in any way.
- Ask if she is jealous of anyone.
- See if she is uncomfortable about the way money is spent.
- Take her on dates now and then.
- Hold her hand in public.
- Put your arm around her in front of friends.
- Tell her you love her — often.
- Remember anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions.
- Learn to enjoy her hobbies.
- Teach her to hunt and fish or whatever you enjoy doing.
- Give her a special gift from time to time.
- Share the responsibilities around the house.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FEELINGS GONE?

- Do not belittle her feminine characteristics.
- Let her express herself freely, without fear of being called stupid or illogical.
- Carefully choose your words, especially when angry.
- Do not criticize her in front of others.
- Do not let her see you become excited about the physical features of another woman.
- Be sensitive to other people.
- Let your family know you want to spend special time with them.
- Surprise her by fixing her favorite meal.
- Be sympathetic when she is sick.
- Call her when you are going to be late.
- Do not disagree with her in front of the children.
- Take her out to dinner and for weekend getaways.
- Do the “little things” she needs from time to time.
- Give her special time to be alone or with her friends.
- Buy her what she considers an intimate gift.
- Read a book she recommends to you.
- Give her a framed letter to hang on the wall, assuring her of your lasting love.
- Write her a poem about how special she is.

For Personal Reflection

1. Who did Jesus say would be the greatest in his kingdom (Matthew 20:25–28)?
2. If we desire to renew our minds and to think like Christ, we need to ask: What were his thoughts (Philippians 2:5–8)?

3. What were Paul's thoughts on the same subject (Philippians 2:17, 22, 25)?
4. If a husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, how does Christ love the church (Ephesians 5:25–27, 29)?