

Why Your Respect Means More to Him Than Even Your Affection

YOUR

by Shaunti Feldhahn

>>> “I’m going to ask you to choose between two bad feelings,” the retreat speaker said. His gaze swept the divided room of 20-something singles, the men on one side, women on the other. “If you had to, would you rather feel alone and unloved in the world, or would you rather feel inadequate and disrespected?”

What kind of a choice is that? I remember thinking. Who would ever choose to feel unloved?

The speaker turned to the men’s side of the room. “Okay, men. Who here would rather feel alone and unloved?”

A sea of hands went up, and a giant gasp rippled across the women’s side of the room. I had just seen a truth demonstrated that many women have somehow totally missed: Most men would rather feel our respect than our love.

Since that day, I embarked on a mission to understand how



men really think and feel. I interviewed over 1,000 men: close friends, strangers in the grocery store, married fathers at church, and the single student sitting next to me on an airplane. I talked to CEOs, attorneys, pastors, technology geeks, business managers, the security guard at Costco, and the guys behind the Starbucks counter. I even interviewed a professional opera singer and a former NFL offensive tackle with a Super Bowl ring.

I learned a lot from these men, and quite frankly, I was astonished by my findings more often than not. Probably the most important revelation was the fact that husbands need—desperately *need*—to be respected and built up by their wives. For a man, it’s respect, even more than love, that can turn a marriage into the delightful place of companionship that God intended.

How Can That Be?

Most of us women want above all to feel loved and cherished, and so we demonstrate the same to our men. In interviews, I’ve often heard husbands say, “I never doubt that my wife loves me.”

But I also heard many of those men continue, “However, I do doubt that she respects me.” The problem is that a perceived lack of respect is as devastating to them as it would be for us to doubt their love. In the professional national survey I conducted, the vast majority of men (three out of four) agreed they could do without love, but could not do without respect.

I say “perceived” lack, because while most of us do respect the men in our lives, we have often unwittingly sent the opposite signal. For example,

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when he makes a decision, we reflexively question it, or offer all the reasons why he might be wrong. Or we second-guess his way with the kids, believing our way is better. Or we publicly tell a “funny” story about his inability to fix the plumbing on the fifth try. Or we tell him how to drive and what lane to be in, and pressure him to stop and ask someone else for directions.

We often don’t see the implications of such behavior; we think we are just being helpful, or have a more fitting solution. But for the average guy, these actions are excruciatingly painful and say one thing loud and clear: “I don’t trust or respect you.”

That loud message is also unbiblical, as is our cultural idea that, while love is to have no conditions attached, respect must be earned. The Bible tells us: “Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Many of us must unlearn years of unbiblical assumptions and habits as we learn to support our husbands in the way they truly need.

At this point, wives might be thinking, *It’s all about him. What do I get out of this deal?* God is the master of paradox, and just as Jesus’ unconditional love for us leads us to *want* to be worthy of it, our decision to unconditionally demonstrate respect to our husband leads him to want to earn it—and to *adore* us. A man who is honored and

built up by his wife will *become* the husband God created him to be, one better equipped to shower his wife with the unconditional love she craves.

The 30-Day Challenge

When speaking to groups of women, I often list numerous examples of actions that their men might perceive as hurtful

and disrespectful, like those mentioned above. While that list is important, a wise new friend of mine has developed a better starting point for how we might take stock of our hearts and change our habits.

When I was discussing this subject and others as a guest on Nancy Leigh Demoss’s radio program, she issued a simple but profound 30-day challenge:

For the next 30 days, don’t say anything negative about your husband, either to him or to anyone else; instead, think and say only those things that are worthy of appreciation.

While this challenge will not instantly fix every subtly disrespectful behavior, it will root out many quietly destructive habits and issues of the heart that we may never have recognized before. And as we respect our husbands the way *they* need to be respected, we will experience the joy of watching them become godly men who love us in return. 💜