

Final Devotional

Look! Just Over Your Spouse's Shoulder! It's Jesus!

I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

—Matthew 25:40 NIV

As we come to the last session of a Love & Respect conference, we close with *the Rewarded Cycle*—the very heart and soul of the Love & Respect Connection. And why is it the heart and soul? Because it teaches husbands and wives this all-important truth:

In the ultimate sense, your marriage has nothing to do with your spouse.

It has everything to do with your relationship to Jesus Christ.

The scriptural basis for this statement is Jesus' parable of the last judgment (Matthew 25:31–46). Those deemed righteous ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go visit you?” (vv. 37–39). The King answers the righteous and says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

The audience quickly sees the application to them: whatever I do for my spouse, I do for Christ as well. A husband's unconditional love for his wife reveals his love for Christ. If love for her is missing, so is love for Christ. A wife's unconditional respect for her husband reveals her reverence for Christ. If respect for him is missing, so is reverence for Christ.

All of us must make the personal application. Jesus is saying, Emerson, look at me. This isn't about Sarah. She may not deserve love—that's not the point. You show love to Sarah in order to show Me that you love me. Or, Sarah, look at me. This isn't about Emerson. Yes, he needs to change, but this is about you coming across respectfully as your way of showing your reverence for Me.

To seal this idea, I use one of the most memorable images of the entire conference. Whatever you do by way of love or respect, you do not do it primarily to get your marriage off *the Crazy Cycle*. Nor do you do it to get your spouse to meet your needs. Ultimately, to practice love or respect, especially in moments of tension or conflict, you look at your spouse and just over his or her shoulder you envision Jesus Christ, standing there looking at you, saying, *Truly, as you have done it to your spouse, you have done it unto Me!*

As I tell the crowd, “When I see Jesus back there behind Sarah, it's as if I hear Him saying, Emerson, this isn't about Sarah, this is about you and Me. Yes, I see her finger in your face as she scolds you for being unloving. Yes, I agree she could be more respectful. So what will you do? Just walk away, or look beyond her to Me because, as a man of honor, you will do the loving thing as unto Me?”

I get letter after letter about the Christ-over-the-shoulder image. Here's an example: “If I see Jesus looking at me over my husband's shoulder, then I'm bound to treat my husband with the respect due to him out of my love and reverence for Jesus. I do believe that was the single brightest

lightbulb flash for me!”

To realize you are doing your marriage as unto Christ is revolutionizing—and sobering. The image of Christ standing there, just beyond your spouse’s shoulder as part of every conversation, is a reminder that you will be standing before Him at the final judgment. As you envision Him, you will more fully understand that your marriage is really a tool and a test to deepen and demonstrate your love and your reverence for your Lord. You will grasp the power of *the Rewarded Cycle*:

*HIS LOVE BLESSES REGARDLESS OF HER RESPECT
HER RESPECT BLESSES REGARDLESS OF HIS LOVE*

Prayer: Thank the Lord for being the “seen” guest in every conversation you have together. Pray for the strength and wisdom to always envision Him at the center of your marriage, especially in moments of tension or conflict.

Action: As you talk together, each of you can practice seeing Christ over each other’s shoulder. Talk about how this feels. What is the Lord telling you?

For more “husband-friendly devotionals that wives truly love,” see Emerson’s book The Love & Respect Experience (Thomas Nelson, 2011).

A Personal Word: “In God We Trust”

I need God. You need God. So, here is what you can do if you are feeling a bit helpless and hopeless. It is amazing to me the number of people who think about praying but never really pray.

The Bible says, “You have not because you ask not” (James 4:2). We’re not talking about health and wealth. We are talking about you asking God to enable you to show love and respect at those times you don’t want to or feel unable to. I am telling you, if anything is heard in heaven, it is this prayer. This is an unselfish prayer. This is a prayer based on the heart of God.

Too many pray, “God here is what is on my heart. Please fulfill my desires for me.” That is totally different from praying, “God here is what is on Your heart. Please fulfill Your desires for me.”

Ephesians 5:33 is the will of God, is it not? John the Apostle said, “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked Him” (1 John 5:14,15).

So, when you have something on your heart that is also on God’s heart, look out! When your will is in keeping with His will, He hears you.

Husbands, it is God’s will that you love. Ask Him for help.

Wives, it is God’s will that you respect. Ask Him for help.

Heaven responds. God is not some cosmic killjoy. Trust Him. Pray this prayer over the next several weeks.

Dear Father,

I need you. I cannot love and respect like this. But I know You hear me when I ask You to help me. Forgive me where I have been unloving and disrespectful. I open my heart to You, Father. I will not be fearful nor angry at You or my spouse. I see my partner in a whole new light. I forgive my spouse. I will appreciate my partner as different not wrong. I am actually excited, Lord. Fill my heart with love and reverence for You. Ultimately, this is about You and me. It isn’t about my spouse.

Thank You for this enlightenment. My greatest reward comes from doing this “unto” You.

Prepare me this day for those moments of conflict. I especially ask You to put love and respect in my heart when I feel unloved and disrespected. There is no credit for loving and respecting when it is easy. I believe You hear me. I anticipate You responding to me. I have on my heart what is on Your heart. I thank You in advance for helping me take the next step.

I believe You will reward me throughout eternity for what I do in my marriage. I believe an eternal first moment is coming in which I will be overwhelmed. Today, I renew my commitment to believe that everything I do toward my spouse matters to You. Nothing is wasted. When I am loving and respectful during a conflict, this contributes to my eternal reward. Salvation is a free gift through Jesus Christ. I cannot earn this. But rewards come in response to what I do daily in the home. My eye has not seen, my ear has not heard and

it has not entered my heart what You intend to do in response to my love and respect in the home. Thank You for revealing this to me. I am humbled.

I believe this brings conviction to my spouse if anything will, but I don't do it for that reason.

I believe this will influence my children. I am committed to leaving a godly legacy.

I believe this matures me and reveals my freedom of spirit. My marriage is a test and tool.

And I believe this touches Your heart as I do this "unto You." I do this out of love and reverence for You because You love me and intend to glorify me throughout eternity. It's between You and me. I am a true believer.

In Your Name, Amen.