

Encore

Married men, let's go to the locker room and end this study guide with our first priority and our first line of defense and often (for me at least) the toughest place to succeed. Our marriage, our kids and our home are the arena of our highest calling as followers of Christ. The Word challenges me here like few other places.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself." (Eph. 5:25-28).

My failures have been many. My few successes are to the credit of a patient wife and merciful God. Thirty-five years ago, I said "I do." Four kids and eight grandkids later, I'm still doing! Loving Debbie Jo as Christ loves us means, simply, I die to myself daily. Without Jesus and yielding to the control of His Holy Spirit, the task is impossible.

Gary Smalley tells me to begin my marriage with honoring her always. Honor means to esteem someone so highly and valuing a person so thoroughly that she feels the love in good times and bad.

Leadership as a husband, to me, means overcoming my pride and self-centeredness and being the first to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

It means whenever possible being the first to wash the dirty dishes, the dirty laundry, and the dirty remnants of a misunderstanding.

Every wife has a love language. Some wives need them all! Almost all thrive on sincere encouragement. They need it daily. Most of us as guys are moderately brain dead to women's love languages. A dozen roses gets one point (not fifty!). A great compliment gets one point. A surprise gift from Macy's gets one point. A caring shoulder rub gets one point. Putting points on the scoreboard of their heart gives our words credibility and brings intimacy to the bedroom.

Wives generally love non-sexual touch. A back rub, a hug, a hand squeeze, a soft hand on the back of the neck are often more appreciated than something sensual that "flips our switch."

When my friend Payne Stewart met his untimely death, I flew to Orlando to see his wife, Tracy, and her friend, Dixie, the wife of Payne's business partner and best friend, Robert Fraley, who also went down in the plane with Payne.

Dixie blew me away when she told me how Robert read to her every night before bed from a great Christian book or from the Bible. She adored him for that! I went home with a new goal to connect spiritually with Debbie-Jo like I hadn't done before.

We started with Psalms 1 and moved through the Psalms and then other books in the Bible. We do one chapter a night. After we read, I ask her the simplest question that brings the greatest blessings to our relationship and probably does more to fill a wife's desire to be spiritually connected to her husband than any other question.

"Honey, how can I pray for you tonight?"

Don't let the simplicity fool you! I take her hand and pray for those needs. I wonder why it took me so long to learn about things that are so obvious and so profound.

I never know what her response will be. Usually she is tender, loving, and appreciative. Last week I asked her the question for the thousandth time and she responded candidly, "Pray for yourself! You're insane!" She's probably right! You've gotta meet this Arizona girl! Every day is an adventure and I don't want to miss any of them! My dad was the best at it. Almost every day before work, he'd write my mom a short letter and leave it on her breakfast counter. She adored him for 66 years!

There may be times when the counsel of a professional is needed to loosen a log-jam in the relationship. I've sought a professional counselor on more than one occasion. Sex, finances, and roles in the home are potential mine fields for every marriage. But day to day harmony can usually be achieved as a man takes the lead with a few Biblical mandates.

#1. Shower your wife in grace. Just as Christ laid down His life for our shortcomings, it is an honor to lay down my life for hers. Overlook the small stuff. Flush expectations in the toilet! Be a mirror and reflect God's unconditional love.

#2. Listen a lot! Speak a little!! Two ears and one mouth was not an accident! "What I hear you saying is...is that what you are wanting me to know?" "How are you feeling?" "Tell me how I've hurt you." "Describe my blind spots in this." (You may need to duck!)

#3. Don't keep lists. One night I was furious over how many times I'd been hurt by Debbie Jo's inability to "get it". (Mostly, "it" was my own selfishness). I went out to read my Bible to diffuse my anger. God was good to take me to Colossians 3:19. The words climbed off the page and pierced my heart, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them."

Marriage training is continuous and always an endless adventure. If you'll log on to our website (**www.menatthecross.org**) and give us your email address, Gary Smalley will send you a monthly encouragement on marriage and I'll do the same on raising kids and "Faith Training Children Who Will Love the Lord."

You can also receive helpful resources and video face-to-face answers to pressing questions from our faculty on conflict resolution, sex needs of husbands and wives, parent/child relationships, spiritual growth, marriage builders, etc.

It is with great joy that we commend this book and our lives to you.

I believe in you.

