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Point of Contrast #1

HEART

What Holds First Place in Her Affections



Girl-Gone-Wild:
Christ Is Peripheral

“Her feet go down to death;
her steps follow the path
to Sheol; she does not
ponder the path of life;
her ways wander, and she
does not know it.”

(Proverbs 5:5–6)

Girl-Gone-Wise:
Christ Is Central

“Her heart has not turned
back, nor have her steps
departed from your way.”

(Psalm 44:18)

He swept her off her feet. I’m sure you’ve heard the expression. People often use it when a girl gets emotionally overwhelmed by and infatuated with a guy. He gains her immediate and unquestioning support, approval, acceptance, and love. Like Wanda, the high school senior who was swept off her feet by the star of the football team. She loved him so much and was so certain they would have a future together, that she gave up her virginity and self-respect. Their relationship lasted a scant month. Or forty-four-year-old Tammy—who was swept off her feet by Omar, a new convert with a Muslim upbringing and twenty years her junior. He was an exotic for-

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eigner, with a desire for a green card. She married him weeks after they met, convinced she had met the man of her dreams. Or Amanda, who was swept off her feet and into an affair with a married co-worker. Or Bridgette, who was swept off her feet and left her husband and teenage children for a guy she met on the Internet. Or Gretta, a lonely widow, who was swept off her feet into bankruptcy by a dashing elderly gentleman who was just a tad too fond of gambling.

The idiom “swept off her feet” indicates that there is a strong connection between a girl’s heart and her feet. That connection is the first point of contrast between a Girl-Gone-Wild and a Girl-Gone-Wise. A wise woman gives the Lord Jesus Christ first place in her heart. Her feet follow the inclination of her heart, so she makes cautious, wise, godly decisions about her relationships with men. A wild woman, on the other hand, does not have Christ at the center of her affections. Other things—such as her desire to have a boyfriend or husband, to gain security or approval, or to have fun—take center stage. Her relationship to Christ is peripheral, shoved off to the side somewhere. The wild woman’s feet also follow the inclination of her heart, but since Christ is not at the center of her affections, she makes missteps in her relationship with men. “Her ways wander, and she doesn’t know it.”

THE WAY SHE WALKS

The Sage Father tells his son that he’ll be able to spot a Girl-Gone-Wild by the way she walks. He advises him to check out a woman’s “feet,” “steps,” “path,” and “ways.” He’s not being literal here. He’s not telling his son to look to see whether the woman sports a crisp French pedicure or calluses rough as concrete, whether she wears designer heels or hiking boots, whether she prefers swaggering through a barn or strutting down urban pavement, whether she sways her hips or marches like a commando. It’s obvious that the “walk” that he and his son are talking about is primarily figurative.

Biblical writers use the word *walk* metaphorically to describe the way human life is lived in relation to God. A girl’s walk has to do with the overriding inclination of her heart. Her walk demonstrates where her loyalty lies. It reveals whether her heart is inclined toward the Lord or toward other things—whether she’s moving toward Him

Point of Contrast #1: Heart

or away from Him, whether she prefers the path of uprightness or the path of wickedness, God's way or the world's way—whether she favors being wise or wild. Her walk is her prevailing pattern of behavior. It's the key to determining which way she's headed. According to the Bible, you can tell the difference between a Wild Thing and a Wise Thing by the way she thinks, what she talks about, and all the small, daily decisions she makes. Her small, individual "steps" all add up to reveal the dominant direction of her heart.

If Christ is at the center—if He is the one who has forever swept her off her feet—she makes sure that her attitude and speech and conduct are pleasing to Him. She seeks to walk in His way. Her eyes are ever toward the Lord (Psalm 25:15). Her steps increasingly follow His path. She relies on Him to make each footstep secure (Psalm 40:2). If, on the other hand, Christ is not at the center, then she will walk in her own way, in a way that is "right in her own eyes" (Proverbs 12:15). She will follow her own desires, turn aside from the straight and narrow, go after things she has no right to, and mess around with sin (Job 31:7). Her way will be "a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 14:12).

The wild woman makes poor decisions concerning her sexuality and relationships with men. If she doesn't have a guy, then she's probably obsessed with getting one. If she does have a guy, she's probably not content with him and is having trouble with the fairy-tale-ending part of the romance. If she's between guys, she may be licking her wounds and wrapping herself up in protective layers, telling herself that she'll be more careful next time. In any case, she schemes, dreams, manipulates, connives, controls, clamors, seduces, dominates, cowers, compromises, explodes, and/or implodes in this area of her life. All the while, her spirit dies a slow, withering death. When it comes to her love life, her "feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it."

It's important to remember that although her steps wander, the Wild Thing of Proverbs is a very religious woman who moves in religious circles. Nowadays, you might find her at a youth group, on the worship team, in a Bible study, on a mission trip, or teaching Sunday school. She could be the leader of the women's ministry in your

church. Or the speaker at your next women's retreat. She could be me. She could be you.

On the surface, the Wild Thing does a lot of things right. She professes to worship God. She offers "fellowship offerings" at church and appears to fulfill her vows (Proverbs 7:14). But a closer examination reveals that her heart really isn't into it. Christ is not at the forefront of her affections. He has not captivated her heart. She loves herself and her own pleasure more. She only follows the Lord as long as it's convenient, and as long as it doesn't interfere with her quest to get what she wants (Zechariah 7:4-7; Isaiah 58:3-7). She lives a religious life, but does not love Jesus wholeheartedly. Though she calls Him "Lord, Lord," she does not know Him intimately, nor does she eagerly and obediently follow His ways (Matthew 7:21-22).

Several months ago, my young adult son, Matt, phoned and told me about a girl he had started seeing. My first question for him was, "Is Christ at the center of her heart?"

"Well," he tentatively replied, "she's super nice. She attended a Christian school. She goes to church. She went on a mission trip last year. Her family seems solid. We get along really well."

"That's not what I asked." I explained, "What I want to know is if she bubbles over with Jesus. Does He occupy her thoughts, purposes, dreams, and desires? Does she long to know Him better and obey Him more? Is she into His Word? Is He the sun around which all her planets revolve? Does she love Him with her whole heart?"

"Umm . . . I'm not really sure," he stammered. "We haven't really talked about it much." (By now, he's probably sweating, because it's dawned on him that his lack of an answer is an answer. If he's gone out with her several times, and they haven't talked about Jesus, chances are Jesus isn't at the center of her heart, at the center of his heart, or at the center of their relationship.)

"Son," I gently advised, "there is *nothing* more important than a girl's relationship to Jesus. Nothing. If her heart isn't sold out to Him, then she's not the woman for you. Plain and simple. A heart for God should be your number one criteria for a wife—number one—at the top of your list. Above all, make sure she loves Jesus and gives Him first place in her heart."

Thankfully, my sons have learned to politely tolerate and listen to

what they refer to as my “mom-lecture moments.” I pray that they take the wisdom of my words to heart. And I pray that you do too. It’s one thing to be acquainted with Jesus. It’s another thing to uphold Him as the Lord of your life—and to let your relationship with Him dictate how you conduct yourself in all other relationships. As my sports-chaplain husband often tells his pro athletes, “You can talk the talk. But it doesn’t mean a thing unless you also walk the walk.”

THE HEART-FOOT CONNECTION

When I was a kid at summer camp, we used to sit around the campfire late at night, belting out any song that came to mind. It was always an eclectic collection, ranging from old spirituals (“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”) to action songs (“Hokey Pokey”), from rounds of “Three Blind Mice” to repetitive counting songs like “Ninety-Nine Cans of Soup on the Wall” . . . (the counselors at the church camp made sure we substituted “cans of soup” for “bottles of beer”). We also sang an old traditional folk song, “Dem Dry Bones.” It started with, “Ezekiel connected dem dry bones; I hear the word of the Lord,” and then continued with a lesson in anatomy: “Your toe bone connected to your foot bone. Your foot bone connected to your ankle bone. Your ankle bone connected to your leg bone . . .” and so on, until you got to the final connection: “Your neck bone connected to your head bone—I hear the word of the Lord! Dem bones, dem bones gonna walk aroun’—I hear the word of the Lord!”

This song comes to mind because I believe that any girl who wants to *hear the Word of the Lord*, feel His Spirit breathe life into *dem dry bones*, and experience what it means to *walk aroun’* in His power needs to be very mindful of the connection between her heart and her feet. Anatomically, your foot bone is connected to your ankle bone. But spiritually and metaphorically, your foot and heart are directly connected to each other. Maybe the campfire song should add the line: “Your foot bone’s connected to your heart bone!”

That’s the way it’s always been. Throughout the Old Testament, God repeatedly asked two things of His people: (1) follow Me with your feet, and (2) love Me with your heart (Deuteronomy 10:12; Joshua 22:5). Under the terms of the old covenant, the “feet” part came first. It was necessary for people to keep all the rules (the Law)

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in order to have any kind of a relationship with the Lord. But it may surprise you to know that the love relationship, and not obedience to the rules, was the main goal the Lord had in mind. His old covenant was a “covenant of love” (Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV). The rules were there because they made a love relationship possible. A holy, sinless God cannot enter into a relationship with a sinful creature. It is an utter impossibility. That’s why the old covenant had a set of rules that defined God’s standard of righteousness and a sacrificial system to atone for the penalty of falling short of that standard.

The sacrificial system of the old covenant had severe limitations. The sacrifices needed to be continual and were never quite “enough” to restore humanity to the sinless state that was required in order to approach and interact with a sinless, holy God. Because of the ongoing problem with sin, people’s contact with Him, knowledge of Him, and relationship to Him were limited. Their feet and hearts continually strayed. They were unable to do what was necessary to remain in a committed love relationship. They couldn’t hold up their end of the deal.

The Old Covenant didn’t satisfactorily solve the problem of the sinful human condition. But God had the ultimate remedy in mind. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord foretold:

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26–28)

There it is again. The foot-heart connection. But this time, there’s a different order—and an absolutely breathtaking promise. The prophecy pointed to a time when things would be radically different. The heart would come first. And the right heart wouldn’t be the result of human effort. It would be the gift of God and a work of His Holy Spirit in the life of the individual. The feet would come second. The new heart would ensure that all who have it would walk in the way of the Lord. They would obey, not because they *had* to—contrary to the old covenant, there would be no obligation to fulfill—but because they *wanted* to. The new heart would contain the power,

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motivation, and guidance to walk the right way. Instead of being inclined toward sin, it would be inclined toward holiness.

Jeremiah prophesied that the new heart would have a far greater capacity to do the right thing, because God would engrave His ways directly on it (Jeremiah 31:33). Instead of relying on the external letter of the Law, the Spirit would provide internal guidance as to the intent of the command. (The Spirit might reveal, for instance, that imagining an affair is just as sinful as having one.) The capacity for holy living would be exponentially greater than under the old covenant, for God's Spirit would provide the impulse, guidance, and power to understand and follow God's Word.

God fulfilled the promise when He sent His Son to institute the new covenant in His blood. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the spotless Lamb of God—satisfied the requirements of God's justice and atoned for all sin. Through Jesus, we can receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit and enter into a close and intimate family relationship with our Father. We can be declared holy and enter into His presence boldly.

In the old covenant, the rules provided “the way.” In the new covenant, Jesus is the Way (John 14:4–6). A relationship with Him sets us right with God. It results in a new heart and inspires and enables us to walk correctly, according to the directions in His Word. The heart-foot connection is still there, as it was in the old covenant, but God is the One who does everything. He gives us the heart, desire, and power to obey. It's a radically different approach.

So what does all this have to do with male-female relationships? We can draw several important conclusions. First, the way a woman relates to men has a lot to do with the state of her heart for God. Her behavior is a good indicator of the state of her heart.

Second, although behavior is a good indicator, it is not a *conclusive* indicator. A woman can have the “right” behavior, yet still miss the mark by failing to have the right heart. Conversely, a woman's heart may be right, but she could still be doing some things wrong. The Holy Spirit's conviction and instruction in her life might still be a “work in progress.” Therefore, although it is our responsibility to evaluate behavior, discern right from wrong, and make judgment calls in our relationships, we need a strong dose of humility when doing so. Unlike the Lord, we are unable to see what is in a person's heart.

Third, when it comes to sexuality and male-female relationships, the Bible gives an *illustrative* list of behaviors that are out of step with God's way, but it doesn't provide an *exhaustive* list. Just because a certain behavior isn't prohibited in the Bible doesn't mean that it's a behavior the Lord condones.

For example, the Bible doesn't explicitly prohibit a girl from having her boyfriend sleep over on the couch at her apartment. I've heard several college students rationalize that if the couple does not have sex, this behavior is totally acceptable, that it's not sin. I agree that it technically doesn't go against the "letter of the Law." But it may be an offense against the Lord nonetheless. It may cause the girl and guy to toy with temptation, compromise purity of thought, engage in sensuality and impurity, dishonor the institution of marriage, disobey their parents, fail to flee the appearance of evil, muddy the reputation of the gospel in the eyes of unbelievers, and/or place their desire for convenience and pleasure above their desire to glorify Jesus Christ. They may have avoided the sin of fornication, but in all likelihood, there are a bunch of other sins they did not avoid. Furthermore, compromise of one protective boundary usually leads to the compromise of more protective boundaries. Couples who start with the intent of abstaining will often find that the circumstances are too tempting and, bit by bit, will give in to sexual immorality.

When the Holy Spirit writes God's law on our hearts, He calls us to a higher standard of purity than the "letter of the Law" ever did. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. He came to fulfill them by having them blossom in the fertile soil of redeemed, Spirit-filled hearts (Matthew 5:17). The presence of God's Spirit increases our capacity to obey the Word of God and therefore our capacity for holiness. Through His Spirit's work in our hearts, the Lord wants to rid us of sinful behavior. But He also wants to rid us of sinful attitudes, thoughts, inclinations, and compromises. A growing love for the Lord inspires and empowers us to turn away from anything that is not completely spotless. When our hearts are captivated by Christ's glory, we are "transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). And that affects our relationships with the opposite sex. As we become more and more holy, we become less

and less tolerant of any hint of evil in our thoughts, words, or actions toward men.

Fourth, under the terms of the new covenant, success in our relationships with God does not depend on our personal resources or capabilities. God's Spirit provides us with all the power, love, wisdom, and self-discipline we need (2 Timothy 1:7). He equips us with *everything* we need to love Him and *everything* we need to be godly in our relationships. "His divine power has granted to us *all things* that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3, italics added). Therefore, proper conduct in our relationships with the opposite sex requires that we rely on Him. His divine wisdom, power, love, and self-discipline—and not our own—are what will enable us to do the right thing.

Fifth, though the order and the means have changed, the Lord still asks His children to do the same two things: (1) Love Me with your heart and (2) Follow Me with your feet. Our obedience is not a *requirement* for a relationship with God, but it is the expected *by-product* of it. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

GREAT AFFECTION

In the mid-1700s, New England and other colonies along the Eastern seaboard experienced a religious revival that historians call the Great Awakening. The people who became followers of Jesus at that time had a unique expression to describe their salvation experience. Instead of saying, "I've been born again," or "I gave my life to Jesus," or "I've become a Christian," they'd say, "I have been seized by the power of a great affection!" They'd say it with a loud voice and lots of enthusiasm. To get the inflection right, you have to put on a thick Philadelphian accent and divide the sentence into three separate phrases and emphasize it something like this:

*"I have been SEIZED . . . by the POW'R
 . . . of a GREAT affection!"*

Try it. (Yes, out loud.) It sounds kinda cool. Being Canadian (and having no accent), I like to try to mimic the accents I hear in various parts of the continent. But more than that, I really like the idea that

this declaration conveys. (Did you say it aloud? My dog came running and is staring at me, because I've hollered it out four or five times now.)

God fervently and unrelentingly pursues a love relationship with us. When the hearts of the New Englanders were "seized" by His affection, they responded with a fervent affection of their own. God's affection stirred their affection. They became passionate about Jesus. Jonathan Edwards, a well-known preacher at the time, made this observation:

On whatever occasions persons met together, Christ was to be heard of, and seen in the midst of them. Our young people, when they met, were wont to spend the time in talking of the excellency and dying love of Jesus Christ, the glory of the way of salvation, the wonderful, free, and sovereign grace of God, His glorious work in the conversion of a soul, the truth and certainty of the great things of God's word, the sweetness of the views of His perfections, etc.¹

For those who had been "seized," the great affection became the central focus of their lives. Edwards said, "The *engagedness of their hearts* in this great concern could not be hid, it appeared in their very countenances." They thought about Jesus. They talked about Jesus. They wanted to hear more about Jesus. They told others about Jesus. They read their Bibles. They sang worship songs on the streets. They stopped living the world's way and started living God's way. Bars emptied. Brothels went out of business. Broken relationships were restored. The poor, hungry, and needy received care.

Bottom line? The heart bone is connected to the foot bone. The more a woman's heart is seized with affection for Jesus, the more her life will be transformed to walk in His way. This is abundantly evident in the behavior of the people who were seized by the power of a great affection during the Great Awakening.

The first and most important characteristic of a Girl-Gone-Wise is that Jesus Christ occupies first place in her heart. He is the object of her greatest affection. A Girl-Gone-Wild loves the Lord little. A Girl-Gone-Wise loves Him much. The steps of her feet demonstrate the devotion of her heart.

THE HEART IS THE WELL

The inclination of a woman's heart is, by far, the most important factor in determining whether she will conduct herself in a godly way in her relationships with men. It's the most important point of contrast between a Wild Thing and a Wise Thing. As I constantly tell my eligible sons, "The first and most important thing to look for in a wife is a girl whose heart is overflowing with love for Jesus." A woman who attends to her heart will attend to her ways.

The remaining points of contrast in this book focus on the ways girls ought to "walk." But all these can be traced back to this first and central matter of the heart. The heart is the "well" from which all other behaviors spring. That's why the Sage Father instructed his son, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

I hope you see the connection. I hope you understand that you will never get your behavior toward men or your relationships right until you first get your heart right before God. Girls-Gone-Wise cry out, as David did, "O Lord, teach me how you want me to live! Then I will obey your commands. Make me wholeheartedly committed to you!" (Psalm 86:11 NET).

Don't forget to watch the *Girls Gone Wise* DVD and do the first chapter in the *Girls Gone Wise Companion Guide*. They will help you examine the condition of your heart.