

THE LOVE  
AND  
RESPECT

DEVOTIONAL

52 WEEKS TO  
EXPERIENCE LOVE & RESPECT  
IN YOUR MARRIAGE

DR. EMERSON EGGERICHS



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For his tireless efforts in editing this devotional book,  
I express my heartfelt thanks to Fritz Ridenour,  
my friend and colleague,  
and dedicate this book to his beloved wife, Jackie Ridenour.  
On December 19, 2009, Jackie stepped ashore  
and found it heaven,  
breathed new air and found it celestial.



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# The Love & Respect Video Devotional

The Love & Respect Video Devotional is made available free to you! Simply scan the below QR code and receive instant access to the *Love & Respect* video series. These inspirational videos complement the devotional you hold in your hands. Go deeper in applying the principles of love and respect in your marriage.



# INTRODUCTION

## *Wanted: A Husband-Friendly Devotional Book*

### FIRST, A WORD TO THE HUSBANDS:

Gentlemen, what do I mean by a “husband-friendly devotional book”? I know too many men who feel that devotional books for couples are geared more toward women. That is why many of the illustrations and stories in these devotionals are geared toward men. I am not trying to give men a special pass or to be extra hard on women. No goodwill man I know wants his wife treated unfairly. But at the same time, men don’t want to be treated unfairly. A key reason for the success of *Love & Respect* is that it is fair and balanced. That is why many men get excited about feeling respected and then motivated about loving and treating their wives as equals. I am hoping wives will enjoy being challenged as equals with their husbands as they do these devotions together.

As Sarah and I travel the land giving Love & Respect conferences, we hear that wives want to have devotional times with their husbands, but their husbands shy away. Are most husbands

avoiding devotional times with their wives because they are not good Christian men who believe the Scriptures and want to follow Christ? I don't believe that for a minute. Nonetheless, many couples have told me that the typical husband just doesn't find the typical devotional book for couples that interesting—or that friendly. After trying it a few times, he just sort of finds other things to do.

I think I know why. Most women experience an emotional and spiritual connection with their husbands when praying and reading Scripture together. The typical woman is energized by the typical couples' devotional because she is quite willing to share her feelings, her weaknesses, and her needs in order to feel oneness in her marriage. And she expects the same from her husband.

But if you are a typical husband, you are not that eager to be so transparent, and you don't see this as the primary purpose of a devotional book for couples. I know because I, too, do not get up in the morning with this kind of mind-set. Instead, I am thinking about fulfilling my responsibilities in my field of endeavor. Like most Christian men, I prefer to pray about what the Scripture is saying and how it applies to my tasks for the day and then commit this into God's hands.

But if I sense that Sarah might be using our prayer time to correct me or change my behavior to match her own Pink perceptions, I automatically start to feel resistant. Does this mean I am not interested in Sarah's needs or the needs of the rest of the family? Of course not, but my point is this: as I focus on Jesus during our prayer times, I am much more open to hearing His voice concerning something I might be doing to bug Sarah. I do want to be corrected, but not because Sarah has endeavored to change me during our devotional times. The changes come because God has spoken to my heart through His Word.

## INTRODUCTION

I am grateful that neither of us is trying to use devotional times to change the other. Sarah is committed to letting God be God in my life, and I am committed to letting God be God in her life. Our conscious attempt to approaching devotionals in this way is paying big dividends. We highly recommend it, and I also recommend “Options for Using This Book on Your Own Terms” (page xvii), which is full of ideas for using the fifty-two devotionals in this book to your best advantage as you seek to have God work in and through both of you.

### AND NOW A WORD TO THE WIVES:

Ladies, may I be gently and lovingly honest with you? What I say may sound a bit stern, but please hear me out. If you have been to an L&R conference or have read the book, you are familiar with the principle of Pink and Blue. As a woman, you are approaching devotionals with a Pink view of life that is much different from your husband’s Blue view, and this can lead to problems, as I have already mentioned.

In fact, it could well be that your big, strong husband lives in fear of your disapproval or criticism. With many couples the wife is often better versed in the Bible than her husband, and he probably doesn’t feel he can “pray as well” to boot. In short, devotionals can make him feel vulnerable, like he is in a situation that will reveal his faults and flaws. Nobody—Blue or Pink—appreciates being in this position. It is contrary to human nature.

But even more threatening to a devotional’s success is Pink’s natural desire to want to “connect” with Blue while having devotions together. She pictures the devotional time as an opportunity to talk with her husband and share her feelings, in the hope

that he will make changes that will make her feel more loved. I understand her womanly heart, but devotional time must not be seen as a vehicle for marital enrichment or therapy.

Am I saying that feeling emotionally connected to your husband during devotions is absolutely forbidden by God? Of course not, but let this be a by-product, not the goal. I was trying to make this very point when Sarah and I were having dinner with friends during the writing of this book. To help the wife process what I was trying to say, I asked her if I could use an outlandish example. She agreed, so I said, "What would you say if your husband wanted to have sex right after having devotions together?"

She frowned a little and said, "No way. Oh, I get it."

"Right," I replied. "This is about the two of you seeking Christ, not about connecting sexually or emotionally. That might happen after having devotions, but it is not your goal."

Feeling encouraged, I decided to make one more point. "On a similar note," I said, "let me try to convey what these big strong men feel about wives pushing them to read devotional books so they can 'connect.' What would you say if your husband said, 'We haven't read that diet book I bought you for a whole week?'"

She laughed out loud. "That's pathetic!"

"Yes, it is," I replied. "I'm not comparing devotionals to diet books, but I am comparing a woman's sensitivity to messages of disapproval with a man's. I don't know all the reasons why devotionals for couples have proven unsuccessful with so many men, but I believe the problem is rooted in a husband's fear of his wife's disapproval. He is not indifferent to connecting with Christ, but he is turned off by the thought that he must gratify his wife emotionally while having devotions together. Fearing that he will fail and be criticized, he stops showing much interest in devotional time together."

“I really get it,” she said with a smile. “I see clearly what you are saying.”

Ladies, perhaps some of you may think I’m making too much of all this, but please hear my heart as you would an older brother who loves you dearly. See this book as an opportunity to have fifty-two devotional times with your husband. Do not see any one devotional as something God will use to motivate him to better love you. I have seen too many men under that kind of pressure drift away, crushing the spirit of their wives who long to read scriptural thoughts and to pray with them. I have tried to make these devotionals as attractive to husbands as I can, while still appealing to wives. Please read “Options for Using This Book on Your Own Terms” (page xvii) for more on how Sarah and I have approached devotionals over the years, as well as many other ideas that can be of help. Use these devotionals with the goal of joining with your husband and believing that God is going to do something wonderful. Allow Him to work, and I guarantee He will!

#### AND FINALLY, A WORD TO BOTH OF YOU:

Obviously, if we hope to have husband-friendly devotional books, we have to do them differently. I am betting on my conviction that if we can create husband-friendly devotionals, the wives will happily take part. Remember, the key premise of Love & Respect is that if the wife respects her husband, he will in turn show her true love, and if the husband loves his wife, she will show him true respect. Yes, I am aware that this premise is not an absolute guarantee. There are always exceptions, role reversals, marriages with issues that need time to work out. Nonetheless, the Love & Respect premise has worked

for thousands of couples. It has worked for Sarah and me. And it can work for you, too, if you hang in there, taking some time to look over the fifty-two devotionals in this book.

Some might ask: Why not more? Why not 365, like other couples' devotional books we've seen? Again, our research tells us that married couples don't want to deal with that much material, that often. So we consulted the survey results from the thousands of couples who have attended a Love & Respect conference, read the book, or watched the DVD. These couples have given us priceless feedback on what works for them and what challenges or hurdles still remain for them to overcome. We took the top concerns that surfaced in the surveys and developed fifty-two devotionals that discuss important Love & Respect scriptures and principles.

As I wrote the devotionals, I tried to keep them brief but still provide enough substance for busy people on the go. As the different topics took shape, they appeared to me like "mini-chapters," and so that is how they are organized: fifty-two brief chapters, each one a complete experience in reviewing each of the Love & Respect principles while you open yourselves to what God's Word has to say to each of you, then to both of you.

I am confident that if you spend devotional time together, the Lord will speak to you from His Word and draw near to you as you draw near to Him. Just always remember the chief (really, the only) ground rule: share what God is saying to your heart, not what you think He needs to say to your mate.

So let's get started. Put my husband-friendly devotionals to the test as you both seek to grow in Christ while reviewing, absorbing, and practicing key concepts from Love & Respect.

## INTRODUCTION



Note: All the devotionals in this book are based on Love & Respect principles. If you have not been exposed to Love & Respect ideas, you can get a brief overview in appendix B, “The Three Cycles of Love & Respect” (page 273).



# OPTIONS FOR USING THIS BOOK ON YOUR OWN TERMS

**A**s I worked with my creative team to develop something really different in devotionals for married couples, we came up with several options for how they can be used:

1. *Consider using these devotions separately, then coming together to compare notes.* Our research tells us that married couples don't always find it easy to "do devotions"—in fact, the opposite is the case. When we asked ministers at various churches how many couples were having devotionals together, the answer was "very few."

One director of a marriage ministry at a megachurch told me: "The most successful couples' devotionals seem to be when the couple doesn't necessarily have to read the devotional at the same time. I know that sounds contrary to what we are trying to accomplish, but most of the couples I've counseled over the years have said: 'It feels really awkward to sit and read a devotional

together, and after we read it, neither of us really know what to say.’ I started suggesting they read it separately, then just talk about it throughout the week. This way it doesn’t feel so forced.”

Sarah and I would concur for a couple of reasons. First, there is no direct statement in Scripture commanding that married couples have devotions together (for more on this, see appendix C, “Devotions for Married Couples: Command or Option?” on page 281). Second, early in our marriage, Sarah and I did not have devotions together. We talked about it and decided to have them separately and then share with each other what we had learned. Sarah was relieved, saying it took a weight off her shoulders.

As for praying together, we would do that, but seldom did we pray for our marriage, because we felt it was just too easy to pray “at” one another and have one of us wind up feeling judged. Instead we would pray for our ministry and for people with needs, and as children arrived we prayed for them and about other family concerns.

Even today, we often read Scripture or other materials alone and then compare notes. And when we pray, we are always careful not to pray *at* one another. If you are recently married, or just starting to explore the concept of having devotions as a couple, am I suggesting you imitate our approach? Not necessarily, but I want you to know that it is an option. You and your spouse have the freedom to work out your own devotional life in a way that works best for you. I do believe, however, that because all of these devotionals are geared to review or

reinforce Love & Respect principles, it is important to explore these principles together at some point, but only after each of you has considered individually what God has to teach you. The primary goal of your devotional time is to experience Christ's love. Your focus must be vertical, not horizontal.

2. *Use these devotionals at your own pace and convenience.* As you can see, these fifty-two short, undated devotional chapters are not organized for use on any kind of daily or weekly basis. Obviously, because there are fifty-two, the idea of doing one per week for a year comes to mind, but that is not required. It is up to the two of you to decide how often to go over a devotional, what time of day to do it, and the approach you want to take. Perhaps you will want to try the do-them-separately-then-compare-notes approach described previously. Or you may feel quite comfortable doing them together. There is no right way to use these devotionals. The best way is the way that works for you.

The following is one suggestion for how a one-chapter-per-week scenario might work. This plan is for a couple that is willing to try devotionals but may have reservations because of previous problems or even failures. You might call the following scenario “inching into the water a little at a time.” Here are the suggested steps, which you can follow, adapt, or change, depending on what is comfortable for you.

- Choose to cover one chapter (devotional) a week.
- Start with chapter 1, which has been designed to launch the Love and Respect devotional. After that, you can use the other devotionals in any order you

wish—up to chapter 52, which is designed to close the book.

- Agree to read the devotional separately as your own schedules allow. Meditate on it and pray about it alone. Make notes you may want to share, but for an agreed-upon amount of time—even several days—work alone, allowing God to speak to you individually about your marriage.

This is as far as some couples may want to go for at least a while. As spouses get used to the material, they may become ready to share with each other. Do not hurry this step. Just let it happen. Agree that you will make no judgments of one another if someone does not want to go on to what is suggested below.

- At some point during the week, come together to share what God has been telling you separately. Read the devotional together, and share any observations or questions you may have noted.
- Talk about the Insight (the boxed item that sums up the truth of the chapter). Pray, but only in a way that is comfortable. Use the Prayer suggestions or your own ideas. Be very aware of the danger of praying “at” each other, subtly (or not so subtly) asking God to change the other person according to your convictions.
- Consider the Action item at the very end of the chapter. Some of these are simple suggestions that individual spouses can apply as they see fit. Other Action items suggest talking together, and if you want to expand on this conversation, you can refer to the discussion questions in appendix A. This appendix includes several questions for each of the fifty-two chapters that can

provide additional study and applications of the devotional truth each week.

This is just one plan for how to use the devotionals in this book. I believe there is enough material here for just about any couple, from those who are just getting started with having devotions together to seasoned couples who have had them for years.

Whatever approach you take, be determined not to get discouraged if you occasionally miss having devotions, for whatever reason. Life gets busy. You and your family may have hectic schedules. The important thing is to keep working at it. Let the Lord change you, but don't try to change each other. Be patient and trust Him. The goal is to have fifty-two devotionals with your spouse in which the two of you apply Love & Respect principles and focus on God together. I pray that these devotionals inspire, remind, and equip you to live out God's most important word to the church on marriage, as expressed in Ephesians 5:33. Oh the reward that will be yours!



# AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER . . . NOT NECESSARILY

PROVERBS 24:16:

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*For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.*

One of our chief concerns at Love and Respect is not that people hear the message, important as that is, but that couples who attend a conference or read the book will go on to practice love and respect effectively in their daily lives. Of course, I realize each couple has this very same concern, and that's why my heart goes out to those I hear from who "get it" but who aren't able to "stay with it" consistently. They have learned that Love & Respect sounds simple, but it's not so easy to do. Maybe "not natural" is a better phrase. I understand. Sarah and I don't find it easy or natural either, and we have conducted Love & Respect conferences over two hundred times during the last ten years!

These are some of the many confessions I've heard from spouses who are struggling:

- “I’m desperately praying for the Holy Spirit to help me change and be a more respectful wife. It hasn’t been easy though, and I fail much more often than not.”
- “Love & Respect works great when we are practicing it, but we are not consistent. It’s hard not to fall back into old patterns. I am so defensive it isn’t funny.”
- “I am continuously amazed at how quickly we can go for a spin on the Crazy Cycle. I want to cry thinking how my level of knowledge far outweighs my level of obedience.”\*

At this point you may be wondering: *Why is Emerson starting this book with such bad news from couples who fail? How can this help us?*

Hear me out. I am not trying to *discourage* you; I want to *encourage* you by saying right up front that Love & Respect is not a magic bullet. You will try it and find that you won’t always practice it perfectly. To realize this truth and use it is a great source of strength and power. I love Proverbs 24:16 because it gives me such hope. Good people are not

**INSIGHT:** In marriage, it is never about not falling. It is always about getting back up.

perfect, but God says: “A righteous man [or woman] falls seven times, and rises again.” And how do you “rise again”? Here are three guidelines:

1. *Never give up.* If you want to have a strong marriage, you need to accept temporary setbacks as part of the game. In

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\* If you are unfamiliar with the term *Crazy Cycle*, see appendix B, page 273.

baseball terms, keep stepping back up to the plate. According to the baseball statisticians, even Hall of Famers fail to get a hit seven out of ten times. And Babe Ruth, perhaps the greatest slugger of all time, struck out over thirteen hundred times, more than anyone of his day!

2. *Seek forgiveness from God and your spouse.* A wife writes: “I failed to communicate respect to my husband. I’ve asked the Lord to forgive me, and I am preparing an e-mail to ask my husband to forgive me as well.” A husband reports: “I know now how I failed as a husband, friend, and lover, and I’ve asked God and my wife for forgiveness.” Ephesians 4:32 says it all: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (NIV). Sarah and I often find ourselves turning to each other and saying, “I’m sorry—again.”
3. *Ask God to take your hand.* Psalm 37:24 promises that though you stumble, you will not fall, for the Lord will uphold you with His hand. We need God’s helping hand, and it’s always there for us, if we ask Him humbly and confidently for guidance.

The storybook ending is always, “And they lived happily ever after.” We know that’s not really true because the slips, the bumps, and the falls do come in crazy ways. Life is not a matter of attaining some kind of marital nirvana. “Living happily ever after” means knowing how to deal with the imperfect parts of life—not accepting them with resignation but dealing with them through God’s forgiveness and help and *always getting back up* when you fall. In a very real sense, the rest of this book is about just that, as you and your spouse will discover as you mine the riches of Love & Respect.

**PRAYER:** Thank the Lord for His forgiveness, His grace, and the righteousness that only He can bestow. Thank Him for His promise that though the righteous fall, they can rise again and continue to build a strong marriage with love and respect. Ask God to put it in your heart to refuse to let *defeat* defeat you.

**ACTION:** Make personalized copies of Proverbs 24:16 that say, “For a righteous spouse falls seven times, and rises again,” and put them up on bathroom mirrors, inside cupboard doors, and in other places where you will see them every day. (For discussion questions, see page 215 in appendix A.)