



The Toilet and Other Female Domains

The Lid, the Paper, and Aiming to Please

The Character of the Knight: Inner Beauty or Mere Plumage?

It is often said that a man is the ruler of his domain, the lord of his castle. But then again, many foolish things are often said.¹ A single man usually has no problem running the compartments of his home. The toilet seat can always stay up, laundry day is based on the underarm sniff test, and eating ravioli directly from the can is simply the most practical way to keep the kitchen clean.

When a man gets married, however, everything changes. The dominion is now shared sovereignty, a division of power with delegated authority, and how he handles that challenge requires skilled diplomacy. A man's ability to respectfully give

1. Warning. Blatant chauvinism will follow. I will flaunt old-fashioned stereotypes and archaic values. Even if such prehistoric views make you gag, please read on. I hope you'll find passages of deep respect for both genders and helpful hints that even ardent feminists will enjoy.

up portions of his realm requires a quality called selflessness,² a crucial part of a man's shining armor.

Selflessness is the key to all courtship rituals. It's the first gleam that a woman notices in her knight's shining armor. Few women are attracted to a guy who hands her a bag of his dirty socks and underwear during a first meeting, saying, "Don't use bleach; it gives me hives."

Proper courtship involves exposing an inner selfless character, and a knight's first act of sacrifice includes giving time and attention.³ To that he may add the price of entertainment and food. He may include chivalrous acts, sacrifices of priority and convenience such as holding the door open or carrying heavy packages. In the spirit of a true gentleman he might even step into puddles or mud and carry her across to help her avoid sully her clothes.

Think back to your courtship period. When you acted as a suitor for your bride-to-be, didn't you display kindnesses that reflected your dedication to meet her needs? These acts defined you as someone who is willing to make a sacrifice. You painted a picture of a man who cares, a man who'll take care of her.

Have you made that commitment last? Showing acts of sacrifice during courtship and then abandoning your wife after "catching the prize" is nothing more than a lie. It's a peacock showing off his exquisite plumage to impress a hen with a mere display of feathers. There's no real inner beauty to match.

Dying to self is the foundation of being a good husband; it's the dubbing of knighthood, our initiation into the profession of spiritual nobility. And the putting on of shining armor is the practice of self-sacrifice, expressed through day-to-day

2. Or in the case of those who haven't yet learned these lessons, it could be called, "I really need someone to clean my house."

3. Although a woman also shares in this sacrifice, I leave examination of her role for another book.

activities that display inner holiness. There are no substitutes, no shortcuts. Every tip in this book that helps us to shine our armor is based on our decisions to deny self. In contrast, every sin that we could possibly commit originates in selfishness.

If Christ hasn't made our hearts pure, and we're seeking an outward shine, we'll just be putting on a show to impress—strutting with peacock feathers. It may look pretty for a while, but it won't last. And it probably won't fool our wives for long. A mask wears out and a façade becomes transparent, but inner light, fired by the beauty of God's holy character, lasts forever.

Domain Theory—Peace at the Borders

Every husband has a domain. Whether he has an ocean of cattle on a thousand mountainous acres, or just an old Labrador retriever on thirty square feet of crabgrass, they're his, and his call to rule over them is undeniable. A man's wife, although she has submitted herself to her husband's authority, is not part of that domain. She's not an acre of land, a heifer in the herd, or a faithful dog. She's a partner, an overseer, someone who stands at his side to help him take care of what is now theirs together.

When a man gets married, he gives up autonomy; he allows his spouse to share his authority within his realm and transfers authoritative power to her. As time goes by, this imputed muscle is clearly demonstrated. His wife's instructions to their children should carry the same influence as his own. Her words to a laborer he has hired should crackle in the worker's ears like the commands of the lord of the house. She has the power to negotiate "foreign affairs"—scheduling activities with the outside world, making day-to-day purchases, and signing legal documents. She is more than an ambassador; she understands the heart of the ruling knight.

Whether these abilities come naturally to her or not, her husband's loving guidance will make his armor shine in her eyes. He has demonstrated a willingness to rely on her, giving up his position as sole and omnipotent ruler by delegating authority to his trusted mate. This is real authority that can't be taken back. It can be retrained, redirected, or refocused, but the authority is hers, exercised in humility as she stays in constant communication with her husband.

As we husbands apply this principle of shared authority in our homes, we must be careful to maintain balance. Delegation of authority doesn't mean relegating all authority to our wives in all areas; nor does it free us from noticing their activities. We are, in effect, guardians over their efforts.

Sometimes in your wife's dealings with the outside world, a person or a business will fail to treat her with due respect. People will not recognize her as an authority in your home, or they won't see your arm of power backing her up. Because she is a woman, some will try to use her weaker frame to their advantage, foolishly assuming that her only clout is the feminine physique they can see with their eyes. In cases such as these, you must step in with power to demonstrate to your wife your passionate commitment to back her authority. Your act of support will correct the foolishness of anyone who perceives outward vulnerability as a means of opportunity, treating the beloved extension of your authority as a powerless peasant.

A Woman's Place

Some female domains don't require our watchful eyes. In fact, some places are so sacred to the female world that it would be best if we view ourselves as visitors rather than sovereigns. The bathroom is such a place.

It's true that men use the bathroom, too. But that's the extent of it. It's a place to quickly wash, shave, relieve the pressures of six cups of morning coffee, and then desert. There are times when pausing to read a magazine might be in order, but only out of necessity. The bathroom is not our domain; we don't want to spend much time there.

A typical woman, on the other hand, views the bathroom as a natural place to dwell. It's an inspection station, a refuge for contemplation, and a hiding place in which to weep. Bathrooms in the homes of other people are a curiosity to her, a place to learn about the habits of friends and acquaintances. Even a public restroom can be a social hall, a place for women to convene and make plans for the evening.

The bathroom is also a woman's weigh station, a place to check out the ravages time has wrought. Don't we want our wives to look as attractive as they can? Of course we do. They know we like to look at them, so we might as well confess our admiration of their frame and form. It's natural for us to enjoy their physical beauty, so we shouldn't try to hide this God-given pleasure. If we show them respect and honor, loving them in word and deed, they'll respond by doing what they can to fight age and gravity.

When your wife primps and fusses, she's probably doing it for you. The time she spends in the bathroom is her way of returning the favor, a way to bring delight to your eyes. Yes, she looks just fine without all that fussing, and yes, some women are overly concerned with how they appear to the outside world. But a loving wife has eyes only for her husband.

When she shaves her legs, she thinks about how smooth they'll be against yours. When she pulls on a dress and scrutinizes it in the mirror, she pictures how the color will reflect in your eyes. When she scowls at the extra three pounds that the scale is obviously lying about, she'll wonder if you'll notice them when you take her in your arms.

Yes, the bathroom is a woman's domain, and it's for our own good that we learn to recognize that fact. The sooner we understand the mystery of Lavatory Land and the identity of the reigning mistress of that province, the sooner we'll learn how to keep our armor bright. The surest way to create tarnish is to usurp what is rightfully hers.

Now it's time to get perfectly practical,⁴ and this next sentence may be the most important tip I give in the entire book: keep the toilet closed and clean.

The age-old stereotype is true. Women really do *hate* it when the toilet seat is left up. A gracious woman might not complain verbally, but don't let her silence fool you; she still hates it. Let's examine the reasons behind this attitude that seems overblown in the minds of most males.

First of all men, how would you like it if you had to sit down every time you went to the bathroom? Cold porcelain isn't a great way to awaken a bottom each and every chilly winter morning. What could be worse? Well, try sitting on cold porcelain that's been topped with drips of stale urine. How's that for stoking the fires of romance?

What kind of insensitive clod would not only forget to lift the lower seat, but also not bother to clean it after making a mess? A man might protest, "I was sleepy, and I wasn't thinking." Is that a good excuse? Of course not! If we really love our wives, we'll think about their needs before our own need for sleep. We'll be so in tune with protecting them that our first thoughts will be for their comfort. It's easy to lift the seat. It's even easier to lower it when we're done. And if we do splash, at the very least we can snap off a few pieces of toilet paper and clean it up.

4. You'll learn as the book goes on that I love alliteration.

Is that such a hard chore to do for our soul mates, the love of our lives?

If you've already messed up in this area, the next time it's really cold outside, get up early and put a space heater near the toilet. Turn it up high, and let it radiate all over that chilly porcelain. What a great way to make her feel warm all over! It's a great way to say, "I'm sorry."

Practically speaking, leaving both lids down just makes good sense. It keeps a toilet's natural fragrance from permeating the room. It keeps the cat from drinking from its tasty reservoir.⁵ And leaving the cover down can discourage two-year-olds from playing boats with whatever plastic toy they bring into Lavatory Land. A closed lid also makes a handy place to sit while putting on shoes before leaving the bathroom.

Now I move on to the toilet paper, which I will call by its popular name, TP. Men see TP as a utilitarian device, the use of which is obvious. It doesn't matter if it's white, pink, or of floral design; it all gets flushed anyway. Women, however, tend to view TP as a symbol, a sign of the care with which they arrange their domain. Yes, the TP gets flushed, but everyone has to use it first so it might as well be pretty and smell nice. And finally, it must always come off the roll in the proper direction.

What *is* the proper direction? Through the years, I've heard a dozen strident arguments for each side, from the "over-the-top" gang and the "from-underneath" defenders. After studying the tissue issue in great depth, I've discovered a concrete solution, an undeniable truth. There really is a correct way against which there can be no argument. The correct way is the way your wife wants it to be.

5. I say "tasty," although I've never tried it. Cats, however, seem to think it's the nectar of the gods.

If the toilet paper is nearly empty, carefully note which way the paper leaves the roll. Does it come over the top when you pull it, or does it roll out from underneath? Next, go ahead and use the rest of it. Don't be shy; the environmentalists will never know. Slip off the cardboard tube,⁶ and put a new TP roll in place. If the tissue doesn't come off the roll the same way it did before, take it off, turn it around, and reattach it. It should then be correct.

The point I'm making is simple. When issues arise that are of trivial importance to men, we should willingly do the little things that make our women happy. It should bring us a measure of joy every time we lean over to properly place the lids and paper, to clean the sink after shaving, and to wipe down the glass door or vinyl curtain after showering. We, who are to be like Christ is to the church, should be willing to die for our wives. Why should we even give a second's delay to doing something so easy and trivial as moving a lid or placing a roll of TP on the holder correctly? What does a lid or roll of TP weigh? Not much. Our little sacrifices, especially in our women's domains, bring far more joy to them than we can imagine.

Porcelain Prodding

If you don't believe that your minuscule moments of kindness will make your wife rejoice, put it to the test. Without being asked and without mentioning it after the fact, scrub out the sink or wash the mirror. Don't worry. She will notice. And if she asks you why you did it, don't say,

6. We save our cardboard tubes for our gerbils. It's a natural way to recycle. I just thought I'd add that in case an environmentalist is reading this.

“Cause it was dirty,” or “It looked like it needed it.” That will make her think you’re upset with her housekeeping. Instead, just shrug your shoulders and say, “I made a mess,” or “Just doing my part to help out.”

Since the bathroom is a place you visit multiple times a day, it provides many opportunities to shine your armor. I’ll list a few more, and once you see the pattern of service and self-sacrifice you’ll be able to come up with some of your own.

1. A Snappy Towel

After you take a shower, put a clean towel on the rod for her,⁷ keeping it neatly creased and looking fresh. A crisp, clean towel says “I’m thinking about you” without ever making a sound, and silent expressions are always more profound than the most romantic sonnets.

2. Aim to Please

Put a sign on the wall above the toilet that says:

FIVE STEPS TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Step 1 — Lift seats

Step 2 — Urinate (Aim with accuracy)

Step 3 — Clean up any splashes

Step 4 — Flush

Step 5 — Lower seats quietly

Just posting these instructions will help her know that you’re really going to make an effort as you aim to please.

7. I’m assuming there’s not already a usable towel on the rod. We don’t want to add to the pile of laundry.

3. Socks and Jocks

Pick up your dirty clothes and put them into the laundry hamper or wherever your family stores them until laundry day arrives. Hang your wet or sweaty ones up to dry, remembering to deposit them in the laundry stash later. Nothing says “I don’t care about your feelings” like dirty underwear in the middle of the floor or stinky, wet socks on the vanity. A message of apathy darkens her heart as surely as the rising odor offends her nostrils.

Matters Small and Great

As we give of ourselves in trivial matters, our actions will prove our commitment to sacrifice in larger ones. As Jesus said, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10). Our attention to detail will prove the validity of our marriage covenant. When we’re faithful in meeting our wives’ needs in small matters, they’ll trust us in greater ones. On the other hand, if we’re unwilling to be servants in something so small as lifting or closing a toilet seat, how can our wives trust us when greater trials come along? We might say, “Of course I’ll be there for the big stuff,” and so we might, but verbal promises are not what solidifies their faith in us. It’s the little, day-to-day acts of servanthood that prove our commitment.

Other Domains—The Kitchen

Another female domain is the kitchen. Yes, I know some men are great cooks, and some women can’t

even burn coffee right, but that's not the point. God gave every woman certain gifts, and one of them is a motherly desire to meet the needs of her family, including nutritional requirements.

When it comes to cooking, a man usually invades the kitchen in order to create a masterpiece, taking pride in the charisma of heavenly scents in willing nostrils, the bliss of a tangy new sauce rippling over taste buds, or the beauty of blended colors that spangle in guests' eyes as his magnum opus is presented at the table.⁸ Who cares if it's nutritious? It's a sensual tour de force!

Don't get me wrong. A husband should cook now and then. It's part of his nature to create, whether he builds with wood and nails, brick and mortar, or lasagna noodles and tomato sauce. Creative energy needs an outlet, and an occasional kitchen invasion can alleviate a lot of his pent-up pressure.

A woman, on the other hand, views the kitchen as a place of sustenance, a storehouse of basic essentials. It's where vitamins and minerals answer to roll call in a hurried assembly of the two-and-a-half basic food groups—bread, meat, and pasteurized, processed cheese food. Since the children had their chewable vitamins this morning, if the mid-day collection has iron, calcium, and at least two major vitamins, it'll do just fine for lunch.⁹ A parade of colors and fragrant aromas might be nice, and she'll strive toward that goal, but if it's nutritious and tastes good enough to keep the kids from saying, "Yuk," she'll ring the dinner bell.

8. Yes, I know this description is overdone. That's the point.

9. Official disclaimer: my wife does an awesome, tireless job of selecting nutritious foods for our meals. We don't always eat it, but she makes sure we are supplied with every necessary nutrient.

Although she might want to create something special on occasion, a wife's mission is really a thrice-daily quest to keep her husband and children from getting scurvy. As a mother, she feels called to this duty, so give her all the honor due her great commission. Her job can be torturous, so don't make it any worse.

In my house, if ungrateful tongues reject my wife's latest attempt at proper dietary provision, I know mine better not be one of them. Even if the meal really is one huge "Yuk," I eat it with a smile on my face. Taking a bite of a live grub-worm would be more palatable to me than risking the slightest chance of disappointing my long-suffering wife.

Stovetop Tips

We should always treat the kitchen as a woman's domain; it's one of her workplaces. It's not a place of refuge, like the bathroom, but it's still a province that should be completely in her power. If we do cook on occasion (and we should), we must clean up our messes thoroughly. If we leave our wives with a hundred pots and pans to scrub, we haven't removed any loads from their shoulders.

Even if we don't cook, we should do the dishwashing or arrange for our older children to do it. If no children are available, cleaning up dinnertime messes is a good job for a husband and wife to do together. It provides a short time to talk, to catch up on the day's activities.

Here's your first tip. I find that clearing the table and putting away leftovers is a good task for me. The hunt for the right-sized plastic dish and matching lid is an adventure, almost like a safari, and it helps me turn out a decent lunch for myself the next day. I can keep track of where everything

is, and I don't have to launch a refrigerator scavenger hunt when I'm in a hurry.

In my experience, searching through refrigerator leftovers is a man's assignment. When six or seven unlabeled margarine containers stare me down, opening each one to discover its contents can be dangerous. One smells like old socks, but it looks like stiff gravy with a bad toupee. When I touch the second, it growls and snaps shut. Nope. That one needs to cool off a little more. The third margarine container holds, well, margarine. Now that's strange. The fourth smells okay and has no growl and no hair. Lunch!

This brings me to the *second tip*. Men, if our wives don't take great joy in making our lunches for us, we should make them ourselves. This is one image of nostalgia that needs to be destroyed: the neatly packed cooler or brown bag sitting on the table just before we leave for work. We must not demand such a luxury. It places an unnecessary burden on our overworked wives, and we're perfectly capable of doing this task ourselves. It doesn't take much effort to slap a piece of meat and lettuce on a sandwich bun, grab an apple, and slip an Oreo[®] or two into a bag.

When we get into the habit of making our own lunches, we open the door of opportunity for our godly wives to beat us to the punch if they have a spare minute or two. And, who knows, they might even slip love notes in with the cookies. Who says the cream in the middle is the best part? I look forward to the sugar I'll get at the end of the day.

Tip number three: When your wife is out of the house for an hour or two, give the kitchen a good cleaning. Sweep and mop the floor, wash and put away dishes, and wipe down all the counter surfaces after clearing the piles of stuff that have accumulated there.

My wife and I tend to stack the day's mail on the kitchen counter, and after several particularly busy weeks the "stuff-to-go-through-later" pile can become a foreboding mountain of doom. It takes a few minutes, but I can usually throw away about two-thirds of the stack, and we take care of the rest together when she gets home.

This tip can lead to a pretty big job, but even if you're not very good at cleanup duty, the kitchen will probably look better as a result of your efforts. Trust me, your wife will think it looks great, even if she doesn't say so right away.

Domain Theory—A Final Word

Men, we must take care to respect our wives' domains. It's worth it. From the bathroom to the kitchen, let's do the little things that fill their hearts with trust. In addition, let's be sure to keep our own domains in shape. The working world, the garage, and the world of tools and handiwork all need our care and commitment.

In any situation where conversation on equal footing or negotiation with a man must take place, it's up to us to be our families' mouthpieces if a conflict arises. We must never allow our wives to be in a position of trading intense words with a man; a woman should not be forced to verbally wrestle with someone physically stronger than she. Enforced authority outside the home is to be our domain.

Even when our wives come to the place of sharing our authority, we will be wise not to forget one of our most important duties—to protect them during difficult circumstances. Step in and take over when the world gets too pushy or becomes threatening. Knights, this is your domain. When

you take control of difficult situations in your realms, your armor will shine like a beacon.

There are times when I have to make phone calls to the school superintendent to straighten out graduation requirements, or talk to the bank manager to delete a service charge on our checking account, or drive to the plumber's storefront when my wife discovers that the "fixed" pipes still leak. Some people are not willing to do what's right, and my wife's influence isn't always enough to persuade them. It's then up to me to exert my influence directly.

I could relate dozens of experiences in which my wife was unable to get a refund from a rules-oriented store clerk or was stymied by a red-tape specialist in the government. It seems that a firm, under-control male voice often lubricates rusty gears far better than a female's. Call it unfair; call it sexist. I call it a fact.

All of this attention to our wives' needs isn't coddling; it's the natural outpouring of our servant hearts, hearts made pure by the sacrifice of Christ, hearts molded into tenderness by His example in life and on the cross. Yes, my wife would survive without my acts of servanthood. If I were less of a servant, she would still clean my messes in Lavatory Land, strive to make nutritious meals for our family, and even pack my lunch and put it by the door. The only missing item would be the one I cherish most, the heartfelt love note nestled against the Oreos[®], the sweet treat of love that gleams in her eyes. Losing that would be a tragedy.

Knowing my wife's deep passion for loving obedience to God, I believe she would do it all without a murmur of complaint. She also made a covenant, a commitment to meet my needs, just as I agreed to meet hers. If I were to shirk my commitments, however, she would be unable to prevent her

spiritual eyes from seeing me as the lazy bum I would be. There would be no sheen in my armor, only the torn rags of a sniveling coward.

Remember, being a servant doesn't make a man into a doormat; it transforms him into a prince or even a king in the eyes of his appreciative wife. Any testosterone-laced fool can be a despot, treating his wife like the crud between his toes. It takes a heroic man—a knight in shining armor—to treat his wife with respect and compassion.