

How do you treat your wife?

I am really concerned with the way many husbands treat their wives. We invite the lady of our dreams to share our lives with us and then fail to get to grips with the most basic of relationship issues. Many Christian men hear good teaching on family life and how to treat their wives but it is water off a duck's back in so many cases.

Our wives go into marriage with high hopes. Most ladies have their ideals of what marriage should be and while many are realistic enough to recognise an element of unreality in those dreams they are rarely prepared for the cruel disillusionment that drives so many of them to utter frustration.

They at least expected to be able to hold a reasonable conversation with their husbands or to have a realistic level of involvement from him in the bringing up of the children. Oh yes, he does all the right things as he sits patiently (or not so patiently!) and listens to you going on about your day and he may well give those children time but you know he has not connected with either you or the children in any of those situations.

And the good things he does make it worse in a way because they mask the important things that are missing. How many wives have sat in frustration while their husbands have fixed the loo or stopped the dripping tap (noble deeds in themselves!) but somehow cannot understand that what she really wants is the heart-to-heart connection. And when she tries to explain he gets defensive and takes it all personally and 'mishears' and it all ends up in a horrendous argument after which you wish you had never opened your mouth in the first place.

Now, fair enough, maybe the man was never taught at home how to relate to anyone else in any meaningful way. How many of us really were prepared for marriage? But, if we say we love our wives, once we know we are getting it wrong, does not love make us stop and listen and take on board what they are trying to say? If our wives have to go on and on will they not soon starting asking themselves if we do really love them? True love will always seek to understand.

If we fail to take our wives seriously then we have to ask why. Unfortunately, from whichever angle you come at this thing the answer always has to be, at the end of the day, that we love ourselves more than our wives.

Now to some that might seem simplistic and harsh but I have spent many years of my life explaining to men why they are responding the way they do, trying to help them to a better place. Popular books have been bought by the millions explaining how men and women respond differently to life and all these have their value in developing our understanding but at the end of the day it always comes down to the will. How much are we prepared to change – or do we want our control too much?

If we behave like this what can our wives do? Many blame themselves. 'It must be my fault.' 'If I was a better wife then perhaps he would want to be closer to me.' 'I am expecting too much'. It is easier for them to take that route because it removes the aggravation from the situation but the end result is that their self-esteem is eroded to zero with all the problems that

brings. The truth is, in the vast majority of cases, we would be the way we are anyway, whoever we had married.

Another option for our wives is that they create their own lives. If they cannot find respect and self-worth from their husbands they will go out to work and get it. At least the people there will value what they do and their skills and abilities are appreciated. If they cannot go out to work they may meet up with friends or join an interest group. At least there is some social life to make up for what is not at home!

Sadly our wives reluctantly accept that there are certain no-go areas in the marriage; they stop asking for certain things, and you settle into your pattern and life goes on. Never mind that the relationship grows stale and life becomes a routine. They know this is not what it is meant to be but what can they do when we hold the key?

Fellows, we have got to start listening and taking our wives seriously. My guess is that most men at some point in the marriage wonder how it is that they chose the most difficult woman on the planet to be their wife! Experience has shown that that simply illustrates just how distorted our perspective becomes when we are on the defensive!

The chances are that you have married a good woman – value her, cherish her and treat her well. Respect her enough to trust her, take seriously what she shares with you and make it your aim to be in touch with what is in her heart, her dreams, her hopes. Love her more than you love yourself. Genuinely put her first and you will wake up to the surprise of how deeply she loves you.

What a woman looks for in a man

Introduction

What right do I have, as a man, to attempt to answer that question? My credentials lie in three areas:

1. I asked a group of men to go home and ask their wives what they look for in their man and the consensus was remarkable.
2. Having sat with countless couples and seen wives shed tears of sadness and frustration I feel I have some idea of what the ladies are looking for from their men.
3. Being married to my wife Merle for thirty years has given me a little inside knowledge as to what a woman expects!

So many men see their wives as unreasonable. My guess is that at some time most men have asked themselves why it was that they happened to marry the awkward one! No doubt there are some difficult women out there but in my thirty years' experience of counselling couples I have found that, all too often, it is the men letting the ladies down. Men see their wives as demanding whereas in reality most of them only want the love and appreciation that is their right as wives.

You will have already noticed, no doubt, that I am seriously biased towards the plight of the ladies. Of course I am not saying that all the problems in a marriage are going to be the husband's fault. However, I am saying that they are his responsibility and that is quite different.

So it is in that context that I want to look at what makes a good man, primarily in the setting of marriage and fatherhood but also as a single man. There are lessons for all of us, whether married or single, for the principles regarding our manhood work out in all our relationships.

I want to look at those principles and I will do so by answering the question, 'What does a woman look for in a man?' and breaking those answers into bite-sized chunks. The qualities I share with you are the ones that the ladies themselves identified in their response to our questionnaire.

I am aware that some of you who read this article will not be Christians. However, what I write, as well as being intensely practical, will also be based on the premise that we can only rise to our full potential as men when we know God.

Spiritual Leadership

Assuming that husband and wife are both Christians, a wife will look for her husband to take the lead in spiritual matters. She may appear to be the strong one, the spiritual one, the one who has a 'sensitivity to these things' but she would love you to be her leader and pastor.

She wants you to really love the Lord, to walk and talk with God and be close to him. She wants to know that her husband will go to the Lord in times of difficulty, will draw strength from him so he can give security and direction to his family. He will hear the Lord and thus be a pastor to his wife and children. He will spend time reading God's Word and will bring his family and friends regularly to God in prayer. He will be a man of conviction who will not be afraid to stand up for what he believes. His friends and colleagues know he is a man of faith, not only by the way he talks but by the way he lives.

What does that description do for you? How do you feel about it? Cynical, frustrated, or condemned? Does it sound like simplistic idealism or a reality you would love to live in but which seems as unlikely as winning the lottery?

Maybe you really have put the effort in to being all those things for your wife and family and you still cannot seem to get it right. You fall flat on your face again and again; your wife and children get hurt and you get frustrated and begin to despair of yourself. It is a vicious circle.

I do not want to just hold out ideals but to help you to understand why it can sometimes feel so hard to live out those ideals. So I will start by suggesting some areas of thought that we will move on to consider.

I have a saying that goes like this: 'A man does not know how to be a husband until he has learnt how to be a son.' In other words our view of God is shaped largely by our experience of our father. Many men who feel the need to break free of the constraints of God are actually

still trying to find a proper independence from their fathers. Whether their fathers were dominating and controlling or uninvolved and distant, such men are trying to find who they are and how to express that. It is a case of having an identity and being your own person.

When a man becomes a Christian there is a need for him to look back with gratitude for what is good in his life that came from his father, to forgive his father if harm and damage was done and to stop looking to his father for needs to be met that his father is not capable of meeting. Now he has a new father and all his need for security and self-worth can be found in him. If these basic needs are met in God then he can give his family security and self-worth. If he expects his family to meet those needs he takes himself and his family onto a path of frustration and conflict.

I would encourage you to think about your father; did he make you feel secure, were issues resolved properly in relationships within your family, was he an example you would want to follow, do you treat your wife and children in the same way that he treated his? Get beneath merely academic answers. How do you feel about your father, what did he make you feel about yourself, how do you feel about the way he was towards your mother and siblings, are you still looking for anything from him?

You may find it helpful to write your thoughts down. If you need help with this, contact me through this website.

Separation from parents

I want to share a simple but profound concept with you. From the moment of birth we are in an ongoing process of separation from our mothers both physically and emotionally. By the age of puberty that separation process is 'complete' and we become aware of the need to be affirmed in our identity. This is where Dad comes in; it is his task to affirm his son into manhood and his daughter into womanhood. It is one thing to be 'separated from' but another to be 'affirmed into'. Affirmation is essential for a sense of identity, security and self-worth. When it does not happen the chances are that we will spend the rest of our lives looking for it and this is where it can all go so terribly wrong when it comes to the marriage relationship.

Do you look to your wife for affirmation? Even to your own children? It is worth thinking through. We can take it further; if there was no affirmation in those vital years it is possible that we look back to mother for all that a mother represents. If we are not affirmed into something we will look back at the warmth, security and comfort that we had from mother. We are in trouble if we expect our wives to fulfil that role! How many times have wives said, 'I am not your mother'! They are not simply referring to our demands to have the shirt ironed on time but to the fact that they were being asked to be something emotionally that was not right. How many times have wives said that having their husbands around was like having another child to look after, or worse!

What is the answer? Firstly, we must recognise that it is a mistake to still be looking to our fathers for affirmation. We need to make the conscious decision to look elsewhere for that affirmation. That is what we did, at least in part, when we were growing up. We either looked

to people in authority or to our peer group, usually the latter. We sought affirmation in belonging, in finding an identity with a particular group, even wearing a particular 'uniform' as a mark of that belonging. It did not matter if others did not like it, in fact that increased our sense of individualism and authenticity as a person in our own right.

So, if we are to stop needing affirmation from our fathers where do we look? It is not by chance that one of the most frequently used names for God in the Bible is 'Father'. It is no coincidence that Jesus, the best specimen of manhood this world has ever seen, used this title for God more than any other title. It was no problem to him, as a grown man in his thirties, to recognise his dependency on his Father. Far from being a sign of weakness and inability to think for himself he recognised this dependence on his Father as the source of his authority and power.

Qualities of Spiritual Leadership

These are some of the qualities ladies listed that they would like to see their husbands provide in their spiritual leadership.

a. Love for God

She wants you to have a real love for God. Not, for example, taking your family to church because that is expected of you but because you have a genuine desire to meet with God.

Your wife expects you to spend time with God and commune with him. She would want your prayer life to be important to you and for you to be disciplined in maintaining that.

b. Study of his Word

This love for God would show itself in a love for his Word, the Bible, and you would take every opportunity to read and study it. You would have your own Bible reading programme and it would take precedence over TV! You would want to share with others what you discover in it.

c. Share your faith

You would share your faith with your wife, children, friends and workmates. You might not be the sort of person who could stand on the street corner and preach to passersby but you would always be willing to speak of your Lord when the appropriate occasion arose. You would be able to talk about the Lord in a natural way. Clearly the Lord would matter to you. You could not expect him to mean anything to your family if you do not have a deep love for him yourself.

d. Worship

You will know how to worship God, not only in church but you will teach your family to in your devotions together as well as in the way you conduct your daily lives together.

e. Firm convictions

You would be a man of firm convictions. You will have thought things out for yourself and would therefore be ready to stand up for what is right. You will have strong moral principles and will not compromise where it matters. It is not a case of being inflexible or harsh - you will be able to hear what is being said but also prepared to speak your own mind.

f. Lead by example

Your wife would expect you to lead by example. She wants you to be able to make decisions, be definite and positive, not vague, weak or indecisive. She wants you to be 'strong and determined, calm and capable, especially if things go wrong, trustworthy, dependable, not a pushover - someone to respect.

Conclusion

So there we have it – that is what a woman looks for in a man as regards his spiritual qualities. In short, she wants him to be her pastor, friend and leader – and why not? Every man is capable, in God, of being that to his wife. We need to move out of self-doubt and into a walk with God that will enable us to live to our potential and in so doing bring joy and security to others.