

Dealing With Life's Button Pushers  
*When Your Spouse Pushes Your Buttons*

On September 11, 2001, the world changed. As the twin towers were being engulfed in flames, those trapped on the upper floors and those aboard hijacked flight 93 desperately reached for their cell phones to get one last message out.

I'm not sure, but I would guess that this was the first time in recorded history that a group of people facing death were able to communicate with those who were most precious to them.

What do you think they said? Incredibly they all uttered the same words, "I love you." No body argued or demanded anything. They didn't give instructions for running the business or distributing assets. There wasn't even a trace of anger or bitterness. Only the simple but profound words, "I love you."

Nine eleven and the words of those victims touched the heart and soul of our nation. People reevaluated their lives. Couples who were on the verge of divorce reexamined their options and decided to stay together. Career professionals who would stay late at the office now started making it home for dinner. Young couples who were postponing marriage or couples that hadn't started a family yet, decided not to wait any longer.

Rebbietzin Jungreis, a Jewish author says in her book, "The Committed Marriage," a young woman confided in her, "Life is so uncertain, at least I should have someone to whom I can say with a full heart, 'I love you.'"

In the days following September 11 it seemed like there was the beginnings of a spiritual renaissance taking place. There was a quest for God, a yearning for love, marriage, and family.

Unfortunately all that quickly faded.

When reports from Afghanistan publicized the success of our military, the surrender and retreat of the Taliban, it's like we all breathed a collective sigh of relief and by January everything was back to normal.

The media reported that church and synagogue attendance was down. The God Bless America sings started to become fewer in number, and people went back to their old ways of finding satisfaction: work, shopping, and entertainment.

The voices of those doomed souls reverberate and echo in the air. "I love you. I love you," they cry out. But somehow the depth of their significance has been lost.

What happened? For a brief moment we took our eyes off ourselves and love took on a whole new meaning. It was more than just an emotional response. It was more than something that was focused on us and what we could get.

We're in week two of a 4 week series called "Dealing With Life's Button Pushers" and today were looking at what to do when it's your spouse who pushes your buttons.

Depending on how intense things have gotten you might title this, "Help I'm Married to The Wrong Person."

Maybe that's the way you feel today.

The question I want us to think through today is, "What does God say?" What does God say about marriage, about relationships, about spouses who push our buttons?

We started off last week looking at why we believe the Bible is authoritative. If you missed last week's message you can pick up a tape. We also have some more extensive tapes in the library on the trustworthiness of the Bible if you want to look into things further.

Without rehashing last week's intro let me just say we believe the Bible has God's fingerprints all over it.

Two weeks ago police arrested Joseph Edward Duncan for murder and kidnapping. As they began to run his prints they matched him to an 8 year old murder case in California. They did the match by using just the side of one of his fingers. They didn't even have an entire print. But it was enough to get a match.

We have all the prints of God, from flawless history and science to precise prophecy. The Bible backs up it's claim of divine authorship.

So one again, let's see what the Bible says about a life issue.

*I. Before The Fall, There Was No "I want my needs met," Attitude*

We want to start in Genesis again, so **turn with me to Gen 2 Pg 4**

God had pronounced, *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."* (Gen 2:18)

You would expect that the next thing God would do would be to make a suitable companion for Adam. Instead this is what He does: **read 19-20**

This is so like God. He always does a lot of preparation work in our lives. Here Adam participated in this gigantic object lesson.

As he named the animals (which was a big job, but not as big as we might expect. There was a dog and a cat, not all the breeds and variations that we have thousands years later.)

But it was still a big job. And at the end of the day Adam had been confronted by this vast variety of living creatures. And something became absolutely apparent to Adam.

Not only did every animal have a suitable companion, but none of those animals were like him in the most important ways. *"for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."*

### **Verse 21-25**

This one was like Adam. This was the one that he could relate to on a mutual level. That could never happen with any other living thing. That's why he says, "This is now..."

And notice, they were not ashamed. Not physically. Not emotionally. Not spiritually. No sin means no shame.

They were in perfect harmony with their creator and with one another. Their needs for meaning and purpose in life; their needs for significance; their needs for companionship, were all met.

But something happened to change all that. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God.

### **Look what Satan promised: Read 3:4-5**

God had said, "Don't eat the fruit or you die." You can't get much plainer than that.

Satan, who feeds us the same line, says "Sin won't hurt you. In fact there's a benefit from sin. Your eyes will be opened and you can be like God, knowing good and evil.'

“Right now you only know good because God’s holding out on you. God’s keeping something from you.”

Does that sound familiar? It ought to. Satan gives us that same special.

But see, Satan never gives the whole story. They ate and their eyes were opened. They did know good and evil, but not like God does. God knows evil without experiencing it. That’s impossible for us.

So what happens? They hide from God, they blame one another, and they have kids who murder.

How many times must Adam and Eve said, “How did we ever get to where we are today? What happened to that beautiful relationship we used to have?”

How many times have you asked that same question? “What happened?”

What happened to Adam and Eve was they allowed sin to turn their eyes away from God who perfectly met all their needs. Now they began to look at one another to meet those needs.

You know a husband can’t meet all his wife’s deepest needs. A wife can never perfectly meet all her husbands needs.

Sin causes us to focus on ourselves. “I’m not happy. He’s not my knight in shining armor like he was when we were dating.” “She’s not the loving person who paid so much attention to me like she did at the beginning of our marriage.”

And instead of saying, “I love you,” and putting the focus on our commitment, we say “You don’t love me like I want to be loved.”

- I. *Before The Fall, There Was No “I want my needs met,” Attitude*
- II. *God Has A Plan For Marriage That Even Works For Sinners Like Us*

I’d like us to look at two New Testament passages this morning that give specific instructions to husbands and wives. There’s a myth about marriage that we all seem to buy into to some degree. It’s the myth that marriage is all about me.

None of us would admit to basing our marriages on this assumption, but all of us at some level believe it.

When we are honest with ourselves, we see that much of what we are doing in our marriage is motivated by this believe that marriage is about me. Therefore it is appropriate for me to relate to my spouse in a way that will insure that my needs are met.

Now somebody might be saying, hold on. I don't think that it is inappropriate to seek to have my needs fulfilled in marriage.

I believe I am entitled to get something out of this deal.

Certainly our culture would tell you that you are right. Let's see what God says:

### **First turn to Ephesians chapter 5 pg 1041**

Ephesians five is a awesome passage for husbands and wives. I always include it in every wedding I perform. But it also can be a hot button passage. In June of 1998 the Southern Baptist Convention made every major news outlet by amending it statement of beliefs to say this:

"...the husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to his people.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ.

She, being in the image of God, as is her husband, and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation."

One editorial on the amendment was titled: *Keeping Women In Servitude Down On The Plantation: Why Southern Baptists Resurrected The Hermeneutics Of Slavery*

Well, that Southern Baptist statement was actually lifted from this passage in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5 is the divine pattern and the divine pattern doesn't condone slavery or servitude.

Here's God's command for all of us: **Read vs 21**

Verse 21 introduces a section that tells what our relationships are supposed to look like. And the first relationship that's tackled is marriage.

Now we're not going to have time to do an in depth study of this passage this morning. Go home and read it this afternoon, it's very straight forward.

We can't get into every detail but we can state the central point:  
A husband's and wife's role in marriage centers around mutual submission or ministry to the other, not manipulation to have his or her needs met.

Marriage is about submission!

It is about me submitting my desire to have my needs met in my spouse to the higher calling of serving my spouse.

Let's just begin to read through here keeping in mind how this is introduced:  
*"submitting to one another in the fear of God."*

### **Read 22-24**

In this domain of submitting to one another wives are to look to their own husbands for headship.

You say, "I don't even like the terminology."

Well, maybe part of that comes from a misunderstanding of terms like headship and submission. And maybe part of that comes from the fact that we think marriage is really all about us so we're sure not going to serve the other person.

The original New Testament was written in Greek. The word "submit" is a translation of the term, *hupotasso*. The prefix *hupo* means "under," (*hypoglycemia*) means "under the proper level of glucose."

*Tasso* means "to put in order, to station."

So *hupotasso* means "to station yourself under."

It has to do with prioritizing the other person's needs and putting them before your own.

Now let's see what the husband's responsibilities are. **Read vs 25**

That's powerful, isn't it? Remember this is "submitting to one another."

If you think about it, in a very real, tangible, way, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, submitted Himself to us.

We just read in verse 23 that Christ is, "the Savior of the body."

What did He have to do to become our Savior? He had to give His life. The King of the universe, the Almighty took on humanity in the greatest act of humility the world has ever seen.

Our Creator became one of His creation to be our Savior. God entered our world through Jesus Christ. He humbled Himself to the point of bearing the judgment for our sins.

He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cruel cross. All of that was the ultimate demonstration of servanthood. The almighty became our servant because he cared more about our good than He did about His own peace and comfort.

The cross wasn't about Jesus Christ having His needs met. The cross was about Jesus Christ meeting our need in a self-sacrificial way. Not in an emotional way, but in a self-sacrificing way.

Now of course the truth is God made us as tri-part beings. That means that by design we were body, soul, and spirit.

The body is the physical, the spirit communicates with God, and the soul is the seat of the emotions.

By nature we're emotional people. Emotions are good things. Could you imagine living without any emotion! Emotions are fine unless they're running our lives.

And here's where it really impacts marriage. The emotion of love is very important to us. We meet that special person and we feel the emotion of romantic love. That's God's design.

But now, here's the reality: Any emotion, by definition, cannot be permanently sustained. Emotions fade. That's their nature.

Think about the last time you experienced real deep sorrow. I've experienced in my life and in the ministry some very intense times of grief\_where I was incapacitated by the depth of my sorrow.

Today, when I think about those situations, I still cognitively grieve, but I'm not incapacitated by the depth of my sorrow because the emotion of grief has faded.

Emotions fade\_that is their nature. We'd experience emotional overload if they didn't. Could you imagine an emotion at it's peak intensity that never fades, and then you'd just add another and another. We'd totally lose it.

Well guess what\_the emotions you experienced when you first met your spouse will fade as well. That is a reality of our existence.

The problem is that much of what we do in our marriages is based on emotion, not truth.

So as long as the emotion of love is there, the feeling of love, we act lovingly.

But when the emotion has changed, we excuse ourselves from acting lovingly.

You can see in a cultural reworking of the marriage vows a number of years ago to say "as long as we both shall love" instead of "as long as we both shall live."

The assumption here is that as long as we continue to feel the emotion of love we'll stay committed to each other. But should that feeling of love cease, we have an out.

Well, guess what, the feeling of love will always mature and change over time. And at the core, love is left standing as an action, not just a feeling.

This is what we looked at last week in I Corinthians 13. These are actions, not feelings. These are choices, not emotions.

And I am capable of making these choices regardless of how I feel.

What's the proof of this: Jesus Christ. The one that I'm to use as my example.

He chose to act in love despite how he felt. *"But God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."*



And here is the incredible thing: When I choose to act lovingly, the feeling or the emotion will often follow. Not always immediately. But over time as I change my attitude I begin to see my spouse differently.

And it is a deeper, more real emotional experience than can be summed up in that initial "falling in love."

I can really say that after 34 years of marriage, I feel more of an emotion of love toward Sandy than I ever felt. But that emotion follows the actions of love, it doesn't precede it.

- I. *Before The Fall There Was No "I Want My Needs Met" Attitude*
- II. *God Has A Plan For Marriage That Even Works For Sinners Like Us*
- III. *Marriage Is About What I Give Not What I Get*

The second New Testament passage I want to look at just briefly is **I Peter, chapter 3, pg 1077.**

The book of I Peter is written to Christians who were suffering. The main point of the book is "Get your eyes off your self and put them on your living hope. Put them on God. Focus on your eternal life and destiny. Keep your mind on Christ."

Chapter 3 applies this idea to the home. First to wives of problem husbands. **Read 3:1-6**

I read verse 6 to Sandy and tried to convince her to call me Lord, but that didn't go over to well.

One thing that's striking in all these verses is that the Bible never commands husbands to make sure that their wife is doing the right thing, and wives aren't told to straighten out their husbands.

The commands are always gender specific. Wives do this. Husbands do that. Don't keep checking up to see if the other person's doing what they should be doing. Or, what you think they should be doing. That's between them and God. Just do what you should do.

It's been said that most women marry men expecting to change them, and most men marry women expecting they'll never change! Talk about a recipe for disaster.

If I could sum up Peter's word to the wives here it's, "Don't nag the guy."

You want to push a guy's buttons just keep nagging him.

Pr 27:15 *"A continual dripping on a very rainy day And a contentious woman are alike."*

Pr 25:24 *"It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman."*

For all you guys who are saying, "Amen. Preach it brother!" Hang on, we'll get to you in a minute.

But notice, this passage is for wives who are serious about God, but their husbands aren't. It says, they don't obey the Word. They're pushing their wife's buttons by the way their doing life.

Peter says, don't nag. Respect your husband for the position God has given him in the home even if he isn't living up to it, and let God change his heart.

Don't paste "repent" signs on the bottom of his beer cans. Don't put gospel tracts in his underwear drawer.

You serve him in an biblical way and think about his most important need which is his knowledge of God and his obedience to God.

This can be hard stuff but remember marriage is about what I give, not what I get.

So wives don't nag your aggravating husband.

But now how about husbands? **Read vs 7**

There are no perfect wives in the world, just like there aren't any perfect husbands.

But guys, just because your wife isn't perfect doesn't give you any excuse for ignoring her, abusing her, or leaving her.

The biblical command to husbands is understand and honor her.

There have probably been a million jokes told over the years about women and the fact that there so hard to understand. They cry when their happy. They expect men to know what they're thinking.

Scientists have finally come to accept that there are fundamental differences between men and women. It turns out that men's and women's brains are not only different, but the way we use them differs too. Women have larger connections and more frequent interaction between their brain's left and right hemispheres. This accounts for women's ability to have better verbal skills and intuition. Men, on the other hand, have greater brain hemisphere separation, which explains their skills for abstract reasoning.

Most women love to shop. Most men hate shopping. Shopping energizes my wife. It drains me. She wants to look and compare, and go back to the first store and look again. I want to find it and leave. We're different.

But if I don't recognize and celebrate those differences, if I don't dwell with my wife according to understanding then what she does is going to frustrate and annoy me.

That's exactly what will happen if my highest priority is me. Marriage is about what I give, not what I get.

So men we can't use that excuse that we don't understand our wife. We can't say what I'm doing that's aggravating her is her problem. You and your wife are heirs together of the grace of life. Ephesians says your one flesh.

There's no such thing as a married man being able to legitimately say, "that's her problem, not mine." Ephesians 5 says: *"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself."*

If it concerns your wife it concerns you. So dwell with her, give honor to her, as the weaker vessel.

Commentators debate about what "weaker" means. I look at it this way.

2Ti 2:20, using that same word vessel, says: "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor."

A vessel is a container and in a household in biblical times there would be everything from heavy clay cooking pots to fine, delicate vases. I believe Peter is saying, "Husbands, treat your wives a fine, valuable, delicate china.

Not that she's going to shatter and has no inner strength, but treat her with the dignity that comes from her great worth.

Take your time. Get to know your wife. If she's pushing your buttons maybe she needs to hear from you in a kind and loving way that something's bothering you.

Or maybe, you need to reevaluate your agenda. Maybe life's become so much about you. Maybe marriage has become so much about you, that you've lost sight of the precious gift that God has given you in your wife.

On September 11, 2001, the world changed. People reevaluated their priorities, their values, and the meaning of their marriage. People echoed the last words of those doomed souls, "I love you. I love you."

But the change didn't last long. How soon we get wrapped up in life. How quickly we get wrapped up in self.

Is your spouse one of the difficult people in your life? Start first with assessing your relationship with God. Solidify that first. Then get your eyes off your own agenda and write out a plan to begin to truly serve your spouse. Do it to honor God no matter how you feel at first.

Remember: God Has A Plan For Marriage That Even Works For Sinners Like Us  
Marriage Is About What I Give Not What I Get