

Introduction

I remember once when I was browsing through a gift shop in Gatlinburg, Tennessee seeing a shelf of new books for sale.

Now, I am always attracted to books so I quickly scooted past the seemingly endless shelves of nicknacks and souvenirs inviting me to "SEE ROCK CITY," and began to scan their titles. I was immediately drawn to a huge book entitled, Everything Men Know About Women.

Well, thinking that I could glean some practical wisdom on a very important subject, I eagerly pulled it down from the shelf and began to leaf through it's pages only to discover that every page was blank.

The book was a joke -- designed to humorously point out that in all truthfulness, men know absolutely nothing about women. And I feel that way as I approach today's subject. Attempting to do justice in explaining a woman's unique wants and needs in one sermon is an impossible task. So, I feel a little like Sigmund Freud who once said, "Despite my 30 years of research into the feminine soul, I have not yet been able to answer the great question, 'What does a woman want?'" Let me be quick to point out that searching for the answer to this question is a source of great joy in marriage.

We spend our entire lives involved in the adventure of trying to understand each other's needs.

So in a marriage there is never a dull moment. And I should also say at the onset that it is hard for a man to understand a woman wants and needs-and vice versa-because we are so very different. Men and women are unique. And of course humor relating to this subject abounds. It has been said that a man won't hesitate to pay \$2 for something worth a \$1 if he really wants it. On the other hand a woman won't hesitate to pay \$1 for something worth \$2 even she doesn't want it. A woman marries a man expecting him to change; a man marries a woman hoping that she won't change. But....all humor aside -- why should we devote sermon time to this subject? Why is it important for men to understand women and vice versa?

So we can live together in some kind of harmony! This understanding begins when we realize that many of our differences aren't due to gender.

Some of us are morning people. We get up at 5AM ready and rarin' to go. Others don't really "wake up" until around 10 o'clock at night. And....being an AM or a PM person has nothing to do with whether you are a man or a woman. Some people -- both male and female -- are incredible neat freaks...they believe in a place for everything and everything in its place. Others are like the little guy in PEANUTS.....the one named "Pig Pen". They are just by nature messy people. And there are many reasons to explain these differences ranging from how we were raised, to our birth order, to inherited personality traits -- NONE of which has anything to do with gender.

So we need to understand that no two human beings are identical because of the variety in humankind.

But on the other hand there are obvious differences in people that are due to gender.

Men do tend to be physically stronger than women. But -- whereas men are usually stronger in the upper part of their bodies....many women can equal or surpass men in lower body strength which comes in handy when babies need to be born. And women tend to do better than men in long distance activities like running and swimming. Did you know that the women's best time in swimming the English Channel is three hours better than the a man's best time? Women tend to live 4-8 years longer than men. A woman's metabolism is slower than a man's....so it is harder for her to lose weight. Women have larger kidneys, liver, stomach and appendix than men. A woman's heart beat's faster than a man's. They withstand high temperatures better than men do. So you see, men and women are physically different inside and out.

Then, a second reason to deal with this subject is because it is difficult for a husband and wife to enjoy any level of intimacy unless they really do understand each other.

Larry Crabb writes, "There is a fundamental flaw [these days] in the way we create intimacy that has to do with our having lost the uniqueness of what it means to relate to one another as men and women."

Think about it. Husbands and wives are supposed to live together, sleep together, eat together, spend money together, vacation together, socialize together, raise children together, worship together, and so on. How can we do this in a way that brings us fulfillment and joy -- if we don't understand each other? When we selfishly don't care about our spouse's unique needs this becomes an impossible and painful task.

So, if marriage is to work then both partners have to learn to deny self. They need to orient themselves toward understanding and meeting each other's needs. Crabb also writes, "With selfishness in control, every effort to improve the relationship will create new problems....only when the central problem of self-centeredness is faced first and squarely can a desire to do right develop....then important instructions become a delight, rather than a box to squeeze into, or an imposition on our freedom."

In our text for today it says that men are to love their wives in a selfless way.

So, a good marriage relationship is one in which each partner willingly and actively devotes whatever he or she has to the well-being of the other. And I want to compliment you as a church. It is obvious to me from your responses to the little survey I circulated that husbands want to understand their wives and vice versa. And my intent in this message is to somehow help this along.

Today we'll look at a few unique characteristics of women. And a week from now - on our next broadcast - we'll re-visit this subject and look at some of the distinct qualities that go into making men....men.

Now before we begin I want to say that discussing the differences between men and women is a potentially divisive subject. To generalize that all women are a certain way can cause problems because we are all so unique and attempting to discuss our sexual distinctiveness can make us respond defensively. It touches something deeply personal within us and we want to say. "But I'm not like that."

So ladies, please forgive me if it seems that I am lumping you in where you don't belong. I'm simply trying to share some things that I think will help us be better husbands and wives.

Well, what DO wives wish their husbands knew about women? Well, I think one of the first things our wives would want us to know is that...

1. THEY HAVE EMOTIONAL NEEDS.

They need to have their husbands express UNCONDITIONAL LOVE to them. In many surveys, this is often listed as a number one need of wives. We would like to love our spouses unconditionally. But you know communicating this kind of love to our wives is often a difficult thing. I'm not saying this to infer that women are emotionally dense....but because people-male and female alike-communicate love in different ways. In Gary

Chapman's popular book, *The Five Love Languages*, he does a great job of helping us understand not only the need to communicate love but how to do so. Chapman points out that people don't always speak the same "love language."

And if we are to make our marriages work-if we are to satisfy our wife's need to feel unconditional love, then we need to discover and use her particular love language. Let's briefly review the five ways to communicate love. Some people understand they are loved through WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

These people hear and receive affection best from a steady diet of encouraging words and sincere compliments. The *SONG OF SOLOMON*, which is an ancient text about marital love, is written in this "love language." Throughout its pages the writer verbally expresses his love for his wife...complimenting her again and again. Listen to this excerpt.

"Your hair is like a flock of goats...your teeth are like freshly shorn sheep....your neck is like an ivory tower...your nose is like the tower of Lebanon."

Now, I don't expect you men to be as good at this as King Solomon but you can try. I would however advise that you not compare your wife's nose to one of the largest towers in the mid-east. For some reason that worked back then but I don't think it would go over very well these days. But the point here is that for some women, their primary love language is encouraging words. In one of your surveys one of your wives said,

"I wish my husband knew that kind and encouraging words go a long way toward making me happy and content."

And with some women they do.

So some of your husbands need to learn to express love like Solomon did when he wrote to his wife, "You are all beautiful my darling. There is no flaw in you"

Others feel loved when their husbands spend QUALITY TIME with them.

They feel loved when their husbands simply take the time to meaningfully interact with them. One wife who responded to my survey apparently values this love language. She said,

"I wish my husband knew how important time he spends with the family is to me and how hurtful it is when he chooses not to spend time with us but with his buddies."

Quality time means giving someone your undivided attention...sitting on the couch with the TV off, looking at each other and talking for 20 minutes or more. And you know all

husbands and wives need this kind of quality time together. One recent study reported that in a typical week, the average married couple spends a total of a mere 37 minutes of time together. That's less than one-half of one percent of your time....not much love can be shared in those brief moments.

And then a third "love language" is that of GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS.

So some women hear "I love you" when their husbands give them meaningful things....not big things but meaningful things. One wife wrote on her survey,

"I wish my husband knew how much the little things he does for me (without a lot of time and effort into it on a whim) mean to me. They are more meaningful to me than the expensive, ritzy endeavors."

People who communicate love in this way feel unconditional love when their spouses give them something that they can hold in their hands and say, "He was thinking of me."

Now men, understand this is not getting your wife something that shows you were thinking of yourself like those husbands who give their wives a drill press or a brand new wheelbarrow for on mother's day. Give them things that are meaningful expressions of your love for them and they will feel loved!

Some women feel loved through PHYSICAL DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION.

This may involve something as simple as a hug or holding hands or just an arm around her shoulder. And we should note that simple displays of affection have all kinds of benefits-and not just for women. Life insurance companies did a study recently and found that men who kiss their wives every day before they go to work have fewer accidents on the freeway. They also discovered that men who kissed their wives the last thing before they go to bed at night live longer than other men. The same study found that men earned more money at their place of employment if they regularly showed physical affection for their wives.

So this is a very beneficial love language to master!

And then, other people communicate love through ACTS OF SERVICE.

These are actions which express a willingness to meet daily needs. This may involve helping around the house, keeping the car filled up with gas, taking out the trash, or fulfilling other basic responsibilities.

So some women "hear" "I love you" best when their husbands do things for them.

Another wife wrote on her survey,

"I wish my husband would respond to me the way he does torequests from the church."

This husband is using his wife's love language....he's just not communicating it in her direction enough.

Now, how can we discover our own love language? You can do this by answering a couple simple questions: * First of all, ask yourself, "What do I request most from others in my significant relationships?" What we request-whether it be gifts or physical touch or whatever-is very likely our love language. Another question to ask is, "How do I most consistently express love in my most significant relationships?" What you do best is likely your love language.

So husbands and wives ask yourself these questions today and then go somewhere with your wife and share your answers. Learn to speak in each other's love language. Do this because your wife has emotional needs. And then a second thing that I think women would want their husbands to understand is that...

2. they have RELATIONAL NEEDS.

They need to believe that their husbands are completely committed to their relationship. They need to feel that our marriage with them is our number one priority. I think this kind of deep relationship is what is meant when we hear the phrase "Husbands and wives will become one..." at weddings. You see, relationships are very important to women. So, whereas men are task-oriented, women tend to be relationship-oriented. Both men and women are important as they both work toward the building of a marriage and a family. Both of their identities and security need to come from embracing and accepting their differences and understanding that their approach to the life will differ. Men are geared to focus on accomplishing tasks and women on building relationships.

So for this reason women tend to be interdependent while men tend to be independent. Men tend to compete; women tend to cooperate. And husbands should realize that their wives' natural ability to develop relationships can actually help them fulfill the desire to love each other. For, our wives are naturally better at building meaningful relationships with other people than we are. Men and women naturally make a great team!

Husbands should understand that, since women tend to be relationally oriented, words are very important to them. And we ought to learn from our helpmates because there is an old saying that goes: "Reliable communication permits progress." Women are skilled at using words and in fact they learn to talk sooner than men do. There was a study done in which they rigged special microphones to record the noises that come out the mouths of little girls and boys. They found that 100% of the noises coming out of the mouths of little girls had something to do with conversation. They were either conversing with somebody else or conversing with someone imaginary or conversing with themselves. All of the noises that little girls, aged 2-4 were making had to do with conversation.

For little boys, it was discovered that only 60% of the sounds coming out of their mouths had to do with conversation. The other 40% were simply noises of animals or machines.

So, the truth of the matter is that men start off behind women in talking and we never catch up. Little girls have a better ability to converse and communicate than little boys and this becomes a lifelong habit. As a result, women seem to understand the importance of clear communication better than men. This is why women who hardly know each other can have a long and meaningful conversation. Perhaps you've heard of the husband who said, "Just the other night my wife was on the phone for nearly 30 minutes. When she hung up, I asked her 'Who was that?' She said, 'Wrong number!'"

Communication is one of the greatest sources of difficulty between men and women. Women talk to express emotions....men talk to solve problems. Whereas men tend to connect by doing things....women tend to connect with words. Listen to the following conversation between a husband and wife and you'll see what I mean. A wife comes home from work and says, "I hate my job!" The loving husband responds by saying, "Well, why don't you quit then?" "No," she says, "It's just that there's so much work to do and not enough people." The husband says, "Well, then tell your boss to hire some help for you." She retorts, "Oh, why can't you ever just listen to me?" And he, genuinely confused says, "I am listening you. If you didn't want my advice, why did you bring up the subject." You see the man was focused on doing something. The wife was focused on relationship and on being heard. One wife expressed this on her survey when she wrote, "I want to be heard, not necessarily have my problems solved." She said this because women have unique RELATIONAL NEEDS....they need to know that their husbands are as committed to their relationship as they are. And then I think that husbands need to understand one other thing about their wives....

3. We need to understand that they have SPIRITUAL NEEDS.

You see, like men, women have an inborn need to experience spiritual needs personally. Women are not just physical beings....they are mind and spirit. And....you know, in a day when women are excelling in so many areas of life, it is worth my pausing for a moment to remind women of their need to excel spiritually. But there is another reason I want to remind women of their need for practicing whatever spiritual discipline that has meaning to them. I do so because of all your incredible responsibilities. Women wear so many hats. They serve as cook, maid, nurse, telephone operator, policeman, valet, clothier, seamstress, gardener, interior decorator, photographer, secretary, educator, financial planner, cheerleader, spiritual advisor, chauffeur, and psychologist. A friend of mine told me yesterday that he read in the paper that it has been calculated that if husbands had to hire out all the things that women do it would cost them nearly a half million dollars per year! So, women need spiritual meaning that can provide them with the strength, discernment, perseverance, wisdom, and protection that is required if they are to do all they have to do these days. And husbands....we need to realize that women need more than a spiritual practice of their own. Research show that practicing some form of spirituality together is a bonding activity in marriage. They also need a husband who has a spiritual life. A wife needs a husband who will help nurture her personal spiritual life. I personally believe that wives yearn for husbands who will help stimulate and nurture their own spiritual growth. You know, contrary to popular belief, the most intimate thing a husband and wife can do together is not have sexual relations....no...husbands and wives are most intimate when they honestly seek to develop a shared spiritual life together....as side by side they discuss way of sharing their fears, hopes and dreams....seeking ways to deepen their relationship.

Do we really know how much better our marriages could be if we took seriously our need to help each other grow spiritually? You see marriage was never meant to be two individuals singing a solo together, but a "duet."

So, to review our discussion for today. Wives have EMOTIONAL NEEDS. They need to feel unconditionally loved... They have RELATIONAL NEEDS. They need to believe that husbands are completely committed to their relationship. They have SPIRITUAL NEEDS. They need husbands who will help nurture their spiritual growth.