

# *Love & Respect*

*By Dr. Emerson Eggerichs*

## *For the Husbands*

It is the primary responsibility of the man to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). This behavior is necessary especially when it is not deserved—when you are being disrespected. In order to understand how to love her, consider the acronym COUPLE as it is described below. In addition, it is important to find out how she receives love (words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, physical touch, etc.) and love her the way she wants, rather than how you want.

### *Closeness*

She wants you to be close. This is how God designed it in the beginning—the two are to become one flesh (Gen 2:24). In ancient Israel, the first year of marriage was a special time in which the man was exempted from military service or any duty that would take him away from his wife (Deut 24:5). The first year of marriage is when each discovers the differences, especially in relation to daily lifestyle mechanics. During this year, married couples are able to work through many significant issues until they are appreciably closer to the one flesh ideal. Even if you did not have a lot of time together the first year, you can still develop closeness on a daily basis so long as we "remember that she wants to connect. She wants face-to-face involvement" (pg 126).

"There is an old story about an older couple having dinner in a restaurant. The wife sees another couple about their age sitting in a booth nearby. She sees the husband sitting close to his wife, with his arm around her. He is whispering things in her ear, and she is smiling and blushing. He's gently rubbing her shoulder and touching her hair. The woman turns to her husband and says, 'Look at the couple over there. Look how close that man is to his wife, how he's talking to her. Look at how sweet he is. Why don't you ever do that?' Her husband looks up from his Caesar salad and glances over at the next booth. Then he turns to his wife and says, 'Honey, I don't even know that woman' "(pgs 130-131).

Specific suggestions to foster closeness include: (1) spend time with your wife each day when you get home from work (tell her about your day, ask her about hers), (2) help her prepare dinner; (3) sit on the same side of the booth in the restaurant, (4) hold her hand, (5) hug her, (6) be affectionate without sexual intentions, (7) find time to spend together alone, (8) go for a walk together, (9) get her insights on things/problems you have faced throughout the day.

### *Openness*

She wants you to open up to her. She wants to see inside of you and be able to know what is happening in your heart. Understand that when she is asking you all kinds of questions about your day, it is not because she is interrogating you, trying to control you, or trying to take away your independence; she is trying to get you to be open so she can connect with you. Openness involves trust and vulnerability. Although openness is risky (it allows you to be hurt), it is a necessary ingredient to a healthy marriage.

Try doing these: (1) share with her your inner dreams, yearnings, fears, and failures (like when you were dating), (2) initiate an "us" talk and discuss where your marriage is at (areas that are doing well and areas to improve), (3) pray with her, (4) turn off the TV, computer, etc. and give her your full attention, (5) discuss financial concerns, ideas for the future, etc.

## *Understanding*

Don't try to "fix" her; just listen. Husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way (I Peter 3:7). Try to understand her perspective, the things that are important to her. Become an expert listener, don't analyze or try to fix the situation, just listen. Try to understand her life, what it is like to be her--the struggles and challenges she faces.

She will feel like you're trying to understand her when you (1) listen and can repeat back what she said, (2) don't offer a solution to her problem unless she specifically asks for it, (3) try to identify her feelings, (4) don't dismiss her feelings, no matter how illogical they may seem to you, (4) apologize and admit it when you are wrong, (5) cut her some slack during her monthly cycle, (6) express appreciation for all she does.

## *Peacemaking*

She wants you to say, "I'm sorry." Since the man is the head of the marriage, he is responsible for it (I Corinth 11:3; Eph 5:23). If the marriage is good, he gets the credit; if it is bad, indifferent, or unfulfilling, then he gets the blame. Thus, it is his responsibility to initiate resolution (the "us" talk) when there is a rift, a conflict, or even just a sense of tension. Jesus specifically called blessing upon those who make peace, they are the ones acting like God's kids (Mat 5:9). You must be willing to say "I'm sorry" or "I was wrong." The goal is peace, not fairness (Rom 12:18).

She'll feel at peace with you when you (1) let her vent her frustrations and hurts and don't get angry and close her off, (2) admit you are wrong and ask for forgiveness, (3) resolve issues one by one, (4) forgive her for wrongs she has done to you, (5) don't say "drop it," but instead ask her to write it down and talk about it later (she can't "drop it" anyhow unless it's resolved).

## *Loyalty*

She needs to know you are committed. It is important to reassure your wife that you love her. In our sex crazed, swimsuit issue culture, it is important that your wife knows that you are a one woman man and that she is that one woman (Job 31:1). It is important not to use divorce as a threat or to joke about upgrading to a "newer model" (Malachi 2:15-16). These comments destroy a woman's security and cause distrust.

A great example of loyalty can be found in the book/movie "The Notebook." It is based on a husband who stays with his wife through Alzheimer's disease; even though he could have easily started a new relationship (she didn't even recognize him anymore). Instead, he cares for her and endures the agony of her inability to remember him day in and day out. He clutches to his loyalty and retells her the story of how they got together over and over again to help her remember who he is.

She is assured of your loyalty when you (1) speak highly of her in front of others, (2) are involved in things important to her (even if you don't enjoy them), (3) don't look lustfully at other women, (4) include her in social gatherings when others may leave their spouses at home, (5) stick up for her in front of the kids or others, (6) keep your commitments.

## *Esteem*

She wants you to honor and cherish her (Eph 5:28-29). Your wife wants to know that you have her on your mind and heart first and foremost. Tell her through words and actions that she is exquisite, beautiful, valuable, and that you are fortunate to have her. Remember her birthday and your anniversary, and do something special to celebrate them.

Your wife will feel esteemed when you (1) open the door for her, (2) make a list of all the reasons you could not live without her, (3) are physically affectionate with her in public, (4) value her opinion/input, (5) make her feel first in importance, (6) choose spending time with her over "guy things."

## *For the Wives*

Usually, wives do not need help in loving; it comes quite naturally and is built into their make-up. However, according to Eph 5:33, we are to respect our husbands, and we could all use some assistance in developing this aspect of a godly marriage. This teaching may seem radical in our current day and age, but it is biblical. Our society teaches that love is the universal language of appreciation and wives should love their husbands. Nevertheless, God commanded us to respect them because that is not intuitive. Below is an acronym that spells CHAIRS. Please consider the following, even if it may be new or different from what you have previously believed, and try it. You will see an incredibly effective way to meet your husband's deepest needs.

"Truly respecting others is the bedrock of motivation."

Dale Carnegie

## *Conquest*

Men have a natural, instinctive desire to "conquer" the challenges of his world--to work and achieve. As a wife, if you understand how important work is to your husband, you will take great steps toward communicating respect and honor to him. As Emerson says, "...he spells love R-E-S-P-E-C-T" (p. 194). God gave man the desire to work when he made Adam to tend to the garden and gave him the responsibility to provide for his family. Men identify themselves by what they do, and it is often the first question they will ask each other. If a wife implies that her husband's work is not important, she has just unknowingly called him a loser. Men want their wives to believe in them, just as Christ wants us to believe in him, which we do in obedience and to the glory of God. As a respectful wife, you need to support his desire to work and achieve.

Your husband will feel you appreciate his desire to work and achieve when (1) you tell him verbally or in writing that you value his work efforts, (2) you listen to his work stories as closely as you expect him to listen to your accounts of what happens in the family, (3) you see yourself as his helpmate and counterpart and talk with him about this often, (4) you allow him to dream as you did when you were courting, (5) you don't dishonor him or subtly criticize his work.

## *Hierarchy*

God also built into the man the desire to protect and provide for his wife and family. The passage that defines biblical hierarchy is Ephesians 5:22-24: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the Body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything." Here God is giving the husbands tremendous responsibility as pointed out in the next verse that says "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...." (See also I Timothy 5:8.)

As Emerson says, "...a good-willed husband who understands this passage sees it as his duty to protect the wife. At the same time, the wife is called upon to place herself under that protection" (p.207). Many, women want to be treated like a princess but resist treating their husbands like kings. It is in a husband's very being to want, to desire to provide and protect his wife, and yet it is very easy with simple words to deflate your husband's heart by balking at his God-given authority.

Your husband will feel you appreciate his desire to protect and provide when (1) you verbalize your admiration of him for protecting you and being willing to die for you, (2) you praise his commitment to these things, (3) you never mock the idea of "looking up to him" as your protector to prevent him from "looking down on you," (4) you never, in word or body language, put down his job or how much he makes, (5) you quietly and respectfully voice concerns about finances and try to offer solutions on where you might be able to cut spending.

### *Authority*

As previously mentioned, the man is the head, and the wife is subject to him. In Emerson's book, he says, "...the good-willed husband does not try to use his position of head as some kind of club to beat down his wife and his children. He acts responsibly—and lovingly—to be the leader that God has asked him to be" (p.216). There cannot be two heads, it just doesn't work. In Titus 2:5, it tells the older women to encourage the younger women to "be subject to their own husbands, so the word of God will not be dishonored." The wife is to place herself under her husband's protection and provision. Disagreements will happen, but the wife is told to defer to her husband, trusting in God to guide him. "The bottom line is that if husband and wife approach each other with the Love and Respect Connection in mind, all will be well in the marriage, even if a decision appears to be stalemated" (p. 218). You mutually submit to one another through love and respect. But when someone is called to make the final decision, that responsibility rests on the man's shoulders.

An important aspect when having a discussion and there is conflict is that neither one is to overstate his/her position or "lose it" emotionally. There are proposals, give and take, offers and counter-offers. Wives, your quiet and respectful behavior will enable your husband's desire to love you (I Peter 3:1).

A testimony from the book

"I believe that ultimately a refusal to submit to or respect your husband is a refusal to trust in God. If we as women believe that God is working in our lives and in our husbands' lives and we place ourselves under His authority, then we can submit to and respect our husbands" (p. 224).

He will feel you appreciate his authority and leadership when (1) you support his self-image as a leader, (2) you never say, "You're responsible but we're still equal, so don't make a decision I don't agree with," (3) you praise his good decisions, (4) you are gracious if he makes a bad decision, (5) you disagree with him only in private and honor his authority in front of the kids, (6) you give your reasons for disagreeing quietly and reasonably, but you never attack his right to lead, (7) you do not play "head games" with him to make him back down and be a "loving peacemaker."

### *Insight*

Many have heard of "womanly intuition," but men have intuition too. Husbands and wives both have blind spots and need each other's intuition. After all, it was Eve, not Adam who was deceived (I Timothy 2:14)! "Yes, men should listen to their wives, who are naturally intuitive. But wives should not fail to appreciate the insight God has given their husbands and reject their counsel" (p. 231). Emerson in his book describes how many women find themselves displaying a contemptuous, critical spirit, one that is filled with self-righteousness. This is not the way to win your husband, and you may want to examine your own behavior with God's help. One question that Emerson asks the wives is: "Are you trying to be your husband's Holy Spirit?" Husbands tend to see themselves as being unrighteous and their wives as righteous. While this is not completely true, it seems at some point the wife also sees her husband as unrighteous. "It is often subconscious, but a subtle judgmental spirit comes over a woman" (p.232). Wives need to appreciate the man's desire to analyze and give advice and realize he does have insight. They must also be conscious of any attitude of self-righteousness that might undermine him.

Your husband will feel you appreciate his insight and counsel when (1) you recognize his problem-solving approach as his male brand of empathy, (2) you counsel him respectfully when you differ with his ideas (you can be right but wrong at the top of your voice), (3) you admit that you can sin and thank him for his perception and godly counsel, (4) you thank him for his advice without acting insulted or like he doesn't care about your feelings.

### *Relationship*

Men are different than women. They share their experiences by sharing an activity. Sometimes they enjoy having you next to them as they do something, whether it be reading, doing something outside, or watching the television. They just like to know you are there, but they do not require or want you to say anything. They just want you near them. Men enjoy this shoulder-to-shoulder silence from their wives. This energizes them. For the wives, it seems like you aren't doing anything, and there are lots more productive things you could be doing, like laundry, making dinner, helping the kids, etc. Yet, you are doing something that will bless your husband very much. He just wants you to be there.

Your husband will feel you value his shoulder-to-shoulder friendship when (1) you tell him you like him and you show it, (2) you respond to his invitation to engage in recreational activities together or you come along to watch him (you don't have to go every time, but just now and then will energize him more than you realize), (3) you enable him to open up and talk to you as you do things shoulder to shoulder, (4) you encourage him to spend time alone, which energizes him to reconnect with you later, (5) you don't denounce his shoulder-to-shoulder activities with his male friends to get him to spend more face-to-face time with you. Respect his friendships, and he will be more likely to want you to join him shoulder-to-shoulder at other times.

### *Sexuality*

Your husband's sexuality is very different from yours. He is visually orientated, and he needs sexual release just as you need emotional release (intimacy). When it comes to our sexuality, both the husband and the wife need to meet each other's needs. This is another way to respect your husband. Just as you need emotional release and this brings you satisfaction, he needs sexual release and this brings him satisfaction. Some women get caught in the trap of thinking, "Well, I'll give him what he wants when he gives me what I need." This never works! "You can't get what you need by depriving your partner of what your partner needs" (p. 253).

Wives also need to be aware that their husbands may have struggles with temptation and should invite their husbands to share with them those struggles. Husbands need their wives to understand and be open to discussion about their struggles, even though it can be uncomfortable. This can happen in two ways: (1) do your best to satisfy your husband's sexual need, even if you are sometimes "not in the mood;" and (2) let him know that you care to understand him, even though his sexuality is different from yours. This way you can be his friend as well as his lover.

He will feel you appreciate his desire for sexual intimacy when (1) you respond to him sexually more often and initiate sex periodically, (2) you understand his need for sexual release just as you need emotional release, (3) you let him acknowledge his sexual temptations without fearing he'll be unfaithful and without shaming him, (4) you don't try to make him open up to you verbally by depriving him of sex.

## *For Both--The Energizing Cycle*

Once you understand that the wife's deepest need is for love and the husband's deepest need is for respect, then you are on your way to the energizing cycle. His love will motivate her respect; her respect will motivate his love. If you practice this simple principle, your marriage is bound to be less negative and more positive.

"When you love and respect unconditionally, you are following God and His will for you. Ultimately, your spouse and your marriage have nothing to do with it. You are simply demonstrating your obedience and trust in the face of an unlovable wife or a disrespecting husband. Unconditional love and unconditional respect will be rewarded" (p. 271).

It makes no sense for a husband to put on love toward a contemptuous, disrespectful woman. But it makes sense to God. These seemingly fruitless efforts matter to God because this is the kind of service He rewards. What is wisdom to God is foolishness to the world (I Corinthians 3:19) (p. 274).

Don't give up if you don't see results right away. It is the unsuccessful couples that give up. The successful ones keep pursuing the relationship and facing issues. Your marriage has nothing to do with your spouse but has everything to do with your relationship with Christ (p. 279). Your response to your spouse is your responsibility. If we involve God and His principles in our marriage, all things are possible. "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1.37). With God, through prayer, a bad marriage can become good; a so-so marriage can become great; and a good marriage can become even better.