

## CONFESSIONS OF AN UNLOVING HUSBAND

Oh, those early years of marriage. Thinking back on them now, I realize that I struggled to love my wife well. You may be thinking, “I can’t believe he’s admitting that!” But the reality was that her emotions – her constant need to *talk about her feelings* – made me uncomfortable. As a man, I could not relate to her need to talk about her emotions and I looked at her through my masculine lens. I quite clearly communicated, “What is wrong with you?” It created havoc in our relationship that didn’t make sense to me. We lived in something similar to a wash machine...everything was good until the spin cycle started.

The spin cycle looked like this: My wife had a conversation with a friend or neighbor that made her uncomfortable. She needed to talk about it, but I considered her “stuff” trivial or unimportant. She would come to me, but I would get that glazed-over look that so many of you are familiar with, saying to her, “Hey, listen, this will blow over. What’s the big deal?” She would walk away frustrated, wondering why I didn’t take her seriously. Everything would smooth out eventually, until the next spin cycle hit. The periods of calm were okay except that the emotional space that built up between us each time the cycle hit was affecting our marital intimacy.

In the spirit of true confessions, I have to admit that in my heart, I felt superior to my wife. I was better than her because I didn’t have all that emotional stuff. Things that bothered her didn’t bother me, and when she “got all emotional,” I wanted to say, “Come on, you’ve got to be stronger.” If she teared-up, if she cried, if she expressed something that was bothering her, I got that glazed look and thought, “Here we go again...why can’t you pull yourself together?” My superiority shut my wife down. No matter how well I

tried to feign interest, I very clearly communicated to her that she was weak, inferior and just not capable of coping.

Unintentionally, I was saying that the only things that will count and matter are things that I understand. If I don't understand them, then they don't count -- they're not given any real merit or value. As hurtful as this message was, I was also communicating something much deeper to my wife: *you don't count*. It was not a message I was intending to send, but she received it, loud and clear. Many times I would say to her, "You shouldn't feel that way," or "Why do you feel that way?" This is like telling someone they shouldn't have to go to the bathroom. There was no place in my world for her feelings and emotions. Again, I was looking at her through my masculine lens.

The spin cycle would rev up because my wife felt hurt, misunderstood and devalued. I would send out a message saying, "Hey, if you want sympathy, get that from your girlfriends. If you want to *fix* something, bring the problem over here and *I'll* fix it." I was Mr. Fix-it -- she was Ms. Feel-it.

Over time, my wife learned that even expressing her need to me resulted in a trip through the spin cycle. She would say things like, "I'm just not going to talk to you about stuff. I'll go talk to my friends."

Rationalizing this in my mind, I said, "Hey, it's not my fault!" If she didn't feel loved, it was because of her own emotional insecurity. If she would just get those emotional insecurities fixed, then she would feel loved...not needy. We lived in the spin cycle of conflict and drama for years. I decided this was just the way it was going to be until God changed her...because I was fine.

One of my modes for self-evaluation is to go spend time alone in the woods. It was on one of these sessions that the Spirit of God really got a hold of my heart in response to my pouring my heart out to God about this issue. I had prayed many times to God to change my wife because I *knew* that I was loving her well and if she could just get her insecurities fixed, she would feel the love. On this day, God dealt with me in a powerful, convicting way. He stirred in my heart a process that focused on me...not my wife. It caused me to ask God to search me and to show me my stuff as it related to our marriage. Boy, did He show me!

God showed me that deep within my heart, I harbored a spirit of superiority over my wife. God helped me see that I believed myself to be better than my wife, and that I carried a serious load of pride around with me. I knew right then that I had to get things right with my heart and with God, and He began to show me the path. God said to me, "Johnny, the way that you treat Lezlyn is a reflection of your relationship with me. So, if you're out of sync with her, chances are you're out of sync with Me." Thus began my tug of war with God that day.

I was very real with God and we had a battle out there in the woods. I said, "God, what am I supposed to do? I have moments when I just don't get it. I don't understand what she's feeling." God helped me see that when I didn't understand what my wife was feeling, I would not just pull away, but pull away with condemnation and judgment. While God showed me my heart, He also heard my plea, "God what am I to do?"

The Lord spoke to my heart, saying, "Johnny, there will be moments like that when you don't understand because Lezlyn is different from you. When this happens, I

want you to draw near to her, not pull away from her. You must form an alliance *with* her...not condemn and judge her from your seat of pride.”

Broken and convicted, I went home that day and poured my heart of confession out to my wife. I admitted that I had not treated her as my equal because I saw myself as superior to her. I confessed that I saw myself as the stronger emotionally, with my stuff together, and that she just wasn't as strong. She just received me humbly, a bit in awe I think, and listened as I committed before God that I was going to be different...that I was going to learn to love her in the way God called me to love her.

We had a wonderful time of forgiveness and reconciliation...and then the real test came. A friend of Lezlyn's had come to town but hadn't called to let my wife know she was in town. I knew something was bothering her...but viewed this whole thing through my masculine lens. I thought to myself, “If a friend of mine came to town and didn't call, (1) I may not have wanted him to call and (2) maybe he's not really a friend.” Very simple!

In the past, I would have told Lezlyn exactly what I thought. “Honey, listen, get over it. If she was really a friend she would have called”; or “Why don't you call her?” I would have tried to fix it instead of joining with her. What I did was what the Father showed me to do. I went into the kitchen and held my wife. I looked at her and I tried to say what I saw her feeling, “It really bothers you that your friend has come to town and that she hasn't called, doesn't it?” When I said the words, it was like Niagara Falls broke through the walls of our kitchen. My wife buried her head in my chest and sobbed. I simply held her and prayed over her. “Lord, this is my wife, my bride, Your daughter.

My wife's heart is hurt, Lord, and You understand fully where her heart is and what's hurting her tonight. I entrust her heart to You. Amen.”

When I spoke the prayer for Lezlyn out loud, I felt something release in me. I felt manly – not that I felt like a girly man before – but I felt like I was being a covering for my wife, that this was what it meant to be a lover and protector of her.

I felt powerful. I felt a sense of strength go through me that I hadn't felt before. It was as if I was there with her in a whole new way. As she held onto me in that moment, I sensed that she found *real* security in me. I knew that growth had happened in me and in us, and I realized that this is what she had been needing. She needed me to come alongside and form an alliance with her that allowed her to *feel*. She needed me to be quiet and just listen to what she was feeling, even when I couldn't fully understand and comprehend the depth or the reasoning behind the feelings. Finally, in my surrendering to God, the how's and why's of my wife's feelings were no longer important. The issue was how could I meet her where she was at emotionally...how could I listen and honor what she's feeling, all the while turning her and her heart over to the Father? In God's timing, I finally heard the message. Men and women are different...on purpose. I'm grateful for where we are today...and now I get it.