

Woman Among the Pillars - 3

This is the last email on this book. I hope you found the book challenging and used it as an incentive to keep your head in the game. Most of what we do in life involves people skills and unity of purpose. The mechanics of what we do are really simple, but the people skills can take a lifetime. Books like this are invaluable in laying the right foundation for that. This is a long one but I make no apologies for that. If your marriage isn't right, what good is anything else?

In these last pages, Stu Weber lists 11 things to help wives edify their husbands and fulfill their role as help-meets (Gen. 2:18). This is where their power over their man is most fruitfully exerted. I've embellished what's in the book to get at some specifics. Please do *not* assume that what I've written is a commentary on my own marriage. These are observations I've made over a lifetime of watching other people and yes, some reflect personal lessons hard-learned. Don't read into it. Take what you need. Add what you think will help you from your own life experience as you consider each item.

1. Read, learn, apply, and grow - read about and observe what the basic needs of men are. Then observe what the basic needs of your man are. Apply what you learned. Emphasize his strengths to him and to yourself, and minimize his weaknesses. Be his cheerleader. One thing a man does not need is conflict at home. It's supposed to be a safe haven. It's supposed to be a place he can retreat to for support, comfort, and encouragement. Kids need that too. When it becomes just another workplace, or worse, a place that is hostile, he's not going to want to be there. That's what happens when his basic needs aren't met there. That's when adultery appears. That's when long hours at work arise. That's when he spends inordinate amounts of time on his *hobbies*. Know your mate. He's more complicated than you think. Let me throw this out to you: your husband is more important than your kids are. When they're all grown and out of the house, you've still got a lifetime to live with this man. Don't undermine your relationship with him by making it a habit of putting his needs aside in favor of meeting your children's needs. If you do, he'll make you secondary in his life as well. When the children are gone you'll have to scramble to rebuild your relationship with him. That seldom works. There's a reason why so many marriages break up after 20-25 years.

2. Love unconditionally - don't create performance criteria for your man. Never withhold your love or the marriage bed on the condition that he performs up to your standards. You'll only drive him away. That's manipulating him, and it won't work long term. Don't try to change him. Instead, give him a *reason* to change. I can't think of anything harder to do, or more satisfying when it happens, than to love with no strings attached. There must be a sense between a husband and wife that they can share openly with each other without jeopardizing the marriage relationship. You can't be honest with each other if you fear payback all the time. You've both got to be able to say with all your heart, "There's nothing you can say or do that will separate you from my love." You've got to be able to say that to your kids. That doesn't mean there won't be consequences, but there has to be security in the marriage vows. Don't take them lightly.

3. Listen intently - I'm always hearing that the woman is the one that needs to be listened to. Here, Stu points out that men need that every bit as much. And because men don't say much, you've got to be paying attention to indirect signals in his message or body language that tell you what's going on in his heart. He's as obtuse as he says you are. Communication is *tough!* You've got to focus when he's talking or moping - stop cooking and cleaning and reading and... just like you want him to do when you say something. Listen actively, interactively by asking questions, without making many statements or offering motherly advice. Just let him dump and guide him during the process. You'd be surprised what you'll learn. Don't use what you learn against him. You are his confidant and partner. You either succeed together, or you fall apart.

4. Don't expect him to meet all your emotional needs - it isn't that he doesn't feel as much or as strongly as you do. He does. But he expresses it differently. The problem isn't always his when you're feeling abandoned, or betrayed, or unloved. There is every chance that *you* may be the one that needs to grow. Just consider that as a possibility before you begin your tirade. No one forces us to feel the way we do. No one controls our emotions. We do. If you want your husband's emotional support, be direct about it. Don't use the word "you" when you try to describe how you're feeling as if he's the one that put you in

your blue funk. Don't say, "When you do that you make me feel so..." No he doesn't make you feel so... And when you aren't looking for direction and solutions, let him know you just need to be held - guys have a hard time trying to figure out what women need. We're an ignorant breed. Lay it out for us. A comedian once said that when a guy wants something he holds up a sign with a single word, like STOP. But when a woman wants something, she holds up a sign that says, "If you really loved me, you'd know what I want..."

5. Understand the power you have - the woman is the neck that turns the head. "A woman can so easily crush a man's spirit. With a look. With a word. With a shrug of indifference. And when she does, it only serves to seed and feed a growing anger in him. On the other hand, a woman is equally capable of causing her husband's spirit to soar." Knowing you have that power, use it carefully and wisely. Don't abuse it by taking that one last dig at him or resurrecting old arguments and failings. If you can forgive but you can't forget, then you haven't really forgiven. God puts our sins as far as the east is from the west. We need to do the same thing for those we love.

6. See your husband as God's gift to you - don't go looking for a return window or gift exchange. Don't ever suggest that you could have done better, not even in fun. Every man has the potential for greatness. Too often it takes a war to allow his hidden reserves and talents to surface. You have an opportunity to expose them and cultivate them without the trauma of war. Take a chance. Make the effort. If you don't value your husband, he won't value himself. If he doesn't value himself, he's not going to value his marriage or you. But if you cherish him, the way you want to be cherished, you build his confidence in himself, you lift him out of his despair, and you drive away his fear and suspicion that he is unworthy. See him as God sees him. See him as he can be, not how he is. You have a diamond in the rough just waiting to be uncovered.

7. Appreciate the little things he does, as well as the 'big' things - men are task-oriented by birth. There are loads of tasks they do around the house from changing light bulbs and fixing stair treads, to taking out the garbage. It may be expected, but it needs to be verbally, and affectionately appreciated too. Be sincere when you say it. Don't get cutesy and say it jokingly. Men are very literal. They'll take it lightly because you said it lightly. If you say it with admiration, that's what he'll hear and respond to. He'll begin looking for other ways to get that admiration and respect from you. When you talk with your children, be sure you pass on this respect to them. If you disparage him in their eyes, you may never be able to repair the damage. The same goes for the guys.

8. Give him some space - this is absolutely crucial. And it doesn't mean you'll give him 5 uninterrupted minutes to get his coat off and wash up. He's only got one choo-choo running on his track. It takes time to change trains and gear up for his new duties as father and husband. So if he goes silent and distant, it doesn't mean he's mad at you or that the marriage is falling apart. It only means he's trying to assess his performance at work that day and setting up his mental picture of what he wants to happen tomorrow. Once he's done that, he can come out of his cave and enjoy his time with you. He may need longer time alone - a retreat or a camping trip with some guys. Again, it isn't that he doesn't love you or want your company. It's only that he needs some solitary peace and quiet to "read, reflect, listen to a little music, and dream." He needs down time. Let him have it.

9. Physically appreciate him - I don't know of any men who won't respond to the light touch of a woman's hand, the sensual aroma of her perfume, the deeply shadowed eyes that become reflecting pools he can get lost in. I don't know of any women who won't respond to the strength of a man, his confidence, and his considerate protection and provision for her. His physical attributes are seldom as important as these things. When it comes time to sexually fulfill him, don't play games. Initiate affection. Woo him without smothering him. Beckon him with a siren's call. Become a temptress. Tantalize him with what you know excites him. What you see in the media or read about in a book may not be a turn on for him at all. Remember, you've been studying him. If you don't know what excites him about *you*, find out. The Bible says, "Never let the sun set on your anger." So don't use sex as a weapon. The marriage bed is not a battlefield. It will turn into an unmapped minefield if you make it one.

10. Follow his leadership - submit to your husband as to the Lord. That's easier said than done, right? Especially if you don't trust him. Nonetheless, it is a Biblical prescriptive, not an option. And as Stu points out, "it pays dividends." God holds your husband accountable for the quality of his leadership, not you. So next time your husband "suggests" something, go with it. You can give him positive and constructive feedback. But don't argue about it. Don't find reasons not to do it. And certainly don't ignore it. He's not about to get in a fight with you over whatever it is. If you shrug it off, he's not going to get his back up, yet. But you just belittled him. And you just got him a little angrier inside. Bitterness is laying seeds in his soul. And that's going to build over time until he unleashes all his pent up frustrations on you. One day he'll blow you right out of the water emotionally. All because you wouldn't listen, and follow... a little thing, that becomes a big thing over time.

11. See your marriage as a journey, not a destination - like any successful venture, you are travelling along a road. That road goes through thickets and clearings, over mountains and down into valleys. Storms will come and so will blue skies. Take time to enjoy the journey. Weather it together. These are shared experiences, whether they are victories or defeats. Don't set up false expectations that lead to inevitable frustrations. That's called setting yourself up for a fall. Instead, accept the fact that some days are going to be better than others, and tomorrow has a whole new horizon to explore. Expect the best, and it will appear. Don't get sidetracked in the stuff of life. Move on. Move forward. Move together. Never, never, never quit. You are a nurturer by makeup and by design. Put a positive twist on everything. Be a source of life and sustenance for everyone around you. If you do, your husband will move heaven and earth for you. He'll meet your needs because you meet his. He'll become that knight in shining armor you were looking for when you married him.