

What a Wife Needs from Her Husband

Melanie Chitwood



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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WHAT A WIFE NEEDS FROM HER HUSBAND

Copyright © 2010 by Melanie Chitwood

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library in Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chitwood, Melanie

What a wife needs from her husband / Melanie Chitwood.

p.cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-2556-3 (pbk.)

1. Husbands—Religious life. 2. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity I. Title

BV4528.3C45 2010

248.8'—dc22

2009017191

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Printed in the United States of America

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 / VP-NI / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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The Starting Point



When I wrote my first book, *What a Husband Needs from His Wife*, I really wanted to write *What a Wife Needs from Her Husband*. I thought I could have finished that book in a week. Not surprisingly, many other women I talked to readily agreed to give me input for that book. And now, here I am with what I've always wanted—a chance to share with husbands what wives need—but now I feel almost paralyzed by several reservations I have about writing this book. I realize that they may be the same reservations you have about reading it, so let's take a moment to clear the air.

First, I'm married to a man who does not like to be told what to do. You probably don't either. Truth be told, no one likes to be told what to do. So as you read this book, please don't think of it as a woman telling you what to do, because that's not what this is about. I want to focus on what God says about marriage, not what I say or any other

woman says. I will, however, share some stories from my own marriage and from other couples' relationships to give you ideas about living out God's principles.

Second, perhaps you've read other marriage books but felt that they really didn't help that much. Maybe that's true, but then again, maybe you read the book but didn't really apply the principles. Will you try again? An investment in your marriage is never wasted.

Third, I'm hesitant to write because I'm not sure how this book got into your hands. Maybe you saw it on the bookshelf, and in a real desire to improve your marriage, you picked it up. Thank you. My prayer is that this book will open your heart to God and to your wife. Maybe someone shared this book with you because it really helped his marriage. I hope that's the case. I hope you will find practical applications that will help you have the kind of marriage you really desire. And I hope you can encourage other married couples too.

And I imagine you might be reading this book because your wife asked you to. Now, if that's the case, how did she go about asking you to read it? Did she set it beside your nightstand and not say a word? Did she suggest gently that this book might be good for your marriage? Or did she present the book to you with the implication that you have no idea what she needs, so read the book, for Pete's sake! Or worse, maybe your wife suggested with anger and resentment that since you have been clueless for so long, she would do just about anything to make you understand what she needs.

Even if your wife presented this book to you in a less than tender fashion, will you read it anyway? Will you consider the possibility that you and your wife have spent years together with unspoken and unmet needs? Will you entertain the idea that her anger might mask a broken heart? Will you consider that your wife may be desperate for you to understand a little more of what she needs?

One more thing. As you read this book, you may occasionally think, *What about my wife? She's not necessarily doing everything she should be doing.* I'm sure that's true, but I'm asking you to focus on

yourself for now. If your wife is open to the idea, consider inviting her to read *What a Husband Needs from His Wife* while you read this book. Both have study guides at the end that can help you have some great talks with your wife.

Now that I've cleared the air a bit, I hope you'll read this book with an open mind and open heart. God called you to be your wife's husband because He knew you would love her best.

Getting Started

Our family recently took a trip to Atlanta, Georgia, where Scott and I met, fell in love, became engaged, and began our marriage. We enjoyed telling our two sons stories about our early days of dating and marriage. We showed them Open Campus High School (where we both taught), the path where we took our first walk, Buck's restaurant (where we ate out almost weekly), and the house in nearby Decatur, where we lived when first married. I'm sure we enjoyed reliving our memories more than our sons enjoyed hearing about them.

Teaching at the same school, Scott and I saw each other daily. We tried to keep our relationship low-key and under wraps, but the anticipation of seeing him at school each day made me hurry to get up and get to work! I constantly thought of errands to run that required me to walk past his classroom so I could get at least a glimpse of him.

We were married about a year after meeting, and like most newlyweds, we were crazy in love. We were really not thinking too much about what marriage would entail other than happiness, companionship, and lots of sex. To be more accurate, we agreed that the destination in our marriage journey was happiness. We were on different paths, however, leading to that destination. Not surprisingly, my path included many rest stops of tender moments, talking, and togetherness. Meanwhile, Scott's path to marital happiness included a sexual interlude about every ten feet.

We would not have been able to articulate this at the time, but

it soon became apparent that we had different ideas about marriage. The first few years of our marriage were filled with a lot more fighting than happiness. We loved each other, and we both loved God, but we just could not figure out how to be married. We kept doing what we were doing, taking occasional stabs at meeting each other's needs and making one another happy, but we usually missed the mark.

Before getting married, my life was rich and full with my teaching job, church involvement, and many close friendships. Once I was married, I kept up with all these activities and friendships. My lifestyle didn't change drastically except that I was living with this man who frustrated me way too much.

Though I had plenty going on in my life apart from Scott, his schedule was even busier. Along with working as a high school math teacher, Scott coached three sports and was also going to flight school part-time. These separate activities left little time for us to spend together.

One Friday night in our first year of marriage, we had planned to go to dinner and a movie—our favorite once-a-week date before marriage. Our plan was that Scott would pick me up and then we'd go out. Because we both had busy schedules and spent a lot of time apart, I was really looking forward to some couple time.

As I was getting ready, Scott called to tell me that he was running late and I would have to meet him at the restaurant. I went ballistic! I didn't want to meet him; I wanted to be picked up, just as if we had been dating rather than married. I angrily told him, "Just forget it. If it's too much trouble for you to take me out, don't bother." He was shocked at my response, which to him seemed extreme and irrational. We argued some more as he tried to convince me to meet him. I stuck to my stubborn ways and refused. By the end of the conversation, we were definitely not going out on a date, and we were also spitting mad at one another.

Unfortunately, our marriage ebbed and flowed like this for many years. We thought if we could just make a few tweaks, our marriage would surely become more satisfying. Throw in some dates here, some

sex there, and we'd have a great marriage. Obviously we were wrong because we continued to have a strife-filled marriage. We always made up because we were sorry, we both loved each other, and we longed for peace. Nevertheless, we continued to be constantly frustrated with one another. We were each thinking the same thing about the other person: *You just don't get it!*

Trusting God

Actually, we were right about that. Both of us didn't get it. Several years into our marriage, Scott and I knew we needed a new marriage playbook. The one we were following was not working, and we experienced one losing season after another. Why did we keep repeating the same mistakes over and over? What we did in our marriage wasn't having the results we wanted, so one would think we wouldn't keep using the same ineffective plays. Our pattern wasn't logical, but we didn't seem to notice. We were caught up in emotions, both of us working hard each day at our jobs but not taking much time to evaluate our marriage and what it needed.

Several years into our marriage, we were finally worn-out from the constant strife. I had become a volcano of anger, spewing frustration and disappointment onto Scott. In return, he felt hopeless, so he either attacked me in return or withdrew to defend himself from my constant anger. I was completely focused on Scott's shortcomings but blind to my own. By this time, however, we had two young sons, and we really didn't want them to grow up in an environment of constant conflict.

Crying one night after another fight, I finally realized that I was the one who needed to change. As long as I stayed mad at Scott for not changing, we would get nowhere. We'd keep doing the same things with the same unsatisfying results.

As I sat in the recliner and told God about my misery, He led me to several verses that turned on a lightbulb in my mind. I saw that my choices could make a huge impact in our marriage. One of the

passages was Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” These were some of the first verses I had memorized many years earlier as a young Christian, but applying these to my marriage brought new depths of meaning. That day was a turning point for me and for our marriage. No longer was I going to focus on the changes I thought Scott should make to improve our marriage. Instead, I knew I had to focus on my own choices and trust God with my marriage.

Trusting God with my marriage included surrendering to God’s principles instead of relying on my own ideas. It included confessing my pride and defensiveness to God and to Scott. No longer would I try to change Scott; instead, I prayed for both of us to be the kind of people God wanted us to be. As I trusted my marriage to God and began to apply godly principles to our marriage, our relationship started to change, and we began to have the kind of marriage we both longed for, one of peace, unity, and laughter.

Trusting God is the starting point for building the kind of marriage God has planned for you. Trusting means surrendering, yielding, and changing. Surrendering may sound more like defeat, weakness, and failure, situations the world would tell a man to avoid at all costs. However, your standards for being the kind of husband God wants you to be must always come from God’s Word, not the world’s example and pressures.

From the Inside Out

The marriage God wants for you will develop only as your heart is transformed. I found this verse when writing my first book about a husband’s needs. I want to include it in this book as well because it captures perfectly what God is looking for in spouses: “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1).

God wants a husband to be yielded to Him so He can transform that man from the inside out. Unless you are willing to let God change your heart, reading this book will be no different from reading a secular self-help book. Self-help focuses on the obvious: self. Depending on yourself rather than God's power working through you to be the kind of husband God wants you to be just won't work. You'll get worn out and frustrated as you rely on your own efforts. God wants you to seek Him, and He'll work through you with His power, love, and grace to love your wife for Him.

Butch and Mandy Ferguson have been married 22 years. Butch describes how he came to the point of surrendering his marriage to God.

One day, I looked at a huge oak tree that had broken in half during a windstorm the night before. The tree had looked healthy on the outside, but it was actually rotting on the inside. Sounds like the way my marriage used to be. It appeared healthy to others, but it was decaying, just like that old oak tree. Deep down, I loved Mandy and didn't want to lose her, but I didn't know how to love her. She wanted to go to counseling, so I finally worked up the nerve to contact our church and make an appointment.

Mandy stated that she had simply fallen out of love with me over the years because of our lack of communication on key issues. I wondered how we could have let our marriage get to this point. With this in mind, I embraced our counseling program. Our marriage began improving, but we continued to have ups and downs.

I was about to leave on a business trip one day when Mandy and I had a serious blowout. I left town with a heavy heart, and Satan was filling me with lies that things would never change between us and that I should just live with or without it. I was in my hotel room by ten p.m., and I called home. Mandy was quiet and to the point, and she

wasted no words answering my questions about the kids, their day, and the like. She added nothing else and eventually hung up on me because she was just fed up with the conversation, with me, and with life.

At that moment, I realized I couldn't fix my marriage. I had tried, but it just wasn't working. I stood in my room and cried out to God, *Why can't we just love each other and get along?* Instantly, I knew the answer. All this time, I was the one who was trying to fix things, and I knew deep inside that it was really up to God to repair our marriage, so I put it in His hands through prayer. *God, I can't fix our marriage. I've been trying for 16 years, but it's still broken.* It was up to God as I surrendered my life and my marriage.

To me, surrendering is like admitting defeat, and as a guy, I hate to get beat. But that night, *surrender* became part of my vocabulary. I surrendered our marriage to God and asked that He give me direction in my life, especially in my marriage. I prayed that Mandy would allow Christ to live through her and begin to heal the hurts that I had caused over the years. I trusted God to change us in His perfect timing. I was filled with hope—I couldn't wait to get home.

We Go Together

To be the kind of husband God wants you to be, you must turn to His Word to learn principles of being a godly husband. Let's look in Genesis to learn from the first marriage God created. As we read the creation story in Genesis 1–2, we see that after six days of creating all sorts of marvels, land and light and creatures, God “saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). There is one time, however, in this creation process that God chooses to say something is “not good.” After making Adam, God states, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). In all the millions of things God created, He said only one item needed some more work!

God knew that Adam's life would be better with a companion. God planned that this person would make Adam no longer alone. Dear husband, God knows you too need a companion. God's plan is for a husband and wife to need one another and to complement one another.

My husband has many wonderful qualities: a strong work ethic, muscular shoulders from years of playing basketball, and the ability to repair any household item. Of course, my list of his wonderful traits could continue. I'm sure your wife could also make a list of your admirable qualities. Nevertheless, God says that husbands need a companion. In Genesis 2:18, God calls that companion a helper: "I will make him a helper suitable for him." All the days of marriage allow a husband and wife to embrace each other's strengths and weaknesses and to see how they can complement one another. Recognizing your need of a helper will strengthen your marriage. Resisting your partner's help will tear your marriage apart.

Oneness

Let's continue to look at Genesis to uncover more of God's design for marriage. When Adam finished naming the animals, one thing was abundantly clear:

For Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.
So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man (Genesis 2:20-22).

All the other creatures were made from the ground, but Adam's companion, Eve, came from his very own body. Scripture says in Genesis 2:24, "and they shall become one flesh." Oneness is vital to a marriage. Oneness, or being "one flesh," includes not only physically becoming one but also much more. Being one flesh includes physical

oneness along with emotional, spiritual, and mental oneness. God intends husbands and wives to know each other and be known in the most intimate of ways.

Oneness is one of the treasures of marriage but also one of its challenges. We long for intimacy, but it doesn't necessarily come easily. Oneness requires husbands and wives to lay down their rights, entitlement, freedom, independence, and expectations. Let's look at some real-life examples of how we create oneness.

- When you were single, you may have spent almost every fall weekend in the woods hunting. In addition, perhaps your job required you to work out of town a few nights a week. But now you are married, so you choose not to go hunting every weekend because you don't want to be away from your wife so frequently. You prioritize spending time with your wife.
- You're sitting on the couch watching TV when your five-year-old comes into the room to kiss you goodnight. Instead of sitting there on the couch, waiting for your wife to tuck your little one in, you get up and do the bedtime routine.
- You're having dinner with your wife when a really attractive waitress comes to take your order. You make sure your eyes don't linger on the waitress as she walks away.

These are just a few examples of everyday choices that can help stitch together the fabric of oneness in your marriage. Just as easily, your choices can tear apart oneness. For example, you go out with the guys instead of going to that chick flick your wife's been wanting you to take her to. You don't make a point of saying "I love you" anymore. You forget her birthday or your anniversary. Oneness means that your wife deserves the best of you—your best time, energy, and attention. God chose you to be your wife's husband, and as you love her the way God wants you to, you'll be the husband she needs.

The moment we are married, we become one flesh, and then we

work out our oneness all the days of our marriage. Husbands and wives must constantly guard, protect, and nurture their oneness because marriages face countless attacks each day. The values of our world are completely contrary to God's ideas of marriage. The home you grew up in and your friendships might not have provided you with examples of how to be a godly husband. When you don't have good examples, knowing how to act can be difficult. In the pages of this book you will find many stories of husbands just like you who are learning to live out God's principles of trusting Him, surrendering to Him, and honoring oneness in marriage.

Willing to Change

As I look back at the first years of my marriage, I see that Scott and I were not embracing our new oneness at all. We were simply living by the old rules of our single days. For example, the time we spent involved with friends, hobbies, or professional advancement often showed that those things remained higher priorities than being together. As we eventually began to trust God with our marriage, we started making different choices that strengthened the oneness in our marriage.

Living out God's principles for marriage requires a lot of a husband and wife. You can't just keep on doing what you've been doing. Marriage requires you to change, to lay down your wishes and yield to your wife's, to sacrifice some of your own dreams and help her fulfill hers, and to come alongside her in the daily ins and outs of life. Husbands and wives must learn to focus on *we* rather than *me*.

So marriage will require you to change. Will these changes be easy? Some changes will, but many will not. Think of it this way. Remember the days of jeans that were not prewashed? (If you're too young to remember, surely you've heard about those days!) I remember wearing the stiffest, most unyielding Wrangler jeans. Whether you were a girl or boy, these were the cool jeans to have, but they were far from

comfortable. These new jeans were so stiff they could almost stand by themselves. Gradually, however, with days of playing and running, those jeans began to fit just right. Soon those Wrangler jeans became my favorites, the ones I always wanted to wear.

The changes you make in your marriage may feel like those brand-new Wrangler jeans—stiff, uncomfortable, and hard to wear at first. Eventually, however, the habits you practice in your marriage will become a part of your character. Your new habits will become your first reactions, just as those new jeans one day became perfectly worn-in and the first ones I reached for.

Gary Smalley, a Christian counselor, writer, and speaker who has become renowned for his wisdom on marriage and family, describes some of his early steps toward oneness in his marriage. He explains what happened with his wife, Norma, as he humbled himself before her and before God.

“Could you forgive me for the way I’ve treated you?” I asked.
“I’m willing to change. I’ll really plan on changing.”

“Sure, I’ve heard that song before,” she said skeptically.

I didn’t know how long it would take for me to reform. But I knew the next time someone called right before dinner, I would have to ask, “Is this an emergency, or can we work it out tomorrow?” I had to show her I really meant business about valuing her and meeting her needs *first*.

I *wanted* to tell her she was the most important person in my life. I really *wanted* to feel that way. At first I didn’t have those feelings, but I *wanted* to have them. As I tried to make her more important to me than anyone else, I soon began to *feel* she was top priority...

My pride was broken, my ego bruised, and my feelings wounded in numerous falls from marital harmony during the first two years of living these principles. Because I tried so hard to make it work, Norma finally believed I was earnest in my endeavor to change. But it took two years to

convince her—and it may take you that long to convince your wife.¹

I appreciate Smalley's honesty in admitting that his marriage took two years to begin to change directions. To make the necessary changes in our marriages, we need to commit to a new way of life and not look for a quick fix. I have no doubt that you will see some immediate positive results, but if you've had years of a troubled marriage, be prepared to reap the harvest over time.

Assess Your Own Marriage

Let's pause for a minute. I've told you some of my marriage story and stories from a few other couples. Now I want you to stop and consider your own marriage story. Maybe you can relate to the conflicts in my marriage because your marriage is characterized by more strife than peace. Maybe you're thinking, *I don't get it. I don't get my wife, and I don't know if I ever will.*

Or maybe you're thinking, *Wait a minute. I'm not sure I even need to read this book. I already have a pretty good marriage.*

Perhaps you started off strong in your marriage, but over the years, the daily stresses of jobs, bills, and children have accumulated, and you really don't like the path your marriage is on.

Maybe your marriage is pretty good, but deep down inside you think God has something more in mind for you than a marriage that is just "fine."

Or perhaps your marriage has reached such a state of hopelessness and bitterness that you're not really sure you even want to stay married.

I am not a marriage expert, but I know the One who is: our heavenly Father, the One who created marriage. Whatever positive or negative thoughts you have about your marriage, God knows exactly where you are; He knows all about your thoughts and feelings in your marriage.

The good news is that God has good plans for you, and they include good plans for your marriage.

As you apply God's principles to your marriage and follow the ideas in this book, you'll discover how to trust God with your marriage. And as you become the man God wants you to be, you'll also become the husband your wife needs.

I believe men want to love their wives the way God wants them to, but often they're not sure what that means. Consider this book as a window into your wife's heart. As you read about God's principles and as other couples share their stories of successes and failures, let them point you to God, to His principles of marriage, and to your wife.

Holy Ground

In this book I'm going to suggest some changes you can make in your marriage. I've already mentioned some in this chapter, and before we go any further I want to give you a fresh perspective from which to view this transformation. It's a perspective I learned when I read about Moses, one of my favorite people in Scripture.

Honestly, I used to think of Moses as one of the most unlikely people for a contemporary woman to relate to. Several years ago, however, while reading through the Bible chronologically, I ended up spending a whole lot of time reading Exodus and Deuteronomy. I began to ask God to reveal Himself to me in the pages of these books and the heart of this man Moses. When I did, Moses became real to me—and not just as an old man with a beard making loud and scary proclamations.

In Exodus 3, Moses is an ordinary shepherd, doing his everyday job of tending sheep, when he encounters our extraordinary God. Moses sees that a “bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2), so he goes to investigate this unusual phenomenon. Unexpectedly, God speaks to Moses, saying, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (verse 5).

We can imagine God saying the same thing to us about our marriages: *Take off your shoes; you are on holy ground.* We may see the ground of our marriages as joyful, ho-hum, or quite challenging, but God sees it as it really is: holy.

When we understand that marriage is sacred, we see that who pays the bills, how often we have sex, and how we raise the kids are not simply matters of convenience. The daily activities in a marriage provide opportunities for us to encounter God. We are on holy ground. We'll talk in this book about how to live out the daily ins and outs of marriage, but at the same time I want to ask you to view all of marriage as a place where we meet God, let Him take hold of our hearts, and allow Him to transform us so we look more like Him.

PRAYER GUIDE

Dear Lord,

Thank you for my wife and my marriage. I want the marriage You want me to have, and I am willing to do whatever You want me to do. I surrender my heart to You and ask that You turn it in the right direction. I confess that at times I have been willful, prideful, and stubborn. I've too quickly pointed out my wife's faults while ignoring my own shortcomings. Lord, work through me to love and treasure my wife for You. Give me the desire to change and the strength to be the kind of husband You want me to be. Then I know I'll be the husband my wife needs. Lord, give me Your perspective of marriage, a perspective that sees my marriage as holy ground, a place where You can change my character to be more like Yours. Amen.
