

# A Woman's Heart

## Your Responsibility to Heal and Nurture Your Wife's Heart

How safe is your wife's heart in your care? Can she extend her heart to you and know that you will protect it with all of your being? Do you provide her with the safest place on this side of heaven?

Proverbs 4:23 counsels us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (NIV) My wife Elvira often paints a word picture to describe what this looks like in our relationships. Imagine your wife holding her heart in the palm of her hand. She extends her hand to you, giving you the opportunity to care for her heart and to nurture it – to heal the wounds of the past and to surround it with loving care in the present. If that vulnerability proves unmerited, it is her responsibility to pull her heart back – to guard it, to protect it. Even in extending her heart to you she should never take her hand off of it.

No one knows our heart as deeply as God knows it. He knows our dreams and desires. He knows the wounds that were inflicted on our heart as children when we were so willingly and innocently extended it to those we trusted. He knows the pain and hurt we suffered through past failed relationships. He knows all about the walls we have built to protect our heart – our reluctance to be vulnerable and our fear of further wounds. Our wives come into our marriages with a hopefulness that this person she has chosen to be her husband will seek to know her heart deeply and intimately. She yearns for safety for her heart. She may not know how to express it or go about it, but she also desires healing of the wounds of the past to make her heart whole again. Deep in her soul, she hopes that you are the person to do those things.

When God brings us together as husband and wife, I truly believe that He has chosen you, of all of the men on the face of the earth, to come alongside Him – to co-labor with Him – to care for your wife's heart. His knowledge of her deepest secrets, wounds, and desires, along with your active nurturing, love, and pursuit of your wife's heart, will create a partnership that brings incredible safety and growth to her.

So where is she today? Are you a "safe place" for her? Does she have daily evidence that she can vulnerably extend her heart to you in absolute trust that you will protect it and guard it? Or has she "shut down," hiding her heart behind a protective wall? Does she trust others more than she trusts you?

For several years of our marriage, Elvira found her female friends and her sister to be much safer places for her heart than I provided. My selfishness and self-reliance led me to put more emphasis on protecting and caring for myself than I did on co-laboring with God to nurture Elvira's heart. Our relationship was characterized by a continuous cycle of emotional closeness followed by a period of woundedness. It's not difficult to picture Elvira extending her arm to me, heart in hand, only to experience hurt or betrayal of that trust. Over the years her willingness to extend her heart to me became more and more tentative. It only changed when both of us decided that we did not want to live that way any longer. You alone, however, can change the pattern in your own marriage. You can be the "safe place" for your wife that God desires for her.

In my case, I had to first acknowledge my selfishness and my self-reliance. I had to trust God with *my* heart and focus solely on His expectations of me when it came to my wife. I also had to be patient. Over twenty years of the “trustworthy – not trustworthy” cycle had taken its toll. The walls that Elvira had created to protect her heart were not torn down overnight. Choice by choice, day by day, week by week I had to prove to her that I truly did cherish her, that I wanted to know her intimately, and that I would protect her at all cost.

Trust is either built or lost in the thousands of choices we make every day. From the way we greet one another first thing in the morning to the tone of our voice during all of our conversations. From the honor and respect we show in all of our interactions to the tender affection we show one another. From the manner in which we come together in the evening to our final kiss at night. Every one of those actions is a choice – we can build safety and trust or we can cause her to retreat to the less painful solitude of withdrawing her heart from us. Which way do you want to live?