Loving Your Spouse Without Ever Touching

Guests:    Dave and Ann Wilson
From the series: Expressing Love Without Touching (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: You’ve heard it said—but it’s true—there are times when a wife isn’t looking for her husband to solve her problems. She is looking for her husband to emotionally process life with her. Here’s Ann Wilson.

Ann: Well, this one time, Dave came home; and I was sitting at the kitchen table so frustrated. Dave comes home—he goes, “What’s going on?” I started venting about my day: “This happened. I feel terribly. I feel like I have no life! I feel like I’m just…”—it was just going on. Dave looks at me and goes, “I’ll be right back.” He comes downstairs with this piece of paper, numbered one to ten. I thought, “He went up there and wrote me this sweet, little encouraging note.” Then, I read it aloud: “Number one, get more organized.” [Laughter]

Dave: Pretty good stuff; huh? [Laughter] I mean, this is not an exaggeration—that’s how clueless I was!

Bob: [Laughter] This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, February 13th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You can find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. When it comes to expressing love in marriage, sometimes, as husbands, we just need to nod our heads and say, “That sounds really hard.” We’ll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You really did that?

Dave: No, I did not, Bob. [Laughter] I don’t remember anything about that.

Bob: Wait, wait, wait. He really—

Ann: He absolutely did that, Bob; yes. [Laughter]

Dave: But wait until you hear what she did with my little piece of paper.

Bob: We’re going to hear that today; because we thought, that with Valentine’s Day here in view, we ought to—

Dave: “Don’t do that.” “Don’t do that on Valentine’s Day!”
Bob: We ought to bring you into romantic mistakes that the Wilsons have made. [Laughter]

Ann: There have been many.

Dave: It’s going to be a long conversation.

Bob: For Mary Ann and me, Valentine's Day is kind of like—not a big deal. We don't get cards for each other; we don't. We typically—

Ann: Bob!

Bob: I know; I know.

Ann: Wait; wait. What are you talking about over there? I get you a card.

Dave: You don't have to call me out on radio. [Laughter] People are listening to this. C'mon; tell them how good I am.

Bob: Do you have a special date on Valentine's Day every year?

Dave: Yes, we usually go out. C'mon!

Ann: Yes, we do. If we're not on the Love Like You Mean It® cruise.

Bob: And if you're on the cruise, that's just a week-long date,—

Ann: That is very special.

Bob: —which is, by the way, where we are right now. We're all on the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise, so our Valentine's Day should be pretty special. I get points. Don't I get points?

Ann: No.

Dave: C'mon Bob; you're working. [Laughter] C'mon; it doesn't count.

Bob: We want to talk about romance and how you cultivate romance. I think the title of this message that you gave on the cruise a couple of years ago was "How to Express Love without Touching."

Dave: Oh—

Ann: That was, actually, your title, [Bob]. [Laughter] Dave and I were thinking, "How do we communicate this?" [Laughter]
Dave: Actually, I said, “I don’t think you can; you have to touch.” But no, we ended up figuring out a way to make Bob’s title a talk that—it helped us; I hope it helped others.

Bob: Well, let’s listen. This is Dave and Ann Wilson talking about loving your spouse without touching.

[Recorded Message]

Dave: It was year eight or nine—so that meant we had two little ones.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: Right? I remember walking, in a moment, in the kitchen. The kids were down or something—they weren’t around. So, I went over and just laid one on her, and I thought it was a really Valentine’s-like romantic moment.

Ann: —even though it wasn’t Valentine’s Day—

Dave: It didn’t matter.

Ann: —which, when he did that, if he would have done that in the early years, I’d have been, “This is awesome!”—but here’s what I said—

Dave: Yes; that’s what she says—I don’t remember that.


Dave: No; I actually said, “I don’t want that right now, just later.”

Ann: Here’s what I was thinking—I said to Dave—I said, “I feel like the only time you touch me is when you do want that.” I said, “It feels like the romance—like for you just to kiss me, or hug me, or hold my hand—like that touching is all gone and this is the only touching that is left.” And it kind of took us into a fight.

Dave: Yes; it was a really fun moment right there. [Laughter] But here’s what I do remember about that moment—and it really frames where we want to go tonight—she started to talk to me about non-sexual touch. We had this discussion about affection and romance that was there in the early days of our marriage and had gone away, primarily, because of me.

As we talk to couples around the country for the last 30-some years, we find a lot of people go through that; right?—you know, there’s not non-sexual touch in the relationship.
We discovered something you already know, and it’s Romance 101 really—it’s like men and women are different. Did you notice that? We’re just different—we’re wired differently—physically, emotionally. In fact, I read a statistic that said, “Eight out of ten times, you can tell men and women are different physically.” So, I’m not just talking physical—[Laughter]—just seeing if you’re listening!

But if you even go back to the original Scriptures—first book: the Book of Genesis, which means “beginning”—when you read how God created us—and I know I’m not reading something you probably haven’t heard before—but in Genesis, Chapter 1, the first chapter of the first book of the Bible says, “God made mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them male and female.”

And right there, you’re like: “So, where did these differences come from?—where?”—“God!” God’s literally made man and woman completely different. Again, we’re joking about physically; but I mean, are we completely wired differently? I mean—I’m not saying every woman is this way or every man’s this way—there’s definitely crossover—but generally, men are a certain way and women are too; right?

You go into the New Testament—Ephesians 5. I just want to take you to the end of Ephesians 5, because we don’t have time to develop all the way through it; but if you look at the very beginning of Ephesians 5, Paul writes to the church in Ephesus—he says, “Be imitators of Christ.” So we—if we are followers of Christ—we are supposed to mimic or look like Christ.

He, then, tells us, in verse 18, how to do that—he says, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” That’s how you do it, because we can’t do it a part from the Spirit of God; but then, he goes on to say, “Okay; if you’re filled with Holy Spirit, God’s Spirit is living in you and empowering you. This is what it looks like in marriage and in relationships…”

Many of you know this—it’s the classic text on New Testament, or biblical, or Christian marriage. There it is: “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.” Then, at the very end—I know many of you have heard this—Paul ends it this way—he says, “So, again, I say, ‘Each man must love his wife as he loves himself; and the wife must respect her husband.’”

Now, it’s interesting that Paul uses two different words when it comes to women and men/wives and husbands. He says to what your wife?—to love her. But he doesn’t say, “love your husband,”—he says, “respect your husband.” Why? I believe/I hope you believe the Word of God is inspired by God. Paul wrote it in his own personality, but God literally inspired each word. So, it wasn’t just coincidence that he said, “love your wife”?“respect your husband”—it’s based on those differences.
So, when Ann and I thought, “Okay; how do you love your spouse without touching?” it’s going to go along the lines of “What does a woman need?”—love/“What does a man need?”—respect; and “What would that look like?”

So, here is what we decided to do—we thought, “Okay; let’s take that word, touch”—because we’re going to use the letters T-O-U-C-H for women and, then, for men; we’ll go back and forth; okay? So, we’re just going to go back and forth.

“What does it look like for a woman? What does a woman really want? We’ve put this—the first letter for “T” is she wants communication—so we call it “Taaalk.” And I put a bunch of “A”s in there; because women don’t want to talk—they want to taaaalk about the relationship; right?

Ann: And here’s the thing—I think, with women, we bond through communication. If you put two women in a room—we will know so much about each other; won’t we? We’ll know the names of your kids, what you’ve been going through, how’s your marriage—we know that stuff because we go deep in our discussions.

Dave: They look at each other, face to face—that’s how women communicate. Do you know how men communicate?—shoulder to shoulder. But women—man, they sit together. I mean, we just wrote this: “Words matter.” And these are sort of personal for our marriage: “Tender words/positive words.” So, guys, I would say this: “I have learned—I’m not great—but I have learned: “Man, if I want to light up her world/if I want her to feel loved without touch, the ‘T’ is communicate,”—and it means taaalk.

We go out on a regular date night every week. We went to the Weekend to Remember® as an engaged couple. We heard Dennis and Barbara Rainey say, “You need to date.” We laughed, like, “Who needs to date once they are married?” You need to date! And when we go out on a date, we taaalk over a nice meal. None of that is what I want to do! [Laughter] I don’t want to spend any money at a nice restaurant. I just want to go watch a movie, go home, and make love—that’s what I want to do. [Laughter] I’m not kidding.

But I’ve realized that it isn’t about me—it’s about: “What would make her feel loved?”—a nice meal/taaalkking. And you know, it’s like—it’s just so important that—like even when she’s going through something, she wants to taaalk about it; and I want to fix it.

Ann: Well, this one time, Dave came downstairs—he came home, and I was sitting at the kitchen table so frustrated—our boys were little/they were young—had the worst day ever. Somebody had an ear infection; they were fighting—all that.

Dave comes home—he goes, “What’s going on?” And I said: “It has been the worst day. Sit down. Let me just tell you about this.” I start venting about my day: “This happened. I feel terrible. I feel like I have no life! I feel like I am just...”—just was going on. Dave looks at me and goes, “Oh my gosh; I’ll be right back.” He goes upstairs; and I’m thinking, “Why is he leaving?”
He comes downstairs with this piece of paper. I thought: “Oh my gosh; he wrote me a love note up there.” [Laughter] He went up there and wrote me this sweet, little, encouraging note.” I said, “What’s that?” He goes: “Well, I went upstairs and I prayed. I felt like God gave me something for you.” I’m like, “Oh!” He hands it to me, and it is numbered one to ten. I look at it; and I’m thinking, “Ten ways to tell you I love you and how you are a great mom.”

“Number one”—and I read it out loud—“Number one, get more organized.” [Laughter] 

Dave: Pretty good stuff; huh?—[Laughter]—pretty good. I’m up here, leading you tonight; alright? [Laughter] Men, do not write this down! This is a bad moment.

Ann: And it got worse. It got worse.

Dave: It got much worse.

Ann: Every one of those was all of that. I was like—I mean, it was like steam was coming out of my ears—I said to him, “You think—you prayed about this?!”

Dave: I did pray about it. [Laughter] I did!

Ann: I took the piece of paper—I said, “Here’s what I think of this paper.” And I took it, and I ripped it up, and I threw it in his face. I said, “That was not from God!”

Dave: And I said: “That was from God. You just ripped up the word of God.” [Laughter] I mean, this is not an exaggeration—that’s exactly how it went down. That’s how clueless I was. So, ladies, if you’re married to [someone like] me, then, there’s hope; right?! [Laughter] You’re going to make, maybe. I mean, I had no idea what she really wanted. What did she really want?—every woman here knows. She wanted me just to listen—

Ann: Listen. Don’t fix it!

Dave: —be part of it with her.

Ann: Just listen to me and nod your head, like: “Wow! You’re amazing!” That’s all I wanted. But Dave—it’s so hard for him—it’s like: “Oh, I can fix that! Oh, I can...”

Dave: And now, I’ve learned. She goes into that—I just sit at the table and go, “Oh, yes; that must have been hard.” [Laughter] And when it’s all over, she’s like: “Oh, thank you! That was so helpful.” I’m like, “I did absolutely nothing!”; right? [Laughter] But that’s that talk; alright? So, if we see you on the boat and I see you go, “Taaalk,”—okay; we’ll get it. So, that’s the first—the “T” for women.
“T” for men—alright; I was going to say, “Touch,”—I was. That’s what I wanted to put in.

Ann: It’s like: “We can’t start with that.” [Laughter]

Dave: Okay; so, the “T” is “Thank him.” And this is true; isn’t it, men? Men—I mean, I’m sort of representing you right now; but respect is: “Appreciate who he is. Notice what he does. Affirm privately/affirm publicly.” Well, let me tell you—we are, us men—we are like little boys. We long for somebody to respect us, somebody to notice us, somebody to affirm us.

Let me tell you, ladies—you probably know this—but if you ever tear him down in public, you are crushing the soul of your man. You will probably never understand it—we are like twelve-year-old boys, like: “Watch me! Watch me! Watch me do the nay nay!”—[Laughter]—you know, it is like we’re saying that—but “Watch me!” When our wife tears us down privately or, especially, publicly—let me tell you the opposite is true. When you affirm your man alone, behind closed doors, and also in public—thank him, appreciate, notice what we do—it’s absolutely life-giving to a man.

Ann: I think what I realized was I had these expectations. Instead of thanking Dave for the things that he did do, I was just complaining about the things that he didn’t do.

Dave: Yes.

Ann: And for you, that was totally un-motivating.

Dave: Well, one night we were sitting down. We’d been talking about this in our relationship, and I was just trying to explain to her how much it means to me. We sat down, and she was reading a book about it. We sat down—the boys were all in the house at the time. All she did was say, “Hey, before we eat, I want to say something to Dad.” She turned to me—she goes: “Thank you for all you do for this family. Thank you for working so hard to provide the money that provides this. Thank you for…”—I mean, she just went through about four or five things.

As she said it, I was thinking: “The books right there. She’s just doing what the book told her to do”—you know—“I know that’s what it is.” But as she did it, my chest started puffing out; you know? I could feel it inside—like, “I am the man; aren’t I?!” It was just like unbelievable. Our boys—

Ann: So, for you guys, that’s totally motivating.

Dave: Oh, it was like, “I will take down the world for you, because you appreciate and notice what I’m doing.” Am I right, guys?!

Audience: Yes.
Dave: Yes.

Ann: Wow.

Dave: So, women, thank him. Out there in the pool—stand up/have your man stand up, and thank him in front of the whole boat; alright? [Laughter]

Alright; let's go to the “O”. We've got to fly. So, the “T” for women—it was talk. Now, for women—we'll go back to women—for guys, here's what they want—is for us to “Open up.” What does that mean? I just put down this: “Level Five—share your heart/be vulnerable.”

Ann: Yes!

Dave: So, let's talk about it a little bit.

Ann: For us, as women, we long for you guys—we long to know what's going on inside. And I know for some of you guys, you're like, “I don't even know what's going on inside;” you know? But for us, as women, we want to know you—we want to know your hopes, your dreams, your fears. We want to know what you're thinking about stuff.

Dave: I mean, Level Five Communication—if you've ever been to the Weekend to Remember, we use the chart there. Level One is, like, cliché—it doesn't mean anything. When you get down to Level Five, Level Five means I'm sharing my heart/I'm being vulnerable.

I've discovered that makes Ann feel loved when I share with her my fears, my weaknesses, the things I'm struggling with rather than hiding it. I don't share that with any other woman on the planet—that's wrong and inappropriate. I will share with my best buddies, and I'll share it with Ann. She's the only one that gets my heart. But I've learned over the years, when I go there with her, it makes her feel loved without touch—it's unbelievable!

I remember, years ago—you know, I'm the Detroit Lions chaplain. Anybody know that? Detroit Lions fans?—okay; I didn't think so. [Whistles and shouts]

Ann: Yes!

Dave: There's more here than in Detroit! I never hear that in Detroit.

But one of the things we used to do—I've been doing this 32 years. Like 20 years ago—long story short—we would take players into high schools during the off season—five of us—and do an assembly, and compete against their athletes, and then talk about Jesus in a public high school. It was awesome. The guys would all wear these tank tops that said “Pro Challenge.”
Well, one day, one of our players didn’t show up. So, I had to compete with them like I was one of the guys; right? You can imagine what a NFL player looks like in a tank top; alright? You don’t need to imagine what I look like in a tank top; alright? I’m standing in this school, and they are introducing us; right? Beside me is a guy named Chris Spielman, who was a guy—at the time, was a linebacker—big guy. We all called him “Mr. Meat”—just ripped. I’m standing beside him in my little tank top.

And there is a teacher, on the wall, like ten feet down. I hear the teacher look down and go: “Hey! Who is that little guy down there?” [Laughter]

And Chris hears it and goes, “Did you hear that?” I go, “No!” [Laughter] Then, I hear, and I can see it over here—I can hear the other teachers sort of look down and go, “Oh, he must be a kicker or something.” [Laughter] And Chris starts laughing—nothing against kickers/if any of you are kickers, I love you—you’re awesome. But I was a quarterback, and I was an Hall of Fame quarterback. So, that was like, “A kicker?!”—right?

So, anyway, the day goes on. I come home that night. My ego had been sort of hit; you know? Ann and I get the boys down to bed. We’re sitting in the family room, and Ann says to me—

Ann: Well, he’s real quiet.

Dave: Yes.

Ann: And he just seems different. I said: “Hey, so, what happened today? It seems like something happened. Are you okay?” He goes: “Yes, I’m fine. It was good.”

Dave: Yes; I was Level One—“Not going there”; you know?


Dave: So, finally, she says, “Okay; I won’t ask anymore, but you seem like something happened today.”

And I go, “Well, we were at this high school, and this guy said…” and I had no humor. “It was just like, ‘I’m a kicker now,’”—you know, sort of like that. And she is so wise—she knew that my little male ego had been hit, and I’ll never forget this night until I die.

She said, “Dave Wilson turn off the TV.” I hit the mute button and then I turned—[Laughter] I’m kidding! Do not say: “Oh! It’s okay to hit the mute.” No; the TV went off; right? I turned, and she like looked me—it’s like this—she put her hands on my knees and she’s like 18 inches away—and she looks right in my eyes—and she doesn’t even
I could tell you exactly what she said: “I’ve got to tell you something. You have a great body,”—that’s what she said. So, what you’re learning here is: “Sometimes, it’s okay to lie in marriage.” [Laughter] But she said that—she sort of had a little smile on her face.

Then she said this—she goes: “I want you to know something. You are a good man; you are a man of God. You lead me, and you lead the boys spiritually; and don’t you ever forget what a real man is. That’s what a man is. It is not about pecs or a chest. It’s about walking with Jesus and leading us, and you are that man. Thank you for being that man.” [Applause]

Ann: Right; right.

Dave: So, why do I remember that?!—because it was a moment of respect in my marriage that I’ll never forget. Here’s what I thought before I opened up and went to Level Five with her—I thought—well, when I finally did—it’s like: “I’m giving her a gift”—right?—“I know she likes this; here we go.” Who got the gift? Whew!—it came back—so she feels loved/I feel respected. I’m just telling you: “Guys, it’s worth the risk and fear to go there.

[Studio]

Bob: Well, we’ve been listening to the first part of a message from Dave and Ann Wilson about loving one another without touching—really getting to the heart of what romance and love is all about in a marriage.

I think what you said at the end about the fear and risk for a guy to open up and be vulnerable and say: “This is what I’m thinking,” “This is what I’m feeling,”—that’s real for so many men.

Dave: It is scary. We sort of, often, grow up in a culture that says that big boys don’t cry. We’re tough: “Man up,”—there’s a phrase for you. To be vulnerable, especially with your wife, is—for a lot of guys, they will not go there. And I mean it—for every man and for me—when you go there, not only do you find life coming back to your soul—I never knew this—your wife feels loved, which is a beautiful gift to your wife.

Ann: That evening was such a great gift to me. And, it makes me want to go to Level Five with you; I really mean it. We, as women, long for that. I think we often do it in our relationships, and it may come easier for us. For us to know our husbands—to know what they’re feeling/to know what they are afraid of—that really does mean a lot.

Bob: Here’s the thing, I think, for a lot of guys—I’ve felt this before—if I am open and make myself vulnerable, the risk is—you’re going to take that and you’re going to know how to hurt me.
Ann: Yes.

Bob: You're going to know how to wound me, so I'm going to not give you a tool that you can use against me.

Why is it so powerful for a woman when she knows that her man has weaknesses? I mean, we think the opposite—you're going to respect us more if all you can see is our strengths. Why is it powerful for a wife if she knows her husband is weak in areas?

Ann: I think it shows a need—and a need for us, as women, to be partners; we want to partner alongside. For you to be vulnerable says, “I don't have it all together.” For me, it said me, “I need you, Ann.” I really want to be needed.

I also think it's a real gift that we give one another in marriage, where we need to be very, very careful and prayerful before we respond. When we come in—and we're harsh, or we laugh, or we'll use it against one another—I don't think that gift will be given as often.

Bob: You guys talk about this more in your book, Vertical Marriage. This is a book that we would love for every one of our listeners to have a copy of. In fact, this week, if listeners will help support the ministry of FamilyLife® with a donation of any amount, we'd like to send you a copy of Dave and Ann Wilson's book, Vertical Marriage, as a thank-you gift for your support of this ministry. If you already have a copy, and you want to get another copy to pass on to a friend, all you have to do is make a donation, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com and request the book. We're happy to send it out to you.

We're so grateful for listeners who engage with us and say: “This program matters; it's important. It's making a difference in my life and in my marriage, and it's making enough of a difference that we want to help support you.” Your donations really do matter; they make a difference. They determine how many people we're able to reach with the ministry of FamilyLife Today. In a very real sense, the donations you make to this ministry are donations to your fellow listeners so that they can hear biblical truth about marriage more often.

Thank you for your support; and again, as a way of saying, “Thank you,” this week we'd like to send you a copy of the book, Vertical Marriage. You can donate online at FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call to donate at 1-800-358-6329—that's 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” Again, thanks, in advance, for your support of the ministry. We appreciate you, and we look forward to hearing from you.

By the way, the Vertical Marriage book is now available as a small group video series as well. I know a lot of people have already heard about this—they're starting to use it. It's a great tool—five sessions. The videos are about 25 minutes long, so this works for a Sunday school class, or for a small group, or just for you and your spouse to go
through together. Again, find out more about the *Vertical Marriage* small group series when you go to our website at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to hear Part Two of Dave and Ann Wilson’s message about how we express love to one another without touching. It’s Valentine’s Day tomorrow, so we ought to be thinking about love and marriage and how we can express love to one another. I hope you can tune in.

I mention it’s Valentine’s Day for those of you who hadn't thought about that yet. You can stop by the store on your way home tonight, or start making plans for what you’re going to do to celebrate.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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