



HOW DO I HURT THEE – LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

–But Don't Be Afraid to Read This

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I liked it; my husband, Jim, didn't. Well maybe that's an exaggeration. We did have different takes, however, on "The Passion of the Christ" movie. He thought it was overly sensational and that some viewers would fixate on the masochistic message that blood and gore are the crux of the Christian message. I thought it was sometimes inaccurate but that it might awaken a desire to rededicate oneself to Christ in some viewers. Despite our differences, we agreed that physical pain and suffering are only part of the story. So, other than spouses disagreeing, what's this all got to do with marriage?

It doesn't have to be Holy Week to talk about the cross. When I am honest, I have to admit that at times Jim and I are indeed a cross to each other. We hurt each other mostly unintentionally, but sometimes with knowledge, just because "I want my way" or "I think I'm right". Generally I think it is better to focus on the positive and what I love about my spouse, but hurts and crosses come unbidden. There is no need to create suffering; life will provide all that is necessary.

For Lent this past year, Jim decided to make me part of his penance. Before you chastise him for chauvinism let me explain. He has always resisted and resented my trying to change him into my idea of perfection. I wonder why? But he said that for five weeks (he didn't think of this till we were one week into Lent) I could inform him of any foible or annoying habit that I would like him to change and that he would make an effort to oblige. The only catch was that I could only request a change once. I couldn't nag about it. Seeing him willing to open himself to my criticism had a strangely endearing quality to it. I felt he was trusting me not to abuse his offer. I wanted to be gentle and prudent – not complaining about every little thing.

Isn't it easy to hurt the one we love most. We know each other's vulnerabilities. Sometimes, however, I think it helps to name the hurts so that we can face them and either change or agree to let it go. May I suggest some ways that I've noticed that couples tend to hurt each other and put these in the traditional "Thou shalt not" form. But just as the Ten Commandments are fulfilled in the two great commandments, the following five "Couples Commandments" end with a positive step to become a better spouse.

- 1. Thou shalt not speak ill of your spouse to others.** Sometimes it's in jest, sometimes it's carelessness, or sometimes it's out of hurt or anger, but it's all too easy to bad mouth one's spouse. As Steven Covey says in *7 Habits of Successful Families*, "Be loyal to those not present."
- 2. Thou shalt not always assume that you are right.** 90% of the time maybe, but not always. Let your two heads work together and let go of the need to win or be right.
- 3. Thou shalt not be passive** and let your spouse do all the relationship work. Sometimes one partner is happy to let the other do all the planning, take all the initiative, start all the conversations. Be a full partner in the marriage, not just a sponge.

4. **Thou shalt not criticize and complain.** Well, at least minimize it. One way is to consciously look for a sincere compliment to pay your spouse each day. Look for the positive.
5. **Thou shalt not hold grudges.** It may take some time to get over a hurt but as soon as possible, apologize or offer forgiveness.

These Couple Commandments certainly don't exhaust the ways we can hurt each other in a relationship as intimate as marriage, but it's a start. Counting the hurts can be a dangerous game in itself that nobody wants to win. But occasionally you might want to tally your own offenses if for no other reason than to ask forgiveness. In the end, marriage isn't that different from the passion of Christ, we voluntarily and lovingly lay down our life for our friend; our best friend, even when it hurts.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Do I know what actions or words of mine hurt my spouse? (Maybe you're both perfect but more likely there are at least some annoying habits or thoughtless remarks that occasionally creep into your relationship.) What are they? (You might have to ask.)

2. When a hurt occurs, how does each of you typically get over it?

__ say I'm sorry	__ pout for awhile and then let it go	__ sleep on it
__ make love	__ talk it out till you're worn out,	__ take a walk
__ argue	__ make a joke or a pot of popcorn	__ pray
__ talk gently with each other (well maybe sometimes, but how about when you're <i>really</i> mad)		
__ Other _____		

3. Assuming that you can't undo the offense, when you've been hurt by your spouse, what would you like him or her to do to make it better?