



the
5 Love Needs
— of —
Men and Women

DR. GARY & BARBARA ROSBERG



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The Five Love Needs of Men and Women

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In sharing stories from other people's lives in this book, we have changed their names and some of the details of their stories in order to protect their privacy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was five years between when I (Gary) wrote *Guard Your Heart* and penned the first edition of this book. In some people's eyes, waiting five years between books is too long. Not for me. For three very important reasons.

First, Barb and I knew the next time we wrote a book, we wanted to write it together. Life is short, and we want to team up as a couple as much as possible to have an impact on families. Barb cowrote *Guard Your Heart* with me, as well as several of our other books. Yet she still has a lot more to say, which you will read in this book.

Second, we had a couple of sweet daughters to finish raising and releasing. God brought those releases within ten days of each other in September of 1999. Ouch! Sarah was married on September 11 of that year to Scott Wolfswinkel. We were thrilled because we now had a son, whom we love. (Scott and Sarah have since had two sons of their own.) Missy, our youngest daughter, left for college in the fall of 1999, which left us with an empty nest. (She has since married Cooper White and has a daughter). We decided that our role as a mom and dad was far more important than writing a book, so we waited. Now that our daughters were released, we were released to write.

The third reason is perhaps more important to you than the first two. We didn't want to write another book until the Holy Spirit had burned into our hearts and spirits something that needed to be said. Our dear friend Dr. John Trent once told me, "The Christian community doesn't need another book by authors who don't have anything to say." We have taken his counsel. We waited until now because we now have something to say. Next to our relationship with Jesus Christ, nothing is more important than marriage. That's why we wrote this book. We want to help you strengthen your marriage and to encourage you to become passionate about helping others strengthen their marriages.

When writing this book, it helped us to surround ourselves with other

people who are as committed as we are to putting out the best book possible. That's what we did. And we want to thank those who helped us.

First of all, thank you to Ron Beers from Tyndale House Publishers. When we met you at CBA in 1997, we knew you were the real thing. Your commitment not only to great books but also to great relationships sold us right out of the gate. Thanks for teaming up with us and being so committed to excellence in publishing this book. Thanks also to Ken Petersen and the rest of the Tyndale team. You are the best.

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We also want to thank the ministry team at America's Family Coaches. Your commitment to bringing God's truth to families nationally and internationally is distinctive and heartfelt. Your sacrifice has enabled us to spend the time necessary to write this book. May your families and thousands of others be strengthened because of your service. We love you and count it a great honor to serve you.

And most of all, we want to thank our family. Sarah and Scott, we love you and are proud of you and of how God is developing your precious marriage. We hold you up in prayer and cherish you. You have started strong. Now in the power of the Spirit of God, finish strong. Continue to raise up Mason and Kaden to be strong, godly men. Missy and Cooper, we also honor you and are crazy about you both. We are humbled to be your mom and dad and to watch your flourishing marriage and parenting of Lilly Anne. It is truly a joy to watch God use you in your ministry. Stay in his grip dear ones, and finish strong.

*Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosberg
America's Family Coaches*

A SPECIAL NOTE FROM GARY AND BARB

**INTRODUCING THE DIVORCE-PROOFING
AMERICA'S MARRIAGES CAMPAIGN**

Dear friend,

The book in your hands is part of a campaign to Divorce-Proof America's Marriages. Couples across this nation—from Boston to Los Angeles, from Miami to Seattle—are joining together to divorce-proof their marriages. They are taking a stand *for* healthy, growing, lifetime marriages and *against* the looming threat of divorce.

Why now?

If we don't do it *now*, then when?

If we don't start *here*—with our family and yours—then where?

If we don't do it *together*, who will?

We believe that if we fail to address divorce now, the next generation of marriages will be lost. We must catch the vision for divorce-proofed marriages and push back the threat of divorce as far as our influence can reach. We want to join you not only in proactively protecting your own marriage but in helping divorce-proof the marriage of every couple you know.

As we go to battle together for the cause of the Christian home, we will pay a price. We have a powerful enemy in this endeavor. The apostle Peter warns, "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

You and your marriage are the devil's intended victims. Since a divorce-proof marriage is high on God's priority list, you can know that such marriages are also at the top of the enemy's hit list. Satan would like nothing better than to discourage you, debilitate your marriage, and add another crippled or broken family to his ledger. That is why we are asserting that your marriage and family *are* your ministry.

Let us proclaim together loudly and clearly: Divorce will stop—and stop *now*. Starting in our home and in yours, let's draw a line in the sand

and tell anyone with ears to hear, “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Let’s agree to pull out all the stops in order to build biblical homes—for the sake of our marriages, for the sake of the next generation, and for the cause of Jesus Christ.

But it doesn’t stop there. If you—as a couple, a pastor, a small-group leader, adult Sunday school teacher—share these principles with other couples and families you care about, you will become part of God’s work to change the face of marriage in our country. (For additional resources as well as ideas about how to start a small group in your community, please see appendix A).

How does *The Five Love Needs of Men and Women* fit into the campaign? We believe that serving love—the kind of love that understands and meets the other person’s needs—is a critical part of divorce-proofing any marriage. This book and the accompanying workbook will help you develop and practice serving love, one of the six different kinds of love outlined in our campaign book, *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*.

We’ve also written another companion book to *The Five Love Needs of Men and Women*. Titled *40 Unforgettable Dates with Your Mate*, this fun and practical book not only gives husbands twenty ideas for planning dates to meet their wives’ needs but also inspires wives with twenty ideas for planning dates to meet their husbands’ needs. This book will help you create an environment in which to discuss and meet your spouse’s needs.

We hope you catch the vision for divorce-proofing your marriage—and the marriages of people you know. It’s a campaign worth investing in!

Your friends,
Gary and Barb Rosberg

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED A MARRIAGE

Phil called my (Gary's) counseling office to ask if he and his wife could make an appointment. Looking at my jam-packed schedule book, I responded, "This is a really busy time, Phil. It may be a few weeks before an appointment opens up."

"It can't wait a few weeks," he said. "It *has* to be today." Then he added, "Gary, I wouldn't ask if it weren't urgent."

I didn't know Phil well, but I knew panic when I heard it. "If you really need to come in," I said, "stop by at five o'clock."

"We'll be there," he said.

Throughout the day I kept thinking about that phone call and found myself praying for Phil and his wife. The urgent tone of his voice was a red flag, warning me that we were about to step into a battle—a battle for the life of his family.

Several hours later my worst fears were realized as I greeted Phil and Susan in my office waiting room. Susan was weeping, staring at the floor. Phil looked like a man who had just come face-to-face with his worst nightmare.

Once we were all seated in my office, I asked them what they needed to talk about.

"I was going to take the kids to the park this afternoon," Phil said. "Before we left, I was changing baby Annie's diaper. I couldn't find the wipes, so I asked one of the older kids to watch the baby while I looked for some. Then I remembered that Susan sometimes carries a package of wipes in her beach bag, which was stowed in our older daughter's closet. When I reached inside the beach bag, I found a letter. It was a love letter to Susan. The only problem is . . . it wasn't from me."

Phil glanced at Susan for a second, then looked back at me.

"The letter was from another man. He was pouring out his love for *my* wife. He talked about times they were together. Right there in print I

began to see my entire life unravel. I couldn't believe it. He talked about her perfume . . . about his favorite dress. *I* bought that dress for Susan. He talked about his memories of hotels and secret lunches. I couldn't believe my eyes. This was my wife, the mother of my kids, he was talking about. But I think the one that is putting me under is that they were even in our bedroom. I go out of town to earn a living for her and the kids, and she is in our bedroom with this guy. All I could do was stare at the letter."

"What did you do next?" I asked him.

"I slid to the floor inside that closet and read the letter over and over again. I couldn't stop," he said. "I knew if I ever stepped outside that closet, I would have to face more pain than I could ever imagine. I knew my life would never be the same. I could hear the kids running through the house, completely unaware that their world was about to change. Finally I gathered enough strength to get up. I could hear Susan on the phone in our bedroom, so I headed down the hallway toward her. As I did, I walked past family pictures representing everything that made sense. Pictures of holidays, white-water rafting, family reunions. . . . It was the longest walk of my life.

"As I walked into the bedroom, Susan's back was to me. Then she hung up the phone and turned toward me. As she did, I looked into her eyes, and all I could say were three words: 'Susan, I know.'

"With that, she fell over onto the bed and began to sob. And then I knew for sure that it wasn't a bad dream. This was really happening. My wife was having an affair. Wrenching pain cut through me from somewhere deep inside of my soul. And we both just fell apart."

Oh no, Lord. Not another family, I found myself praying. Not this couple . . . these little children. Father, give me the words, give me the wisdom.

"What happened to us, Gary?" Phil asked, tears in his eyes as he looked at me. "We began our marriage with so much love for each other, with such incredible hope for our future together. We were so determined to have a strong, Christ-centered marriage. What happened?"

"Phil and Susan, I am so sorry. Let's talk a bit about your situation," I said. "What is going to happen in the next several minutes is literally going to be a defining moment for the rest of your marriage because you guys are at a crossroads. If you were in a physical crisis as serious as this, I would have a physician hospitalize you. We don't hospitalize couples in crisis, but what I do is give you a safe place to bleed—with the promise that God can sort all this out. It's not too late. He is here, and so am I."

Over the next several minutes I helped Phil and Susan begin to drain the pain. There were tears, outbursts of anger, and times when they were ready to walk out. But they didn't. They stayed and began to face this storm head-on. Then, as I began to sense that they were ready to hear some strong truth, I began to both press them and to give them a vision for what needed to happen to restore their marriage.

"I need to start by asking you some things to bring me up to speed," I said. "Susan, I guess I would like to start by asking how your relationship with this other man got from zero to 100 mph. As painful as this is, Phil needs to hear this, and so do I if I am going to help you. I know it didn't start with a sexual relationship."

"No, it didn't. It started with attention," replied Susan. "Looks. Innocent at first, then playful. Listening. We became friends through a volunteer project we worked on together. I never would have done this intentionally, Phil, I swear. I love you and the kids. I was so confused. It was as if I stepped in innocently and then just got caught up in it. I was just so lonely. You were traveling and totally absorbed in your work. I was trying to juggle the kids, the house, the bills. That project was my only time out, and I think I just let down my guard. It started out with little things. I knew it was wrong, but it felt so good. How could something that felt so good now make me feel so dirty and ashamed? I can't believe this is happening."

"Susan, how could you just lie and lie to me?" Phil asked. "That time I thought you were at your sister's house, you were with him, weren't you? And when you would drop the kids off at different sitters, I thought you were doing volunteer work. What a sham! My whole life is a joke. Nothing is what it appears to be. I know I wasn't paying attention to all your needs, but I just had to get through this busy time at work."

At this point I stepped in once more.

"Phil and Susan, I want you to listen to me. I am not going to soft-pedal the reality of the condition of your marriage. It's a mess. You are in trouble, and everything that made sense when you woke up this morning is now up for grabs. Susan, your lies are now in the light. Phil, you are being broadsided by a freight train you didn't even know was coming.

"Susan, you put down your guardrails. Instead of guarding your heart and being cautious, you gave in to what felt good at the moment. This guy met a need by listening, responding, and spending time with you. The whole nine yards. I believe you when you say you didn't mean for it

to happen. People rarely do. But it did. And, Susan, the very things you were giving this other man are the things Phil needs from you. He needs your love, your affirmation, your belief in him. He needs your companionship and your time. He needs you to be his one and only—sexually and with all your heart. He needs you to cheer him on, equipping him for the battles of life.

“And, Phil, you’re not off the hook either. You weren’t paying attention to the needs of your wife, were you? I know what it’s like to have a demanding schedule. You are under the gun at work. Besides that, guys like to go where they are successful, where they know they can accomplish something—and that is usually work. But the time and attention you devote to your work has got to come from somewhere, like from Susan and the kids. Phil, you let your guard down too. The very commitment and energy required to feed your marriage relationship were going to everyone and everything but your wife. To the house, work, church activities, even the yard. Susan needs your love, your heart, your time. She needs you to be the one to encourage her and cheer her on and lead her spiritually. She needs you to be her soul mate, her best friend.”

I paused for a moment as I looked straight at Susan and then at Phil.

“Trust me on this, you can’t build a marriage unless you are pouring yourself into each other. That is what commitment is all about. That is what the covenant of marriage is all about. That’s what a marriage of three is all about: God, a husband, and a wife. You have lost your first love for each other. You both needed to have your needs met somewhere. But you both looked in all the wrong places.

“Now, you both need to be willing to walk right through the eye of this storm, knowing that God will walk with you if you let him, all the way through to the other side. But let me tell you, it is going to be the fight of your life.”

As I looked at the heartbroken and heartsick man and woman sitting in my office, I posed the big question: “Phil, what are you going to do?”

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do,” he said, looking at me with determination in his eyes. “I’m going to win back my wife.”

With that, he turned to look at Susan. “I love you, Susan,” he said. “I want you. If it takes everything I have, I will win you back.”

Susan slowly raised her head and turned toward Phil.

“I am hurt and angry,” he continued. “But I want you, Susan. I want our kids. I want our family to heal.”

At that point, Susan threw her arms around her husband and held on as if her life depended on it. “After what I have done, you still want me?” Her voice was choked with tears.

“Yes. I want you. You have hurt me. And I know I have hurt you along the way too. I haven’t paid attention to your needs. I know my job has consumed me, and I haven’t reached out to you. But I love you. Please . . . let’s make this work.”

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What is your response to Phil and Susan’s story? Are you thinking, *That could never happen to us?*

Before you jump to that conclusion, please understand that Phil and Susan would have said the same thing a year or two earlier. They never dreamed that in their responsibilities to work and family and church, they had unconsciously let go of their commitment to meet each other’s needs. They did not see their relationship eroding. They were not aware of the deficits and gaps that left them vulnerable and unprotected. I don’t mean to be an alarmist when I say that what happened to Phil and Susan could happen to you. Maybe your affair won’t be a sexual one. Maybe it will be an emotional affair or an affair with work or other activities. I’ve seen it happen too many times to ignore the reality. I also know that it doesn’t *have* to happen. You can safeguard your marriage, and that’s what the rest of this book will help you do.

Or maybe you read Phil and Susan’s story and are thinking, *That’s us. Our marriage is disintegrating. I don’t see how we can ever have a great marriage. My spouse and I don’t talk much anymore. Our sex life is almost nonexistent. We argue more than we ever did before. In fact, I’m not sure my spouse really wants me.*

If you are at that point of discouragement in your marriage, take heart. It may be late, but it is not *too* late. God can restore the most damaged relationship. And we believe he can use the stories and insights and principles in this book as tools to strengthen and heal your marriage.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MEET YOUR SPOUSE’S LOVE NEEDS?

Meeting your spouse’s love needs is one of the most important responsibilities you have in your marriage . . . for several reasons.

Meeting your spouse's love needs is a matter of keeping your vows. When you got married, you promised to love your husband, to cherish your wife, to face the good and the bad hand in hand, together, as one. When you meet the needs of your spouse, you are fulfilling your marriage vows. That's what the marriage covenant is about, as I reminded Phil and Susan. Our culture doesn't recognize, respect, or support the importance of the vows. But God does—as do the men and women who are choosing to live out biblical marriages.

Meeting your spouse's love needs is what God calls you to do. Some of the New Testament's most powerful words about marriage call husbands and wives to the kind of sacrificial love that makes them willing to lay down their lives for each other. God wants husbands and wives to consider the needs of the other as more important than their own. When you meet the needs of your spouse, you are being “God with skin on,” a phrase Barb and I use to describe the privilege we have of reflecting Christ's love to each other.

Meeting your spouse's love needs will result in a great marriage. Do you want a great marriage? Do you want an intimate and healthy relationship with your husband or your wife? When you meet the love needs of your spouse, you build the foundation for a great marriage. When you focus on how to meet your spouse's needs, you become motivated to do what God is calling you to do. And when a husband and wife do this wholeheartedly, each loving and focusing on meeting the legitimate needs of the other, the relationship is doubly strengthened. It is no longer a fifty-fifty deal; it is a one hundred—one hundred commitment.

But beware: When our love needs go unmet and we choose to buy into the world's plan of fifty-fifty performance, the results are not pretty.

Neglecting to meet your spouse's love needs could cost you your marriage. Perhaps the bottom-line reason for meeting your spouse's needs is that if you don't, you could end up losing him or her to another man or woman. Or to whatever “affair” your spouse believes will fill that need in his or her heart. You would never think of not meeting your spouse's need for food and water; it's obvious that he or she would die without these essentials. Yet your spouse's emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual needs are so vital, so critical, that if they are not met, your marriage will begin to die. It's that simple. When you meet the needs of your husband or your wife, you guard your marriage against temptation.

At the heart of the urgency Barb and I feel for this issue of meeting

love needs is our deep commitment to marriage and family—ours as well as yours. For the first ten years of my adult life, I worked with imprisoned men and women whose lives were marked by broken relationships and devastated families. For the past sixteen years, in over twenty-five thousand hours of counseling, I have worked with thousands of couples who have come into my office to try to repair their damaged relationships. All told, then, for the past twenty-six years I have lived “below the waterline” with hurting people, listening to the pain of their hearts. Now, together, Barb and I speak to couples all across the country about how to keep their marriages strong and rooted in biblical truth. They all ask the same basic question: “How do I have a great marriage?”

I think most of you would agree that our culture has no answers to that question. And just being Christians doesn’t make a marriage great.

Pollster George Barna tells us that Christian marriages are ending in divorce at an even higher rate than non-Christian marriages (27 percent vs. 23 percent). These statistics indicate that just showing up in church isn’t going to build a healthy, biblical marriage. We must be more than hearers of the Word; we must be doers of the Word. That’s what the New Testament writer James meant when he said, “Remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself” (James 1:22).

You need to know your spouse’s heart and needs, and then sacrificially step away from your own selfishness and learn—really learn—how to meet those needs. You must build your life on a foundation that is going to stand the test of the storms—a rock-solid foundation that will not shift under pressure. That is the rock that Phil and Susan held on to for dear life.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse, because it is built on rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash” (Matt. 7:24-27).

Houses don’t do well on sandy foundations. Neither do relationships. Marriages built on the rock of Christ Jesus not only start strong but also finish strong.

WHAT ARE YOUR SPOUSE'S LOVE NEEDS?

Human nature is strange. Something in us assumes that if we treat our spouse the way we would like him or her to treat us, we are meeting our partner's needs. But when it comes to needs, the Golden Rule does not always apply. Why? Because in many cases a husband's needs are different from a wife's needs. That is most evident in areas like sexual needs, but it is true in other areas as well.

If I asked you if you are meeting your spouse's love needs, you would probably answer yes. In reality, what many of us are really doing is just assuming our spouse wants what we want, and so we act on that. Often we really don't *know* what our spouse's needs are. And if we don't know what the needs are, we can't possibly meet them effectively.

To help us understand the unique love needs of husbands and wives, Barb and I surveyed more than seven hundred couples. We presented them with a list of twenty needs and asked them to rank, in order of importance, what they needed from their spouse and what they thought their spouse needed from them.

The complete results of that survey can be found in the appendix, but here are the top five responses:

HUSBANDS' TOP FIVE LOVE NEEDS

1. Unconditional Love and Acceptance
2. Sexual Intimacy
3. Companionship
4. Encouragement and Affirmation
5. Spiritual Intimacy

WIVES' TOP FIVE LOVE NEEDS

1. Unconditional Love and Acceptance
2. Emotional Intimacy and Communication
3. Spiritual Intimacy
4. Encouragement and Affirmation
5. Companionship

How do these love needs align with your own? Do any of these needs surprise you? Does the order of priority surprise you?

Barb and I have a good marriage. In fact we have a *really* good marriage. There are times when we are convinced that we have the best

marriage on the planet. We'll look each other in the eye and say, "What we have could not get any better." Then there are other times when we know we haven't arrived yet. But armed with our love for each other and the necessary information tools, we keep working to make our marriage the best that it can be. We want a *great* marriage, and that is our desire for you too.

I love watching and interviewing couples who have been married fifty years or longer. Barb and I try to have a golden-anniversary couple on our radio show once a month, and when we do, we just drink up the wisdom. One of the things I ask them is this: "What do you have to say to those of us who are not as far along on the journey? What works? How have you done it?" Their answers almost always include the needs our surveyed couples ranked the highest.

"Gary and Barb, we take time every day to listen to each other and learn what the other experienced that day."

"We love to spend time with each other. We just enjoy being each other's best friends."

"It is a little embarrassing to say on radio, but Barney taught me a long time ago that when I meet his sexual needs, he feels valued. When I listen to him and encourage him, he feels respected. When he prays with me, I feel so safe. When I spend time with him, he feels like a million bucks!"

"Mildred taught me a long time ago that my voice of belief in her is the only real voice, next to God's, that she really needs to hear. So I learned to speak. Yep, we have been married fifty-four years, and I think the marriage is going to take, don't you, Barb and Gary?" The twinkle in this man's eyes almost knocked us off our chairs!

Unconditional love. Encouragement. Companionship. Sexual and spiritual intimacy. Sound familiar? Look again at the top five love needs of men and women. They are all there. Not all couples married fifty years or more are living out great marriages, but many of our parents and grandparents really get it and want to pass it on.

In the following ten chapters we will explore each of the love needs listed earlier. I will talk to wives about the top five love needs that husbands have because I think I can offer wives some unique insight into how men think and feel. Barb will talk to husbands about the top five love needs that wives have because she can speak authoritatively about how women think and feel. Then in the final two chapters of the book we'll switch, and I will talk to husbands, and Barb will talk to wives. By

combining our voices, we hope to offer you the best possible opportunity to understand your spouse's needs and to learn how to meet those needs.

You may choose to read all of the chapters of the book, or you can opt to read only the ones that you feel apply specifically to you. I recommend that you read them all, though, because if you are a husband, you may find that I did not do a good job of describing your needs to your wife. If that is the case, then you can clarify what I have said so that your wife understands you. If you are a wife and you feel that Barb does not adequately describe your needs to your husband, you can augment what she says so that your husband has a clear picture of your needs. In this way, the book will become a springboard for your own personal discussions and actions.

We also encourage you to study this book with other couples in your home or in a Sunday school setting. Instead of adding questions for group study at the end of each chapter, we opted instead to include questions throughout the chapters. Use these as the basis for your discussions of the unique needs that husbands and wives have. Then spur each other on to meet your spouse's unique love needs.

Our goals in this book reach beyond helping you understand and learn to meet your spouse's love needs. We also want you to understand why it's important to meet those needs. And we hope that the stories and principles we share will inspire you and motivate you to a lifelong commitment to love your spouse in ways that neither of you dreamed possible. But most of all, we hope you discover that in meeting your spouse's love needs, you are "putting skin on" God's love. Marriage really is a relationship of three: God, a man, and a woman. The world doesn't get that, does it? And sadly many Christian couples haven't quite grasped that profound truth either. But when a husband and wife truly begin to understand the significance of a marriage of three, relationships begin to flourish.

God has used the intimacy of the marriage relationship as a metaphor to describe his love for us. As a husband or a wife, you can demonstrate what God's love for your spouse looks like; you can be God's voice and arms of love and care. What a privilege!

THE REST OF THE STORY

Now, are you wondering what happened to Phil and Susan? Well, for several months after their first meeting in my office, they came for coun-

seling and explored the causes of their disintegrating relationship. At that point they had a long road ahead of them, but since they moved when Phil's job took them to another state, I did not see them for some time.

Then, not long ago, Phil and Susan called me. They had heard I was going to speak at a conference in their hometown, and they asked if I would spend a night in their home. I said yes, eager to see them.

As I pulled into their driveway on the first evening of the conference, I looked at their beautiful home and wondered if the lives of the people on the inside would look as good as the house. When I rang the doorbell, a little girl, dressed up in her Sunday best, answered the door. The curly-headed blonde looked up at me and asked, "Are you Dr. Gary?"

"Well, yes, honey, I am. And what is your name?"

"I'm Annie. You get to stay in my room tonight."

With that proclamation, little Annie, who had been a baby when Phil and Susan first came to my office four years earlier, welcomed me in. And there on the staircase stood Phil and Susan, hand in hand with the rest of their family.

What a picture! Just the sight of them made the tears begin to flow. They were tears of gratitude to a God who gives us second chances. Tears of thankfulness that Phil had the humility to forgive his wife and rebuild his family. Tears of joy that as Susan and Phil learned how to understand and meet each other's needs, they began building a marriage that is not only surviving but radiant.

That is the joy and oneness that Barb and I desire for every marriage.

TAKE A STEP TOWARD MEETING YOUR SPOUSE'S LOVE NEEDS

So where do you start? Well, first of all . . .

1. How committed are you to meeting your spouse's love needs?
2. Take some time in the next two days to discuss with your spouse what his or her love needs are. One of the ways you can begin that discussion is to make a list of what you think are your spouse's top five love needs.
3. At the same time, make a list of your top five love needs. (If you are not sure that the needs we listed earlier in this chapter are your needs and if you want some other ideas, turn to appendix B for the list of twenty needs we used for our survey.)
4. Then sit down with your spouse and say, "I want to learn what your

love needs are so that I can meet them more fully. I've made a list of what I think your top five love needs are, and I want to discuss those with you. But what is more important to me is what you think are the most important love needs that you need me to meet." Then begin to discuss his or her needs. If your spouse asks you what your love needs are, you have your list ready.



PART 1

*Understanding and Meeting
Each Other's Love Needs*

CHAPTER 1

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

A HUSBAND'S #1 LOVE NEED

"You mean you will love me no matter what?"

Gary talks to wives

Unconditional love and acceptance. Isn't that what every one of us searches for as we risk letting other people get close to us? When we open our hearts to another person, our bottom-line desire is to be accepted and loved the way we are, warts and all. We want to be able to drop the mask and be safe. We want unconditional love. We want the real thing. Deep. Lasting. Resilient.

In our national survey, a majority of both men and women told us that unconditional love is their number one love need from their marriage partner. No doubt many would expect the number one need for men to be sex and the number one need for women to be communication, but that was not what we found. Instead, as different as men and women can be, both agreed on this one truth: We all need to be loved unconditionally by our spouses.

When my wife needs my unconditional love, it simply means that she needs me to love her and receive her no matter what. For richer or for poorer. In sickness and in health. You remember the vows. Unconditional love is the commitment that says, "I will stay with you no matter what. I will always love you. I will affirm you and support you." Acceptance means, "I will receive you even in the midst of tough times."

Barb and I have found that our love for each other is glorious in the good times—the vacations on the beach, the memory-making experiences with the kids, the times of deep intimacy together with Jesus Christ. It's easy to love in the good times. But when our marriage comes

under intense testing, we need *unconditional* love. Love that won't quit. We need to know we are accepted even when we come up short, even when we can't see beyond our own pain and failures.

You've had those times; I know you have. Times of crisis. Times of unbearable stress. Times when, in your heart of hearts, you wonder whether your husband will draw close to you and love you without question or whether he will turn his back and reject you.

Let me share one of my experiences with this kind of crisis. It was a time when I really needed to hear Barb say, "I'm here, Gary. I'm not leaving. I'm here for you. *No matter what.*"

My crisis began with a phone call to a business client from another state. During the call, I had to take a strong stand on an ethical issue. And the result of that stand was that at the end of the call, I had lost half of my income for the year.

Half of my income!

That phone call sent me into a tailspin, and I knew I needed help to come out of it. More than that, I needed a safe place, a place where my heart, spirit, and soul would be loved unconditionally. No strings. No exceptions. No limits.

I reached for the phone and called Barb. "Something has happened. I just need to know, Barb, that no matter what I have to tell you, you will support me. That we are going to be okay. That the Lord and you will stick by me."

"Gary, you don't even need to qualify it. Yes, I'll support you. And God promises never to abandon us. What happened?"

"Barb, I need to talk to you right away, but I can't do it on the phone. I'll be home in ten minutes. Please, just clear the decks."

When I hung up the phone, I knew my safety net was in place—whether or not I deserved it. I could tell by the tone of Barb's voice that she was mine and I was hers and that we both belonged to God. I knew that regardless of what I was about to tell her, *that* wouldn't change.

Still, as I drove home, fears pelted my heart. As a man, my roles as provider and protector—the two roles every man feels he *has* to fulfill—were in jeopardy. I felt like a failure, and I was afraid that I might have put the welfare of my family at risk. So I started to second-guess myself. *Maybe we could have worked something out. Should I have taken such a strong stand with this client? What if I misunderstood what he was saying?*

Then I thought about the ramifications for my family: *How am I going*

to make up for this significant loss of income? What will Barb and the girls say? What are we going to have to sell to keep ourselves afloat?

At that point God's Spirit began to shove away some of my lingering doubts. I knew that he would provide for all of our needs and that I had made the right decision by confronting the issue. But I still needed to look Barb in the face. I needed to connect to her and know that she thought I had done the right thing. I needed to know that she loved me, that nothing would change between us.

As I walked through the back door, I must have had "that look" on my face because Barb immediately grabbed me and held me. "No matter what, Gary, I am with you," she assured me. "Please, sit down and tell me what happened."

It was one of those "God with skin on" moments, when we needed to reassure each other that we are secure, safe, and one with each other and with the Lord.

"Barb, I talked to _____ on the phone. You know that I have sensed something is wrong, deeply wrong, in our business relationship. As a result, I haven't been sleeping, concentrating, or focusing on the ministry. You and the girls haven't gotten my best over the last few days. I've had such deep conviction in my spirit that I needed to confront this guy about his business practices, but I knew that if I did, I would run the risk of losing the contract. Today I called him and asked if I could talk something out with him. Within a few minutes we agreed that we couldn't work together any longer. As quickly as that, our business relationship was over. I know it was the right thing to do, but it is really going to hurt us financially."

"Gary, I am so sorry," Barb said. "You must feel both overwhelmed and scared at the same time."

"I don't know what I'm going to do. What if this means we have to sell the house? I keep wondering if I could have handled it differently."

"Honey, how can I help you most right now?" she said.

"You are doing it, just by listening."

Even as I was saying all this, I was searching her eyes for her *real* response. What a relief I felt when I saw no panic, no fear. Not even disappointment. Instead, her eyes told me the same thing that her words did: "I'm so sorry this happened to you. But it will be all right. We are going to be okay." With each fear-driven comment I poured out, Barb responded with an encouraging nod or a touch. The circumstances hadn't changed: We were still going to lose a substantial portion of our income for a time. Yet because of Barb's response, everything was differ-

ent. I knew that I wasn't alone; and I knew that between the Lord and my wife, I was secure.

When I finished telling her why and how I had made the decision to sever the business relationship with this person, Barb looked me in the eye and quietly but confidently reminded me of the truth that often escapes us in the heat of pressure, stress, or trouble. "Gary, God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He will provide for you and for our family," she said. "And no matter what happens, I will stay close to you." And then the words I can never hear often enough: "I'm proud of you, Gary. You did the right thing."

I remember looking at her and thinking, even as the tears rolled down my cheeks, *You mean you love me . . . even now?* And I can't begin to explain the impact her response had on me. Her words, her touch, her look all affirmed my worth as a man and helped me regain my confidence that I was a husband deserving of her respect.

That was unconditional love and acceptance at its finest. And let me tell you, it doesn't get any better than that for a man. When the wife God has given him reminds him that she will always be there for him, that's when he knows the power, real power, of unconditional love and acceptance.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE STARTS WITH GOD

Barb's response that day became a defining moment in our marriage. But that moment was possible only because, years earlier, Barb and I had been introduced to the One from whom all unconditional love emanates. Let me back up a little. . . .

I grew up in a good home, a moral home. It was a home that was culturally Christian but not biblically Christian, although it wasn't until I was in college that I learned the difference. In fact, I was sitting in a fraternity house when I learned the difference. I was listening to some guys from Campus Crusade for Christ talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and I immediately realized two things. The first was that I couldn't "do life" without God, and that his love was there for the asking. All I had to do was ask. It was up to me to humble myself and confess to God that I needed him in my life. The second thing was that he loved me—me, Gary Rosberg—enough to send his Son to live a perfect life on earth and die a sacrificial death for my sins. I knew that God loved people. But I had no idea until that night that he loved *me*

with that kind of sacrificial love. These two truths may seem elementary to you, but they sent shock waves through me.

Why hasn't someone told me this before? was my first response. My second response was to try to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I was dating Barb at the time and falling in love with her. She was a brand-new Christian herself. After five months of intense study, wrestling with God, and at times almost torturing Barb and the guys God sent into my life with countless questions, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. What finally convinced me? It was the simple yet overwhelming truth that God loved me unconditionally. Completely. Without reservation. Unequivocally. Just as I was. No matter what.

The apostle Paul reminds us, "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's special favor that you have been saved!)" (Eph. 2:4-5).

That describes *agape* love. His great love. His mercy. His grace. These words took on a whole new meaning as I began to come to a true understanding of just how much God really does love me.

And that is the heart of Christ's love for me: He truly loves me without limit. He loved me before I trusted him. Before I knew him. Before I even existed. He loves me even though I fail him miserably, even though I come up short emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. He loves me even though I don't deserve it, which is much of the time. He loves me even though it would be easier not to love me when I disappoint him in my thoughts, words, actions, and deeds. He loves me even though my heart is full of pride and my thoughts are self-centered.

Bottom line? He loves me, no matter what. He accepts me, no matter what. And that's how I know what unconditional love is—because I've been to the Source.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE CHANGES LIVES

But that's God, some of you may be thinking. How does unconditional love and acceptance operate practically on a human level?

Matt and Melanie

Let me tell you how it worked, on both levels, for Matt and Melanie. Two summers ago, Matt got on a bus with a group of men from his church and

headed to a Promise Keepers conference. His wife, Melanie, and his kids were thrilled and excited; they had been praying for Matt for several years, and now those prayers might be answered. And they were. Matt made a personal commitment to Christ at the conference and returned home with a new, redeemed lease on life. He began meeting weekly with a men's Bible study and accountability group, and he was growing spiritually.

Then Matt started getting negative vibes from the guys at the office. "What happened to Matt? Isn't he taking this religion thing a bit too far?" On top of that, his parents voiced concern that he had gone off the deep end, that perhaps he was being too extreme.

Over the next few months Matt's faith commitment began to diminish, and he returned to old patterns: excessive work schedules, meeting with the gang for drinks after work. By caving in to the belief that he could "manage" his own sin rather than be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit's work in him, he drifted further and further from his walk with Christ and his reenergized marriage.

Melanie's hopes for a distinctively Christian marriage and family were folding before her eyes. Yet she knew she had made her own commitment when she took her marriage vows, and that meant loving Matt in spite of her fear of losing all that she held dear. Her staunch Christian friends echoed this truth. "Love him unconditionally," they encouraged her. "You've seen God work in Matt. You know it's possible. Don't give up. Ever."

So Melanie continued to love her husband, even though he did things that disappointed her deeply or when he behaved in ways that made it difficult for her to love him.

Matt is very aware of Melanie's love for him, and he realizes that he often doesn't deserve it. Thankfully, he is beginning to show signs of returning to his commitment to follow Christ.

Patty and Jeff

Jeff grew up on a farm with three brothers, and Jeff's dad always made time for fishing, hunting, and playing sports with his boys. Jeff loves to hunt, and he looked forward to sharing the experience with his own son, Zachary. Jeff's wife, Patty, however, grew up in the city and didn't share Jeff's passion for autumn days in a cornfield with a rifle. Besides that, she was worried. She thought Zach was too young and inexperienced to go on a hunting trip. "He's shot his new gun only a few times at the rifle range," she told Jeff. "Please don't take him out. Not yet. He isn't ready."

Jeff dismissed his wife's fears. She just didn't understand what an important family tradition this was for father and son.

So Jeff and Zachary headed for the woods on a Saturday morning, and they had a great day. Zach even got his first deer. As Jeff drove home that night, he knew that he and Zach had drawn closer because of the shared experience and the time together. He began thinking of ways that he might continue to deepen the relationship with his son.

Suddenly, an oncoming car crested the next hill at high speed and swerved into their lane. Jeff survived the terrible crash. Zach was killed instantly.

It has been three years since the accident, and although Patty knows the accident was not Jeff's fault, she is still haunted by the voices that continue to ring in her mind: *If only they hadn't gone out that day. If only Jeff had listened to me. If only . . .* The pain of their loss and the pressure on their marriage often seem unbearable. Yet God continues to call Patty to love her husband—no matter what. And she is. Meanwhile, Jeff himself is just beginning to feel some relief from his own guilt and pain. God is pumping new life into their relationship, and much of it is due to Patty's unconditional love for Jeff.

Marge and Ben

Ben is another man who knows what it means to be loved no matter what. After twenty-three years in his career, Ben was worn out, exhausted from trying to climb the corporate ladder. One morning he happened to catch a television infomercial that promised him all the luxuries of life if he would just attend an upcoming seminar in a local hotel. So Ben went to the seminar—and was promptly overwhelmed with the potential of the program as he watched the videos and studied the brochures. He and Marge had always discussed any expenditure over one hundred dollars. But that day he caved in to his greed and withdrew all their savings as well as cashed in their retirement fund to invest in this get-rich-quick enterprise. It was such a sure thing. It had worked for so many.

Months later Ben's life was one huge mess. He had quit his job, believing that if he devoted all his time to this new venture, he would surely reap the rich rewards the videos and glossy brochures promised. Unfortunately, that's not what happened. He was out of a job, their credit cards were maxed out, and Marge had to go back to work full-time for the first time since before they'd had children.

Despite all this, Marge didn't give up on her husband. When she

discussed her fear and anger and frustration with her pastor, he told her, “Marge, you’ve come smack up against one of those ‘in sickness or in health’ realities. But you are called to love Ben *even if* . . . That’s the kind of love Christ exhibits for us—*agape* love. It’s the real thing, Marge. It is love without limit.” With strength and commitment that Marge admits come solely from God, she took her pastor’s words to heart.

And Ben responded. He found a new job with a Christian employer, and the nature of the work made him feel truly useful for the first time in years. He and Marge downsized their home, sold their boat, and made serious inroads into paying off their creditors. Ben replaced his desire to get rich quick with a renewed vision and commitment to live and finish life well. When I asked him what made the difference, he said, “Christ and Marge. It is that simple. I have learned that God really does love me. Marge taught me that. She accepted me *even when* I had messed up. And she showed me the kind of unconditional love and acceptance that I never knew existed. I really got caught up in my greed. Now the simple things make more sense. A walk with Marge. An evening at home. Time with a few close friends. The Word of God each day. And an honest day’s work. I am beginning to feel whole again.”

Matt, Jeff, and Ben have, through tough and painful experiences, learned what a difference unconditional love and acceptance can make. From Christ and from their wives.

Now, let me ask you a tough question. Has your unconditional love ever been put to the test? Have those vows that you took on your wedding day to love your husband in good times and bad ever been put through the crucible of painful reality? If so, just like Barb and Melanie, Patty and Marge, you have been called to love your husband unconditionally. No matter what.

Every family struggles with hard times, broken promises, unmet expectations, financial setbacks, betrayals. When you face such difficulties, call on God’s strength so that you and your husband can walk through the pain together and emerge the stronger for it. Stronger individually and stronger as a couple.

THE POWER OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Unconditional love is powerful stuff. By way of example, let me tell you what happened inside me when Barb showed me unconditional love. If

Matt and Jeff and Ben could talk with you, they would probably say some similar things.

Barb's response helped me feel safe in the midst of a lightning storm. Her love allowed me to be honest. It established a comfortable environment for open communication between us. Her love reminded me that I wasn't ultimately in charge—the Lord was. It reminded me that her commitment truly was for bad times as well as good. It confirmed for me that even though my decision was going to put our family at risk financially, it was the right decision.

When I share the story of that memory-making day, people often ask me, What would have happened if Barb hadn't responded with such grace and encouragement? What if she had responded with anger and told me I had made a stupid decision? What if she had panicked and withdrawn? What if she had turned her back on me? What if she had said, "Gary, I told you so. You never should have gotten involved with that guy"?

Don't misunderstand. Barb certainly had to deal with her own share of fear and uncertainty during that turbulent time in our life. But if she had rejected me or, maybe even worse, been neutral and unresponsive to me, I would have felt lonely and isolated. Her rejection would have built a wall that would have weakened our intimacy and trust.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MEET YOUR HUSBAND'S NEEDS

Your response, initiative, and connection to your husband are crucial to the health of your marriage and family. Your expression of your unconditional love and acceptance is the very force that will drive you together in the midst of the testing times in your marriage. Your standing with him in the painful times as well as the good times is one of the primary elements of a great marriage.

At times this means putting aside your own needs in order to meet his. It means resisting your tendency to be selfish and self-protective. But if you love unconditionally in the hard times, you and your husband will become one in the kind of intimacy the Lord desires for you. If you don't, you will end up living like two immature children, each trying to get your own way and resenting the other person when you don't. You may still be married, but you will miss out on the joy of a great marriage.

Your husband desperately needs to know that you will accept him no matter what. Even when he fails or makes poor decisions. Even when he

feels crummy about himself or disappoints you. Your love is a make-or-break reality. Your inability or refusal to love will cripple him and tear him apart. Your unconditional love and acceptance will build him up and free him to go on.

Okay, this all sounds good in theory, you may be saying, but how do I live this out in the nitty-gritty of real life? What does it look like? Before we get to that and discuss some practical ways you can demonstrate unconditional love, let's focus one more time on what we said earlier in the chapter: *Unconditional love starts with God.* We cannot lose sight of that. Our ability to give costly love comes from God's unconditional love for us.

Just think about your own relationship with God. Because you are convinced of his grace toward you, your faith has meaning and foundation. After all, each of us knows the condition of our own heart; we know what we've done to offend God in word and deed. Yet as believers we are able to start anew each day with God, repenting for sinful lapses and being assured of his forgiveness. Perhaps in a similar way we need a daily clearing away between husband and wife.

This becomes especially important for those of you who are in situations right now where the need to demonstrate unconditional love is a daily concern or struggle. You may be living with a hard-hearted husband. Or perhaps your dreams and desires have been put on hold while you support your husband so that he can fulfill his dreams. Your husband may have wounded or betrayed you. Or you may be married to a man who is spiritually passive, not serving you as God has instructed him to do. But whether you are in the midst of a crisis, living with an ongoing circumstance, or just responding to the normal routine of married life, giving your husband the security of your unwavering love requires at least five elements: showing grace with his weaknesses; affirming him whenever you can; helping him feel safe; taking time to connect; and studying your husband.

Show Grace with His Weaknesses

All of us need grace. But we need it most when we are truly aware that we don't deserve it—when we have failed, when we have made mistakes, when we have been selfish, when we have sinned.

If your husband has failed you or disappointed you or sinned against you, then he needs your grace. And when you express grace to your husband in his areas of weakness and sin, you love him as Jesus loves him.

Let me ask you, where does your husband need an extra dose of grace right now? Where does one of his weaknesses need a covering of grace from you, his wife?

- If he has sinned against you, forgive him. Over and over.
- If he has violated your trust in some serious way, show your love by getting help from a pastor or professional Christian counselor.
- If he is experiencing failure, let him know that you will stand with him, no matter what.
- If he is experiencing a pressure point in his life, perhaps at work or in a decision he must make, encourage him with understanding.
- If he is going through a dangerous passage of life and drifting from his moorings, remind him that God and you love him and that both of you are with him even during these times.

Affirm Him Whenever You Can

Mark Twain once said, "I can live a whole month on one compliment." Just think about the life we can bring to a marriage with an ever flowing stream of affirmation.

Strengthen your husband with comments such as

- "I am proud of you, honey."
- "I love the way you love me when you . . ."
- "When I saw you with one of the kids this morning, I was so encouraged that you . . ."
- "Yesterday when you told me you loved me, it meant so much to me. Thank you for expressing your love."
- "Thank you for providing for our family."
- "You are one of God's richest blessings to me."
- "When you receive me even though I hurt you, I feel safe and secure in your love."

Hearty affirmation is a key ingredient in unconditional love. It's like a magnet: It draws us in; it attracts us.

If you have a hard time verbalizing your affirmation to your husband, think about when you first met him. What drew you to him? What opened your heart to him? What about him made you tingle inside? What would you have said to him then?

Now, as you have matured in your marriage, what do you appreciate

about your husband? How would you express this? Write your thoughts down on a piece of paper. Here are some examples:

- “I appreciate the way you stand up for me with the kids.”
- “I appreciate how hard you work to provide for our family’s financial needs.”
- “When you participate in _____ [some family activity], it makes me feel secure.”
- “I love to watch you interact with people who don’t know the Lord.”
- “You are so patient with our difficult neighbors.”
- “I appreciate that you are active with other Christian men.”
- “When you touch me with an encouraging touch, it makes me feel loved.”
- “I am proud of you for not being part of the negative attitude at work, even though you are surrounded by it daily.”
- “I am proud of you when you persevere in the face of discouragement.”
- “I appreciate that you initiate prayer with me and tell me what God is teaching you in his Word.”

From your own responses, make a list of at least five statements that you can grab onto and begin to repeat to your husband. Someone once told me that it takes eight to ten affirmations to balance out the impact of one negative remark. Do you affirm your husband eight to ten times more frequently than you criticize him?

Take your list of affirmations and begin to repeat these to yourself each day. Then repeat them to your husband each day—even if he has disappointed you. *Especially* if he has disappointed you.

Help Him Feel Safe

When I know that Barb understands me, I feel safe. When I don’t feel understood, my insecurity increases. Normally, a man won’t recognize it in these terms. He won’t think, *My wife doesn’t understand the pressures I’m under at work and how it affects the way I feel about myself. So I’m going to find a way to compensate. I’m going to lash out at her and the kids. After all, I have to control something.* We husbands don’t know how to tell you this, so instead, we blow up. Or we bury ourselves in some excessive behavior. Or we search for *something* we can control. Some men overwork or overeat. Others turn to alcohol or other drugs, or to pornography. Some men become obsessed with hobbies and sports.

If you see any of these patterns in your husband's behavior, something is missing in your relationship. I am not saying you are responsible, although you may be contributing to the patterns, but something definitely is missing and needs to be addressed.

Where do you start? Get alone with him and assure him that you are not intending to criticize but that you are committed to him and want to help him work through any patterns that could be undermining the security of your marriage. As you do this, you begin to lay the groundwork for healing to begin. At some point, couples or individuals who are struggling with excessive behavior may need to seek the outside help of a professional Christian counselor and/or a pastor. But first you need to approach your husband to begin the process.

How do we husbands know we are beginning to be understood? In two ways:

1. When you are truly interested in our mundane life to the point of fascination.
2. When we try to "fix" something and we know that you understand that we are just exercising the part of our masculinity that needs to "make things better."

Just as you feel understood when we listen to your *feelings*, we feel better when you listen to our *ideas*. For example, Barb lets me know that she appreciates my good intentions even though she sometimes checks me on my timing. It usually sounds something like this: "Gary, I know you are trying to make things right. And I know you have good insights. But right now I need you to listen to my feelings about this. After that, I would be happy to hear what you think I should do about it." I truly can receive that message because she isn't saying, "Gary, you're wrong." She is just saying, "Your good input is too early." I can accept the fact that my timing is lousy as long as I don't feel completely inadequate as a husband.

Sound familiar?

Take Bob and Sherry for instance. They're having an after-dinner conversation, and she's describing a painful disagreement she had with her mother on the phone that day. *Another* disagreement. There have already been two this week. As Bob listens, he has the solution to the problem on the tip of his tongue. He can't wait to fix the situation so Sherry will feel better and they can get on with the rest of the evening. All day long he fixes things, and this is a no-brainer: *Just don't call your*

mother so often since she upsets you so much. Makes perfect sense to him. Subconsciously Bob is operating on the assumption that if Sherry valued and understood him, she would know how important it is to get his insight so she could solve this problem.

Instead, Sherry is focused on her own (unconscious) need to be listened to, encouraged, and hugged. She needs her husband's support and approval. Now, those are real needs, too, but I'm talking to *you* about men. (Barb will hit the guys on this in her chapter.)

Each day couples like Bob and Sherry make subtle choices that either *strengthen* their spouse or *feed* their insecurities. Just as your husband shows you how valuable you are when he listens to your feelings (strengthening you), so you make him feel valued when he knows you have understood him and listened to him.

I'm not real proud of us men on this point, but my experience in my ministry and at home bears it out: When we sense that our opinion is not being enthusiastically received, we feel frustrated and rejected. Then we start to clam up or to get angry. And when this happens often enough, it can destroy the security of the relationship. For a marriage to become a great marriage, husbands and wives need to learn to partner with each other, accentuating each other's strengths and helping to compensate for each other's weaknesses.

Take Time to Connect

As unbelievable as it may sound, the first few minutes you and your husband connect at the end of the workday is critical.

When I was growing up, I saw this modeled positively by my own parents. When we kids heard Dad drive into the garage after work, we would yell, "Dad's home!" We would rush to greet him at the back door, and he would ruffle our hair or hug us. But then, for the next sixty minutes, we would disappear (most of the time) while he and mom sat and talked. Sixty minutes!

Barb and I have carried that tradition into our own home. Within minutes of greeting each other at the end of the day, we are sitting in two mauve-colored chairs and talking—just the two of us. We talk about the kids, we review Barb's day and my day, we discuss the highs, the lows—everything! Sometimes these are deep discussions, but often they're just newsy, connecting talks. And this connection sets the tone for the rest of the evening. It reminds us we are teammates who are absolutely commit-

ted to the same game. There's no competition between us, no fear of hearing a sermon instead of gaining a sympathetic ear. I'm not trying to fix her problems (not always, anyway), and she's listening to me. We're two weary people reconnecting to each other and, most important, tearing away the layers of the day. Our souls get revived.

When this doesn't happen consistently, the atmosphere can become colder than a Dairy Queen blizzard. We get out of sync, disconnected, and that leaves room for coolness and selfishness to grow. I've tried to imagine what would happen if there were no connection between us for a week, a month, a year. Guess what? I don't have to imagine too hard because I see the grim reality walking into my counseling office every week. Couples who are hanging on desperately, hoping their marriage will survive, when it all could have been prevented by an hour a day . . . thirty minutes . . . even fifteen!

Unconditional love occurs only in the context of communication and true connection.

Think about your own relationship with God. When do you feel most secure, protected, loved, understood? It's when you've had a rich time of prayer, when God has spoken to you personally through his Word, and when you've reached the heart of the Father in worship. And when this connection happens every day, not only do you feel secure as a Christian, but you also develop a mature relationship with God, where *everything* is possible.

That's the way marriage is designed to work.

Study Your Husband

One of the best ways for you to know how to meet your husband's need for unconditional love and acceptance is to *know* your husband. This means you must become a student, getting to know your husband inside and out.

As a man, I can't figure out sometimes how Barb knows things, but *she just knows*. The kids may be hurting, hiding something, having problems with a friend, or isolating themselves a little because of some insecurity or conflict. And Barb just knows. Our household isn't unique in this. When a husband and father senses the kids aren't around as much as usual, he may think, *Good. Now I can get some work done or watch the game or read the paper*. When a wife and mother senses this kind of distance from the kids, she gets concerned. You need to use that same womanly

sensitivity to pick up on what's going on with your husband—which means not only reading his moves but also his moods.

Men often don't know how to verbalize what they are feeling. So it's essential for you to use your instincts when you're trying to understand what's going on in our heads. Timing is always important, even when dealing with the most even-tempered male. So learn to *read our moods*. If you do, you'll soon know the answer to these kinds of questions:

- If you bring up a sensitive issue at the end of the day, is your husband going to enter into the discussion, withdraw during the conversation, or lash out at you?
- When your husband gets home from work and you are telling him about your day, will he be more likely to give advice or to do what you really need and just listen?
- If you get a disturbing phone call from your mother on a Saturday afternoon and your husband is out working in the garage, is he going to be tender and attentive to you, or will he be distracted by the tasks at hand?
- When does your husband get cranky?
- What tends to diminish your husband's sense of value and worth?
- Does your husband get more irritated when he's hungry or fatigued?
- Your husband seems to be unusually short-tempered. Is he upset with you, or is he stressed out about something at work?

A buddy of mine recently boasted, "My wife can read me like a book." Think about that statement. You go to a bookstore, hoping that among the myriad of books on the shelves, you'll find a treasure. You pick up several, read the jacket copy, thumb through a few, and wonder if what is inside measures up to all the marketing on the outside. Will the content be as beautiful as the cover? Finally you make a selection, take it home, and curl up in your favorite chair. Suddenly, the characters become friends; the story becomes part of you. You're reluctant to put it down and wish it could go on and on.

Change a few words, and this could describe a great marriage. The relationship starts off with an attraction to the outward, visible features—looks, personality, charm, sense of humor. But it's when you really see what's inside, when you come to know each other in the deepest sense as husband and wife, that you truly delight in each other and become one.

Grace. Affirmation. Safety. Time. Study. All are keys to unconditional

love and acceptance. Here's a checklist to help you begin to measure how you are doing in each of these areas:

- Where do I need to show some grace, real grace, to the man I married? Where do I need to let go and let God do his thing with him?
- Who needs my words of affirmation more than anyone in my life? Is it easier for me to affirm my kids and my friends than it is for me to affirm my husband?
- What are we doing to build safety into our marriage so we can take the risks to love unconditionally?
- When was the last time we took time to go deeper with each other? Are we making time to connect with each other daily?
- Am I studying my husband? Do I know his strengths as well as his weaknesses? Am I helping to build on the former and strengthen the latter so that I can best become one with him?

These are tough questions. Building a great marriage is not easy. As Barb says, true love doesn't always take place on a romantic balcony. Sometimes it takes place on a battlefield. Let me tell you about a husband and wife who know all about the reality of unconditional love in the tough times.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AT ITS FINEST

Brian worked hard and came from a long line of hardworking men—good, stoic, midwestern stock. His dad and grandfather before him had both prided themselves on a work ethic that bragged, “You may be smarter than I am, but you will never outwork me.” Yet under pressure, that strong work ethic looked more like a stubborn streak that both hurt and scared Brian's wife, Karen.

Karen's greatest fear was that Brian's refusal to take care of himself would leave her without a husband and their children without a father. She had good reason to fear. Both Brian's father and grandfather had died in their fifties from heart attacks. At forty-eight, Brian had high cholesterol and ate high-fat foods at his power lunches. He hadn't been on their home treadmill for months, and he habitually canceled his annual physicals, insisting, “I'm just too busy at work to get there.” Karen had done everything she could to take care of her husband. She had pressed

him to see the doctor. She had bought the treadmill. She cooked healthy foods for him at home, although she had given up trying to control his eating patterns at work. Bottom line: Brian wasn't taking care of himself, and it was driving her nuts. They'd had more than one argument about it.

Brian knew Karen's nagging (as he sometimes called it) came from her love and concern for him, but he was unwilling to change. He just couldn't be bothered. Then he started having some mild chest pain, and he got scared. He didn't tell Karen. For one thing, he didn't want to worry her; for another, he didn't want to admit to himself that something might be wrong.

Then one night his chest pains became more intense, pushing him from his denial to the point of blurting out, "Karen, I need to tell you something. For the last three weeks or so, I've been having some chest pain. I think it's probably just heartburn, but . . ." Somehow, letting her into his fears relieved some of Brian's anxiety.

While Karen was thankful that Brian had leveled with her, she became even more fearful. She begged him to go to the hospital immediately. He didn't want to do that, but he promised to call the doctor the next day. In desperation Karen said, "If you have a heart attack and die, the kids and I will always know it was your fault. You are deliberately choosing not to take care of yourself. I am so frustrated, I don't know where to turn. Please do something."

But it was too late. While climbing the steps to his second-floor office the next morning, Brian had a massive heart attack. He didn't die, but he faced a long recovery. And he would never be the same again.

Karen had feared this very thing for a long time, and here it was. In an instant, her life had changed. With one child in college and the other getting ready to go, she faced major adjustments. She worked day and night, caring for Brian, being a mom to their kids, and trying to bring order and stability to a household in crisis. In her heart she felt she had been left holding the bag because of Brian's negligence, yet she loved her husband and wanted to take care of him.

Their style of living changed dramatically. Brian was unable to return to his high-powered job. With his earning potential greatly diminished and their savings depleted, Karen was forced to take a job outside the home.

She was faced with a choice. She could resent Brian for his stubbornness and careless behavior, which had brought them to this point, or she

could forgive his failings and love him unconditionally with a Christlike love. Should she give him the love he didn't deserve? Or should she wall off her heart and go through the motions of marriage, never releasing him from the pain his actions had brought to their family?

She chose to love him unconditionally. Karen faced the truth that as long as she withheld love and forgiveness from Brian, her own anger and resentment would imprison her. In her brokenness and obedience, God met her and gave her the courage and humility to love her husband no matter what—regardless of the results of his actions. She took the high road, returning a blessing for an insult (see 1 Peter 3:9).

Karen's self-sacrificial love modeled Christ's love for Brian, and he responded. He came to grips with the pain he had caused her and their family, and he began to love her with the same kind of sacrificial love.

This once culturally successful family had become something much more significant: they had become a model of Christ's love for each other. Their marriage took on a whole new dimension as they served each other and loved each other unconditionally. Things that used to seem so important—golf-club memberships, exotic vacations, large stock portfolios—were replaced with times together in prayer, simple pleasures like a walk around the block, and the kind of intimate understanding and connection they had never known.

Make no mistake, Brian and Karen had to make major adjustments in their lifestyle. But they made them well. Why? Because they followed Christ's example of loving each other with an *agape* love. And Karen set the pace.

Unconditional love is the real thing. The genuine article. It is the kind of love that is given when it isn't deserved. Jesus models it, Paul writes about it, and our Father gives it to us.

Will you love your husband unconditionally, the way Karen loved Brian? This is the number one love need men have in their marriages. This is the way a great marriage is designed to work. God said so.