

THE CROWN

LOVING YOUR HUSBAND ON HIS TERMS

“I, take you, to be my husband, my constant friend, my faithful partner and my love from this day forward. In the presence of God, our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to be your faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow. I promise to love you unconditionally, to support you in your goals, to honor and respect you, to laugh with you and cry with you, and to cherish you for as long as we both shall live.”

“In the presence of God, our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to...unconditionally... support...honor...respect...and cherish you.” How quickly we forget our promises.

During the course of our marriages we will face situations that test our willingness to honor our husbands. When conflicts arise we will be tempted to oppose our husbands rather than support them. Instead of honoring them, we will discredit them and put them down. Rather than respect them, we will scorn them. And rather than cherish them, we will reject them. Evidently, when we feel unloved, respect becomes expendable!

Most women equate love with understanding, openness, closeness, and esteem. Most men equate love with respect and affirmation. If we fail to respect our husbands, we fail to love them in the way that they understand love. Respect is “a choice that we make out of reverence for God and love for our husbands.”¹ First John 4:21 tells us “*that he who loves God **must** love his brother also*” (NKJV, emphasis mine). What we must realize is that love on our terms isn’t love at all.

Ephesians, Chapter 5, closes its exhortation to husbands and wives with the following words: “*let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband*” (v.33, NKJV).

Define love. _____

Define respect. _____

How are the two different? How are they similar? _____

Proverbs 12:4 says, “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones*” (NKJV).

Fear

For one hundred and eighty days King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, gave a banquet for his princes, military officers, and provincial officials, displaying the tremendous wealth and splendor of his kingdom. It would seem that nothing had escaped their gaze...until the king’s most beautiful possession, the stunning Queen Vashti, was summoned.

Turn to Esther, Chapter 1, and read verses 1-22.

What did King Ahasuerus ask of his queen (vv.10-11)? _____

God's Word does not afford the reason for the queen's refusal, leaving us to speculate why Vashti declined her husband's request. Persian modesty required all women to be veiled in public.² In order to display her beauty it would have been necessary to remove her veil, thus resulting in a loss of dignity and respect. Another Eastern custom dictated that the women, including the queen, were to be excluded from such revelry.³ It is also suggested that the queen herself had become intoxicated while entertaining the women (1:9). Still, others believe that she was pregnant at the time. Whatever the reason, Queen Vashti felt justified in her decision to publically disrespect the king.

In his book *Love and Respect*, Dr. Emerson Eggerichs states that "when a wife feels unloved, it is especially hard to respect her husband." Her natural tendency is to react in ways that feel disrespectful to him. "When a husband feels disrespected, it is especially hard to love his wife." Like his wife, he will react in ways that feel unloving to her.⁴

A woman will naturally justify Vashti's actions. But for our purposes in this lesson we will not focus on whether King Ahasuerus' request was wrong and Vashti's response was right, and vice versa, but on the consequences to a marital relationship devoid of love and respect.

How did King Ahasuerus fail to show his wife love? _____

How did she respond? _____

Consider how you react when your husband treats you in a way that feels unloving. Record your answer(s). _____

Why do you believe the king reacted to the queen's defiance with such fury? _____

What did the king's advisors fear would happen as a result of Vashti's disrespectful behavior (vv.17-18)? _____

How can the things you say about your husband cause others to form preconceived opinions about him? How can your speech cause other women to degrade their own husbands? _____

Read Matthew 18:15.

Vashti's refusal to appear before the king challenged his authority as a man, as her husband, and as her king. Perhaps he feared that if his own wife did not respect him, he would lose the respect of his subjects. After all, if he could not rule his own household, how could he rule a kingdom! (See 1 Timothy 3:5).

According to Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:1-2, can a woman justify her disrespect when her husband is unloving? Why, or why not? _____

Have you placed stipulations on your willingness to respect your husband? If so, what are they? _____

When a wife says, “I cannot respect him!” what does she reveal about herself? Consider Philippians 2:3. _____

How does a woman disgrace herself by speaking disrespectfully of her husband? _____

Turn back to Esther, Chapter 1. What consequences did the king suffer because of his actions? Likewise, what consequences did the queen suffer because of her actions? _____

Perhaps Vashti thought Ahasuerus’ love for her would outweigh her sin. Perhaps Vashti expected Ahasuerus to forgive her after he had come to his senses. Unfortunately, neither came to fruition. Irreparable damage had been done and the queen’s crown was removed.

Unconditional

God’s Word commands husbands to love their wives even when they are disrespectful. And as you read in Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:1-2, it also commands wives to respect their husbands when they are unloving. As wives, we expect to receive unconditional love (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 for an example), but are rarely willing to give love to our husbands in the way they need to be loved—through unconditional respect.

The Amplified Version states Ephesians 5:33 this way: *“and let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband [that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates, and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly].”*

When you declared your love for your husband before God, you vowed to respect and reverence him no matter what transpired in your relationship. The words listed below are synonyms for the words “respectful”, “respect”, and “reverence.” These words give us a greater understanding of what it means to love our husbands. If you have a dictionary, look up each word and record its meaning. In what ways can you implement these qualities in your relationship?

- Attentive: _____
- Prefer: _____
- Gracious: _____

- Amiable: _____

- Regard: _____

- Honor: _____

- Esteem: _____

- Appreciate: _____

- Cherish: _____

- Praise: _____

Five years later, Vashti's replacement, Queen Esther, took her place on the throne. Esther could not have married a man more unlike her. Without a doubt, Esther felt neglected and unloved at times (Esther 4:11). And yet, despite their different upbringings, different manners and customs, despite their differing faith, she upheld her vow to support, honor, respect, and cherish her husband. *"The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight...so he set the royal crown upon her head..."* (Esther 2:17, NKJV).

Proverbs 31:25 says, *"Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come"* (NKJV).

One day we will kneel before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He will place on our heads a *"crown of glory that does not fade away"* (1 Peter 5:4, NKJV). Until then, *"let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16, NKJV).

In closing, read John 12:24-26.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do women today show disdain for their husbands?
2. In what ways have you made it clear that your husband must earn your respect?
3. Proverbs 12:4 stated that *"an excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rotteness in his bones"* (NKJV). The word *"excellent"* describes a woman of outstanding moral character. Are you a *"crown,"* or are you *"like rotteness in his bones"*?
4. In the heat of battle, respect often becomes secondary to emotions. Do you speak your mind assuming that your husbands will later forgive you? Do you find yourself excusing your harsh words and disrespectful behavior because grace should abound (see Romans 6:1-2)?
5. If you are unwilling to respect an unloving husband are you any better than he?

6. As stated in the lesson, your attitude and your words regarding your husband can cause others to form preconceived opinions about him. Based on recent statements you have made about your husband, and the attitude you've conveyed regarding him, how might others describe him?
7. Read Esther 4:1-17. Esther felt a sense of urgency to approach the king after hearing of the decree to annihilate her people. But, it was a well-known fact that to approach the king without first being summoned was an act of disrespect and would result in death. What did Esther do before she approached the king?

When conflicts arise between you and your spouse, what can you glean from Esther's example?

Fasting is an act that causes you to acknowledge your dependence on God. How can patience, prayer, and fasting refocus your heart when facing difficulties between you and your spouse?

8. Although it may not be apparent, many men feel inadequate as husbands, fathers, providers, protectors, and leaders, etc. Explain how criticizing your husband in public, putting down his opinions, or questioning his judgment in front of others, will negatively impact him *and* your marriage relationship.

Put yourself in his place. When your husband publically criticizes, or teases you regarding an issue that you are particularly sensitive about, how is your self-esteem *and* your relationship with him affected?

You learned that to “regard” your husband is to take an attentive and protective interest in him. (Esther demonstrated this in Esther 2:21-23.) How can you “protect” your husband by respecting him in public?

9. As with submission, a wife will not respect her husband because he is unlike the ideal man described in Ephesians 5:25-33. Oftentimes, wives get so caught up in demanding love that they forget to be loving themselves. Read John 15:13. What does love require?

Are you willing to lay down your life before demanding that he lay down his?

10. You also learned that women equate love with understanding, openness, closeness, and esteem. What happens in your heart and mind when one or more of these qualities is missing from your relationship? How can you guard yourself from becoming wounded by the enemy's whispers? Consider Ephesians 6:13-18 and 1 Peter 5:8-9.
11. How do the following passages speak of respect: Philippians 2:4, Romans 12:10, and Luke 14:7-11?
12. Reread the opening paragraph. Have you upheld your vows to your husband? If you have failed to support, honor, respect, and cherish your husband turn to Psalm 51. As you meditate on this prayer of repentance, acknowledge your failings as a wife and helpmeet, and ask God to teach you to love your husband in the way he needs to be loved. After you have done this, share your intentions with your husband.

¹ Feldhahn, Shaunti. *For Women Only: What you need to know about the inner lives of men*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah Publishers, 2004. 27.

² MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (Es 1:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's Study Bible*. (Es 1:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Eggeriches, Emerson. *Love and Respect*. Nashville Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2004. 16.