

FILLING YOUR SPOUSE'S EMOTIONAL TANK

I have gotten the idea of an emotional tank from Dr. Ross Campbell's book, *How to Really Love Your Teenager* ([Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 28–29). An emotional tank is the emotional reservoir a person draws from to feel secure in life. Dr. Campbell gives the example of a young child at the market with his mother who feels safe and secure enough to walk five feet ahead of her. When a stranger walks by and says hello to him, he becomes insecure and runs back to hold onto his mother's leg for emotional reassurance. His emotional tank was suddenly drained by the greeting. Soon he will be recharged and able to venture out again. Just as children have emotional tanks, so do teenagers and adults. The older you are, the larger your emotional tank becomes. It will take more time to fill an adult's empty emotional tank than a child's. One of the callings of a parent is to fill his or her child's emotional tank with focused attention, love, acceptance, training, discipline, instruction, and loving touch. One calling of a husband and wife is to fill the other's emotional tank.

A need is something you can either meet or ignore. It is not something you can talk someone out of. Trying to negotiate a need is the same as ignoring it. When it comes to recognizing and filling a spouse's emotional tank, the husband seems to be at a disadvantage to his wife. Let us compare the skills most men and women have to recognize and meet the emotional needs of a spouse with boxes of crayons: Women have the sixty-four-color box with four-tiered rows and a built-in sharpener in the back! Men have the eight-color box with the basic colors of black, brown, red, blue, green, yellow, orange, and purple! Perhaps a better illustration would be a paint palette with eight colors to mix and match to make a variety of new colors. It takes men time to learn to make different colors with the basic eight. Women seem to have the colors premixed and can still make new ones. It is important to learn to lovingly care for your spouse. In some ways it is like learning another language (your wife's love language).

The emotional needs of a woman fall into four basic categories: security, romance, emotional intimacy, and affirming touch. The four complementary categories for a man are: feeling needed, feeling appreciated, physical intimacy, and responsive to his touch. List and discuss together your respective emotional needs, using the basic categories listed above.

The Woman's Emotional Tank

Security

Romance

Emotional intimacy

Affirming touch

The Man's Emotional Tank

Feeling needed

Feeling appreciated

Physical intimacy

Responsive to his touch

List below and discuss the things that drain you emotionally:¹

¹ Smith, C. M. (1999). [*Getting ready for a lifetime of love: six steps to prepare for a great marriage*](#) (pp. 23–24). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.