

The Incredible Worth of a Woman

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Well, today is Mother's Day, and I want to talk about "The Incredible Worth of a Woman." That's a phrase the Lord spoke to me some years ago in 1995. Paragraph B. It was 3:00am. I was suddenly awoken from a sound sleep. It was like the arrow of the Lord struck me and I awoke and I prophesied. I said, "The incredible worth of a woman, who can fully understand it?"

I was startled. I thought, "Who are you talking to, Mike?" I mean, I had never thought such a thought. It's the first time and it's the only time I ever prophesied to myself. I was the only one there to hear the prophecy. The spirit of the Lord was resting on me. I mean, from a dead sleep, I awoke and said, "The incredible worth of a woman, who can fully understand?"

The Lord was saying in essence, "Mike, I'm talking to you. I want you to understand this. I want you to address this," because the answer is that only God can fully understand it, but if we ask Him, He will unpack the implications and the application of what this means to Him.

I have good news: the Holy Spirit will answer this question on a global level. It's actually foundational to the end-time revival. I'll connect that with other verses at another time, but the Lord is going to establish the full honor that He intends for women before He returns. It's connected to the Church in Ephesians 5 being full of glory when the Lord returns. So the Holy Spirit will answer this. So it's a subject that's bigger than Mother's Day, and I'm going to apply it to mothers, but not only to mothers. It's a subject that all of us need to be aware of, committed to, and equipped in, young or old, male or female, single or married.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HONORING WOMEN AND THE ANOINTING FOR PRAYER

Now it's interesting, or *significant* is a better word, that honoring women is connected to the anointing on the prayer movement (1 Pet. 3:7). We'll get there in a few moments. The Scriptures say that if a man doesn't honor his wife, his prayers will be hindered. There will be a resistance in his life in prayer and connecting with God if he doesn't honor his wife. Now if the resistance and the hindrance to prayer is related to dishonoring his wife, then the opposite is true as well. If he honors her because he's agreeing with the Spirit's heart, his prayers will be more effective. That's the point.

Now I can't think of anything more important to a prayer ministry than this reality that God connects the anointing of prayer in the end-time harvest and the glory in the end-time church to honoring women. He puts those together because that's how important it is to the Spirit.

THE LARGEST, MOST DILIGENT, AND MOST EFFECTIVE WORK FORCE

Now when I look over church history I see women as the largest, most diligent, and most effective work force in the kingdom throughout 2,000 years of church history. Now the history books don't highlight that because they're all written by men. That's really true, most of them are written by men, but I believe that if all the facts were before us, there's no question: the most effective, diligent, and even largest work force in the kingdom of God for 2,000 years of church history is women.

I believe mothers are the most successful in making disciples. Now the Great Commission is to make disciples. I believe that mothers have done that more successfully than any other group that could be defined in the Body of Christ. You know, the little disciples are three, then they're five; they're ten and they're twenty, but they're making disciples.

In our thirteen years of IHOPKC, I've heard women say, "Well, I joined full-time staff. I was single, and then I got married, and now I have children, so I'm not really involved in IHOPKC. I'm not in the ministry right now."

I said, "Completely wrong. You're fully in the ministry and you're fully involved with IHOPKC, because making disciples is the commission of every single ministry. There's nothing more important than making disciples, and you're doing it in the most focused, concentrated, high-quality way." Yes, you're fully a part of the vision and the ministry to which God has called us, just like you were when you were single, but the application is different. The value is not less; you're still in the ministry.

SATAN'S LONG-TERM PLAN TO SILENCE AND OPPRESS WOMEN

Well, Satan is opposing this grand, global plan that's on God's heart to establish the full honor towards women that God the Father intends. I mean, this is in the Father's heart. He's above all things. He's the Father. He isn't just a glorious being; at the core of His being He's the Father with His children. He wants His daughters honored in His family.

Now, back in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve fell into sin, God pronounced over Satan that through a woman would come the Messiah who would destroy Satan (Gen. 3:15). It was then that Satan determined a very strategic, focused plan to destroy and oppress women. He has told lies about women ever since, for 6,000 years since the garden of Eden.

THE FATHER IS CONTENDING FOR THE HONOR OF THE WOMEN IN HIS FAMILY

Now it's interesting that it's not only men who believe the lies, but women, too. Even godly women believe these lies about women. Satan wants to minimize the value and effectiveness of womanhood and motherhood. More than that: he wants to completely negate it wherever he can. One way he's sought to do this is by establishing the image of women as sex objects. He has been successful in doing that throughout history in the hearts of many. Or, he causes women to be seen as a free workforce, and have the women do all the work. Or, he has promoted false stereotypes about women, that they're inferior to men, intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually. Again, there are women who buy into those lies and those stereotypes. The Holy Spirit says, "No, this is not OK."

The Lord has a plan to fully establish honor for women that's in the Father's heart. The Father is contending for the honor of the ladies in His family. Again, it's connected and it's foundational to the end-time church that's full of glory and the harvest of all nations, and the prayer movement is linked to honoring women in the home. You know, the man can go to the prayer meeting and be the fiery intercessor, and then not honor his wife at home. I want to assure you he will be resisted by God and he will have a dull spirit. I mean, he may preach his prayers eloquently; he may put more energy into them, but they won't be more powerful. He may say, "Well, I just feel like there's a resistance. In the name of Jesus I bind it!"

I have good news for you: you can't bind Jesus in the name of Jesus. The Lord says, "I want you to honor that woman in your home. I'm watching. It matters to Me."

Well, part of establishing the honor of women, number one, is to treat them with all purity. Paul tells us, "I want you to treat women with all purity" (1 Tim. 5:2, paraphrased). That's something that we're committed to in this spiritual family. We don't want jokes and innuendos that promote the stereotypes that are wrong. We don't want sexual innuendos. We don't want "innocent touching" that's not innocent; it has an element of sensuality and seduction in it by men. We don't want that. We want an atmosphere where women are treated in all, ALL purity in this house.

CELEBRATING THE FULL FUNCTION OF WOMEN TO THE DEGREE GOD ANOINTS THEM

Another element of honoring women and seeing the incredible worth of women is that we celebrate the full function of women to the degree that God anoints them. There's no position of leadership that's held back from them as the Spirit anoints them. They can function in any way that the Spirit bears witness to them. There are many other elements to the honor, but I just wanted to declare it.

THE LORD IS RAISING UP A VIRTUOUS WOMAN CALLED THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Paragraph C. Now there's a virtuous woman that's being raised up in the earth called the Bride of Christ. It's made up of male and female. It's the Bride of Christ. Now we see her brokenness. We're often critical of her. She stumbles, but I want you to know, the Lord understands her incredible worth to Him. Though it's important to address the failures and deficiencies in the Church, we must do it with honor and tenderness and humility as we address the great gaps and failures in the Church.

Now the way that Jesus talks to His church, the way that He sees His church, is the model of how we're to relate to one another, not just men to women but men to men, women to women. All relationships are based on this model, and that's what we'll develop for a few moments here. In order to honor women or in the bigger sense just have honor in relationships in the Body of Christ, we have to begin with seeing people as the Lord sees them.

It begins with seeing them like He sees them. Honor isn't just something that's verbal; honor is established with seeing differently. We'll talk about that in a few moments.

"WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WIFE? FOR HER WORTH IS FAR ABOVE RUBIES"

Proverbs 31:10. That night in November 1995 that I mentioned a few moments ago, when I awoke and prophesied about the incredible worth of a woman, the Lord highlighted this passage—Proverbs 31:10. He highlighted it, but He put a different angle on it. The question is this: "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies" (Prov. 31:10).

The Holy Spirit asked me a different question. It's not, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" although that's still a great statement. Here was the question: "Who can find the virtue that is in his wife?" Not just to find a virtuous wife, but to actually see the virtue that's in her heart that's not obvious to the natural eye. That's how the Lord challenged me.

HE SEES THE CRY OF OUR SPIRIT FOR FULL DEDICATION

The way the Lord views the Body of Christ is the way He views His people.

That's synonymous, but it's the way He wants us to view one another, which means the way a man views his own wife is modeled after the way Jesus views His wife.

What do I mean by that? Because we can easily miss the budding virtues that are in the heart of a woman or any believer without the help of the Holy Spirit to see it. The way the Lord relates to His wife, the Bride of Christ, He sees the budding virtues in our spirit, in our character, that aren't fully formed. They're not fully manifest; they're not obvious to others. He sees the cry of our spirit to be dedicated to Him long before the dedication is fully walked out.

I have good news: victory doesn't begin in your life when you have a full transformation of an area of weakness. Victory begins in your life when you set your heart to obey in that area, long before you ever get the breakthrough. Now the breakthrough brings the victory to fullness, but the victory begins with the setting of the heart, the intention of our heart, those budding virtues.

“FROM NOW ON, WE REGARD NO ONE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH”

Let's look at 1 Samuel 16:7. The Lord doesn't see as man sees. The Lord doesn't look at people in the way that people look at people. He has a whole different perspective, a whole different paradigm of looking at people. When we look at someone, we look at their outward appearance and that means more than just if they're tall, dark, and handsome. It means more than that. Their outward appearance means their achievements, their failures, their positive achievements, their performance. We look at what they do and we don't see who they are at the heart level. We don't see what they're committed to at the heart level before God.

God says, “I don't evaluate people in the same way you do. I go deeper. I see the intentions of their heart. I see what their heart is committed to, and that's where I begin in measuring My people long before their actions are manifest. I see what they're reaching for, what they're crying out to be.”

Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 5:16. He says, “From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh” (2 Cor. 5:16). Now that we're born again, we don't measure or evaluate people only by who they are outwardly.

Because before we began, before we had the Holy Spirit and cared what the Spirit thought about people, when we were unsaved, we would regard or measure or evaluate a person by who they were in their outward actions. We would look at their weaknesses, their limitations. We would look at their failures. We would look at their accomplishments. Here's what Paul is saying: “When we became born again, we changed the way we evaluate people. We look at who they are in the spirit, meaning who they are in God's eyes. We begin to see them in the way that God sees them, and God always looks at the cry of the heart first.”

That's not all that God looks at, but that's where He begins. What are the intentions, the commitments of the heart? Now when we regard someone according to the flesh, we highlight their failures. I have good news for you: your failures aren't the whole truth about you. Our failures are part of the truth of our story, but our failures aren't the whole story. The things that we determined in our heart to be, the reach in our spirit to love Him and be dedicated, that's as much the truth about us as our failure to walk that out. I'm talking to sincere believers.

THE LORD WILL BRING TO LIGHT THE HIDDEN COUNSELS OF THE HEART

1 Corinthians 4:5 was a verse that revolutionized my view of people some years ago. Because when we understand how the Lord views people, then we view people differently when we see how differently He views them. The good news is, we see ourselves differently when we see how the Lord looks at people.

Paul says this; he's talking about the motives of the heart. "Judge nothing until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things and"—note this—"reveal the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5, paraphrased). By *counsels* he means the commitments of the heart, the intentions, the thing you're reaching for in your heart, He will reveal those things. "Then each one's praise will come from God" (v. 5b, NKJV).

Now before I first discovered the truth of this verse in a deep and personal way, I would have read this verse differently. Here's how I would have read it: "Don't judge a person's motives until the second coming, when God reveals the counsels or the intentions of the heart." Then I would have thought, "Oh no! If God reveals the deep intentions of our heart, that's trouble."

Paul says, "No, no. You don't understand. When God reveals the intentions of your heart, then God will praise or affirm you at the second coming."

I looked at this and said, "He will praise us? You mean He will rebuke us... He will forgive us, maybe. That's what you meant."

Paul said, "No, no, because the motives of your heart aren't only the bad ones. I'm talking about when you rise up and say, 'I don't want to yield to lust. I don't want to yield to bitterness. I don't want to yield to envy. I don't want to yield to these things. No! Lord help me. I don't have the breakthrough but I'm not content with where I am. I want freedom.' The Lord says, 'I see that. That's the truth about who you are. On that day, at the time of the second coming, I will praise you or affirm that.'"

THE LORD SEES AND AFFIRMS THE COUNSELS OF OUR HEART

Now the good news is this: the Lord sees it and affirms it now in His leadership over our life. He doesn't only affirm it on that day; it's just that on that day do we fully see the fullness of how He feels about it. He affirms it now. So, as I looked at this, I began to say, "If the Lord is moved by the setting of our heart to obey Him, then I want to be moved by it. I want to affirm people, not just in the resurrection when the Lord says, 'You see your wife? You see your friend? I was moved by the things on which they set their hearts way back then, but you didn't have any insight about it so you were critical of them because you couldn't see it. It was true all along.'"

I say, "Lord, I don't want to wait until then to get it. I want to get it now." I want to relate to people now based on some insight into how God sees them now.

Now the enemy accuses us and tells us, "You're just a hopeless hypocrite." I mean, we're crying out: we want to walk in greater prayer, greater humility, greater purity, greater freedom. We're reaching for it, and we come up short, and the devil says, "You're just a hopeless hypocrite. Just give up and give in. You're never going to break through anyway!"

The Lord has a very different view. He says, "I see and affirm the counsels of your heart. I see what you're reaching for; stay with it. It moves Me. It pleases Me."

Now the Lord doesn't only begin to enjoy us after we get the breakthrough; He enjoys the relationship with us when we set our heart to obey Him. Again, the breakthrough takes time. Some issues come more quickly than other issues, but He enjoys the relationship when we set our heart, and He affirms that. Again, at the second coming when we're face to face with Him, He will say it publicly, but He feels that way about us even now.

Beloved, this is a dynamic shift and change, the way we evaluate people. Now the reason I'm stressing this, and I'll just take another moment or two on it, is because honor is based on this perspective of evaluating people. If we don't see this, then our honor doesn't have a foundation. We're trying to be positive but we end up making stuff up, and it becomes flattery because we don't really see that virtue in them even in its budding form. He didn't say, "Just flatter people," but, "Encourage them. Speak the truth about them."

Now the challenge is this: that often we have the least spiritual insight into those with whom we're most familiar—our spouse, our children. We see their failures. We see the things they stumble in. We can grow so familiar that we don't see the whole truth. We only see part of the truth, the negative side. It's Mother's Day, so I'll address this a little to husbands, but it's bigger than husbands. I want you to have the most insight spiritually about the one you're most familiar with.

A MULTIFACETED PLAN TO BRING THE CHURCH FROM COMPROMISE TO GLORY

Let's turn to the top of page two. This is an amazing end-time prophecy in Ephesians 5. Paul talks about the time where Jesus will present the Church to Himself full of glory. Now beloved, this isn't just a church in the resurrection. Everyone is full of glory in the resurrection. He's talking about at the time of the rapture when He comes back and the trumpet is blasted, and the Lord returns, and the Church worldwide will be spotless and full of glory.

They say, "Wow, that's a huge gap that has to be filled between now and then."

Now there's a multifaceted plan to bring the Church from compromise to glory. There are several aspects. One: there will be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit beyond any time in history. Number two: there will be great pressures beyond any time in history. An outpouring of the Spirit and pressure isn't enough to have transformation. You would think that if the Spirit is poured out, people would all be transformed. No, that's not true. There's another element. People have to interact at the heart level with truth about God. They have to understand God's heart and receive it and interact with God according to the truth of who He is; then transformation takes place.

I'll add those three points together. There's an outpouring of the Spirit. We're all believing for that. There are great pressures. Whoa, that makes us nervous. But there's a deep interaction with the truth about God at an unprecedented level that's coming. Now that's what Paul is addressing here in Ephesians 5. He says the Church is going to be full of glory, power, purity, wisdom. It will have neither spot nor wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). The compromises will be gone.

AN UNPRECEDENTED REVELATION OF JESUS AS THE ONE WHO CHERISHES

Now you know what it takes to move a spot or a wrinkle from a garment. It takes pressure. You get the iron, you turn it up really hot—eerrrrr—and then, with the pressure and heat—wow, the wrinkle is gone. Wrinkles don't just go away; it takes pressure and heat. Neither do spots. That's not the whole story; just the story of

pressure. Look what it says in verse 29: the Lord is going to cherish the Church. He's going to manifest who He is as the God who cherishes His people. There will be an unprecedented revelation of Jesus as the One who cherishes His people.

Now some translations just use the phrase, "He cares." It's stronger than that. The idea is that He will care with great affection and He will treat His people as a prized possession, as a treasure. This isn't the sterile caring of a maid coming to care for the house. This is a deeply engaged, affectionate, caring of a prized possession. Now it's interesting that when Paul talks about the Church coming to glory in that unique time frame just before the Lord's return, he only highlights this premier characteristic of Jesus. This isn't the whole story, but this is what he highlights. He's going to highlight Jesus as the God who cherishes His people. That will be understood in that day beyond any time in history.

Here's my point. One of the primary modes in which Jesus changes us is by revealing how dear we are to Him and by revealing to us the great worth we have in His eyes. When we feel cherished, we respond very differently. Now this is not the only thing He uses, but if this is how He changes His people, this great Leader, how are we to change people? There are negative components to change, to seeing change in people's lives, but the primary component is the issue of cherishing.

Well, we cherish to the measure that we can see clearly these budding virtues in their spirit. Now there are many examples of this in the Bible that God relates to us in this way. Again, the whole truth about you isn't what you do outwardly and externally. The whole truth about you is who you are internally, on the inside. That's not only true of you; that's true of the people you're close to that might be annoying you and wearing you out. We need to see them beyond just who they are in the flesh. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for insight. Particularly the husband does this for his wife in the home: "Lord, show me who she is."

Lets look at paragraph one, just as a quick example. The Midianite armies were invading Israel. They were right next-door. They were attacking Israel. Gideon went and hid himself trembling in fear. "I don't want to be on the front lines. I don't want to confront the issue. I will hide. I will retreat and hide."

Fair enough. The angel of the Lord appears to him and says, "Gideon, you mighty man of valor" (Jdgs. 6:12, paraphrased).

Mighty warrior? Courageous leadership skills? Gideon looks to his right and his left, and he says, "Who, me?" He says, "You've got the wrong guy! I'm the lowest-ranking one in my family. I'm hiding. I don't like battles. I'm not your guy."

What was happening is that God saw something in Gideon that Gideon couldn't see about his own heart. He said, "Gideon, I know who you are. Your problem is that *you* don't know who you are."

Well, the same thing happened with Peter. The Lord called and renamed him. Simon was his name, and the Lord called him Peter. *Peter* means "the rock," and the idea was, "Simon, you're the Rock. You're the stable leader. You're a stable leader; that's who you are. You're the rock" (Mt. 16:18, paraphrased).

"OK, sounds good. I like it."

Well, some time passes. Peter shakes in fear, and he denies the Lord even before a little servant girl. He didn't look like a stable leader. A little more time passes—you can read the story in Galatians 2. At a critical time in church history in the first century, at a very critical time, Peter went to Antioch and stumbled in hypocrisy because of the fear of man. He fell into and yielded to a man-pleasing spirit and caused tremendous confusion in the Church. Paul rebuked him publicly. He said, "How dare you create confusion?" because he came under the fear of man and he wouldn't stand up for the truth. That's the same thing that he did with that little servant girl, just in a different application.

Someone might say, "Jesus, are You sure You named him right? Stable leader? How about sincere leader?"

"No, he's the rock. I knew he would stumble and fell but I see what is in him. I see the cry of his heart to be that. That's his name. That's how I will relate to him." I mean, beloved this is glorious.

GOD WANTS US TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER DAILY

Let's look at paragraph M. God wants us to encourage one another daily (Heb. 3:13). Now to *encourage* means to put courage in their heart. Now I will apply this to the home. I will apply this to the marriage. It certainly is not limited to that.

We're to put courage in the hearts of people daily. Why do we do it daily? Because the devil is accusing us day and night before God (Rev. 12:10). The devil's work is to accuse us. The devil wants a culture of accusation in the marriage in the home. That's the most common culture in most homes, a culture of accusation. Fault-finding, sarcasm, criticism, bitterness, talking behind each others back, talking face to face with anger, belittling each other: that happens in marriage all the time, even in the kingdom. It happens between husband and wife, parents and children, children and parents, siblings with one another. There's a culture of accusation in most homes in the earth. The devil is winning, because that's his work to accuse night and day. His goal is to get humans to agree with and verbalize the accusations.

God says, "Well, I'm doing something different. My kingdom has a culture of honor. When My people feel the urge to accuse because of their natural fallenness, they'll repent. They'll put courage in the heart instead of take courage out of the heart."

HUSBANDS ARE ALIGNING WITH GOD IN THE BATTLE TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN

Accusation takes courage away from people. Many people, men and women, young and old, have been accused so relentlessly by the devil. Well, he accuses everyone, and in his accusation what he does is to exaggerate the negative and hide or obscure the positive. He does it day and night. So the woman loves Jesus, but the exaggeration of her failures is so vast in her own eyes that she can't see the positive. The budding virtues don't make sense to her. She feels like a hypocrite. The devil is winning.

Then her husband comes along and the Lord says, "Here's my assignment to you. You're to encourage her day and night. You're to put courage in her. You're to break her own agreement with accusation."

Beloved, I'm talking to men that are married: God put you next to that woman as part of God's answer to put courage in her heart.

Well, here's the problem: many men are promoting the accusations of darkness. They're not only taking the negativity; they're enforcing it day by day. I'm talking about men who love Jesus.

GOD WANTS OUR HOMES TO BE STRONGHOLDS OF HONOR

Top of page three. Let's go down to paragraph C. Now God wants our homes to be strongholds of honor in the culture—in the overall society. He's raising up men who see the incredible worth of women because they have a new paradigm of seeing the budding virtues, and they agree with His heart night and day, and they instill women with courage. They don't rob them of courage. They break the power of accusation. That's what a man of God does in the kingdom. He doesn't only do it the home; he starts in the home. He does it wherever he goes: women in the workplace, women in the church, wherever. He's a vessel that sees what God sees, a little. We don't see all that God sees, and we speak words of courage and virtue that are real, not flattery. We call forth the beginning of virtue. We need insight in order to do it.

So we ask the Lord, "Let me see what You see. Then let me say what You say about this woman I live with or this person I work with."

YOU HAVE A CHARGE TO CULTIVATE THE GREATNESS IN HER HEART

Now we have a wedding in our community literally almost every weekend during the summer months. I love to celebrate with some of these young men. I talk to them. They're excited. Some of these men have a wrong view, and I understand because I had it, too. They think, "That girl is so cute, we can work through any problem."

I say, "You know, I like it that you like that, but her cuteness won't hold up and keep you in a culture of honor. It will for a while, but it won't long-term." Do you know that when you vow to marry this woman, not only is it a life-long covenant, but you're also committing to take the stewardship to partner with Jesus to call that woman forth? It's a long-term commitment, all the days of your life—for decades. You're committing to a stewardship to call forth her virtue and her honor. It's Jesus' ministry to His bride but He's entrusting it in partnership with you.

The man says, "Oh, that's fantastic."

Beloved—I'm talking to the men—God wants you to be spokesman. He wants your words to communicate to her what He feels about her and how He sees her. I'm not talking about prophesying to her and having new information. I'm talking about calling out her dedication, calling out her humility; her humility isn't fully formed, her dedication isn't mature, but it's present. She desires to do well, though she stumbles, just like you do, but you're calling forth that desire.

God says, "I want to hear in your mouth the words that I would say to her if I were standing before her. I want her to hear them from you coming from Me."

You don't have to say, "Thus says the Lord..." I'm just talking about throughout the course of the relationship speaking courage about who she is and the virtues that are in her heart. Beloved, this is foundational to being a husband. It's not just about how cute she is and how much fun you'll have and really enjoying life. No, it's bigger than that. You're taking on a life-long commitment to join this stewardship, to partner with Jesus.

YOUR COVENANT OF LOYALTY ISN'T BASED ON YOUR PERSONAL FEELINGS

Now over the years someone says, “Well, it’s year ten, year twenty. I don’t like her anymore. The affections are gone. It’s not happening anymore.” That happens all the time in the kingdom of God.

I tell them, tenderly but straightforwardly, “That’s not relevant to what I’m saying right now. You took on a stewardship and made a covenant that’s not related to having warm feelings. It’s a stewardship you’ll have to all the days of your life. You must be faithful to that stewardship.”

“I know, but I just don’t have that loving feeling anymore.”

I wish you did, but this commitment, this stewardship, isn’t based on that. Your covenant to be loyal to her isn’t based on feelings for her right now. Now I certainly honor feelings in marriage but lots of marriages don’t have them. I’m talking about kingdom ones, but that doesn’t change the stewardship.

Young men need to know what they’re committing to. I’ve heard this so many times: “Oh, you don’t know that woman. She has such a bad spirit. She’s bitter, she accuses, she complains... she’s full of poison!”

I say, “OK, that’s fair, but consider this. She’s been under your leadership for ten years and that’s what she’s like, for real.” I say, “She’s still responsible, but you have to know that you are, too. If that’s the way she talks and she has been under your leadership for ten years, you and the Lord need to have a serious conversation and make some real changes. Because whatever spirit she has, though she’s responsible for it, so are you. She is a mirror expressing the way you’ve lead.”

The man says, “I haven’t done anything!”

I say, “That’s the point.”

He says, “What do you mean?”

I say, “If you plant good seed in a field and do nothing, if you come back ten years later, you won’t have fruit; you’ll have weeds and thorns and thistles.

Just do nothing and you’ll destroy her heart.”

The man says, “Well...”

I say, “No, no. This isn’t ‘Mike being tough on guys’ day. This is reality. Her husband has to nurture that relationship if he wants her to have a vibrant heart.” I don’t mean every few months throwing in a positive word; I’m talking about daily speaking courage and talking of her virtue that’s not even fully formed, and calling it forth. I don’t mean saying, “You ought to be more dedicated.” That’s not what I mean by calling it forth. Calling it forth means, “I see your dedication, your dedication now. It moves His heart. He sees it.”

She says, “I want to be more dedicated.”

Say, “He even sees that, and so do I. I appreciate that in you.”

Now go down to Roman numeral III; we'll look at just this key verse. I want to say this before we get there. 2 Peter 3:7 is the great verse connecting the end-time prayer movement and the grace of prayer to the way we honor our wife in secret in our home. It's the way we treat and talk to her when no one is around. Grace in prayer is connected to this. I can't think of another verse more important for the end-time prayer movement than this issue. I mean, Jesus linked prayer and grace for prayer with the way we treat women.

MACHO PARADIGMS DON'T HONOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now this is really appropriate in the hour when the prayer movement is exploding worldwide. We need to teach the men all over Asia, all over Latin America, all over Europe, all over Africa, all over North America that if you'll do the prayer movement, you must honor women in the way God does. This macho paradigm rooted in darkness is not biblical. It won't impress the Holy Spirit. You can pray more eloquently, you can pray more loudly, you can shout and jump higher, but it won't move God. Talk to different men in our culture and in other cultures; they don't like this. But it's how the Father feels about the daughters and it's how Jesus feels about His bride, which is men and women as well.

Well, guys have told me, "Well, I tell my wife to submit," because of Ephesians 5:22. Verse 25 tells men to love their wives as Jesus loves the Church. A man comes to me and says, "You know, I pointed out that she's supposed to submit, and she isn't."

I've said this and it shocked a few guys, and it needs to: I said, "Any time you use verse 22 instead of verse 25, if you call your wife to submit to you, you're already operating in a wrong spirit." I say, "When you go to your wife and she isn't cooperating with you, go to verse 25. 'Tell me how I'm not loving you the way Jesus loves the Church.'" That's the verse you use when she isn't submitting to you.

I've been married for thirty-five years, and I've never once, nor would I dare use the word *submit* to my wife in that context. I will go to her with verse 25 and say, "What am I not doing? Where are the blind spots that make you not respond to my leadership?" That's the only valid question if she isn't submitting.

Now if the Lord talks to her about submitting, that's between her and God.

You never, never use that word to your wife, ever. Guys tell me that; they say, "Oh, I guess I hit a live one here."

I say, "That's the worst word you could tell me, O young man of God. Go back home and ask her where the blind spots are in the way that you're loving her. I guarantee she will have a quick list."

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN A MANDATE TO UNDERSTAND AND HONOR OUR WIVES

Well, look at what it says in 1 Peter 3. We're to dwell with our wives in two ways especially: with understanding, and by giving honor, or our prayers will be hindered.

I challenge men. I've made it a part of my life goal. I say, "In your spiritual life, you want to grow in prayer, you want to grow in the Word, you want to grow in humility? Make sure that on the list of your life goals, you want to understand your wife. Number two, make sure this is near the top of the list: you want to honor her." Those are two different things that overlap: to understand her and honor her—that's our mandate.

Now, in order to understand our wife we ask the Lord, “Give me insight: how do You see her? Talk to me about her destiny. Talk to me about her makeup. Talk to me about how she processes life.” We’re all unique in how we understand and process information about life. Holy Spirit, let me see what You see. Many men never ask that question. That, to me, is unthinkable, that a man wouldn’t focus on that question in his walk with God. I’ve asked the Lord that question many times about my wife. “Tell me what You see about her. I have to see what You see. I want my prayers anointed.” I mean, I like her, too, but I want my prayers anointed. I mean, I can’t imagine being stuck for decades with God hindering me because I never got around to this. No way! If I’m going to do the work of IHOPKC, I want to do this thing right. It’s too hard, plus I like her.

Ask God, number one. Number two: ask her. “Help me understand you.” Don’t ask her just once; ask her again and again, throughout the years.

Number three: observe, study her, watch her. Dial down, lock in, pay attention. Observe her. You’ll understand her passions, her triggers that trigger negative emotions, her weaknesses, her failures, her strengths. Study her. Ask God, ask her, study her, and you’ll get understanding.

Beloved, it’s essential that you do this. Next, honor her. Honor her.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT WIVES ARE WEAKER VESSELS?

Now I’m just going to mention one thing, and then I want to talk briefly about honor, and we’ll end on prayer. I want to address this issue of weaker vessels (1 Pet. 3:7). Women, that’s not exactly right. *Wives* are the weaker vessel. Now the commentators all debate what this means. One guy says, “Well, they’re weaker intellectually.” A lot of guys write that. I know a lot of smart guys, but I know a whole lot of smart girls, too. I know a lot of girls that are smarter than guys. I don’t think that’s the one.

“Ah, they’re weaker emotionally; that’s it. They’re as smart as guys are, but it’s those emotions.” I know a lot of really oversensitive girls, but I know a whole lot of oversensitive boys. I’ve been in ministry for thirty-five years. I have much more trouble from oversensitive boys than oversensitive girls. They wear me out. I mean, sometimes they’re seventy-year-old boys. So I don’t buy that; I’ve been doing ministry for way too long.

Here’s what I think this means: wives are weaker vessels positionally, meaning in the authority structure of the home. Now I’m not saying this as a joke, but every woman who’s married is under an imperfect male leader. In fifty years, he’s going to make many wrong decisions. I don’t care how wise you are; every one of us is going to make a bunch of wrong decisions, and she’s vulnerable to the consequences. Just like the husband and wife will make decisions, the children are vulnerable to the consequences of those decisions, and they really do hurt the wife when the husband makes wrong ones, and the wife and the husband together do hurt the children sometimes.

What the Lord is saying is this: “She’s in a weaker position here. I want to make up for it. You give her double honor. You go overboard in understanding her, because she is subject to what you’re saying and doing in a way that’s greater than your subjection to her.”

Now God didn’t call men to be the heads of their families. I mean, they are. Many times the woman is actually a better leader. Many times the man is. It’s one here and one there. He did it in order that the family might have leadership in one direction—so that the family could be unified. He didn’t say, “OK, I’ll pick the smartest one

as the best leader. It just so happens it's always the male. Six thousand years later, there's never been an example that's different."

No. That's not what He's doing. He's saying, "I'm giving leadership so that there's direction and unity in the family direction." Anyway, I had to get that off my chest.

SEVEN COMMITMENTS TO HONORING YOUR WIFE

OK, page four. I'll go through this really fast, and then have you respond in a moment. In 1977 I got married. I went to a marriage seminar beforehand, and I highly encourage pre-marriage programs, so that you can learn to communicate in ways you're not guessing. Cuteness isn't going to carry you through the pressures.

Well, I went to one because I was a twenty-year-old pastor of a church. I didn't know anything about marriage, so I thought, "I had better go to a program here and figure out some stuff."

So these guys taught, and I took these principles from them. They worked.

Thirty-five years later I'm staying with them. Now I only have seven, and there are more; I like the number seven. This isn't comprehensive, but I made these seven commitments to my wife Diane thirty-five years ago. I've upheld them in this regard. I come up short; I fail in these commitments. But when I come up short, I acknowledge that I failed her. I believe that we're not hypocrites if we come up short if we're reaching to obey and we acknowledge our failure.

So as far as I know—and I've asked a number of times—each time I haven't followed through, I've looked her in the eye and said, "I've come up short. I apologize. I committed to this to you. I want to give these commitments to you."

Maybe you've been married forty years. You can start them now. Maybe you'll be married one day. That's not a prophecy. The guy says, "Yay! It's confirmed!"

Whether single or married, old or young, you'll be talking into marriages even if it's not your own as a member of the Body of Christ. We all need to know these.

COMMITMENT NUMBER ONE: HONOR HER VERBALLY

Commitment number one: to honor her verbally. I mean, I don't know if I do it daily, but I do it really, really regularly. This is something that's an important part of my stewardship, to honor her. The Bible says to honor her. I recommend a ten-to-one ratio of saying positives to negatives. That's not an exact number. It's not like I have something negative to say, and I have one more positive: "Sweetheart, you're really nice. Now I can get down to business!" You know, it's not one of those. If you have a one-to-one ratio, you'll break her spirit in the relationship, meaning she will despise the relationship. If you give her one affirmation along with one criticism, it won't work at all. If you do that to your children, you'll break their spirit. It really needs to be a ten-to-one or something like that.

COMMITMENT NUMBER TWO: A PERMANENT YES

Commitment number two: a permanent yes. Again, I heard a guy tell me this and I just said, "I'll do it." These weren't my ideas, but I believe them. I've taught this for years. I honor her with action. I'll just give you one example. I told her this on day one. I said, "From now on, for the rest of our life together, on any domestic

issues, if you want it, the answer is yes from now on till we meet the Lord. If you want me to do a task, yes. If you want me to run an errand, yes. You'll say how we spend our family time," because we have time that we've committed together. "If you want to go with this group or that group, then yes. You want to go out and eat at this place or that place? You want to go on vacation here or there? Yes." I said, "I'll give you a permanent yes until we meet the Lord."

She said, "That works!"

I want to honor her. I said, "Every time." I mean it.

COMMITMENT NUMBER THREE: VALUE HER MINISTRY

Number three: I value her ministry. Now what do I mean by that? The stereotype is that a woman should support her husband's ministry, and there's truth to that for sure, but not in every season of her life is her assignment your assignment.

In our thirty-five years of marriage there have been times when she was really focused 100 percent and supporting what I'm doing. In the next season she was focused on our assignment and only overlapping with what I'm doing a little. Then in the next year, in the next season, it changes. I said, "I'm committed to helping you in your assignment in the home or out in the workplace, wherever you go." I'm not demanding that your assignment is always and only my assignment.

COMMITMENT NUMBER FOUR: TAKE THE LEAD IN HUMILITY

Number four. I heard the guy say this. I was really excited about this one. It seems so awesome. I had never done it but I heard it, so I committed to her. Here's what the guy said. In conflict—well, let's call it "intense fellowship." Anyone know what intense fellowship is? It's always the responsibility of the leader of the home to take the initiative to humble himself first—always; every time. That's the biblical model of conflict-solving. That the one with the highest leadership, whether it's in the workplace, wherever it's at, but particularly in the home: they take the lead in humility in humbling themselves.

Now Jesus is the role model. How did He establish or bring us into reconciliation with Himself? Here's how. The innocent One, Jesus, became guilty so that the guilty one, you and I, could become innocent. That's how we get reconciled. There's no other way to reconcile than the innocent One taking the role of the guilty, and then the guilty ones are brought into reconciliation with them. That's the model. Now if it's true that He's innocent and took the role of the guilty, how much more true is it of a husband who is partially guilty as well to take the role in resolving conflict?

So sometimes the conflict is fifty-fifty. Sometimes it's eighty-twenty. Sometimes I'm more the trouble, and other times the trouble is more on her end. But here's what I told her, what I heard in the seminar. I said, "Every time, no matter if it's eighty, or twenty, you're the most responsible. I'll initiate the humility, the humbling. I'll come to you with confession first, every time. I'll search for it. I'll be able to find a genuine confession. I'll come and ask you to forgive me and that's how I'll initiate the process."

She says, "Good! That works for me, too. You'll tell me I'm good, you'll do what I want in the domestic things, and you'll take the responsibility to confess your sin first. I love this!"

Again, I made the commitment. I had never done it before, but it was awesome. I'm glad I did it. I said, "I need to confess it to you if I don't follow through on this every single time."

COMMITMENT NUMBER SIX: AVOID WOMEN YOUR WIFE DOESN'T LIKE

Let's go to number six. I made a commitment to her, because the guys said it and I buy it. I mean, I bought it for thirty-five years. I believe it. I said, "I'll never relate to another woman that you're uncomfortable with for any reason whatsoever—any reason."

Sometimes a wife has discernment. Other times the wife has jealousy and other times it's a mixture of the two. Guys come to me and say, "Yeah, but it's an old friend and my wife is just being jealous."

I said, "So what? So what if she's just jealous? The relationship is different now because you have a covenant with your wife."

"Yeah, but I don't want to lose the relationship."

"No! You don't understand. You made a covenant with your wife. Every relationship is secondary to that. It's reformed in the light of that covenant; every relationship."

The man says, "Yeah, but she's just being jealous."

I said, "So what? Honor her. Do what she wants. Maybe she's not just being jealous, but here's a point to consider. You've been married to her for ten years and she still isn't confident. Tell me what that says about your leadership over ten years." I said, "She's been with you for ten years; she sees what you look at and who you look at. She sees how you talk. She sees how you touch others and she says, 'I'm jealous.' That says a whole lot more about you than it does about her." I said, "Even if it's mostly about you, honor her 100 percent in this."

This really makes young guys mad. When they're newly married, they just grumble. I say, "Totally wrong spirit!"

COMMITMENT NUMBER SEVEN: CONTEND FOR HER HONOR

Number seven: contend for her honor. I made a commitment to her, not just in our home but in other ways as well, but I said, "You'll never, ever have to fight for honor in our home—never. And not only will I give you honor, but so will our two children."

We have two sons. They're both in their early thirties now, Luke and Paul. They would be five, six, seven, and eight years old and they would say something in a disrespectful tone, and I would say, "Guys, you don't understand. You're talking to my wife that way! I have a problem with that."

They would say, "Dad, you're getting awfully intense about that; it's our mom."

I would say, "No! Forget the mom thing for now; she's my wife. We'll have a come-to-Jesus talk right now. You can't do this in my home. I mean it."

I had a number of conversations like that with them. I remember once I came home during the day—and Diane doesn't mind that I tell this story—and she said, "I told you to duh, duh, duh, duh..." She raised her voice in that tone.

I said, "Sweetheart, why did you just do that?"

She said, "Well, I've asked them three times."

I said, "That's not OK."

She said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "If you have to raise your voice and say it three times, that's a statement about my leadership over these two boys."

I looked at her and said, "I apologize to you for that. This isn't OK in my home."

We had another come-to-Jesus meeting. We had quite a few of them. I said, "When my wife asks you to do something, she never has to raise her voice, ever, in this house."

Now if she wants to, that's her business, but I don't want her to have to because I'm not functioning as a leader in a proper way. I'll say this just because it's fun to say: my two sons have honored my wife in a most remarkable way in their thirty-plus years. I mean, it's remarkable. The way they honor their wives is a picture of it. I look at it and say, "Yes, yes, yes!"

Now a child won't do it unless they see the dad do it. If the dad is sarcastic, with a short, angry tone, they'll do it. The dad has to do it twice as much as the children or he won't establish honor for that wife in the home. The dad can't have relapses, and if he does that's OK, because I had failures, too, but I would get my boys together and say, "Did you see how dad talked? That was sinful, and I asked your mom to forgive me and I want you boys to forgive me for talking to mom that way."

They would say, "We got the message."

Then we would get all happy and I would say, "Now you realize how serious I am about you doing it as well? This can't happen in our home, ever. If it does, we have to acknowledge it as sin."

ASK YOUR WIFE HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE IN SHOWING HER YOUR LOVE

Well, as I bring this to an end I want to look at K. Again, a number of you are not married, but you might be or will be, and you know married people whom you need to speak wisdom into when they ask you, but here's your Mother's Day gift, husbands. Paragraph K. Men assume they're doing all of these. That's how we are. "Oh yeah, I do all that. That's cool."

Here's what you'll do for Mother's Day. This will beat flowers. This will beat chocolates. You'll look at her in a private time, not with anyone around, and you'll say, "Tell me how I can improve on any of these things."

Happy Mother's Day. She'll say, "Really?"

"Yeah, now I want you to tell me. I really want to know."

It doesn't have to be these seven. It might be a few other ones, or maybe not all these. You ask her, and I do this to my wife periodically. I say, "Talk to me about how I'm keeping my commitments to you. Show me my blind spots."

She says, "I never feel more loved than when you talk to me and open the door like that." So that's your Mother's Day gift. Now you can still give her the flowers and take her and do what you're doing, but make sure this will be the biggest gift you'll give her today.

And again, I have to acknowledge this. I struggled with this message, because I'm very aware that there are women in this room who don't have a man in their home. They have children, and for many different reasons, in many situations, there are no men. As I was preparing this, my heart was hurting. I saw some faces. I thought, "Oh, this will hurt." I said, "Lord, I don't know how to say these truths and care for their hearts." I still don't know how to do that, because some of them are so aware of a situation where this could never happen for them, but I at least wanted to acknowledge that. Not that that makes it a whole lot better, but at least we're aware of that.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. Let's stand. Happy Mother's Day. I know it went really long, but I got too long-winded on the stories. You don't have to do this, by the way; you can do it in your chair, but I want us to make recommitments to the Lord.