

# Loving Our Wives Well



## Understanding Four Needs of a Wife That Only Her Husband Can Meet

### Six Week Men's Study

By Dr. Gary Yagel

Sample PDF First Chapter

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# One

## A Noble Calling

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Eph. 5:25*

If you've picked up this booklet, chances are that you do not want the expression, "half-hearted" to describe your commitment to Christ. You are all in. You are not lukewarm about running the race marked out for you by Jesus.

You know that this race includes loving well the wife God has entrusted to your care. But stop and consider how astonishing Paul's command really is. We husbands, despite the fierce battle we fight everyday with our own selfishness, are called to the mind-boggling challenge of loving our bride *the way Jesus loved his*. What? Me? Are you kidding?

Doesn't Paul realize that the sinful nature I fight every day wants to make my marriage about ME. My default view of matrimony is that I need a mate who doesn't nag, who doesn't cramp my style, who is beautiful enough to excite me, gifted enough to help me accomplish my goals, sexually responsive enough to satisfy me any time I want, who accepts me as I am and who fits well into my world. My anger and resentment towards my wife when she doesn't meet this standard betrays the fact that I too often view marriage just like the world does. As one study found,

Both men and women today want a marriage in which they can receive emotional and sexual satisfaction from someone who will simply let them "be themselves." They want a spouse who is fun, intellectually stimulating, sexually attractive, with many common interests, and who, on top of it all, is supportive of their personal goals and of the way they are living now.<sup>1</sup>

Paul calls Christian husbands to a radically different view of marriage. In short, we are to see it as Christ's call to *sacrifice*.

The sacrificial nature of the love we are to give our wives is often missed because the English word *love* translates four different Greek Words. The word Paul uses in Eph. 5:25 is not *storge*, which refers to the love of family, nor *eros*, which describes romantic love. Neither did he use *phileo* which refers to the love of friends for one another.

Rather, he used the word for sacrificial love, *agape*. A useful working definition of the Greek word *agape* is “*sacrificing what is most dear to you in order to meet the needs of another.*” John uses this word in his gospel to describe God's love for the world (John 3:16). “For God so loved (*agaped*) the world, that he gave his only Son (*sacrificing what is most dear to him*), that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (*our need for a savior is met.*)

To *love our wives as Christ loved the church* means sacrificing whatever is necessary to meet my wife's needs. (Chapters 2-5 give a biblical explanation of what some of these needs are.) Most men have a common grace understanding of this calling to die. We would take a bullet to protect our wives. Men tend to be great at the heroic.

When it comes to the mundane, however, saying “no” to ourselves on a daily basis in the little things, our sinful nature comes out. Agape love requires death to ourselves—our interests, preferences, comforts, rights, appetites, preferences—when it is necessary to meet our wives' needs. It is a love that is *costly*. It only flows from a heart that has understood Jesus' challenge

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:24-25).

Don't underestimate the resistance of your sinful nature to paying the price required. Let's explore three common obstacles that must be overcome to love as Jesus loves his bride.

## Our Love of Freedom

Men love the open road. We don't like being hemmed in, constrained, restricted, nagged. Deep in our hearts we love autonomy. Yet such hunger for independence is the very opposite of what is required to love. Tim Keller points out:

One of the principles of love—either love for a friend or romantic love—is that you have to lose independence to attain greater intimacy. If you want the “freedoms” of love—the fulfillment, security, sense of worth that it brings—you must limit your freedom in many ways. You cannot enter a deep relationship and still make unilateral decisions or allow your friend or lover no say in how you live your life. To experience the joy and freedom of love, you must give up your personal autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

Healthy love relationships always require mutual, unselfish service **and the loss of independence**. We can't have it both ways. This fact means that loving my wife well is going to require battling fierce resistance from my autonomy-loving, sinful nature.

Jesus *gave himself up* for us. Paul describes this emptying of God, the Son:

“Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8).

The loss of freedom to God, the Son by imprisoning himself in a finite human body forever is immeasurable. Only in that body could he die and meet our need for redemption from sin. What an astounding example of giving up freedom in order to love. What a pattern for us to follow as husbands!

Do you sometimes resent the demands your wife makes upon your time, your energy, your attention? Do you tire sometimes of these incessant demands? Giving up our freedom is one of the toughest parts of loving another well.

### Our Self-Centered Nature

An even bigger obstacle to loving our wives well is the radical self-centeredness of the sinful human heart. We might be attentive to her needs, and serve her some—especially when we want something in return. But if she doesn't return appreciation or affection, it is easy to start to shut her out emotionally and head for our man cave. Her criticism of us easily exasperates us. Resentment builds and finally explodes into retaliation with a verbal assault of our own. Perhaps the greatest symptom of our self-centered nature is our laziness, which leads to complacency in our marriage relationship. How different we are from Jesus who *took the initiative to pursue us to provide what we needed!*

In Paul's classic description of *agape* love, it is not hard to see that self-absorption is the opposite of this kind of love.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful (1 Cor 13:4-5).

Ask any thoughtful marriage counselor and she will admit that at the root of failure in marriage is the rearing of the ugly head of self-centeredness. It may take the form of criticizing, selfishness, anger, resentment, verbal assault, insensitivity, withdrawal, or the simple failure to appreciate.

The reality is that overcoming our self-centered nature is impossible apart from the empowering of Christ who lives in us by his Spirit. Our sinful nature battles against the promptings of the Spirit, whose job it is to produce spiritual fruit—including *agape* love. If we would love our wives well, we are going to have to be intentional about asking God, by his Spirit, to root out our self-centered nature. It is often disguised as

complacency, passivity, and an acceptance of the status quo—*I'm not a perfect husband but I sure do a lot better than most guys.*

## Our Uncertainty About What She Needs From Us

If agape love is *sacrificing what is most dear to you in order to meet the needs of another*, we must have a wise understanding of what the loved one NEEDS. Paul prays that the Philippians would have a growing, love (agape) for one another that is *full of knowledge and wise insight*. “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil 1:9).

One of my observations from over thirty years of helping men better love their wives is that we husbands have to learn a lot about what our wives need from us. After about three days of marriage we realize, **THEIR NEEDS ARE NOT THE SAME AS OURS!** The shape of her feminine soul is very different from our masculine ones. To make matters worse, we are often expected to know what she needs without her having to tell us!

The good news is that behind the biblical teaching about marriage and femininity are some clues that can help us form an intentional strategy for meeting *four of the needs of her heart that are most neglected by husbands*. Certainly she has physical needs for provision and protection. But where husbands are confused is in the realm of her soul—what she needs emotionally and spiritually—the realm of the heart. The chapters ahead explain from Scripture four needs of a wife that God has designed husbands to meet. They provide a clear, concrete target on the wall for which to aim, and a strategy to hit the mark.

## Further Inspiration For Husbands From Paul

Before turning to the first of those needs, however, we must consider another of Paul's arguments for loving our wives well: “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes

it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:28-31).

Paul recognizes two characteristics of men: they take care of what belongs to them and they default to taking care of themselves. In the deepest possible way our wives are worthy of special care and devotion because their body so thoroughly belongs to us that to love them is to love ourselves. Here is the point: **Men pay constant attention to their bodies.** When my body aches, I groan. When my body is hungry I eat. When my body is tired, I rest. When my body craves sexual release, I pursue my woman. When my body is wounded, I care for the wound. When my body is sleepy, I nod off. We are so **united** to our bodies, that we cannot ignore them for long. They get our consistent attention.

So, it should be with our wives—**we are to pay constant attention to them**—and that is setting the bar very high indeed! Both of the words Paul uses to describe the care our wives need imply tenderness. *Nourish* implies providing care for one not able to provide for herself. *Cherish*, according to Webster, “implies a special love and care for something, and connotes a deep-seated, long-lasting, often irrational attachment.” We are permanently attached to our bodies and constantly aware of how they feel. So should it be with our wives.

When we take care of our bodies it is to our own ultimate benefit. The investment we make comes back to be a blessing in our lives. Surely, Paul’s statement that to love our wife is to love ourselves recognizes that our wife’s welfare has a direct impact on us. To pay constant attention to her so that I can be attentive to her needs will lead to a more fulfilled wife and be of enormous benefit to husbands as well.

Going back to Webster’s definition of *cherish*, did you notice that his explanation of this deep-seated attachment is that it is, *often irrational*. What great insight! That’s the way your relationship with your sweetheart started. When you first began to fall for her, you couldn’t stop thinking of her. Your heart beat faster when you held her hand. Her voice on the phone was music to your ears. You hated saying goodbye to her. And her kiss made your heart nearly jump out of your chest. How wonderful the

*irrational* nature of romance! How delightful to be delirious with love! **It was so easy to pay constant attention to her then!**

But for many reading this book, the passing years may have enabled “the agent of familiarity” to cool some of that early passion to love your wife well. Max Lucado describes this enemy of our soul this way:

His commission from the black throne room is clear, and fatal: “Take nothing from your victim; cause him only to take everything for granted.” He’s an expert at robbing the sparkle and replacing it with the drab. He invented the yawn and put the hum in the humdrum. And his strategy is deceptive.

He’ll replace evening gowns with bathrobes, nights on the town with evenings in the recliner, and romance with routine. He’ll scatter the dust of yesterday over the wedding pictures in the hallway until they become a memory of another couple in another time. The poison of the ordinary has deadened your senses to the magic of the moment.<sup>3</sup>

There was a day when your heart beat wildly with excitement as you saw your bride come down the wedding aisle—a day when you were asked:

Will you have this woman to be your wife, and will you pledge your faithfulness to her, in all love and honor, in all duty and service, in all faith and tenderness, to live with her and cherish her, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bond of marriage?

Gladly, you answered, “Yes.” Could it be that right now in your own heart, God is prompting you to renew this vow, to think more deeply than ever before about what it means, and to be more intentional about spending the rest of your days together honoring Christ by the way you love your bride?



## Discussion Questions

1. Share with the other men your wife's name, how long you have been married, and one of your favorite qualities of your wife.
2. How is a Christian husband's view of marriage different from that of unbelievers?
3. What are some of the ways our culture uses the English word, love? How is that different from the Greek word *agape* used by Paul?
4. Love always requires the lover to restrict his freedom for the sake of the other. What are some of the toughest freedoms for you to give up in order to care for your wife?
5. Do you agree that self-centeredness is the biggest obstacle to agape love? Go back and study the characteristics of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-5 (page 8). How does self-centeredness undermine each of these characteristics?
6. What has helped you most to be less complacent and more intentional about loving your wife well?
7. Why is it easy for us men to *pay constant attention* to our bodies? Why is it hard for us men to *pay constant attention* to our wives?
8. State in your own words Paul's argument in Eph 5:28-31. "Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."

Why don't men do a better job of heeding this argument?

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with Wisdom From God*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *The Reason For God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism*, (New York: Dutton, 2008), p. 47-48.

<sup>3</sup> Max Lucado, *God Came Near*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987), p. 152-153.

## Chapters 2-6

2. A Wife's Need for Emotional Intimacy with You. (Genesis 2:24-25)
3. A Wife's Need to Feel Like You Are Partners. (1 Peter 3:8)
4. A Wife's Need for Spiritual Strength from You (Ephesians 5:28-30)
5. A Wife's Need for Verbal Affirmation from You (Proverbs 31:30)
6. The Power to Love as Jesus Did

(This chapter describes how we can experience the strengthening power of Christ in our own lives helping us love our mates as he loved us and gave himself for us.)