

INTRODUCTION

LOVE ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

You may remember how the Beatles sang, “All you need is love.” I absolutely disagree with that conclusion. Five out of ten marriages today are ending in divorce because love alone is *not* enough. Yes, love is vital, especially for the wife, but what we have missed is the husband’s need for respect. This book is about how the wife can fulfill her need to be loved by giving her husband what he needs—respect. Here is the story of one couple who discovered the Love and Respect message just in time:

My husband and I attended your Love and Respect marriage conference. A few days before we had gotten into another “Crazy Cycle” and decided we had had enough and were going to end our marriage. We were both hurt, sad, angry, and despondent. By the way, we are both believers and I work on the staff of a large church.

We had been seeing a Christian marriage counselor and I can honestly say that your conference not only saved our marriage but actually helped us more and gave us more information and strategies than counseling ever did. We had decided to go as

a last-ditch effort, but my husband really didn't believe it would help and almost didn't go. The truths God has revealed to you are both simple and profound. . . . They started a healing process and revolutionized our marriage. If only we had been given this information thirty years ago, what heartache and pain it would have saved us.

Let me just say, after the close on Saturday, we spent the best afternoon and evening with each other we have had in years. It was like we were in our twenties again and so in love. Emerson, I can honestly tell you, I never ever realized how important, how life-giving, respect was to my husband.

What did this woman and her husband hear at that conference? What revolutionized their marriage? What caused two people ready to divorce on Friday to be walking together the next day like two young lovers? The book you have in your hands is the Love and Respect message this couple heard. Their account is one of thousands of letters, notes, and verbal affirmations I have received that testify what can happen when a husband and wife take a different approach to their marriage relationship.

Do you want some peace? Do you want to feel close to your spouse? Do you want to feel understood? Do you want to experience marriage the way God intended? Then try some Love and Respect!

This book is for anyone: people in marital crisis . . . spouses headed for divorce . . . husbands and wives in a second marriage . . . people wanting to stay happily married . . . spouses married to unbelievers . . . divorcées trying to heal . . . lonely wives . . . browbeaten husbands . . . spouses in affairs . . . victims of affairs . . . engaged couples . . . pastors or counselors looking for material that can save marriages.

I know that I am promising a lot, and I wouldn't dream of doing this unless I fully believed that what I have to tell you works. Follow-

ing are more examples of how marriages turn around when wives and husbands discover the message of Love and Respect and start living it out daily:

It has been one year since we attended the Love and Respect conference. It is the single most powerful message on marriage that my husband and I have ever heard. We constantly find ourselves going back to the principles we learned that special weekend. We sit on the couch together and walk through C-O-U-P-L-E and C-H-A-I-R-S and see where we have gotten off track. . . . We have such incredible joy in trying to do things God's way and then seeing Him bless us.



Just a few days ago I decided to tell my husband that I respect him. It felt so awkward to say the words, but I went for it and the reaction was unbelievable! He asked me why I respected him. I listed off a few things, and I watched his demeanor change right before my very eyes.



I am sad that I have been married twenty-two years and just now understand the Respect message. I wrote my husband two letters about why I respected him. I am amazed at how it has softened him in his response to me. I have prayed for years that my husband would love me and speak my love language. But when I began to speak his language, then he responded with what I have wanted.

The above letters are typical of those I receive weekly, if not daily, from people who have gained wisdom by understanding the one key

verse of Scripture that is the foundation for this book. No husband feels fond feelings of affection and love in his heart when he believes his wife has contempt for who he is as a human being. Ironically, the deepest need of the wife—to feel loved—is undermined by her disrespect.

Please understand, however, that what I have to tell you is not a “magic bullet.” Sometimes the glow a couple feels at one of our conferences fades in a few days or weeks, and they succumb to the same old problems—the Crazy Cycle. I like to advise all couples who learn about the power of Love and Respect to give it a six-week test. In that time, they can see how far they have come and how far they still have to go.

The journey to a godly, satisfying marriage is never over, but during three decades of counseling husbands and wives, I have discovered something that can change, strengthen, or improve any marriage relationship. I call it the Love and Respect Connection, and my wife, Sarah, and I are taking this message across America. We are seeing God work in remarkable ways when men and women submit themselves wholeheartedly to this biblical design for marriage. We see it working in our own marriage, where we are still discovering new blessings as we use the Love and Respect Connection to touch each other.

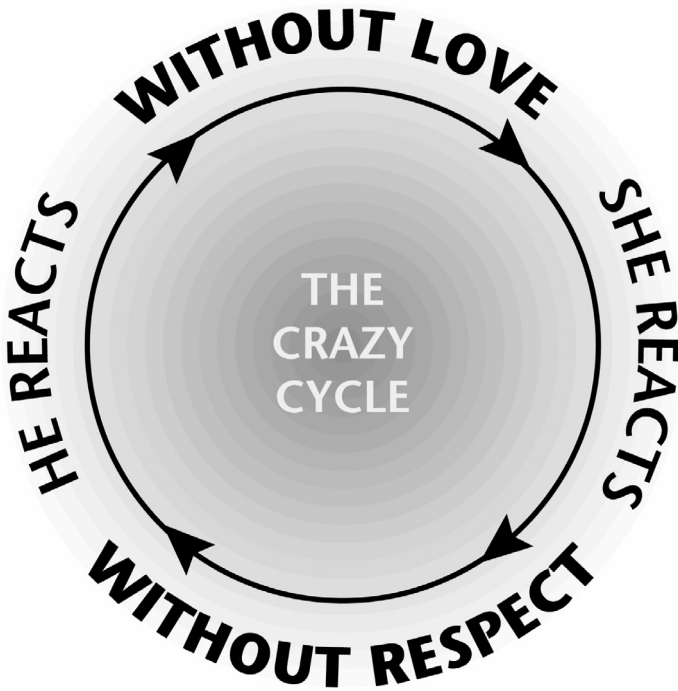
If you and your spouse will practice the Love and Respect Connection, the potential for improving your marriage is limitless. As one wife wrote:

I wanted to let you know, I GOT IT! God granted me the power of this revelation of respecting my husband. . . . This revelation . . . has changed everything in my marriage—my approach, my response, my relationship to God and my husband. It was the missing piece.

For so many couples, respect is, indeed, the missing piece of the puzzle. Read on, and I’ll show you what I mean.

PART ONE

THE CRAZY CYCLE



I wrote this book out of desperation that was turned into inspiration. As a pastor, I counseled married couples and could not solve their problems. The major problem I heard from wives was, “He doesn’t love me.” Wives are made to love, want to love, and expect love. Many husbands fail to deliver. But as I kept studying Scripture and counseling couples, I finally saw the other half of the equation. Husbands weren’t saying it much, but they were thinking, *She doesn’t respect me*. Husbands are made to be respected, want respect, and expect respect. Many wives fail to deliver. The result is that five out of ten marriages land in divorce court (and that includes evangelical Christians).

As I wrestled with the problem, I finally saw a connection: without love from him, she reacts without respect; without respect from her, he reacts without love. Around and around it goes. I call it the Crazy Cycle—marital craziness that has thousands of couples in its grip. In these first seven chapters I will explain how we all get on the Crazy Cycle—and how we all can get off.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SIMPLE SECRET TO A BETTER MARRIAGE

How can I get my husband to love me as much as I love him?" This was the basic question I heard from wife after wife who came to me for counseling during the almost twenty years I pastored a growing congregation. My heart broke for wives as they wept and told me their stories. Women are so tender. On many occasions I sat there with tears rolling down my cheeks. At the same time I became irked with husbands. Why couldn't they see what they were doing to their wives? Was there some way I could help wives motivate these husbands to love them more?

I felt all this deeply because I had been a child in an unhappy home. My parents divorced when I was one. Later they remarried each other, but when I was five, they separated again. They came back together when I was in third grade, and my childhood years were filled with memories of yelling and unsettling tension. I saw and heard things that are permanently etched in my soul, and I would cry myself to sleep at times. I remember feeling a deep sadness. I wet the bed until age eleven and was sent off to military school at age thirteen, where I stayed until I graduated.

As I look back on how my parents lived a life of almost constant

conflict, I can see the root issue of their unhappiness. It wasn't hard to see that my mom was crying out for love and my dad desperately wanted respect.

Mom taught acrobatics, tap dance, and swimming, which gave her a good income and enabled her to live independently of Dad's resources. Dad was left feeling that Mom could get along fine without him, and she would often send him that message. She made financial decisions without consulting him, which made him feel insignificant, as if he didn't matter. Because he was offended, he would react to her in unloving ways. He was sure Mom did not respect him. Dad would get angry over certain things, none of which I am able to recall. Mom's spirit would be crushed, and she would just exit the room. This dynamic between the two of them was my way of life in childhood and into my teenage years.

As a teenager I heard the gospel—that God loved me, He had a plan for my life, and I needed to ask forgiveness for my sins to receive Christ into my heart and experience eternal life. I did just that, and my whole world changed when I became a follower of Jesus.

After graduation from military school, I applied to Wheaton College because I believed God was calling me into the ministry. When I was a freshman at Wheaton, my mother, father, sister, and brother-in-law received Christ as Savior. A change began in our family, but the scars didn't go away. Mom and Dad are now in heaven, and I thank God for their eternal salvation. There is no bitterness in my heart, but only much hurt and sadness. I sensed during my childhood, and I can clearly see now, that both of my parents were reacting to each other defensively. Their problem was they could offend each other most easily, but they had no tools to make a few minor adjustments that could turn off their "flamethrowers."

While at Wheaton, I met a sanguine gal who brought light into every room she entered. Sarah was the most positive, loving, and others-

focused person I had ever met. She had been Miss Congeniality of Boone County, Indiana. She was whole and holy. She loved the Lord and desired to serve Him only. She should have had a ton of baggage from the divorce that had torn her family, but she did not let it defile her spirit. Instead, she had chosen to move on. Not only was she attractive, but I knew I could wake up every day next to a friend.

THE JEAN JACKET “DISAGREEMENT”

I proposed to Sarah when we were both still in college, and she said yes. While still engaged we got a hint of how husbands and wives can get into arguments over practically nothing. That first Christmas Sarah made me a jean jacket. I opened the box, held up the jacket, and thanked her.

“You don’t like it,” she said.

I looked at her with great perplexity and answered, “I do too like it.”

Adamant, she said, “No, you don’t. You aren’t excited.”

Taken aback, I sternly repeated, “I do too like it.”

She shot back. “No, you don’t. If you liked it, you would be excited and thanking me a lot. In my family we say, ‘Oh my, just what I wanted!’ There is enthusiasm. Christmas is a huge time, and we show it.”

That was our introduction to how Sarah and Emerson respond to gifts. Sarah will thank people a dozen times when something touches her deeply. Because I did not profusely thank

her, she assumed I was being polite but could hardly wait to drop off the jacket at a Salvation Army collection center. She was sure I did not value what she had done and did not appreciate her. As for me, I felt judged for failing to be and act in a certain way. I felt as if I were unacceptable. The whole jacket scenario took me by complete surprise.

Sarah and I discovered that “those who marry will face many troubles in this life . . .”
(1 Corinthians 7:28 NIV)

During the jean jacket episode, though neither of us clearly discerned it at the time, Sarah was feeling unloved and I was feeling disrespected. I knew Sarah loved me, but she, on the other hand, had begun wondering if I felt about her as she felt about me. At the same time, when she reacted to my “unenthusiastic” response to receiving the jacket, I felt as if she didn’t really like who I was. While we didn’t express this, nonetheless, these feelings of being unloved and disrespected had already begun to crop up inside.

We were married in 1973 while I was completing my master’s degree in communication from Wheaton Graduate School. From there we went to Iowa to do ministry, and I completed a master’s of divinity from Dubuque Seminary. In Iowa, another pastor and I started a Christian counseling center. During this time, I began a serious study of male and female differences. I could feel empathy for my counseling clients because Sarah and I, too, experienced the tension of being male and female.

YOU CAN BE RIGHT BUT WRONG AT THE TOP OF YOUR VOICE

For example, Sarah and I are very different regarding social interaction. Sarah is nurturing, very interpersonal, and loves to talk to people about many things. After Sarah is with people, she is energized. I tend to be analytical and process things more or less unemotionally. I get energized by studying alone for several hours. When I am with people socially, I interact cordially but am much less relational than Sarah.

One night as we were driving home from a small group Bible study, Sarah expressed some strong feelings that had been building up in her over several weeks.

“You were boring in our Bible study tonight,” she said, almost angrily. “You intimidate people with your silence. And when you do

talk, you sometimes say something insensitive. What you said to the new couple came across poorly.”

I was taken aback but tried to defend myself. “What are you talking about? I was trying to listen to people and understand what they were saying.”

Sarah’s answer went up several more decibels. “You need to make people feel more relaxed and comfortable.” (The decibels rose some more.) “You need to draw them out.” (Now Sarah was almost shouting.) “Don’t be so into yourself!”

I didn’t respond for a few seconds because I was feeling put down, not only by what she said but by her demeanor and her tone. I replied, “Sarah, you can be right but wrong at the top of your voice.”

Sarah recalls that our conversation that night in the car was life-changing for her. She may have been accurate in her assessment of how I was acting around people, but her delivery was overkill. We both dealt with things in our lives due to that conversation. (We still sometimes remind one another, “You know, you can be right but wrong at the top of your voice.”) Overall, I think Sarah has improved more from that conversation than I have. Just this past week she coached me on being more sensitive to someone. (And this is after more than thirty years in the ministry!)

That early episode in our marriage planted more seeds of what I would later be able to describe and articulate. I knew Sarah loved me and her outburst was caused by her desire to help me. She wanted me to appreciate her concern and understand that she was only doing it out of love, but the bottom line was I felt disrespected, attacked, and defensive. Over the years, we continued to grapple with this same problem. She would voice her concern about something I was not focusing on as I should. (“Did you return so-and-so’s phone call? Did you jot a note to so-and-so?”) I would do my best to improve, but occasionally I would slip back, making her feel that I did not value her input.

AND THEN I FORGOT HER BIRTHDAY

A few more years went by, and Sarah's birthday was coming up. She was thinking about how I would respond—would I even remember? She always remembered birthdays, but birthdays weren't big on my radar screen. She knew she would *never* forget my birthday, because she loved me dearly. She wondered, however, if I would celebrate her birthday. She was thinking, *Does he hold me in his heart the way I hold him in mine?*

So what she did was not done in a mean spirit. She was simply trying to discover things about me and men in general. She knew that forgetfulness was a common problem, and she was just being curious. As an experiment, she hid all the birthday cards that had arrived before her birthday. No hints of her birthday existed anywhere, and I was going along in my usual fog, studying and thinking. On her birthday I had lunch with a friend. That evening as Sarah and I had dinner, she softly asked, "So, did you and Ray celebrate my birthday today?"

I can't describe exactly what goes on inside the human body at a moment like that. But it felt as if my blood went out of my heart, down to my feet, and then shot full force into my face. How would I ever explain this one?

I hemmed and I hawed, but I couldn't explain forgetting Sarah's birthday. My forgetfulness had been unloving, and I could see that she was hurt. But at the same time, I had these strange feelings. Yes, I had been wrong to forget, but I hadn't ignored her birthday intentionally. I felt judged, put down—and rightly so. At the time, I couldn't describe my feelings with a word like *disrespected*. During those years, when the feminists were going full blast, men didn't talk about being disrespected by women. That would have been arrogant, and in church circles it would have been considered a terrible lack of humility.

LOVING TIMES AND SPATS OF UGLINESS

The years rolled by—a blur of preaching, pastoring, and counseling more married couples. Sarah and I continued to grow in our marriage as we learned more and more about one another, and we had a lot of great times. But along with the loving times were spots (should I say spats?) of ugliness. Nothing was long term; we would almost always pray together afterward, asking forgiveness from one another as well as from the Lord. But what did it all mean? Where was our marriage going? After all, I was a pastor who was paid to be “good.” How could I justify all my little slip-ups that were “good for nothing”?

As someone has said, the problem with life is that it’s so daily. And Sarah and I irritated each other almost daily with bad habits we couldn’t shake. One of mine was leaving wet towels on the bed. At least once a month Sarah would be angry about my wet towel. And every three months or so, I would start drifting back into being preoccupied with other things, neglecting certain duties, and forgetting certain requests. When she would critique me, tension would arise and I would come across as blaming her or making excuses.

Every couple learns about daily conflicts, which Solomon calls “the little foxes that ruin the vineyards” (Song of Solomon 2:15 NIV).

Sarah periodically coughs and clears her throat, and early on in our marriage when we would be praying, I would get irritated by her coughing. How childish could I be? We were praying to the Lord of heaven, and I was bothered by something she couldn’t help. Other times, she wanted me to praise the Lord when I was frustrated. Frankly, I didn’t always want to praise the Lord, so did that make me less spiritual? When she was frustrated, I didn’t tell her to praise the Lord! Didn’t that make me less judgmental and more spiritual?

Tension has a way of tearing down your self-image. On the heels of

confrontation, I felt I could never be good enough. And on the heels of family conflict, Sarah felt she was a failure as a mother and wife. As with all couples, the specifics that prompted these tensions weighed heavily on us as a couple. Indeed, life can be “so daily.”

It is not Sarah’s first choice to travel, study, and teach because that is not her gifting, though she is willing to go for the sake of our ministry. I can’t stand fixing things that break in the home since that’s not

—————
*As God revealed the Love
 and Respect message,
 I experienced Psalm
 119:130: “The unfolding
 of Your words gives
 light; it gives under-
 standing” (NIV).*

my talent. So I usually complain when trying to fix something which doesn’t get fixed anyway (and that’s why I didn’t want to do it in the first place!).

I share all these little “secrets” about my wife and me to let you know that we do not deliver our message on marriage from any pedestal of perfection. We have struggled on many fronts and will continue to do so, but now we struggle knowing we can win! Over the years, ever so slowly, we have discovered the “secret” that has made all the difference for us (and for many other couples).

THE “SECRET” HIDDEN IN EPHESIANS 5:33

For more than twenty years I had the privilege of studying the Bible thirty hours a week for my pulpit ministry. I also earned a PhD in family studies, plus a master’s in communication. I had a lot of formal training, but when this illumination from Scripture exploded in my heart and mind one day in 1998, it simply blew me away. I literally exclaimed, “Glory to God!” The insight that I finally recognized in Scripture, and which I later confirmed from reading scientific research, explained why Sarah and I would get into our arguments. I finally saw very clearly why Sarah could be crushed by my words and actions, just

as my mom had been crushed by my dad. And Sarah could say things that would send me through the roof, just as my mom had said things that would send my dad through the roof.

What was the secret? Actually, it was not a secret at all. This passage of Scripture has been there for some two thousand years for all of us to see. In Ephesians 5:33, Paul writes, “Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (NIV).

Of course, I had read that verse many times. I had even preached on that verse when conducting marriage ceremonies. But somehow I had never seen the connection between love and respect. Paul is clearly saying that wives need love and husbands need respect. As I started sharing my secret in messages and later in seminars and conferences, I would often run into people who would say something like, “This Love and Respect Connection sounds good, Emerson, but isn’t it a little theoretical? We have real problems—money problems, sex problems, how to raise the kids . . .”

As I will show throughout this book, the Love and Respect Connection is the key to any problem in a marriage. This is not just a nice little theory to which I added a few Bible verses.¹ How the need for love and the need for respect play off of one another in a marriage has *everything* to do with the kind of marriage you will have.

HOW GOD REVEALED THE LOVE AND RESPECT CONNECTION

In the beginning, when I was struggling to find help for other marriages as well as for my own, I was not searching for any “Love and Respect Connection.” But that connection surfaced as I pondered what Ephesians 5:33 is saying. My thought process went something like this: “A husband is to obey the command to love even if his wife does not

obey this command to respect, and a wife is to obey the command to respect even if the husband does not obey the command to love.”

So far, so good. Then I reasoned further: “A husband is even called to love a disrespectful wife, and a wife is called to respect an unloving husband. There is no justification for a husband to say, ‘I will love my wife *after* she respects me’ nor for a wife to say, ‘I will respect my husband *after* he loves me.’”

At this point I still hadn’t seen the Love and Respect Connection. My theory surfaced as God guided me in recognizing the strong link between love and respect in a marriage. I saw why it is so hard to love and respect. When a husband feels disrespected, it is especially hard to love his wife. When a wife feels unloved, it is especially hard to respect her husband.

At that point came the illumination that made sense to me, and it has made sense to a lot of people ever since. When a husband feels disrespected, he has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. (Perhaps the command to love was given to him precisely for this reason!) When a wife feels unloved, she has a natural tendency

—————
The Crazy Cycle is, indeed, “the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness” (Ecclesiastes 7:25).
 —————

to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband. (Perhaps the command to respect was given to her precisely for this reason!)

The Love and Respect Connection is clearly within Scripture, but so is the constant threat that the connection can be strained or even broken. And then came what I call the “aha” moment: this thing triggers itself. Without love, she reacts without respect. Without respect, he reacts without love—ad nauseam. Thus was born the Crazy Cycle! (See page 5 for a visual of it.)

Everywhere I share my theory, husbands and wives immediately understand. They see that if they don’t learn how to control the Crazy Cycle, it will just go round and round and where it stops nobody knows.

To put this book in brief outline form, I want to help couples:

- Control the Crazyiness (The Crazy Cycle)
- Energize Each Other with Love and Respect (The Energizing Cycle)
- Enjoy the Rewards of a Godly Marriage (The Rewarded Cycle)

WHY LOVE AND RESPECT ARE PRIMARY NEEDS

Getting on the Crazy Cycle is all too easy. Recognizing that you're on the Crazy Cycle and learning how to keep it from spinning out of control *is* possible if husband and wife can learn how to meet each other's basic needs for love and respect. I have often been asked, "How can you be so sure the wife primarily needs to feel love and the husband primarily needs to feel respect?" My answer comes in two parts.

First of all, my experience as a counselor and as a husband confirms this truth. The wife is the one who asks, "Does my husband love me as much as I love him?" She *knows* she loves him, but she wonders at times if he loves her nearly as much. So when he comes across as unloving, she typically reacts in a negative way. In her opinion, he needs to change into a more sensitive and caring man. Unfortunately, a wife's usual approach is to complain and criticize in order to motivate her husband to become more loving. This usually proves about as successful as trying to sell brass knuckles to Mother Teresa.

On the other hand, a husband does not commonly ask, "Does my wife love me as much as I love her?" Why not? Because he is assured of her love. I often ask husbands, "Does your wife love you?" They reply, "Yes, of course." But then I ask, "Does she like you?" And the answer usually comes back, "Nope."

In many cases, the wife's dislike is interpreted by the husband as disrespect and even contempt. In his opinion, she has changed from being the admiring, ever-approving woman she was when they courted.

Now she doesn't approve, and she's letting him know it. So the husband decides he will motivate his wife to become more respectful by acting in unloving ways. This usually proves about as successful as trying to sell a pickup to an Amish farmer.

Even more convincing is what Ephesians 5:33 teaches about the woman's primary need for love and the man's primary need for respect: The husband *must* love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife *must* respect her husband. Could it be any clearer than that? Paul isn't making suggestions; he is issuing commands from God Himself. In addition, the Greek word Paul uses for love in this verse is *agape*, meaning unconditional love. And the wording of the rest of the passage strongly suggests that the husband should receive unconditional respect. Christian spouses should not read this verse to say, "Husbands, love your wives unconditionally, and wives, respect your husbands only if they have earned and deserve it." As the old saying goes, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. In this verse, respect for the husband is just as important as love for the wife.

Another writer of Scripture chimes in with Paul on this matter of respect for husbands. The apostle Peter wrote to wives that if any husbands were disobedient to God's Word, "they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and *respectful* behavior" (1 Peter 3:1–2; italics mine). Peter is definitely talking about unconditional respect. The husbands he mentions are either carnal Christians or unbelievers who are disobedient to the Word—that is, to Jesus Christ. God is not pleased with a man like this, and such a man does not "deserve" his wife's respect. But Peter is not calling on wives to feel respect; he is commanding them to show respectful behavior. This is not about the husband deserving respect; it is about the wife being willing to treat her husband respectfully *without conditions*.

To say the least, doing something when you don't really feel you want to do it is counterintuitive. Therefore, this passage must be acted

on in faith. God has ordained that wives respect their husbands as a method to win husbands to Himself. As a husband opens his spirit to God, he reopens his spirit to his wife. No husband feels affection toward a wife who appears to have contempt for who he is as a human being. The key to creating fond feelings of love in a husband toward his wife is through showing him unconditional respect.

RESPECT—UNIQUE FEATURE OF THIS BOOK

Many books on marriage stress the need for husbands to love wives, but the unique feature about this book is the concept of wives showing unconditional respect toward husbands. My theory is simple, but it is so powerful that I decided to leave the pastorate in 1999 and begin sharing these truths about love and respect full time. Ever since, Sarah and I have shared our message with thousands of married couples and, again and again, we receive confirmation that we are definitely on the right track. Every wife we've met wants her husband to appreciate how much she loves him, and she yearns to feel more love from him. What we try to share is that the best way to love a husband is to show him respect in ways that are meaningful to him. Such respect lets him feel his wife's love for him and ignites in him feelings of love for his wife.

This book will show you the power of unconditional love and unconditional respect. As you and your spouse use these powerful tools, you can save a struggling marriage from the divorce court or a "ho-hum" marriage from boredom and concealed bitterness. If you have a good marriage, you can make it even better. Sarah and I had a good marriage before we discovered the simple secret taught in this book. But now our marriage is *much* better.

How much better is it? Have we reached some kind of marital nirvana and all is perfect? Hardly. We still come across to one another at times as unloving or disrespectful. We still get on the Crazy Cycle like

everybody else. But we have made a decision that has changed the course of our marriage for the good. If only my mom and dad could have discovered this. Sarah and I now know how to reduce the number of times we spin on the Crazy Cycle, and we often stop it before it gets started.

What is this life-changing decision we both have made? I have decided to believe that Sarah does not intend to be disrespectful. Oh, she can get nasty, but that isn't how she feels in her heart. I know she respects who I am deep inside. Sarah has decided to believe that I do not intend to be unloving, though I still hurt her at times with my comments and attitudes. She knows that in my heart I love her deeply and would even die for her. So how does all this actually play out? I'd like to illustrate with eggs and towels.

SARAH CAN'T STOP PEPPERING THE EGGS

Sarah likes pepper on her eggs. I do not. In her view, scrambled or sunny-side-up eggs need to be peppered until black. In the course of our marriage, Sarah has fixed me eggs hundreds of times, and she has put pepper on these eggs just about every time she cooks them, even though she knows I don't like peppered eggs. But I have concluded that Sarah is not doing this to spite me or because I am unimportant to her. I know her heart. She has even muttered in frustration (after peppering the eggs again), "Well, they aren't any *good* if they don't have pepper."

As baffled as I am by this constant peppering, I have not concluded that Sarah is plotting to change me or irritate me. I know Sarah is thinking of other things. She is on autopilot when she peppers my eggs. I have told her hundreds of times, "Please don't put pepper on my eggs." If she really respected me, wouldn't she listen to me? Wouldn't it be natural for me to explode in anger, especially if I can predict this—

again? Wouldn't it be right for me to become doubtful of her good intentions? Wouldn't it be right for me to start keeping track of many annoying things she does like peppering my eggs? All this would prove I really don't matter to her, wouldn't it?

But I am able to interpret Sarah much less negatively than that because I have decided that she does not intend to be disrespectful, not in her deepest soul. I made that decision, and other husbands are making it too. One man wrote:

It was freeing to reflect on the fact that my wife was well-intentioned and good-hearted toward me, as she acknowledged. Sadly, I could misunderstand her heart. There were lots of things I didn't know about her heart. For example, it turns out she had been going through postpartum depression. Understanding some things like that softened my heart a lot. I started to think more about how she might not be sensing my love for her, even though I was well-intentioned and good-hearted toward her.

This husband "gets it." He has made the right decision about his wife, and so can you regarding your spouse.

EMERSON CAN'T PUT THINGS WHERE THEY BELONG

I leave wet towels where they don't belong. I leave a loaf of bread on the counter. I leave the cupboard doors open. I leave books stacked on the living room floor. I have an excuse, of course: I am mentally preoccupied. As Sarah says, "He is always thinking." Sometimes I stun myself by what I do or don't do. Looking back at the cupboard doors, I realize most of them are still open. I say to myself, *Why didn't I close those doors? Where was my mind?* Or I leave towels lying on the bedroom

floor instead of hanging them up in the bathroom. (By the way, this is where we've learned to keep things light, which releases tension. When Sarah dangles the towel in front of my face, I smile and say, "What a coincidence! I was just going to hang that towel up!")

Now don't get me wrong. I am not a pig. But I am married to Sarah, who is the epitome of neatness and cleanliness, and I flunk by her standards. She is not a perfectionist, but she is logical. Why leave a towel on the bed when a rack is in the bathroom waiting for the towel? Why leave a cupboard door open when the hinge functions both ways? Why leave the books on the floor when it would only take a few seconds to put them on the bookshelf?

But Sarah has not concluded that this means I am out to ignore her or irritate her. She knows I am thinking of other things, that I am on autopilot as I come and go. Yet she has told me thousands of times, "Please pick things up and put them away." Wouldn't it be easy for her to say, "If you really loved me, you would listen to me"? Wouldn't it be natural for her to explode in anger? Wouldn't it be right for her to become doubtful of my good intentions? Wouldn't it be right for her to start keeping track of the many things I do like this? After all, surely all this would prove she really doesn't matter to me.

But Sarah is able to see me in a more positive light because she has decided to believe that I do not purpose to be unresponsive and unloving, not in my deepest soul. She has made that decision, and so have other wives. One woman married more than thirty years says:

As I look back, I realize how disrespectful I've come across. He is a naturally kind and compassionate man, very outgoing, and has the gift of serving (he's always willing to do things for me on a moment's notice) . . . truly a well-meaning, good-hearted man who has had sin in his life, like all of us. . . . I realize that maybe my expectations were too unreasonably high.

Another wife adds:

Since early in our marriage when he came across as really controlling and not listening to concerns that I would have, I didn't see that he had feelings inside. I started the "in your face" bitter wife responses. Now I see more of his heart and am starting to understand what my words have done to him.

These gals "get it" also. They've made a decision to change their approach, and so can you regarding your spouse.

Yes, Sarah and I both have our faults. The Crazy Cycle always wants to spin, but we can control it by remembering the Love and Respect Connection. We know this works, and there is much I want to share about how and why it works. The first step is understanding just how husbands and wives communicate.