

3 Life Hacks That Will Revolutionize Your Relationships

Ever hear of “life hacks”? Little tips and tricks to make your life easier, like running a sticky note between your keyboard keys to collect crumbs and computer lint. Here are three life hacks that will act like relational lubricant.

“When you said/did X, I felt Y. Did you mean to communicate that?”

Instead of assuming we know someone’s motives and thinking, we need to clarify that we understand what they intend. Sometimes things just come out wrong, not at all what is meant, and it’s easily misinterpreted.

“When you gave me permission to take comp time after I worked all weekend, I sensed you were giving it begrudgingly and you weren’t happy about it at all, like I had broken an unwritten rule or expectation. Did I read you right?”

“When I asked you about _____, it seemed that you got really quiet and shut down. It felt like you were shutting me out. Is that accurate, or am I missing something?”

“When I asked you to unload the dishwasher, you rolled your eyes and sighed. It’s the only thing I’ve asked in two days, but it sounded to me like you were upset. As if it were an unfair burden to place on you. Is that what you meant to communicate?”

The other person might respond with, "Yeah, I was upset and felt put-upon, but really I have no right to be. I'm sorry for reacting so badly." Or they might say, "I did? I don't remember tha—oh wait, you know what? I had just heard such-and-so on TV and it disgusted me. My body language was in response to what was going on in the other room. Sorry, I didn't hear you at all."

It's always a good idea to clarify what's going on. And not assume you can read the other person's mind. Only God can do that.

Own the Plank in Your Eye

Whenever there is a conflict, it's the result of clashing perspectives or motives or interpretations. According to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3, the first step to resolving conflict is to take responsibility for our part in it. It's amazing how hostilities can de-escalate when someone steps up to the plate and takes responsibility for their contribution to a problem.

Even if our part is only 5%, we're 100% responsible for that 5%. And even if we're sure we haven't done anything wrong, we can acknowledge the possibility that we may have said or did something that was misinterpreted, and we can own that.

It's natural to expect the other person to then take responsibility for their part in the conflict, but alas, very often that doesn't happen. They will just let you take the blame/credit all by yourself even though you know perfectly well the other person was at fault at well. That's okay. When you live for an Audience of One, it's always right to do the right thing, trusting God to work out the justice part. Guilty parties never get away with it forever.

It's not just a life hack, it's supernatural, divine direction from the One who designed people and intended us to be in relationship. Own your part in a conflict—and watch the tension deflate like letting air out of a balloon.

How to Apologize

The specifics on this life hack came from [one of the best blog posts](#) in the history of the internet. There are four parts:

1) I'm sorry for _____. . .: Be specific. Show the person you're apologizing to that you really understand what they are upset about.

Wrong: *I'm sorry for being mean.*

Right: *I'm sorry for being unkind when I said you were fat and ugly.*

2) This is wrong because _____: This might take some more thinking, but this is one of the most important parts. Until you understand why it was wrong or how it hurt someone's feelings, it's unlikely you will change. This is also important to show the person you hurt that you really understand how they feel. I can't tell you how much of a difference this makes! Sometimes, people want to feel understood more than they want an apology. Sometimes just showing understanding- even without an apology- is enough to make them feel better!

Wrong: *This is wrong because you are hyper-sensitive.*

Right: *This is wrong because I hurt your feelings and made you feel bad about yourself.*

3) In the future, I will _____: Use positive language, and tell me what you WILL do, not what you won't do.

Wrong: *In the future, I will not say that.*

Right: *In the future, I will keep unkind words in my head.*

4) Will you forgive me? This is important to try to restore your friendship. Now, there is no rule that the other person has to forgive you. Sometimes, they won't. That's their decision. Hopefully, you will all try to be the kind of friends who will forgive easily, but that's not something you automatically get just because you apologized. But you should at least ask for it.

I love these four steps, and I would add eye contact to the mix.

These four steps to apologizing are powerful because they are biblical.

1. "I'm sorry for" means you are confessing, or agreeing with the other person, that you did something wrong. Biblical prayers of confession are very specific in naming the sins committed, such as idolatry, adultery, and murder. Apologizing to another person needs to be just as specific.

2. "This is wrong because" reveals that you understand of why it's a problem. David prayed for that kind of self-awareness in Ps. 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."

3. "In the future, I will" is a commitment to repent and choose a better, more righteous behavior than the one being renounced and forsaken. Zaccheus gave an example of this in

Luke 19:8-“Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.’”

4. “Will you forgive me?” is a humbling, difficult question to ask. Putting ourselves in the “one-down position” of asking for forgiveness risks exposure and shame-after all, the other person may say no-but forgiveness was extraordinarily important to Jesus. “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matt. 6:14-15)

Apologizing the right way is probably the most powerful way to restore a strained or broken relationship.

God created us for relationships and for community. These three life hacks can go a long way toward make them run more smoothly.

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Echoes of a Voice

Rick Wade explores how we hear echoes of a supernatural voice calling us through justice, relationship, beauty and spirituality.

Is Anybody Listening?

We spend so much time defending our beliefs and making a case for the faith, and we wonder why people won't listen. We have great arguments and evidences, and it's all so obviously true to us, but they give it as much attention as we might if asked to consider some ancient Sumerian religion. Maybe they hear it filtered through preconceived negative ideas of Christianity. Think of the very vocal atheists who think that Christianity is not just old and useless; they think it's downright dangerous. Another problem is that people really don't know about Jesus and what He taught. We live in a society which has little understanding of Christianity outside the church and, unfortunately, inside it, too, in too many cases.

Maybe we should consider changing the order in which we make a case for Christ.

Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth century scientist and apologist, said that we should "make [Christianity] attractive, make good men wish it were true, and *then* show that it is."^{1} Theologian John Stackhouse argues in his book *Humble Apologetics* that today we have to address the question of *plausibility* before that of *credibility*. "'Might it be true? Is Christian argument something I should seriously entertain even for a moment?'"^{2}

Of course, Christianity has to be true to be worthwhile, but in some cases it could be better to postpone arguments for the truth of the faith in favor of simply putting it on display. If I tell someone I have a diamond in my pocket, before arguing that it *is* a diamond and not some kind of fake, maybe I need to pull it out and show them to get their interest.

What are some important issues in most everyone's life that could pique people's interest? For his book *Simply Christian*, Anglican bishop and Bible scholar N. T. Wright chose justice, spirituality, relationships, and beauty. I'll draw from that

book in this article.

There's another important dimension, namely, living out the gospel. Are the things we talk about *real*? Do we live them out across the spectrum of our lives' activities?

In the discussion that follows, I'll talk first about the four subjects just mentioned. Then I'll highlight a very important theme in Wright's book, that of the meeting of heaven and earth. Finally, we'll turn to the matter of Christians as the living voices of God on earth, heralding the day of final redemption, and showing how Christianity applies in some important areas.

Justice and Spirituality

N. T. Wright says we hear "echoes of a voice" calling to us from many directions. To hear these echoes correctly is to hear the voice of God. By encouraging people to pause and focus on these echoes, we can help prepare them to hear a case for the truth of Christianity, if a case needs to be made at all.

One of those echoes is justice. Everyone hears it, even children. Let one child get to stay up later at night than another, and you'll hear it: "That's not fair!"

We want things to be right, to be in proper order, but we live in a world so often out of order. Racism, religious oppression, laws which serve only the powerful: we can multiply examples. We try to bring about justice, but it slips through our fingers.

Some say the echo we're hearing is just a dream, that there can be no justice. Others say there is such a thing as justice, but it's from another world and cannot be attained here. Still others say it's the voice of Someone speaking to us from elsewhere. God is calling to us, telling us what is

right and wrong, and bidding us to pursue justice.

Spirituality is another echo. Wright tells a parable of a dictator who believes it isn't safe to have water coming from so many sources in his kingdom, so he decides to cover with concrete all the land that once was marked by springs and provide one water source for all the people. This is safer, he thought. It's controlled. In time, however, the waters of the springs begin to break through the concrete, and soon they erupt all over the place.

The water in this parable is spirituality, and the dictator is the philosophy that has shaped our culture for a few centuries, that of naturalism.

As much as the "dictator" of naturalism hates it, spirituality is breaking out all over these days. Many religions are now practiced in America. Spirituality and the supernatural are regular themes on TV and in the movies. Bookstores sell scads of books on the subject. It's cool to be spiritual.

Why has this happened? People are hearing something, although many aren't hearing it correctly. Wright says that the formerly "hidden spring" of spirituality "[points] away from the bleak landscape of modern secularism and toward the possibility that we humans are made for more than this."[{3}](#) There is more to us than what can be studied scientifically.

Relationships and Beauty

After dealing with spirituality, Wright turns to relationships. He wonders, "How is it that we ache for each other and yet find relationships so difficult?"[{4}](#)

It's obvious that we are made to live in relationships with other people. In the realm of relationships, we hear the echo of a voice telling us something very important about ourselves.

We find our meaning in the context of a society, small or large, including intimate relationships. Maybe especially so. Marriage is still popular even though so many marriages end in divorce. Many couples just live together in an attempt to avoid the messiness of divorce. We seek good relationships, but plan on failed ones.

And even good relationships including marriages have to end, because death, that great separator, comes to all. We fear it, but we can't do anything about it.

Not only marriages struggle, but so do larger societies, especially democratic ones. We want to trust people, indeed we have to. But we're let down and cynicism is bred. Wright says that in Britain, more people vote on reality TV shows than in elections.

What keeps driving us to be so closely involved with other people despite all the risks? Christians have an explanation. But now I'm getting ahead of myself. That's for later.

What about the echo of beauty? Is beauty important to people? Not everyone is a patron of the arts, to be sure. But people put time and money into making their homes attractive places to live. Even a person who doesn't care about such things will be found outside on Saturday washing his car.

Yet for all our love of beauty, we find it difficult to capture. Artists paint canvas after canvas trying to get it right. Beauty is transient and incomplete. My wife often draws my attention to the late afternoon Texas sky. The sun, partly hidden behind clouds of white and grey shoots out a fiery glow of brilliant orange and red and yellow. And in a matter of seconds the colors change and then are gone.

The common belief about beauty is that it is in the eye of the beholder. But if that says it all, then nothing is beautiful in itself. Shared experiences of beauty with other people are just happenstance; their subjective response just happens to

accord with ours at the moment.

But I don't think that idea exhausts the truth. We behave and talk as though some things are beautiful in themselves.

Through the transient beauty of our world, could we be hearing the echo of a real voice whispering to us of a beauty that will remain?

Jesus: Where Heaven and Earth Meet

What explanation does Christianity offers for those "echoes of a voice" we've been discussing?

The bottom line is this: The death and resurrection of Christ provides a context within which these things come to fruition, where His creation will not be ultimately frustrated by the fallenness of the world.

One of the central motifs of Wright's book is the meeting of heaven and earth. When he speaks of heaven, Wright is speaking of the supernatural realm where God is; he has in mind more two different realms than two spatial locations.

Wright describes three views of the way God and the world relate. Option 1, he calls it, is the belief that God and the world are identical; what is called *pantheism*. Option 2 is the belief that there is a great gulf between God and the world, what has been called *deism*. Option 3 is the belief that, while God and the world are distinct, their realms meet and even overlap at times.

In Christ, heaven and earth meet in their fullest, most profound way. Jesus, the full embodiment of God, became man; Emmanuel, God with us, is what Isaiah called Him. "In listening to Jesus," Wright says, "we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along." [\[5\]](#)

In his ministry and his death, Jesus took on the powers of darkness. The victory He won didn't only serve to get us into heaven. In defeating evil he won a victory over injustice, spiritual deadness, broken relationships, and an ugly world among other things. His victory applies to us. Being a Christian isn't about leaving this fallen world behind to join God in a disembodied state way out there in heaven. Jesus has set us free and made us new creations, empowered by His Spirit to work at restoring creation in the here and now. We know that this work won't be completed until Jesus comes again and establishes a new heaven and new earth. However, we are to enter into His victory now. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Jesus prayed (Matt. 6:10).

Jesus is the one who both makes sense of our longing for justice, spirituality, relationships, and beauty, and who makes them possible.

Living in the Future Today

So what do we do? What does this have to do with the matter of plausibility I discussed at the beginning of this article? I noted that people who won't hear a case made for the truth of Christianity might be open to hearing what it has to say about such significant matters as justice and relationships and others. I also noted, however, that people have to see them being worked out in our own lives individually and corporately.

In 1 Cor. 3:16 Paul tells us that we are individually temples of the Spirit. In Eph. 2:21 he says that the whole church forms a temple. The temple in the Old Testament was where God dwelled among His people. Now, we are God's temple, the place where God dwells. In us because of the Spirit within us, heaven and earth meet. And the Spirit, who is our constant companion, enables us to continue Jesus' work, to "begin the work of making God's future real in the present." [\[6\]](#)

We participate in the life of the church: we read and speak the Word; we engage in worship and prayer; and we partake of the Lord's Supper. In all these things, we declare that God is engaged in this world.

And as a result, God's Spirit is at work through us to set the world to rights. Justice should be demonstrated by the church, and it *will* be complete one day.

We discover true spirituality, that we can partake in both the earthly and heavenly realms, because we are body and spirit. Both parts of our nature find their fulfillment in a proper relationship with God.

We are given a new relationship with God, and the Spirit works in us to show the love of Christ to others and hence to establish and maintain good relationships with people.

And through the church, the Spirit works to restore beauty to this world and to free it from corruption. One day God will restore beauty completely in remaking creation to be what it is supposed to be.

John Stackhouse writes that "We live in a time-between-the-times," in which people raised in a more or less Christian culture now are reacting against it. Christianity seems to receive greater disdain and resistance than other religions.[\[7\]](#) How can we get them to listen?

As Christians, Wright says, we are "workers for justice, explorers of spirituality, makers and menders of relationships, creators of beauty."[\[8\]](#) "We are called not only to listen to the echoes of the voice . . . but to be people through whom the rest of the world comes to hear and respond to that voice as well."[\[9\]](#)

When people see us living this way, maybe they will stop long enough to listen to our reasons.

Notes

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* 187.
2. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38.
3. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 20.
4. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 29.
5. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 92.
6. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 124.
7. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 51-52.
8. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 189.
9. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 218.

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“How Do I Help My Friend Get Unstuck From a Failed Relationship?”

I have a friend who has been saved for about 8 years. She is a 30 year old single parent with an 8 year old daughter. She broke up with the baby's father about 6 years ago. The problem bothering her is that she is still in love with him. She realizes this is not a man she can marry due to his lifestyle and the fact that he is living with another woman. This is the only man she has been sexually involved with. Moving on with her life has been a constant struggle. Her confession to me is, “I feel stuck.” What do you recommend?

I suggest you encourage her to reframe her thinking about her daughters daddy. In our culture, we tend to elevate our

feelings to the position of idols, and we feel like it would somehow be dishonest not to follow them. But feelings are just feelings, and they are not equally valid or wise. If she's still "in love with" a man she hasn't had a relationship with for six years, who had made it abundantly clear he doesn't care for her, then it's because she is still feeding the fantasy and the feelings with her thoughts. No wonder she feels stuck! She is stuck because she keeps feeding the feelings.

The problem is that we can't change our feelings by attacking them directly. Feelings are like the caboose on a train; they follow the engines. The engines are our beliefs/thoughts and our behavior. Redirect the engine, and the caboose will follow in a different direction.

I would suggest you help her write out on a sheet of paper two columns: the lies and stuck thoughts she believes, and the truths that would counter the lies. Such as:

Lies and Stuck Thoughts	Truths
I want my daughters daddy to come back	He's not coming back. That chapter is over.
I have feelings for him	So what, they're just feelings. I have to deal with reality.
I am stuck	God will help me get unstuck as I follow Him
I need him	He's not available; I must get my needs met from God, through my support network of friends and family

I love him because I had sex with him	I must confess my sin of sexual immorality and renounce the emotional ties I have to him because of our one-flesh union
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I would also suggest that you instruct her to imagine taking a giant roll of Saran wrap to her bundle of feelings and wrapping them up like leftovers that go in the fridge. Then put them on a mental shelf, and purposely engage in some activity that will help her replace her thoughts and feelings with something else. The biblical pattern for lasting change is to replace and displace the old with the new, but first we have to plan on what the new will be—such as a new hobby, new relationships, new habits that don't remind us of the old thing we were trying to renounce. She may need some help with coming up with ideas for new things to add into her life.

It's also possible that she'll say no, no, no to all that you suggest, giving excuses why none of those will work. Sometimes people don't really want to change, they just want to complain about their terrible emotional state and suck sympathy and compassion from those they complain to. If you discern that that's the route she's taking, then I would suggest that you tell her, You don't really want to be unstuck. So I'm not going to talk about this situation with you. Then always change the subject if it comes up.

Bless you for being a friend! I hope you find this helpful.

Cordially,

Sue Bohlin

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“I Have Questions about the Marriage Test”

I took the [Marriage Test](#) by Kerby Anderson. A couple questions....

1) On the age question (#7), how do you score if you are between 30 and 40 years of age?

2) If this is my 2nd marriage to the SAME PERSON, how do I score question #3?

3) Again, considering this is my second marriage to the same person, how do I add up years married (#8)? We made it 7 years the first time, 5 years this time, but were pretty involved in each other's life during the 5 years we were divorced.

4) Question # 11 asks about agreeing with each other's attitudes. I think we do mostly agree, it is just usually a long, verbal battle to figure that out.

This was a very interesting test. I am anxious to see how to score those questions listed above.

Thank you for your e-mail. The marriage test we aired is based on the work of Howard Markman at the University of Denver. I assume that it will eventually be put in a book and will then answer some of the questions you are asking.

In the mean time, let me do my best to guess what the answers to your questions might be to the marriage test.

1. On the age question (#7), I assume you would receive 0 points if you are between 30 and 40 years of age. You receive a -1 if you are under 30. You receive +1 if you are over 40,

and you receive +2 if you are over 60.

2. On the previous marriage question (#3), I assume you would still give yourself a -1 because you had a previous marriage even though it was to the same person.

3. On the years of marriage question (#8), I assume you would add up the total years married to the same person. In your case, that would be 12 years. Of course, if you want to add the 5 years you were divorced then the number would be 17 years. It wouldn't make any difference in the score you would give your marriage.

4. On the conflicting attitudes question (#11), you would probably assume that you mostly agree with each other (+2 points) even if it takes awhile to reach agreement. If the conflict is too strong, then perhaps you should give your marriage 0 points.

Thank you for writing. I hope this helps.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“Where Does Scripture Say That Men Should be Strong and Women Should be Soft?”

Re: God's order for the “strong, leader” capabilities of men, and the “soft, nurturing” capabilities of women.

Chapter and verse, please, where is this laid out in scripture?

In the Bible we seem to have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and no specific statement that “strong” characteristics belong only to men, and “soft” only to women.

Hi _____,

Thanks for your letter.

Re: God’s order for the “strong, leader” capabilities of men, and the “soft, nurturing” capabilities of women. Chapter and verse, please, where is this laid out in scripture?

Well, I was thinking of Joshua 1:6-9, where Joshua is exhorted three times to be strong. And I was thinking of the role of the helpmate in Genesis 2, where Eve was created to respond and complement Adam, and a wife’s responsibility is further spelled out in the New Testament to submit to and respect her husband. Are there “chapter and verse” delineations where the observations about men and women are laid out? No, I don’t think so. We can’t point to specific chapters and verses for many of the things we believe (there is no specific verse, for instance, that says “abortion is sin” or “do not go into pornographic chat rooms”), but I do think we can draw conclusions based on our observations of life that correspond with what we DO know in scripture.

In the Bible we seem to have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and no specific statement that “strong” characteristics belong only to men, and “soft” only to women.

I agree, we do have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and I see problems that arise when men and women go against the way we were created to be. For instance, when men become passive, weak responders (Adam, Ahab) and when women become harsh controllers (Jezebel, Michal, Rebekah).

I would agree with you that strength is not a male-only

characteristic, for we see many examples of strong, godly women in scripture. But that doesn't cancel out God's call for men to be strong. (For instance, the qualifications of elder and deacon in the pastoral epistles.)

However, the concept of a "soft man" seems to call up unfortunate, unflattering images of milque-toast characters. Who wants a man to be spineless and too-easily influenced or intimidated? I don't see any place in scripture where wimps are held up as role models. ****BUT****—there is a huge difference between a "soft man," and a "gentle man," or a "sensitive man." The Lord Jesus was hardly a soft man, but He was certainly gentle and sensitive, while at the same time charismatically attractive to the most masculine types of men.

I hope this has communicated my heart better than my article apparently did.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Can You Give Examples of Subtle Invalidation?"

In Kerby Anderson's article [Why Marriages Fail](#) he writes, "Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other."

What other examples can you give of subtle invalidation?

I decided to answer your question because it's helpful to have

a woman's perspective in addition to a man's (as what you read in Kerby's excellent essay). Here's what I came up with:

- *Rolling the eyes at something a spouse says*
- *Ignoring the spouse when they're talking*
- *A dismissing or contemptuous tone of voice in saying things like "I don't think so" or "You're wrong" or "Like you would know anything about that!" (Note: those very words can be used in affectionate banter when said with a smile and in the context of a spouse's strengths.)*
- *Any form of sarcasm*
- *Making plans without consulting the spouse (which would affect the spouse)*
- *Ridiculing a spouse's dreams and hopes, even in jest*
- *Continually rejecting a spouse's romantic or sexual overtures*
- *Choosing to spend time chatting with internet friends (especially of the opposite sex) over being with one's spouse*
- *Not acknowledging the heart issues behind the words that a spouse shares*
- *Not looking at a spouse when they're talking*
- *Being critical of or ridiculing a spouse in public, even in jest*
- *In a dispute or disagreement that involves the children, ganging up with them against the spouse*
- *Saying things to one's kids like "Oh, your mother is just being wierd (stupid, illogical, emotional, etc.) again" or "Don't listen to your father, he doesn't know what he's talking about"*

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Help Me Figure Out Why My Relationship Hurts!”

I checked out the article where you and that guy were making comparisons between [Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus](#), and the Bible. That discussion really interested me because I am reading *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus*, and I began thinking as I was reading it and I developed a theory... First I thought about older people (ages 55 and up). I have seen so many of those older couples still holding hands and being very loving together. I found my self asking what is so different in relationships today and relationships in the fifties and earlier? Why do so many relationships fail today and not in those yester years? I came to the conclusion that Christianity must have been the key. Not only does the Bible provide instruction for healthy relationships, it also provides people (believers) with a feeling of fulfillment. Never before have I ever really understood the real reason for the verse “Do not be unequally yoked.” It causes a real strain on relationships, and I have been through many unmeaningful and heartbreaking relationships. I was wondering since you have read the whole book *Men are From Mars and Women are from Venus* if you could help me with my most recent relationship problem.

I have a great boyfriend—he is very beautiful on the outside and inside, he is considerate in fulfilling my needs, buying me gifts, and taking on his fair share of the cooking and cleaning responsibilities. I really love him for that. I know that he likes me or else he wouldn't be with me and he says that when I ask him how he feels about me. Actually he says you know how I feel about you why else would I be with you, and if I say how I feel about you too much it won't mean as

much. How should I go about telling him that it means the world to me every time I hear (which is totally not enough and I feel unfulfilled because of it) him say how much he cares about me and I really need some reassurance right now about his feelings or I will have to leave him because I am very fragile right now and every day I grow more and more insecure in how I feel as to where I am in our relationship. I am even starting to question if he really wants me to go with him when he asks me if I would like to go out with him and a friend for lunch. Then he gets mad and says I wouldn't ask you if I didn't want you to come. I constantly wish he would just give me some reassurance, any kind, because I feel myself hurting soooo much, and I know he is hurting too because he doesn't like to see me sad. I think that he has a really hard time expressing how he feels towards me because he has been single for 30 years now (he has had long relationships that end badly) and like MAFMWAFV says that men start to love people and they pull away so they can find their own self because they are afraid they will lose their sense of independence. Do you think that he is really struggling with something like that or what do you think I should do to solve my problem? I really sincerely love him and I don't want him to slip away because I don't understand or know something that I should. When I am done my formatted and fully (to the best of my knowledge and understanding) completed correlation between the Bible and MAFMWAFV I will send you a copy. I know you probably get about a million emails a day so if you can't answer mine I want you to know that I feel a little better just having gotten all of this off of my chest. Thank You Sue!

Wow, sounds like you have your emotional plate full. Question: are you living with your boyfriend? (Otherwise, why would you mention "his fair share of the cooking and cleaning responsibilities"?) If you are, no wonder you're so insecure! Tell me, what are you getting out of this relationship? It sounds like you're giving him the benefits of having a wife without requiring that he give you the commitment of a

husband.

That's a big reason why God wants us to be married before setting up house. It sets us up for major pain to give ourselves away without a foundation of trust.

Trust is everything, and trust is closely tied to commitment. If I were you, I would pull waaaaaay back and stop giving yourself away without a commitment. If he loves you, he will pursue you and marry you. If he's just "enjoying the milk without buying the cow," (to use an old expression), then if you leave and he doesn't pursue you then you will know he is using you. Even if he's fond of you, he's using you. With your permission. (Ouch!) Which is not a way to demonstrate self-respect.

I would also suggest that you read Gary Chapman's book "The 5 Love Languages," and ask him to read it or listen to it on tape. Sounds like your love language is verbal affirmation, and he needs to know that you need to HEAR verbal appreciation and affirmations of love to feel loved. I cannot tell you how disrespectful it sounds to hear the excuse "If I tell you all the time how I feel about you it won't mean as much." Ask him why he eats all the time instead of only at Thanksgiving. I mean, eating all the time diminishes the meaning of eating, right? Wrong! It nourishes his body, just as hearing "I love you and I appreciate you" nourishes your heart and your relationship.

I hope these observations help. I am concerned for you because it sounds like you're the one paying emotionally in this relationship, and you're treating yourself poorly. I like what psychologist [Dr. Phil](#) says: "We teach people how to treat us." Sounds to me like you're teaching your boyfriend that it's OK to get what he wants from you without any reciprocal commitment on his part. Doesn't sound fair—or healthy—to me! And for SURE it isn't what God commands in scripture, which is a way to protect and provide for women's fragility and need

for security.

You might also want to read Dr. Laura's (Schlessinger) *The 10 Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*. It's a good read because it is consistent with biblical values. . . such as the value of marriage and purity and commitment and servant leadership.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What About Us Women Not From Venus?”

This question is sent in response to the article [“Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.”](#) Are all women relationally oriented? What about the introverts out there? What about the goal-oriented women?

Being an introvert myself, I have had to work at caring for other people and reaching out, as God commands. I naturally want to do things by myself and for myself. When I get stressed out or upset, I withdraw from people into my “cave.”

I am also goal-oriented. I cannot multi-task. I can only focus on one thing at a time. My motivation is achieving the goal. I strongly dislike group projects.

My fiancé is the opposite of me. He is very relational, loves to be around people, talks a lot, and is not as goal-oriented.

In my experience, there are many people like us. How can this

be explained? If God designed woman to be relational, then why am I (and many others) not wired that way?

Great questions.

I do think that at our core, women are relationally-oriented, which you will probably see once you have children and the concept of “family” becomes much more important to you. Particularly in American culture which has been so steeped in feminism, women’s mindsets have been shaped to be more male-like, and there are more and more women saying the same thing as you.

When Ray and I give our “Mars/Venus” lecture, we run into couples like you and your fiancé from time to time, where it looks like somebody switched the labels. <smile> But the interesting thing is, you guys still find each other! There is still a beautiful complementarity to the male-female relationship where each person’s strengths and weaknesses are balanced by the other person’s strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes people become independent and self-reliant not because of their gender but because of their family dynamics. That doesn’t change what it means to be a woman at the core of your being, though. Your experience of being independent and self-reliant is going to be different from a man’s experience. And honestly, they are both a challenge to living as God wants us to—depending fully on HIM instead of on ourselves. Being fiercely independent can be a curse; it’s a way of digging our own cisterns (Jer. 2:13) instead of going to the source of Living Water in complete dependence and neediness. But you didn’t ask that question, so I’ll get off my soapbox now! <grin>

I’d be interested in having this discussion with you a few years down the road after you’re married and hopefully have children. I wonder if you would still see yourself as not being relational anymore. If you think of it, pop back in and

let me know, OK?

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus

How Men and Women Differ

[Sue] Counselor John Gray made a ton of money—and found a ton of grateful fans—in writing his best-selling book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*[{1}](#). This book explored the intrinsic differences between men and women in a way that has helped millions of people understand why relationships between the two sexes can be so frustrating!

[Ray] In this essay we'll be examining some of the insights from this book, then looking at what the Bible says about how God wants men and women to relate to each other. It's no surprise that since God created us to be different, He knew all about those differences thousands of years ago when He gave very specific instructions for each gender!

[Sue] The whimsical premise of *Men Are From Mars* is that many years ago, all men lived on Mars, and all women lived on Venus. Once they got together, they respected and enjoyed their differences—until one day when everybody woke up completely forgetting that they had once come from different planets. And ever since, men mistakenly expect women to think and communicate and react the way men do, and women expect men

to think and communicate and react the way women do. These unrealistic expectations cause frustration. But when we understand the God-given differences between male and female, we have more realistic expectations of the other sex, and our frustration level drops.

[Ray] Speaking of which, we do realize that it can be very frustrating for some people when gender differences are painted in such broad strokes, since there's such a large spectrum of what women are like and what men are like. Both men and women come in different shapes and sizes but by and large, we feel that most will identify with these characteristics.

[Sue] With that said, let's look at some of the differences between men and women.

[Ray] Men get our sense of self from achievement. We tend to be task-oriented, and being self-reliant is very important to us. You put those two together, and you get people who hate to ask for directions or for help. I'll wander in a store for 15 minutes trying to find something on my own because accomplishing the task of getting a certain item isn't going to be satisfying unless I can do it on my own. For us, asking for help is an admission of failure; we see it as a weakness.

[Sue] Women get our sense of self from relationships. Where men are task-oriented, we are relational-oriented. Our connections to other people are the most important thing to us. Instead of prizing self-reliance, we tend to be interdependent, enjoying the connectedness to other people, especially other women. For us, both asking for help and offering it is a compliment; we're saying, "Let me build a bridge between us. I value you, and it'll bind us."

[Ray] Men usually focus on a goal. We want to get to the bottom line, to the end of something.

[Sue] But women tend to enjoy the process. Not that reaching a

goal isn't important, but we like getting there too. That's why driving vacations are so very different for men and women; the guys want to get to their destinations and beat their best time with the fewest stops, and we sort of treasure the time to talk and look and maybe stop at the outlet malls along the way!

Gender Differences, Continued

[Sue] We believe these admittedly broad-brushed differences are rooted in God-created traits. In fact, some Christian authors like Gary Smalley and Stu Weber have addressed them in their books as well.[\[2\]](#) Ray, why don't you continue with the next point about men—something that's bound to be real surprising?

[Ray] Well, yes, men are competitive. Big shock, huh? Whether we're on the basketball court or on the highway, we just naturally want to win, to be out front. Many of us are driven to prove ourselves, to prove that we're competent, and it comes out in a competitive spirit.

[Sue] And it's not that girls aren't competitive, because of course we are; it's just that we tend to be more cooperative than competitive. When girls are playing and one gets hurt, the game will often stop and even be forgotten while everyone gathers around and comforts the one who went down. It's that relational part of us coming out.

[Ray] Men are often more logical and analytical than women.

[Sue] And we tend to be more intuitive than men. This isn't some sort of mystic claim; there was a study at Stanford University that discovered women catch subliminal messages faster and more accurately than men.[\[3\]](#) Voila—intuition.

[Ray] This difference is evident in brain activity. Men's brains tend to show activity in one hemisphere at a time . . .

[Sue] . . .Where women's brains will show the two hemispheres communicating with each other, back and forth, constantly. That means that often, men and women can arrive at the exact same conclusion, using completely different means to get there. Our thinking has been accused of being convoluted, but it works!

[Ray] Men are linear. We can usually focus on just one thing at a time. That's why you've learned not to try to talk to me while I'm reading the paper. I really struggle to read and listen at the same time.

[Sue] Yes, I've learned to get your attention and ask if I can talk to you so it'll be an actual conversation and not a monologue! God made us women to be multi-taskers, able to juggle many things at once. It's a requirement for mothering, I've discovered. Many times I'd be cooking dinner and helping the kids with homework and answering the phone and keeping an ear on the radio, all at the same time.

[Ray] Men tend to be compartmentalized, like a chest of drawers: work in one drawer, relationships in another drawer, sports in a third drawer, and so on. All the various parts of our lives can be split off from each other.

[Sue] Whereas women are more like a ball of yarn where everything's connected to everything else. That's why a woman can't get romantic when there's some unresolved anger or frustration with her husband, and he doesn't see what the two things have to do with each other.

[Ray] One more; men are action-oriented. When we feel hostile, our first instinct is to release it physically. And when we're upset, the way for us to feel better is to actively solve the problem.

[Sue] Women are verbal. (Another big surprise, huh?) Our hostility is released with words rather than fists. And when we're upset, the way for us to feel better is by talking about

our problem with other people.

More Gender Differences

[Ray] When men are under stress, we generally distract ourselves with various activities to relax. That's why you see so many men head for the nearest basketball hoop or bury themselves in the paper or TV. But there's another aspect of the way we handle severe stress that can be particularly frustrating to women who don't understand the way we are: a man withdraws into his "cave." We need to be apart from everybody else while we figure out our problems alone. Remember, a man is very self-reliant and competitive, and to ask for help is weakness, so he will first want to solve the problem by himself.

[Sue] We women handle stress in the exact opposite way, which of course is going to pose major problems until we understand this difference! When we're stressed, we get more involved with other people. We want to talk about what's upsetting us, because we process information and feelings by putting them into words. But merely talking is only half of it; we talk in order to be heard and understood. Having a good listener on the other end is extremely important. No wonder there is such misunderstanding when people are under stress: as a friend of ours put it, "Men head for their cave, and women head for the back door!"

[Ray] John Gray gave some great advice when he said that when a man's going into his cave, he can give powerful assurance to the woman in his life by telling her, "I'll be back."

[Sue] Works for me! What's next?

[Ray] A man's primary need is for respect. There are a lot of elements involved in respect, which he needs both from his peers and from the significant women in his life: trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval, and

encouragement. A man needs to know he's respected. He also needs to be needed. That's why it's so devastating to a man when he loses his job. He gets his sense of self from achievement, and he needs to be needed, so when the means to achieve and provide for his family is taken away, it's emotionally catastrophic.

[Sue] It's good for us women to know that, so we can be grace-givers in a time of awful trauma. I think that just as a man is devastated by the loss of his job, a woman is devastated by the loss of a close relationship; both losses reflect the God-given differences between us. Just as a man needs to be respected, we primarily need to be cherished. Cherishing means giving tender care, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance. We need to know others think we're special. And just as a man needs to be needed, we need to be protected. That's why security is so important to us. A man needs to be able to provide, and a woman needs to feel provided for.

[Ray] One final difference. For men, words are simply for conveying facts and information.

[Sue] But for women, words mean much more. Not just to convey information, but to explore and discover our thoughts and feelings, to help us feel better when we're upset, and it's the only way we have to create intimacy. To a woman, words are like breathing!

Women's Needs and Issues

[Ray] We have been examining how God created men and women to be different. So it's not surprising to find how many of our uniquenesses and needs are addressed by God's commands and precepts in the Bible.

[Sue] In this section we'll consider women's needs and issues, and look at how God's commands fit perfectly with the

observations we've made. In the next section, we'll look at men's needs.

As I said above, our primary need as women is to be cherished—to be shown TLC, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance.

[Ray] And in Ephesians 5:25, we read God's command that addresses this need: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." When we think about the way Christ loves the church, we see a sacrificial love, a tender love, and a love that is committed to acting in the church's best interests at our Savior's own expense. God doesn't just want men to love their wives like they love sports—He wants us to love our wives in a way that makes them feel cherished and very special. He wants us to love our wives with a sacrificial love that puts her needs and desires above our own.

1 Peter 3:7 gives further instruction along this line: "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way." The Greek literally reads, "Dwell with them according to knowledge." The only way to live with your wife in an understanding way is to seek to know her. And when a husband listens and responds to what his wife shares—remembering that women are created to be verbal—she will feel cherished and understood and loved.

The last part of 1 Peter 3:7 continues, "live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman." This isn't a slam on women. When we read this verse, we ought to think along the lines of a fine china cup. It's definitely weaker than a tin cup, but that's because it's so fragile, delicate, and far more valuable. When we serve dinner on our china, we're very careful in handling it, and extremely protective of washing and drying it. We treat our china with tenderness and gentleness because of its fragility and value. That's how we cherish it. And that's how a man is to treat his

wife—not roughly or carelessly, but with tenderness and gentleness, because God made women to be treated with special care.

[Sue] The flip side of needing to be cherished is our need for security. We need to be protected and provided for. Even when a wife works, she wants to know that her husband is the main provider, or at least truly wants to be and is working to that end. The burden of being forced to provide for our families is bigger than we should have to bear.

[Ray] God created that need for security within women. That's why He puts such a high value on the provisional aspect of a man's character. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." God wants us men to be diligent workers and providers. He created us to bear the burden of providing; women are to be protected from that burden whenever possible.

Men's Needs and Issues

[Ray] Men's primary need is for respect and support—to receive trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval and encouragement.

[Sue] I think God intends for wives to meet that need by submitting to our husbands, as we are commanded to do in Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:1. Submission doesn't mean giving in or being an overworked doormat; it's a gift of our will. It means submitting to God first, then demonstrating that submission by choosing to serve and respect and be our husband's Number One supporter. Even when a man is more of a jerk than a Superman, he needs the respect of his wife, even if she has to ask the Lord for His perspective on what areas of his life are worthy of respect!

It's interesting to me that in Ephesians 5, at the beginning

of the passage on marriage, Paul exhorts women to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord, and then closes this section by saying, "And let the wife see to it that she respect her husband." (v. 33) Submission and respect aren't the same thing, but they're both necessary to meet a man's God-given needs. In the middle of this "marriage sandwich," so to speak, is the awesome command to men to love their wives sacrificially and tenderly, as Christ loves the church. What I see is that submission and respect is a natural response to that kind of love.

[Ray] Another aspect of men's constitution is that we're action-oriented, whereas women are verbal.

[Sue] Yes, and that's why I'm very intrigued by the wisdom of Peter's admonishment to women, where he says,

You wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

To men, words are cheap—and if they're coming from a woman, all too plentiful! What impresses a man is what a person does, not what they say. So here the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to basically tell us to shut up and live holy lives, which is the only language that's going to have a true impact on a man.

[Ray] Another characteristic of men is that we tend to be self-oriented, as opposed to women who are more relational.

[Sue] It's interesting to me that Paul exhorts men to love their wives as they love themselves and their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28,33). And he does this without condemning them for that self-orientation; he just uses it as a point of reference to demonstrate how powerfully men are to love their wives. From what I've observed at the health club about the way some men love their bodies, God wants men to indulge their

wives with some major pampering!

[Ray] One last comment. While men and women may be constitutionally different by design, we do share one important and serious flaw: our sin nature. Both genders are prideful and selfish. And that is one reason we find commands to both men and women to serve the other sex. But in the midst of our service, we can certainly enjoy the differences God planted!

Notes

1. Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
2. Smalley, Gary. *Hidden Keys to a Loving Lasting Marriage*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1984. Weber, Stu. *Tender Warrior*. Sisters, Ore.:Multnomah Books, 1993.
3. Smalley, *Hidden Keys*, p. 17.

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