

Pastor: Love Your Wife!

Tim Kerr

Although he was born in Canada, Tim Kerr has spent over half his life in Asia. When Tim was a year old, his parents moved from Canada to India and lived there for the next 10 years. Tim has many fond memories of his childhood growing up in places like Calcutta and Bangalore. Later the family returned to Canada for Tim's high school years.

During college, Tim met his sweetheart Joanne, who had grown up in "Little Italy" in the St Clair area of Toronto. After college Tim and Joanne moved to Japan for 12 years. Tim was involved in starting new churches in that fascinating country.

In 2000, their family moved back to Canada. Tim was involved in mentoring men one-to-one as a full time job for the next 5 years.

He has been the pastor of Sovereign Grace Church Toronto since its beginning in the summer of 2004. Tim and Joanne have 4 children aged 13-19.

It is a great privilege for me to talk with you today on the subject of Pastors loving our wives. I'm sure many, if not most of you know a great deal more about the subject matter we are to cover today than I do.

On top of this, Paul has made sure this is going to be an honest message by inviting the wives to join us. This of course should strike fear into any sane man about to talk about how to love your wife. No theoretical musing will pass muster, if our wives are listening in. Having my wife sitting through this will have the wonderfully edifying effect of keeping me honest in what I say today.

I am very grateful for the wives that have taken the time to come today and I hope some of what is communicated will encourage and edify you as you encounter God's grace in his word.

I have also struggled with sin in my heart as I have prepared to deliver this message to you. Again and again, I found that my desire to impress you was stronger than my desire to serve you. I have confessed this to the Lord and have asked for the grace to overcome my

sin and serve each of you in a meaningful way today.

Let's pray and ask for his grace right now.

Today we will look at two passages that will be well known to each of you. My overarching purpose today is to explain, prove, and apply the following proposition to our lives. The proposition I would like us to consider is simply this:

Love is a powerful means of grace in marriage

When we say something is a means of grace, we mean that it is something that enables us to grow spiritually.

Now today I would like us to consider love as a means of grace -- especially in our marriages. In other words, the practice of love in a marriage results in spiritual growth.

Not only is the practice of love itself an indication of spiritual growth, but I hope to prove to you today that love also is a means of growth in our relationship with God.

In particular, I would like to demonstrate how a husband's love

for his wife becomes a special means of grace in their marriage.

I think we could show how a wife's love for her husband is a means of grace from passages like Titus 2:4-5. But today we will not be focusing on a wife's love for her husband, but rather on the husband's love for his wife.

Love is a powerful means of grace in marriage

My outline will consist of two simple points:

1. We need to comprehend how love edifies
2. We need to intentionally practice edifying love

Well let's begin with two familiar texts that will help us discover the edifying effect of love in our relationship with our wives.

1. We need to comprehend how love edifies

Turn with me to the very familiar text of **Eph 5:25**. Now I would like each man here to pause for a moment and come up with a mental list of 1-2 ways that you obey this command of scripture. Think about it for a moment.

Now, let me ask you what will at first seem like an odd question—"Are any of the items that you just came up with uniquely Christian?"

What I mean by saying that is simply this: Is there anything on your personal list that a caring Hindu, agnostic man, or kind unbeliever could not do?

Perhaps your answer involved something about kind things you say or do. Perhaps you help out around the home or regularly take your wife out for dates. These are all wonderful things, but the

question is, is there anything uniquely Christian about that kind of love?

Let's think about it. A caring agnostic can help his wife in many ways and take her out for dates. And no doubt, his wife will be made happy by such kindnesses.

Is then God calling us to love our wives in the same way he is calling every other man on the planet to love his wife? (Whether Christian or not?)

I think our passage reveals that the kind of love that is being spoken of here is different than that. I think you cannot demonstrate the kind of love described here if you are not a Christian, and it is in fact a distinctively Christian kind of love that is being spoken of here.

Let me prove this to you by considering the source, the expectation, and the result of this love. **Verse 18** tells us that the love spoken of here must come from a heart filled with the Spirit. This love is not self generated. Unbelievers do not have the Spirit and therefore cannot display this kind of love.

Then **verse 25** tells us that the love expected must conform to a particular pattern — none other than the love of our Saviour for his own people. It is to be a cruciform kind of love, a love that demonstrates the cross and the gospel. Can an unbeliever who does not know the gospel or has rejected the gospel, at the same time display the gospel in their marriage? I don't think so.

Now look with me at **verse 26**. We see here the purpose of this love.

If we are to pattern our love for our wives on the love of Christ for his church, then the purpose must line up as well.

We see that the purpose of Christ's love was to sanctify the church and cleanse her. The word "sanctify" often points to a progressive moral sanctification. But in this verse it probably refers

to the objective status of being “set apart for God”. **Verse 27** goes on to explain this sanctification further. It results in a church that becomes radiant in its display of God’s character and holiness.

Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make the church distinct from the world and set apart to God, to display God’s splendour in the beauty of holiness. Salvation is not just *from* wrath but *to* God-likeness.

Now this is what makes a man’s love “Christian” toward his wife. An unbeliever may love his wife and make her very happy. But when a believing man loves his wife it results in more than just her happiness; it results in her holiness.

Verse 26 tells us that the instrument that conveys this kind of love is the word of God. Do you see that in **verse 26**? A husband will not just minister to his wife through sacrificial actions but with the word of God.

As pastors, God has called us to shepherd our wives in the word. They should not just encounter the word in our preaching but in our conversations with them in all of life.

Yes, love is a powerful means of grace in marriage.

So let me try to sum up the first principle we have found here.

A wife’s growth in godliness is not just the result of her personal quiet times with God, nor of her fellowship with other believers, nor of her encounters with preaching, nor of wonderful times of worship, nor of sacred moments at the Lord’s Table. These are all wonderful means of grace, but there is yet another means of

grace that is exceedingly powerful and yet often overlooked. It is simply this: A wife’s growth in godliness is nurtured by her husband’s tangible love for her.

In other words, my love for my wife is a means of grace: A means of Christian growth, for my wife. When a wife is surrounded by a gospel saturated love, she will grow spiritually.

A man once told me of a sinful habit of his wife that deeply troubled him. It bothered him that she was still spiritually immature in that area of her life. He told me she was quite faithful at spending time in the word and involved in fellowship with other believers. I remember pausing and praying a quick

prayer asking for the right words from God and then saying to him, “Perhaps the holdup is somewhere else... perhaps it is because you are not loving her as God calls you to.”

A flower bulb looks very much like an onion when you buy one at the store. It is hard to imagine

that something so ugly could ever produce a flower. If you squeeze it in a vise, you will be unlikely to see a flower emerge. If you cut it in half, you would not find a miniature flower inside either. But if you put it in the soil and keep the weeds away, making sure it gets the right amount of sunshine, and giving it the time it needs, one day a beautiful flower will emerge from the ground.

Men—sometimes the very issue that irritates and aggravates you about your wife betrays the fact she is not receiving enough love from you. The means of grace God wants her to encounter so she

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can grow out of that sin *is* your love for her. Sow more love and you will reap more holiness in your wife.

Now let's look at another passage that gives us a further perspective on this issue.: **1 Peter 3:7**.

Here we see the instructions to a husband narrowed down to two basic commands: live with your wives in an understanding way (with insight, tact, and empathy) and show honour (make her feel valued and appreciated).

Here is yet another indication that love is a powerful means of grace in marriage. Now you might say, "Where do you get that from?"

I get it from the last part of the verse... "so that your prayers may not be hindered."

In other words, this verse is telling me that if I neglect to love my wife, then God will neglect my prayers. My relationship with God is affected by the way I love my wife.

In Eph 5 we discovered that to some extent, a woman's growth in godliness was dependent on her husband's tangible love for her. The husband's love was a means of grace to helping her to grow closer to the Lord. In this passage in Peter we see another side of this same truth.

Here we find that a husband's love for his wife is a means of grace for the Husband's growth in godliness. His prayer life and relationship with God is either weakened or strengthened by his love toward his wife.

So not only is the husband's love for his wife a means of grace for his wife, it is also a means of grace for himself! Both the husband and wife gain much from the husband's love expressed.

Now let's think a little closer about what this looks like in practice.

2. We need to intentionally practice edifying love

1. Love your wife by regularly identifying evidences of God's grace in her life

I regularly remind our congregation that there are two major areas that Christians tend to be blind to. When we look in the mirror in the morning, we don't see our back or what it looks like. So also, we all have a spiritual back that is hidden from view. Each of us tends to be both blind to our sins *and* to the work of God in our life. We need other believers to both point out the sins we don't see, and also to show us the grace of God at work in our life that we need to see.

For now let's consider how to encourage our wives by highlighting God's "hidden" grace in their lives.

This can be done many different ways. You can write a note to your wife telling her why you give thanks for her. Try to be as specific as possible, giving illustrations and examples. The great thing about a note is that it's the gift that keeps on giving. She will be encouraged by your words each time she reads it.

If you have a regular date night with your wife, begin your date with her by expressing one or two areas that you see God at work in her life.

In our home we also practice regular times at the end of a meal where we single out one person in the family, and everyone identifies one or more evidences of God's grace in that person's life. It is wonderful to do this for your wife in front of your kids. It teaches them how to encourage others and how to look for "God at work" in others lives. It also gives them a fresh appreciation for their mom. When was the last time you intentionally and specifically encouraged your wife this way?

2. Love your wife by giving her your most valuable possession: Time

Several men in the church have been helping me with this. A year ago under their advice (and as an act of dependent faith in God) I consciously cut back my hours in the church. This was very hard to do and many things didn't get done. But it allowed for more time with Joanne and the family.

Now they have encouraged me to stop for dinner at 5pm and not start working again til 6:30pm, devoting that time to attention on Joanne and the family. So I sit down with Joanne at the table and talk about her day and mine as she prepares dinner. These conversations are building our relationship and deepening our enjoyment of each other.

Many years ago when serving in Japan, my dad reproved me on the phone for working on my day off. He told me that that time was a gift from God for my own refreshment and for investing into my family. If I neglected it, I would live to regret it. The conversation had a profoundly sobering effect on me.

By God's grace, we have been observing a family day each week for almost 18 years. I try to have a simple date with Joanne each week on Monday morning: two hours at our favourite hang-out: Tim Hortons. This gives us an uninterrupted chance to talk, and for me to listen intently to Joanne.

Sometimes we do something that costs a bit more and go out for a special dinner or a small trip. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as its together.

These have been rich times and have allowed me to share my most valuable possession with Joanne: my time.

3. Love your wife by protecting her spiritually

If I were to ask you what you wife is reading in her quiet times these days would you know how to answer? Do you know if she is regular in her times with the Lord? Do you know how she is doing spiritually? One of the ways we love our wives is by helping them guard their quiet times and protecting them from distractions that take them from this significant means of grace. We will watch their involvement in the church so that their life doesn't become predominantly ministry output without with generous portions of input to replenish their spiritual supplies.

But this spiritual protection takes other forms as well.

A few weeks ago Joanne and I watched a movie that had profanity and other inappropriate behavior in it. Usually we would turn a movie like that off, but it was an action flick that I wanted to see and so I let it pass.

But Joanne was very quiet through the movie and got up and left the room several times. Later she told me that she felt I had failed to be a true leader toward her by protecting her from sinful and unedifying content on the DVD. That rebuke stung because I knew it was true.

Men — Are you careful about what kind of entertainment your wife is exposed to? Are you guarding her soul by your choice of movies, TV, and internet options? Are you careful to treat her like a woman by not behaving in a crude or crass way in front of her? Do you protect her from over involvement in the church? Do you guard her from being hounded by troubled people who want all her time?

Sometimes this spiritual protection is demonstrated by helping her recognize patterns of sin in her life that are hindering her walk with the Lord. Other times it

is done by setting an example for her by regularly confessing your own sin to her.

4. *Love your wife by romancing her*

Everything I learned about romance I learned from my wife. She is a great romantic. But I didn't become convicted about romance until I realized that God is the greatest romantic. The way he seeks his bride and sacrifices all for her to win her is the ultimate in romantic love.

There are so many ways that we can cultivate romance in our marriages:

phone calls or text messages telling her your wife how much you love her and that you are thinking about her. Surprise gifts (even small gifts) for her. Taking a walk together. Taking time to show her physical affection when you see her or pass her in a room. How often do you hug your wife?

How often do you tell your wife you love her (while looking in her eyes)?

Romancing your wife is just another way of saying "I enjoy you. I delight in you. You are the apple of my eye. You are my earthly joy. I thank God I get to spend my life with you."

5. *Love your wife by prayer for and with her*

I have found that there is no greater fellowship between believers than the fellowship of prayer. Prayer unites hearts together. Men, do you pray *with* your wives? Do you pray *for* your wives? Is her spiritual growth one of the items on your daily prayer list?

Church matters tend to swallow up our attention and can divert us from the needs of our own families, so I encourage you to pray with your wife for everything in your home right now that is of concern to you.

Pray for your relationship with each other. Pray for the salvation of your children. Pray for spiritual growth of everyone in the family. Pray for future spouses for your children (even when they are young). Pray for the salvation of future grandchildren. Pray about everything.

And don't forget to give thanks in prayer as well.

Our temptation is talk about problems a lot and pray about them a little. Better to make prayer our first recourse. Prayer is like a greenhouse. We grow answers when in prayer that can't grow in our minds when in the wintery

chill of prayerless discussion.

After hearing a list like this it is easy to start to feel a cloud of condemnation start to descend on our hearts. The application list becomes like the law, pointing its boney finger at us and showing us how far short of God's ideal we are living.

Rather than feeling inspired to love, we can start to feel very defeated and want to give up altogether.

I have often struggled with this myself. A while back I read something by Thomas Oden about Luther that's helped me a great deal in this regard:

"Luther taught that every time you insist that I am a sinner, just so often do you call me to remember the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, upon whose shoulders, and not upon mine, lie all my sins. So when you say that I am a sinner, you do

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not terrify, but comfort me immeasurably" (from *The Justification Reader*).

Friends, do not let the weight of your sins drive you to despair...rather use them to drive you to Christ. Use your sins like a shepherds rod to herd your heart to the cross. Confound Satan by using the very sins he designs to defeat you to be the means that lead you to Jesus!

Let me then close this talk in loving

our wives with a verse that precedes the admonition we looked at in 1 Peter 3:7.

It wonderfully reminds us of what Jesus bore away and why he bore it away for us. May the design and purpose of the cross promised here be seen in the love each of us show toward our wives:

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, *that* we might die to sin and live to righteousness." **1 Peter 2:24**