



# 6 Love Like a Man (contd)

The following excerpts are taken from part 7 of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full message is available on [FoodForYourSoul.net](http://FoodForYourSoul.net)

## Selflessness

What does it mean to love like a man? In Brochure 5 we found the first mark—gentleness.

**Ephesians 5:28 He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body but he feeds and cares for it**

**Like Christ loved the church**

That word translated "cares" is a beautiful word. Some versions translate it "cherish." It literally means *to impart warmth with body heat*—like a mother nursing her baby (1 Thes.2:7). How are you to treat your wife? The same way your wife handles your newborn baby.

That is the way the Lord loves you. If it were not for the soothing, warming, gentle love of Christ, being a Christian in this world would be like walking naked across Antarctica. But He shelters us from what we cannot handle, picks us up when we fall, heals our wounds, feeds us, cares for us, and watches over us with fierce jealousy. He listens to every word we say to Him and is interested in what is on our hearts. And He has deep compassion in His great heart for everything that distresses us – whether it ought to distress us or not. This is our model for loving our wives.

### Understanding

**1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, in the same way live with your wives in knowledge as the weaker vessel...**

Part of what it means to love your wife properly is understanding her specific, unique points of weakness, and having that knowledge inform the way you live with her. For some women balancing the checkbook will put too much stress on her as she sees the financial woes on a daily basis. Other women aren't bothered by that. Some woman's emotions are fragile when it comes to interactions with people—especially criticism. For some women there is a point of vulnerability when it comes to worrying about how the kids are doing in school. For others it is concern about how she looks, or how she comes across social-

ly. Each woman has special points of sensitivity. And they change over time, so the task of studying to understand your wife never ends.

### Compassion

What if your wife thinks you are being harsh but you don't agree? When rough, calloused skin rubs up against soft skin, which one feels it more? The soft one. Let your wife be the judge of whether or not you are dealing roughly with her – because she is the one who can feel it. A good practice is make yourself accountable to a friend and to have a

question on your accountability sheet for your wife to fill out each week that says, "Regarding my husband's living with me in a loving and understanding way this past week I am: disappointed, concerned, content, or delighted."

To love your wife properly you must have knowledge and understanding of her unique points of weakness, and you must respond to those weaknesses with compassion. And one way to gain insight into her unique points of vulnerability is by paying close attention to those topics that she tends to bring up in conversation with great frequency. Rather than complaining about nagging, gentle love will think, "Evidently this is a topic that is creating distress and unrest in her heart." Instead of spending your energy thinking of how unreasonable she is, ask yourself, "What is it like for her to have to carry the burden of worrying about that issue all day long every day with no light at the end of the tunnel?" You may judge that it would be unwise or unloving or impossible to give her what she is asking for, but whether you say yes or no to her request you should always have compassion for her as you take time to understand her distress. Acknowledge to her how terrible it would be if her worst fears came to pass and comfort her from Scripture.

Are you gentle in the way you love your wife? Are you patient with her? Kind? Compassionate? Quick to forgive? Is your speech soft? Are you considerate and understanding?

## Selflessness

**Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy**

We are called not only to gentle love, but also to selfless love. Men are called to love their wives by giving up self – just like Jesus gave Himself up to make His bride holy. He gave up the glories of heaven and took on human flesh and bore the punishment of all our sin on the cross because that was what His bride needed in order to become holy. To love your wife with selfless love means to give up your own desires when those desires are in conflict with your wife's highest good, which is her holiness.

How do you make someone holy? How do you build people's faith and help them stand firm in the Lord? Here's Paul's strategy:

**2 Corinthians 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.**

His ministry was a ministry of working for their joy in the Lord, because that is the basis for holiness. You do everything in your power to make her happy in the Lord.

**1 Corinthians 7:33 a married man is concerned about ... how he can please his wife.**

Do all you can to please her and make her happy in the Lord and not in this world. If you do something that tempts her to find her happiness in this world instead of in God then you are harming her holiness. In our culture especially we all struggle with materialism, so if your wife is tempted by that, you are not loving her well if you just assist in the process by buying her all the stuff she wants. You should desire to buy her everything you can possibly buy her that will help her have joy in the Lord, but nothing that will *compete* with joy in the Lord.

### Protect her from sin

Protection from sin is the most important kind of protection a husband provides. If you sense some unrighteous inclination or desire in her heart, work hard to help her see it *with the utmost gentleness*. Give much thought to the best way to show her her sin and the best way to help her out of it. Even if your wife is more spiritually advanced than you are, still you can help her. Ask her where she struggles and pray earnestly for her.

And very often protecting your wife from sin will involve some sacrifice. Just as saving us from sin cost Jesus, so helping your wife fight against sin will cost you. If something you really enjoy causes her to stumble, you will be glad to set it aside – that is selfless love.

### Be the moral guardian for your family

It is the man's role to be the primary purifying influence. When it comes to whether or not you are going to have cable TV, or TV period, what is going to be allowed to be watched in your home, what kinds of videos will be shown, what kind of language will be used – some men will gravitate toward whatever level of impurity their wives will allow. "I won't rent this video, because my wife wouldn't approve...but maybe she wouldn't mind this one too much." So the wife becomes the moral guardian, trying to reign in the family as they are drawn toward impurity. But that is the man's role. He should be the one to say, "No, that's not pure. I won't have it in my home." The husband who loves his wife would never drag her into any situation that will defile her. He will do everything he can do draw her closer to God.

You're her protector, and the greatest danger out there is sin. You would defend her from a mugger, or an intruder, wouldn't you? Then how much more important is it that you protect her from that which can harm her soul?

And remember; women are tempted in different ways than men. For example, since men are stimulated more visually, sexual temptation comes after us in the form of pictures and images. But women are affected more by relational things. So Satan comes after them more through romantic fantasy—a story line in a soap opera or romance novel. That's why the story inevitably involves some illicit romantic encounter or relationship – it is pornography for women.

Whatever the form, you need to be aware of what kinds of things harm your wife spiritually, and protect her. And you'll have to talk to her about it because her temptations will be different from yours.

Be the strength in a time of temptation. Don't stand there like Adam and just silently watch your wife fall. Don't turn it all over to her and say, "You decide." Step forward and say "no" to impure influences. Create an edifying, purifying home environment.

### The ministry of the Word

Paul is clear about what the tool is for accomplishing this task.

### **Mt.5:26 ... cleansing her by the washing with water through the word**

The way the Lord Jesus Christ makes His bride holy is through the ministry of the Word of God, and that is the same method we should use. You make your wife more holy not by ignoring her sin, not by humiliating her and belittling her over her sin, not by shallow, mindless comments about how she should change, but by applying the Word of God to her heart. God's Word is always the means of purification. (Jn.15:3, 17:17)

Perhaps you are married to a woman who knows Scripture better than you do. How are you going to teach her anything from God's Word? The method most heavily emphasized in Scripture is preaching. So if you want to make your wife holy, expose her to good preaching. This is easy to do in our day because of the Internet and radio. Get her some sermons by John Piper, John MacArthur, James McDonald, Alistair Begg, R.C. Sproul, and other great expositors. Help her find the guy whose preaching she can really relate to. Buy her an MP3 player or install some speakers in the laundry room or whatever you have to do to make it easy for her. If your kids are little work hard at teaching them to sit still so your wife does not have to be distracted during the sermon at church. And listen to preaching yourself so you can talk to your wife about what you are both learning.

Another important method of applying the Word of God to a person's heart is through private study and meditation.

Get your wife a nice variety of different devotional books and materials. Figure out something to do with the kids so there is some time slot in her day she could take to be alone with God without interruption. And set an example for her and for your kids with your own private devotions. Print out some verses on cards to make it easy for her to memorize Scripture.

The point is you do not have to be the one who teaches her everything. But if you love her, and you truly believe that what she needs more than anything else is the Word of God, then you will spare no expense to do everything in your power to see to it that the Word of God is delivered to her heart one way or another.

### Restores Priority

While gentle love restores the ideals of *companionship*, *oneness*, and *intimacy*, selfless love restores the ideal of *priority*. When God said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother" He was showing us that marriage is to be the highest priority in life. And the reason it is to be the highest priority is because it is supposed to put on display the covenant relationship between God and His people. So you are to be absolutely committed to your spouse above every other person in the world. So out of all the people in the world, who is the greatest threat to your commitment to your spouse? Who is it that you are most likely to fall in love with and allow your heart to be drawn away from your spouse? I can tell you who it is – you! There is some possibility that your heart could be drawn away by love for another woman, but there is a far greater possibility that your heart will be drawn away by love for yourself. When your own comforts and pleasures and immediate desires rise up as a higher priority than your spouse's wellbeing, you have become unfaithful. When we allow selfishness to take over we cheat on our spouse with ourselves. If anyone on this earth is more important to you than your wife – including yourself, then you have broken you covenant with her, and you are unfaithful.

### Restores Intimacy

When priority is restored, intimacy (naked and unashamed) can be restored. A flawed woman can be naked and unashamed when she is in the presence of someone who is more committed to her than he is to himself. Usually men do not hurt their wives just for the fun of it. We hurt them because we are focused on ourselves—pleasing ourselves and making ourselves comfortable. But on those days when you hold your wife up above yourself as your highest priority, she does not have to worry much about being hurt by you. You will still hurt her some, just because of ignorance, miscommunication, etc., but for the most part she is safe. And when your spouse is safe, that enables intimacy. You can be naked and unashamed – exposed without any fear of rejection or ridicule, when there is no threat.

## Self interest

The third mark of masculine love is self-interest.

**Eph.5:28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself**

Just as you are doing yourself a favor when you put food in your mouth to feed your own body, in the same way you are doing yourself a favor when you show love to your wife. So the point of vv.28-32 is, Love your wife because it is in your own self-interest to love her.

### Contradiction?

At first this sounds like a contradiction of the last mark of godly masculine love. On the one hand our love should be marked by self-denial, and on the other hand our love should be marked by watching out for our own self-interest. Is that a contradiction? No, because the self denial was only when your immediate desires were in conflict with her highest good. But her highest good also happens to be in your ultimate best interests. There is no conflict. Her highest good and your best interests are one in the same.

There is a night and day difference between *selfishness* (a bad thing)and acting out of *self-interest* (a good thing). The selfishness man cares more about his comfort than hers. Self-interest is when you do what will ultimately be best for you. Selfishness is a bad thing because it places self above others. Self-interest is a good thing to do because what is ultimately best for you is never in conflict with what is best for others.

Scripture condemns selfishness.

### **1 Cor.13:5 Love is not self-seeking.**

**Php.2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

Just as strongly as Scripture condemns selfishness, however, it commands self-interest. Every time God offers us a reward, that is a command to live according to what is in our own best interests. God is constantly telling us, "Do this because it is in your best interests to do it." Consider the Beatitudes. God does not tell us to be poor in spirit and meek and to be merciful out of pure altruism. He tells us to do those things because of how it will benefit us (receive the kingdom, inherit the earth, be comforted, filled, shown mercy, called sons, etc.). Jesus frequently offered reward as a motive.

**Matthew 6:4-20 your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ... 6 your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ... 14 your heavenly Father**

**will also forgive you. ... 18 your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you ... 20 store up for yourselves treasures in heaven**

God commands us to live for reward. The passage from Philippians 2 that forbids selfishness goes on to tell us to follow Jesus' example. If Jesus had placed His immediate comfort above our highest needs, He would have just stayed in heaven. But instead He placed our need higher than the pleasantness and comfort that He enjoyed in heaven. But was that devoid of self-interest? No. Heb.12:2 says that He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. And ultimately it was in His best interests to do what He did.

Your wife's greatest good and your best interests are always the same. The reason it is not selfish to do that which is in your own ultimate best interests is because God, in His infinite mercy and wisdom has set things up such that what is in your best interests, and what is best for your wife and others, and what glorifies God most are all exactly the same thing! There is never a time when you have to decide, "Should I do what is ultimately in my best interests, or should I do what is best for someone else?" Nor is ever a time when you have to choose between glorifying God or doing what is ultimately best for yourself. Whatever glorifies God the most is always what is best for you, even if it means torture and death in the short term.

That is an incredible gift from God, because the only thing that really matters is the glory of God. God cares more about His own glory than He cares about anything else. (If He didn't then He would be guilty of idolatry.) And so if there were ever a situation in which God had to choose between His own glory and your wellbeing, He would have to choose His own glory. But in his unfathomable mercy and grace that never happens. He designed everything so that He never has to choose between the glory of His own name and pouring out love on you. And He also made it so you never have to choose between what is in your ultimate best interests and pouring out love on your wife.

So we are to love our wives out of the motive of self-interest. But be very careful not to get that backwards. Do not twist that into a manipulation motive, where you love your wife in order to get her to respond better to you. That is not what it is saying at all. That is selfishness. You do not love her in order to get her to treat you better. You love her because she is your own flesh and bone. You are so attached to her emotionally, and your heart is so entangled with hers, and your emotions are so tightly bound up with her emotions, and your hopes and dreams are so intricately interwoven with hers, that whatever happens to her happens to you. And her happiness is your happiness, and her wellbeing is your wellbeing. So you make her happy just because her happiness is happiness for you. You and your wife are like the bow and the stern of the same boat. If you are the stern you don't say, "I don't care what happens to the bow." If the bow sinks, the whole boat sinks.