

Book Review on

Discovering the Mind of a Woman

Summary

Discovering the Mind of a Woman by Ken Nair presents a thought-provoking investigation into every husband's responsibility to understand his wife.¹ His primary thesis is based on the command in 1 Peter 3:7: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge". Although the author approaches his topic from the perspective of broad evangelicalism, his book offers excellent biblical advice to husbands which is intended to help them reflect Christ-likeness within the context of marriage.

The book's argumentation begins with the basic premise "that Christlikeness is God's first priority for every man."² The basis for this assertion is the symbolism of Ephesians 5:25-27 in which the husband is commanded to love his wife in the same way that Christ loved the church. It is only the man who is like Christ in character that can love his wife after Christ's example.

The second pillar of the author's argument is his interpretation of the meaning of "help meet" in Genesis 2:18. According to the author, the wife's function in the marriage relationship is to be a "helper" to her husband in a very particular way. The woman, by her response to her husband in the marriage relationship, functions as a valid and

1 Ken Nair, *Discovering the Mind of a Woman* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 250 pages.

2 *Ibid.*, 6.

accurate indicator of his success or failure to be like Christ.³ The author does not argue that this is the only way in which the wife functions as a “helper” to her husband, but he does emphasize this meaning as the the most significant one.

The third element of the author's argument is that the woman's unique physical, emotional, and spiritual makeup (which is distinctly different from that of the man) demands that a husband abandon his natural (self-centered) method of relating to his wife and pursue a new way of relating to her based on a biblical and practical understanding of her needs. This understanding can only come (1) through a recognition and rejection of his own selfish orientation and (2) his diligent application to the task of learning how his wife thinks. The goal is to discover his wife's real needs so that he can love her after the example of Christ by meeting those needs. Only the wife (in her function as “helper”) can say whether her husband is successfully accomplishing that task.

In presenting his arguments for understanding the mind of women, the author shares many of his own insights into the way women think (their real needs) based on his own marriage experiences and on his wide experience in counseling men about marriage. Along the way he lists four male prejudices which stand as barriers to prevent men from becoming the Christ-like husbands that God has called them to be. These false concepts include the following: women are mysterious and incomprehensible and therefore impossible to understand; the difficulties that we (men) face in marriage are, at heart, caused by our wives' problems; women are inferior and secondary in importance to men; and men are destined by creation for rule over women. In answer to these false and un-biblical ideas, the author offers up six positive characteristics that a husband should seek

³ Ibid., 38-39.

to inculcate in his own life which will cause his wife to respond with love, respect, and submission to his leadership. The author argues that because God designed women to be responders in the marriage relationship, they naturally desire to love their husbands but are often shut out of the relationship by their husband's self absorption. As husbands learn to understand the real needs that their wives possess and incorporate these truths into their own lives, then their wives will respond to the Christ-like love that they are receiving from their husbands.

A Critique

The main strength of this book is, at the same time, its greatest weakness. The book is a powerful tool for dealing with men on the issue of marriage because it focuses exclusively on his responsibility before God as the head of the home. The author systematically demolishes every excuse that men make for their failure in marriage. He shows that God *does* hold him personally responsible for his own actions and for the well-being of his wife and his marriage.

But this single-minded approach also reveals the limitation of this book's usefulness. If every Christian man read and implemented this book's teaching, then many (if not most) marriage problems would be solved. But many wives must live with a husband who is *not* sensitive to her real needs and who has no commitment to change in order to become more Christ-like in his relationship with her. That being the case, this book has next to nothing to say to this woman concerning her responsibilities to God or her husband in these circumstances. In fact, a woman in these circumstances who does

happen to read this book will most likely be tempted to become bitter and disappointed as she considers the multiple failures of her husband.

The biblical balance for this is found in the same passage from which the author draws his main argument (1 Peter 3:1-7). Verses 1-6 address the wife of a man who does not “obey the word” and commands how she must respond to him (with submission) and to God (with faith). The passage also provides hope that her godly response to an ungodly husband can affect a significant change in the situation for the better (“they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives”). From this analysis it can be seen that the book offers an unbalanced view of responsibility for individuals in imperfect marriages (which is every marriage!).

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the lack of balance in the author's presentation, the book does have much to say that is of great value to men and those who counsel them. While the author may get carried away by his very narrow interpretation of the meaning for “help meet” in Genesis 2:18, his premise that the wife is the responder to the husband (who is the initiator of biblical love) can be adequately demonstrated from other passages of Scripture (cp. Eph. 5:25 with 1 John 4:19). Similarly, the author has correctly identified that the command to demonstrate Christ-like love presupposes that a husband must first understand his wife and her needs. This fact provides the ethical basis for Peter's command to live with one's wife in an understand way. These underlying truths provide a strong biblical foundation for most of the author's applications in the book. His compelling examples and pointed illustrations also point out that most of us have far to go before we understand our wives as we should.

Also, the author correctly identifies that the primary responsibility for maintaining the marriage relationship and the home rests with the man. He rightly insists that the husband take responsibility to love his wife according to the biblical standard. Many physical, emotional, and spiritual problems experienced by wives may be traced to his failure to meet her real needs in these areas. From this perspective, the author's unapologetic call for men to pursue Christ-likeness—to learn to understand their wives and demonstrate biblical love to meet their needs—is a legitimate and biblical call.

Implementation by the Pastor-Counselor

In counseling couples preparing for marriage or couples whose marriages are in trouble, primary attention must be paid to the husband's success or failure to love his wife in an understanding way. Focus must be placed first on the husband and his responsibilities. Though this may appear to place the pastor-counselor in the position of partiality toward the wife when dealing with complicated marital problems, he should make it plain to both parties that he is not acting partially in this case, but rather presenting God's viewpoint on the issue. Of course, this assertion will require proof, in the form of adequate Biblical teaching, to establish the fact that the man's God-given headship in the family includes the responsibility of initiating and exercising Christ-like love toward his wife. Much good can be done (and much evil avoided) if these principles are taught and habits established before the couple enters into marriage.

In situations where couples are being counseled together, the pastor-counselor will need to show more balance in his counsel than is shown in Discovering the Mind of a Woman. Conversely, more balance will also need to be shown than is demonstrated in

the approach which over-emphasizes the woman's responsibility to submit to her husband (without fully addressing his responsibility to love biblically). Nevertheless, this book, and the information in it, does provide a profitable supplemental text to help teach and disciple the man toward becoming a Christ-like husband.

The four male prejudices identified by the author in chapter 3 provide a useful diagnostic tool for revealing a man's level of understanding about and conformity to biblical principles in his own marriage. These four sinful ways of thinking reflect a perversion of God's plan and pattern for marriage. When these attitudes surface during the counseling process, they are indicators of a man's failure (or excuse for failure) to meet his obligations to God and his wife. Thus, their appearance provides an opportunity for the pastor-counselor to provide Biblical teaching and training that will initiate change in the man's habitual ways of thinking about and relating to his wife.

Another diagnostic tool available to the pastor-counselor which can help reveal a man's level of success (or failure) in understanding and loving his wife is feedback from the wife. This feedback can be in the form of actual statements by the wife about her husband's performance, or it may be obtained by observation of the wife's physical, emotional, and spiritual state. Troubles which surface in any of these areas may be indicators of her husband's failure to sanctify, cleanse, nourish, and cherish her (Ephesians 5:26, 29). Of course not every physical problem experienced by a woman can be blamed on her husband; neither can every spiritual or emotional problem be traced to the husband's failure. But often this will be the case. The pastor-counselor must be alert to these indicators and be prepared to explore the possibility that the husband has failed in some way to understand his wife and to love her biblically.

Finally, the key issue for both men and women (and everyone else) is Christ-likeness. For married men this must be demonstrated first in the marriage relationship. Christ-likeness means character. One cannot have true Christ-like character in the arena of business or ministry and yet lack it in one's relationship with one's wife. As the closest of all human relationships (“one flesh”), marriage reveals the real character of a person. Therefore men must be led to earnestly desire Christ-likeness for themselves and then to pursue it within the context of marriage by loving their wives as Christ loved the church.