

November 20, 2007

Dear Gina-

This letter is a little more serious than the usual email, so I took the trouble to put it in print. The day of your dreams is finally coming this April. The cast of characters (you and what's-his-name) will be center-stage for a day and then you go about the lifelong task of learning to love each other after the honeymoon is over. You might be happy to know that Ian got a letter too. He didn't get off quite as easy as you- not because I'm playing favorites but simply because he's the man and God holds him accountable for this whole covenant.

So as I did with him, I'd like to ask you two questions and then offer you two exhortations. These are the kind of questions that it's easy to give a churchy answer to but I'd like to ask you to go beyond that. Meditate and pray on these questions until an insight comes up that you know didn't originate in your own head. In other words, like James 1 says, ask God for wisdom on these topics with confidence, and He will answer you. So here's the first question- I'm sure you are both getting counseling on the passage in Ephesians 5 that commands husbands and wives to love and submit. I'd like to ask you what you think submitting looks like. In what kind of situations do you find it easy? And in what kind of situations do you find it difficult? How does submitting to God look different from submitting to Ian? How will you do at submitting when he's not being particularly loving? Okay, that's a whole string of questions but it only counts as one.

The second question isn't quite so Biblical. This question comes from a male perspective- you have probably come to figure out by now that our male egos are quite inflated. I guess we're wired that way. I mean, if you look at the animal kingdom, who did God give all the pomp and fanfare to? The male. I guess He knew His creation pretty well- our egos are inflated because they are so fragile. We spend our whole lives trying to milk our significance out of our accomplishments, our reputation, and our abilities. Then God brings a woman alongside man and she is a salve to his ever-hungry ego. If she's wise, she builds up her man and keeps that ego satisfied so he doesn't go grazing other pastures to find his significance- he finds it inside his own home! Now don't mistake my meaning here- I'm not suggesting that you overlook Ian's faults and just tell him he's great all the time. But the more of that you do, the more authority you wield when you speak hard truth into his life. So the question is, how are you going to nourish Ian's ever-hungry need for significance? Okay, I can hear you thinking, "Only God can do that." Fair point- but you are the primary instrument He wants to use to convey this. How will you become the builder-upper that Ian needs?

Two questions down, two exhortations to go. The first one is a no-brainer but you need to hear it repeatedly between now and April 26. One word: w-a-i-t. I'm talking about... uhhhhh ... sex. I know that you know that I know that you already know this, but trust me, your Enemy will implement a whole new rationalization campaign over the next five months. Yours and Ian's desire to become one will (quite naturally) strengthen with every day that passes. Before long, you'll start to tell yourselves that you're already committed to each other for life. Why should a stupid little piece of paper stand in the way of what you're longing for? It will become very tempting to just push the line a little bit further when you're together. It will seem 'so right'. But heed Proverbs 14:12- "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way that leads to death." Don't compromise. What seems so harmless and right today will come back and haunt both of you in the future. I've observed it in more than one marriage- the couple were both Christians and remained pure until engagement, and then compromised either partly or fully. And years later, one of them (usually the woman) throws the penalty flag. That little concession in the past becomes a seed of doubt when conflicts crop up some time later.

The second exhortation is sad, but true. Do NOT underestimate the ignorance of the husband when it comes to understanding his wife. You may spend many years wondering why Ian doesn't "get" you. You'll think he should know you better after all these years together. But speaking on behalf of the whole male population, we are just pathetically dense. And if you're a teacher, what do you do with the slow kid in your class? You use repetition... you spell it out for him... you don't assume anything. You'll be doing yourself an eternal favor if you will commit your lifetime to teaching Ian how to love you. He wants to; we all want to. We're just a little bit retarded in that department. That's why God put it at the top of the list for us.

So there are some nuggets for you to chew on for awhile. I'd love it if you would come back and share (either written or spoken) some insights that you have gained from pondering these things. And I would like to hereby formally give you my blessing as you embark on this lifelong relationship. Enjoy each other fully and glorify your Father in the process.