

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 6: “UNDERSTANDING YOUR WIFE’S DEEPEST NEEDS”

“A man should fulfill his duty as a husband and a woman should fulfill her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other’s needs.” 1 Corinthians 7:3

Warren Bennis has written a number of books on leadership. In a recent book Strategies for Taking Charge he undertook a study of 90 of the top male CEO’s in the US. They were looking for common denominators in these men, which might be used to recruit or train others to become top level CEO’s. These 90 men were all from different fields, some in politics, some in business, some in sports, TV, entertainment. What they found was striking; these successful leaders had nothing in common in terms of background, upbringing, abilities, personalities, even education. They found only one common denominator: All of the top 90 CEO’s were still married to their first wife! They all claimed to be happily married and they all were very enthusiastic about the institution of marriage.

Things certainly might have changed since this study, but what an interesting conclusion, that the stability that takes place when a husband and wife have a good relationship is one of the most indicative factors in a person’s professional success.

Today we are going to talk about discovering and eventually meeting a wife’s deepest needs. Our text makes it very clear that the husband and wife are commanded to meet the needs of their spouse. In order to meet those needs we first must know what they are.

Sigmund Freud said: “Despite my 30 years of research into the feminine soul, I have not yet been able to answer the great question; ‘What does a woman want?’”

Some of us are as confused about a woman’s needs as little Johnny after Sunday School. They had been learning how God created everything, including human beings.

Little Johnny seemed especially intent when they told him how Eve was created out of one of Adam's ribs. Later in the week his mother noticed him lying down as though he were ill, and said, "Johnny what is the matter?" Little Johnny responded, "I have a pain in my side. I think I'm going to have a wife."

Before we jump into these needs, let me say two things:

1) As mates we are commanded to meet each other's needs, so wives you'll learn about your husbands needs next week. I also want to remind you of something I mentioned in our first sermon of this series: All of us have some needs that only God can meet in our lives. It would be improper and ineffective for any of us to expect that a spouse or any other person might meet our needs for self-esteem or self-worth, yet many marriages try. God has hard wired us to have some needs met by Him and Him alone, and we each have some needs that God has designed to be met by our spouse. For those God has called, or have chosen, to be single, God somehow meets these needs with His own presence, or through the presence of other significant human beings.

2) I Peter 3: 7 says: *"In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard."*

Honor is a biblical concept that is closely connected with shame. To honor is to recognize the value of someone or thing and to act accordingly. The ancient Christians viewed every human action and interaction as an occasion for either gaining honor, (that is increasing one's value in the public eye), or for being shamed, (that is, having one's estimation degraded). Think of your treatment of your wife this past week.

Have the things you said about her increased her value in the eyes of those you spoke to, or did they diminish her value? Depreciation means to lessen in value. Every time you appreciate your wife, you make her more valuable to you.

Note also that the way you 'honor' her, has a direct correlation to your prayers being answered, so we better be careful!

Much of this message comes from the research of Dr. Willard Harley and his work with thousands of couples in Marriage Counseling, and are contained in his book: His Needs, Her Needs. I commend it to you for further study. It reveals that a husband has five basic needs and a wife has five basic needs. Here they are:

A Woman's Five Deepest Needs:

1. MY WIFE NEEDS MY AFFECTION

This is the first thing a woman cannot live without. Affection is the cement of a relationship. Affection symbolizes security, comfort and approval. When a husband shows affection to his wife, he is sending a powerful message to her; 'I care for you, I'll take care of you, I'll protect you, I'm concerned for your needs, I approve of you, I'm proud of you.'

A few years ago Ann Landers did a survey that eventually ended up in Redbook. She asked the question of women: "What would you rather have; sexual intimacy or cuddling and hugging from your husband?" I doubt anyone couldn't guess the answer she found, but most were stunned at the percentage. 80% of the women responded that they preferred the cuddling and non-sexual affection from their husbands. Allowing that things might have changed since then...this verse still captures the essence:

"Husbands give your wives much love; never treat them harshly." Col. 3:19

The KLC translation might be: "Give your wife affection, not affliction!"

The more you appreciate your wife, the more you love her, the more you show her affection, the more valuable she becomes! Before I mention quickly 4 different ways to show affection, I want to share a story about a woman who didn't receive enough affection.

An elderly woman died last month. Having never married, she requested no male pallbearers. In her handwritten instructions for her memorial service, she wrote, "They wouldn't take me out while I was alive, I don't want them to take me out when I'm dead."

4 different ways to show affection:

(A) I can show affection by my **WORDS**. Be gentle and complimentary in the way you speak to your wife. Every wife needs a steady diet of compliments. Keep her emotional bank account full, and she'll not go seeking deposits somewhere else! Read the book of Song of Solomon, and notice how he verbally caresses his bride!

(B) I can show affection by my **ACTIONS**. Acts of kindness. Plan some ways to show her that you are thinking about her while you're not with her. Leave a note she'll find in the middle of the day, cards are always nice, flowers good, especially when not expected. Candy can be hazardous. She may love it, but if she's dieting, and you give candy it proves you've not been paying attention.

(C) I can show affection by the way I **TOUCH** her. It's a time honored tradition, holding hands is still a great thing to do, even in church! Life insurance studies have found some interesting results. Men who kiss their wives every day before they go to work have fewer accidents on the highway. They also discovered that men who kissed their wives the last thing before going to bed live longer than other men. Men, we must learn the 'fine art' of touching with no hidden agenda!

(D) I can show affection by giving her **FOCUSED** attention. Look her in the eye when she talks. Put down the paper, turn off the TV, turn and position your body to be directly facing her when she speaks and watch what happens. Become an active listener, not just a 'grunter'.

2. MY WIFE NEEDS CONVERSATION WITH ME

Paul writes; *"Live together in harmony and love as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you."*

You and your wife need to have fellowship with one another, you need to live together in harmony and love, and there is only one way that is possible-communication. It has been called the Key to Marriage, and I can't argue with that.

Conversation is sometimes defined as: "Verbal Attention". He values what I have to say; he's giving me attention. Remember the verse we considered a couple weeks ago: *"reliable communication permits progress?"* It's not our nature as men to sit around and chew the fat with our wives, but it's a huge need for women, second only to affection. There are many obstacles to conversation these days aren't there? You could name plenty, which reveals only one thing: If you want to fulfill this need for your wife, you are going to have to make it a priority, and may have to change your habits and even lifestyle! One of the greatest gifts you could give to your wife would be undivided, uninterrupted time to talk, and if you really want to blow her mind, offer to talk about your feelings! Which leads us to number 3.

3. MY WIFE NEEDS MY OPENNESS AND HONESTY

If your wife is like most women, they want to know the details of your life, not necessarily the problems you have at the office, but your thoughts and feelings. The fact is; they have a right to know those things because you're married to her. If you ever catch yourself talking with someone outside your home with stuff about your wife, or your home, or your relationship; without first having discussed it with your spouse, you are headed for trouble!

Your wife ought to know you better than any other person in the world, and most wives want to. If you're not open with her and give her accurate information she won't trust you. And a woman who doesn't trust you is going to be very difficult to satisfy. You've got to build openness.

"Insincere talk hides what you are really thinking...it brings nothing but ruin." Pr. 26:23,28.

Most men are afraid to be open with our feelings, even with our wives because our feelings often get out of our control...and we are all about control. I think it is a remarkable thing that God made women to want to know and share our feelings and our lives, and equally amazing how freeing it is for us men, when we finally do open up and begin to share our fears and feelings with our wives. No marriage can survive dishonesty.

4. MY WIFE NEEDS FINANCIAL SECURITY AND SUPPORT

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Tim. 5:8

The Bible says, if you're the husband, you are the provider of the home. That is not a judgment against women working outside the home, or men working while at home, but a Biblical observation. It is our duty as husbands, to provide for the family's financial needs. Sometimes that is best done by the husband staying home to be the primary parent, and sometimes it's done as the man sacrifices his career as the primary one, to enable his wife to pursue her career as primary, and not always just for financial incentive. For most women it's not even so much a fiscal reality, as it is a psychological one.

Women don't need to have a man to provide for them, but most women are wired to want to know that someone is looking out for them, someone is able to care for their needs, someone is ready, willing, and able to provide for their needs. This is what Dr. Harley's research discovered while working with thousands of couples.

This isn't in the Bible but I want to say it anyway. This is just my opinion. It has almost become impossible for a family to make it anymore on one income. What concerns me more than the perception that the rising cost of living has forced wives to work more outside the home, and men to work longer away from home; is the insidious consumerist mentality that has blurred (probably forever) our ability to distinguish the difference between a legitimate need and a selfish, 'keeping up with the Jones', want!

Often when that happens, who pays the price? The kids; and the relationship itself. It is seldom a surprise when an affair blooms at the office, that's where most people spend most of their time! Again, hear me, I'm not raging against women working outside the home, but neither is there any disgrace in mom's (or dads) staying home to be the professional parent!

5. MY WIFE NEEDS MY COMMITMENT TO THE FAMILY

There are 4 primary ways, and a hundred little ways; I can meet this need for my wife to know that I am fully committed to our family, including her.

(A) Be **faithful** to my wife. *"Be faithful to your own wife, and give your love to her alone."* Pr. 5:15

I want my wife to know I am committed to her and to our family, and I let her know that by the decisions I make. I royally messed this up a few years ago, which partly prompted our move to Bismarck. I neglected Susan and my boys, by wrongly thinking I was more important to the success of my ministry, than I was to my family. I have vowed to not make that mistake again.

I am haunted by a story from the life of Billy Sunday that great and dynamic evangelist who led thousands of people to Christ, crying on his deathbed, that he would trade all those thousands, if he could just know that his own sons would be in heaven. He made the same mistake I was making, not being faithful to his wife.

(B) Share the **Parenting** Responsibilities. *"Fathers, don't over-correct your children or make it difficult for them to obey...bring them up with Christian teaching and Christian discipline."* Eph. 6

By far the greatest way you as a husband/father can help your wife to know you are committed to the family; is to assume a fair share of the responsibilities around the house. Especially with so many wives now working, husbands, we have to do more at home. That includes disciplining the children, and household chores. Here is a bit of advice for disciplining children:

1) Be consistent. Inconsistent fathers produce insecure children. 2) Discipline, don't punish. Punishment is payment for past sins; discipline is training for the future. 3) Be unified in your approach. Husbands and wives shouldn't contradict each other in front of the kids. Work out your differences alone, and be unified with your kids. Now the third way to demonstrate your commitment to your family:

(C) Take the **Initiative** in home repairs. *"if a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks."* Eccl. 10:18

One of the best ways you show you cherish you wife is that you take care of the things at the house because the house is primarily her domain. You don't have to fix it yourself, just get it fixed! If you let things go on and on you're saying they don't matter, and eventually she hears, from you;... 'you don't matter.'

(D) Be the **Spiritual Leader** of your House. *"You husbands show the same kind of love to your wife as Christ showed to the church when he died for her, to make her holy and clean."* Eph. 5:26

How did Christ love the church? With his life, he sacrificed himself to save the church, and husbands, that is our 'call' as spiritual leaders!

There are many ways you can take the lead spiritually. Pray together, take the initiative to read and study the Bible together. All leadership really means here, is taking the initiative. If the laundry needs to be done, take the initiative. If the dishes need washing, you're the head of the home, take the initiative. If the kids need attention, be the leader. If your conflict seems at an improbably impasse; then you as the head of the house must say you are sorry...first! That's what being the head means!

Maybe your wife has been a Christian much longer than you, that is fine; just begin to take the initiative to become the leader. You don't have to know it all, just be willing to learn, and sacrifice.

Few of us, ah heck, let's be honest, none of us by nature, is selfless. We all want what we want! But if you want to have a happy, holy, satisfying marriage, you husbands must take the initiative to meet your wives needs, start with these five, and when you are done,...I'm sure she'll come up with some more! Seriously, it is not within us to selflessly ignore our own needs and give priority to our spouses needs, ...but that's what marriage is! Let me pray that God would make us all equal to this great and rewarding task!

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A Woman’s Five Deepest Needs:

1. MY WIFE NEEDS MY _____

4 different ways to show affection:

(A) I can show affection by my _____

(B) I can show affection by my _____

(C) I can show affection by the way I _____ her.

(D) I can show affection by giving her _____ attention.

2. MY WIFE NEEDS _____ WITH ME

“Live together in harmony and love as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you.”

3. MY WIFE NEEDS MY _____ AND _____

4. MY WIFE NEEDS _____ AND _____

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Tim. 5:8

5. MY WIFE NEEDS MY _____ TO THE FAMILY

(A) Be _____ to my wife.

(B) Share the _____ Responsibilities.

(C) Take the _____ in home repairs

(D) Be the _____ of your House.

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Study Guide

1. Spend some time discussing what “honor” means. How does your spouse “honor” you?
2. Have the wives share if these 5 needs match their own. Do they have different needs than the ones discussed in the sermon? If so what are they?
3. Have the husbands rank themselves in fulfilling these 5 needs, at the same time have the wives rank their husbands. (Use the 1-10 scale; one being poor, 10 being the best). Share the results, and discuss how the husbands might begin to do better. (remember we’ll switch roles next week)
4. Talk a bit about how/if you think consumerism might be driving a wedge between husbands and wives and parents and children. Share how you as a family are addressing/dealing with this reality.
5. Talk about discipline. Do you agree/disagree with the suggestions for discipline in the message? What have you (who have older children) learned about discipline that might be helpful to share with those who have younger children?