

A MAN'S NEED FOR RESPECT

A Theological, Psychological, and Biological Study for the Married Couple

Beauty is like the morning dew on a leaf — lovely to look at, but it cannot sustain the tree when the sun is hot. A woman's true radiance is not found in jars of cream or expensive lace. It is found in her character.

“Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” — Proverbs 31:30

The elders say that a beautiful face without a respectful tongue is like a golden ring in the snout of a pig. Scripture agrees — and God wrote it first (Proverbs 11:22). When you pour the salt of disrespect into the soup of your marriage, you make the whole meal bitter.

A man's desire is not just a thing of the flesh — it is a thing of the spirit. Sexual arousal is like a delicate bird that only perches where there is peace. It is better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife. (Proverbs 21:19)

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The 5 Wounds a Man Suffers When Respect Is Absent

1

His Identity Collapses.

A man's sense of self is fundamentally anchored in how he is perceived by the person closest to him. When his wife consistently disrespects him, he does not simply feel bad — he begins to question who he is at the most foundational level.

Psychologically, this is called identity threat. The brain's threat-response system activates in interpersonal environments of chronic disrespect exactly as it does in physical danger. He is not overreacting. He is physiologically responding to a genuine threat.

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). When the voice he hears daily tells him he is inadequate, that voice begins to shape his internal reality. Identity, repeated consistently enough, becomes destiny.

2

His Leadership Withdraws.

God designed man to lead — but leadership requires the belief that one's direction is trusted and valued. Chronic disrespect dismantles that belief systematically and silently. A man who is mocked when he speaks will eventually stop speaking.

Therapeutically, this is learned helplessness — the psychological state in which a person stops attempting because repeated failure has taught him that effort produces no reward. He withdraws not from laziness but from accumulated discouragement.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). A husband stripped of respect loses his vision for the marriage. And a marriage without male vision is a ship without a captain — drifting toward danger nobody named.

3

His Desire Diminishes.

Sexual desire in a man is not purely physical. It is profoundly relational. Testosterone is the biological driver of male desire — but research confirms that chronic stress and relational hostility suppress testosterone production measurably and consistently.

A man living in a disrespectful home is a man under chronic cortisol elevation. Cortisol and testosterone are in biological opposition — when one rises, the other falls. His diminished desire is not rejection. It is the body responding to an unsafe environment.

Proverbs 21:19 says plainly — it is better to live in the desert than with a quarrelsome wife. The desert, at minimum, is peaceful. Peace is the soil in which a man's desire grows. Remove the peace and you remove the harvest.

4

His Emotional Availability Shuts Down.

Men process emotional pain through withdrawal rather than expression. When disrespect is chronic, a man does not escalate — he disappears. He is physically present but emotionally unreachable. The lights are on and nobody is home.

Gottman's research confirmed that men physiologically flood faster in conflict than women do — and take longer to return to baseline. Repeated flooding without repair produces stonewalling. He is not cold. He is protecting himself from a wound that keeps reopening.

This emotional shutdown is one of the most damaging long-term consequences of disrespect. It creates the relational distance that both spouses feel but neither can fully explain — because it happened gradually, invisibly, and over time.

5

His Covenant Commitment Erodes.

A man can love his wife and still reach the point where staying feels like choosing daily destruction over quiet survival. This is not weakness. It is what happens when the accumulated weight of disrespect exceeds a man's emotional and spiritual capacity to absorb it.

Most men do not leave marriages loudly. They leave quietly — emotionally first, then mentally, then physically. By the time the departure becomes visible, it has been happening invisibly for years. The disrespect was the slow erosion. The departure is the cliff.

“Ephesians 5:33 commands the wife to respect her husband. That command exists precisely because God knew what its absence would cost — not just the man, but the marriage, the children, and the covenant community built around it.

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How Disrespect Has Factored Into Broken Marriages

1

He Stopped Coming Home.

One of the most consistent patterns in marriages that end is this — the husband began spending less and less time at home long before the marriage officially ended. He worked late. He stayed with friends. He found reasons to be anywhere but where the disrespect lived.

This is not always unfaithfulness. It is often survival. A man cannot sustain peak performance — as a father, provider, and leader — in an environment that consistently depletes rather than restores him. Home became a place of emotional withdrawal rather than renewal.

“Better to dwell in the corner of a rooftop than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Proverbs 21:9). The man on the rooftop has not abandoned his family. He has found the only place in the house where he can breathe.

2

He Found Affirmation Elsewhere.

Most emotional affairs and many physical ones begin not with attraction but with affirmation. A man who is consistently disrespected at home becomes neurologically hungry for environments where he is valued, heard, and treated as capable and worthy.

A female colleague who listens respectfully, a friend who affirms his ideas, even an online community that honors his perspective — these become disproportionately powerful because they are filling a need that home has left chronically empty.

Disrespect does not excuse infidelity. But it creates the emotional vacancy that makes a man vulnerable to it. The wife who understands this truth holds more power over her husband's fidelity than she has perhaps ever been told.

3

He Became a Different Man.

Chronic disrespect does not leave a man unchanged. It reshapes him — producing bitterness, passivity, aggression, addiction, or depression, depending on his temperament and his coping mechanisms. What began as a wound becomes a wound-shaped personality.

Many wives who complain about who their husband became were unknowingly contributing to his transformation. The critical, dismissive, contemptuous environment she created over years produced the distant, reactive, or defeated man now standing across from her in a courtroom.

Ellen White wrote that the atmosphere of the home is largely determined by the wife. She compared a woman's influence to sunshine — capable of warming and brightening every corner, or withdrawing entirely and leaving everything in cold and shadow.

4

The Children Inherited the Pattern.

When disrespect governs a marriage, it rarely stays between the two adults. Children absorb what they observe. Sons learn either to accept disrespect as normal or to resent women preemptively. Daughters learn either to disrespect men or to expect disrespect as their own inevitable experience.

Research in intergenerational trauma confirms it — relational patterns observed in childhood are replicated in adulthood with remarkable consistency, even when those adults are consciously trying to do better. What children see modeled becomes what they instinctively reproduce.

The broken marriage does not end when the divorce papers are signed. It continues in the next generation — in the therapy offices, the broken engagements, and the marriages of the children who grew up watching disrespect treated as normal communication between spouses.

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How a Man Defines Respect

1

Respect Means She Trusts His Leadership.

A man does not need his wife to agree with every decision. He needs her to trust his intent, his process, and his commitment to the family's wellbeing. When she consistently overrides, second-guesses, or publicly contradicts his leadership, he experiences that as fundamental disrespect.

This is not about control. It is about the deep human need to know that one's contribution matters. A man who leads and is consistently undermined eventually stops leading — not because he is incapable, but because the cost of leading in an environment of mistrust exceeds its reward.

“Ephesians 5:22 calls wives to submit to their husbands as to the Lord — not because husbands are perfect, but because the structure itself reflects God's design. Trust in the structure is an act of faith, not a concession of intelligence.”

2

Respect Means She Honours Him Publicly.

A man's honor is profoundly connected to how he is spoken of when he is not present. A wife who rolls her eyes at her husband's ideas in company, shares his failures with her friends, or corrects him publicly in front of the children is delivering one of the deepest wounds available in marriage.

Conversely, a wife who defends her husband's name, speaks positively of him to others, and refuses to participate in the cultural sport of husband-bashing gives him a gift that cannot be purchased. She is building his honor in the community — and his trust in her simultaneously.

Proverbs 31:23 notes that her husband is known and respected at the city gates. His honor in public was connected to her character in private. What she cultivated at home produced what flourished beyond it.

3

Respect Means She Values His Words.

A man speaks less than a woman — neurologically, structurally, and communicatively. What he does say has been filtered, considered, and chosen carefully. When his wife dismisses, interrupts, or talks over him consistently, she communicates that his thoughts carry no weight.

Therapeutically, this produces the phenomenon of male emotional withdrawal. He stops sharing not because he has nothing to say, but because repeated experience has taught him that saying it costs more than it returns. The quiet husband is frequently a husband who tried and was dismissed enough times to stop.

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19). When a wife applies that principle to her husband’s words — listening fully before responding — she gives him the rarest and most powerful gift in their communication.

4

Respect Means She Chooses Him Deliberately.

Respect, to a man, is not merely the absence of contempt. It is the active, visible, daily choice to honor the person he is — imperfect, growing, and trying. He needs to know that she would choose him again. That she sees what he is becoming, not just where he has fallen short.

A wife who regularly affirms her husband's efforts, expresses gratitude for his provision, and pursues him with intentional warmth is doing something neurologically powerful. She is activating his dopamine reward system and building the emotional scaffolding that makes him want to be the man she sees.

“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband” (Proverbs 12:4). A crown is not worn reluctantly. It is placed with intention. Choosing to honor your husband daily is the daily act of crowning that Scripture describes.

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Ways a Woman Can Realistically Show Respect — or Fix a Disrespectful Situation

Disrespect that has been established as a pattern does not end with a single conversation. It ends with a consistent, intentional, daily renovation of behavior — one interaction at a time. Here are practical, realistic, and transformative ways to begin.

1. Acknowledge It First — Without Excuses.

The beginning of change is honest acknowledgment. Not a qualified apology (“I am sorry, but you...”) but a direct, undefended admission. “I have been disrespectful to you. That was wrong. I want to change.” Those words, spoken sincerely, begin to rebuild what years of disrespect have dismantled. A man who hears genuine acknowledgment from his wife often responds with a grace he did not know he still possessed.

2. Stop Correcting Him Publicly.

Choose one visible, immediate change: never correct your husband in front of others. Not in front of the children. Not in front of friends. Not in social media posts. If a correction is needed, wait. Bring it privately, gently, and without an audience. This single discipline communicates volumes about how much you value his dignity. Public correction is one of the most emasculating experiences a husband endures — and stopping it is one of the most powerful acts of respect available.

3. Affirm Him Specifically and Daily.

Vague affirmation (“you’re a good person”) lands differently than specific affirmation (“I watched how you handled that situation with the children and I was proud of you”). Specificity signals that you are actually paying attention. Choose one thing your husband does well or tries hard at — and name it. Daily. Without conditions. Without following it with a complaint. Watch what consistent, specific affirmation does to a man who has been running on empty for years.

4. Ask His Opinion — Then Listen Without Interrupting.

Ask your husband's opinion on a decision — a household matter, a parenting question, a financial consideration. Then listen fully before responding. No interrupting. No redirecting. No dismissing. Reflect back what he said before offering your own perspective. This practice — repeated consistently — rebuilds the communicative trust that disrespect has eroded. A man whose wife genuinely seeks and receives his counsel begins to believe again that his leadership is wanted.

5. Defend His Name When He Is Not Present.

The next time the conversation in a group setting turns to husband-bashing — and it will — refuse to participate. Speak positively about your husband. Protect his reputation. Decline to share his failures as entertainment. This is perhaps the most countercultural act of respect on this list — and it will reach him, because someone always tells him. When he hears that you defended him in his absence, something shifts at the deepest level of his trust in you.

6. Pray For Him — And Tell Him That You Do.

There is something profoundly powerful about a wife who prays for her husband — not just about him, not for him to change, but genuinely interceding for his wellbeing, his vision, and his walk with God. And then telling him. “I prayed for you this morning.” Those five words do something in a man that no performance of respect can replicate. They tell him he is seen, that he is valued, and that the woman who knows him most intimately still believes God has something to do through him.

The tongue is a small thing, but it can burn down a forest. Be the cool water that quenches the fire — not the oil that feeds it. Your beauty will never fade in the eyes of the man you love when your character gives him a reason to stay.

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