EIGHT GREAT WAYS TO HONOR YOUR HUSBAND

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To Mom and Dad:

I’ve been inspired by your stories of our family’s heritage—
thanks for leaving us such a wonderful legacy of honor.  
And for honoring each other through more than 
six decades of marriage.

To David:

Honoring you is not hard—you’re truly an honorable man.  
You’re even better than my “prayer list” of what I hoped for 
in a husband. We’ve shared great adventures and 
big dreams together—I’m thankful to be your wife.

To Bethany, David, and Michael:

I believe each of you is a world changer.  
Every possible career path seemed pale compared to 
the privilege and honor of being your mom.  
You were worth my best energy—I’m so proud of you.
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My new friend began our conversation quite innocently by asking me to pray for her marriage. We were both young wives adjusting to life in a new city. I didn’t know her very well, but over the next few minutes, I would learn way more than I wanted to know about her personal life. And about her husband. She launched into a litany of all the ways he had disappointed her. She then proceeded to describe in detail how far short he fell in her eyes as a man. Before too many minutes had passed, this poor guy began to fall short in my eyes as well.

Many years have come and gone since that conversation. So why do I still remember it so well? Well, for one thing, I never could quite look at that guy in the same way again. His reputation, at least from my end, had been damaged by his wife’s words. I made a mental note to myself to never, ever talk so casually to someone else about my husband’s shortcomings. And I tried not to be on the receiving end of that kind of toxic spill again.

Now please don’t get me wrong. It’s not that David and I don’t have our own flaws or that we’ve never struggled in our marriage. We’re human too. Marriage is hard work and forces us to come to
grips with our sin and selfishness like nothing else. No doubt, there are times in life when it may be appropriate to share your marriage struggles with a good friend or a wise counselor. But it was the disrespectful picture that my friend had painted of her husband that felt so wrong. So dishonoring.

And because this is a book about honor, I’ve been taking a long, hard look at the whole concept of honor and its importance in marriage and in our culture in general. The word *honor* describes the value or worth we give to someone because of his or her good quality or character. Honor conveys dignity, honesty, and integrity. To honor someone is to treat that person “with admiration and respect.”

But honor feels loftier to me than respect. Weightier. It goes deeper and has to do with intangibles like virtue and morality. Courage and self-sacrifice. Even nobility. We may not know exactly how to describe honor. But like love, we know it when we see it.

And we know when honor is missing. In some cultures around the world, to be disrespected or dishonored is so insulting that it’s grounds for fighting. Some even justify the use of violence to defend one’s honor or the honor of one’s family. What started out as an urban slang expression for *disrespect,* “dis,” has become so common as to transcend culture or age. Most any child can tell you what it means to dis somebody, or worse yet, to be dissed.

Sadly, we live in a time when dishonor is so common that it feels almost normal. Over the years, I’ve noticed that honor, especially in marriage, seems to be disappearing. More than once I’ve overheard a group of wives criticizing their husbands to each other. Sort of a group-gripe fest. And why not? It’s open season on men these days. You don’t have to watch television or movies too long before you see an example of “man bashing.” I find this trend disturbing.

Maybe it’s because I live with a servant-hearted husband who is not only the love of my life, but also my best friend. Perhaps it’s because I have two grown sons and a son-in-law, all of whom are
honorable young men. Or maybe it’s because I grew up with a wonderful dad who has been a faithful husband and father for more than 63 years. For whatever reason, I’m bothered by how trendy it has become over the years to dis men, especially husbands and fathers. Seems like we’ve gotten too cool to appreciate the good guys anymore.

I pointed this out in a recent editorial I wrote for our local newspaper after the passing of the legendary University of North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith. Along with great basketball, Coach Smith taught his players, including my husband, much about honor. David says that next to his own father, Smith was the most significant man in his life. Though the excerpt below is primarily about men as fathers, it begs the question as to why the lack of honor toward men today:

Good dads these days are hard to find. Just watch any television show. Dads are spoofed, maligned, caricatured, and generally disrespected. The message? It’s just not cool to be a dad. If the same treatment were given to moms, you’d spark a revolt.

But that’s the nature of dads. The good ones don’t whine. They don’t show off. They put the needs of their families ahead of their own. And as Coach Smith modeled for us all, good dads embody self-sacrifice. In short, good dads are that reservoir of safety and unconditional love for which all kids hunger. Quite likely, they’re a major factor in determining the outcome of a young person’s life. The statistics aren’t pretty. Girls and boys without dads are more likely to end up pregnant out of wedlock, in prison, poor, or dead. And bad dads may be worse than no dads, leaving scars inside and outside that can last a lifetime.

But I’m seeing a resurgence of dad-hunger out there. I think people today are literally dying for good dads. Perhaps Coach Smith’s legacy will inspire dads to be better.
Smith knew it wasn’t simply about winning and losing but rather “how you play the game.” His life reminds us that good guys are very cool. And just maybe, more guys will want to become good dads. Lord knows we need them.3

The responses to my editorial surprised me. Had I touched a nerve? Handwritten notes and emails poured in from a variety of readers—male and female, black and white, young and old. A prominent defense attorney shared memories of his own father, now deceased, reminiscing about what an honorable man his dad was in his eyes. A federal judge, a bank president, the local head of a government agency, a former mayor. Each told me about the honorable men in their lives. One even confided his heart’s desire to be a man of honor within his own family. Several young moms, all who happened to be at home with small children, wrote in to praise their husbands for their hard work and for being such good husbands and fathers. Others posted on social media that they were challenged by my reminder to simply be thankful for the honorable men in their lives.

The responses made me wonder. What has happened to honor these days? Are we a culture that’s thirsty for honor?

Perhaps it’s because honor is sorely lacking in many of our homes. Marriages are breaking up at an alarming rate. Sadly, the percentage of wives leaving their husbands has risen dramatically. So I feel a book on honor is timely.

We’d do well to first remind ourselves that at its core, honor is a biblical concept, woven throughout the pages of Scripture to characterize our relationship with God and with each other. The Bible defines honor in the most precious of terms, conveying not only value and respect, but also extreme costliness. It’s sometimes used interchangeably with the word for wealth. So to honor someone is to treat that person as having the utmost worth.
As I set out to write this book, it dawned on me that I could use a refresher course myself in how to show my husband how special he is to me. You’d think that after nearly four decades of marriage, I’d have this one down. David and I have had a wonderful life together. We love and respect each other and we enjoy spending time together. We’ve always remained faithful to one another.

But I admit that every now and then, I’ve been guilty of taking my husband for granted. Maybe you have done the same too. The mystery and the wonder of marriage—we can let it slide past us if we’re not watching. We can forget to be thankful when the familiar becomes comfortable. To honor our husbands means to recapture a little of the awe.

And so, as part of this process, I’ll be exploring ways to become more mindful about how to honor my husband. I will share some of the practical ways I’ve learned to communicate to David that I truly do honor him as the most special person in my life. I’ll also include some valuable tips from friends in my life. Women I’ve admired, in part, for the ways they have honored their husbands. Some of these friends have strong, long-lasting marriages. Others have vibrant, healthy, youthful ones.

We’ll walk through the pages of Scripture to explore what it has to say to us as wives who want strong marriages. What practical lessons does the Bible have to teach us about how we can honor our husbands? Plus, I’ll share eight ways you can begin to honor your husband and create a culture of honor in your home.

My husband’s father, the late Dr. Howard Chadwick, used to tell David, “The best gift you can give your children is a strong marriage.” And so I remind those of you who are moms: The best gift you can give your children is to love and honor your husband.

Our husbands are not merely an afterthought sandwiched in between life with kids, chores, workouts, and activities. We need
to be strong, faithful, and above all, intentional if we want our marriages not just to survive but to thrive. Our marriages are worth it. So are our husbands.

It’s time to have an honest conversation about honor. Why does it seem to be in such short supply these days? The culture around us is groaning, desperately in need of honor. My hope is that together, we could spark a movement of honor that will spill over into a hurting and broken world. It’s hard work, but the rewards are worth it. I hope you’ll join me for this journey.
I glanced at the young couple seated at the table next to us. They were to be married the following afternoon, and this was their rehearsal dinner celebration. It sounds cliché, but there was a glow about them. That unmistakable look of being madly in love. As long-time friends of the bride’s parents, we had watched her grow from a tiny baby into a lovely young woman. We were gathered with other friends and family at the charming riverside restaurant to toast the happy couple with well wishes before their big day. The exquisite meal served by candlelight under an elegant, billowy white tent was perfection. The balmy spring breeze made us all want to linger outside and enjoy the last few hours together to share memories, the usual marriage tips, and a few stories before the young man and woman began their new life together as husband and wife.

It was a familiar scene for us. David has performed hundreds of weddings in our 35-plus years of ministry at the same church. And still, we marvel at the magic of marriage. The holiness. The sheer audacity of two young people taking vows to love one another forever. Solemn promises to stick together no matter what. To be faithful until death. The enormity of it all is a bit staggering. And though divorce statistics loom heavy, young couples continue to dive into
marriage with high hopes of wedded bliss and dreams of happily ever after.

The festivities carried on long into the night. Heartfelt reminiscing gave way to a few mildly embarrassing stories about the groom-to-be in more carefree days. But one theme rang true. A transformation had occurred in the young man as a result of his relationship with his soon-to-be bride. Love can do that to a man.

A buddy from his college days stood up and shared one final story about the groom’s crazy antics and wild oats sown. Then he paused, as if perplexed by the changes he’d observed in his friend. “I don’t really know why,” he said with near-reverence, “but this girl is different. She is *solid.*” He seemed mystified as to how the changes could have happened almost overnight. “She has brought out the best in my friend,” he added. “And because of her, he’s becoming the man he was meant to be.” Then he made a comment that still sticks out in my mind. “I guess you could say she’s his *rock.*”

**The Secret to a Good Marriage**

The groom’s young friend was more of a beer-drinking buddy than a theologian. Yet there was a strong biblical truth in his words. An honorable woman can help inspire a man to be his best. To become worthy of honor. And in that way, she is his “rock.” A friend of ours who recruits for a large company agrees. “I’ll hire a single woman over a single man right out of college any day,” explaining that she is often more responsible, mature, and serious about her work than her male counterpart. “But just let that young man get married and have a mortgage. Suddenly his responsibility, drive, and maturity jump through the roof.” The groom’s buddy was right. The love of a woman, marriage, and family can help grow a guy into a man in a hurry. They can also spur him on to live a life of honor.

Honor is a noble concept. It includes attributes like dignity, value, and worth. To honor someone is to regard that person as being special.
Honor is the central theme of this book. More specifically, we’ll take a look at what it means to honor our husbands and why honor is crucial to a marriage. I hope you’ll begin to appreciate the unique privilege you have as a wife to inspire and empower your husband to reach his God-given potential.

Together, we’ll explore what the Bible has to say about honor and why it can strengthen our marriages. Along the way, we’ll look at some real-life examples of women I’ve known who I think have done a good job of honoring their husbands. Finally, I’ll talk about some of the practical ways I’ve learned to honor David through our years together. Marriage is probably the best laboratory available to us for learning how to treat another person with love, respect, and honor.

But first, I have to confess the irony that I am even writing this book in the first place. In college, I was an agnostic with somewhat feminist leanings. Growing up, I’d been curious about God and attended church with my family. But I had an independent streak and wanted to live life my own way. So at around age 15, I pretty much invited God out of my life. And by the time I got to college, I had stopped believing in God altogether.

So church attendance was a habit I easily abandoned once I entered the large university. I was quickly caught up in the fun of making new friends and stretching my wings. Plus, I thrived in the exciting intellectual environment and had big dreams for my life. It didn’t take long for the secular academic climate and the social whirl to sweep away any remaining spiritual leanings.

I was home from college one weekend to visit my family and reluctantly agreed to attend church with them that Sunday. I can still vividly remember my rather cynical attitude as the minister launched into what I thought was a boring sermon. I looked at the earnest young fellow and said to myself, “I can’t imagine a bigger waste of a person’s time and talents than being a preacher. Except being a preacher’s wife.”1 I’m sure God laughed. For a short time later, I would meet...
a handsome young preacher on a blind date. We would fall in love. That young preacher would become my husband barely a year after I had surrendered my own life to Christ, following a dramatic encounter with God which I will share more about later.

I wish I could tell you that my transformation was immediate. But my grasp of marriage from God’s perspective did not happen right away. It took time, trial and error, and a study of the Bible, along with the help of some good role models, for God to open my eyes to His beautiful and somewhat mysterious plan for marriage.

But this book is about honor, not about how to fulfill your role in marriage, although I will spend some time on that subject in later chapters. Many good books are devoted to the biblical roles of husbands and wives. I’m not sure I can add much more to the conversation. And to be honest, I’ve grown a bit weary of the debates about her role versus his role in marriage, as if one size fits all. When it comes to honoring our husbands, we need to understand that no two marriages or men are exactly alike. So words or actions that make my husband feel honored and respected might go right over the head of your husband.

As I’ve studied what the Bible has to say about honor, and as I have become more intentional about honoring my husband, I’ve come face-to-face with an important realization. Honoring my husband demands way more from me than mere submission. Please understand. I’m not anti-submission with regard to the biblical framework of love and respect. It’s just that to truly honor my husband, I have to set the bar much higher.

Honor requires self-sacrifice and humility. It challenges me to bridle not just my words, but my thoughts as well. It makes me bite my tongue. Honor confronts me with my sin. Honor, even more than submission, is an imposing benchmark. It’s a sublimely powerful target. For if I take aim and hit the bulls-eye of honor, I am probably covering all the other virtues that make for a good marriage. Finally,
if I want to honor David, I have to become honorable myself. So honor conforms me to the image of Christ. In short, honor requires a strong walk with the Lord. To truly honor my husband, I must first become strong.

**GOD CREATED US TO BE STRONG**

To explore the concept of honor from a biblical point of view, it helps to go back to the very beginning. The first mention of marriage in the Bible is between Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. If you want to understand God’s blueprint for marriage, or anything else for that matter, it helps to look through the lens of what theologians call “original intent.” What did God originally intend for marriage to look like before the fall?

In Scripture, we see that God’s purpose for creating marriage was to provide companionship. Everything which God had made up to that point was good. But when He looked at Adam, He said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Something was missing. The Genesis account explains that there was no “suitable helper” for Adam, so God plans His next step: “I will make a helper suitable for him.” God goes to work to create a woman from the very stuff of man, his same substance: “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:18,20-22).

**A ROCK OF SUPPORT**

The marriage relationship was God’s gift to the humans. Eve was Adam’s companion, but the Bible also calls her his helper. The exact meaning of the word helper has been the source of much confusion and debate for centuries. That’s not surprising when you see how this
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word evolved into its watered-down version in our English language. Our word for *help* can mean anything from roadside assistance, to a distress call, to domestic servants.

But in Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, the word *help* is surprisingly strong. Help, or *ezer*, means “to support.” But it goes much deeper than just assistance. One Hebrew scholar has pointed out that the word for *ezer* is actually a combination of two roots meaning “to rescue, to save,” and “to be strong.” In its more than 20 uses in the Old Testament, the word *ezer* is used just twice to refer to the woman. The rest of the time *ezer* refers to God doing the helping, often during battle situations.

In the Psalms, when David said, “The Lord is with me; he is my helper, I look in triumph on my enemies,” he used the word *ezer* (Psalm 118:7). We also see *ezer* in the context of God running to provide aid or support to His people during times of trouble. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

The word *ezer* is also closely related to the Hebrew word translated “rock,” or *eben*. Thus, the *Ebenezer* stone mentioned in the Bible is a “stone of support.” The prophet Ezra’s name means “help” and also comes from *ezer*. Do you see the strong imagery here? Think about what it means to be strong like a rock for our husbands, our families, and those around us.

I’ve discovered that an important part of being a wife to a strong husband like David is to be his rock of support when everything around him feels like it is crashing down. When you grasp what it means to be a support, you begin to get an image of your role as being more like that of a rock than a doormat. Your challenge is to become strong so that you are a source of strength for a husband who will sometimes be weak.

Let’s revisit the wedding rehearsal dinner described earlier in this
Chapter. As we’ve explored the beautiful biblical concept of ezer, we can now see why the young bridegroom’s buddy I mentioned earlier was surprisingly right on target when he described the bride-to-be as his friend’s “rock.” Right out of the starting gate in the book of Genesis, the Bible paints a picture of the woman’s ability to be a rock of support for her husband.

**A Different Kind of Strength**

It’s clear throughout Scripture that helper is a strong word. But just what kind of strength are we talking about here? What does it really mean for me to be an ezer, or a rock, for my husband? Clearly it can’t mean I am to be his physical protector. For despite all the female superheroes kicking guys into oblivion on the movie screen, the fact remains: Physically, most men are still stronger than women. Check out the USA Olympic trial standards for athletes. Men can run faster, lift more weight, put down better times in swimming. Testosterone has its place in the world.

I recently read an article boasting about all the ways women are “stronger than men.” Women tend to live longer, it stated, be more stoic when sick, and now boast a higher college graduation rate than men. But I grow tired of such gender-war comparisons. Men and women are created by God to uniquely represent His complete image. “Male and female He made them,” and with good reason. All scientific research aside, men and women are supposed to be different.

But back to our conversation about ezer. I’m wondering if God had in mind a more subtle kind of protector role that women bring to the marriage. I recently learned a fascinating aspect of the word ezer that may give us a clue. In the ancient Hebrew language, the letters were actually pictures that evolved into the modern letters used today. According to one scholar, the ancient picture letters for ezer were an eye, a man, and a weapon. Could it be that woman as ezer might function as a kind of an early warning system for her husband?
Ezer then becomes a mighty helper and protector for her husband, one who is able to reveal his enemy in times of danger, thus helping to strengthen and protect the marriage. Perhaps this is why Satan targeted Eve instead of Adam. If he took the woman down, he also removed some of her husband’s protection.

**If You Want to Be Strong, Be Humble**

Sometimes I have noticed that I’m alert to problems or problem people before David picks up the cues. (He shares at length about this intuitive sense—which most women seem to possess—in his book for husbands, *Eight Great Ways to Honor Your Wife.*) I used to think my job was to insist that David listen to me. But I learned over the years that sometimes my discernment was not right. So if something sets off my alarm bell, I commit to praying about it before I say anything to David. “Pray it before I say it” has become my mantra, and has often prevented me from speaking too soon. But if and when I finally share the burden that’s on my heart, I am able to give the right information in the right time and in the right way.

Which brings me to the importance of humility as an aspect of our role as ezer. The Bible consistently reminds us that strength, like honor, comes through humility. By way of servanthood. As believers and as husbands and wives, we’re called to give up our rights and die to self. When I accepted Jesus, I gave Him all of me. It was the same with God’s Word. Scripture was my newly found authority. I realized I couldn’t stand firm on the promises and power in God’s Word if I wasn’t also willing to submit to its authority in my life. I’m not a half-way person by nature. Remember, I had gone from practically being an atheist to following hard after God. So when I died to myself and accepted Jesus, I instinctively knew to obey God. No looking back.

Bottom line? If I truly want to be strong in the Lord and live out what it means to be a rock, or an ezer, in my marriage, I must also be
humble. So I want to spend some time reflecting on the delicate balance in the Bible between strength and humility.

We hear a lot about humility, but it seems it’s the virtue nobody really wants. We admire it when we see it in others. But it’s so against our nature to walk in humility that most of us run the other way. I once read a quote that said something like this: “Truly great people are always humble. Arrogance is the consolation prize for those who aren’t at the top.” Some of the most outstanding and honorable people I’ve met are also humble. Humility is a virtue I greatly admire, one that I tried to teach our children as they were growing up.

I’ll share a little secret with you. The main reason I accepted a blind date with the man who became my husband was because of a single sentence spoken by a friend who knew David. Donna and I had gone to high school together, but had lost touch since graduating from college. She had known David when he was the college minister of her church group near Atlanta. She told me what a great guy he was. How he’d played basketball for Dean Smith at the University of North Carolina, and then had a career playing in the European professional league in Belgium and France. She went on and on and on about all of his accomplishments. But then she paused for a minute and said the words that grabbed my heart. “For all the things he’s accomplished, David is incredibly humble.” Humility and honor. That combination intrigued me and made me want to find out more about this guy.

The Bible is clear about the connection between humility and honor. We’re reminded that “humility comes before honor” (Proverbs 18:12). “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up,” comes the strong admonition in James 4:10. The Greek understanding of humbling ourselves in this verse literally means “to be made low.” Another version adds weight to this promise: “He will lift you up, He will give you purpose” (James 4:10 AMP).
A friend of mine who seems quite confident expressed his understanding of humility this way: “Without Christ, I am an incredibly insecure person, and so I stick close to Him.” Isn’t that what humility really is? Apart from Christ, I’m weak and I know it. So I’m going to make a point of sticking close to Him. To abide. Jesus made it clear that abiding in Him is the secret to our strength. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 esv).

**If You Want to Be Strong, Abide**

I was recently asked by a young mom if there was anything I’d do differently if I were just starting out in my marriage again. It didn’t take me long to respond that I would simply be even more intentional about abiding in Christ. As I’ve learned, it’s the only secret to strength in marriage that truly lasts.

David and I are both intrigued by this concept of honor in marriage. We understand how important it is that husbands and wives learn to love and honor each other. Plus, we’ve grown to appreciate the often-overlooked aspect of a woman’s strength as the ezer in her marriage.

David made a comment the other day that got me to thinking. Maybe this whole thing of being strong in the Lord is even more important to expressing honor than I’d realized. “I really like it that you are not needy,” he told me. What he appreciates so much, he went on to add, is that I’m not looking to him for my identity. In other words, he knows I don’t expect him to meet my need for meaning or purpose. “Because of your relationship with the Lord, you come to our marriage with a full cup,” he explained. “I know you’re not going to drain me dry.”

I’ve thought further about his comment and why it made me
pause. For one thing, David knows my weaknesses better than anyone. He has walked me through more fears and more tears than I can count. And yet he still considers me strong. He must see a strength in me that I don’t even see in myself. Maybe abiding in Christ brings a strength that I cannot see. Abiding is not some magic pill you swallow and then—bam, you’re in! No, it’s a daily process lived out by putting one foot in front of the other. Even on days when I don’t feel like it. Especially when I don’t feel like it. So in a sense, the call to be an ezer in my marriage is a call to walk daily with Christ. It’s saying yes to Jesus’ calling to me to be His disciple.

Perhaps as wives we’d do well to take the message of Genesis 2:18 to heart. God knew what He was doing when He created woman as ezer. Marriage is the closest, most intimate relationship we know on earth. We’re called to love and honor each other for our entire life, to depend upon and draw strength from each other. But God also knew that ultimately, we would receive that strength through our relationship with Christ. He, not our spouse, is the center of our life. It’s only through that kind of strength that I can be an ezer in my marriage. It’s by being strong like a rock in the Lord that I can best honor my husband.