

For those of you who are more visual, we're providing this summary of today's message ... (SHOW CARTOON). I hope that helps to clarify things ...

We begin where we began last week ... with Ephesians 5:21, because this is where I believe healthy relationships begin and end. In one line in Ephesians, Paul gives us the key. He says (Ephesians 5:21) - *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. Remember that the Greek word for "submit" means "to arrange yourself underneath" ... to be a support, a foundation. We discovered last week that *The Message* version of the Bible translates the word "submission" as "courteously reverent." You wrote that down last week. Please feel free to write it down again. *Courteously reverent*. Men, how can you become more courteously reverent toward the women in your life?

Two weeks ago, when I asked folks to write on a card what you wish the other gender knew about yours, the women's remarks came in three broad categories. First, guys ... **women say they don't need you to fix it**. The specific "it" women are talking about is our personal stuff. The things we talk about ... often at the end of the day. Women made comments like, "We don't want you to fix it, we just want you to listen." And, "I wish that men knew that when I talk about my problems, troubles ... I really don't want a fix ... I just want a sounding board." And that's not necessarily a woman thing. That's what most people want. Most of us just want to be heard. We underestimate the value of just having someone to listen.

Now, we learned last week that guys like to fix things because men are wired to take care of women. Its part of the God-given design. I believe this is very much what's beneath Paul's word in Ephesians 5 when he says (Ephesians 5:22) - *Wives, submit yourselves (come underneath to support; be courteously reverent) to your own husbands as you do to the Lord*.

Paul is *not* saying women are somehow second-rate. He's simply asking us to understand how men are wired by The God who created them. He has wired them so that they are driven to provide and protect. So it's natural for men to approach problems this way. But, Men: understand that when women are talking about their problems, you don't *have* to kick into the "provide and protect" mode. Mostly, we just want you to listen and tell us it's going to be okay.

Which is not to say there are not things women *don't* like to have fixed. In fact, there are lots of things women do like to have fixed. We like the bathroom faucet fixed. And we'd like the garage door fixed. And the leak in the roof. So ... one way you can bless the women in your life is by fixing *not* our problems but our things. And let me tell you something, guys. When you fix something without being asked, it is as valuable to us as flowers. Maybe more valuable.

My friend John talks about a season in his marriage when he and his wife were really on each other's nerves. John said he couldn't seem to do anything to turn it around. Talking didn't work. Giving her space didn't work. Finally, one day in frustration he went outside and pulled all the ivy off the side of the house. Hours later, when he went back inside, his wife was in a wonderful mood. She'd been asking him to do that for months. And for her, *that* was the communication she needed in order to step back in emotionally.

Women also reported that they value strength in men, especially strength of character.

On your cards, you said things like, "How much I want his strength even though I'm so strong." And also, "We need you to be a positive Christ-like partner in raising the children." Willard Harley is a psychologist who wrote a book called *His Needs, Her Needs*, based on years of counseling couples. In that book, Harley lists the top five needs of men and women ... and among the top five needs of women he lists "honesty and openness," along with "family

commitment.” He says, “A woman needs to be able to trust her husband completely. When a man doesn’t maintain honest, open communication with his wife, he undermines her trust.” He also says, “A woman needs her husband to be a good father and to be committed to the family.”

Women value strength in men, especially strength of character. When Paul was making a list of things he wanted from an elder in the church ... (and remember that in the first century he would have been talking to men) ... he made a sort of character list. I want to ask you to jot down a few of the words you hear in this list that lead to strong character. Paul says (1 Timothy 3:2-4) - *Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,* ³ *not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.* ⁴ *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.* That’s what strength and character look like in a guy. Faithful. Temperate. Self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle. Not a lover of money. Wow. That would be a great list to work on if you’re looking for a relationship-building exercise.

Some guys may say, “That’s great, Carolyn. I value strong character, and maybe I’m not firing on all those cylinders but I’m not slacking. But I’m still not connecting with my wife.” If that’s where you are, then I want to think with you about the connection between character and emotion.

Now, It won’t surprise you to find out that women tend to deal with life from a more emotional place. **Women need to bond emotionally.** This was #1 on Willard Harley’s Top Five List of needs for women. Affection. But this is interesting. Harley says (listen to this), “Women often associate affection with security, comfort, protection and approval ... so when a man shows his

wife affection, he's sending subliminal messages to her that he'll take care of her, stand by her and protect her." So men, if you're struggling to connect at home, consider the connection women experience between character and communication. Women talked a lot on those cards about the "importance of talking and open connection on emotional issues."

We said last week that men need women to need them in the healthiest sense of that term. And women need men to love them. Maybe this is why Paul says (Ephesians 5:25-26) - *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy.* Everybody needs love. But for women, it's a way we connect. When love is communicated by affection ... by touching, holding hands, sweet words ... it meets a deep emotional need in women. And what men need to know about women is that our emotional need is just as strong as your sexual need. Men are physically wired to need sexual fulfillment in regular doses. Women are physically wired to need emotional fulfillment in regular doses. And just as we said last week, if the need is not met at home, the need will still get met, but in unhealthy ways.

And that leads us to the great danger for women. Our great danger, women, is that temptation to find emotional fulfillment beyond the marriage. They call them emotional affairs ... these unhealthy connections women will often make with other men. And it is so easy to justify them. We think, "Well, we're not getting what we need at home, and this person is filling a need in my life. And besides, it isn't physical, so it isn't really an affair, right?" Well, not according to Jesus. Jesus said (Matthew 5:27-29) - *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it*

out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

So yes ... if you're connected emotionally with someone who is not your spouse, it is an affair and it is a sin. And yes, it takes two to make an affair happen but women are particularly susceptible to emotional affairs. According to more than one source, here's how they happen:

1. Spend plenty of time with a person of the opposite sex who is not your spouse.
2. Tell your life story to one another.
3. Share from deep in your heart, especially where your spouse misses your heart.
4. Share seemingly meaningful experiences together.
5. Let yourself relax and enjoy the other's presence.
6. And for good Christian measure, pray with the other person for God to take away the attraction. Because there's nothing more intimate than prayer ... and for a woman it can be a deeper connection than sex.

That's *how* it happens. *Why* does it happen? Because it eases anxiety and masks hurt. It's a way for women to deal with depression. Or for the thrill of it. We get hooked on people and want the rush that comes from a new experience, new emotions, new dangers. So ... if you're there, or even close to there, I want to ask you to consider this question. Whether the question is an emotional or physical affair, or a porn habit or even just a decision to withhold what's needed in your marriage, the question is: Who is picking up the tab for your choices?

This is where our science experiment comes in. I want to ask our resident scientists to come up.

(RANDY AND SAM COME) Randy and Sam are going to show us how to hold fire.

It is a very cool feeling to be able to hold something that's burning without it burning you. Often, this is how people manage emotional affairs. We think, "Sure, its dangerous but I can handle it. No one's getting hurt." But what happens if you drop this fireball on your bed? Do you believe there would be no damage? What happens if you hand it to your child? Are you sure it won't burn them? Even if we're able to hold fire, we wouldn't hand it off to people we love. But that's who gets hurt. That's who picks up the tab. Our children. Our marriage.

So Mike Breaux talks about this and one thing that he suggests is "defantasizing the myth." He talks about thinking out what your fantasies will do to you, your spouse, your children, and most importantly, to your relationship with God. Play out the scenarios in reality not in fantasy. Think about what it would mean to pass the fire along. There is only destruction and pain ahead if you do. Who picks up the tab for your choices?

If you are in that place, I want to give a two-step process to get out: first, cut off all communication with that other person. If there is an emotional attraction, don't play with fire. Cut off all communication. Second, tell your spouse. Bring it into the light. That won't be fun, but you won't die. Anything in the light is useless to the enemy.

You've got two take-home pieces this morning. One is especially for guys. It's the exercises in your "Dig in the Word" Bible study for the week. Guys, I want to challenge you to work through these exercises this week. The other is an insert called "Guidelines for Facebook." Social networks like Facebook have revolutionized relationships. The largest age group on Facebook is people age 35-54, the age of those who are traditionally married or divorced. One

counselor says, "We're learning that marriages that were already having "little" issues with honesty, are now having full-blown honesty issues due to things (like Facebook and email)." *Men ... women need accountability when it comes to all those other relationships we build to satisfy our emotional needs.* So I've given you a list of guidelines for Facebook, written by Trey Morgan. I hope you'll go over these together at home and make a fresh commitment. The last one on the list says this: *No matter how many friends you have on Facebook, remember that your #1 friend should be your spouse.* Morgan says, "The last thing you want is a thousand Facebook friends, while the love between you and your best friend slowly dies out." Let me say that again. The last thing you want is success in *any* other area of your life while the love between you and your best friend slowly dies out.

I know there are some great marriages in this room. And some great marriages that are struggling. You may feel like you're hanging on by a thread, or even like you're beating a dead horse. That kind of struggle is so painful. Maybe you're thinking it would be easier to just let it go. Before you do, please think honestly about that question: Who will pick up the tab for that choice? I can't say it better than a friend has said it: God delights in making marriages work that the world would rather see fail. God specializes in resurrections. It takes work. It takes hope. But anything you bring to Him ... anything! ... God has a way of making it work again.

Paul wrote this to the Corinthians at a time when he was really struggling. If you're struggling in a relationship right now, I want you to hear this as God's word for you today (2 Corinthians 1:8b-10) – ... *We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.*⁹ *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*¹⁰ *He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again.*

That's what God does best. He delivers people, even from death. So as we take communion together this morning ... when you take these elements, say to yourself, "God has the power to raise the dead." He has delivered you before and He will deliver you again.

I am going to pray three prayers ... first, for women ... for God's best over your life. Second, for those in the room who may be struggling with a fireball ... some issue that you thought you could control but that is dangerous and in danger of controlling you. And then, as you come for communion, I want to invite the couples among us to take time for prayer together. We'll have two stations, one by the cross and here at the front. If you'd like to receive a blessing, please come and pray.