

Loving Your Husband Before You Get Married

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In my first year as a Christian, I attended or was part of thirteen weddings, including the weddings of my two younger sisters and one ex-boyfriend. The Lord was working overtime on the sin of self-pity that year, but out of His sanctifying work came my informal "ministry" of a wedding coordinator. I started by helping one of my sisters, and as the word got around, I ended up serving countless friends.

At a recent rehearsal dinner, someone asked me if it was difficult as an unmarried woman to be so involved in these weddings. I was glad to genuinely say no. That wasn't always my answer, however. I can clearly recall sitting at many wedding receptions with the wind knocked out of me due to the bitterness in my heart. I would evaluate each aspect of the weddings I attended and plan for how "my" special day would surpass the event unfolding before me. Like any Cinderella devotee, the highlight of my life would be that special moment when the doors were opened and all eyes, most especially those of My Prince, would be on me. What happened in the "happily ever after" part was the fine print. It was going to be *all about me* on that day.

And probably for every day after that, too.

Maybe this is why the apostle Paul thought it was of paramount importance that the older women *teach* the younger women how to love their husbands. As always, the Bible is radically counter-cultural to the self-centered worldview spoon-fed to young girls through fairy tales and force-fed to young women through movies, magazines, and music. We have to learn how to step out of the princess spotlight and learn how to love well in the way God defines love. A wedding isn't the kick-off to Happily Ever After. It's only a segue into a new season with new and different opportunities to demonstrate Christ-like love that weren't present when single.

Doing Him Good All the Days of Your Life

King Lemuel was taught well by his mother, and his wisdom was memorialized in the 31st Proverb. Writing of the virtuous woman, he said that her husband has full confidence in her, and she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

That's *all* the days of her life—days before and days after marriage. If you're single, there are things you can do now to sow good seeds for a godly marriage. What if you're not sure if you'll be married? Though marriage is the norm for most, not all of us will receive that gift—that's true—but we're still called to prepare.

"Problems in marriage are *always* the result of self-centeredness," writes Douglas Wilson in *Her Hand in Marriage*. "So the time a person spends when he is single should be time spent in preparation for marriage. This is important even if he never gets married. This is because biblical preparation for marriage is nothing more than learning to follow Jesus Christ and love one's neighbor. In other words, preparation for Christian marriage is basically the same as preparation for Christian living. Christians are to prepare for marriage by learning self-denial, subduing their pride, and putting their neighbor first. Once they learn to love God and love their neighbor, they are prepared to enter into the covenant of marriage with one of their neighbors."

Growing in *Philandros* Love

In her outstanding teaching series on the Titus 2 virtues, Carolyn Mahaney notes that the phrase "love their husbands" is only one word in the Greek. It is the compound word *philandros*, derived from *phileo* (a warm affection) and *andros* (man). Loving your husband with a tender, warm, deeply affectionate love might seem like a no-brainer until you think about the caricatures of long-married women in our culture: dismissive, disrespectful, bored, shrewish. Cultivating and maintaining that tender affection can, at times, take some work.

Single women can prepare to grow in *philandros* love now by understanding the doctrines of sin and God's sovereignty. If God has marriage for us (His sovereign plan), one thing we need to settle now in our hearts is that we won't be marrying Prince Charming; we will be marrying a sinner (the doctrine of indwelling sin) as will our husbands! So now we can do the "heartwork" to cultivate *philandros* love by working on what undermines it: the bitterness, selfishness, fear, and sinful judgment resident in us. When and if God brings us

into a new season of marriage, this preparation will help us cultivate tender thoughts and behavior toward our husbands. Though there's not space for a comprehensive treatment of these topics, below are some questions we can consider before the Lord while still single:

- Bitterness: Is there any unforgiveness in your heart against the men you've dated or against the men who have never asked you out? Do you regard the single men in your life as brothers in the Lord or as potential husbands? Do you grumble and complain on a regular basis about being single? (Ephesians 4:31-32)
- Selfishness: Are you willing to serve the "unlovely" or the "least" in your church or circle of friends, even when no one is watching? Do you defer to others, esteeming them as better than yourself, or do you insist on your way? Do you view your time and schedule now as a single as a season to indulge yourself or to be more available to serve others? (Philippians 2:3-4)
- Fear: Do you trust God for your future or do you think He has forgotten you? Do you think others will betray you and thus "mess up" God's plan for your life? (Romans 8:28-39)
- Sinful judgment: Do you speculate about the single men around you, for good or bad? Are you assigning motives for their actions without asking humbly for information? Are you constantly comparing yourself with other women? (James 3:13-4:3)

Whether or not the Lord attaches an *andros* to our *phileo* love, this kind of "heartwork" is crucial to growing in the likeness of Christ. By working to become more like our Lord and Savior, we will be worthy of the full trust of both our earthly husbands (should we get married) and, ultimately, our heavenly Bridegroom.