

LOVE & RESPECT - CHAPTER EIGHT by Emerson Eggerichs

C-O-U-P-L-E:

HOW TO SPELL LOVE TO YOUR WIFE

(Note to wives: This chapter and the six to follow are “for husbands only,” but wives are invited to read along.)

Gentlemen, we have spent quite a quite a bit of time learning how to stop the Crazy Cycle. In the following chapters, we want to focus on getting on the Energizing Cycle and staying there. The Energizing Cycle is proactive. It is positive. And it is preventative. Stay on the Energizing Cycle and the Crazy Cycle will not spin.

Because you and your wife are human, however, the Crazy Cycle may start to make a revolution or two. It still does for Sarah and me, but only when we forget to use the tools and techniques in the Energizing Cycle. What I will cover in chapters 9 through 14 may not seem to be “natural” for you, and that’s okay. As we have already seen, love is not a husband’s mother tongue. But as you live out the several simple truths for husbands set forth in Scripture, which are presented in the acronym C-O-U-P-L-E, it will energize your wife. She will respond with respect, and that is your mother tongue.

Since wisdom “will honor you if you embrace her” (Proverbs 4:8), I believe a good-willed wife will honor you when you love her.

Before we get into the details in Closeness, Openness, Understanding, Peacemaking, Loyalty, and Esteem, we need to look at the word C-O-U-P-L-E itself. It means two people connected together, and this is the key to how women view relationships. Wives want connectivity.

Think of a photograph of the two of you, which symbolizes your relationship. As troubles, big or small, hit your marriage, imagine that photo being ripped straight down the middle, or at least torn a bit. Your wife sees it as her mission to tape the relationship back together. She wants to connect with you, and she approaches you with that intention in mind.

Here is where couples often run into trouble as they try to work out their problems, even small ones. Women confront to connect. The typical response from a man, however, is that he thinks his wife is confronting to control. If another man talked to this man like that, he would sound intentionally provocative. Is that not why some men feel their wives are picking a fight?

Even the simplest and mildest “confrontation” between you and your wife is an excellent illustration of this basic difference between the deepest needs of a man and a woman in a relationship. It is a clear picture of how the codes you send one another can be misinterpreted because of your very different needs. In part 1 we looked at the need to learn how to decode. When your good-willed wife appears negative and offensive, she is crying out for C-O-U-P-L-E. At such moments your feelings may tell you she’s just being critical and disrespectful. Take it by faith, however—what she really wants is to connect. She wants your love.

THIS HUSBAND WOULDN’T BELIEVE ME UNTIL . . .

One couple who came to me for counseling had the very problem I am speaking of. She had been confronting him and he felt suffocated, frustrated with her controlling attitude and her seeming “lack of respect” for him. I told the husband, “Sir, your wife is confronting you to connect.”

“No,” he answered quickly. “She tries to control me.”

I turned to the wife and asked, “Are you really confronting him to try to control him?”

“Of course not,” she replied. “It’s just what you said. I’m trying to connect with him.”

I turned back to the husband. “You see?”

He did not see. He insisted, “She’s a controlling person.”

In that session and several others, that husband would not let go of his interpretation of his wife’s “confronting ways.” He was convinced he knew what she meant and he knew why she was doing what she was doing. He had received her code, translated it, and thought he understood the message: “She is a controlling person.”

When on the Crazy Cycle: “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 12:15).

Obviously, he was wrong, but at that point he wasn’t willing to try to decode his wife more accurately.

As it so happened, they later attended one of our Love and Respect Conferences and sent me a note afterward: “We are now a Love and Respect couple. We realize that we misinterpret the codes we receive and when we try to communicate what we feel, it can come across in different ways than we intend.”

This couple “got it,” particularly the husband. He figured out that if his wife came across to him as controlling or too negative or too complaining or too disrespectful, he had to realize he could easily misinterpret her code. Her cry was, “Love me!” When he withdrew, she would simply try

even harder to access his heart. He saw that as she tried to pull him closer, he had mistakenly assumed she was trying to put him even more firmly under her thumb. Once he learned to decode her correctly, he started to make progress in getting off the Crazy Cycle and on the Energizing Cycle (see page 115). She was not scolding him as a “bad boy.” She longed to be his lover, not his mother.

LEARN TO TRUST YOUR INSTRUMENTS

Vertigo is defined as a sensation of dizziness and the feeling that you are being whirled about in your environment. The term vertigo is sometimes used when training people to fly, especially when they learn to fly on instruments without being able to see where they are going. Unless a pilot learns to pay attention to his instruments, he will feel as if he is being whirled about, quickly get disoriented, and crash. He learns that if his instrument panel tells him he’s upside down, even if he feels he’s right side up, he should listen to the instrument panel and turn the plane right side up, no matter how he feels. The instrument panel is not hampered by “feelings,” nor is it blinded by an impassable bank of clouds or fog enveloping the plane. In short, the instrument panel cannot be fooled and it does not lie.

To decode correctly, be “a wise man...who listens to counsel”(Proverbs 12:15).

As we go through all of the secrets in C-O-U-P-L-E and the various aspects of connectivity, I want you to treat the following six short chapters as your instrument panel. Don’t always let what you see, hear, and seem to feel determine how you will interpret a situation. Instead, keep in mind that you are the one who wears blue sunglasses and has blue hearing aids. They color and influence what you see and hear, and they form your understanding of the code you may be receiving from your wife.

You may think, Maybe some men’s wives are trying to connect with them, but not mine. She is trying to control me. You have to set all that aside. You have to trust your instrument panel, which is labeled C-O-U-P-L-E. Do this and you won’t get disoriented and dizzy, sure signs of the Crazy Cycle. Instead, you will energize your wife. C-O-U-P-L-E is based on foundational biblical passages related to husbands in marriage. You cannot go wrong trusting and obeying God’s revelation. You will learn how to show love in your tone, words, and face, even in the middle of a conflict that would normally send you into some state of stonewalling or irritation. And you will see her melt. Trust me, the Energizing Cycle is truly powerful—when you trust your instrument panel.

You cannot go wrong when you say, “I trust in Your Word”(Psalm 119:42).

IN THE OCEAN OF CONFLICT, MEN SINK UNLESS . . .

As we saw in part 1, a man's tendency is to pull back from conflict. When the ocean of marriage emotions becomes turbulent, a husband can feel as if he is drowning. A wife, on the other hand, stays afloat quite naturally and comfortably. But if a husband will use biblical principles—God's techniques, if you will—I believe that he can learn to swim through the conflict.

A man voiced his discontent to me about the way his wife would verbally emasculate him. He was a man's man, "blue" to the core. His tendency during her flareups was to stonewall, which sent her through the roof. I coached him to approach her differently to discover the benevolent power he possessed over the spirit of his wife, a power every woman readily defers to when loved.

He reported back to me his shock when he tried what I suggested. As usual, she became disgruntled and vexed with him about something trivial. He stopped her and said gently but firmly, "Look, you can continue to emasculate me or you can join me on the couch where we can sit down and pray over this."

Like air out of a balloon, all the negativity drained from her. She stopped her ranting, turned, headed for the couch, sat down, bowed her head, and put her hand out for him to hold. He was in utter disbelief. He had never seen such a sight. I told him, "Look, women may seem to be out of control or it may appear they are trying to control you, but their real motive is to connect in love. When she feels true love coming toward her, she immediately and respectfully aligns herself with the spirit of her husband. Her goal is accomplished. That was her purpose all along!"

Using the Love and Respect Connection proves that "a man of knowledge increases power" (Proverbs 24:5).

This husband saw my point. He admitted that trying my suggestions went against his natural grain, but when he saw the results, he became a believer. He had learned to trust his instrument panel. (For examples of how to tell your wife your needs and to gain insight into her needs, see appendix C.)

TO LOVE HER DOESN'T MEAN BECOMING "PINK"

Note that when I ask you to trust your instrument panel and pursue a course of love with your wife, I am not calling on you to become a woman. We make a huge mistake in the church, particularly among evangelicals. We tell men to "get in tune with their feminine side," yet we don't tell women to get in tune with their masculine side.

Men are not to be effeminate (see 1 Corinthians 6:9). When I challenge a husband to love, I am not calling on him to become pink. Instead, I call on him to be a man of honor—to adjust his blue sunglasses and blue hearing aids a bit and put on love.

The truth is, it is easier for many a man to die for honor than to move toward a contemptuous wife in a loving way, saying, “I believe I was wrong. Can we talk about this?” To turn to your wife in the middle of a conflict and say, “I am sorry. Will you forgive me?” takes guts. I know because I have been there. It isn’t pleasant, but it works powerfully. Over time it becomes easier, but it is never natural. Even so, this response gives you the power to drain the negativity out of your wife in conflict after conflict.

And the best part of it is that you, the male who tends to see and hear life through blue, will touch your pink wife in the tender and loving way she desires. Some wives simply melt. Others warm up considerably. At the very least, she will soften and you can talk through whatever the situation may be. You will gain the right to appeal to her to understand your need for respect and to join you on the Energizing Cycle.

When you act on C-O-U-P-L-E, you will “enjoy life with your wife, whom you love”(Ecclesiastes 9:9 NIV).

As we study C-O-U-P-L-E, my prayer is that you will discover how Scripture describes God’s heart and will learn what it means to be a husband. You won’t have to become a Bible scholar and study dozens of passages. I’ll show you only a small number of verses but they will all be significant because they spell love to a wife. As one husband told me, “The information is working. I have seen the glow in my wife’s eyes when I apply it and defeat and despair in her eyes when I fail to practice the principles you are trying to teach me through your material and God’s Word.”

To keep that glow in your wife’s eyes, act on the biblical principles I will describe in the following chapters and your wife will feel loved. That’s connectivity—that’s coupling. You will energize your wife God’s way and see how His way works in the heart of a good-willed woman!

Still a bit dubious? Let’s take a closer look at C-O-U-P-L-E and see. We’ll start with Closeness.

Eggerichs, Emerson (2004-09-07). *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* published by Thomas Nelson.