

Walking Worthy in Marriage – Part III – *Ephesians 5:22-33*

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Well men, it's round two today in our study of how God is calling us to operate as husbands within our marriages, and I'm glad to see that some of you came back for more and didn't decide just to skip this week! Who knows, maybe your wives forced you to come? Nevertheless, I'm glad to see a lot of husbands here and I think when we're done you'll be glad you came. Today we'll be learning some really practical ways we can be better husbands and fulfill the calling God has given us in marriage. We're going to learn some things NOT to do and some things TO DO as we seek to love, nourish and cherish our wives.

Today I'm going to have a little fun using my dad as an example and sharing with you a couple of stories about a few mistakes he made as a husband. He wrote these stories in a book, so I think it's safe to share them with you without getting in too much trouble. The first story I'll share is pretty much just an honest, unintentional mistake he made that had some really negative consequences and caused my mom to give him what he called, "the look." Husbands, have your wives ever given you "the look" that tells you she's extremely unhappy and you are going to be made to suffer for what you've done? Well, after I share this story, you'll see why my mom gave my dad "the look" in this case. So here we go:

"The winters in our cabin at Kasilof, [Alaska] were very cold. Sometimes even running the old oil stove wide open, water would freeze when it hit the floor. We all wore knee high Sorrell lined boots..." in the cabin to keep warm. Now a friend "had told me that each October I should make it a point to clean the stove pipe to prevent a chimney fire. The first time I tried that was a total disaster. I removed the pipe from the stove to the ceiling and cleaned it outside the house. Then I got an old pillow case, wrapped it tight around the remaining stove pipe that came through the ceiling about four inches. The first mistake was that I had Lois stand on a short ladder to hold the top of the pillowcase bag tight to the stove pipe.

Climbing up onto the roof of the house, I shoved the cleaning tool down into the stove pipe and began moving it up and down to remove the soot on the inside.

The second mistake, that got me into deep trouble, was that I misjudged the length of the pipe from the roof to the ceiling. As the cleaning tool came out of the stove pipe and reached the bag Lois was holding, it shoved the bag off the stove pipe stub. All the sticky black soot went all over the kitchen and front room below. I might have survived the ordeal but the black stuff also coated my beautiful blond haired wife. I think it was being unable to hear her screams from up on the roof, and that I continued to clean the stove pipe that was the “last straw.”

When I finally finished cleaning the stove pipe and came into the house I was shocked. There was Lois. No blond hair. No white skin. But I did see the very black sooty clothes on my wife who was just standing there with her hands on her hips and saying nothing.

I think the third mistake I made was trying to say something to justify my actions because through all of the black soot covering my wife I could distinctly make out “the look.”

You just can’t imagine what a terrible mess I had caused. I have no idea what Lois used to clean herself up, but I do know she worked at the process for a very long time. It took all of us many long hours to remove and clean every item in the rooms and then clean all the floors, shelves, counters, tables and furniture. For some reason the attitude of my wife toward me sunk to a new low level and did not improve for a long, long time.”

Well, men, would any of you like to be in that situation? I can’t imagine it would be a pretty picture for any of us! Well, today, we’re going to see if we can learn how to do a little better job as husbands and hopefully avoid most situations like this, doing everything we can to avoid building up resentment within our wives.

If you’ll remember from what we learned last week in our study on husbands, we discussed the first two points Paul makes in Ephesians 5, verses 22 to 33, relating to how husbands are called to operate in their marriages. First, he made it clear that the husband is called to operate as the head of the wife in marriage, but this

is a headship that moves beyond power and authority to servant-leadership, working for the good of our wives and kids, rescuing, protecting and promoting growth in God and his Word. This is a headship that is not about exalting ourselves and getting whatever we want, but rather humbling ourselves and giving ourselves up for their good and to accomplish God's purposes rather than our own.

Secondly, Paul told us that the call of husbands in marriage is to love their wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. A very tall order! Doing this involves taking our eyes off ourselves and what we may selfishly want, and instead looking out for the good of our wives, helping them grow in their walk with the Lord and become the women God has designed and called them to be. And what we concluded last week, is that this is an extremely challenging job for husbands that we can't pull off apart from the power of the Holy Spirit operating within us. This mission can only be accomplished as we pursue God with all that we have and grow our own love relationship with Christ.

In learning how to love our wives, we need to get to know Christ and understand the way he loves us and functions as our head. We need to get on our knees, immerse ourselves in his Word and allow him to transform us from the inside out. In order to help our wives and kids grow in their walk with the Lord, get rid of darkness in our lives, and build our relationship and love for each other, we need to live and breathe the Word of God and incorporate it into every aspect of our daily existence. And that's where we ended last week.

So as we get ready to wrap up the fifth chapter of Ephesians today and examine what other guidelines Paul gives to husbands, let's begin again by reading today's passage in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22 to 33:

22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

II. HUSBANDS ARE TO LOVE THEIR WIVES LIKE THEY LOVE THEIR OWN BODIES

So today we're picking up in verse 28 and we see that Paul tells husbands that they are to love their own wives as they love their own bodies. In other words, husbands are to be as concerned about taking care of their wives as they are about taking care of their own bodies.

Let's think for just a minute about how we treat our own bodies. What are some good things that people do for their own bodies every day? How about giving them food and water; making sure they get exercise; giving them a good night's sleep; protecting them from injury; avoiding things that cause physical pain...

What about the bad category? What are some bad things people do to their bodies sometimes? Perhaps eating unhealthy food; eating too much food; drinking too much alcohol; overworking them; allowing them to be lazy and not get enough exercise; smoking...

Clearly we know there are good things we can do for bodies and bad things that will bring harm to our bodies and may eventually destroy them. But the point Paul is making here for husbands is that every human being is always aware of his or her own body, watching out for it, protecting it, and doing nice things for it. And even when we do the things that cause long-term harm to our bodies, we're usually doing it because of some sort of pleasure or relief it temporarily brings to our bodies.

But if we're wise and smart and really care about our own bodies, we'll be treating them well and watching out for them and taking care of their needs. We'll be doing everything we can to make sure they stay healthy and live long lives.

And this is how Paul tells us we need to treat our wives. He's challenging husbands to care for their wives like they care for their own bodies...to be as concerned about them as we are about our own bodies. After all in marriage we become one flesh with our wives, so if we're not watching out for them and caring for them and providing for their needs, we're really only hurting ourselves.

III. IN LOVING THEIR WIVES, HUSBANDS ARE REALLY LOVING THEMSELVES

In fact Paul goes even further and says that when we love our wives and take care of them like we take care of our own bodies, what we're really doing is loving ourselves. There will be a huge personal benefit to us that results from us loving our wives like we love our own bodies...a benefit that is so much more long-lasting and fulfilling than just being concerned about ourselves and what we want personally.

As always, God's way and the path to true fulfillment and success in our lives and in our marriages is completely opposite from what the world teaches us. The world says that in order to find success and happiness you need to, "Look out for number one, fight for your own rights, scrap your way to the top, do whatever it takes to get what you want out of life, make sure you get the recognition you deserve..." The world says, dump your husband or wife if they're not giving you what you want and need. The world's perspective might be summed up with the old Janet Jackson song, "What Have You Done For Me Lately?"

But God, on the other hand, says the way to happiness, joy, and fulfillment in life and in our marriages is to humble ourselves, look out for others, and treat them just as we would treat ourselves. God teaches us to remain faithful to our spouses through thick and thin and to take the focus off of what they can do for us to what we can do on their behalf. And when we learn to walk this way we will find that life finally begins to work and make sense. We will experience peace in our relationships, rather than constant conflict. We will experience love as we finally begin to truly love others. We will find that in walking this way, we're really loving

ourselves because of the personal benefits we receive by walking according to God's design, rather than according to our selfishness and attempts to get what we want at the expense of others.

IV. HUSBANDS ARE CALLED TO NOURISH THEIR WIVES

So in verse 29, Paul gets more specific about the ways each of us love our own bodies. He says that those who love their own bodies do two things for their bodies: they nourish and they cherish. As we husbands seek to love our wives as we love our own bodies, the first thing we need to concern ourselves with is nourishing our wives.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition of "nourish" is this:

- to provide (someone or something) with food and other things that are needed to live, be healthy, etc.
- to cause (something) to develop or grow stronger

One of the primary things we as husbands are called to do as we love our wives as we love our own bodies is to provide for their nourishment and growth. We are to be concerning ourselves with providing the things they need to be both physically and spiritually healthy and most of all growing in their love relationship with the Lord.

So what does this mean in a practical sense for husbands? I think we all understand our responsibility to work in order to provide for the physical needs of our wives and kids. But how can we be spiritually nourishing our wives on a day-to-day basis? Well I spent some time thinking about this and came up with a few practical ideas that might provide us with at least a starting place as we learn how to nourish our wives.

First, it's absolutely essential that we as husbands are making the pursuit of God a practical reality in our own lives. If we're not getting nourishment ourselves, how could we ever expect to contribute to their nourishment? But as I was brainstorming some ideas, it came to me that something really practical we as husbands could do to help nourish our wives is to tell them that we would really like to help them find time in their days to pray and study God's Word and maybe even attend a small group Bible study. And to help make this a real possibility for

them, we could offer to take over some of their weekly responsibilities or take care of the kids at certain times each week, so that they can have specific times to pray and study.

And men, if you make this offer, be sure to follow through. And get specific. Agree on specific times each day when you are going to free up your wife to get alone with God. And wives, be sure you use that time for that purpose alone. Don't allow Satan to infiltrate that time and convince you there are more pressing needs that need to be attended to. What a contribution it would be to the spiritual nourishment of our wives if each of us here in this room would make this offer and follow through.

Another way that husbands can be nourishing their wives is to study and pray together. Find a devotional you can read together on a regular basis, or read through a book of the Bible together and discuss as you go. Get comfortable praying together and when you have a difficult challenge, be brave enough to say, "Let's stop right now and pray about this together."

There are many other ways husbands can contribute to the spiritual nourishment of our wives. Give it some thought and prayer this week and think about how God is calling you to be the spiritual leader in your marriage and how you can be nourishing your wife in practical ways.

V. HUSBANDS ARE CALLED TO CHERISH THEIR WIVES

The second specific way each of us loves our own bodies, according to Paul, is that we cherish them. So when learning to love our wives as we love our own bodies, husbands are called to cherish their wives.

The Greek word translated, "cherish," means to warm or to keep warm; or to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care. The central idea is taking care of someone with tenderness. I get the image in my mind of a mother hen keeping her eggs warm, protecting them, treating them gently, and making sure they survive. So husbands, you may think that tenderness is something only women are good at. But guess what, we're called to relate to our wives with tenderness and God never calls us to anything that's not possible for us to do by his power.

As we think about this idea of cherishing our wives, I'm going to tell another short story from my dad's memoirs that provides us with a little humor on this topic and a good example of not cherishing your wife. Hopefully, my dad will forgive me for using him as a negative example this week, but he did write this story down to be preserved forever in a book and has acknowledged that he put my mom through a lot over the years. So I think we'll be alright. Forgive me, dad!

As I share this story, just remember my mom grew up as a city girl in Longview, Washington, and had no experience with wild animals or guns or anything like that. Living in a cabin in the backwoods of Alaska was an enormous adjustment for her. So here we go with my dad speaking:

"In the fall of 1970 a very large wild tomcat began stalking around the cabin and the old dilapidated garage. After he started feeding on a moose quarter that I had hanging to age before cutting and wrapping, I decided that the tomcat had to go. I set a couple of foot hold traps in the old garage to catch him. It was about eight in the morning when Lois called me at the radio station which was about twenty miles away. "John, you caught that tomcat last night and he is just screaming at the top of his lungs. You have to come home and put him down. It's just awful the way he is crying and screaming," she told me.

"Lois, you know I am on the air. I can't come home right now and I have appointments later in the morning," I said. "Well, something has to be done to stop his screaming and suffering. You shouldn't have set those traps anyway. What am I going to do?" she responded with tears in her voice. "Babe, it's real easy. Just go get my .22 rifle, load it up and go down and kill the cat," I advised. "I don't know how to load it or shoot it. You have to come do it," she countered. "Now, Lois, you need to settle down. You can do this," I said.

Needless to say, she was hard to convince, but finally she got the rifle and I detailed to her how to load and fire it. Jason [my oldest son] went down with her to do the deed. Later he told me she leaned up against the door about 25 feet away from the animal and carefully squeezed off a shot. Who knows where she hit the animal but he said then it really started to

scream and wildly jump around all over the place as Lois ran back up the hill to the phone.

She was crying hysterically when I took the call. "John, I shot the cat but he won't die. He's screaming twice as loud and jumping all over the place. You have to come home and shoot him." "Lois, now listen to me," I said. "Were you real close when you shot him?" She was still crying and told me, "No." Well, here is what you have to do. Go down there and get the gun barrel close to the cat, wait till he settles down, and then shoot him in the ear. If he still moves, shoot him again and again until he stops. It's no big thing. Just shoot him until he's dead. Now, pull yourself together and go do it."

The poor girl! She was certainly out of her element for sure. She told me later that she just did what I told her to do and has no idea how many times she shot that tomcat, but it finally succumbed. I don't know how many times she actually hit the cat, but I found eleven spent cartridges on the floor of the old garage."

Well, you're getting a little idea of my mom and dad's personalities, aren't you? They were quite different to say the least and there are a lot more stories like this one. Let's just say my mom was a very patient and enduring woman. And I do love my dad, so, again, please don't take this as a dad-bashing story. Remember, he's the one that wrote this story in a book!

But in this situation, would you say my dad was cherishing his wife? I would say no. Understandably he had serious commitments at work, but there probably would have been some better ways to take care of this issue for my mom without trying to teach her how to use a gun on the phone and then asking her to go shoot a wild animal on the spot.

To cherish our wives, men, we need to be treating them with love and tenderness in all things. The concept of cherishing expresses the idea of placing a high value on someone...protecting them like you would a precious jewel or a valuable pearl. Get an image in your mind for a moment of your most prized material possession. What kinds of things do you do to protect and care for it and make sure it doesn't get damaged or stolen? Chances are you're thinking about it a lot, securing it,

maintaining it, enjoying it and treating it with tender care. The question is, are you doing these types of things for your wife? Or are you just coexisting, while your main focus is directed elsewhere? Are you treating her in ways that grow your love relationship, or are you doing things that are building up resentment within her?

Husbands, what are some practical ways that we can be cherishing our wives? How about listening to her with your full attention? How about planning specific ways you can regularly communicate your love to her in ways that she understands? How about planning fun things you can do together...date nights or weekend getaways? Or maybe helping her with some household duties? Or maybe tackling something on the “honey-do” list without having to be reminded 10 times? How about communicating with her and sharing your struggles and challenges? Men are not always known for their great communication skills, are they? How about adjusting your priorities so that she knows she is more important to you than your hobbies or your new favorite toy? How about making sure she gets some alone time so she can do what she likes to do?

These are just a few practical ideas, men. And believe me, I could use them just as much as any other husband here. Mindy’s probably thinking, “Yeah, Joe, these sound like great ideas for you!” And she’s right. But the bottom line is, husbands, God is calling each of us to give ourselves up for our wives, loving them as we love ourselves, and making sure we are nourishing and cherishing them. Second only to God, our wives and our kids should be the highest priority of our lives and our most treasured possessions.

Let’s make an honest assessment, men, on how we’re doing in our marriages and whether or not we’re functioning as the head according to God’s design. Clearly none of us are doing it perfectly, nor will we ever reach that state of perfection. But as we pursue Christ and walk more and more closely with him, this is where he’s calling us in our marriages. As we personally experience Christ giving himself up for us, leading, nourishing, cherishing and making us more like him, we, in turn, learn to walk like he walks, giving ourselves up in order lead, love, nourish and cherish our wives, loving them like we love our own bodies.

As we’re told in verse 31 of Ephesians chapter 5, we have become one flesh with our wives...we are now one body and should take care of each other like we take

care of our own bodies. In our marriages and in the body of Christ, this is how we are called to operate: in unity and in mutual love and care for each other...as one unified body.

VI. A FINAL WARNING

But before we wrap up today, I want to issue a final warning to husbands. As you learn to love, protect, nourish and cherish your wives, take care that you never place your wives above God and make your highest priority protecting them and keeping them happy at all costs. Sometimes we can become so focused on protecting our wives, pleasing them, and keeping peace in the home that we can allow them to become our highest priority and even refuse to confront darkness or sin in their lives because we don't want to risk arousing their anger.

Paul warns of this in 1st Corinthians 7, verses 32 to 34, where he discusses the challenges that come with being married and how it's easy for us to allow pleasing our wives to become our main focus. He says:

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided.

How many of you husbands out there prefer to have your wives pleased and happy? How many of you love it when they're mad at you or say, "We need to talk," when you walk through the door? How many of you love it when your wives give you "the look?" I don't know any men who love it when there's conflict in their marriage or when they've really ticked off their wives and are reaping the consequences. But men, we need to always keep our main focus on pleasing God and that sometimes means we have to risk starting a fight and dealing with the consequences if our wives have sin in their lives or are putting what they want above what God wants. And wives, the same is true for you. If your husbands are allowing sin to take root in their lives, you need to be willing to confront them as well.

Our highest priority must always be God and his purposes, and if we're really going to love and cherish and nourish each other, we need to have tough love and

be willing to deal with a little conflict from time to time to keep each other on track with God.

VII. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

As I mentioned last week, God has really been using this study to place on my heart that we as men and husbands need to rise up and fulfill the calling God has given us in the church and in our marriages. We live in a culture where godly, courageous men, willing and able to lead in the church and in their marriages are very hard to find. But as we've seen in our study, God has called men to do just that, and this can only happen when we get serious about pursuing God and walking by his power.

We have a really amazing opportunity coming up, men, right here at our church, that can help each of us move further along in this process. It's going to involve some sacrifice and time commitment. You may even have to let some other things go in your life for a period of time. But I don't think you'll find a better opportunity to grow in your faith and start becoming the men God has called you to be in the church and in your marriages. And wives, I want to ask you to please give serious consideration and prayer to allowing your husbands one night a week over the next year to devote to a focused pursuit of Christ with other men. The fruit that it will bear in their lives and in your marriages will be well worth the sacrifice.

The opportunity we have is a 43-week study from Conservative Baptist Northwest called the Relational Elders Training. But please don't let the word "elder" scare you off. Andy Baxter, from CB Northwest, who would be facilitating this weekly study, said this about the training:

"The RET is for any of the men in your church desiring to grow in their personal relationship with our Triune Lord God. Past, present and future leaders are the focus. We have seen former leaders become rejuvenated in their desire and abilities to serve the Lord. Present leaders benefit from the training and equipping that comes by actually putting into practice things they know but may lack the "know how" to become and do what God calls us to be and do. The training is an excellent means by which to identify and equip future leaders."

This really is a powerful study, men, and I've heard some great testimonies of how God has used it in other churches. And I'm convinced that God has provided this opportunity "for such a time as this" in our church. Andy is currently teaching the class in Baker City on Sunday evenings and in Milton-Freewater on Tuesday evenings, so he will already be in the area to teach our class on Monday evenings.

We don't have an official start date, but I'm hoping that it will be early to mid-February. We would meet on Monday evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm and then the men's prayer group would meet from 8:00 to 9:00 pm. As far as study and preparation time as week, we've been told it typically takes about 2 hours.

I know we're all busy, many of us have young kids, or other commitments, but I would really like to challenge you men to set aside some other things to devote to this focused pursuit of God and this opportunity to be disciplined and discover how God can use you powerfully in the body of Christ and in your marriages. Please give it some serious prayer and consideration over the next week or two. And wives, while it will mean some time away from the family for your husbands, I believe it will be well worth the sacrifice and investment in the fruit it will yield.

Over the next couple of weeks I'm going to be sending around a sign-up sheet and I may even be talking to some of you personally. I'm also looking into some options for an evening or weekend study for ladies to participate in during the upcoming year while the men are doing the Relational Elder Training. Steve Merrick is also planning to teach some Bible studies in the homes of some of our elderly that aren't able anymore to make it to church. And the long-term vision we have is that when this study completes we will kick off Fellowship Groups, which will be home Bible study groups focused on the study of God's Word and building deeper relationships. Husbands and wives and singles will be able to participate in these together.

These are some exciting times here in our church, and I'm looking forward to seeing what God does among us as we get serious about pursuing him and learning to walk worthy by his power...as we allow Christ to love, nourish and cherish us...and as we as husbands and wives learn to better operate in marriage according to God's design! We have a great God! Let's seek him and eagerly watch to see what he does!