

Causing Change Without a Word 5-11-14

In I Peter 3:1-8 we are told that a wife, by her Godly conduct, can change her husband's spiritual nature "without a word...". An illustration of this ability to change others by our actions is found in the story of "*the Eight Cow Wife*", which follows this sermon.

This story reflects a simply truth: people often sink to expectations, and people can rise to meet expectations too. Christians "rise" to God's expectations (I Peter 2:5-10). Consider that as the bride of Christ, we were purchased to rise to an expectation He created (Ephesians 5). We can even rise to the level of "perfection" according to Matthew 5:48 and James 1:4, 3:2.

As well, Christians rise to other's expectations and can cause others to desire to change themselves. In our relationships (Colossians 3:18-4:1). We also can do so in our church fellowship (Colossians 1:28). How is this possible? "*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*" (Colossians 3:12-14). It is this "bond of perfection", love, that causes this to occur.

As the example of the eight cow wife demonstrates, we can raise one another up "without a word". It is by our conduct and treatment of others within the commandments of Christ. We can cause others to changes themselves with faithful expectations, with the bond of love, and with patience, kindness and humility.

The Eight-Cow Wife

by Patricia McGerr,

Adapted and edited from it's original appearance in Reader's Digest, February 1988, pp138-141

"Get Johnny Lingo to help you find what you want and then let him do the bargaining," advised Shenkin as I sat on the veranda of his guest house and wondered whether to visit Nurabandi. "He'll earn his commission four times over. Johnny knows values and how to make a deal."

"Johnny Lingo." The chubby boy on the veranda steps hooted the name, then hugged his knees and rocked with shrill laughter.

"Be quiet," said his father and the laughter grew silent. "Johnny Lingo's the sharpest trader in this part of the Pacific."

The simple statement made the boy choke and almost roll off the steps. Smiles broadened on the faces of the villagers standing nearby.

"What goes on?" I demanded. "Everybody around here tells me to get in touch with Johnny Lingo and then breaks up. It is some kind of trick, a wild-goose chase, like sending someone for a left-handed wrench? I there no such person or is he the village idiot or what? Let me in on the joke."

"Not idiot," said Shenkin. "Only one thing. Five months ago, at festival time, Johnny came to Kiniwata and found himself a wife. He paid her father eight cows!" He spoke the last words with great solemnity and I knew enough about island customs to be thoroughly impressed. Two or three cows would buy a fair-to-middling wife, four or five a highly satisfactory one.

"Eight cows!" I said. "She must have been a beauty that takes your breath away." "That's why they laugh," my guest said. "It would be kindness to call her plain. She was little and skinny with no--ah--endowments. She walked with her shoulders hunched and her head ducked, as if she was trying to hide behind herself. Her cheeks had no color, her eyes never opened beyond a slit and her hair was a tangled mop half over her face. She was scared of her own shadow, frightened by her own voice. She was afraid to laugh in public. She never romped with the girls, so how could she attract the boys?"

"But she attracted Johnny?"

This is the story Shenkin told me:

"All the way to the council tent the cousins were urging Sam to try for a good settlement. Ask for three cows, they told him, and hold out for two until you're sure he'll pay one. But Sam was in such a stew and so afraid there'd be some slip in this marriage chance for Sarita that they knew he wouldn't hold out for anything. So while they waited they resigned themselves to accepting one cow, and thought, instead, of their luck in getting such a good husband for Sarita. Then Johnny came into the tent and, without waiting for a word from any of them, went straight up to Sam Karoo, grasped his hand and said, "Father of Sarita, I offer eight cows for your daughter." And he delivered the cows.

"As soon as it was over Johnny took Sarita to the island of Cho for the first week of marriage. Then they went home to Narabundi and we haven't seen them since. Except at festival time, there's not much travel between the islands."

This story interested me so I decided to investigate.

The next day I reached the island where Johnny lived. When I met the slim, serious man, he welcomed me to his home with a grace that made me feel like the owner. I was glad that from his own people he had respect unmingled with mockery.

I told him that his people had told me about him.

"They speak much of me on that island? What do they say?"

"They say you are a sharp trader," I said. "They also say the marriage settlement that you made for your wife was eight cows." I paused, then went on, coming as close to a direct question as I could. "They wonder why."

"They say that?" His eyes lighted with pleasure. He seemed not to have noticed the question. "Everyone in Kiniwata knows about the eight cows?"

I nodded.

"And in Narabundi everyone knows it, too." His chest expanded with satisfaction. "Always and forever, when they speak of marriage settlements, it will be remembered that Johnny Lingo paid eight cows for Sarita."

So that's the answer, I thought with disappointment. All this mystery and wonder and the explanation's only vanity. It's not enough for his ego to be known as the smartest, the strongest, the quickest. He had to make himself famous for his way of buying a wife. I was tempted to deflate him by reporting that in Kiniwata he was laughed at for a fool.

As we spoke a woman entered the adjoining room and placed a bowl of blossoms on the dining table. She stood still a moment to smile with sweet gravity at the young man beside me. Then she went swiftly out again. She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. This girl had an ethereal loveliness. The dew-fresh flowers with which she'd pinned back her lustrous black hair accented the glow of her cheeks. The lift of her shoulders, the tilt of her chin, the sparkle of her eyes all spelled a pride to which no one could deny her the right. And as she turned to leave she moved with grace that made her look like a queen.

When she was out of sight I turned back to Jonny Lingo and found him looking at me with eyes that reflected the pride of the girl's.

"You admire her?" he murmured.

"She--she's glorious. Who is she?" (*I couldn't help, but think -- if she was a servant, how difficult it must be for homely Sarita, having to daily be in the presence of such a beautiful woman. And what a temptation for Mr. Lingo!*)

"She is my wife."

I stared at him blankly. Was this some custom I had not heard about? Do they practice polygamy here? He, for his eight cows, bought both Sarita and this other? Before I could form a question he spoke again.

"This is the only one -- Sarita." His way of saying the words gave them a special significance. "Perhaps you wish to say she does not look the way they say she looked in Kiniwata."

"She doesn't." The impact of the girl's appearance made me forget tact. "I heard she was homely. They all make fun of you because you let yourself be cheated by Sam Karoo."

"You think he cheated me? You think eight cows were too many?" A slow smile slid over his lips as I shook my head. "She can see her father and her friends again. And they can see her. Do you think anyone will make fun of us then? Much has happened to change her. Much in particular happened the day she went away."

"You mean she married you?"

"That, yes. But most of all, I mean the arrangements for the marriage."

"Arrangements?"

"Do you ever think," he asked reflectively, "what it does to a woman when she knows that the price her husband has paid is the lowest price for which she can be bought? And then later, when all the women talk, as women do, they boast of what their husbands paid for them. One says four cows, another maybe six. How does she feel-- the woman who was sold for one or two? This could not happen to my Sarita."

"Then you paid that unprecedented number of cows just to make your wife happy?"

"Happy?" He seemed to turn the word over on his tongue, as if to test its meaning. "I wanted Sarita to be happy, yes, but I wanted more than that. You say she's different from the way they remember her in Kiniwata. This is true. Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. Now she knows that she is worth more than any other woman on the islands."

"Then you wanted..."

"I wanted to marry Sarita. I loved her and no other woman."

"But--" I was close to understanding.

"But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."

http://www.ultimatehusband.com/8cow_wife.htm