

SIXTEEN

"...Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church ... So too, should husbands love their wives as their own bodies, for he who loves his wife loves himself ... no one hates his own flesh, but rather nourishes and cherishes it ... as Christ does the church..."

Paul of Tarsus

"Hey, I've spent the evening talking about the women in my life, what about those two girlfriends of yours ... Renee and Mariah ... those are their names, right? ... Thought so ... How'd those two angels ever end up with you two wise guys? Let me guess, there was a 'win a date with a handsome and exciting bachelor' contest, and you two were the consolation prize? ... heh,heh ... hey, don't look at me that way ... c'mon, I'm just playing with ya. All kidding aside though, you guys never heard this from me, but your mom loves those two girls, and she's proud of your choices. You gotta remember, though, she has that 'mama-bird' image to keep up, so when she gets a little overprotective and wants to know more than you want to tell her, try to see things from her perspective. Think about it ... she's trying to see it not only from her side, but from your dad's too. So, give her a break, okay?

"C'mon ... let's go ... I'll pay the check ... it's getting late ... you guys have to be up early. Your grandmom is having Thanksgiving dinner at her place so we'll all get together then. It'll be good to see your mom and everyone again ... just stay out of the Godiva this time. Yea, you two remember that one, don't you? ... That Thanksgiving when you were little and the two of you found that box of chocolates and polished it off in no time flat up in the bedroom ... so much for Granddad's surprise after dinner. Got the bellyache of the year if I remember, didn't you? I don't think I've ever seen two faces that shade of green ... feeling a little queasy just thinking about it, huh?

"Your granddad used to get those chocolates from a fellow named Mel Stein. Mel was a bit older than Dad and he owned a small specialty candy company; they were members at the same golf club and friends for over twenty years. I'd caddy for Mel when I was a teenager 'cause he was always good for an extra two-dollar tip. I remember one Monday when caddies could play for free, Mel asked if I wanted to join him. We played a nine-hole match for a buck, and I had to spot him five strokes. But I got to ride in his golf cart, so that in itself was worth the buck, even if I lost. Don't laugh; when I was sixteen, a buck went a long way. I remember on th ... what? ... No, Mav, the Civil War hadn't just ended ... smart aleck ... wipe that grin off your face ... anyway ... I remember on the ninth hole I had this tricky downhill putt from about twelve feet to win the match. I missed it on the low side and it rolled four feet by ... no problem, right... make it and I halve the match ... no blood ... and I got that free cart ride, right? ... wrong ... I missed the putt coming back. I lost

"Walking back to the cart, I looked at Mel and saw a puzzled look on his face. He asked me why I looked at the putt from only one side of the hole. I said something stupid like I already knew what it would do ... but he wouldn't let it go. He took me to the opposite side of the hole,

and from there, it was easy to see that the putt had to break farther to the right than I originally thought. Mel made me hit it until I made it, and he taught me one of the most important lessons I learned in golf, to look at putts from both sides of the hole. Then he said something else. He said that looking at something from all sides is even more important in life; that the difference between success and failure often hinges on seeing things from several points of view. And he told me never to forget it. Then he collected that dollar. One of the best lessons I've ever learned ... too bad I ignored it for so long. Funny thing though, today, whenever I knock in a twelve footer, I often think of Mel ... and Dad

“You guys were, what, about six or seven when your granddad died? You know, as far as Dad was concerned, the sun rose and set on you two. At the funeral, I remember the two of you in your matching suits, sitting next to your mom and dad in the pew, looking a little lost, and trying to understand what was going on. As Dad's oldest son, I knew it fell to me to say a few words, and I had no idea what to say. Then, as I was sitting there with the rest of the family, it dawned on me

“Your dad and your Uncle Jeff are two of the finest men I've ever met, and right there I realized that the real tribute to a man's life isn't necessarily the accomplishments of his sons. It's the choices of his daughters. You see, for a young woman, her father is her first and most important image of a man. He's usually the model of what she'll look for in a husband, and, in a sense, girls often marry their daddies. What I realized in looking at your dad and your uncle was that both my sisters had chosen fine men because they had a terrific role model in their father

“And then I remembered a conversation Dad and I had in a quiet moment in his hospital room when he was sick that last time. He said how very proud he was of your dad and Jeff, and that he felt he'd done a pretty good job of being a father to his girls, though I didn't fully understand what he meant until that moment in that church. You see, your granddad was raised in a time where men had a genuine respect for women, all women, and he worshipped the ground your grandmom walked on. Mom's a great lady, and I'm not saying that just because she's my mom ... and I sometimes wondered while I was growing up just what she saw in Dad. Now I know

“Dad loved Mom the way a man should love a woman and I never fully understood it until he died. It was only then, and in the following years, listening to Mom reminisce about Dad, that I finally began to understand how much value a woman puts not only on being loved, but on being respected. And thinking back, I finally realized that the respect and the love he had for her was the result of the respect he had for himself and his values ... values that he tried to instill in me when I was a boy. Values that I trampled on for too many years

“Standing there, I could see that the example he showed to his girls allowed them in turn to take what they saw in him and find it in their own husbands. I stood at that pulpit and spoke of how I could see the real value of my dad's life in the presence of his sons-in-law. In that moment, in that church, and in that pew, I could see my dad alive in your father and your uncle. I remember saying a few more words, though I don't recall what they were, and then I sat down ...

“...and somewhere I know Mel was smiling....

“Enough, guys ... enjoy the wedding, have a great time ... just don’t drink too much. Oh, and unless you really mean it, don’t try too hard to catch the garter. I mean ... that is ... unless one of you really wants to. What? ... Dinner ... ah, forget it ... you’re welcome ... don’t mention it ... it was my pleasure. It was just great to see you two guys again. Drive carefully and have a great ... what? ... You have a cab coming ... Good ... good move ... you’ve got your mom’s smarts. Have fun tomorrow ... I’ll see you Thanksgiving”

In the movie *Jesus of Nazareth*, there’s a scene showing the engagement of Joseph and Mary. At that Jewish betrothal service, Joseph places a ring on Mary’s finger and says, “Be thou consecrated unto me.” *Consecrated*. A profound word! A perfect word, really, one that speaks eloquently of the sacred nature of the relationship between a man and a woman. A relationship of infinite and eternal value, designed by God from the beginning of time ... a relationship called marriage. Isn’t that how you want to think of your bride? As someone ... *sacred*.

God has an interesting habit, one we often miss. He takes that which is common or ordinary and makes it extraordinary. And in doing so, He sanctifies it, makes it holy, and pleasing to Himself. By His life here on earth, Jesus took all of creation and all of our humanity, lifted it up to His Father, and made it holy ... He made our world sacred. That truth came home to me one night while I was setting a diamond into an engagement ring for a young couple coming in to pick it up the next morning.

A diamond ring is traditionally used to signify the engagement of a couple. Now a diamond is nothing more than pure crystallized carbon, and carbon is maybe the earth’s most common element. From pencil lead to your basset hound to the oak tree in the back yard, carbon is the common building block of virtually all living things. Yet in His creative genius, God takes ordinary carbon, exposes it to incredible extremes of pressure and heat, and turns it into a diamond, something man finds extraordinarily valuable ... in some instances, worth millions of dollars. And man then takes what God Himself has made extraordinary and uses it to signify the value of that profound relationship between a man and a woman ... a marriage ... a union that, itself, will be subjected to the heat and pressures of life’s trials and tribulations ... A union that God treasures as sacred.

Water is vital to all living things, yet, like carbon, something quite common. In the gospel account of the best-known wedding reception of all time, we see that habit of God at work again. At the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus is confronted by His mother with a dilemma. The wine is gone. So, at His mother’s request, Jesus takes water, simple, common, ordinary water, and

turns it into wine, a vintage at which the stewards marvel. An extraordinary vintage.

Now look at marriage itself. In the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is called the sacrament of matrimony. For Catholics, a sacrament is a life experience where Christ lives and is truly present. Others embrace the idea of covenant, a sacred and living bond between man and God. In any marriage ceremony where God is an invited *and distinguished* guest, two very common things come together. A man and a woman. Face it, there are over six billion of us walking around this planet. Yet in the sacrament or covenant of matrimony, God lives and dwells in those two souls. Thus, He creates a union of eternal and infinite value. And in doing so, they become a light and a hope to the world, a union that no one or nothing on earth has the right, or the authority, to tear apart.

Nice idea you say, but how does it apply to us single men? Where is the sacred found in the commonplace in our lives? It's a fair question. Okay, how about the ground we walk on? Consider the creation account of Genesis. God takes dirt, ordinary dirt, breathes His life into it, and, in doing so, He creates man, a male human being created *in His own image and likeness*. Talk about taking the commonplace and making it sacred! From ordinary dirt, God creates a being He infinitely loves ... Adam, man, us!

Yet even given the endless bounty of creation, still the man, Adam, is incomplete. So, God creates for him a partner, woman, Eve. But this time God chooses to do something different. He creates Eve, not out of something common or ordinary such as dirt, but from something that is already eternally precious to Him ... Adam, man, us. If precious things are created from the common and ordinary, what is God saying to us men in the manner in which He created woman? Think about it.

Many believe literally in the biblical account of creation as found in the book of Genesis. Others, in the theory of evolution. And there are those who believe that mankind was "seeded" on the earth by extra terrestrials from the galaxy Delta Tau Xi (oops sorry, that's a fraternity at Faber College). Let's say, Beta Omicron IV or some such place. Regardless of our individual vision, the lesson we men need to understand is that God created man and, from us, He created woman. *Both are precious and sacred in His sight*. And accepting that, ask yourself, shouldn't a woman hold a loftier position in a man's life than a mere plaything in the back seat or on the sofa late on a Saturday night? Do you wonder what God thinks ... or do you suspect that you already know?

God's Law, and His Church, emphatically tells us that our sexuality is sacred and anything that desecrates it is contrary to His design. He laid down that Law, not for His benefit, but for ours. God is no less powerful because we defy or disobey him. *But we are*. Our sinfulness doesn't in some way weaken

Him. *But it weakens us.* That's the nature of sin; it cripples the sinner. God created men to be strong, wise, courageous, and to live with dignity and respect. And the misuse of our sexuality gradually destroys strength, wisdom, courage, dignity, respect ... and love. If we choose to live in accordance with God's Law and embrace the discipline that Christ shows us, we will act with wisdom and self-control until we find our true lifelong partner with whom we can freely and joyfully express ourselves sexually. Call it a temporary celibacy that one day we will turn into a lifelong celebration.

Our sexuality wasn't given to us to frustrate us. It was given to us to create life, to give us pleasure, and to enrich and strengthen a union which God views as eternally precious, a marriage. But the creative power God gives to us men is to be used wisely, not recklessly. After all, the power to create in the wrong hands can, and sadly often does, lead to tragic and even catastrophic results. Its wise and proper use, however, fills our lives with joy and affords us a great opportunity to build the character and courage we men need to live strong and healthy lives. We build discipline, strength, self-control, and self-assurance as we learn to appreciate and control our passions and desires ... and to express them properly.

And the Creator who gave us this magnificent gift is the loving God we find in Sacred Scripture. He is not the ultimate eternal boogeyman, a cosmic killjoy who haunts our lives with the specter of His anger and His wrath. God is not the twisted, sadistic, practical joker that many in today's popular culture depict Him to be. That's the fool in a deck of cards ... or a villain in a kid's comic book.

Resistance builds strength, especially moral strength. It's a fact of life that took me far too long to learn; I hope you learn it much sooner than I did. As with all pleasurable things, both overindulgence and indifference dull our appreciation of them and that lethargy will eventually spill over to other aspects of our life. The couch potato, who continually overeats and drinks, inevitably becomes fat and sluggish; a condition that will affect other areas of his life. Likewise, the man who refuses to respect his sexuality, and embrace a healthy and necessary sense of self-control, will eventually become a man of little discipline and no respect ... for himself or others. He will find that those character flaws spill over to his spiritual life, his social life, and his career. And emptiness and failure will eventually color all aspects of his life.

On the other hand, the man who carefully chooses the values on which he builds his character resists the allure of hollow pleasures and meaningless self-indulgence. He builds an inner strength that manifests itself in a personality that is assertive, self-assured, and disciplined. A man in control of both himself and his relationships with others ... especially the women in his life. And that strength spills over to all the other areas of his life. He becomes a powerful man; a man who has himself in his own power.

God tested Adam and Eve, and they failed. The thing is, God didn't stop there. He's funny that way; tests didn't end in the Garden of Eden. God gives us men a test, an everyday test. And it's in the gift of our sexuality that the test resides. It's a test of character, courage, and respect ... of the value we see in ourselves, in the women in our lives, and in our relationship with our God. It's hidden in that facet of our lives that affords the greatest opportunity for moral strength and character growth ... and the greatest opportunity for failure. It's a difficult test; God intended it to be that way. Study hard ... don't fail it.

Jesus often spoke of stewards and stewardship; it's a recurring theme in His teaching. A steward is someone into whose care is entrusted something of significant value. In the sacrament or covenant of marriage, God entrusts into a man's care a woman, a child of His who is so priceless that He sent His Son to give His life for her salvation. And God considers that union so infinitely valuable that He infuses it with His grace for the purpose of giving to you the love, the wisdom, and the strength you need to help your future bride realize her life's worth and purpose. And, ultimately, to bring her home to Him. As in the scriptural accounts, in the end God will call each man to account for his stewardship. Like the stewards of scripture, will you be rewarded and honored for your strength and success ... or cast into the darkness for your cowardice and failure?

In God's eyes, isn't a husband the ultimate steward? Yes! Christ told a story in which a worthless steward was severely punished for failing to safeguard mere money. Imagine what's in store for the husband who fails to safeguard his wife, that eternally precious child that God entrusts into his care. And in reality, since any woman, married or not, is that precious in God's sight, do you think that His wrath might be reserved for more than simply the husband who fails his wife? Might not any man who abuses a woman, who treats her with contempt or disdain, face a very angry Father? ... Think about it.

In the book of Genesis, Moses meets God on the mountain at the burning bush. And God commands Moses to remove his sandals. Why? Because in the presence of God, Moses stood on sacred ground. In the sacrament or covenant of marriage, God is truly present, and when a husband and wife are united in that most intimate of unions, God is alive in those few inches between their hearts. He lives in the five feet between those two hearts the next morning at the breakfast table, and He is alive in the miles between them when one is apart from the other. *God lives in every Christian marriage and every Christian marriage is sacred ground!* And those cancers that are adultery, lust, fornication, and all the others that corrupt and degrade the God-given dignity of our sexuality are the sandals that defile God's sacred ground...

...be careful where you walk!

For strong and healthy men and women, united in a strong and healthy marriage, sex is the only thing each can give to the other on a mutually exclusive basis. All other aspects of your character and your personality you will share with others. You will love your wife, but you'll love your family, your friends, and others. You will respect her, but you'll respect others, too. You may have a great sense of humor and can make her laugh and she may treasure that about you, but you'll tell jokes to your buddies, too. The talents, qualities, and values that you will bring to her and to your marriage, yet share with others, are many. But it is only your sexuality and its expression that you can reserve for, and share with, one person ... and one person only.

As men, our passion and desire are rooted in the best part of ourselves, not the worst. God made nothing evil, certainly not our sexuality. A man's passion and desire for the woman he loves are as normal as night following day. And just as right. *We men are wired that way and God did the wiring.* And those who understand that our passions and desires are an expression of the values by which we live our lives know that casual and careless self-indulgence is the province of those who regard both their sexuality and themselves as meaningless ... or evil.

"...And God saw that it was good"; something the creation story in Genesis repeatedly tells us. And maybe the greatest good, at least the greatest physical pleasure that God gives to man, is the final physical satisfaction of an act of lovemaking: an orgasm. Yet for the man who regards his sexual expression as a valueless act of compulsion, an act having no meaning beyond the emotional and spiritual vacuum of the moment, an orgasm is merely the punctuation mark at the end of a dirty joke. He refuses to understand that sex is a great and sacred gift given to us men by our God. And trying to eliminate the sacred, as God intended it, is like trying to eliminate white from snow ... or wet from water.

On the other hand, for morally, spiritually, and emotionally strong and healthy men, an orgasm is laughter to the hundredth power. And if laughter is the sound of happiness, then an orgasm is the sound of the profound joy in a man's spirit expressed in physical terms. The man who understands this truth knows that this great gift can only be truly shared with one woman. The woman who is the sum of his deepest and most passionately held values; the ultimate tribute to his character and everything for which his life stands...

...God's great blessing on him ... His wife.

We choose. We are born with this marvelous right given to us by our God. A strong man understands that he is neither an animal driven by instinct nor a sycophant living for the approval of others. He lives according to his chosen principles and gives expression to his sexuality within the sacred gift that is marriage. And together with his wife, his sacred honor in living form, he will

dine with joy and dignity at God's banquet. He will not waste his life gorging himself on moral and emotional junk food till he is sick. Kind of like little kids out of control with a box of chocolates.

Jesus Christ is a husband and a lover. Blasphemy? No. Christ's bride is His Church, and like any good husband, He loves, guides, protects, and strengthens her so that she may thrive and prosper. He shepherds her, a Church that, as history shows us, has too often had incredible feet of clay. Yet He remains constant, vigilant, loving ... and faithful. Our role as men, and eventually as husbands, is designed to be a reflection of that perfect marriage relationship. Too lofty you say? True, we stumble. But too often do we simply shrug our shoulders and make excuses for our actions, saying that since we can't be perfect, why try? Imagine how poor sports, business, and life in general would be if that attitude ruled. Again, too lofty? No. In the figure of Christ as husband to His bride, His Church, we must see and emulate His example so as to be the best man we can be for our own bride.

And one final thought. No, God is not some eternal killjoy, deriving a sadistic form of amusement from man's earthly frustrations. To think so is a sad mistake. But so is considering God as some old, warm and fuzzy, absent-minded eternal Grandpa, stumbling around heaven looking for His glasses and slippers and trying to remember His grandkids' names and faces. A kindly old celestial codger who, on that final day, will simply gather everyone together, throw His arms around us all, regardless of the life we've lived and the sins we've committed, and just let everyone in the family room to watch the big game and eat manna ... forever. No, the first lesson we men must learn is that God demands that we be accountable for the life we live and the gifts we have been so generously given. Man must choose. And there are severe consequences for doing so unwisely ... or maliciously...

...To think otherwise is a grave mistake.

Did I do it right? In some manner, it's the question we all will ask ourselves as we realize our life is drawing to its close. Did I take the gifts I was given by my God and create ... abuse ... or destroy? Did I live a life of dignity, strength, love, and self-respect, or was I merely an ongoing sham of lies, hypocrisy, and deception? Did I lead a life that allows me to stand tall and proud and give honor to myself and glory to Him who created me? And in the end, as a steward to whom much has been given, stand before Him in final judgment and humbly, but with a touch of healthy and honest pride, offer my life in payment of the investment He has made in me. What will **your** answer be?

God graces man with the gift of free will and we live by continual conscious choice. We can live in no other way. We can choose to embrace His Law and His love, or we can ignore, deny, and abuse it, all at our own risk. But in the end, that Law is not open to debate; it cannot to be revised, suspended, or

countermanded. God's Law is The Law by which we all will be held accountable for our life and how we spent it. And in that final judgment by the Ultimate Judge, there will be no deals cut and no suspended sentences ... God will not settle out of court.

So, ... "Be thou consecrated unto me" or "slam, bam, thank you ma'am"? ...

...what's it gonna be?...

...It's your choice...