

9 Suggestions for Winning Back Your Wife's Heart

In working with marriages in distress, I've discovered most men have injured the women in their lives emotionally, at least at some level. To understand how this can happen, one needs to first understand one of the ways men and women are usually different.

Most men are predominantly thinking beings—they receive and process experiences in life in a predominantly rational and logical way. If someone says something that offends a man, he will accept or dismiss it based on whether it is true.

Most women are different. Women are usually more in tune with their emotions. They are often more relationally aware. When life happens to them, their dominant reaction is often to respond emotionally first. When someone hurts a woman's feelings, for example, even though the information they receive may be false, it takes them longer to work through the feelings associated with the emotional injury.

Of course the two preceding paragraphs are general statements, but they ring true for most men and women. I would contend though—every woman's heart is injured to a certain extent—and, fairly, probably every man's. Sometimes this injury occurs gradually over time. Sometimes it comes suddenly through serious breaches in the marriage trust.

The heart, speaking in terms of the seat of our emotions, was created much like other parts of the body. When a finger is broken the body is designed to instantly start to heal and protect itself from further injury. When a person takes a swing at you, your natural reaction is to put your hands up in defense.

The same is true of the heart. When a person's heart is

injured, it goes into a self-protective mode to keep it from further injury. Over time, after years of injury, the heart becomes almost calloused, refusing to allow anyone to injure the heart again. A woman who has had years of emotional injury doesn't have much heart left to give to anyone, but especially to the one who has done the injury. She has closed off her heart to keep from being hurt anymore.

Most men enjoy trying to "fix" problems, but men cannot fix their wife's emotions. Emotions are not repaired as easily as one could fix a leaking faucet or program a computer. So what is a man to do if he feels his wife's heart is injured? How do you heal a broken heart?

Of course, Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. He can come in, erase all the pain and make the heart brand new. Most of the time, however, at least in my experience, He lets us wrestle with life's heartache while we learn to better love one another.

The following steps are designed for a man to help heal his wife's heart. This post developed when a pastor came to me with a horrible story of his wife's sexual abuse as a child. Even today she struggles to trust any man, including her husband. I gave him this advice.

Here are nine suggestions for winning back the heart of your wife:

- 1. Seek God.** Whatever draws you closer to God is a good thing—and will make you a better man, regardless of what happens with your marriage. When you are attempting to rekindle your wife's love, use this time to develop and strengthen your relationship with God. It starts as all relationships with God begin—through a recognition of who Christ is and your belief in Him. Start there and grow.

- 2. Practice patience.** The first thing men need to do is to recognize restoring a broken heart will not happen

overnight. Emotions heal very slowly. Steps should begin to restore an injured heart or to rebuild the marriage, but men should not expect too much too soon.

3. Love your wife. This is by far their greatest need. Most wives have their love need unmet. The standard for our love is perfection, since a man is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. As imperfect men, we will actually never love our wife enough. The wife knows, however, when the husband's attention is somewhere else. Many men sacrifice their marriage for their careers or other interests. A wife's love need is new every day. A wife needs to know that she is second only to God in her husband's affections.

I have found that in order for my love for my Cheryl to grow, I need Christ's help. I pray for this often.

4. Romance her. Every woman has a certain need for romance. Many wives had a fairy tale idea of marriage when they were growing up. They realize early in marriage this isn't reality, but their need for occasional romance remains. Most men rarely know how to do this. A man should be genuine, but should recognize and value the uniqueness of his wife and find ways to give her romance.

I gave my wife a "romantic" trip to New York City for Christmas one year. We were going to dance, walk through Central Park and just enjoy each other. It didn't turn out exactly as I had planned it, but I earned huge points in the romance category with my wife.

5. Value words. When a man comes home and says "This house is a mess," being a mostly factual being, that's probably all he meant. He looked around, made a physical observation and stated a factual conclusion. The wife, however, probably did not receive the information that way. The wife most likely heard lots of negative information such as, "You have done nothing all day" or maybe even "I don't like you." This sounds

impossible to most guys' rational minds, but with emotions receiving information, anything could be heard, whether it was the intended response or not. Men need to learn how to be gentle with their wives and the words they use.

One question I ask men is, "Would you let another man talk to your wife the way you talk to her?"

6. Communicate on her terms. Many women communicate best heart to heart—not head to head. A man should allow his wife to see his heart. He should be willing to be vulnerable with her. Men may need to ask their wives to help them learn how to say things to her. Men cannot talk to their wives as they would their guy friends. Women require understanding, compassion, openness and honesty in communication.

7. Give constant assurance. Trust is an important need for a woman in relationships. The wife needs to know that her husband is going to be faithful. Men should not take offense, for example, when their wife asks details about their schedule or the activities of their day. The wife desires to be a partner in her husband's life and these details help her provide trust and security in the relationship. A man should also tell his wife frequently he loves her and is committed to her. She needs this consistent assurance.

8. Learn to Live by truth. Ultimately life cannot be lived strictly by emotions. We need truth. Emotions are often unreliable. A woman who feels unloved may be very much loved by her family, but she fails to feel that truth because of years of emotional abuse. Men should gently, but consistently speak truth in love, reminding his wife of her worth, her beauty and her place in his life. Over time—truth, when given with love, can help heal damaged emotions.

9. Keep doing it! The heart is damaged over years and years of injury. Sadly many women have deep and tragic heart wounds, but much of this injury will have been unintentionally

delivered and small in terms of the magnitude of the incident. Years of emotional injury builds up in the heart until the heart becomes closed. The erasing of the pain will happen just as it was developed—a little bit at a time. The husband cannot try this for a week and then stop. Protecting a woman's heart must become a lifestyle.

Recently I was talking with a man whose wife experiences deep depression. As I talked with this man, it became apparent that, though probably unknowingly, he had been damaging his wife's heart for years. He cannot seem to understand why his wife is so emotional. "Everything seems to upset her," he said. The man told me he had tried to help her through her problems and that he could "fix" everything they had going against them if she would let him. I am not sure I could have ever convinced this man that his attempts at "repair" were probably one of the chief causes of his wife's broken heart.

Most men tell me they don't know how to be who their wife needs them to be or wants them to be. I believe if we want to win back our wives' hearts, we may need to learn how. It's never too late to begin! {eo}

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