LOVE THAT LANDS

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You Love Her. But Does Your Love Land?

A free excerpt on understanding your impact and making room for connection.

Includes A Relational Reset
Six steps for slowing down and listening.

From Chapter 2
Care More About Your Relationship Than Your Image

Written to husbands, with insight for wives seeking clarity about their experience.

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Care More About Your Relationship Than Your Image

Every man has an image of himself.

You may see yourself as a good husband, a committed father, a provider, a protector, a man of faith, a patient person, a rational person, or the one who keeps the family together. Some parts of that image may be true. Some may describe the man you genuinely want to be.

The problem begins when protecting the image becomes more important than understanding your impact.

Imagine that you say something to your wife and her face changes. She becomes quiet. She says, "That hurt," or "You are not listening to me." You immediately feel something rise in you. Perhaps it is shame. Perhaps it is fear that she sees you as a bad husband. Perhaps it is irritation because you believe your intention should be obvious.

Then come the words:

"Let me explain."

Those three words can sound reasonable. Sometimes an explanation is necessary. But in emotionally charged moments, "Let me explain" often means, "Let me protect the version of myself I need you to see."

You are trying to move her attention away from the impact and back toward your intention. You want her to understand that you are not the kind of man who would hurt her. You want the record corrected. You want the courtroom to recognize your good motives.

Meanwhile, she is trying to tell you that she is hurt.

You are protecting your image. She is trying to protect the relationship by telling the truth about what happened inside her.

That is why "Let me explain" often needs to become "Let me listen."

Listening does not mean confessing to something that is untrue. It does not mean agreeing with every conclusion. It means caring more about

what is happening between you than winning the argument about who you are.

Your image says, "I am a good husband, so I could not have meant that."

The relationship says, "A good husband can still have a painful impact, and he wants to understand it."

Your image says, "I provide for this family. They should know I love them."

The relationship says, "Provision does not automatically communicate emotional presence."

Your image says, "I am not angry. I am just being direct."

The relationship says, "Your tone changed the room, whether you intended it or not."

The moment you care more about the relationship than the image, you can ask a different question. Instead of, "How do I prove that I am not wrong?" you ask, "What happened between us?"

This is the beginning of accurate empathy.

You may feel a strong internal objection: "But if I do not explain myself, she will believe something false about me."

Maybe. But notice what happens when you rush to correct her before you understand her. You confirm that your reputation matters more to you than her experience. You may win the definition of your intention and lose access to her heart.

There will be time to clarify. First, establish that her experience matters.

You could say:

"I can feel myself wanting to explain, but I want to understand what happened for you first."

"Tell me what you heard when I said that."

"What did my tone communicate to you?"

"What did you need from me in that moment?"

"I know what I intended. I do not yet understand my impact. Help me see it."

That last sentence is important. Your intention belongs to you. Your impact is partly revealed through the person who received you. You need both pieces to understand the interaction.

If you only study your intention, you will keep grading yourself by what you meant. If you only accept another person's interpretation without discernment, you may abandon your own reality. The goal is not self-erasure. The goal is a fuller picture.

Honesty says, "Here is what I meant."

Consideration says, "And I care about what it felt like to receive me."

Connection requires both.

There is another reason image protection is so powerful: the image may be holding together your sense of worth. If being a good husband is the evidence that you are lovable, then any feedback about your marriage will feel like a threat to your identity. You will not hear, "This behavior hurt me." You will hear, "You are worthless."

Once that happens, your nervous system will try to save you. You may defend, counterattack, withdraw, become sarcastic, produce evidence, or remind everybody of their failures. You are no longer listening to the relationship. You are rescuing the image.

The work from Chapter 1 becomes vital here. You must be able to say, "I can be loved and still have a harmful impact. I can be a sincere man and still be confused. I can disappoint someone without becoming a disappointment in my entire identity."

That is emotional strength.

A fragile image needs constant protection. A grounded identity can receive information.

The Christian life gives us a foundation for this. Your worth does not have to be earned through perfect husbanding, flawless fathering, or always being right. When your identity is anchored in God, feedback can become instruction instead of annihilation. Repentance becomes possible because you do not have to defend yourself from every exposure.

You can care for the relationship.

A Relational Reset

The next time someone responds to you in a way that feels confusing, try this sequence:

1. Notice the image you want to protect. What do you need this person to believe about you?
2. Name what you feel. Shame? Fear? Anger? Embarrassment? Powerlessness?
3. Delay the explanation. Give the other person's experience room to exist.
4. Ask about impact. What did they hear, feel, or conclude?
5. Reflect before correcting. Tell them what you think you heard and let them adjust it.
6. Clarify your intention only after connection has begun. Clarification lands differently when the other person already feels seen.

This is not a script for manipulating someone into calming down. It is a posture. If your hidden goal is still to get back to your explanation as quickly as possible, the person will feel it. Your body will lean forward. Your questions will become cross-examination. Your reflection will sound like a transaction.

Slow down.

Care more about the relationship than the image.