EIGHT GREAT WAYS TO HONOR YOUR WIFE

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To my mom and dad, Helen and Howard Chadwick, who honored each other and the Lord they loved and served until their last breath. I’m glad you’re together in heaven. I look forward to seeing you again!

To my beloved wife Marilynn, who has honored me with her life, faith, and love. I hope my life has honored you as well. I honor, value, treasure, and esteem you beyond mere words.

To my three children, Bethany, David, and Michael, who have honored me mostly by choosing to love and serve my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Your lives and choices have honored me well. May your children honor you too.
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The word *honor* has become missing in action in the English vocabulary. Oh yes, sadly, we sometimes hear about an “honor killing.” Most often, that’s when a child rejects a certain faith tradition. The father feels he must kill the child for the sake of honor in his home. There is also “honor among thieves.” They still seem to hold the word *honor* in high esteem. The Boy Scouts still begin their pledge with “On my honor, I will do my duty.” Some schools still emphasize an honor code.

But in reality, the word *honor* isn’t much talked about today.

The importance of the word *honor* has not been abated in the Bible. Children are to honor their mothers and fathers (Exodus 20:12). Rulers in the government (Romans 13:7) and the elders who preach, teach, and lead the church are to receive a double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Widows who serve others (1 Timothy 5:3) and friends who labor for us (Philippians 2:29) should also be given honor because of their personal importance in our lives. Christians are to honor one another, even above self (Romans 12:10). When Christians behave with honor, it should draw spiritual skeptics toward faith in God (1 Peter 2:12).

And honor is supposed to be given by a husband to his wife (1 Peter 3:7). He is to honor her as one with enormous value. In this verse,
Peter says that a wife is to be treated as a “weaker vessel.” I don’t think this idea expresses inferiority at all. I believe Peter used this phrase to describe a fine, delicate piece of pottery, like porcelain. The wife is supposed to be like a priceless vase in her husband’s hand. He is to treat her with great care and gentle esteem, tenderly showing to her the enormous value she holds in his life.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated “honor” is *timen*. It can refer to a prize, esteem, value, recognition, or respect. The opposite of honor is shame. To dishonor something or someone means we are ashamed of it or the person.

To honor something or someone means it or the person is very valuable; indeed, a treasure—something or someone about which or whom you’re not ashamed. When you feel shame, you feel worthless. Shame is the antonym of honor. So when we honor God, we are saying he is infinitely more valuable and prized than anything on earth and therefore worthy of our worship.

What does the Bible mean when it tells us to honor our wives? Let me put it in a way our culture can understand. She is a trophy—a person dearly prized. She is the husband’s ultimate, permanent trophy bride! When you look at your wife, you can’t believe she is a part of your life. You consider it a high privilege to be married to her. You want others to know the value she has in your life. You are honored she is your wife.

What would happen in our culture if we stopped looking at our wives as being someone placed on our arms to make us look good? What would happen if we truly understood what biblical honor means and desired to value our wives by recognizing them as prized, permanent trophies?

When we truly show honor as we should, we will treat our wives as a priceless treasure—a person of immense value and worth. As King Solomon wrote, “A man’s greatest treasure is his wife” (Proverbs 18:22).

This book is about eight great ways to honor your wife. My wife, Marilynn, has written an accompanying book entitled *Eight Great Ways to Honor Your Husband*. We both are trying to recapture the significance
What Does It Mean to Honor Your Wife?

and importance of this word *honor*—especially in the marriage relationship between a husband and a wife.

We both believe God gives his original design for marriage in the creation narrative (Genesis 1–2). In Genesis 2:20, Eve (*isha* in the Hebrew) is taken from Adam’s side (*ish* in the Hebrew). These two were once one. When separated, the goal is for them to come back together as two equal and complementary partners. Only these two different people can cleave and weave their lives together.

In Genesis 2:24, God gave his order and goal for marriage: one man, one woman, in a committed, complementary, permanent, heterosexual, monogamous relationship. At the end of this verse, God gave his intended desire for these two complementary people coming together: oneness. He wanted the two to become one flesh.

He wants my love for Marilynn and Marilynn’s love for me to swim through our veins like fish in the sea.

At the end of all marriage days, God wanted a man and a woman to be inextricably one. His design was the strange, mysterious, profound intermixture of two hearts and souls. I am to become one with Marilynn. She is to become one with me. At the end of our married days he wants our fingers tightly squeezed together, expressing the mingling of our lives together. That’s God’s will in marriage. That’s why he created it.

You will see this theme of oneness in marriage interwoven throughout this book. Honoring one another as husband and wife is one of the major ways this goal from God happens.

Let’s be very clear: Honor is not the end goal of marriage. But it *is* very important in marriage. Marilynn and I would not have written these two books if we didn’t think so. But it’s an aid. It’s a means to the end. The goal is two becoming one. Learning to honor one another unequivocally helps this occur.

Isn’t there something within you as a husband that resonates a desire to be permanently one with your bride? Doesn’t your heart and soul long to know this reality? Don’t you yearn to imagine yourself at the end of your married days with your fingers still interlocked with
your beloved in marriage, joyfully sharing together a lifetime of collective memories?

Most couples do. And I believe God himself is the one who placed this longing within the hearts of those whom he has called to marry.

But it doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a lifetime of tiny, imperceptibly different threads sewn together through a husband and wife’s different choices. But at the end, nothing should be able to separate a man and woman who have become one—especially as they choose to honor one another.

Let me give you one final thought. These eight great ways to honor your wife may paint a picture of me that’s not entirely accurate. Yes, I have practiced them throughout our marriage. But some were learned by what I didn’t do correctly. Moreover, like most all husbands, I’ve regrettably stepped on Marilynn’s toes too many times. My human hubris hasn’t allowed me immediately to apologize, as I should have. I think Marilynn would say the same thing.

But we both keep trying. We both keep moving toward one another. We both are committed to practicing honor to the end, cheerfully embracing marriage as God intended it to be.

That’s because we want oneness more than anything else in our marriage.

We are now almost 40 years strong. We love each other deeply. We regularly practice these eight great ways to honor each other in our marriage. We are more in love today than we were when we married. Our love grows by the day. We are permanently bound together. Our oneness is increasing by the day, month, and year.

Marilynn is indeed my lifelong, imminently treasured trophy bride!

I hope these eight great ways to honor your wife will help you feel the same way about your wife.

And mostly, help you and your wife become one.
I wish I’d been smarter in this area. If so, I could have avoided a lot of pain. I stupidly ignored this reality. If I could redo one major part of Marilynn’s and my marital life together it would be this one. I’d trust her gut more. I’d honor her intuition.

It’s happened not once, but on multiple occasions. Marilynn sensed something was wrong. Her spiritual antenna was high. It was receiving strong signals. She sensed an unknown something. There was an inward, environmental stimulus without any accompanying reason. It caused extreme tightness and discomfort in her stomach area.

She couldn’t explain why she undeniably sensed what she did, but she did. She just knew something wasn’t right. Something was out of whack. Something bad was about to happen. Her gut was twisted and nervous. There was a foreboding something on the horizon. And she was saying to me that I just needed to trust her gut.

Too often I ignored her suggestions and plowed ahead with what I needed to do and thought was best. I’d give a polite nod. Or sometimes I’d argue back, saying she didn’t understand the full picture. Or sometimes I was totally dismissive and I’d say she simply needed to trust me. Looking back, I often ignored her instincts to my own eventual chagrin and demise.

Fortunately, she’s seldom poured on guilt by saying, “I told you so.” She’s been gracious when I’ve later acknowledged her wisdom and my
foolly. But on many occasions I’ve gone to her and simply said, “You were right. I was wrong. I’m sorry. I should have listened to you.” If there is one positive thing that’s come from these excruciating experiences, it’s that I learned great humility.

Again, I wish I’d been smarter. In this area, hindsight truly is 20/20. Some people call it women’s intuition. Others refer to it as a gut instinct. I’m not exactly sure of the appropriate term. But I know it’s true. Women have something inwardly that men don’t have. They receive insights on situations men tend to ignore.

A NATURAL GIFT

What is intuition? It’s the unusual ability to acquire knowledge without inference or the actual use of reason. There’s little scientific research and evidence on the subject. But it does exist.

Women in general, and my wife in particular, have a natural gift. There is something to intuition. Perhaps it’s what Pilate’s wife felt when she warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus (Matthew 27:19). From my experience, it is something men generally don’t possess in the same way women do. Yes, men do have gut instincts. They are often-times useful and insightful. But they don’t have it like women. It’s a special gift. There’s no comparison.

Some women object to this statement. They feel it’s misogynistic. Others try to explain it away through female stereotyping. Some say it’s because of biological differences between males and females. Others say it is caused by the different ways genders communicate. Others say it’s a learned behavior, deeply rooted in living through different life experiences. Some suggest it’s a way women have learned how to deal with and manipulate men through the ages. Still others suggest it is caused by estrogen affecting the brain’s subcortical functions. Huh? This last one is beyond me.

Again, there’s not much scientific data. We really don’t know why it works. And I’ll have to leave the potential scientific causes of women’s intuition to people more learned than I. All I know is it does work. I’ve seen and experienced it on multiple occasions in my marriage and with other women. Of that I’m certain.
And I think it should be especially operational in a marriage relationship. If the goal of marriage is two different people becoming one, it makes sense that when the wife feels something is awry about a situation that her husband is walking through, then her gut instinct is what’s best for both of them in their lives.

That means when Marilynn is feeling something, she’s feeling it for me! If we are one flesh, spiritually connected and intermixed, that means God may be using her as a sensitive vessel to speak to me, warning me of a potential problem. Therefore, I need to listen to her. I need to trust her gut.

Through the years, I’ve learned that Marilynn is on my side. Like God, she is for me (Romans 8:31). She wants the best for me. She wants me to succeed. She desires for me not to step into stuff that will hinder me. If this is so, I must trust her gut.

Sometimes Marilynn has insights into people. Other times it’s insights into situations. Still other times it involves both. Often she can’t explain why she’s feeling what she’s feeling. She’s just feeling it. It’s like a red warning light blinking brightly on a car’s dashboard. It’s to be taken seriously and acted on immediately. It’s alerting the driver to a problem in the engine. If not taken care of soon, the engine is imperiled and could break down.

That’s a good analogy of what a wife’s gut instinct does for a husband. It’s an alarm bell that needs to be heeded.

But let me restate my premise. I believe women’s intuition is real. I’ve personally experienced it in my relationship with Marilynn. There are many, many times I wish I’d trusted her gut and listened to her intuition about certain issues occurring in my life. I’d have been wiser and able to avoid much pain.

**Life Illustrations**

There are two general areas in which Marilynn’s intuition has come into play and I have tended to ignore her. The first relates to our kids’ sports activities. The second is in the area of church staff.

First, there’s her intuition with regard to our kids’ participation in sports. Being a former athlete myself, I invested heavily in their sports
success. I knew what sports had done for me. I’d learned invaluable life lessons. Sports are a microcosm of life as a whole. They had taught me discipline, hard work, personal responsibility, and teamwork. I learned how to win with joy and lose with grace.

I wanted my kids to learn what I’d learned through sports. So I became deeply involved. Plus, I really enjoyed the time we were able to share together—much like what my dad and I were able to experience.

As our kids all became increasingly involved with their sports, at different times, I’d have a blind spot when it came to coaches. Outside of parents, coaches are some of the most potent influences in kids’ lives. They are teachers and their classroom is the court, field, or diamond. They should be positive role models to whom kids look for life lessons. They should emulate the values of parents, reinforcing what is being taught at home.

Yet on several occasions, Marilynn sensed a disconnection between our values and those evident in one of our kid’s coaches. She would flinch when an angry word was hastily spoken to a child. Or she would see a permissive attitude toward what the coach would watch publicly at the movies or on television at home. Or she would notice pieces of literature in their home that we’d never permit in our own. Or she’d be concerned about whether the coach really believed in our kid’s giftedness and not give fair opportunities we knew he or she needed or deserved.

Marilynn would feel keenly uncomfortable as she observed these kinds of things. Frequently she would wait weeks before she’d say anything to me. She didn’t want to overreact. But the gut’s discomfort persisted and grew.

Finally, she would voice her concerns to me. She would wait for the right moment, and speak respectfully to me. She would make it perfectly clear that her greatest concern was first for our kids. But she was also concerned that I or the church could be negatively impacted as well.

I’d love to tell you I was a godly man who immediately listened and acted. I wish I could tell you that I rightly trusted her gut. But too often, I didn’t. I tended to quickly wave away her concerns, most often hiding behind my knowledge that I understood sports better than she.
Marilynn would occasionally remind me that this had nothing to do with my sports acumen, but about her care for the kids and me. That didn’t help either. I still didn’t listen.

Later, after finally concluding she was correct, I’d have to painfully and carefully extricate us from the problem. There’s a leadership adage that says, “It’s easier to get in than out.” How true it is! It’s much easier to start something than get out of it when it’s a mess. If only I had heeded her counsel earlier, I could have avoided a lot of the pain of the mess.

The other area is with church staff. Marilynn would sense long before I that there was a potential problem. Sometimes she would notice incompetence. Or she would hear someone using foul language for effect. Or she would feel disrespect from someone toward me. Or she would notice people who thought faithfully following a secular business model was more important than nurturing the spiritual life of the church. Or she would sense people forming relationships behind-the-scenes that later expressed themselves in power plays against me.

She would warn me. She felt that was her obligation as my life partner.

But I wouldn’t listen. As happened with the coaches, I’d assume I knew better. I was living in the arena of the church every day. I was the expert. She wasn’t. I knew better than she what was really going on. Surely people weren’t that devious or incompetent. Surely in ministry circles people didn’t live out personal agendas for their own glory. Surely church staff wouldn’t do these kinds of things.

But I was naïve. I was too trusting. I wanted to believe the best in people. I wouldn’t acknowledge human hubris. It was difficult for me to believe that people had agendas—especially those who said they were faithful followers of Jesus.

Looking back, I have some painful memories. It’s hard to admit to blind spots and places where you’re not self-aware. But successful leaders need to do it. I’ve needed to do it. It’s not optional.

I’ve repeatedly asked myself why I didn’t listen to Marilynn. I’ve wondered why I didn’t honor her by trusting her gut.
A PAINFUL LESSON

After having gone through these two painful trials, and trying to become more self-aware, I’ve asked myself these pertinent questions: “Why didn’t I initially trust her gut? What made me become defensive and dismissive when confronted with her concerns?”

And I can come up with only one answer. It wasn’t pretty. The Lord revealed to me an ugly side of my fallen nature. Bottom line, I didn’t trust her gut because I wanted something better for my glory. I wanted something greater for me than I wanted my wife’s input.

With sports, I wanted my kids’ success. I overlooked rather obvious character flaws and problems with coaches because I wanted them to succeed too badly. Their success would make me look good. Their success was a positive reflection on me. Marilynn’s input, therefore, needed to be secondary to what I desired for my own glory. Ouch.

With the church, I wanted its success more than I wanted Marilynn’s input. The staff consisted of people I was hoping would help the church grow. Some of these people were younger, hipper, and seemingly more relevant. They brought an organizational business model that had proven successful in other churches. They could help the church reach out to younger people and become even more successful than it already was.

That’s idolatry. It’s using people for my glory. Ouch.

Do you see the consistent pattern? I wanted something more than Marilynn’s gut instinct.

It’s been a painful lesson to learn. But I think I’ve learned it. To honor my wife, I need to trust her gut. If we are one, as God intended all married couples to be, the Lord will speak to me through my wife, who is a part of me. When Marilynn speaks to me from her gut, it’s for my good. And I may well be listening to the voice of God for me when she’s speaking from her intuition.

I honor Marilynn when I trust her gut.

A WORD TO WIVES

I find it interesting that there is not much scientific data to explain the phenomenon of a woman’s intuition. Personally, I think it’s a
special “something” God has given to women from the beginning. It’s a spiritual warning system God has formed within them.

And I also think a wife’s intuitive ability to hear from God is directly connected to her prayer life. Her gut instinct is docked in heaven’s harbor; it resides in eternity’s halls. And as she seeks God, his heart is made known to her. Perhaps her prayer life opens a special door to receive the spiritual gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10).

I think that’s the case with Marilynn. Almost every morning, I see her sitting on the couch with her Bible open and her “chubby” book before her. What is her “chubby” book? That’s a nickname she’s given to the book in which she lists her prayer requests. On the pages, she lists every day of the week. Then, under each day of the week, she has people, places, and organizations for which she prays.

For example, you’ll find me listed under Monday. Elsewhere, she has included other family members and friends. There are some missionaries listed in there. She fervently prays for each one. (For more information about this prayer strategy, please purchase Marilynn’s first book, Sometimes He Whispers, Sometimes He Roars.) I know she seeks God daily. I know she wants the doing of his will to be the master passion of her life. I am certain her heart is connected to God’s heart every morning.

Therefore, I can trust her gut. I can fully anticipate that her concerns to me about a situation may be from the heart of God through her to me.

If you’re a wife who is reading this book, this means that if you want your husband’s ear, God needs to have your heart. And the best way he can have your heart is through prayer.

Have you examined the depth of your prayer life recently? Seeking God daily will increase your gut instincts. It will enlarge your woman’s intuition. It will increase your husband’s desire to know what you have to say. It will encourage him to trust your gut.

**Practical Suggestions for Husbands**

There are some practical things we husbands can do to give our wives the best opportunity to speak to us and help us avoid stepping in stuff we shouldn’t. Here they are.
First, set aside time regularly to be together and alone. This theme recurs over and over again throughout all the eight great ways to honor your wife. It’s an essential. You can’t hear your wife’s gut unless you spend time together. You can’t become one without time together.

Second, ask her opinion on issues in your life. Desire her complete honesty and perspective. If something doesn’t make sense, ask again for clarification until it becomes clear. Pay special attention when she says, “I don’t know why I feel this; I just do!” Or, “I’ve got this inner vibe that just won’t go away. It keeps twisting my stomach into knots.” That’s probably her gut instinct in operation.

Third, consider all your motives as she shares her gut. Are you refusing to listen because you want something more? If so, you’re entering dangerous waters. Beware! You are probably soon approaching a mostly hidden and destructive iceberg. And believe me when I say it’s much easier to get in than out.

Finally, take action. If your wife is warning you about a person or situation that just doesn’t “feel” right to her, at least pause. Examine carefully what she has noted. Even if it may embarrass you, you’ll most likely need to back out. Even if the situation at the moment seems prosperous, you may find yourself needing to run in the opposite direction of the deal. Trust me—you’ll be glad you did.

You may want to start keeping an “intuition journal.” What is that? It’s a journal listing all the times your wife’s gut instinct told you about something and she was right. Then read that journal—repeatedly! As you observe the number of times her warnings were right, it’ll cause you to pause and listen to her more in the future. My journal has many chapters, unfortunately.

Trust your wife’s gut. Listen to her intuition. I’ve learned through the years that this is a badge of honor I gladly pin on Marilynn. It’s a badge she actually wants to wear.

When I listen to my wife, I honor her. And it creates more oneness between us.

And the more I listen, the fewer problems I have in life.

That, within itself, is a very good reason to trust her gut.