

She needs love! He needs Respect!

Proposition: In marriage, a woman's basic need is to feel loved whereas a man's basic need is to be respected. A man needs to give unconditional love to his wife and a wife needs to give unconditional respect to her husband.

How many of the men here would like to understand their wives a bit better?

And how many of the woman here would like a deeper insight into how men tick and what makes them want to love you more?

We are going to spend two weeks looking at one verse in Ephesians 5. A verse, not surprisingly because it's in the Bible, that has some deep and practical insights for men meeting the needs of their wives and wives meeting the needs of their husbands.

If you are single this morning I want to assure you that what I am about to talk will truly help your future relationships and marriage if that happens, and so even though I am talking about marriage, please don't tune out.

Now I like doing pre-marriage and marriage counselling. I have learnt a lot through my mistakes, though life, through plenty of courses and books on how to help folk in the area of their relationships. But a couple of years ago a new book caught my attention.

A book called "Love and Respect" by Dr Emerson Eggerichs. "A Focus on the Family" book.

When I saw that word 'respect' it just occurred to me that here was a key ingredient to any healthy marriage that I hadn't heard focused on before so I bought the book and found that this was Dr Emerson's basic proposition:

In marriage, a woman's basic need is to feel loved whereas a man's basic need is to be respected. A man needs to give unconditional love to his wife and a wife needs to give unconditional respect to her husband.

I have preached from Ephesians 5 many times but have never heard a writer, preacher or commentator focus in on vs 33 like Dr Emerson does.

Listen to this one verse in probably the most significant paragraph on marriage in the New Testament.

Ephesians 5:33(CEV)

³³ ***So each husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself, and each wife should respect her husband.***

I really liked this book because it is not telling men to be soft or to try and be like our wives, it's all about men being real men but recognising that men and woman are different and have two basic human needs in a marriage.

There are thousands of books on love and a woman's need to be loved but I have never read a book that includes a dad's need to be respected.

Dr Emerson quotes two large surveys that were done amongst American men. In both of these studies large groups of men were asked: What do you need MOST from your wife; Love or Respect? In both surveys over 85% of the men said they needed respect the most.

A man is commanded to love his wife because even though our wives are wired to show love and want to be loved we are not so well wired.

A woman is commanded to respect her husband because even though men are wired around showing respect and being honourable, it doesn't come so naturally for woman.

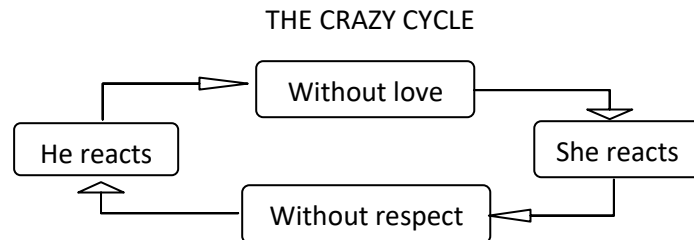
When a husband feels disrespected, it is especially hard to love his wife. When a wife feels unloved, it is especially hard to respect her husband. In fact when a man feels disrespected in a relationship he has a natural tendency to withdraw and to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. When a woman feels unloved she is likely to get angry, and has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband.

Maybe God gave the command for men to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands for exactly that reason.

To quote Dr Emerson; “When a woman feels unloved a wife’s usual approach is to complain and criticise in order to motivate her husband to become more loving. This usually proves about as successful as trying to sell a knuckle buster to Mother Teresa.” Pg 17

“Every wife ... wants her husband to appreciate how much she loves him, and she yearns to feel more love from him....the best way to love a husband is to show him respect in ways that are meaningful to him. Such respect lets him feel his wife’s love for him and ignites in him feelings of love for his wife.” Pg19

Without love, she reacts without respect. Without respect he reacts without love and the crazy cycle begins.



Here’s how this pastor sees many marriage problems. A woman is always very concerned about relationships and knowing that things are all right and relationships are well connected. Therefore, when there is a problem or a concern, she immediately wants to talk about it and she wants to get it sorted, because she loves her husband. As she tries to get it sorted she might raise her voice at her husband or she may put him down and make him feel criticised. The husband is now totally unmotivated to sort the problem out, he feels disrespected, and at that point he will often go silent and withdraw or start saying things that make her feel more unloved and insecure. As a result she raises her voice further, feels that her needs are not being met, and it affects her whole sense of well being far more than it does his. However, now he’s feeling trapped and if he foolishly says something sarcastic and hurtful, or worse still walks out of there, to keep the peace, she will feel more unloved etc, etc, etc.

Dr John Gottman spent 20 years researching marriages that had been happy and together for over 40 years. He found that though these couples had diverse backgrounds, cultures or income levels, all these couples had two things in common. As they talked together there was “a strong undercurrent of two basic ingredients: Love and Respect.”

I think that in virtually all the marriage problems I have seen over the years, the crazy cycle happens, even though the bottom line is that she really loves him and wants to know how much he loves her, and he really loves her but isn’t so good at showing that love. He needs her admiration and respect and so often wives aren’t so good at showing that.

“Right or wrong, men interpret their world through the respect grid, and a wife’s softened tone and facial expressions can do more for her marriage than she can imagine.”pg65

I think that communication in marriage is always further complicated by the way that men see things and interpret things through male eyes and woman always see and interpret things through female eyes.

For example when a man says “I’ve got nothing to wear,” he means I can’t find any clean clothes. When a woman says “I’ve got nothing to wear,” she probably means that she doesn’t have any new clothes appropriate to the occasion.

When our wives raise their voices and say we have got to get this sorted, often men hear criticism and maybe even contempt.

When men don’t speak or they walk out of the room, which they might be doing because they don’t know what to say or to keep the peace, most woman would interpret that as not caring or even a hostile act.

Dr Emerson's core message in this book is that God commands men to love their wives unconditionally and He also commands woman to respect their husbands unconditionally. Respect and love are not things you need to earn in a Christian marriage like trust may be. He says that they are the basic needs of men and woman and if you choose with God's help to show respect to your husband and men if you choose with God's help to show love to your wife, you will begin to get back what you need most from your spouse. But it's up to you to determine to give to them what they need as a choice you make.

After 30 years of marriage counselling and pastoring Dr Emerson concludes this: "When a husband receives unconditional respect from his wife, those fond feelings of affection will return, and he will start giving her the kind of love she has always hoped to receive." Pg 66

I want to suggest to you three things that you can do to break the crazy cycle when it comes up in your marriage.

HOW TO BREAK THE CRAZY CYCLE

1. ASSUME THE BEST OF YOUR SPOUSE.

You continually trust your children to your spouse's care. If they are male they are probably not good communicators of feelings but good providers and protectors and if they are female they are probably good communicators of feelings. But no matter how skilled you each are at finding the right words and expressions you need to decide in your heart that even if she gets too emotional for your comfort or even if he doesn't express his feelings as well as you want him to, you both love each other and you both want things to work. If she raises her voice and distorts her face and says some things that make you feel like mud, it's usually because she is desperate for your love and to feel connected with you. She may not be going about it the best way, but assume the best of her. And ladies, if he is foolish enough to tease you or try to make a joke about the situation that you are really concerned about, or if he is too silent; give him the benefit of the doubt, men find it hard to find the right words and many men have been trained to be tough, to not show too much emotion and to walk away from conflicts.

Assume the best of each other; ultimately you both want the marriage to work and the family to be happy.

2. FORGIVE EACH OTHER AND HAVE THOSE LOVE AND RESPECT CONVERSATIONS BEFORE YOU GO TO SLEEP

Jesus warned us not to let the sun go down on our anger. There are so many scriptures in the Bible teaching us of our need to be forgiven and our need to forgive others. It takes a real man to initiate reconciliation and to show humility and love to his wife. It takes real love and respect to consider your spouse's needs and to minister to those needs before the day is finished.

Assume the best of each other and forgive one another. Thirdly

3. BE STRONG

Ladies ask yourself this question when you need to sort out an issue with your man.

"Is what I am saying and how I am saying respectful to my husband?"

Husbands before you respond to your wives ask yourself.

"Does my response demonstrate the love that she needs right now?"

No sarcasm, no jokes please.

Men, one of the many ways our wives are not like us is that often their whole sense of happiness is based around their relationship to their husband. If a man is stressed about one area of his life, men have a tendency to compartmentalize that issue and it remains in the mix with the other issues, many of which may be doing well. When a lady feels her marriage has got problems, that colours the whole way they view their lives. Our love has that much impact on them.

So if they raise their voices and say things to us that seem like bullets fired at us, I want to encourage you to stand up, take the shots, let them off load and then quickly rush in to say you love them and you are listening. It's important that if you are even slightly wrong you say "I am sorry." Men, when you are with your friends or at work and there is a problem, usually you express your thoughts then let it go. Woman find it much harder to let it go unless they hear words from you that demonstrate that it is resolved i.e. "I am sorry." Take your wife's needs seriously.

Dr Emerson recounts the story of a Christian man who spent a short time in prison. He had read the scripture "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church..."

'For two days, God replayed the memories I had of our arguments and in each one I was acutely aware of how I had failed to love my wife. It was like pausing a video and having someone point to it and say, "See, right here you could have reached out to her, but you were too busy trying to prove your point.' At one point I was seeing her face, all distorted with rage as she screamed at me, but totally without any sound ... the mute button had been pushed on this memory, and then little by little the sound came up so I could hear it. Only the words were not what my wife had been screaming at me. Instead, they were replaced with other words that I needed to hear; "I want you to LOVE me, why won't you LOVE me? I'm afraid and insecure and I need you to hold me and LOVE me...

And that's when I began to weep. All this time I had been so totally wrapped up in my own needs – to demand respect, to be right at any cost, to win a petty argument – this hurt our priceless relationship. I had been so caught up in the words that I had totally missed her heart, her need." pg 83

This book is full of testimonies of marriages transformed by just applying the command for wives to respect and men to love. I will close with these very practical testimonies from these two ladies.

I wrote my husband two letters about why I respected him. I am amazed at how it has softened him in his response to me. I have prayed for years that my husband would love me, and speak my love language. But when I begin to speak his language, then he responds with what I wanted." Pg 78

This next lady had two what she calls major fights with her husband and saw that they were locked into the crazy cycle. She writes to Dr Emerson:

The thing that struck me was your comment that a man can feel the loss of respect so deeply but not be able to give voice or vocabulary as to what is wrong. As a man who is not given to voicing his emotions much on a good day, I believe this is how my husband was affected. He was able to tell me I had pushed him too hard, but I didn't understand what button I had pushed. As a result, a lot of my efforts to reach out over the last six months backfired.

So, on New Year's Eve I left a card in his lunch box. Nothing mushy, just a "You give me many reasons to smile" message to which I added "and many things about you I respect, "then I said a thanks for Christmas and Happy New Year. The next day he got up from the table and brought a chair for me! This last Sunday he suggested going to a movie in the evening, sat and talked before the movie started, proposed going to a musical in town next week. In general, he has been much more open and communicative ...

While it would be simplistic and untrue to say all our problems are magically solved, there is a bridge between us that did not exist a week ago. I have yet to hear the "L" word from his lips, but his actions are such that I know it still exists in his heart, and I intend, with God's help, to fan that flame as much as possible. Pg 79

There are some very practical things that you men can do to show love to your wife.

Ladies there are some very practical ways in which you can show respect to your husband.

And we will look at those next week.