

Your Wife's Need For Affection

Nothing is as devastating to a marriage as an affair. Counselors often discover two basic causes: The wife reports that she was vulnerable to the lure of another man because of a lack of affection from her husband. The husband, on the other hand, explains his betrayal as the lack of sexual fulfillment from his wife.

Unfortunately, what might have been easily worked through with honest and loving communication often spirals downward into a vicious cycle. When affection is infrequent or non-existent she will interpret this as being unloved and uncared for by her husband. Typically, this leads to hurt and anger which manifests itself in sexual withdrawal. The husband, in turn, feels cheated and is even less motivated to show his wife the affection she desires. The miserable scenario ends predictably with him blaming her and her blaming him. Ultimately, resentment sets in and both become vulnerable to being entrapped by Satan in an affair. Sadly, even Christians find themselves caught in this deadly whirlpool. The once-sacred vow to forsake all others becomes a faint memory as the hope for marital fulfillment fades.

Can anything be done to prevent this cycle from starting? Can a couple escape when they have already been caught in this downward spiral? God's Word says, "Yes!" In fact, Scripture has much to say about this very common problem. Perhaps all of God's wise counsel about resolving this dilemma can be distilled into one key concept. What at first might appear simplistic reveals great profundity when it is believed and acted on in the marital relationship. This concept is found in the command to "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39) The couple in crisis, however, are practicing a much different relational philosophy. It says, "I'll love you if you love me." Some even protest that they cannot love their spouse because they don't feel loved. What a remarkably different example we believers have in the Lord Jesus! He loved us when we had absolutely no love for Him. He calls His disciples to love as He does.

When there is little or no love in the home, God declares that it is the husband's fault. Why? Because He has specifically given him the responsibility for introducing and maintaining love in the family (Ephesians 5:25). This, of course, does not excuse the wife from loving her husband. It simply sets him apart as the one God holds responsible for emulating Christ's love for the church.

While love may be commanded, it does not come naturally; it must be learned. But since it is a fruit of the Spirit, Christians may be sure that it will take His work in their lives to learn to love. Although most Christian husbands would readily acknowledge the wisdom of loving their wives as themselves, the great majority are completely lost when it comes to translating love into concrete behavior. This is precisely why many men need specific instructions on how to love their mate.

Perhaps one of the most important ways in which a husband can demonstrate love to his wife is through affection. Most men do not understand affection and even less how to show it. Yet, to a woman, affection symbolizes security, protection, comfort, and approval. When a husband displays affection to his wife he is sending the following messages: 1) You are important to me and I don't want anything to happen to you. I'll take care of and protect you. 2) I'm concerned about the problems you face and I'm with you. 3) I think you have done a good job and I'm proud of you. Men desperately need to understand how strongly women desire these affirmations. For the typical wife, there cannot be enough of them.

Men, unfortunately, often associate affection with physical intimacy. Women, however, distinguish between the two. The affection they give to one another, children, relatives and others has nothing to do with sexuality. They see it as being important in its own right. From her point of view, it is the essential cement in the relationship with her man.

Of course, all of this is extremely confusing to the typical male. He shows affection as an introduction to sexual intimacy. To her affection is the *environment* of the marriage, and physical union as the event. It forms the canopy that covers the marriage and provides shelter for the lover's bed.

Most men do not seem to understand that sexual interest will come naturally on her part if he will shower her with affection. This, of course, is not a gimmick or technique to manipulate her with but a tangible expression of the love that he has for her. In other words, he should not turn on affection simply to gratify his sexual desire. Nor should he feel that he must constantly hug, kiss, and whisper sweet nothings in her ear. There should be, however, an atmosphere that says, "I really do love you; you are special and important to me."

Most women desire affection regularly, at least several times a day. A hug in the morning before getting out of bed, a kiss good-bye as he leaves for work, a big hug and kiss upon arriving home, seating her at the dinner table, holding hands in front of the TV—all of these create an environment of affection.

The truth of the matter is that most husbands stop working as patiently and carefully at showing affection in their marriage as they did when they were courting their wives-to-be. For those who say they aren't the affectionate type, don't have time, or see affection as being impractical, they should be warned that they are asking for real trouble. In fact, they may be making their wives vulnerable for an affair.

Men, hopefully you have been convinced of the necessity for consistently showing affection to your wives. For most of us it will simply be a matter of remembering that in Christ we are called to love our wives as ourselves. For others, it may be a matter of not knowing how to do this. If the latter is the case, consider the following as some helpful advice to get you started:

- 1) Hug and kiss your wife every morning while you are still in bed.

- 2) Tell her you love her while you are still eating breakfast.
- 3) Kiss her before you leave to work.
- 4) Call her during the day to see how she is doing.
- 5) Surprise her by bring her lunch.
- 6) Bring her flowers once in a while as a surprise (include a note).
- 7) Remember special occasions should be sentimental and not practical.
- 8) Before you leave work, call and let her know when you'll be expected.
- 9) When you arrive home give her a hug and a kiss. Spend a few minutes talking about how her day went.
- 10) Help clean the kitchen up after dinner.
- 11) Hug and kiss her before going to sleep.

Husbands, remember that God designed you to be the provider, protector, and preserver in the marital relationship. He has given you the role of caring, cherishing, and nourishing your wife. When you choose to consistently act in a loving way toward her you will discover that she will respond in like manner. Why? Because God made her to be a responder. Take to heart God's trustworthy instruction and begin to fully experience the joy that He intended for marriage!

- Adapted from "His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage" by Willard Harley, Jr.