

Introduction

Mark Littleton cites a story that is worth remembering:

When Winston Churchill was prime minister of Great Britain, his marriage was considered one of the best examples in England of true loyalty and love. Often, when he gave a speech in the House of Commons, he would not begin until he had received a sign from her. Later in his life, someone interviewed Mr. Churchill and asked, "If you could live again, what would you want to be?" With a twinkle in his eye, Churchill replied, "Mrs. Churchill's next husband"

What a benediction on a marriage! And what a monumental compliment for one's wife.

How sad that in today's society we would be surprised if someone made a statement like that. Unfortunately, what should be the norm is often quite the contrary. Sadder yet, the Christian community has not escaped the deterioration of the sanctity of marriage. Close to fifty percent of all Christian marriages end in divorce! Thankfully this statistic is greatly reduced among those couples who regularly pray, read God's Word and attend church together.

What is the problem? Why are so many Christian marriages filled with trouble and ending in divorce? Ultimately the answer always comes down to one word: Sin.

Whether it is the sin of selfishness, adultery, lying, or unforgiveness -- sin destroys marriages. And as Christians, we need to walk daily in the newness of life, following Christ and choosing to live a holy life rather than living in sin. There is a significant drop in the divorce rate among those Christian couples that regularly attend church and read God's Word together.

We must deal with reality. As long as individuals continue to follow their own fleshly desires rather than God's Word, there will be trouble. The Lord has given us a prescription for a healthy marriage and it is found in His Word. The Bible literally offers us a road map for handling marital relationships, but it only works when we follow it and commit ourselves to loving God and loving our spouses.

If you are not married yet but are looking for information on what a godly marriage should be, you are off to a good start. However, maybe you are already married and your marriage, which you thought was made in heaven, is feeling more like hell on earth. I can assure you, God has a better plan for your marriage.

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The Lord wants us to be filled with joy in spite of our circumstances. He wants us to love our spouses just as He has loved us. But what does that mean to you? It may mean that you need to forgive even if you have been tremendously hurt. It may mean that you need to forsake all others and commit only to your mate. It may mean that, outside of the Lord Himself, your thoughts need to be directed only toward your spouse -- not towards other people or things. It may mean you need to make some major adjustments in your life right now. The way to get a brand new husband or a brand new wife is to be a brand new spouse yourself. This can happen when you put Jesus in the center of your life and marriage.

I can tell you that no matter how troubled your marriage is, it is not beyond the restoring power of Jesus Christ. Nothing is impossible with Christ (Mark 10:27), and though it may seem that your marriage is beyond repair, it is not! No matter what the problem, even adultery, if both husband and wife are willing to repent and to recommit to the Lord and to each other (which includes forgiveness), God can not only restore your marriage, but make it the source of joy and support it was meant to be.

Let today be a new start for your marriage. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13, "But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."

Take hold of your new life in Christ and put the past behind you. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17 assures us.

You can have a blessed marriage filled with love and joy. Notice I did not say you are guaranteed an "easy" marriage. Too many people want things to be easy -- and as soon as difficulties arise they think it is time to move on. Marriage is not easy! It takes work -- it takes dying to self -- it takes obedience to God instead of to your own fleshly desires! There is an old saying, "Nothing worthwhile is easy." This is especially true of marriage.

The following pages were written to help you form a marriage based on God's direction. Like any set of directions, they need to be followed. If you choose to ignore them you will have problems.

The choice is yours. Are you going to walk in love?

CHAPTER ONE

Why Marriage?

The mystery is this: God did not create the union of Christ and the church after the pattern of human marriage; just the reverse! He created human marriage on the pattern of Christ's relation to the church. --John Piper

What is the purpose of marriage? Did God look down at Adam and say, "Gee, I think you need a few problems in life?" Perhaps He created Eve to be Adam's personal slave! Unfortunately, some of you may have husbands who think that way. However, God had a divine purpose for marriage -- right from the beginning. In Genesis 2:18 we read, "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'"

God said everything about His creation was good -- that is, everything except the fact that man was alone.

Though the Lord has gifted some people with singleness, for others He has ordained a life-long companion -- knowing that for them it is best not to be alone. In other words, in some situations, two are better than one.

This was the case with Adam. God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone -- to remain single. What kind of companion did Adam need?

Genesis 2:19-20 says, "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."

There is humor in this passage. Imagine Adam looking for a helpmate. He is looking for someone like himself and all he sees are animals being paraded in front of him. Adam knew they were unable to commune with him. I know there may be a lot of pet lovers reading this who think that their pet is a better companion than their mate!

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But Adam knew he could not have a meaningful conversation with one of these animals. He wanted someone just like himself. Someone who could understand his humanness, someone who could communicate, and someone who could feel just as he did.

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:21-22).

Notice that God brought the woman to the man! If we could grab hold of this it would make for a much easier time when it comes to dating and singleness. The Lord knew what Adam needed and the woman fulfilled all his desires.

I think it is safe to say that Adam was pleased with the woman God brought him. The King James Version of the Bible the verse states, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23).

In essence what Adam was saying is that this woman is a part of him. There is an intimacy -- a common bond between the two of them. This was a bond that Adam could not experience with the animals, but he knew he could experience it with the woman. She was a part of him.

The Great Mystery: Christ and the Church

Scripture continually draws parallels between Christ and the church and marriage. Christ is the bridegroom and we (the church) are the bride. In Ephesians 5, Paul talks of a great mystery regarding marriage, in which he is speaking of Christ and the church.

Woman was taken out of the side of man. Up to that point, Adam was looking for someone to fellowship with him, but there was none like him. God remedied the problem by bringing a woman to Adam.

In the same way, God also desired fellowship, but man was full of sin and unable to commune with a Holy God. So, He sent His son to Earth to die on a cross. Like Adam,

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Jesus' side was pierced, and out of it came His bride, the church. Now we can have fellowship with God because of what Christ did. This is the great mystery of the church and also the holy blueprint for marriage.

God's desire for marriage parallels His desire for fellowship with man. He wants husbands and wives to be close to each other – to share an intimate rather than platonic relationship.

There are many marriages today that are platonic in the sense of true intimacy. There may be a sexual outlet, but the relationship overall is routine and surface. Just as there are many people who consider themselves religious because they go to church or take part in the rituals, their hearts are far from God and they do not know Him personally and intimately. There is no fellowship -- no daily communion. Unfortunately, there are many marriages composed of the same superficial elements. There is a certain ritual to the relationship and a carrying out of certain duties -- but the heart is missing. There is no bond, no intimacy, no true fellowship with the spouse. This is not what God designed!

God designed marriage to complement the spouses. It should be a bedrock of joy, fulfillment, and true intimacy. Your mate should be your best friend -- your closest human relationship. Only your relationship with God should come before your marriage relationship.

Two Are Now One

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined
to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. --Genesis 2:24

The marriage partnership blends two lives into one. Your home is now with your spouse rather than with your parents. This means change. You cannot run to your parents for everything now. You have to be responsible and accountable. A Christian family once shared with me a story regarding their daughter. Having only been married two months, the daughter wanted to come home to her parents after having a fight with her husband. The parents wisely told their daughter that her home now was with her husband and she needed to stay there and work it out!

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Marriage partners need to leave their parents and cleave to one another. The key in the relationship is oneness. You and your spouse are one. If I hurt my wife, I am hurting myself. If I bless my wife, I am blessing myself. If you nurture, encourage, and love your spouse he or she will reflect it.

We need to realize that marriage was the first social institution ever created. Before any other foundation, God created marriage! Remember, however, that though marriage was made in heaven, we are responsible for the maintenance work . . .

TWO

Off to the Right Start!

It is very desirable, when there is a marriage, to have Jesus Christ present at it; to have his spiritual gracious presence, to have the marriage owned and blessed by him; the marriage is then honourable indeed; and they that marry in the Lord (1Corinthians 7:39) do not marry without him.

--Matthew Henry

Jesus Christ needs to be the foundation of Christian marriages. Marriages built on any other foundation will eventually crumble and die. I have seen countless people seek to become married for the wrong reasons. Many people look at marriage as a tool to meet their own selfish needs. Those who enter into marriage with selfish motives will soon reap a whirlwind of destruction.

Marriage brings out who you really are. It amplifies everything about you. If you are a self-centered slob before you are married, you are going to be more of a self-centered slob after you are married. If you are an unhappy single person, guess what? You are going to be an even unhappier married person.

You have to enter marriage willing to be a servant to the other person. You need to put yourself last and focus instead on the happiness and security of your spouse. In order to have this right attitude, you must have the right foundation, and that is Jesus Christ.

A Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ

Marriages are comprised of individuals, and God deals first with the individual's relationship with Himself. You cannot expect to have a good, godly marriage if your own relationship with the Lord is waning. The best way to be a good marriage partner is to be a devoted Christian.

This may seem shocking to you, but God makes promises to individuals, not couples! Your fulfillment comes directly from Jesus Christ -- not from your spouse. The closer

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you are to the Lord, walking in the Spirit and believing His promises to you, the more fulfilled you are going to be in life.

You may not have a great marriage, but it is your own fault if you do not have a great life. Why? Because God loves you! He values you so much that He sent His own Son to die in your place. And when you believe in Jesus Christ and surrender your life to Him, you are given every spiritual blessing and inheritance in heaven. God's promises to His children are loving, hopeful, and true! As you relinquish control of your life to Him, He fills you with His Holy Spirit and produces fruit in your life such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). All these things can be yours if you are willing to walk in the Spirit. Your life can be fulfilling, joyful, and secure -- and it is not dependent on the actions of your mate, but it is dependent on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A strong, healthy relationship with the Lord is the basis for a strong, healthy marriage. Yes, we can point out all the defects in our mate -- and perhaps you are married to someone who is not a Christian -- but the first step that must be taken in your marriage is to get your own relationship with the Lord in order.

There is only one real marriage problem and that is sin. Which means there is only one marriage solution -- repentance.

Often the Lord will not take us out of difficult circumstances, but He will change our hearts and our attitudes in the midst of the circumstances. We cannot possibly handle the challenges (or the blessings) of marriage when we are walking in the flesh.

Jesus Christ must be the foundation of our marital relationship. That means you may need to examine your relationship with the Lord before trying to "correct" your spouse. Where is your relationship with the Lord? Does it waver back and forth or is it a steady walk of faith?

If you are not married yet, the best preparation you will ever make for married life is focusing on a strong walk with the Lord. The more you follow Him, stay in His Word, develop a strong prayer life, and live a lifestyle of Christian fellowship, the more discerning you will be in selecting a mate and the stronger your marriage relationship will

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be. When God is truly the foundation of your life, your faith will work itself out in your home and with your spouse. It will overflow naturally.

Before you go any further in this booklet, examine yourself. Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

If you answered no, and would like to ask Jesus Christ to come into your life right now, or if you would like to rededicate your life to the Lord, you can pray this prayer:

God, I am sorry for my sin. But I thank You for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die for me and pay the price for my sin. I turn from my sin now and turn to You, Lord, by faith. Come into my life and forgive me. Restore me and make me a new creation in Your Spirit. I surrender control of my life to You, and ask that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer for the first time, welcome to the family of God! You are on your way to a new life in Christ. The Bible tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now that you have the right foundation, let us look at what the Lord has to say about love and marriage!

THREE

What is Love?

Perhaps the best way to start out this chapter is with the following story:

Writes a surgeon: "I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face postoperative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. The surgeon has followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh; I promise you that. Nevertheless, to remove the tumor in her cheek, I had to cut the little nerve.

"Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily? The young woman speaks. 'Will my mouth always be like this?' she asks. 'Yes,' I say, 'it will. It is because the nerve was cut.' She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. 'I like it,' he says. 'It is kind of cute.' All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I so close can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works."

--Dr. Richard Selzer

What is love? That is a valid question for the day and age in which we live. Is it what we see portrayed in romance novels, in the movies, or in advertisements? I like what Marjorie Holmes says regarding romance versus love. Maybe this will shed some light on our subject:

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- Romance is seeking perfection
- Love is forgiving faults.

- Romance is eager, striving always to appear attractive to each other.
- Love is two people who find beauty in each other no matter how they look.

- Romance is dancing in the moonlight, gazing deep into desired eyes across a candlelit table.
- Love is saying, "You're tired honey, I'll get up this time." And stumbling through the darkness to warm a bottle or comfort a frightened child.

- Romance is the anguish of waiting for the phone to ring to bring you a voice that will utter endearments.
- Love is the anguish of waiting for a call that will assure you someone else is safe.

- Romance is flying.
- Love is a safe landing.

- Romance is flattering attentions.
- Love is genuine thoughtfulness.

- Romance is tingling excitement.
- Love is tenderness, constancy, being cherished.

- Romance is suspense, anticipation, and surprise.
- Love is dependability.

- Romance is delicious.
- Love nourishes.

- Romance is fleeting.
- Love is long.

Our world is very deceived when it comes to the subject of love. Unfortunately, many

Christians have also bought into the media's distorted and deceptive definition of love.

C.S. Lewis said, "Love is not a feeling, it's a deep unity maintained by the will deliberately, strengthened by habit, and reinforced by the grace of God."

Love vs. Lust

So often people think the opposite of love is hate, but the true antonym for love is lust. Hate is just a by-product of lust. Usually, when people hear the word "lust" they think of sexual immorality and sexual impulses. And though lust certainly does refer to that (Matthew 5:28), it encompasses much more than wrong sexual desires.

The apostle Paul often referred to the "lust of the flesh" when speaking of our own natural, ungodly ways of thinking and acting. Prior to becoming a Christian we are ruled by our lustful fleshly nature. However, upon receiving Christ, we are given a new nature, one that is born of the spirit and not of the flesh. It is out of this new nature that we are able to love in the true sense of the word. But, before we take a look at "love" let's define the attributes of "lust."

In the book of Galatians, Paul clearly defines lust:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. --Galatians 5:19-21

Did you notice something about the above list? Lust is a craving that centers around one thing -- self! It is a "get me," "I need," "I want" kind of mentality. It does not care about or do anything for the other person; rather, its motivating drive is self-gratification. A person filled with lust is incapable of loving someone. His or her mind is always driven by its own selfish desires, needs and wants. Even when a wrong is committed against another individual, the person who is filled with lust does not care or respond to the other

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person's hurt unless it impacts him or her. And then the reaction is one of self-defense, self-pity, and self-preservation.

Some of you may be thinking, "That is the type of person I am married to!"

Unfortunately, lust often passes for love in our world. The secular mindset has so dominated the media, education, and culture at large that there is often a confusion within the body of Christ as well.

Paul makes it very clear that lust comes from within the person and it wars against the Spirit. In Galatians 5:17 we read, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

As Christians we are in a war. Our new nature battles with our old nature and vice versa. It is a struggle that will continue until we are present with the Lord. However, that does not mean we have to succumb to the lusts of our flesh. Christ died to give us victory over sin and Satan, and Paul also clearly warned us that if we are living a continual lifestyle of lust we are not really Christians at all.

Far too many Christians live a defeated lifestyle simply because they refuse to walk in the Spirit. Paul gives us a distinct answer as to how to defeat our lustful tendencies, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16).

It is impossible to love someone if you are walking in your flesh. Lust competes with love, it does not enhance it. And the Scriptures are clear -- love comes only from God, and in order to love others we must walk with God and allow His love to flow through us to others.

God's Word says to love your enemies and do good to them (Matthew 5:44), even if they persecute you, mock you, speak badly about you, and reject you. Human love cannot do that. Human love gets defensive, angry, frustrated, and revengeful. It is conditional and has expectations of getting something in return. That is why it is

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impossible for us to truly love our enemies apart from God. Only God's love is unconditional. It does not take into account wrongs suffered (1 Corinthians 13). It is freely given and not dependent on getting anything in return (James 1:27).

So What Is Love?

1 Corinthians 13 defines it well:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. --1 Corinthians 13:4-7

We need to remember that love is a by-product of walking in the Spirit. Jesus tells us that Christians are known by their love. True Christianity and love go hand in hand.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

Love says, "I want the best for you," and "I am more concerned about your needs and feelings than my own."

When you feed your lusts, you are going to be incapable of true love. When you deny your worldly lust and yield your life to God, you will then find the capability to love other people.

Different Types of Love but One True Love

In the Greek language different words are used to describe different kinds of love. *Eros* is a selfish kind of love, craving passion and sexual pleasure. Though it has a place in marriage, it is not the foundational love that is necessary for a lasting relationship. When marriages are built strictly on *eros* they lead to total dissipation. Someone who loves only with *eros* ends up being controlled by lust. That person has a weak character and a weak mind.

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I am reminded of the young couple who after just a few years of marriage filled with constant arguments decided that the only way to save their relationship was to try counseling. They had been at each other's throats for some time and felt that this was their last hope.

When they arrived at the counselor's office, the counselor jumped right in and opened the floor for discussion. "What seems to be the problem?" Immediately, the husband held his long face down without saying anything. In contrast, the wife began talking ninety miles an hour, describing all the wrongs within their marriage.

After fifteen minutes of listening to the wife, the counselor went over to her, picked her up by her shoulders, kissed her passionately and sat her back down. Afterwards, the wife sat speechless.

The marriage counselor looked over at the husband, who stared in disbelief. The counselor said to the husband, "Your wife needs that at least twice a week!" The husband scratched his head and replied, "I can have her here on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

As this story illustrates, the world's answer to marital problems oftentimes manifests itself in the form of *eros* love. That is why there is such an increase in extra-marital relationships and divorce, because people are actually looking for the wrong kind of love.

Storge is the type of love seen in family relationships. It is not based on common attributes or likes, but on a bond that exists even though we may have nothing in common with the other person.

Phileo is friendship love. It is the love we have for people whom we enjoy being with and having fun with. This kind of love is based on common ground.

Though all of these different types of love are necessary for a good marriage, the love that God asks us to base our relationships on is *agape*. This kind of love is selfless -- it dies to the rights of self in order to help and nurture the other person. *Agape* loves unconditionally. It is not demanding to be loved in return, but instead loves continually, no matter what the circumstances. How does this happen? *Agape* love comes from God Himself. As we walk in the Spirit, we are filled with His *agape* love and are able to love

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others whether we are loved in return or not.

When Karen and I were good friends serving the Lord together, an incident revealed her selfless love—*agape*, toward me. I led a group witnessing on Hollywood Boulevard every Saturday night. At the end of the evening we would gather together in a donut shop to share our experiences. Karen and I would usually sit together, but on this evening there was a new girl who I felt needed to be encouraged. When I sat with her instead of Karen, I did not know what was going on in Karen's heart. Later, after we were engaged, she told me that she had felt that I was interested in that girl and at first she was hurt. Then she chided herself for being so selfish and prayed "Lord, if that girl would make him a better wife than me, then I pray You put them together." That is *agape*! Can you see why God said there must be *agape* love in marriage?

Agape love is the key to a successful marriage -- and the key to *agape* love is being filled with the Spirit. When you are immersed in the Lord and walking in His love you are able to love your spouse, no matter how unloving and selfish he or she may be. God continues to fill you up so that you can pour out His love on your mate. It just may be that you are married to an unloving person. Perhaps your spouse is selfish, filled with lust rather than love. God has put you with that person for a reason. Even if you did not know the Lord at the time you were married, He still wants you to love your mate with His *agape* love.

Your love for your mate can help bring about a change in his or her heart. *Agape* love serves as a witness of the love of Christ. The best way to witness to an unbelieving (or backsliding) mate is to love them the way God has said – with His *agape* love. You have to remember that you cannot love in the *agape* way on your own. This kind of love flows from Jesus Christ. As we are filled with the Lord, He gives us this kind of love for our spouses!

On the foundation of *agape* love, there grows a sweet *phileo*, friendship love, and a safe *eros*, erotic love, but *agape* is the foundation. *Agape* love will build and strengthen your marriage -- lust will break it down!

FOUR

A Spiritual Union

... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- Ecclesiastes 4:12

Marriage is a spiritual union between a husband, a wife and God. When the Lord becomes a fading memory in the lives of the couple there will be a rise in self-centeredness, lust of the flesh, and overall marital disharmony.

God's role in your marriage serves as an anchor, a glue and a compass. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in a marriage that brings about a couples' mutual fulfillment, blessing, and ultimate glory to God. It is only through a right relationship with the Lord that either spouse can love the other in the *agape* way that God has ordained.

The Importance of the Word

You might say that the Word of God is like soap. Every day we are faced with certain challenges, temptations, decisions, choices, the world's values and Satan's attacks. What is our defense? What enables us to make the right choices and decisions? What helps us resist temptation? What cleanses us from the world's filth? Only one thing -- God's Word. The Bible is our road map -- it is God's personal words to us. In it, He tells us how to live, what to do, how to respond, what is true and right, and how to protect ourselves from temptation, the world, our flesh, and the devil.

That is why it is essential for Christians to read God's Word daily. And not only just to read it, but to meditate on it, prayerfully asking God to help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Him. True transformation comes when we believe the Word of God and are willing to apply it to our lives. It is only through the power of God's Word working in our lives that our minds can truly be renewed. So, being in the scriptures is like taking a spiritual bath every day. Can you imagine how much you would stink if you did not take a bath or shower on a regular basis? It is the same with our spiritual life. If we are not being washed in God's Word on a daily basis we are going to stink. The desires of

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our flesh will begin to dominate our lives and every work of the flesh will manifest itself in our marital relationship.

What does the Word of God do in our lives? Psalm 19 gives us some insight:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the
commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments
of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be
desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter
also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your
servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them
not have dominion over me . . . --Psalm 19:7-13

God's Word revives the soul; makes us wise; gives us joy; opens our eyes to the truth; makes us pure; serves as a warning light; gives us great reward; cleanses us from hidden faults as well as known sins; tears down strongholds; and keeps us blameless.

Now that is quite a list! Something amazing takes place in you when you put your trust and confidence in the Word of God. It begins to work within you transforming both your heart and your mind.

Can you see why the Word of God is so critical for any marriage? Our heart, attitudes, and thoughts need to be transformed to mirror the Lord's. This is vital for each of us individually as well as for our marriage relationship. The more we reflect Christ, the better our marriages will be -- the less we reflect Christ, the harder it is to sustain marital love and commitment.

Three Important Elements About the Bible

First of all, the Word of God is infallible. There are no mistakes in the Bible-- it is perfect from cover to cover. Many philosophers and liberal theologians try to argue that the Scriptures are riddled with flaws and that it was written by men, not God. However, God says something very different. He says that His Word is just that, *His!* Jesus said that not one jot or tittle will depart from the law until all these things are fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). He also said that Heaven and Earth would pass away, but His Word would not pass away (Matthew 24:35). The Bible will stand forever because it is the very Word of God!

Secondly, the Word of God is sufficient for your life. In today's culture, it seems that everyone wants to turn to other people, psychologists, or self-help books to get the help or answers they need. Sadly, even some Christians regard the Bible as if it is not enough -- as if something else is needed to give guidance, correction and hope. This is far from the truth. In fact, it is a major deception of Satan's to get our eyes off the Word of God and onto ourselves or others. God's Word is useful for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). The apostle Paul told young Timothy that the Word of God would complete him and thoroughly equip him for every good work. Nowhere did Paul tell Timothy that for the really big issues in life he would need a professional psychologist to help him handle his problems! God's Word is sufficient for everything. Regardless of the marital or personal problems you face, God's Word gives you everything you need to know to reconcile the situation.

It is the Word of God that gets us on the right path when we have strayed. It is the Word of God that gives us a heart of love when normally we would be bitter and hateful. It is the Word of God that helps us forgive and overlook offenses instead of being resentful and seeking revenge. It is the Word of God that enables us to die to ourselves and to put our mates first in everything we do.

Thirdly, the Word of God is effective. We are always looking for more effective ways of doing things. Whether it is being better organized to get our jobs done faster or finding better products to make our lives easier, we are always wanting effectiveness in our life. The most effective thing in your life is the Word of God. As you make yourself available to God's Word, amazing things will take place. It will begin to transform you and work in you. And it will lead you and give you everything you need. In Jeremiah 23:28-29 we read:

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“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream;
and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully.
What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD. “Is not My
word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer that
breaks the rock in pieces?”

God wants to update our minds with His Word. He wants to replace a lot of our thoughts and our wrong thinking with the truth so that we can be effective in our lives. The Word of God is like a hammer. Take the hardest problem in your life right now, the thorniest difficulty, or the greatest struggle, and I guarantee you that as you are in the Word of God, seeking Him and depending upon Him, that problem will wear down. It will be broken into pieces. God's Word is a hammer that will take care of your problem. Of course you must believe God's Word and have confidence in Him in order for it to be effective.

A Word About Forgiveness

The most important aspect of God's Word is atonement -- God's redemption of mankind through the cross. The most expressive act of God in the atonement is His forgiveness of our sins.

I believe the greatest need in marriage is forgiveness. We need to learn how to forgive our mates. Your spouse will have ample opportunity to hurt you, it is part of our human nature to hurt one another. That is why forgiveness is so necessary. When we do not forgive we open a floodgate for Satan. An unforgiving spirit brings with it a heart of resentment, hatred, divisiveness, discord, and every other evil behavior of the flesh. Unforgiveness feeds on the faults of another and nurses the wounds over and over. A spouse with an unforgiving spirit grows harder and actually stifles the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. It is a downward spiral that ends up destroying the marriage and the person's relationship with God as well.

How do we forgive when we have been hurt, treated wrongly, or have been the victim of injustice? We need to look to Jesus as our example. God forgave us while we were yet sinners! He did not wait for us to clean up our act. He forgave us as we were. And, as we confess our sins, His cleansing blood continues to forgive us on a daily basis (1 John

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1:9). We do not earn our forgiveness from God. It is unconditional. Can you imagine what our Christian life would be like if God was continually bringing up our past sins? Mercifully, He forgives and forgets. He casts our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

Now, if God can do this for us, how can we withhold forgiveness from another? Jesus said we are to forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22). In other words, we are to continually forgive our mates. I have seen couples come in for counseling who are still recalling a hurtful word or action that the mate committed twenty years ago! When we forgive we must also choose to forget. That does not mean that we do not remember what they did -- it means we choose not to remember it and not to bring it up against them anymore. It is a choice.

Listen to a pastor recount the story of a woman in his fellowship:

To the rest of my brothers in the Lord; there is a woman in my fellowship who has gone through hell in nineteen of her twenty-six years of marriage. As a Christian, she prayed for thirteen years for her husband to get saved (both were unbelievers when they married).

Reading the Bible one day (this was very difficult for her because her husband refused to allow her to read the Bible in her home—didn't want the kids corrupted) she stumbled across one thing she understood—God hates divorce, while reading Malachi. Even though even her husband's mother counseled her to divorce, her response was, "I have to hate what God hates so divorce is not in my vocabulary!" (The power of the Word is awesome!)

At the time, because her husband was very successful in business, they were quite wealthy. The husband began to gamble enormous sums of money. After going through a couple of personal tragedies, the husband flipped out and lost more than a million dollars. The wife, who had prayed

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that God would do whatever was necessary to bring the husband to faith in Christ, realized that if she didn't get out of the marriage while some of the money was left, every bit of worldly security would be gone! But God spoke to her heart and said that He would be her very great reward!

All the money was lost, life got much worse before it got better, but she remained faithful in prayer and steadfast in her resolve to obey God and love her husband. She just wanted a husband to take her to church once in a while—well...today is their twenty-sixth wedding anniversary and the last seven years, since the husband received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, their life has been wonderful!

By now, of course, you probably know that the woman is *my wife* and I want to thank God for her, for His patience and love, and give Him all the glory for the unbelievable marriage He has created! In every way our marriage is better than anything either of us could have imagined! I am so very grateful to God!

Forgiveness is the highest expression of Christianity. When you witness an unforgiving Christian, a question arises regarding his or her true salvation. We must forgive one another in marriage in order to stay right with God and with each other!

When God forgave us, He did so in order to bring restoration to our relationship with Him and wholeness to our life. The same holds true for marriage. Forgiveness restores a marriage, making it whole and healthy once again.

God's Word is powerful. We need to believe it and rely upon it!

What place does the Word of God have in your life right now? Are you relying on it daily or is it something that you get around to reading once in a while? Is it your life-blood or is it a chore to pick it up at the end of the day and get through a chapter?

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Let the Word of God take hold in your heart. And, as it does, share what the Lord is doing in your life with your mate. Together, read God's Word on a daily basis and commune with Him in prayer. Remember, your marriage not only includes the Lord but is grounded in His love and faithfulness. Your marital relationship is a spiritual union that needs God at the center!

FIVE

Calling All Husbands!

I really don't understand my wife sometimes. She insisted on buying a new bathing suit before we went on vacation just because her old one had a hole in the knee.

We need to face it -- sometimes guys just do not get it! The Bible has a lot to say about the role of the husband in marriage. And, if he does not get it -- it is because he is not paying attention to what God says. Sound harsh? Well, it is not meant to be harsh, but it is meant to be direct. I believe men are pros at coming up with every excuse in the book to avoid taking their role seriously. It takes work to be a godly husband -- it does not come naturally or easily. It is best to understand that from the very beginning so that you can spend your energy focusing on what God calls you to do as a husband!

And The Greatest Is Love . . .

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

You may have thought that I would start out talking about the husband's role as leader in the family. However, there is a far more important and critical responsibility of the husband and that is to love his wife. In fact, it is the husband's love for his wife that tempers his role as leader and enables him to lead as God instructed.

Paul exhorts husbands in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." The kind of love Paul was talking about is a self-dying love. It is not a love based on warm, mushy feelings. This kind of love is not dependent on feelings at all, but is a choice -- a choice to be obedient to God first and to put your wife's welfare over your own. The kind of love that is referred to in the above scripture does not seek its own but seeks the best for someone else. This kind of love is a tall challenge but one that God equips every husband to perform. Jesus serves as your example.

How did Jesus look at His bride, the church? Do you think when He was on the cross

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that He felt really good about the crucifixion? No, I think the Lord was feeling a lot of hurt and pain, though He knew the end result would be glorious. Jesus made Himself vulnerable. And this is the key. You need to be vulnerable in order to love your wife. If you are busy protecting yourself, you are never going to be able to love anyone.

Jesus always treats His bride with the utmost sense of what is best for her. He did not think of Himself when He was on the cross -- He thought of His bride (the church) and died for her. And He gave Himself up for her and loved her in spite of her unworthiness and deficiency. Now, that is sacrificial love -- and that is the kind of love husbands are to have for their wives!

Love is a choice. We have already discussed in detail the definition of love, especially *agape* love which is the kind of love a husband is to have for his wife. But you also need to understand how this love works practically.

How do you look at your wife? Christ looks at us not for what we are but for what we are becoming. This is an important example for you, as a husband, when it comes to loving your wife. Do you criticize her? Do you focus on her weaknesses? Do you compare her with other women (a never, never do, I might add)? If you are doing these things, that is not loving your wife. Love overlooks -- it looks at strengths, not weaknesses -- love builds up, it does not tear down -- and love does not compare but rejoices in the beauty and uniqueness of the individual.

Jesus loves us in spite of us. He looks at our positive traits and encourages us. In the same way, one of the most practical ways to love your wife is to focus on her positive traits and encourage her in those areas. Nurture her by building her up and pointing out the great qualities that she possesses. Remember, love chooses to overlook faults, failures, and deficiencies. To truly love your wife you have to choose not to focus on those things but to see the good.

Another practical manifestation of love is taking care of your wife and not neglecting her. So many husbands spend more time taking care of their own needs than they do their wives'. Many women are just plain neglected! Pay attention to her. Put the newspaper down or turn off the television and talk to your wife. Look after her needs, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Buy her a new dress, take her out to dinner, talk

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to her, listen to her, give her a hug when she is down, and be affectionate. Do whatever makes your wife feel special. If you pay attention to these details you will be putting your wife's needs before your own!

Finally, *agape* love is willing to love even when it is not loved in return! This is the type of love Christ has for us -- and this is the type of love that God expects husbands to have for their wives. This kind of love is based not on feelings but on commitment. You choose to love your wife out of obedience to God, not based on how she responds to you. When you love your wife in this way you will find it is the only foundation by which you can build a lasting friendship with her. Ninety-nine percent of marriage is based on friendship! You and your wife need to be best friends, and the foundation that allows this to happen is *agape* love. Friends share and are honest; they rely on one another; they trust one another; they enjoy one another; they have things in common; their differences complement each other; and they do things for each other.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church. The amazing thing about this is that when you love unconditionally, you will find that your wife will react in kind toward you. Whether you want to admit it or not, your wife is a mirror. You will receive whatever treatment you are rendering out. If your wife is insecure, cold, angry, and bitter, it is a safe bet that you have not loved her or treated her as God has directed you to. Wives will reflect the treatment they are receiving. So, if you do not like what you see in your wife take a good look at what *you* are doing (or not doing). If necessary, repent and obey God. As you obey God in this area, you will undoubtedly see improvement in your marriage. He intends for your marriage to be a source of mutual love and blessing.

Leadership is Not An Option

I like what Samuel Logan Brengle has to say about leadership:

[Leadership] is not won by promotion but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified.

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We have a real problem in our world today when it comes to leadership. Where are the leaders in our homes, churches, and nation? The number one problem observed in marriage counseling is the lack of male leadership in the home. Husbands are relinquishing their role as head of the home, especially with regards to spiritual leadership. This creates a strain on the wife, who God created to support and submit to her husband's leadership. Many wives are left wondering what to do. How do I submit if my husband does not lead? In essence many men are AWOL.

Let us take a look at what the Lord has to say about the man's position of leadership:

... submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

--Ephesians 5:21-27

Spiritual leadership must be tempered with love. Love prevents husbands from being tyrants. No husband deserves leadership responsibilities if he is not willing to sacrifice himself for love. This passage teaches that as Christ is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife. How does Jesus lead His church? He does what is best for her; He takes care of her and leads her in ways of holiness and righteousness.

And, just as Christ manifested His love for His bride by dying for her, likewise a husband's leadership in the home ought to manifest itself with *agape* love -- loving his wife as Christ loved the church. In order to be a good leader, you must love your wife. This molds your leadership into a position that is tempered by humility, wisdom, and the motivation of doing what is best for your wife!

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I have seen plenty of men in the church who take their role of leadership with a "head honcho" type of attitude. Instead of loving their wives they become more like tyrants treating them as slaves. This is not the example that Jesus showed the church! On the other extreme, I have seen men totally abdicate their role and rely on their wives to lead spiritually, emotionally, and even physically (letting her be the provider for the family)!

Both extremes are wrong -- and neither shows a loving heart.

There cannot be two heads in a home. It does not work. God modeled marriage after the relationship between Christ and the church. In marriage, roles are designated so that the home can function properly. Just because the man is given the leadership role does not mean he is smarter or superior to his wife. Both are equal in the eyes of the Lord -- but both have different roles. The husband is to be the head of the home, while the wife is to be submissive to his leadership. So, in order for the wife to submit -- the husband must lead!

Leadership in the home begins with spiritual leadership. It is important for the husband to lead his wife and family in devotions, prayer, and church fellowship. Far too often it is the wife who is dragging the husband to church and initiating prayer in the home. Husbands, it is vital to have a close relationship to the Lord -- and the closer your relationship with God, the more apt you will be to lead your family in devotions and prayer. I have counseled many couples through marital difficulties. The first thing I ask is if they are praying and reading the Word together. Not surprisingly, the answer is usually "no."

Many problems could be avoided or at least reduced if husbands would take the time to lead their families in prayer and devotions. By keeping Jesus Christ in the center of your family life you will enjoy a much more blessed and peaceful marriage!

Another aspect of leadership is the area of provision. It is the husband's job to provide for his wife and family. In this day and age, many women are working. This is not necessarily a problem (especially if the couple does not have small children in the home); however, the husband's income should be the primary resource for paying the bills. This may mean that a family should adhere to a lower standard of living. There are too many couples who are working to maintain a higher standard of living at the expense

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of their children. Yes, it is best for the woman to be home raising the children when they are young. As the children go to school, it is important for the wife to be home when the children get home from school. I do realize that there are exceptions where both parents have to work. And of course, most single moms need to work to provide for their families. In marriage, however, it is God's directive for the man to be the provider! (1 Timothy 5:8)

Lastly, the husband's role as leader impacts the decision-making process in marriage. Although the wife should certainly input her wisdom and opinion in areas of discussion, it is ultimately the husband's responsibility to make the decision. This is not always an easy role to fulfill. Making the final decision also brings accountability. A wise husband will seek godly counsel from his wife and give due consideration to her counseling addition to seeking the Lord in prayer prior to making a final decision!

**Live With Your Wife
With Understanding**

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. --1 Peter 3:7

Wives need sensitivity and tenderness from their husbands, yet so often they are treated harshly. A husband needs to understand his wife's weaknesses and do all he can to protect her, not expose her! Part of understanding your wife is knowing her. It takes effort and some energy to get to know your wife. It does not happen automatically.

If I were to ask you what dress size your wife is, would you know? What is her favorite color? What are her greatest weaknesses and greatest strengths? What areas does she struggle with spiritually? You see, the more you know your wife, the more you are able to encourage her, be patient with her, and show her love and sensitivity.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul tells husbands to love their wives as they love themselves. Living with your wife with understanding means that you give her grace and mercy in the same way you give yourself grace and mercy. It means that you pay attention to her in

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the same way you pay attention to yourself. It means that you nourish, cherish and protect her in the same way you do yourself. Husband, you are your wife's biggest defender -- and she needs to know that you are on her side at all times!

Living with your wife with understanding requires honoring her at all times. Honor means you treat your wife with high regard and respect. Verbal abuse or foul language towards your wife is not honoring her. Criticizing her, mocking her or making fun of her feelings is not honoring your wife. Treating her like a doormat, ignoring her or comparing her with other women is not honoring your wife.

Respecting your wife means that you treat her as your sister in Christ; you speak lovingly and warmly to her; you are a gentleman with her; you always consider her needs before your own; you defend her when she is attacked by other people; you protect her from harm; you give her your full attention and make her know that she is the most important person in your life!

Oftentimes a man will often choose to just clam up—not really honestly sharing what is on his mind. *Elaborate on this? Maybe add something to tie this in to the previous paragraph—something like “Speak openly with your wife...”?*

A little girl and a little boy were at day care one day. The girl approaches the boy and says, “Hey Tommy, wanna play house?” He says, “Sure! What do you want me to do?” The girl replies, “I want you to communicate your thoughts.”

“Communicate my thoughts?” said a bewildered Tommy. “I have no idea what that means.” The little girl smirks and says, “Perfect. You can be the husband.”

Marriage is diligent work. And as a husband, the responsibility of the marriage is squarely on your shoulders. How you treat your wife will more than likely be reflected in her treatment of you. As you fulfill your role as husband by obeying the Lord in this matter, God will bless your marriage with joy and love. Let me emphasize that even if your wife does not respond in kind, you are accountable before God to fulfill your role regardless of whether you get anything in return.

Husbands, are you going to be obedient and do what God tells you to do?

SIX

A Wife's Influence

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
--Ephesians 5:22

The secular world attacks the concept of marriage and family on a consistent basis. I believe that the biggest attacks on the family unit are aimed at women. Our society bombards women with the idea that if they are wives or stay-at-home moms, they are inferior, and in fact, insults to the female gender.

Whether it is magazines, fashion, television or the movies -- women are pressured regarding their appearance, their careers, their motherhood, and their marital status.

There is a great need for women to understand what the Word of God says about their role as a wife. The Bible liberates women from the demands and pressures that the world places on them, and God makes it clear how immensely valuable a godly wife is to her husband, children and the Lord Himself.

You Are In Good Company!

You would think the word "submission" is a bad word when you look at the reactions it stirs up in people. The secular world thinks that the whole idea of submission is barbaric and uncivilized. Even some in the church bristle at the mention of the word. However, submission has gotten a bad rap, so to speak, and it is time to clarify what the Lord meant when He spoke of submission in the role of a wife.

The whole idea of submitting to anyone makes the world shriek. In the 1960's the counter-culture rebelled against anything that remotely resembled authority. It was considered an infringement on individual rights to have to submit to anyone in authority. We are witnessing the by-product of this attitude in society today. Invoking individual rights, people today are trampling on the rights of others in order to live the lives they desire. There is a general lack of respect for authority, whether it be for a policeman, a parent, or the President of the United States. Everyone wants the freedom

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to “do their own thing,” even at the expense of others and society at large. But not everyone can be in charge -- otherwise there will be disorder and disaster.

The framework of a civilized society hinges on laws and authority. There must be teachers and students; parents and children; police officers and citizens; government and constituents; management and work crews; and the list goes on. When there is an absence of authority, or when there are too many who are in charge, organizations, governments, systems and society stop functioning properly.

It is no different in the home. There has to be order, and because of that there needs to be one person who ultimately has authority in the home and one who is submissive. We need to remember that these are roles and have nothing to do with superiority, value and ability. Just as with other aspects of society, the roles of the husband and wife help set up an organizational structure that enables the family unit to function in an orderly, efficient way.

I have already covered the role of the husband as the leader and the head of the home. If you read that chapter you know that all leadership positions need to be tempered with love. In other words, the husband is to lead in such a way that loves, honors and respects his wife. Remember, the scriptures are clear, that husbands and wives are to submit one to another (Ephesians 5:21). So, that should get rid of any fears of a tyrannical ruler in the home, because that is not what is taught in God's Word.

One of the best ways to describe the role of the wife in submission is to look at a few verses in 1 Peter in the context in which Peter was writing:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:
‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’;
who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Wives,

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likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even
if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won
by the conduct of their wives . . . --1 Peter 2:21-3:1

It was not a coincidence that Peter described the example of Christ's submission to the Father prior to discussing the wife's responsibility to be submissive to her husband. Just as the Lord serves as the example for the husband on how to love his wife, He also serves as an example to the wife on how to submit to her husband.

Submission is willingness. It is not forced. Jesus willingly gave up his rights as God and became a man. He willingly submitted His will to that of the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, even though we see the Lord asking for another way other than the cross, He submitted to the will of the Father! Jesus willingly submitted.

Wives, the Lord is saying you are to be willingly subjected to your husbands, giving them the pre-eminence and the opportunity to lead. Now in conjunction with this, there are a couple of extremes that need to be discussed.

First of all, submission does not mean that you are to do whatever your husband says, even if it means doing something wrong. No, you are to always obey God first. If your husband is telling you to do something that flies in the face of God's Word then you are not to submit to him but rather to God. Never disobey God in order to obey your husband!

Secondly, there is the flip side to the above extreme. This view says, "I'll submit to my husband as long as he follows the Lord." This view is wrong as well. Your husband may not be following the Lord, but that is not a reason for you to abdicate your role and go off and do your own thing. In fact, Peter says just the opposite. "Wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives" (1 Peter 3:1).

You are a witness to that unbelieving or backslidden husband when you show respect to him and submit to his authority despite his failing spiritual state. This can be a very difficult road. It is hard to submit to someone who does not follow the Lord, but it is God's will and shows the love of Christ in a practical way. It is in these situations that

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you can follow the Lord's example, as He was submissive to those very people who reviled Him, rejected Him and ultimately crucified Him. Let me stress here that it is not God's will for a woman to suffer physical or consistent verbal abuse. In these situations it is usually best to separate with the purpose of seeking help for the husband and ultimately reconciling the marriage. In normal circumstances though, where a wife is married to an unbeliever or a Christian who is not walking with the Lord, the very act of submission serves as a witness to the husband.

As you willfully submit to your husband, paying him respect in this matter, it can do wonders in bringing him closer to the Lord. Peter emphasizes that words are not necessary, but simply showing obedience to your role as a wife. In other words, do not preach, nag and argue with your husband to try to make him a godly man. It does not work and defeats the witness that Jesus would have you to be. If your husband is not obeying the Word and is going in his own direction, even causing harm and hurt to the marriage and the family, the most powerful thing you can do is to give your husband to the Lord, trust Him with the matter, and submit to your husband in love. Is this an easy role? No, it is not. Does it seem fair? No, not in human terms. But the Lord has to serve as your example. Do not look to yourself, do not look to the situation, and especially do not look to the world -- keep your eyes on Jesus and follow the Lord's example. Throw your life into the Lord's hands and trust Him to work out the situation in His time.

We are all called to die to self -- men and women. And, in the area of submission, it is a very real dying to self. You will find, however, that as you submit to your husband out of obedience to God, you will be blessed and the Lord will give you the strength to love your husband with God's love. Do not underestimate the influence you have over your husband. Willfully submitting to your husband will bring about a plentiful harvest in due time!

One silly argument my wife and I had for the first few years of our marriage was over chocolate brownies. I love to have lots of frosting on them and Karen thought it was overkill. We would battle about this—obviously not smart enough to just frost one half of them! One day I suggested making chocolate brownies and instead of arguing with me, Karen did not say a word. I thought I would be noble and offered to not put frosting on

them and she was shocked. Then she told me the secret, "I prayed that you wouldn't put frosting on and look how good the Lord was to answer."

Becoming A Woman of Beauty . . .

Do not let your adornment be merely outward –
arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel
-- rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the
incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is
very precious in the sight of God. --1 Peter 3:3-4

Our culture puts a high premium on beauty. Cosmetic (plastic) surgery is becoming increasingly popular among middle class women and even teenagers. Formerly considered a luxury for well-to-do women, cosmetic surgery is now one of the most popular operations among women of all socio-economic classes.

Most women's magazines are tailored to beauty and use young, attractive models to try to persuade women that they are supposed to look like the cover girls. Pressure to look "perfect" is squarely placed on women, and it is no wonder that many ladies focus an enormous amount of attention on their appearance.

However, God's concept of beauty is quite different from the world's. While our society focuses on the outer person, God focuses on the inner person (1 Samuel 16:7). It is a woman's character -- her kindness, gentleness, love, patience and godly attitude -- that makes her beautiful. There may be outward beauty in some women, but when the inner person is ungodly and corrupt it affects their outward appearance in a very negative way. On the other hand, when a woman's inner character exemplifies a loving and gentle spirit, it radiates to her outward appearance as well.

Now, something we need to understand is that scripture is not saying that you should not pay any attention to your outward appearance. There are many examples in the Bible, including the Song of Solomon and the story of Isaac's bride, Rebekah (Genesis 24), where women adorn themselves with jewelry and fix their hair. It is not more godly to be plain, though there are many churches that would lead you to believe that. Wearing makeup, fixing your hair, and wearing nice clothing is not wrong. You should look as nice as you can, but your focus should not be on these things. If you are spending all of your time, energy, and money on how you look, while your inner life is a mess, you have

your priorities upside-down. It is an issue of the heart.

Realize that your beauty begins with your character and radiates outwardly -- not the opposite way around. A godly woman is the most beautiful woman in the world!

Becoming An Encourager

When God created Eve, He gave her the important designation of being a helpmate. I do not believe there is one wife who does not realize that her husband needs a great deal of help! Wives complement their husbands. You might say they fill in the gaps. And a great part of being a helpmate is being an encourager.

Building up your husband, backing up his decisions, and encouraging him goes a long way in bringing out the godly character that God wants your husband to exemplify. Your husband needs to know that you believe in him, respect him and are on his team. Far too many wives send the opposite message. They tear down, instead of building up, and they fight their husbands every step of the way, instead of backing them up.

If you are not happy with your husband's performance, tearing him down and mocking him is not going to improve the situation. The best way to get a new husband (a change in behavior and attitude) is by being a loving, supportive wife.

Just as the biggest fear for women is rejection and abandonment, for men it is failure. The Lord created you to be a supporter -- an encourager of your husband. Any other behavior or attitude will rip apart your marriage and cause dissension.

Your role as a wife is vital. You are the missing link in a man's life and your influence far outweighs anyone or anything else outside of the Lord Himself. Take an inventory of your life. Are you influencing your husband in a positive way? Does your attitude and behavior reflect the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit? Can your husband see the light of Jesus Christ in your life?

CONCLUSION

Is Jesus Christ the Lord of your marriage?

Some of you may be enjoying your marriage just as God intended, while others may be undergoing severe trials and hardships. God wants to bring healing to your relationship. Nothing is impossible, and no relationship, no matter how many problems exist, is beyond God's redemptive love.

Let me share a letter that I received on the reality of God's healing power in a marriage:

Dear Pastor,

After your message, my husband and I agreed that I should share what God did in our marriage. In 1994, I filed for divorce. Years of sin and abuse tore our marriage asunder and all that was left was paperwork. In my eyes there was no hope that my husband would ever change, and it seemed as though God was leading me out.

My husband had broken every vow he ever made to me over the years with his alcohol abuse -- literally leaving our marriage in a state of disrepair. We were bankrupt in every sense of the word. The love was gone, the hope was gone, the dreams were gone -- torn asunder by sin. There has been nothing more painful in my life than to lose the affection and the support of the man I married -- the one I trusted with my life, who promised to be faithful and now was the source of such bitter pain.

But today I can thank God for the pain and for the people He surrounded me with during those years. You see, it was through the pain of the worst years of my life that God graciously showed Himself to me in such a real way. However, after I accepted Jesus and people began praying for my husband and my marriage, things went from bad to

worse -- culminating in separation and divorce proceedings. It was during this time of separation that my husband was brought to his knees as a result of much prayer and sorrow. Sobriety and salvation came into his life when he gave his heart to Christ at a church service some newfound friends had brought him to. I had nothing to do with it!

Although this had been my prayer for so many years, I didn't believe it when he first told me. You see, after years of his lies, his words had lost all their value and it was only over time that his actions began to convince me. Even though I had filed divorce papers, I continued to pray for God's will. Though I knew I had biblical grounds for divorce (adultery), I also knew that God hated divorce.

I asked many people to pray that I would be able to forgive my husband (for my sake, not his). And privately, I was asking God to show me very clearly whether or not I should continue with the divorce. I must admit here, that although I was happy for the change in my husband, I didn't want to continue in the marriage. I was afraid he would revert to his old ways and I truly felt God knew and maybe He was trying to protect me and my son from more grief.

Well, after weeks of privately seeking God for guidance, one morning as I prayed the Lord led me to a passage in Philemon which read, "Perhaps you were separated from him for a while so you could have him back forever, no longer as a slave but as a brother in the Lord." I don't think God could've made it any clearer if He had dropped in for coffee and a chat that morning. I knew God was saying, take him back and don't worry, it's forever. He's no longer a slave to the sin that hurt you so bad. He's your brother in the Lord.

Let me tell you, that was not what I wanted to hear. However, I knew that was God's will. Immediately I called a strong Christian friend and told her the whole story and we began praying for reconciliation. It took many months, but eventually my husband came back bringing much joy

to our little family. It has been four years since then and if anybody had told me then what my life would be like today, I could not have imagined it! We still struggle with the problems of life, but we have God at the center of our home and that makes all the difference.

My husband is a godly man and I love him more than ever and his son has a good example to look to in him. I truly believe that God would have allowed me to divorce my husband but because of prayer and obedience to His very special and difficult direction in my life, He has blessed me tremendously. He has renewed the love and restored the hope so that we can dare to dream once again.

I would not have wanted to miss that. So I just wanted to encourage anyone who's struggling in what feels like a hopeless situation, not to give up on God no matter what the circumstances.

Maybe you are in a difficult situation right now and are ready to file those divorce papers. Take the advice of this godly woman who, through much pain and suffering, chose to obey God and now has a restored marriage filled with joy, love and peace. She is not a special case. As Christians, we are called to obey God -- even when it means suffering and sorrow. Ultimately, God works everything out for good in the life of the believer (Romans 8:28).

Put God in the center of your life and in the center of your marriage. Submit your relationship to Him and persevere. The Lord will do as Isaiah 61:3 promises:

To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.