

## Black Belt Dad Level 2: A Christ-like Husband

### Case Study #2.1: Faith

A Christ-like Husband understands that the way he treats his wife is the way he treats God.

### D.O.T.K

Only one relationship in your life is a sacrament. It's not your relationship with your kids. Not your relationship with your boss, your dad, or your best friend. Not even your relationship with God. **Only your relationship with your wife is a sacrament.**<sup>1</sup> That means that the marriage bond existing between you and your wife is by nature a holy thing, **the holiest and most important thing in your life**, an objective sign and instrument of God's grace in the world. Your relationship with your spouse is like the Eucharist, like the priesthood, like baptism: in it God is present and active more intensely than in any merely natural reality.

Every sacrament has its own **unique purpose**. The priesthood exists to minister to God's people; the Eucharist exists to nourish the divine life in the Church; baptism exists to adopt fallen human beings into God's own family. What about marriage? Why did God turn that into one of the seven sacraments? What is its primary purpose? **To bring each other to heaven.** To this end, all the other goods of marriage (union, procreation...) are directed. Loving her, and letting yourself be loved by her, is how you become a saint, and how you help her do the same. One contemporary author explains it like this:<sup>2</sup>

- Though monarchies are rare these days, my wife is actually the *daughter of a very wealthy King*. One of the great benefits of this relationship is that he has expressed in no uncertain terms that he loves me and my family and that we will always be welcome in his care. The challenge is that he is also a very powerful King. Though he is benevolent and kind, I do live with an extra sense of caution regarding how I treat my wife. I know that *her Father is always aware of how his daughter is feeling about our relationship*.
- In order to properly and consistently remind myself of whose daughter I married, I often address her as "*Daughter of the King*" or "*DOTK*" for short (especially when we correspond via e-mail). This reminds her that I hold her in proper high esteem. It also reminds me that she is not just another woman, but that *she is of noble stock and is worthy to be treated as such*. Her Father, her lineage, the image of the King she bears in her person, and her lofty position with the King, help me to be ever aware of the need to treat her like the princess she truly is.
- As you might suspect, I am not speaking here of a mere earthly King, but of the great King of the Universe; the one who created and sustains all life, all matter, all being, heaven, and hell. Even more ominous is that this King — who truly does know my every thought, intent, and action toward my spouse — can effortlessly and at any moment withdraw the gift of life and bring me face to face with my final judgment.
- Now, it is important to note that I love my wife deeply, and am highly motivated by that love; she is an incredible woman and obviously designed by God specifically for me. However, my *higher motivation*, the one that transcends all earthly and temporal impulse, is *to honor the King of Kings*; to conform every aspect of my life to Christ, who condescended to become man, lived a perfect life, suffered, and was crucified on my behalf.
- Husband or wife, both are made in the image of God. The one whom God has entrusted to each of us in marriage is *a precious gift in God's sight*. The *care of their soul* is as serious a charge as one can ever receive in life. This most holy responsibility between man and woman must have as its foundation a total self-giving to one who is of royal lineage, and for whom the King has shed his own blood.

<sup>1</sup>That is, if you and your wife are both baptized Christians. If one of you is not, than it is a potential sacrament.

<sup>2</sup>Dan Burke, writing at [www.rcspiritualdirection.com/blog](http://www.rcspiritualdirection.com/blog)



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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What struck you most about the “D.O.T.K” quotation and why?
2. Discuss the following statement (taken from a real conversation): “The reason my marriage failed is because I wanted my spouse to complete me instead of accompany me.”
3. The Church teaches that the purpose of marriage is the eternal and temporal good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. To what extent does popular culture share that conception?
4. What aspects of daily life in today’s world make it hard for us to actively pursue the true goal of marriage? What aspects help us do so?
5. Catholic psychologist and author Gregory Popcak identifies two types of love that go together in a spousal relationship:
  - companionate love (desire and commitment to work for the good of your spouse) and
  - romantic love (passion and emotion expressed in sexuality and sentiment).
  - What proportion of each do you think needs to be present in a recipe for true, lasting marital love? 50/50? 25/75?...

### QUOTATION

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

(St Paul, Letter to the Ephesians 5:28)

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I’ve learned from this discussion?)**

- Invite my wife for a “date night” to do one of her favorite things in the coming week, and personally make any needed arrangements (babysitting, reservations, etc.)
- Surprise my wife with a small special gift that reflects one of her personal hobbies or interests (a new book, CD, clothing item, etc.).
- Rent the movie “Fireproof” and watch it together, and then discuss each others’ reactions to the film.



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### Case Study #2.2: Wisdom

A Christ-like Husband establishes and maintains channels of effective communication with his wife, so their relationship stays grounded in truth.

### LEARNING AND USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE FOR YOUR SPOUSE

Renowned psychologist and author Dr James Dobson once wrote: “Love is a four-lettered word spelled T-I-M-E.” A husband has to take the initiative to *create parameters* in which frequent, regular, and sincere communication with his wife can take place, and that means investing *time*. A *log-jam* in communication is a *time-bomb* waiting to explode a marriage.

Author and marriage counselor Jim Burns suggests that, in today’s fast-paced world, husbands should take the initiative in establishing three regular (weekly, or every other week) “meetings” with his wife:

1. A **“business” meeting** in which you discuss all the practical and economic things about the family, kids, house, etc. What expenditures are coming up? What’s our situation? Where should we go on vacation?...
2. A **“spiritual” meeting** in which you discuss each other’s growth in holiness and the kids’ moral and spiritual challenges, victories, and needs. What has been happening in my/your prayer life? What temptations is Johnny struggling with and how can we help him?...
3. An **unbreakable “date night.”** This is something that you as a husband plan and execute, just as you used to do when you were courting your wife. This is not a sloppy, unplanned thing. But it will only be a relaxing and energizing time if you feel comfortable not spending the whole time dealing with other, “business-like” topics. By establishing the other two meetings, you create space for enjoying each other as people when you go on your date night.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION – PART I:

- How do you think having these kinds of “meetings” with your wife would affect your relationship with her?
- In your professional life, what official channels of communication help the office run well? Is there any way you could adapt similar practices to help communication with your most important “partner,” your wife?
- What other “tactics” could you employ to make sure that your marriage has clear, open, dependable channels of communication?



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### PART II:

Choosing to dedicate time for substantial, one-on-one communication is essential for *grounding your marriage in truth*, not just in rash judgments and dangerous assumptions. But to spend that time well also requires knowing *how to communicate*. Two areas are especially crucial for husbands: 1) Dealing constructively with conflict (which will be covered in Unit 3), and; 2) Knowing how to tell your wife that you love her.

Scientists and psychologists have used a concept called “love languages” to describe the obvious (but often ignored) fact that different people receive meaningful messages in different ways. Linguist John Grinder and mathematician Richard Bandler originally identified three different ways people prefer to give and receive affection:

1. Visual (seeing) love language: “Show me that you love me!”
2. Auditory (hearing) love language: “Tell me that you love me!”
3. Kinesthetic (touching) love language: “Let’s just be together!”

Author and psychologist Gregory Popcak explains the importance of knowing which language your spouse prefers:

*“Very often, what’s missing is a particular love language [without which your spouse will] suffer from a kind of marital sensory deprivation. For example, if you are primarily a kinesthetic love, your nervous system will literally crave touch... If you don’t receive enough loving input through your most acute senses, you will physically feel dried up and dull when with your spouse. Why wouldn’t you? The neural pathways that carry loving signals to your brain are dried up and dulled. They are literally atrophying from a lack of stimulation. If this continues over a long period of time, you may become depressed, possibly seriously so. As a husband... you get from God an immense amount of power to affect the health of your mate’s body, mind, and spirit. Will you love your spouse the way she needs to be loved, the way God wants you to love her? Your marriage. Your choice.”*

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION – PART II:

1. Miscommunication in this essential area happens when one spouse simply (wrongly) assumes that the other spouse has the same preferred love language. Come up with possible examples of this kind of miscommunication.
2. Author and Protestant pastor Gary Chapman came up with a more concrete list of five love languages: 1) *Words of affirmation*; 2) *Quality time*; 3) *Receive gifts*; 4) *Acts of service*; 5) *Physical touch*.
  - a. Which of the three “sensory” love languages does each of Dr Chapman’s categories best correspond to?
  - b. Judging from experience, which categorization (the three sensory languages or the five Chapman languages) do you think is more accurate? Which is more helpful in thinking about how to communicate better your love to your spouse?

### QUOTATION

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4: 29-32)

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I’ve learned from this discussion?)**

1. Pick a night of the week that will be our “business” meeting, and one for our “date night.”
2. Discuss the “love languages” with my wife, and identify each other’s primary language.

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### Case Study #2.3: Love

A Christ-like Husband discovers and strives to meet the real needs of his wife.

### MANIFOLD WAYS OF MEETING THE ONE BASIC NEED: LOVE

*The Marriage Encounter* ministry has identified three stages that every marriage goes through: 1) Romance; 2) Disillusion; 3) Joy. The defining characteristic of each stage is the spouses' *definition of love*.

- In the “romance” stage, spouses consider love to be a feeling — the strongest feeling they have ever experienced, the feeling that led them to get married.
- In the “disillusionment” stage, that strong romantic feeling, the emotion of “being in love,” *wanes or disappears*. This is a natural thing; feelings are inherently transitory. This is a time of crisis, which is meant to be time of transition to a more mature spousal love.
- Marital “joy” is the product of becoming convinced that *love is fundamentally a decision*, not a feeling.

Sam, a Marriage Encounter leader, explains:

- “If you perceive that love is not a feeling but a *choice*, you have a greater range of ways to tell her, ‘I love you.’ Actions speak louder than words. I can decide to love her by not screaming, in spite of feelings I have. By putting the other person first, I am acting out my love. If I am more open and honest with her, letting her know how I feel — that decision to share wholeheartedly involves risk and is an *act of the will*. I felt relieved when I heard that ‘love is a decision.’ It gives me freedom to show my love in spite of feelings. My act of love is freely chosen.”

A husband's love matures and bears fruit when he is constantly asking himself: “*What does my wife need in order to flourish as a human being, and how I can give that to her or help her get it?*” This is one reason the husband has to take the initiative in the area of communication, otherwise he can never know her real needs, or even if he does, he may not learn how to meet that need.

- A variation on an old fable is used by Catholic author and psychologist Gregory Popcak to emphasize the importance both of *discovering* someone's real needs and of finding the *right way* to meet them:

A beautiful young princess asked a wise old bard how she could find the perfect prince. The bard told her that the perfect prince had been cursed and turned into a frog, and was living in a nearby stream (it was the only frog that wore a golden crown). The bard explained that if she could convince this prince that she loved him, the curse would be broken and they could live happily ever after. She ran off and found the frog. Then she sang love songs to it, but that didn't seem to convince the frog that she loved him. So she gathered a bouquet of flowers, but that didn't work either. So she wrote a love poem to him. No dice. Finally, she took the frog to the old bard and explained everything she had done. “You gave me a defective frog-prince,” she said to the bard. But the bard said, “No, you just don't know how frogs think. You have to kiss the frog to convince it of your love.” She was disgusted by that idea. But she screwed up her courage, closed her eyes, and kissed the slimy amphibian on the mouth. Lo and behold, the curse was broken and the handsome prince and beautiful princess lived happily ever after.



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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Examine this chart of some common needs experienced by wives and then come up with at least **THREE DIFFERENT** ways a husband may be able to meet those needs.

COMMON NEEDS	POSSIBLE WAYS TO MEET THEM
Affection	1.
	2.
	3.
Conversation	1.
	2.
	3.
Recreational companionship	1.
	2.
	3.
Honesty and openness	1.
	2.
	3.
Admiration/Respect	1.
	2.
	3.
Family commitment	1.
	2.
	3.

### QUOTATION

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:1-4)

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)**

1. Choose two of the 'common needs' in the chart above, and decisively act on one of my 'possible ways to meet them'.
2. Take 15 minutes of quiet time and think about the hardest area for me to act lovingly towards my wife. Write it down in a few words, along with my desire to grow in this area, and share it with my wife one night this week.



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### Case Study #2.4: Responsibility

A Christ-like Husband takes the initiative to be the spiritual and moral leader of the home.

### PARABLE OF THE GENEROUS MAN

Catholic author and psychologist Gregory Popcak uses the following parable (adjusted for this lesson) to illustrate the unpopular reality that God created the husband to be the *head* of the family and the wife to be its *heart*.

There was once a kind and generous man. He attended church faithfully. He ran a successful business. He gave generously to charitable causes and was on plenty of boards. His pastor praised him for taking the hours no one else wanted in Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. He was universally praised for being such a civic leader. He was often seen with his rosary, and he often prayed when he had a few free moments. He felt full of the Spirit; he defended the faith; his wife and children admired him; everyone agreed he was a good man.

One day he died. He found himself surrounded by beautiful light, but also filled with a strange sadness. Standing before him was Christ in his awesome glory, but when the man looked into Christ's eyes, a tear rolled down the Lord's cheek. "Why are you crying, Lord?" asked the man.

Jesus said nothing, but pointed to a small group of people huddled in the darkness behind him. The man walked over to them, then stopped in his tracks. The sight sickened him: there, at his feet, were the emaciated forms of his wife and children. They were alive, but barely. Terrified, the man cried out: "Lord! What happened?"

Jesus answered, "You are looking at the souls of your wife and children. They are starving for me. You did not show them how to find me while you were with them. Now, they don't know where to look." But the man argued, "Lord, what do you mean? I was a model Christian: I defended the faith, served my community, gave time and money to the Church... How can you say I didn't show them how to find you?"

Jesus shook his head: "My son, do you still not understand? Your family admired you, but they never knew you well enough to love you, much less to see me in you. You gave to others so that you could avoid giving to the ones I gave to you."



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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What struck you most about the parable and why?
2. God's design for the family includes the husband as the family's head and leader, as St Joseph was the head of the Holy Family (the angel kept giving instructions to *him*, not to the Blessed Virgin Mary), and as a bishop is the head of a diocese (which is why the Christian family is traditionally called "the domestic Church").
  - a. Does this mean the husband is more important or has more dignity in God's eyes than the wife? Why or why not?
  - b. Does this mean the husband should make all decisions and rules by himself? Why or why not?
3. In pagan Rome, the father of a family was called "pater familias" and had the legal power of life and death over all family members. He was a dictator. The Christian concept of a father's headship of the household follows a different model, that of Christ, the servant leader, who gave himself up for his spouse, the Church. The husband is the first to follow Christ, and his family follows him.
  - a. What expectation does today's secular view of family life set up for a husband?
  - b. Describe how each of the three models of being a husband (dictator, servant leader, secularist) might respond to the following situations:
    - i. The husband comes home after a grueling day at work to find out that his wife has totaled her car (everyone is physically fine).
    - ii. Saturday morning rolls around and the wife informs her husband that their 14-year-old son, who has a basketball game that day, has refused to do his chores all week long.
    - iii. The husband was gone on a business trip over the weekend. When he comes home, his wife informs him that their 16-year-old daughter refused to go to Mass on Sunday.
4. In his book *Successful Fathers*, Catholic educator and author James Stenson explains the necessity of a husband's active leadership as follows: "*Apparently, it is not simply patterns of correct conduct that teenagers are looking for. What is happening here is much more important. Adolescents look to their father, more than ever before, to give final form to their conscience, the internalized objective standards of right and wrong, the standards adults try to live by in the sight of men and God. Psychology has substantiated that, though both parents must form the consciences in small children, the formational role gradually shifts to the father as the children approach maturity. Dad is increasingly seen as the arbiter and model for objective, unsentimental standards of morality. The conscience must be followed in the outside world, and this is Dad's territory.*"
  - a. Given this reality, what do you think will happen to adolescent children if the husband leaves moral and religious guidance up to the wife?
  - b. What fears or insecurities may inhibit a husband from taking this leadership role in the home?

### QUOTATION

Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since, as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church is subject to Christ, so should wives be to their husbands, in everything.

(Ephesians 5:22-24)

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)**

1. Speak with my wife about how I allocate my time... what is her perspective?
2. Identify one 'problem' in the family I have avoided dealing with, and take the initiative to address it plainly with my wife/children.

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### Case Study #2.5: Integrity

A Christ-like Husband lives sexual intimacy truthfully, respectfully, and joyfully.

## FORGETTING ABOUT THE “PERFECT SEX LIFE” AND WORKING ON A “GOOD SEX LIFE”

### Truthfully:

The Church teaches that sexual intimacy has *intrinsic meaning* in God's design for human nature. That meaning is *unitive* and *procreative*. Sexual intimacy is meant to bring the spouses closer together as human beings created to love and be loved, and it is meant to be the sacred action by which new human beings are conceived. Violating that meaning causes damage both to the individual spouses, and to the marriage itself, just as lying (violating the intrinsic meaning of human communication) causes damage.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How do the following sins violate the intrinsic, God-given meaning of sexual intimacy?

- Pornography
- Masturbation
- Adultery
- Prostitution
- Artificial contraception
- Artificial Reproduction
- Homosexuality
- Divorce and remarriage

### Respectfully

In his book *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women*, renowned Christian author and psychologist Dr James Dobson identifies three major differences between masculine and feminine sexual appetites:

1. Men are primarily excited by *visual* stimulation, whereas women are much less visually stimulated and, in general, are primarily excited by the *sense of touch*.
2. For men, sexual intimacy tends to be more of a *physical reality*; they can be impassioned merely by the presence of an attractive body. For women, sexual intimacy is a much more *emotional experience*; they tend to be stimulated by the romantic aura surrounding a man, his character and personality. (Think about the difference between the pornographic magazines men use to fantasize and the trash romance novels women use.)
3. Men tend to become excited and reach orgasm *more quickly* than women.
4. Men tend to hunger for sexual release *more consistently* than women.

These different tendencies are built into human nature at the physical, emotional, and psychological levels. God did it on purpose. By *being aware of and respecting* them, spouses can better achieve the purposes for which sexual intimacy exists.



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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of any society influences that encourage men to ignore or belittle these differences?
2. Think of three ways husbands typically fail to respect the unique characteristics of their wives' sexual appetite.
3. Think of three ways husbands can effectively respect these characteristics.

#### Joyfully:

Dr Dobson also lists five behaviors a man can engage in to help meet his wife's sexual needs:

1. Emphasize the romantic element as a prelude to intercourse.
2. Not demand that his wife experience orgasms, and certainly not insist that they occur simultaneously. (Some women do not have to experience orgasms in order to enjoy intercourse.)
3. "Perhaps the most dramatic contribution a husband can make to marital sexual relationships is to reverse the trend toward pressurized silence... [T]he husband should take the lead in releasing the safety valve for his wife... getting her to verbalize her feelings, her fears, her aspirations. There is something magical to be found in such soothing conversation; tensions and anxieties are reduced when they find verbal expression. To the men of the world, I can only say, "Try it.""
4. Pay attention to the geography of intercourse. "Spontaneity has its place... [But] I believe sex should be planned for and prepared for and anticipated." Simply tacking it on to the end of a tiring day is not the best formula for joyful intimacy.
5. Recognize the connection between her self-esteem and sexual enjoyment. Expunge from your vocabulary any comments that may, even jokingly, wound your wife's self-esteem, e.g., comments about her age, weight, breast size, wrinkles...

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think it is so hard for many couples to talk openly with each other about their sex lives?
2. Why do you think couples today tend to lose self-confidence if every sexual encounter isn't filled with fireworks and dramatic, Hollywoodian passion?
3. As regards sexual satisfaction, which do you think is more important for most women, playfulness or passion?

### QUOTATION

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.  
(Genesis 2:21-25)

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)**

1. Choose a quiet time & ask my wife about her feelings about our sexual life together.
2. My idea...

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### Case Study #2.6: Fortitude

A Christ-like Husband defends his wife from the devil on a daily basis.

## TURNING CONFLICT INTO CONNECTION

Peter and Heather seemed like an exemplary couple. They were both well-educated, they were both mature, and they were both faithful Catholics. But early into their marriage they ran into a snag. Although they each considered themselves effective communicators, they began to fall into a pattern of not being able to resolve conflicts. They decided to get counseling for this from an older, mentor couple at their parish.

In one meeting, to illustrate a recent argument, Peter explained, “Heather bought a lamp on sale. To please me, she bought a less expensive one for eighty dollars, but it wasn’t satisfactory. I did not like it and thought the price was a rip-off – that store charges high prices. I wouldn’t mind if it were the ideal lamp –” Heather interrupted and added, “Here’s a lamp that you are not happy with and I am not happy with; that made it more traumatic. Here we are having a major struggle over something not very fundamental... We *can* communicate. We can articulate things, but we don’t resolve our disputes. I sense a lack of desire to bring about a solution.”

- *Pause for a moment and consider: Was this conflict really about the lamp?...*

Heather went on to explain what was really at the heart of this dispute, from her perspective: “One would assume that if you have two good communicators, that you communicate well. That’s not necessarily the case. It is one thing to articulate your feelings and quite another for both people to be willing to listen and to change... After you have expressed your feelings a few times and felt shot down, you then tend not to want to share them again, out of a fear of being wounded, ending up hurt and frustrated again.”

- The real issue for Heather wasn’t the lamp. The conflict over the lamp agitated her deepest fear: Peter wasn’t rejecting her choice of the lamp; Peter was rejecting her as a person.
- Pat and Bill Farrel, in their excellent book, *The Marriage Code*, identify the passcode to a wife’s heart with the word “security.” Modern American culture tends to identify this kind of security with financial stability. That is a mistake — poor couples (like Joseph and Mary) can have deeply fulfilling marriages. The wife, in order to fulfill her mission as a wife and flourish as a human being, must receive constant validation as a person from her husband. That’s her deepest security need. The husband must become her mirror, in which she sees herself as beautiful, valued, needed, wanted, and cherished, simply for who she is.
- The devil’s primary strategy against the wife is to sow doubts in her heart about how much her husband values and cherishes her. This happens especially through unresolved conflict, but also through “spiritual divorce,” which occurs when the spouses share the same house, but live independent lives.
- The courageous husband must be aware of the devil’s attack strategy and battle intelligently against it; he must make sure that his devotion to her is a constant reflection of God’s devotion to her.



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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Conflict is inevitable. What matters most is how it is handled. Is it handled constructively, or destructively? Emotions should be expressed, but considerately.
  - a. According to some Christian psychologists, we all have a naturally defensive reaction to conflict. If we can identify it, we will better be able to counteract it. Here are the four defensive reactions – which one characterizes you?
    - i. **Withdraw:** When conflict surfaces, I retreat back into my cave.
    - ii. **Escalate:** When conflict surfaces, it taps into my reservoir of stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction and allow myself to vent uncontrollably.
    - iii. **Belittle:** When conflict surfaces, I start cutting down my spouse, insulting them, pointing out all their flaws.
    - iv. **Negativize:** When conflict surfaces, everything turns black and I can only see all the problems and imperfections of my marriage, myself, and my family.
  - b. If you have the desire to protect your wife from the devil's attacks on her security, then, with the grace of God, you can counteract these destructive reactions to conflict.
    - i. In the past, what has helped you turn conflicts or disputes into moments of deep connection with your wife?
    - ii. Of the following *rules of thumb* for dealing with conflict constructively, which do you think is most practical? Which do you think would have the biggest positive effect? Which do you think is most difficult?
      1. Keep in mind that the *person* is always more important than the *issue*.
      2. Force yourselves to deal with *one issue at a time*. Even if other issues come up, table them and close one loop at a time.
      3. *Cultivate the Skill of Honor* outside times of conflict. You honor your spouse by valuing her (she is autographed by God), by writing out a list of her good qualities and reviewing it regularly, and by regularly verbalizing your appreciation for her in speech or writing.

### QUOTATION

*Even if you are angry, do not sin: never let the sun set on your anger, or else you will give the devil a foothold.*

*(Ephesians 4:26-27)*

### POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

**(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)**

1. Write down how I feel about how I handle conflicts with my wife, and then ask her to do the same. Then discuss it together.
2. Write a spontaneous note to my wife mentioning how much I appreciate one of her best qualities...leave it on her pillow before bedtime.

