

Reading 2: The Half-Made Bed and the More Excellent Way

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Notes

“**The Personal is Political**” was a slogan engineered by Marxist feminists of the 1960s and 1970s. Few people realized at the time exactly what that slogan entailed. “The personal is political” should have telegraphed loud and clear that these women intended to politicize every aspect of our personal lives.

Many people dismissed extreme feminism as irrational and crazy and therefore unworthy of serious consideration. Others excused feminism because they had some worthy goals, such as outlawing the firing of women when they got married or pregnant. I know I swung back and forth between these responses. I reasoned that I was just trying to live my life.

What I didn’t realize was how much baggage I had acquired from feminism. This baggage made it difficult to “just live my life,” even though I was never more than a skeptical feminist.

I thought it was important to “assert myself,” to not be a doormat, to demand respect from my husband. I thought it was important to keep separate bank accounts and divide our expenses equally. I thought we should avoid gender stereotypical divisions of labor. Even if he was manifestly better at something, I should try to “do my share” of whatever mechanical project he might have in mind.

Most importantly, of course, he should do his share of household chores, even if a particular chore didn’t even register on his radar screen. He should do his half of everything I thought was important. And, he should do it to my satisfaction. In the interest of fairness and equality.

It was all quite exhausting.

I did eventually learn that nagging my helpers for not doing things my way was a good way to lose my helpers. But notice: this is a purely pragmatic consideration. I still was not questioning the basic rightness of my overall approach. I thought I had a right to achieve my goals, and other people were there to help me achieve them.

Just to be sure I'm making myself clear here, let me repeat for emphasis: I had a right to achieve my goals, and other people were there to help me.

I was still operating within the Equality Paradigm, created by those whose stated objective was to politicize my personal life. Only after my reversion to Catholicism, did I realize that there was a "More Excellent Way," as St. Paul would put it: The Way of Love (1 Cor. 12:31).

Instead of asking myself whether he did his fair share, I can ask myself: What does love require of me, in any given situation?

Let's say I want the bed made in the morning. I don't take it for granted that all my readers accept this as a lofty goal. So be it. I want the bed made each morning. Sometimes, my husband and I make it together.

The problem is: my idea of "making the bed" is not universally shared. I know this for a fact, since my husband's idea of "making the bed" is not the same as mine. How smooth must the sheets and covers be? Do we have to pull the covers down evenly on each side of the mattress? The most frequent difference of opinion is over the correct location of the covers, in relation to the pillows: under or over the pillows?

My husband made the bed this morning.

I've got a few choices here. Correct him? Tell him he did it wrong? "Here is the correct way to do it." I know from experience that, as a non-push-over himself, my husband doesn't appreciate being treated like a child. (Imagine that.)

Or worse, I could scold him. "I've told you a million times how to do this. You are doing it wrong just to spite me. I have to do everything around here."

Or I could ignore it until he leaves the house and remake the bed to my satisfaction. Sometimes, this is what I do. I like seeing the bed a certain way. So, I do it my own way, for my own reasons.

When I take this path, I strive to do it without judgment of him. I try to put these thoughts in my mind: "He does a lot for us. He can handle effortlessly things I can't do, and would not even know where to begin." In other words, I try to praise him, even when he is not around.

I can also install in my mind some course corrections on the significance of the chore itself. "It is just the bed. It is not that important in the grand scheme of things." Best of all, "Never mind. With any luck, we are just going to mess it up again soon," with a grin in my heart.

I notice that I still have to shut down some of those Way of Equality scripts running in my head. I feel quite certain I am not the only woman who thinks this way. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if there aren't female readers tut-tutting me at this very moment. "He is a grown man: he should know how to make his bed by now." "He is counting on you to keep his home nice." And so on.

But those scripts are not the Way of Love. Love means being grateful to and for one another, in all our differences, with all our quirks and insecurities. There are lots of possible Ways of Love in every situation. In all cases, the Way of Love teaches us to see the person as more important than the chore. In fact, the person is more important than pretty much anything else.

The feminists with their Way of Equality, gave us an unlimited supply of justifications for nagging our husbands, for feeling superior to our husbands, and for being just plain selfish. Do you suppose this is relevant to the high rates of family breakdown in our culture? Dismissing this topic as unworthy of thoughtful political commentary underestimates the gravity of what the sexual revolutionaries have been doing to us all this time. They have been driving wedges between men and women, husbands and wives, and even between mothers and babies.

While our brothers in the conservative movement were holding conferences on the American Founding, and symposia on free market economics, the sexual revolutionaries moved into our homes. Sexual revolutionary rhetoric is speaking to us from across our kitchen tables, from the back seat of our minivans, and from the other side of our beds. The revolutionaries have entered the minds of our family members, our spouses, children, and grandchildren.

All the while, powerful people have accumulated even more power over our personal lives, which have indeed become extensions of our political lives. Big Government expands to fill the voids created by family breakdown. Big Business makes money selling us stuff we wouldn't need if we were content with our family lives. Big Media makes money keeping us overstimulated, while we scarcely know how to have face-to-face conversations. Perhaps this explains why feminists who support the Sexual Revolution get far more legal, financial, and media support than any other group of women who try to wear the feminist label.

So here we are in 2017, with record numbers of young people afraid to get married and millions of children born without both parents living with them. We Christians have a humane alternative sitting right under our noses: The Way of Love. "Love one another as I have loved you." Fully, freely, faithfully, fruitfully, love one another to the end.

I mentioned that my husband made the bed. Did I mention that he did it without my prompting, asking or nagging? When I see the half-made bed (or the bed I consider "half-made"), I can say, "Thank you, honey, for making the bed. I smile when I see it. I appreciate you so much." Almighty God put this man in the center of my life. No matter what is going on, I know God wants me to love my husband.

That is St. Paul's "More Excellent Way." The sexual revolutionaries have nothing that can compete with it. Let us say so, and live so, without apology.