

A Husband's Top Three

Top Three

by Carolyn Mahaney

In my “study” of my husband (see Nicole’s post), I have found it handy to discover the three things that please him the most. This helps me in two ways. One, it enables me to do a quick evaluation in my mind as to how I’m doing in my marriage or what area I need to shore up. Secondly, it serves me in those “crazy busy” times when I am trying to juggle many different balls – and dropping some. Yet, if I can only keep a few balls in the air, I know which ones to choose.

Now, I know it is intimacy, encouragement and affection that top the “most pleasing to my husband” list. Consequently, if I give priority attention to these 3 areas, my husband’s happy, and often doesn’t even notice areas in which I might be doing poorly.

For instance, I’ve been doing a lousy job with meal preparation lately. My dinner meals have looked something like this: A rotisserie chicken from the grocery store with a couple of side dishes thrown together; hot dogs and coleslaw from KFC (my husband’s favorite coleslaw); peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and popcorn; frozen pizzas.... You get the picture. Pathetic, I know. However, I don’t think my husband has even paid attention (I just need to keep him from reading the blog today!).

What are the top three for your husband? Obviously, only you can figure that out. My guess, however, is that many husbands would list at least one of my husband’s top three in their top three as well. So, we’re going to do a little series on these three topics over the next few days. But in the meantime, why not quiz your husband over Valentine’s Day dinner? Find out what are three ways you can most please him.

The Undisputed #1

by Nicole Whitacre

The first topic in our mini-series—“Top Three”—is marital intimacy. By “top three,” we don’t mean a wife’s top three priorities as outlined in Scripture, but rather, the top three ways in which we can best fulfill the scriptural command to love our husbands—which will be different for

everyone. But for my husband (and I suspect for many others), intimacy holds an unrivaled position at #1.

This topic of intimacy however, is only appropriate for married women to consider. Single women and young girls are, in the eloquent words of Solomon, not to “stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (S of S 2:7). For this reason, we are providing today’s post in a downloadable document and ask that unmarried women refrain from reading it. Married women, you can continue reading here.

From One First Lady to Another

by Kristin Chesemore

When an interviewer once asked Barbara Bush what advice she gave to her daughter-in-law Laura Bush, her answer was simple: “Don’t criticize your husband.” The elder Mrs. Bush recalled a remark she made about one of George Bush Sr.’s speeches: “I think you’re tired, and you mumbled your words.” The effect of this seemingly innocent comment? “When I criticized George, he remembered it for months afterwards.”

“So I really took her advice to heart,” Laura Bush said. “I knew there were plenty of other critics [of my husband] without me being one of them. Until one night we were driving into our driveway and he said, ‘Tell me the truth, how was my speech?’ And I said, ‘Well, it wasn’t that good.’ And with that, he drove into the garage wall!”

Although our president might be the only man to have driven into a garage wall upon hearing his wife’s criticism, the fact remains: *our critical words can have a debilitating effect on our husbands!* I imagine that many men, like the first President Bush, remember their wife’s critical words for months or even years.

My mom has observed that, of all the criticism our husbands may receive—from their boss or their family or even an enemy—a wife’s disparaging remarks can often do the most damage. To me, this is a sobering thought. I regret many a hasty, critical comment that I’ve made to Brian.

This doesn’t mean there is not a place for gentle correction at times. As wives, it is our responsibility to help our husbands in their pursuit of godliness. However, there is a big difference between gentle correction motivated out of a heart of love and sinful, unkind criticism.

However, as detrimental as our criticism is, *our words of encouragement carry a unique, life-giving potential for our husbands*. Recently, I sat down with my husband and asked him what he experiences when I encourage him. He said that my encouraging words sustain him, and help him to persevere in life and godliness. He said they help him to be aware of God's grace at work in his life, changing him to be more like the Savior. And my encouragement makes him feel prized and appreciated. What a stunning effect my words can have!

Now, please don't assume I'm the world's most encouraging wife. Far from it! As Brian described the effect of my encouragement I was saddened by how little I do encourage him, but freshly inspired to make this a greater priority.

If your husband, like mine, would list "encouragement" in his "Top Three," consider making small but specific changes. Seek to refrain from critical remarks, and instead, look for creative ways to express encouragement.

For example, put a sticky note somewhere telling him that you love him. Hide a card and his favorite candy in his bag when he goes on a business trip (this is my husband's favorite). Or think about one character trait where he really shines, and tell him so!

Our husband may never be President of the United States, but when we refrain from criticism and cultivate encouragement, we can give them confidence in our love, inspire them to persevere, and point them to the Savior.

Ten Thousand Faults

by Carolyn Mahaney

Before Caly's birth happily distracted us, we were mid-way through a series we were calling "Top Three." Our goal was to encourage wives to consider what were the "top three" ways they could please their husband. Although these are different for every man, we chose to focus on our husbands' top three, one or more of which probably make many other husbands' lists as well.

Nicole considered the importance of intimacy and Kristin the enriching effect of encouragement. We want to camp out at the encouragement site a little longer. And single women, we want you to hang with us, because whether it's in your interactions with others or preparing for marriage, this topic is extremely relevant for you.

If you're like me, you can be inspired by reading something on encouragement or watching another woman who exemplifies encouragement, but when we daily face the sins of others—our husbands, co-workers, family, roommates—that desire to encourage evaporates, leaving only resentment, anger, and then eventually discouragement. So how do we cultivate a genuine attitude of encouragement that withstands the rigors of everyday relationships?

I believe the foundation of encouragement is a growing awareness of our own sinfulness. As I wrote in *Feminine Appeal*:

“Like a pebble tossed into a pool of water, awareness of our sinfulness generates a marvelous ripple effect in our marriage. Here's how it works: The more we understand the sin in our hearts, the more we appreciate the patience and mercy of God; and this, in turn, produces an attitude of humility and mercy toward our husbands.

My husband's historical hero Charles Spurgeon once said:

‘He who grows in grace remembers that he is but dust, and he therefore does not expect his fellow Christians to be anything more. He overlooks ten thousand of their faults, because he knows his God overlooks twenty thousand in his own case. He does not expect perfection in the creature, and, therefore, he is not disappointed when he does not find it.’

When we see our husbands as sinner like ourselves—sinners in need of God's grace and mercy—it strips away any intolerant, critical, or demanding attitude we may be tempted to have. Every husband has areas where he needs to change and grow, but so do we!

Although we both are sinners, God is using our marriage to help us grow in godliness. In fact, our husbands' particular sins, unique weaknesses, and even their idiosyncrasies are tailor-made for us. Likewise, our sins and weaknesses are custom-designed for them. Both husbands and wives will become more Christlike by having to deal with each other's sins and deficiencies."

Do you see how this works? If we are more critical than encouraging, more dissatisfied than grateful toward our husband, that is a sure sign of self-righteousness. And encouragement doesn't grow in this proud

environment. If we want to become an encourager, the first step is to 'remember we are but dust.' When we are overwhelmed with gratitude for God's mercy toward us, it will be easy to encourage our husbands.

Finally, a word to single women, also from *Feminine Appeal*:

"If you are single, I would encourage you to study these truths now. They will serve you as you interact with single men, encourage your married friends, and prepare for our future—should God call you to marriage. Humility born of the awareness of our sinful tendencies is an essential character quality in mature Christians. As single women you should cultivate this humility and look for it in any man who might pursue you for marriage."

Eighty/Twenty

by Carolyn Mahaney

As a way of introducing me to the attendees of the College Church women's retreat last weekend, one of the event coordinators conducted an interview with me on the first evening. A particular question she asked was: *If given the opportunity, who is one famous person with whom you'd like to have dinner?*

My answer: Actually, I've already been blessed to have that experience. For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to meet Elisabeth Elliot. A few years ago, she was the guest speaker for my church's women's retreat and my husband and I were privileged to have dinner with Elisabeth and her husband.

After my mom, Elisabeth Elliot is the woman who has most affected my life. I still remember as a child my mom reading *Through Gates of Splendor* to our family. This book left an indelible mark on my young mind. Since that time, I have read most of the other books that Elisabeth has authored, and listened to oodles of taped messages by her, as well as subscribed to her newsletter. As you probably can tell, I deeply admire this godly woman and the uncompromised message of biblical womanhood she has imparted through her writing and speaking.

All this to say, there's a quote in one of her books--actually, she's quoting her husband--that would serve us well in keeping with this whole topic of encouragement that we've been considering. Lars Gren (Elisabeth's husband), presented this helpful challenge:

“A wife, if she is very generous, may allow that her husband lives up to perhaps eighty percent of her expectations. There is always the other twenty percent that she would like to change, and she may chip away at it for the whole of their married life without reducing it by very much. She may, on the other hand, simply decide to enjoy the eighty percent, and both of them will be happy.”

Sometimes as wives, we are more inclined to concentrate on what our husbands are doing wrong rather than what they are doing right. We are more prone to criticize the twenty percent rather than encourage the eighty percent. That’s why this little quote has been such a great reminder to me as I endeavor to encourage my husband.

So, let's apply this eighty/twenty rule in our marriage. Let’s enjoy all the wonderful qualities about our husband. For I daresay that Lars is right: when we enjoy and encourage our husbands, both of us will be happy!

(A little addendum to my College Church Women's Retreat experience...The girl who wired me with the mic for each message came up to me after my interview and first message on Friday evening and said, “I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Elisabeth. I am Elisabeth Elliot's granddaughter and namesake.” What a treat to meet this young woman!)

A Grandmother’s Secret

by Nicole Whitacre

I want to tag this little anecdote onto Mom’s post about encouraging rather than criticizing our husbands:

"On her golden wedding anniversary, my grandmother revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. 'On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook,' she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. 'To tell the truth,' she replied, 'I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'" Roderick McFarlane, in Reader's Digest, December, 1992.

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” Proverbs 19:11

Q & A – How Do I Encourage My Husband?

by Nicole Whitacre

The following humble email came in yesterday:

I have appreciated the last few days about encouraging our husbands. I've been struggling with this for the entirety of my 10-month marriage, and I have really seen how my critical spirit tears my husband down. I would really love to begin encouraging him, but I'm not sure how. Are there any practical ways to do this?

There are many answers to this question, but I think that Ephesians 4:22-24 lays it out very simply: we are to “put off the old self” and “put on the new self.” By God’s grace we are to “put off” critical thoughts, which lead to unkind words and “put on” loving thoughts that lead to encouraging words. Meaningful encouragement begins with our thought life.

The apostle Paul understood the influence of people’s thoughts on their feelings and behavior. He exhorted the Philippians in this way: “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*” (Phil 4:8).

If we think Philippians 4 thoughts about our husbands, then encouraging words are sure to come out. I love what Shirley Rice has to say along these lines:

“Are you in love with your husband? Not, do you love him? I know you do. He has been around a long time, and you’re used to him. He is the father of your children. But are you in love with him? How long has it been since your heart really squeezed when you looked at him? Why is it you have forgotten the things that attracted you to him at first?...Your husband needs to be told that you love him, that he is attractive to you. By the grace of God, I want you to start changing your thought pattern. Tomorrow morning, get your eyes off the toaster or the baby bottles long enough to LOOK at him. Don’t you see the way his coat fits his shoulders? Look at his hands. Do you remember when just to look at his strong hands made your heart lift? Well, LOOK at him and remember. *Then loose your tongue and tell him that you love him*” (emphasis mine).

So how do we begin to encourage our husbands? First, we “change our thought pattern” and then we tell him how much we love him!

Affectionate Love

by Janelle Bradshaw

The final topic in our mini-series on marriage is *affection*. When I asked my husband, Mike, if affection was among his "top three," I received a resounding "oh definitely!" I suspected as much.

I find it interesting that Scripture highlights an affectionate love as a priority for us as wives. In Titus 2 we are commanded to love our husbands, and the word for love there is the Greek word, *phileo*.

My mom defines *phileo* for us in *Feminine Appeal*: “This word describes the love between very close friends. It is a tender, affectionate, passionate kind of love. It emphasizes enjoyment and respect in a relationship.”

It is also interesting to note (as my mom writes) that *phileo* is used instead of *agape*. You see,

“The Greek word *agape* refers to a self-sacrificing love. It’s a love that gives to others even if nothing is given back. Yet Paul didn’t use *agape* in describing the love we are to cultivate for our husbands. He chose *phileo*. In fact, in commands specifically related to wives, *agape* is never used. Now this does not mean we have been released from needing to extend this kind of love. [However] I believe women are generally weaker in exhibiting an affectionate love—thus the instructions given to us in Titus 2.

In fact, women will often continue to sacrifice and serve their husbands even if all tender feelings for them have subsided. I have met women like that! They obviously do not respect their husbands. They certainly do not have tender feelings for them. Yet that does not hinder these women from continuing to wash their husbands’ clothes, cook their meals, and clean the house for them.

How often I am guilty of this same thing! I frequently get bogged down with serving Mike, all the while neglecting one of the things that mean the most to him. For all you wives who can relate, we’ll try to inspire you tomorrow with some ideas for showering your husband with a tender love.

Cherish Him

by Janelle Bradshaw

It's time to take a closer look at how to cultivate the wifely affection that we talked about yesterday. And who better to ask what makes a husband feel cherished than husbands?

Chapter two in *Feminine Appeal* contains responses from different men about how their wives show them this tender love. I have included some of them here to get you thinking...

“If I'm sick in bed, my wife prepares tea and meals for me without my asking and waits on me hand and foot. It's as though her world stops so she can take care of me.”

“Each time Karin catches my eye in public with a smile and subtle wink, or greets me with a warm embrace upon my arrival home from work, or hangs on my arm when we go out on a date, the message comes through loud and clear: ‘I enjoy being with you and want you to know that I love you.’”

“With just a handful of exceptions, Lisa has written me a note in my lunch every single workday for over ten years.”

“My wife shows me affection through a constant stream of small surprises--showing up at work with my favorite Starbucks drink, making her famous brownies on no special occasion, arranging to borrow a friend's convertible sports car for our anniversary. Not all have been extremely costly, but all have been very meaningful.”

“I am cherished by my wife through her fervent and faithful intercessory prayer for me. Her conviction is that no one can care for me like my heavenly Father.”

And here's one more fun idea I recently came across. My mom was given this t-shirt as a gift and immediately began wearing it. After my husband saw it, he began dropping hints about how he might like me to have the same shirt. This Christmas, one of his gifts under the tree was this t-shirt which I proudly wear! (Although we can't heartily endorse all the t-shirts on the website, you can purchase your very own "i love my husband" t-shirt [here](#).)

So, we have no more excuses, ladies! There are plenty of ideas here for showing affection to our husband. Let's get started today!*

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