

Recognizing Our Own Needs

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While the wives of elders, deacons, and preachers (and the single women in leadership positions such as teaching) must be strong and self-sacrificing, we cannot afford to ignore our own needs. We are human (and not super-human), just as our husbands are. Especially where there are young children, the needs of the wife and mother are often relegated to the back burner. It is true that the role of a leader calls for unselfishness—for placing the needs of others ahead of our own needs. Nevertheless, many disasters within the home might have been averted if this unselfishness had not been carried to extremes. Some women actually take pride in and boast of their refusal to take time for themselves, saying they are just “too busy” to bother with proper rest, diet, and even grooming, cleanliness, and dress. Sometimes the best thing a mother can do for her children, as well as for her husband, is to take a nap.

Of course, we would all agree that our spiritual needs should come before our physical needs. For many long years, particularly for those women who have several young children, it seems as though we are never able to find any time for ourselves, even for Bible study and prayer. Sometimes in worship we find ourselves wondering, “Why am I here?” Bible classes and worship services are pressure-filled hours of trying to teach and train our children, to the point that we ourselves seldom receive any benefit at all. It is impossible to avoid the feeling that all eyes are upon us and our children. Preachers’ wives in particular usually have to care for and train their children alone. Deacons are often involved in teaching Bible classes or taking a leading role in the worship. Of course, one would assume that elders’ wives would not have young children, although there are always grandchildren.

I remember so well in one church where my father preached how the wife of one of the elders would sit up on the second row from the front. If a baby cried, she would turn around and glare at the mother until the mother, red-faced, got up and took the baby out. I also remember an older preacher who, when our first child was a baby, told me that the Scriptural place for a mother with a baby to sit is on the back pew on the end. I had been feeling guilty—with a little help from some others—for sitting at the back. The reason I did so was that, when we sat near the front, the people behind us would play with our daughter. She was a very friendly (and beautiful, even if I do say so myself) baby.

When we have to take one or more children to the nursery or cry room, we are often confronted with a situation where other mothers use that place and that time for visiting with each other and allowing their children to play. Those who are looking for a place where they can hear and worship, while attempting to train their children to behave (and, beginning from a very early age, to listen, to sing, to bow their heads during prayer), are often doomed to disappointment and frustration.

Preachers are often away from home for long periods to work in Gospel meetings and to attend and/or speak on lectureship programs. This creates a “double whammy” for their wives who are mothers of young (or even adolescent – **especially** adolescent) children. The wife and mother is usually unable to take advantage of these opportunities for spiritual growth, because of school and because of the expense and inconvenience of trying to find a place for the whole family to stay. (These difficulties suggest one of the excellent arguments in favor of home schooling: flexibility and being able to adjust the schoolwork to the occasion or situation.) Not only is she deprived of these opportunities, but she is also deprived of a husband and her children of a father for extended periods of time.

It is very important that she learn to take care of basic repairs and gain some degree of independence. I did not do this (coming from a long line of Southern belles who believe it is someone else’s job to unstop the toilet), and I have had many, many occasions to regret my ignorance. She must attempt to fill the shoes of both mother and father. Learning to drive, if she does not know how, should be an imperative. She must do all the chauffeuring, helping with homework, and enforcing rules of cleanliness – both of bodies and rooms. She must keep the peace, which includes settling fights as well as positive teaching. As important as all of these are, her most important (and most difficult) responsibilities are the teaching, the training, and the discipline.

The children must be taught to respect their father, as well as to respect their mother. They must know that their father’s rules will be enforced even when he is away. Children tend to take advantage of Mother when Dad is not there. She must never be guilty of storing up all the children’s offenses until their father comes home. This practice is unfair to the father, who is forced to become the “bad guy,” and it causes the children to await his homecoming with fear and dread rather than eager anticipation. In addition, it diminishes the children’s respect for their mother. They know she isn’t going to punish them for disobedience or even impudence.

She only yells and threatens and bluffs. They will ignore her and are often willing to risk punishment as long as it is deferred – out of sight, out of mind.

Wives must find ways of setting aside time for themselves for study and prayer (get up early in the morning or put kids to bed early at night. Naps during the day, or at least resting quietly with a book or listening to music), and even for recreation (reading, watching TV, taking kids to park, McDonald's, exchanging babysitting with other mothers for shopping trips, movies, etc.). She might use the times when her husband is away to do special things (easy meals instead of doing a lot of cooking, relaxing chores and routines just a bit) she and the children would enjoy, since her husband would not want to do them when he is home.

While spiritual needs are definitely more important than physical ones, there must be a balance; a woman's physical needs are also important and must be attended to (bodily exercise, temple of Holy Spirit [1 Tim. 4: 8; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16]). She needs to allow herself time for good hygiene and grooming (makeup, hair, dress); these things are particularly crucial to morale. Paul wrote to the Romans that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3), implying that we ought to think highly of ourselves. God created us, and He blessed us – all of us – with certain abilities. In other words, we should look at ourselves realistically and objectively. This ability to provide an accurate judgment and assessment of ourselves grows with maturity.

Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man. That statement covers all aspects of a human being's makeup and needs. These needs would include a woman's (and a man's, for that matter!) physical health. She needs proper food, rest, and exercise. She should keep up with regular medical and dental checkups (as she should with her children also). When children are small, these things can loom as insurmountable difficulties. This is one of the areas where she should be able to ask for and receive the support and help of her husband, since she usually urges him to take care of his health. The average man is not generally careful about his own health. He needs to be reminded that he has his family to think about, and not just himself.

One area of need that women are reluctant to talk about with anybody is their need for love – for both sex and affection, in addition to the superior *agape* form of love. Go back and read the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. While some want to interpret this poetic book as an "allegory" of sorts, with the bride representing the church and Solomon the bridegroom representing the Christ, it seems to me more logical to take it quite literally, as written by and

about a young couple (Solomon and his bride) and their passionate, physical, conjugal love. It is a beautiful song, and it inspires us to take more interest in fulfilling the needs of our mates.

Men—especially young men—generally have much more powerful and urgent sexual drives than young women do, who are exhausted, distracted, and pulled in pieces by children and twenty-four-hour household responsibilities. When she is young, a woman may often have to content herself with the knowledge that she has fulfilled her husband's needs and has given him unselfish love. (This is an extremely important consideration. No doubt some husbands have strayed because their wives were selfish. I hasten to add that this is by no means true in every case, or even in most cases). Still, most women's need for sex cannot be discounted, and we will ignore it at our peril. We can be tempted by a man who offers us the love and physical gratification which we have denied ourselves, or which our husbands have denied us. As husbands and wives mature and age, and as the children grow up and leave home, the desire level often shifts, and can bring about a greater balance and compatibility between the needs of both.

Conclusion

We cannot improve on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 for a good description of *agape*:

Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things hopeth all things, endureth all things.¹

Endnote

1. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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