

## Podcast 227 Understanding Our Wives

### Let's Pray

Father, thank you for this opportunity to delve into Your Word and to understand not just ways that we can love our wives, but ways that You have loved us and that we can learn more about Jesus in the process. Thank you for this great gift, and thank You for Your Spirit that's available to help us. We appeal to You today to help us in our conversation, our teaching, our deliberation. Reveal Jesus to us in a fresh way and soften our hearts and enable us to hear what You have to say to each of us. Amen.

I've certainly been enriched thinking about how to love my wife as Jesus loves us. As a result these studies I've been thinking about Jesus differently. I've been looking at God in a new way. I'm really thankful for this opportunity to delve into the Word of God. As we've been focusing on how has Jesus loved us and how can we love our wives the same way, and I'd like to share a personal testimony.

When Jesus first came into the world as a baby He came as a lamb. When He comes back in the future, He's going to come back as a lion. As a husband, I don't want to be a lion, I want to be a lamb. I want to have the attitude of a servant, not the attitude of a returning king who owns everything. As I'm focused on Jesus as the lamb of God and I'm thinking am I lamb-like or am I lion-like?

That's just one positive fruit of considering how to love our wives as Jesus has loved His wife. Another passage that has to do with loving our wives, is found in 1 Peter 3:7: "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered." That's a powerful passage and it's got lots of applications. I want to read it again in the New Living Translation with has a different flavor. "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner and God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered."

As with any passage of Scripture, this one verse is found in a bigger context, in 1 Peter 3, where Peter was talking about wives and how they relate to their husbands. Peter comments on how Sarah relates to Abraham. Then he jumps down to the seventh verse, for specific direction to husbands. There is more written to wives, but I'm focusing in this series on the husband's responsibility.

Let's break it down into several smaller passages. "Live with your wives in an understanding way." Whenever I read this verse I think of Ken Nair who wrote the book, "Discovering The Mind Of A Woman." This verse was a huge encouragement to Ken. Ken and his twin brother grew up in a male orphanage, then he joined an all-male Navy. After he graduated from college he ended up in a ministry with a large contingent of ladies on staff, and when he was married had three daughters. Ken found himself in unfamiliar territory. He'd grown up all those formative years around men and now he's living with women. One day his wife drew a line in the sand and said, "I can't keep doing this." He didn't know what he was doing wrong. But this verse from 1 Peter 3 encouraged him. He said to himself, "If God tells me that I can live with my wife in an understanding way, then I can do this."

The key for him was he learned how to listen to his wife. We have to understand that wives are usually better at relationships than men. So he was able to convince her that he really wanted to learn because it took some chutzpah on her part to take the risk of opening herself up and teaching him. But he learned how to listen to his wife and communicate. I would like to concur with Ken that I need my wife's input to live with her in an understanding way. In order for me to receive her input, I need to be safe. I need to create an atmosphere where she feels safe. I need to be a lamb and not a lion.

It's pretty hard to communicate with lions. It's a lot easier to communicate with lambs. In order for me to be safe or lamb-like, I need to spend time with The LAMB of God, and I need to allow God to work in my heart. I can't fake it. People know when they're talking to somebody who's safe and lamb-like and when they're talking to someone that's going to start roaring and eat them. I know what that means to me. I need to be rooted and grounded in God's love. I need to have sleep, I need to have food. I know this sounds pretty carnal and physical, but I know myself and I'm not going to be approachable and safe until I'm in a good place with God myself.

The more secure I am in Jesus, the better equipped I am to hear without taking input personally. When I take input personally, then I have a tendency to react emotionally instead of responding thoughtfully. I'm learning how to listen. I'm learning how to communicate with my wife. This is the key to this whole unit, I can't live with my wife in an understanding way if I can't listen to her. Communication is vital.

Sandi and I set aside time for our weekly chair chat on Wednesday mornings. We agree to just listen to each other and not to fix each other or confront each other. We don't need to agree with everything that each other believes. It's simply to hear each other and learn how to listen, which is a great gift.

Now that I'm learning to listen to my wife, she can help me with the other points in this verse. For example; what does it mean to show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel? The best way I'm going to know how to honor my wife is to ask questions such as, when do you feel honored? Or the antithesis would be, when do you feel belittled?

Something that Sandi said to me once, which she doesn't remember but I remember distinctly, she said that I have treated her at times like a second class citizen. Those words, I don't even like to say them to this day, but I recognized that if she was sensing it, then that was part of what was in my heart. That was part of my attitude. Because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So what we hold dear are values that are hidden in our heart. They come out in things that we say and attitudes that we embrace. When I heard those words, I recoiled for that's the last thing I want to do. Then I realized that there was a part of me as a man that thought I'm the head of the home. I'm the leader of the family. She's my help meet. Just those words, head, leader versus helper, help meet, you can see that there is a head and there's a helper. One person is the first class citizen, and the other is the second class citizen.

I have had to consciously work against this inclination to feel superior. One of the passages that has helped me is found in Philippians chapter two, describing the nature of Jesus. Paul is talking about the relationships in the church when he says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself." Another translation says, "Esteem one another more highly than yourself." He continues, "Let each of

you not only look to his own interest, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself."

If we're going to be Christ-like in our homes, if we're going to emulate Christ and love our wives as Christ loved the church, we're going to adopt this same attitude that Jesus displayed. Even though God has made us the head of the home and He's made us the spiritual leader, we are still to esteem one another more highly than ourselves. One exercise which helps me to do this is to write down the truth of who our wives are. In my book on "Speaking the Truth in Love, I wrote. "If I'm going to treat Sandi in a way that reflects Christ, then I have to think of her as Christ thinks of her. Sandi is created in the image of God. She was given to me by God. God designed her to be one flesh with me. She's a valued member of the church. She has gifts and talents to uniquely build up the body of Christ different than mine. She is also a joint heir of Christ and an adopted child of God."

All of these truths are rooted in Scripture. The more I think Scripturally about this special and unique individual, the easier it is to esteem her highly and treat her well. She's an incredible woman of God. She's a devoted disciple of Christ. She's home educated four sons, one of whom has a disability. She has been a pastor's wife, an incredible wife, a daughter who has honored her parents, a steadfast servant of Christ who has followed Jesus faithfully since she was a child. And every time I read these truths, it helps me to honor my wife in my heart. And the more I can honor her and esteem her highly in my heart, the more my speech and my attitudes are going to be changed and reflect the attitudes of Christ.

I would encourage anybody that's listening, stop. Step back and ask God to help you to see your wife as Christ sees her. Ask God to give you the eyes of faith to see her as He sees her.

And my third point from the same passage in 1 Peter 3:7, "Heirs with you of the grace of life," or as the NLT says, "She's your equal partner in God's gift of new life." One of the biggest lessons I learned from listening to my wife and communicating with her and hearing her heart is that Sandi likes to be part of a team. She doesn't like to work for Steve. She's not one of my employees. She's not somebody that's in charge of the food and she's not my servant. I hate to even say this stuff, but I have been guilty of treating her this way. One of the biggest words that I have heard as Sandi and I got our hearts together in 2012 is she likes to be treated with a spirit of mutuality. That's a word that she has used several times. Mutuality. This word makes me think of Ephesians 5:21, "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." That's right before the passage about wives submitting to their husbands. It says submitting to one another.

That's the basis for a teamwork approach. One is not over the other one, one person is not better than the other one. We are each part of a team. Mutuality is huge. I think that's what 1 Peter 3 is saying. "She's your equal partner in God's gift of new life." Now within that partnership, you have different roles. We understand that.

One of the ways that we have done this in our home is we have divided up John's care. This is very practical and pertinent in the Demme home. For many years, I'm been working and building a business. Sandi was responsible for not only raising our sons, but she has also been responsible for John's physical care. This is significant work. He has issues with his feet. We have to go to a podiatrist a couple times a year. He has issues with his teeth. He's prone to

gingivitis. He had open heart surgery as a baby, so we have regular appointments with heart surgeons. He has GI issues, which he takes medication but which also require periodic visits to a GI doctor.

After some discussion we divided up his care. I'm responsible for some of his grooming. I shave him on a regular basis. I am in charge of his teeth. I make all of his dental appointments, I brush his teeth twice a day and floss him. I'm also in charge of his feet and make the appointments with the podiatrist. I'm also trying to do more with his physical fitness and exercise. I take him to a gym and encourage him in that respect.

These are some of the things that I do. It's not fun brushing an adult's teeth and it's not fun shaving him. But one of the things that helps me is recognizing we're part of a team and knowing this is a huge blessing to her. I have a little bit more time on my hands now because I'm gone all weekend speaking, but during the week I have more flexibility. I'm also in charge of breakfast most mornings. For about an hour every morning Sandi has time to take care of herself. Mutuality. When I am brushing John's teeth I often think of how many years she did this by herself and am glad to even up the score a little.

Mutuality in our family business was a tough issue for me. In my mind, MathUSee was Steve's business and even though I had help from Sandi and the boys, it was my baby. I've talked about that on previous podcasts so I won't go there again. Things have changed significantly and we make mutual decisions about almost everything. We are part of a team. It's not just me being the head and everybody else working for me.

Since I've been very open about my own struggles, especially in the book "Crisis to Christ," I've gotten lots of letters from couples in similar straights. One just popped up my email box a minute ago from somebody that's asking me advice on what she should do. Sadly there seems to be a lot of dysfunctional and abusive behavior on the part of men. In these relationships wives feel trapped. There is no spirit of mutuality. There's no spirit of teamwork. The husband has his thumb on the wife. And one of the ways these insecure men dominate their wives is by controlling the finances. They've put their wives in financial bondage. When a husband crosses the line and becomes abusive and harmful to not only the wife, but the whole family, the wife and the children are caught and unable to leave these awful situation.

I've talked to some of these folks, and discovered that the husband has made sure that they own all the bank accounts. They have all the credit cards. It turns out that this is really a pretty common. I read an article recently that said that 99% of domestic violence involves some financially abusive behavior. It's a pattern of monetary actions that are meant to control and intimidate a partner. There's an organization called Purple Purse, which was set up to help people in these situations. If you're in the one of those folks, look at Purple Purse.

Money, like other aspects of family life, needs to be addressed as a team with mutuality. One person is not to be in control.

Sandi chose to be a mom and at home the entire time that our boys were being raised. When our youngest was 18, she took a job at MathUSee in charge of the office with varied responsibilities. When our kids were at home, she was at home. But even though she was at home and not collecting a paycheck, she was involved in many of the decisions that I was making. I would bounce things off of her. She was always encouraging me and helping me in some capacity. She should have been treated with mutuality and respect and dignity and

value, but I wasn't doing a good enough job of this. I finally and painfully learned how she felt when we went through the business breakup in 2012.

I've thought about this a lot and I have thought about Jesus and how He was described in Luke 4: "He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah" (the 61st chapter) "was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

John 8:36 corroborate this language: "If the Son sets you free, you'll be free indeed." These passages speak of Jesus setting us free and at liberty. I don't believe that I'm loving my wife as Jesus came to love us if I am keeping Sandi in bondage. Jesus came to set us free. He did not come to put us into bondage. If I'm keeping my wife in financial bondage because of my own insecurities or desire to be in control, or because I want her to stay with me that is wrong. It's flat out wrong. I'm not doing what it says about living with my wife as an equal partner and as an heir. A joint heir. And I'm not loving her as Christ loved the church because Jesus came to set people free, not to put them into bondage.

Sandi now has her own checking account. We get our recompense from the business, she has a salary, I have a salary. We're still working for MathUSee, but we're also stockholders and we get our bonuses but we get them separately. I don't look at hers, she doesn't look at mine. We still make joint decisions concerning the house and our retirement and our care and our wills for our children and all that kind of stuff because we're a team.

I don't think I could encouraged her to be free and independent in this manner until I was in a good place myself. Until I was secure in Christ, it was hard to set my wife free because I needed her and I needed her to be with me. I had issues. I had insecurities. I am seeking to address these personal problems and not let them influence our healthy relationship.

That might be a tough one for some folks to hear, but I really believe it's part of what it means to be mutual. It's part of being a team and it's part of what God designed for us when we esteem each other highly and even more highly than ourselves.

I didn't realize that domestic violence is so prevalent and how much money is tied to the abuse. according to this article, "Financial abuse is a pattern of monetary actions that are meant to control and intimidate a partner. These actions can include running up a partner's credit score, which makes it difficult for them to obtain housing in the future, controlling their spending habits, even deliberately sabotaging employment or educational opportunities." As far as I'm concerned, this comes out of a person's own pain, their own baggage, their own insecurities. Sadly, it's usually the wife who's caught in these situations and can't leave.

I've got letters from wives saying, "I need to leave. I don't know what to do." She doesn't have the funds, she doesn't have a place. The husband sabotaged her. Even in the church, oftentimes that sabotage continues where he'll appear so wonderful. Then the congregation begins hearing rumblings about the wife wanting to leave and they all blame the wife because he appears to be a wonderful man. What the church doesn't see is his behavior behind closed doors and the control he exercises. I hear these more than I wish. God help us to set our

partners free and use our strength to build our wives up and encourage them, not to overwhelm and dominate them.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for jointly creating us in your image. Thank you for creating us in your image. I pray that you'll help us to follow these principles, and if we have blind spots, help us to be in a good place where we can hear about them from our spouse and can take the appropriate steps. Thank you for these words and thank you for your life that illustrated how to live them out. Bless us to that end in Jesus' name. And if there's any families that are hurting and caught in difficult situations, I pray that you'll lead them into a good place and set them free. In Jesus' name, Amen.