

“A God-Centered Husband – Part 1”

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Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 3:7, ESV

Wives and Husbands

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Nearly twenty-four years ago, I entered the sanctuary of Grace Presbyterian Church on a snowy Saturday afternoon to receive a gift from God which continues to be the greatest source of earthly joy and strength in my life. I walked to the front of that church with full confidence my steady, masculine demeanor would prevail throughout the wedding ceremony, but halfway through the service emotions overwhelmed me and tears dropped out of my reluctant eyes. To this day, if I think very long upon my bride, those same mighty tears still vanquish my stoic heart. They are good tears, joyful, thankful, reflective tears. Proverbs 18 says,

²² He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.

Frankly, I marvel still God should display His unmerited kindness to me in such a lavish way.

That afternoon, my brother Scott, who was the pastor leading our wedding, asked me a profound question. As I stood with my hand in Kimberly's, Scott inquired, "Ritch, do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife and do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses you will love, honor and cherish her and forsaking all others you will live with her according to the ordinance of God in the holy bond of marriage so long as you both shall live?" What a thing to ask!! At the time, I thought I understood what was going to be required of me to fulfill that question and the vow which would follow. I must have reasoned I was such an unselfish, gracious person this vow would be light and airy and nearly whimsical to fulfill. I did not realize the vow to love, honor and cherish my wife everyday, throughout the rest of my physical life here on earth, would sometimes be heavy, weighty and serious. The complexity of obedience to my commitment is not due to deficiency in my wife, but to the pride and self-centeredness of my own heart.

One of the great discoveries marriage unearthed to me is the extent to which my thoughts, desires and actions are dominated by self-interest. I am convinced God designs marriage, for us men, to be His sanctifying tool to shape us more to become more like Jesus. If you are married, please know the conflicts and difficulties in your marriage are really God's gifts because they provide a context for the Holy Spirit to shape you into the likeness of God's own Son to become more God-centered and more conscious of your own sin so it might be removed and you might have the fruit of God's Spirit displayed and dominating your life.

Marriage becomes God's classroom for advanced spiritual discovery. God designs to use our marriage to make you look more like Jesus. Do we resist God's gracious instruction or do we delight in it, do we embrace it and say, "Yes, here is another opportunity for me to become more like Jesus"?

Today, Peter addresses husbands in our text. It is one small verse, but it is loaded with conviction and encouragement for the Christian husband. If you are taking notes for your husband this morning (laughter), we will begin by considering the goal of the God-centered husband.

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel...

Notice the word "likewise". The New International Version (NIV) says, "In the same way..." This is important because it points us back to the context of this passage and the context is very important. It begs the question, "Like what? What are we to do which is similar to something to something we have already been told to do or to be?" Peter is linking his instruction in Verse 7 to the earlier instruction in Chapter 2 and 3.

The word “likewise” ties God’s instructions to husbands to the instructions God has given in Chapter 2 and the first six verses of Chapter 3. Remember Peter is writing this entire letter to a persecuted church, a church which is suffering as a result of their faith, and they are having a hard time holding it together. Peter is writing to encouraging them, to strengthen their faith and them in their distress so they might glorify God in the midst of their suffering, that they might persevere in their faith, and that they might live out, before this world, this new life and new birth God has given to them.

In Chapter 1 we learned God gives new birth according to His mercy through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to all who would come to believe in Jesus. We also learned, in Chapter 2, God, through Jesus, transforms us from being condemned sinners into this holy priesthood, this royal nation, this people who are set apart for God Himself, a priesthood which offers sacrifices to God in worship of Him to bring glory and praise to Him. The attitudes and behaviors of our lives necessarily reflect this transformation and this internal reality of our being regenerate and being born again. This is Peter’s point in 1 Peter 2,

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

The goal for believers who have been given God’s life inside their soul is to live a life that brings praise to God even among unbelievers. Notice this objective is also stated in 1Peter 2

¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

The core purpose of the Christian’s life centers upon our lifting up the name of Jesus in a world at war with God, one which is at enmity with Him. How do we practically do that? How do we glorify Him? Peter tells us we bring praise to God through our attitudes and behaviors, particularly in our horizontal relationships.

Peter says, first, in reference to glorifying God through our relationship with human government, in 1 Peter 2,

¹³ Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.

Second, in reference as to how we glorify God through our relationship to our employers, where the word “masters” is used,

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect...

This is the attitude which will bring praise to God. Peter then relates how we might bring praise to God through our relationship to our spouse, and he begins with counsel to wives, in Chapter 3,

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands...

In this study we focus upon Verse 7,

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...

The goal for the Christian in marriage is God’s glory, not merely human fulfillment and satisfaction.

The primary goal of our relationship with our government is that we might bring God glory. The primary goal of our relationship with our employer is that we might bring God glory. The primary goal of our relationship with our spouse is that we might bring God glory. Everything flows upward for His praise and for the worship of His name.

What is my goal in my relationship with my spouse? Is this the first thing I think about when I think about my goals for my marriage? Regardless of whatever else happens, whatever joys and bits of gladness and beauty there, and regardless of anything else which happens, is my primary goal I would have acts and attitudes which would cause others to bring praise to God when they see them?

The only way anyone clings to this goal is if they have been born again. This cannot be manufactured. This is not something a person can say, “I want to have that as my goal so I will will it within my heart.” It must be a change because we have a huge problem: our flesh dominates our life and sin and selfishness dominates our soul. Before we think about what it means to be a God-centered husband, we must ask ourselves, “Am I born again? Has God made this change in my life?” It is important to distinguish that question from the question, “Have I prayed a prayer to receive Jesus?” There is a way to pray a prayer to receive Jesus which does not lead to being born again. It is not mere words.

God hears the humble cry of a distressed heart, one which says, “God, I have a problem. Lord, I need your salvation. Lord, I need you to rescue me from my sin and I believe Jesus came into this world to die upon a cross so I might be set free from my self and from my sin. Lord, rescue me!” If your prayer is humble, contrite, and sincere God will hear that and He will answer that. It is not saying a few words which leads us to being born again. That is why we ask ourselves, “Have I been born again? Is there an evidence of a transformed life inside of me?”

Let’s consider 1 Peter 1 for a moment, Peter is speaking to a people born again to this living hope,

¹⁸ ...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

If the glory of God is not our primary ambition, then what Peter tells us in his instructions to us as husbands will not make any sense to us. These instructions are specifically directed to Spirit-filled believers who are submitting their lives underneath the Lordship of Jesus. They are not given to people who are outside of Christ. It is little wonder to the people of the world who are still walking in darkness these words about roles in marriage, the role of the wife and the role of the husband seem to originate from another universe! They seem strange, foreign, odd, and ridiculous. The reason why they seem to originate from another world is, for a person who is still a part of this world, those words do originate from another world! It is a wholly different language and way of thinking.

We should not be surprised the world rejects these principles and this is important for teachers and everyone as we communicate these principles to others in this world, we should not try to shape our words of Scripture and the instructions Scripture gives to believers regarding roles in marriage so the worldly people will accept them, understand them, and welcome them. Worldly people will never accept them. We diminish the full impact of what God has to say to His people when we do that. Marriage is a gift from our Creator and anyone who submits to Scripture, whether they are believers or not, will benefit from God’s instructions regarding marriage, but the person who remains man-centered will have a hard time embracing them and joyfully following them. God sets before us this vertical goal of pleasing God by the way we respond to our wife, and it is in that context He gives us these instructions.

As self-focused people, our natural aims are toward our own pleasures, our own priorities, and our own fulfillment. These must be put to death so our soul is free to pursue joy in God. The ultimate purpose of marriage is God’s greater glory and God is most glorified in us when we follow and submit to His instructions.

Let us consider the design of the God-centered marriage. Peter assumes prior biblical knowledge in our hearts as he writes these things. He assumes the reader understands some truth before they read the text. He assumes we will not argue the role of the husband and the role of the wife being different. In reading 1 Peter 3:1-7, we observe Peter does not justify the distinctions he makes between the roles of husband and wife so much as he assumes them and explains them. He assumes the reader already has knowledge of Genesis 1 and 2, and the reader is already embracing Genesis 1 and 2. This is an assumption I do not make to a 21st Century audience, so let us review the design for a moment. We will not understand God’s instructions in marriage apart from a brief review of the original design God has as He establishes marriage.

In Genesis 2 we learn God created Adam first, from the dust of the earth and He breathed into Adam life so that Adam became a living soul, a person who is able to connect with God Himself in a relationship. He then commissioned Adam to work in the Garden and keep it, but something was not complete, something is not right, and something is not wholly good. In Genesis 2, we read,

²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for

Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

So, the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs and while Adam was asleep He fashioned this rib into the woman, a helper suitable and fit for Adam. Eve was fashioned from Adam's side to communicate her exalted role of coming alongside Adam to live, love, and work together with him throughout their lives. Eve is this incredible gift from God to this man. As with all of God's good gifts, responsibilities toward those gifts follow.

God commissions Adam with sacred responsibility to be the provider, protector, and pursuer of his new bride. Genesis 2 has such a key verse of Scripture for us. This is God's commission to Adam and to all of Adam's sons,

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Notice where the responsibility lies. He does not say, "A woman will leave her father and mother and hold fast to her husband." The man will initiate this oneness relationship so they might enjoy this mysterious oneness God has ordained for marriage to experience. This is God's original blueprint for marriage so we, as men and women in marriage, might bring glory to God and so our joy might be full as well. His design is always filled with joy for His creatures.

Someone may protest, "Pastor, this is really outdated. Our world has a greater understanding now about male and female relationships. We do not make role distinctions in marriage anymore. The very idea is very chauvinistic and narrow-minded." Granted, the biblical truths of role relationships in marriage are often twisted by teachers of God's Word and they are misrepresented. But, think about this before you set them aside: How is marriage working out in a world which has rejected God's original design? We cannot disregard the designer's instructions and expect joyful results.

In Genesis 3, Adam failed to be the man, the leader, the protector, the provider, the pursuer in his marriage. He fails nurture Eve as her spiritual leader, so much so even though Eve is deceived and sins first, God holds Adam primarily responsible. The husband possesses the greater responsibility! Sin came through Adam and death passed to all men, for all men have sinned.

The principle we learn is: The husband's headship or leadership in the marriage covenant means the man is always responsible for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the home, particularly of his wife. This does not mean the wife has no responsibility for herself, but it does mean the greater weight of responsibility is upon the husband, not only for himself but for the whole.

Sin enters the world through Adam and death spreads upon all men. This deadly force of sin creates a wedge between the husband and the wife which drives them apart so that they hid from themselves and from each other. Not only were they hiding from God, but they were hiding from one another. The transparency was broken and the deadly force of sin diminishes the oneness in marriage God intends for couples to share. It diminishes our ability to reflect the image of God and of His likeness.

How do we fight against this spiritual force? This is where Peter helps us with the initiatives of the God-centered husband. Our text tells us how we fight against this force of sin which is driving a wedge between husbands and wives. In it Peter gives two universal initiatives. First, we need to take the initiative to understand our wife and to live with her in an understanding way. Secondly, we need to take the initiative to honor our wife, "showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel."

These initiatives to honor the wife are universal and without exception. They transcend culture and customs. There are many ideas about marriage and customs throughout the world and time and men and women have related to one another differently according to culture and custom. Some of those differences are very legitimate, but what is universal, one which no man can squirm out of as a result of his culture or custom is this responsibility God lays upon our lives: The responsibility to understand and live with our wives and to honor them and exalt them.

I have used the word “initiative” carefully. The Bible does not say it is the wife’s responsibility to get her husband to understand her or to motivate her husband to honor her. The initiative to take action rests solely upon the strong shoulders of the man in the marriage. God created the man to be the initiator, the ignition that starts the engine, the switch that turns on the light.

The fall affected man’s natural inclinations toward his wife. The fall removed from us, or place within us, this self-centeredness which cause her to be outside of our nature circle. It poses for us a confusion surrounding the question: What does it mean to be a man? There is unbelievable which is continuing to grow in such a way I did not anticipate the kind of confusion regarding gender occurring, being accepted, endorsed, and promoted all through our culture. This affects everyone of us in some way.

What does it mean to be a man? Mark Driscoll comments, “Now, from that moment forward, the gender wars ensue and men are prone to go one of two directions, not understanding masculinity in general and marriage in particular. One is cowardice. They, like their father Adam, are passive cowards. They avoid responsibility, they avoid conflict, and they dump parts of their curse on their wife. There are also men who don’t want to be like Adam, who don’t want to be passive, silent, worthless cowards, and they overcompensate and they become chauvinists and bullies and thugs and jerks and bad boys, and the history of the world is really marked by these two men.”

We, as believers, do not desire to be either of these two kinds of men. Let us discuss these two initiatives because they help us find the right ground God has established for us in biblical manhood. The first is our need to understand our wives,

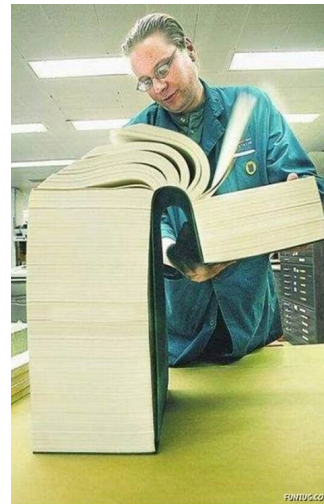
⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...

The New Living Translation (NLT) reads,

⁷ Treat your wife with understanding as you live together.

In order to live with your wife in an understanding way, you must grow in your understanding of your wife. We cannot treat them with understanding if we have no understanding whatsoever. Men, do you understand your wife? Perhaps you husbands are overwhelmed by that command.

Recently, a person in our church posted this picture on her Facebook page:



**The book
“Understanding
Women” has
finally arrived in
book stores.**

Poor guy! He does not know where to begin! Indeed, admittedly, women are very complex, particularly for men as we are attempting to understand them, but when we marry, God enrolls us, automatically, in an advanced degree program to earn a PhD in “Wife Understanding”. When we say, “I do,” immediately God enrolls us in this school saying, “You are now in school. You must gain understanding and it is not an option to study this any longer. Here is your syllabus with homework and exams along the way. Be diligent in your studies! Passing this class is necessary to earning your A.U.G degree (“Approved Unto God”). If I, as a husband am going to earn my AUG degree, where at the end of time I stand before God and He says, “AUG” then I must pass this set of courses.

Any man who does not live with his wife in an understanding way is not living a life that pleases God or that glorifies Him. This is important for us to settle this into our soul. Our flesh likes to fool ourselves on this account. We think, “My relationship with my wife is not great, but I still go to church, I am involved in church, I read my Bible, at least occasionally, I pay the bills, I stay out of deep, deep, grievous sins, so I believe I am doing okay in God’s eyes.” But, look at what God says at the end of this verse, “so that your prayers may not be hindered.” He is telling us this is so drastic if we do not get it as men, it will completely corrupt our relationship with God to the very point we cannot pray to Him and have Him listen to us. That is how significant this is in our home and this must be our primary objective in our home.

Remember on your wedding day, you made vows not just to your wife, but to God. You vowed to love, honor, and cherish her everyday throughout the rest of your life. God gave you that wife. He gave you one of His daughters. Do you think He is pleased with your life when you are frustrated with her, neglectful of her, or harsh toward her? Of course God is not pleased.

I do not know what kind of human father your wife has. Perhaps he is aloof and does not hold you to the responsibility he handed over to you on your wedding day, but there is a reason a dad on the wedding day is asked, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” The reason is biblical. Up to this point the dad has been the head of the home, the leader of the home, the provider, the protector, the pursuer of his family and of his children. On this day that responsibility is being transferred from one man to another man in this marriage and he is looking at this young man and saying, “All this love I have bound up and all this care and protection is off my shoulders and I am trusting you with this. I believe you to be capable and I am trusting you with the care of my daughter.”

Part of the tears dads shed on that day is because of the loss of this sacred responsibility in their daughter’s life and the loss of this precious position. Dad’s, you have a right to hold that young man to the promise he gave to you that day as well. Talk to him about this before the wedding seriously and soberly and say, “This is what I am doing. This is what I expect of you. I am going to lay it out for you.”

And, you also have the responsibility to make sure and to speak into his life when you do not believe he is carrying it out. Do not be one of those dads who say, “That is their problem and if I see he is not treating my daughter well, there is not much I can say.” No, be one of those dads who say, “Let’s talk because I care for my daughter, I care for you, and I care for your marriage, but I see some things and I do not believe you are living up to the promise you made to me and to God on that day.”

I do not know if your wife’s dad took his role seriously or how much he holds you accountable for the responsibility he gave you, but your wife is precious and prized by her Father in heaven and He sees all. God cares deeply how you care for her.

Sometimes a man may protest, “But you do not know how hard my wife makes this for me!” Understand this command God gives to us men is not dependent upon our wife’s response to us, but it is dependent upon our attitudes and actions toward her. God’s grace is enough; it is always enough. He will always supply us with the wisdom and strength we need to live out His commands. God’s Word tells us He opposes the proud, so if you do not feel as though you have the strength to live this way, it is because we are proud and independent of God Himself, but God gives grace to the humble and our frustration ought to lead us more to the throne of God’s grace where we humble ourselves on our knees before God and say, “God, I need your strength, your grace, and your wisdom. You give grace to the humble and I need grace right now to be the kind of man in my marriage you call me to be.” You will have to work hard by God’s grace if you wish to live with your wife in an understanding way. This is not natural to our fleshly, selfish nature. There is a battle to be won, but God has given us armor to win it.

Marriage involves spiritual warfare which calls men to take up our armor each day and to fight for the welfare and blessing of our wives and families. You may say, “Okay. I accept this. I do care about God’s glory in my life, and with this in view, I commit myself to living with my wife in an understanding way, but how do I do this? What text should I study in order to understand my wife so I can live with her in a way considerate of her?” Many recommend all kinds of books, tapes, and CDs offering detailed descriptions of the differences between men and women. Some popular book titles on this subject: “Men Are from Mars; Women Are from Venus”,¹ “Why Men Don’t Listen and

¹ “Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus”, John Gray, Harper Collins, 1984

Women Can't Read Maps",² "Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti",³ "All Men Are Jerks - Until Proven Otherwise".⁴ Many books will only confuse you more in seeking understanding because they contradict Scripture, so we must be careful.

Remember this command to live with our wives in an understanding way is accessible to the 1st Century reader. The 1st Century reader could not tune into "Focus On The Family" on the radio. The 1st Century reader could not go to Hoerr's Berean Bookstore and get a good book on the subject. He is commanding this to a people who are living in difficult straits without access to these things. It does not mean those things are not helpful; it just means those things are not necessary and we may be bypassing the most necessary source.

God calls us to do research. We have the greatest source of information, understanding, and knowledge living with us in our own homes and they are our wives. Let us do some original research!

If we say, "I have a hard time understanding my wife," do some original research and take some time to listen to what she would say. Sadly, many husbands do not open the pagers, let alone peruse the contents of this veritable goldmine of knowledge.

One study reported the average married couple spends only twenty-six minutes per week in significant, serious conversation. That is less than four minutes per day! We will not get our degree and pass our exams with four minutes per day of study. Instead of being light, airy, and surfacey all of the time in our relationship with our wives, God would have us take some time to have deep, significant conversation with them. In order to do that, we must off the football game, get out of the workshop, set aside the golf course, shut the computer off, put away the cool Droid phone, stuff your iPod in your pocket, and commit yourself to active, significant conversation with your wife. Our vows to God and our wife demand this kind of decisive action and we must make a decision for this.

Many men would readily set aside all kinds of things if our employer needed our time. We will skip the golf game, the hunting trip, and set aside all things if our employer said he needed us. Why are we not setting these things aside for our wives? Our priorities easily become twisted.

Some of you may be thinking, "I know my wife really well. I understand her completely. I live with her in deep consideration of who she is. I do not need to change the way I use my time at home." You may be one of those few men who may be right. I thought I was one of those men, but let me give you an assignment: Set aside one hour on three different days this week and take that hour for serious, significant conversation with your wife. Say to your wife, "Honey, I desire to live with you in an understanding way. I desire to listen to you and learn from you so I might complete God's design and purpose for me in our marriage. Would you be willing to set aside some time with me for deep, serious conversation?" For most, our wives will be overjoyed at that request. Ask the following questions:

1. "On a scale of 1-10, how well would you say I already understand you?"

I made the mistake of asking that question before preaching this message. I was expecting at least an 8 or a 9. I got a 6! Six is ahead of five, but it made me think. If your wife comes back to you with a 2, a 3, or a 6 it is not time to argue as to how she is wrong. It is time to say, "Whoa, I do not understand how much I misunderstand my wife and I need more work. The follow-up question would be:

What do you wish I understood more about you? "

2. What could I change in my words or actions to be more considerate of you? How am I missing the mark in living with you in an understanding way?

It could be three hours is not enough for these questions. Just hold onto them and keep working through them in the weeks ahead.

3. What makes you feel most joyful as my wife?

² "Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps", Barbara and Allan Pease, Broadway Books, 2001

³ "Men Are Like Waffles, Woman Are Like Spaghetti", Bill and Pam Ferrel, Harvest House Publishers, 2007

⁴ "All Men Are Jerks Until Proven Otherwise", Daylle Deanna Schwartz, Adams Media Corporation, 1999

4. What desire would you most like for me to meet?
5. What do I do that irritates you the most? What habits would you like for me to change?
6. If I sacrificed one thing to strengthen our marriage, what would you identify and what would you have me give up for the sake of us building a strong relationship?
7. What date activity would you most enjoy with me?

Men, as you listen to your wives, you may want to jot down a few notes to jog your memory for a future day as you think about these things. Before you ask these questions, take some time and test your current understanding by jotting down how you think she will answer these questions before you ask them. Write down your anticipated answers and see how closely they match. You may be surprised at how much you learn from asking these questions.

After asking these questions, jot down on a sheet of paper three practical applications you will make this week to begin glorifying God by obeying His command upon your life as a husband. Pray the results today will be fruitful living.