

Becoming More Like Jesus ... in My Marriage

The Root Cause

There is an incredible section in the book, The Shack, that provides great illumination into the “root cause” of most (maybe all) marriage difficulties.

Mack Mackenzie is the man whose 6 year old daughter, Missy, was abducted and killed by a serial child killer in a remote shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Three years later Mack is summoned back to that same shack ... *by God* ... there to engage in all manner of conversation with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

At one point Mack (referring to the Trinity) asks the Father (Papa), *“Isn’t one of you more the boss than the other two?”*

Jesus looked over at Papa ... and said, *“Does that make sense to you, Abba? Frankly, I haven’t a clue what this man is talking about.”*

Papa then says, *“Nope, I have been trying to make head or tail out of it, but sorry, he’s got me lost.”*

“You know what I am talking about.” Mack was a little frustrated. *“I am talking about who’s in charge. Don’t you have a chain of command?”*

[And now ... all of us married retreatants will want to listen very closely to what Papa says.]

“Mackenzie, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a ‘circle relationship’, not a chain of command ... What you are seeing here is relationship without any overlay of power. We don’t need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best (for the other).”

“We don’t need power over the other because we are ALWAYS looking out for the best (for the other).”

For the most part marriages have problems because so often ... in word, in action, etc. spouses are *actually* looking out for the best ... *for themselves* (even if at times unconsciously).

Maybe it’d be best if I reword what Papa said to Mackenzie above ... but now as related to our marriages. Note below:

*“There ought be no concept of final authority among married partners, only unity. My plan was for spouses to be in a ‘circle relationship’, not a chain of command. Marriage was created/intended as a relationship without any overlay of power. Spouses don’t need power over the other when they are **always** looking out for the best (for the other).”*

In the end, God’s plan for marriage is that each partner would “serve” the other (literally be a servant) ... in everything ... and in an “unselfish” way: ALWAYS more wanting the “best” for the other than for themselves. (Such is a reflection of what actually happens within the Trinity itself.)

Exercise:

The following pages will give us an opportunity to examine how we might better **Become More Like Jesus** in our marriages ... as related to 12 key categories of interest/importance (6 for wives and 6 for husbands).

[Do note that these categories reference *most* marriages. Obviously there are *some* marriages wherein husbands take on some of the characteristics normally attributed to wives ... and vice verse.]

As I begin each new category, I pray:

*“Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, You Who live within me ...
You move in my life now ... **You** make of me an imitator
of Jesus in whatever area of my marriage that **You** see fit.”*

Husband ... For Your Wife

#1. Closeeness

When Scripture speaks of “cleaving” ... it refers to spiritual and emotional closeness. Your wife will feel loved when you move toward her and let her know you want to be close with a look, a word, a smile or a touch.

**I Need
Help**

- you often hold her hand ... even in public. _____
- you often hug her ... even in public. _____
- you are often affectionate without sexual intentions. _____

- you are often with her alone with the purpose of focusing on each other ... and even laughing together. _____
- you go for walks or jog ... or search for anything that results in togetherness with her ... watching what she likes on TV. _____
- you seek her out ... (maybe set up a date night ... eat by candlelight ... anything that shows you so want her). _____

- you go out of the way to do something for her ... like run an errand ... relieve her of cleaning ... shopping for her. _____
- you make it a priority to spend time with her ... and lots of it. _____
- you are aware of her as a person with a mind and opinions ... and you let her know that you enjoy discussing things with her and getting her insights. _____

- you suggest the unexpected ... get takeout and eat on the beach ... take a walk to see the full moon ... park on a bluff and watch the sunset. _____
- you pillow talk after making love ... lie close with your arms around her and share feelings and intimate ideas ... and never turn on SportsCenter. _____
- you read books together ... things she likes to read. _____

#2. Openness

Wives, for the most part, are expressive-responsive. You are “compartmentalized” ... the opposite of expressive-responsive. Your wife wants to talk about things ... to have problems out in the open for discussion to solve them. You tend to want to play it close to the vest.

I Need Help

-you share your feelings, telling about your day and especially about your difficulties. _____

-you say, “Let’s talk,” and ask her about what she’s feeling and routinely ask her for her opinions. _____

-your face shows that you want to talk ... relaxed body language, good eye contact, smiles. _____

-you talk about how you met, reminiscing about romance in your earlier years. _____

-you talk about the children and about the challenges and difficulties they are facing. _____

-you pray with her ... asking God to help her with whatever. _____

-you work at giving her your full attention ... no grunting responses while you’re watching TV, reading the newspaper or writing emails. _____

-you discuss financial concerns and are open about all the family finances. _____

-you talk about your job, your ministry, what concerns you, the possibilities of change, the affect on your futures. _____

-you answer her questions in a straight-forward way. _____

-you never lie to her, tell half-truths or hold back important information. _____

-you often ask her how you can be a better husband ... how you might better meet her needs. _____

#3. Understanding

1 Peter 3:7 challenges husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way. Though you might not actually *understand* your wife the key is for you to come across as wanting to live with her in an understanding way, and even more so, to trust her heart.

**I Need
Help**

- you listen so well ... you can repeat back what she said. _____
- you don't try to "fix" her problem unless she specifically asks that. _____
- you never dismiss her feelings, no matter how illogical they may seem to you. _____

- you say, "I appreciate your sharing that with me." _____
- you don't interrupt when she tells you how she feels. _____
- you apologize and admit you were wrong. _____

- you cut her some slack during her monthly cycle. _____
- you see something that needs to be done and you do it without any hassle. _____
- you express appreciation for all she does: "Honey I could never do what you do." _____

- you emphasize with her difficulties and pray with/for her. _____
- you willingly waste time with her, allowing her whatever time she needs to communicate with you. _____
- you work hard at being sensitive to her whenever you communicate. _____

- you say, "Do you need a solution or a listening ear?" _____
- you are patient with however long it takes for her to come to the point. _____
- you are patient when she says, "I just want to talk." _____
- you don't press for and are sensitive to her differing desires for intimacy. _____

#4. Peacemaking

Your wife wants to connect with you and abhors rifts, conflict or whatever causes an absence of peace. Without peace your wife won't feel connected: she won't feel close, she won't feel you're open and she certainly won't feel that you understand her.

I Need Help

- you let her vent her frustrations and hurts (even at you) and don't get angry and close her off. _____
- you admit that you are wrong and apologize ... and you ask for her forgiveness. _____
- you are very intentional about searching out whenever you have offended her such that you might apologize. _____

- you understand her natural desire to negotiate, compromise and defer as she attempts to bring peace ... and you willingly meet her halfway. _____
- you try to keep your relationship "up-to-date," resolving the unresolved and never saying, "Forget it." _____
- you work at not avoiding or sweeping issues "under the carpet." _____

- you quickly forgive her for any wrongs she confesses. _____
- you never nurse bitterness for past things/issues and always reassure her of your love. _____
- you spend whatever time is necessary to soothe her after a hurtful time. _____

- you appreciate her desire to live at peace with you and you take the initiative to tell her so. _____
- you understand and you do your part to never leave conflicts unresolved overnight. _____
- you never shut her out and run from conflict rather than moving to resolve it with her. _____

#5. Loyalty

Your wife may at times ask, "How much do you love me?" A natural follow-up question might be, "What do you love about me?" She asks such questions because the reassurance of your love energizes her ... and your wife must have reassurance.

I Need Help

- you speak highly of her in front of others. _____
- you are (and want to be) involved in things important to her. _____
- you help her make decisions (if she wants you to), such as ones regarding the children. _____

- you never correct her in front of the children. _____
- you don't look lustfully at other women (and you work at breaking any such habit). _____
- you make her and your marriage a priority. _____

- you are never critical of her or your children in front of others. _____
- you include her in social gatherings when others may leave their spouses home. _____
- you tell the children, "Don't speak to your mother that way!" _____

- you call her and let her know your plans ... or you advise her in advance. _____
- you keep all commitments with her. _____
- you always speak positively of her and the children at all times. _____

- you tell her often, "I love you." _____
- you have a mindset to always make sure your actions broadcast to her that you love her. _____
- you mimic (and express) to your sons how a man ought to treat a woman. _____

#6. Esteem

Scripture speaks powerfully as to how you should esteem and cherish your wife (Song of Solomon 7:6; Ephesians 5:29; Proverbs 31:28-29). God so created your wife such that cherishing, treasuring, honoring, esteeming and respecting her as the woman you married are the critical things that most tell her that you love her.

**I Need
Help**

- you say, "You handled that so well. I'm proud of you." _____
- you speak highly of her in front of others. _____
- you open doors for her (cars and entryways). _____

- you send her cards ... with your own words written. _____
- you try something new that you know she will enjoy. _____
- you give her encouragement or praise with kindness and enthusiasm. _____

- you notice something different with her hair or clothing. _____
- you are physically affectionate with her in public. _____
- you teach the children to show her utmost respect. _____

- you stand at restaurants when she returns to the table. _____
- you always help her with her coat. _____
- you value her opinion in the gray areas as not wrong but different from yours ... and yet valid. _____

- you choose things with her over "guy things." _____
- you work to make her feel first in importance. _____
- you show that you are proud of her and all that she does. _____

- you always make Valentine's Day, your anniversary and her birthday special. _____
- you plan romantic get-a-ways with her. _____
- you get her gifts for no good reason. _____

Final Questions for Husbands

Answer with Details in Your Journal

1. Do you REALLY want whatever is “best” for your wife?

2. Do you REALLY want whatever is “best” for your wife ... even when it conflicts (which it sometimes does) with what you see as being “best” for you?

3. And are you REALLY willing to relinquish what you see as being “best” for you ... in exchange for helping your wife?

Daily Spousal Prayer

Dear Lord,

I pray for my wife ... that by your grace she be open to receive all that You intend for her this day.

And I pray that You prompt me all through this day as to how I might, in thought, word and deed, show my love for her such that she both RECEIVE & FEEL that love from me. In particular this day help me to for my wife.

Wife ... For Your Husband

#1. Employment

Your husband has a natural, inborn desire to go out and work and achieve ... so to speak, to conquer the challenges of the world. Your husband's employment is very important to him and receiving honor and respect for this from you is of inestimable value to him.

**I Need
Help**

- you tell him verbally or in writing that you value his work efforts ... all that he does in his ministry. _____
- you express your faith in him and all the things he does as related to his ministry. _____
- you listen to his ministry stories as closely as you expect him to listen to your accounts as to all that happens within the family. _____

- you see yourself as his helpmate and counterpart and talk with him about this whenever possible. _____
- you pray and seek the Lord to give you insights that might help him in his ministry. _____
- you provide positive and constructive suggestions regarding his preaching and teaching. _____

- you allow him to dream about the future as you did when you were courting. _____
- you don't dishonor or subtly criticize his work in his ministry in order to get him to show more love in the family. _____
- you never compare his work with others in the ministry. _____

#2. Protect & Provide

Your husband has been imbued by God with a deep desire to protect and provide for you and your family. That desire is such that if necessary he will choose to die for you. Such desire permeates all that he does and requires for him the appreciation of a supportive wife.

I Need Help

- you verbalize your admiration of him for working to protect you and the family. _____
- you praise his commitment to provide for and protect you and the family (he needs to know that you never take it for granted). _____
- you empathize with him when he reveals his male mind-set about position, status, rank, or being one-up or one-down in his ministry. _____

- you genuinely “look up to him” as your protector (this will usually prevent him from ever “looking down” at you). _____
- you never, in word or body language, put down his work or how much money he makes. _____
- you’re always ready to figuratively “light the candles” and do whatever you can to fit your family’s lifestyle to the money he makes. _____

- you quietly and respectfully voice concerns about finances and then try to offer solutions that will help. _____
- you are always very conscious of limiting expenditures on yourself. _____
- you never make fun of the unsuccessful efforts that he makes In an effort to protect and provide for the family. _____

#3. Authority

The Scriptures call your husband the “head” ... both for you and your family. He has been given the authority and responsibility to lovingly lead you and your family. It is a very difficult and challenging task, one requiring both the counsel and understanding of a loving wife.

**I Need
Help**

- you tell him you're thankful for his strength and enjoy being able to lean on him at times. _____
- you support his self-image as a leader. _____
- you never say, “You're responsible but we're still equal, so don't make decisions I don't agree with.” _____

- you'll praise his good decisions. _____
- you are gracious if he makes a bad decision. _____
- you are careful to disagree with him only in private and always honor his authority in front of the children or any other parties. _____

- you give your reasons for disagreeing quietly and reasonably, but you never attack his right to lead. _____
- you tell him (in words or actions) that his willingness to lead takes the pressure off of you. _____
- you do not play “head games” with him in an effort to undercut his leadership and get your own way. _____

- you are quick to pray ... and slow to criticize any of his efforts to lead that you consider questionable. _____
- you willingly defer to him on the smaller issues as part of your role in helping to build up his confidence. _____
- you tell him that you thank God that you don't have to carry the responsibility he has. _____

#4. Insight

Your husband needs to know that you very much appreciate his desire to analyze and counsel both for your good and that of the family. You recognize that it is your role to give him the same respect at home as he receives in his ministry.

I Need Help

- you tell him up front that you just need his ear; and don't complain to him later that he always tries to "fix" you. _____
- you thank him for his advice without acting insulted or like he doesn't care about your feelings. _____
- you recognize in his problem-solving approach his male brand of empathy for you and family. _____

- you realize your own vulnerabilities, especially among males, and value his protection. _____
- you counsel him respectfully when you differ with his ideas (you can be right but wrong at the top of your voice). _____
- you sometimes let him "fix things" and then applaud his solutions. _____

- you believe in the fact that God gives him insight that you do not have ... and you pray that God will bring it forth. _____
- you readily admit that you can sin and ask him for his forgiveness. _____
- you thank him both for his perception on issues and for his Godly counsel. _____

- you accept the fact that as head of the family the Lord will give him insight that you do not have ... and you are not afraid to tell him so. _____
- you are sensitive with him when your women's intuition tells you that his insight is wrong. _____
- you never judge your husband with contempt or anger. _____

#5. Friendship

Your husband will often want you to join with him and just “be together” - even if what he is doing holds no interest for you. Your presence alone is enough to energize him. In Song of Solomon 5:10 the woman says, “This is my beloved and this is my friend.” As his wife you want to develop that.

I Need Help

- you appreciate his desire for shoulder-to-shoulder friendship with you (just to be together with no purpose) and you are willing to join with him often. _____
- you tell him often that you “like” him and work to show that that is true (he knows you love him, but he often wonders if you really like him). _____
- you respond positively to his invitation to engage in recreational activities ... or at least you come along to watch him (you don't have to go every time, but just now and then will energize him more than you realize. _____

- you enable him to open up and talk to you as you do things shoulder-to-shoulder (just being together with no purpose). _____
- you encourage him to spend time alone, which energizes him to reconnect with you later. _____
- you don't complain about his shoulder-to-shoulder activities with his male friends ... which often cause him to want to spend more face-to-face time with you. _____

- you respect his friendships, and he will be more likely to want you to join him shoulder-to-shoulder at other times. _____
- you decide to “like” your husband in spite of the habits he has that you don't like. _____
- you are okay just being with your husband even though you are not talking. _____

#6. Sexuality

Your husband needs you to appreciate his desire for sexual intimacy. Even though his desire may differ from yours he very much wants you to understand him in this area.

**I Need
Help**

- you have made a decision to accept the fact that your husband's sexual desire may be significantly different than yours. _____
- you accept the fact that men are more visually oriented with sex than women. _____
- you understand that he needs sexual release just as you need emotional release. _____

- you respond to him sexually more often than you yourself have a desire for. _____
- you even initiate sexual encounters from time to time. _____
- you never use the availability of a sexual encounter as a wedge/weapon to get him to do what you want. _____

- you let him acknowledge his sexual temptations without fearing that he'll be unfaithful. _____
- you never do anything to shame him with regard to his strong sexual desires. _____
- you don't try to make him open up to you verbally (or for any other reason) by depriving him of sex. _____

- you work seriously at learning how to give pleasure to both your husband and yourself during times of intimacy. _____
- you understand at times that you have to minister to his body to gain access to his spirit. _____
- you understand that for him the sexual act draws him close to you and that fact doesn't bother you. _____

Final Questions for Wives

Answer with Details in Your Journal

1. Do you REALLY want whatever is “best” for your husband?

2. Do you REALLY want whatever is “best” for your husband ... even when it conflicts (which it sometimes does) with what you see as being “best” for you?

3. And are you REALLY willing to relinquish what you see as being “best” for you ... in exchange for helping your husband?

Daily Spousal Prayer

Dear Lord,

I pray for my husband... that by your grace he be open to receive all that You intend for him this day.

And I pray that You prompt me all through this day as to how I might, in thought, word and deed, show my love for him such that he both RECEIVE & FEEL that love from me. In particular this day help me to for my husband.

(This Exercise was taken in part from the book, Love & Respect, by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs.)

