

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:8-12

Pastor Ensener

Memory verse: Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Many of our modern marriage ceremonies include a time in which the bride and groom showcase their unity for all to see. Sometimes it's tradition, sometimes it's creativity, but all paint the same picture. One man, one woman, uniting in one marriage. The most traditional way would probably be the unity candle, where the bride and groom, each with a lighted candle, light up a third candle. Others such traditions include blending different colored sand, or the literal tying of a knot.

My wife and I decided that we would do a threefold cord as a part of our wedding ceremony; we wanted to showcase our unity in Christ by braiding three cords together. One string represented me, the other my wife, but the most important one was the third string which represented God.

Before we started dating, we came to the conclusion that our relationship would only last if God were the center of everything. That is not to say that our relationship has been perfect. We have gotten our cords tangled many a times and sometimes we end up "tied in knots", but regardless of how many times we would fail each other God was there to give us strength and direction. As we wrapped our lives around Him, He has brought our relationship back into unity again.

The only way your relationship can become great, is if you constantly acknowledge the third person in your marriage. Every relationship failure, is due to the neglect of our relationship with God.

**Meditation for the day:** Think about what it means to have unity with God and with your spouse and then how to have them both together.

**Assignment:** If you have your unity candle, sand, ropes or whatever you used, put it on display to remind you of your commitment to God and each other. If you don't have one, do one!

**Just for fun:** Play a unity game. Tie your legs or hands together and do things as a team. Play it with just the two of you and with your kids.

**Scripture:** I Peter 3:1-7

**Memory Verse:** I Peter 3:4 But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

*Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Nina Roesner's 40-day devotional, The Respect Dare. I felt it would make a worthy devotion.*

Standing and waiting on Bob and Joan's front porch, Janda realized they apparently hadn't heard the doorbell ring. Nor were they aware that Joan's voice was coming over the intercom at the front door as they set up the crib.

"That's not right, it pops up here first! No, not like that, like this! No, push that side in first, and then pull it up. Bob, you're still not doing it right." The wife's comments nipped at Janda's ears as she waited and grew more uncomfortable. She rang the doorbell again. "Go get the door, and I'll just do this myself!"

The man, clearly irritated, answered the door. "Bob, it's good to see you!" Janda smiled. "I just wanted to drop dinner off for you and your wife. How's the new baby?" He smiled and launched into a story about life with a newborn, and she could see him relaxing.

About five minutes later, his wife came to the door. "Oh, thank you for bringing dinner!" she said. "Bob, you better get that in the refrigerator. The lettuce will wilt if it gets warm." His brow furrowed, his lips pursed a bit, he nodded at Janda and left. She felt sorry for the guy. Here's a man who daily runs a crew of 30 guys on a construction job, and his wife talks to him like he's a 5-year-old.

In the car on her way home, Janda grimaced as she remembered someone asking her at a social gathering about 10 years before, "How many children do you have?" "Three, if you count my husband," Janda had replied. Since then, she had heard similar responses from many women over the years. She was sure that back then, her behavior matched her attitude. How could it be that she could think about her own husband as if he were a child? She felt a twang of guilt and remorse for her actions. She also realized that Joan was on the same path in her marriage.

Janda was thankful she had learned that her behavior was rooted in disrespect and that it was not honoring to her or her husband.

**Bottom line:** Think about and treat your husband as the man God created him to be. If you do, your husband will feel more respected by you and your marriage will improve.

### **So what about you?**

1. Ask your husband if he feels like you have ever treated him like a child. Ask him how this made him feel, and apologize. How has treating him like this been harmful to your marriage and to him?
2. Can you remember your mother, sisters, or friends talking about their husbands as though these men were inferior? How has this impacted families?
3. Make a list of eight things that wives in general can do to make their husbands feel like men.
4. Pick two things from the eight things that you feel would benefit your husband's esteem the most and circle them.
5. Either schedule these activities or do them today, without exceptions. What specifically are you going to do and when? Write it down.

Often we give to others with the expectation that our gift will be rewarded. Recognize that this type of giving is not a true gift if it is actually "sold" for praise or appreciation. Christ gave the gift of His life for ours by dying on the cross. Before that, He repeatedly gave healing, teaching, and food to those in need without expectation of payment or even appreciation. His behavior is the perfect example of love. It is God's love for us, brought to life in the man of Christ Jesus.

From this day forward, when you experience resentment or disappointment due to your husband's reaction or lack of reaction, consider those feelings cues of expectation for you. Choose in those moments to change your attitude, loving without expectation, as God did through Jesus Christ.

Pray for God's help in doing this.

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:13-18

Pastor Wayne

**Memory Verse:** Proverbs 31:30 Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

Most women have a negative body image. According to one survey only four percent of women worldwide consider themselves beautiful and they are ten times more likely to have a poor body image than men, despite the fact that more men are overweight and out of shape. Society and especially media, has much to do with the struggles that women have with how they view themselves, but this problem is not new.

The Shulammitte woman in Song of Solomon was ashamed of her tan. Read love stories from the 1800's the author would describe a pretty woman as having "creamy white skin" but today tanning salons promote getting a "healthy glow" to enhance your beauty. Rembrandt painted beautiful women who were overweight by today's fashion standards. In the 1920's surgeons advertised breast reductions and today it is just the opposite.

Standards of beauty are constantly changing. Few women, especially real women who live real lives, can keep up with the latest unrealistic expectations put upon them by fashion designers and Hollywood. Age, children, and the reality of life all take their toll upon the body. It is unrealistic to think that you can compete with the supermodels and movie stars. Many of them struggle with the same negative body image despite their fame.

Stop trying to live up to the world's standard of beauty. Realize that you are wonderful creation of God and He made you exactly the way you are for a purpose. That purpose is to satisfy your husband's need and no one else. Accept yourself as God made you and perceive that your "merchandise is good" (Proverbs 31:18). Take care of God's creation, but remember that the most important beauty comes from the heart (I Peter 3:3-4). When he compliments you accept it as a wonderful gift and embrace it in your heart and mind.

Husbands, if your wife struggles with a poor body image, the problem is probably not what she sees in the mirror in the bedroom, it is the reflection that she sees in your eyes. Beauty is truly in the eyes of the beholder. You hold the key to how she perceives herself. Does she see love, acceptance, and desire for her in your eyes? Do your words build her up or tear her down? She may struggle to accept your compliments; don't stop telling she is beautiful, double up your efforts. Your job is to convince her by your words and actions that she is everything you could want and need.

**Meditation:** Meditate on how God created you as a one-of-a-kind unique individual for His glory and purpose.

**Assignment:** Make a list of both your negative and positive features. Mark the ones that you can improve, change, or enhance. Determine to work on those areas and to accept and embrace what you cannot change.

**Just for Fun:** Do a sexy fashion show for your spouse. Ask him to tell you what looks nice and why he likes that outfit on you. Tell him why it makes you feel confident and beautiful. Be positive in your comments to each other.

**Scripture:** Genesis 29:15-30

Pastor Wayne

**Memory Verse:** Proverbs 31:28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.

This passage reminds me of a story that I have heard many times before. I cannot vouch that the story is true, but I want to believe that it is:

Johnny Lingo was a successful young man who lived on one of the many islands in the South Pacific. Johnny was one of the brightest, strongest, and richest men in the islands, considered by most to be a shrewd and careful businessman, except in one area.

It was customary among the people of these islands for a man to buy his wife from her father with the price being paid in cows. Two or three cows would buy an average wife and four or five cows was extravagant. Yet for some reason, Johnny had paid the unheard-of price of 10 cows for his bride, Sarita, who would have been described as plain at best. Sarita was shy and introverted who barely said two words to anyone, but Johnny wanted her for his wife. Why he paid ten cows for her when he could easily gotten her for one or two at the most, no one understood.

Johnny took Sarita back home to his island. No one in the village saw her for a year. When she finally came home to visit it was like looking at a totally different woman. She was beautiful! She had a glow of confidence and a sparkle in her eye that transformed her. The villagers could hardly believe she was the same woman. They asked each other what happened?

The father understood and explained it to those who would listen. Johnny told me that he loved Sarita, but I knew that she could be so much more if she believed in herself. If I had paid 1 or 2 cows for her then she would always believe that is all she is worth to me. She will always know that I valued her more than any other woman and will desire to live up to the price that her husband gave for her. I have certainly received more than I gave!

Are you willing to pay the price of loving your wife? Do not discount her value by giving little of your time and self to her. Make your wife feel like you would be happy to pay ten cows or work 14 years for her. Show that you are glad to spend a lifetime for her!

**Meditation:** In what ways have you shown your spouse how much you value them?

**Assignment:** Make a list of all of the things that your spouse does for you and tell them how much you value them for it.

**Just for Fun:** Start a "Pay my Spouse" jar. Each of you put a quarter (or more) into the jar whenever your spouse does something for you. Save the money up for special dates out together or a vacation.

**Scripture Passage:** 1 Peter 3:1-7

Don Nordtrom

**Memory Verse: 1 Peter 3:7** - *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

I pray for my wife daily, however, each Thursday, I specifically pray for our marriage. Prayer is simply communicating with God. It has been said, "The devil is well aware that prayer is the most powerful weapon - it defeats him every time. With it, we touch heaven and cause the hand of God to move in mighty ways. Therefore, the devil would rather see us doing every other Christian activity instead." He also attempts to hinder our prayers. Some of his tactics include: lack of faith, unconfessed sins, selfish prayers for human lusts, hypocrisy, failure to hear or obey the Word of God, failure to give to God or others, pride, demonic interference, bitterness or unforgiveness and as indicated by our Scripture Passage (1 Peter 3:7), failure to properly love and honor our mate.

In an effort to reduce these roadblocks, here are some keys to successful prayer: praying in faith, praying according to God's will, praying in Jesus' name, praying in humility, praying with fasting, praying with boldness, fervency, persistence, sincerity and specificity and praying in unity.

Here is a sample of how I pray for our marriage: "Lord, I pray that You would establish in me and my spouse bonds of love that cannot be broken. Show me how to love my wife in an ever-deepening way that she can clearly perceive. May we have mutual respect and admiration for each other so that we become and remain one another's greatest friend, champion, and unwavering support. Where love has been diminished, lost, destroyed or buried under hurt and disappointment, put it back in our hearts. Give us strength to hold on to the good in our marriage, even in those time when one of us doesn't feel love. Enable my wife and I to forgive each other quickly and completely. Help us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving" the way You are to us (Ephesians 4:32). Teach us to overlook the faults and weaknesses of the other. Give us a sense of humor, especially as we deal with the hard issues of life."

**Meditation:** Don't just pray for your spouse once a day. Meditate on your relationship and pray for them "always" throughout the day in little ways as God brings different needs or concerns to your heart.

**Assignment:** Look at the list of Satan's tactics again and identify all the roadblocks Satan has placed in your marriage and eliminate them. Do you have unconfessed sins? Is there someone whom you need to forgive? Use the keys to successful prayers and pray together for your marriage.

**Just for Fun:** Try combining prayer for your spouse with physical contact: Lay a hand on their head or shoulder while praying. Cuddle on the couch or in bed when you pray for each other. Kneel together. Take a walk, holding hands while you pray for one another. Stand together while lifting your hands to heaven. Be creative!

**Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20**

Don Nordstrom

**Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 2:16** *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

Yesterday I pointed out the keys to effectively praying for our spouse included praying with boldness, fervency, persistence, sincerity and specificity. You need to be confident in your prayers, expecting to receive what God has promised. This is a continuation of yesterday's sample marriage prayer:

"Unite us in faith, beliefs, standards of morality, and mutual trust. Help us to be of the same mind (the mind of Christ), to move together in harmony, and to quickly come to mutual agreements about our finances, our children, how we spend our time, and any other decisions that need to be made. Where we are in disagreement and this has caused strife, I pray You would draw us together on those issues. Adjust our perspectives together to align with Yours. Make our communication open and honest so that we avoid misunderstandings.

May we have the grace to be tolerant of each other's faults and, at the same time, have the willingness to change. I pray that we will not live two separate lives, but will instead walk together as a team. Remind us to take time for one another so our marriage will be a source of happiness, peace, and joy for us both.

Lord, I pray that You would protect our marriage from anything that would destroy it. Take out of our lives anyone who would come between us or tempt us. Help us to immediately recognize and resist temptation when it presents itself. I pray that no other relations either of us have, or have had in the past, will rob us of anything in our relationship now. Sever all unholy ties in both of our lives. May there never be any adultery or divorce in our future to destroy what You, Lord, have put together. Help us to never cast aside the whole relationship just because it has developed a nonworking part. I pray that we will turn to You - the designer to fix it and get it operating the way it was intended.

Teach us to seek each other's well-being first, as You have commanded in Your Word (1 Cor 10:24). We want to keep You at the center of our marriage and not expect from each other what only You can give. Where either of us have unrealistic expectations of the other, open our eyes to see it. May we never waiver in our commitment and devotion to You and to one another, so that this marriage will become all you designed it to be."

**Meditation:** Ask God to bring your spouse to your memory throughout the day and pray for them when you think about them.

**Assignment:** Commit to praying for your spouse every day. Write a daily prayer for each day of the week that you will pray for them. Base each prayer and specific needs or goals. Incorporate at least one Bible verse into each prayer.

**Just for Fun:** Ambush your spouse in prayer. Look for times throughout the day to catch them and say a short prayer for them. For example pray for them when they are in the shower to stay clean in their heart or while she is washing dishes that God would give her joy (like joy dishwashing soap). Make it a game where you surprise each other.