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Series: *Faith for Tough Times*

Title: *God's Design for Marriage*

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Scripture: 1st Peter 3:1-7

- 1 - Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the Word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,**
- 2 - when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.**
- 3 - Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.**
- 4 - Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.**
- 5 - For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands,**
- 6 - like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.**
- 7 - Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life---so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

Back in 1991, Tama Starr, whose company is in charge of lowering the ball on New Year's Eve, put together a book composed of derogatory comments made about women down through the ages. She entitled it: *The Natural Inferiority of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males*. And before I share a few of her collected comments, I want to be absolutely clear in saying that I agree that these men were indeed misguided!

- In 1533 Martin Luther said, *"Girls begin to talk and to stand on their feet sooner than boys because weeds always grow up more quickly than good crops."*
- In 1817 Napoleon Bonaparte said, *"Nature intended women to be our slaves. What a mad idea to demand equality for women!"*
- In 1980, Senator Barry Goldwater was asked his feelings about letting women serve in the military. He said, *"Women are hard enough to handle now, without giving them a gun."*

One more.

- In 1975 the playwright Henry Miller, said *"I enjoy women as a breed, like a dog. I don't mean that in a derogatory way."*

The sad fact is many people believe these outlandish comments are not far from what the Bible says about women. And people who feel this way often quote this morning's text as proof. After one such person read this portion of 1st Peter, she got defensive and said, *"Women get seven verses here and men only one because men aren't too bright and can only handle one instruction at a time."*

Well, what DOES the Bible say about women? Does it teach that men are superior to women?

To answer those questions, we need to look at the entire Bible. Otherwise we would be taking today's text out of context---which is not the right way to study God's Word. So to get our answers, to fully understand this text, I want us to expand our study beyond 1st Peter. In fact, I want to begin by looking at the beginning. Turn to the book of Genesis chapter 1 beginning with verse 26 where it says that both male and female were made in God's image. In verse 28 God says to Adam and Eve, ***"Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth and rule***

over it.” God didn’t say that man was to rule over woman or vice versa. No, His plan was for them to be a husband and wife team—EQUALLY responsible for dominion over creation and for marriage and family.

Now turn to Genesis 2:24 where it says, **“For this reason, a MAN will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.”** Now let me ask you a question. If two people are going to get together for say, a meeting, who comes to who? Usually the person of lower stature goes to the person of higher stature, right? I mean, at work, your boss calls you into his office, not the other way around. So if God’s ORIGINAL plan were for the husband to RULE over the wife, then I think we would expect for the writer of Genesis to say something along the lines of, *“Woman shall be the one LEAVING. She shall leave her father’s authority and pass now under her husband’s authority.”* In fact, when God inspired Moses to write these words, that’s the way it was done. Fathers chose whom their daughters would marry. There was no such thing as dating or picking your spouse on e-harmony. No, the dad just said, *“Daughter, I’ve picked out your husband. Pack your things.”* So by Moses’ time, mankind had altered God’s original design.

And please don’t misunderstand. The book of Genesis is not saying that woman is more important than man. No, it is telling us that God’s original plan was for husband and wife to come together as EQUALS. This equal footing deal would enable them to know the greatest intimacy possible. You can disagree with me and I’ll still dance at your wedding but I believe the best reading of Genesis, specifically these first two chapters before the Fall, indicates God’s intention from the beginning was that marriage should be a joy-filled PARTNERSHIP between a husband a wife who EQUALLY bear the image of God and are equally charged with co-dominion over creation.

Of course, all that changed when Adam and Eve sinned. Not only was their relationship with God broken. Their oneness was broken as well. And we see this right away. I mean, within moments of the fall the equal partnership between Adam and Eve dissolves into competitive BLAMING.

“It was the Serpent’s fault!”

“It was Eve’s fault!”

“It was YOUR fault God. After all You gave me this woman!”

Let me stop at this point and ask—how many of you married people out there have ever blamed your spouse for something? Let’s have a show of hands. Thanks for your honesty! Okay let’s go a bit further—no need to raise hands this time but, how many of you find yourself at times wanting to be RIGHT in an argument with your spouse? How many of you ever feel like you have this need to prove your spouse is wrong? I’m guessing all “mental hands” are raised!

Well, all this competitive blaming started right here in Genesis 3. And in just a couple chapters things go even further downhill—fast. Genesis 4:19 tells us that in just six generations POLYGAMY was invented when a man named Lamech married two women. Of course, there’s no oneness in that. I mean, from the one flesh that God intended it now becomes possible for men to collect wives like cattle. Then in Moses’ day we see men casting their wives aside for any reason and because of this hardness in men’s hearts God told them to at least give the women a writ of divorce. Down through the ages we see the oneness between man and woman that God intended continue to deteriorate. And all those ridiculous statements I read that have been made about women are proof of that. If you want more proof, just look at all the sitcoms where men are pictured as fools. I mean, it’s obvious that the unity God designed men and women to enjoy still suffers from the effects of the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

Well, Jesus came to reverse the curse of sin—including the way sin affected the oneness and community husbands and wives were supposed to enjoy. That brings us to this morning’s message because today I want us focus on learning how to make our making our marriages more like God originally intended. And the key to

doing that is a proper understanding of submission in marriage. So, what is it? What is Peter talking about in verse 1? What does God's Word say about submission in marriage?

First the Bible tells us...

(1) It's PERSONAL.

As we learned last week, submission is something you choose to do yourself. It's not something that is coerced. The Bible doesn't say, "*Husbands, make your wives submit to your headship.*" No, it says, "*submit YOURSELF.*" So TRUE Biblical submission comes from the person DOING the submitting—not from the person BEING SUBMITTED TO! Submission is not something that is DEMANDED. It is something that is GIVEN.

Here's a second thing the Bible says about submission.

(2) It's MUTUAL.

In our text for this morning, after Peter tells the wife to submit to her husband he says husbands are to treat their wives "*in the same way.*" Here's *The Message* paraphrase of that verse: "***The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them...in the new life of God's grace, you're equals.***" Being GOOD to your wife, HONORING them, doesn't that sound like submitting? And does respecting them as equal heirs of God's promise sound like men are to be superior? No, but if you doubt that, look at Ephesians 5:21 where God uses Paul to say to husbands and wives, "***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.***"

So who submits to who? Who's in charge in marriage? The husband or the wife? Well, according to the Bible it's neither---they submit to each other---as both submit to Jesus. He is the boss! He is the HEAD of any marriage just as He is the Head of the church!

In our text Peter says Sarah had put her hope in God and obeyed Abraham who had done the same. They both submitted to God's plan. Sarah was not a wall-flower wife, she got in Abraham's face a few times, times he needed that. And the time she referred to Abraham as Lord was when she had been listening inside her tent, when God's angel told Abraham they would have a child even though they were well past the time in life when that was physically possible. When she heard that Sarah laughed and said to herself, "***After I am worn out and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?***" But Sarah accepted this promise in faith, as Abraham had. They both submitted to God and God did as he promised.

Marriage doesn't have much of a chance of lasting unless BOTH spouses follow their example, both submit to Jesus' authority, Jesus' headship, in their part of the relationship.

Let's stay in Ephesians 5 for a bit because God uses Paul to explain how this works. First, he talks to wives. In verses 22-24 he says, "***Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.***" Okay, look at your Bibles. And make a note if it's not already in your particular translation. The word "submit" in verse 22 is not in the Greek text. It is supplied in verse 21. So literally verses 21 & 22 say, "***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ—wives to your husbands as to the Lord.***" I point this out because I think the clear principle in this text is this. Wives are to relate to—submit to—their husbands in light of their relationship to Jesus. They are to treat their husbands as Jesus would want them to treat them. How does Jesus love? Selflessly, sacrificially, nothing stops Jesus' love.

Okay what does Paul say about husbands? He says men should treat their wives in the same Christlike way but he spells it out more clearly for us. For example, in verse 25 he says, ***“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”*** Now guys, that’s a nice, poetic way of saying, ***“Jesus chose to submit Himself to the whip, the thorns and the nails for our benefit. That’s the example for you husbands to follow.”*** In short, Paul boldly says here that we men are to have the same kind of Christlike, SACRIFICIAL love for our wives. Their needs are always to come before our own—even if it is costly for us to satisfy those needs.

So, Biblical submission is MUTUAL.

Now, I think I can read your minds at this point, because many of you are thinking, *“Great thoughts Mark---but I don’t care how much you love each other. Someone has to be in charge for decisions to be made. I mean, someone has to rule or there will be chaos and disorder in marriage. Someone has to make the final call in decisions—and I vote for me.”*

Well, ideally, when both spouses are submitting to Jesus that kind of rulership is not necessary. I believe when both spouses are looking to Jesus they can have a relationship like Adam and Eve had BEFORE the fall. They will embrace CO-DOMINION—MUTUAL DECISION MAKING. But of course, there comes a time when someone does have to make a call and I believe the Bible teaches that in those times it should be the husband. But it should never be a dictatorial “call.” It should be selfless-sacrificial type call. And if that call turns out to be the wrong decision, the wife should show her respect for her husband by NOT blaming him, but rather by respecting his servant leadership, trusting that He did his best. But, MOST of the time this is not necessary. Ideally husband and wife make JOINT decisions. Yes, sometimes they compromise on decisions or take turns on things like where to go on vacation. If they are wise they give greater decision-making power to the spouse who has the most knowledge in a particular area. If the husband is a CPA and the wife is a professional plumber, yield to him in difficult financial decisions and let her deal with how best to fix clogged drains. But when it comes to the BIG decisions, both should ask the HEAD what to do. Both should PRAY. And prayer, talking to God together like Adam and Eve did when they walked with Him in the garden in the cool of the day, that develops our oneness as a couple better than ANYTHING.

So Biblical submission is PERSONAL. It’s MUTUAL. And next it’s

(3) It’s BENEFICIAL.

It’s good for us! Anyone who is in a marriage where this attitude is embraced has it made! And this is important for us to note because many people over the years have thought of Biblical submission as a terrible doctrine when nothing could be farther from the truth because it embraces a truly Christlike love that ***“does not demand its own way.”*** (1st Corinthians 13)

Genuine, Biblical submission does not lead spouses to extract service or to manipulate. Instead it leads them to cherish the other spouse. It is a love that constantly works to satisfy the needs of the other. Husbands and wives who practice it, obey the command that is found in Philippians 2:4 where it says, ***“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** By the way, let me just stop and ask, *“Husbands do you KNOW your wife’s interests? Are you familiar with her needs as a person? Do you know their dreams—their hopes?”* And wives, what about you? *“Do you understand your husband’s needs? Do you know his interests? His favorite things? His fears—His aspirations?”* We can’t practice Biblical submission to each other if we don’t KNOW each other. You can’t have the ONENESS we all yearn for without this mutual knowledge. We want spouses who love us and respect us and believe in us and root for us in spite of our fallenness and the flaws that come with it. My point is this—a marriage where both spouses practice true Biblical submission is a wonderful, satisfying, benefiting marriage.

Life doesn't get any better than when husbands and wives are a team looking out for each other! When a husband and a wife love each other in this way, put each other's needs first, it makes for a powerful team.

This week I read about a couple who love each other this way. Their names are George and Dorothea Taylor. They live in Alaska and were both in their mid-80's when George got into a tussle with a moose while taking their golden retrievers, Fellar and Tut, out for some fresh air. Dorothea was waiting in their truck to avoid the Alaskan subzero temperatures while her husband collected the dogs and that's when George noticed the massive animal. He reports, *"He was way off. He spotted me, and he started to come right after me. I was trying to get to the truck. But I didn't make it."* The moose caught George and began stomping on him in the snow. Fortunately, his 5-foot-tall wife grabbed a shovel from the truck and attacked the moose, taking swing after swing at the animal. She said, *"When it turned and started to go off slowly, I hit it with everything I had."* Finally, the moose retreated, and Tut, one of their dogs, chased it off. Dorothea made it out of the fight unscathed, but George had seven broken ribs and a 6-inch cut on his forehead. Dorothea said, *"We've helped each other out of problems before. This just happened to be the latest."*

And then in our text God uses Peter to tell us something else about submission.

(4) It's ATTRACTIVE.

He says to wives: ***Submit so that, if your husband does not believe the Word, he may be won over without words by your behavior---when he sees the purity and reverence of your life."***

In other words, wives, when you submit to Jesus, when YOU are following His lead, God can use that to lead Your husband to Jesus. Peter says this kind of submission is more attractive than outer adornment like jewelry and makeup. God can use YOU to attract your husband to Jesus. In fact, God can use a marriage in which husband and wife are relating as He intended to bring other people to Jesus. Christopher Ash is the author of a book entitled: *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best it Can Be.* And in it he refers to this principle. *"Some years ago a dispute arose in Britain between Foreign Office and the Treasury. The argument was about which British ambassadors would be provided with a Rolls-Royce for their official duties in a foreign capital. The Treasury unsurprisingly wanted these wonderful cars restricted to a few: perhaps Washington, Moscow, and Paris. The Foreign Office argued for many more based on the following reasoning: most people in a foreign capital have never been to Britain, they said. But when they see this magnificent car gliding through their streets with the United Kingdom flag on the hood, they will say to themselves, 'I have not been to Britain. I don't know much about Britain. But if they make cars like that there ... then Britain must be a wonderful place.'* In a similar way, it is Christ's hope that men and women may say to themselves as they watch a Christian marriage, *'I have never seen God, sometimes I wonder, when I look at the world, if God is good, or if there is a God. But if he can make a man and a woman love one another like this; if he can make this husband show costly faithfulness through sickness as well as health; if he can give him resources to love his wife with Christ-like sacrifice; well, then he must be a good God. And if Christ can give this wife grace to submit so beautifully, with such an attractive spirit, then again he must be a good God.'"*

(5) Finally, Biblical submission is IMPOSSIBLE on your own.

Husband and wife cannot submit to one another and daily practice a sacrificial love and mutual respect ON THEIR OWN POWER. If a husband is to love like Jesus, he must have personally experienced the love of Jesus. If a wife is to treat her husband as Jesus would want her to she must know Jesus and have submitted to His Lordship herself. They each need Jesus living in and through them, they each need to be acknowledging Him as LORD in order for them to practice true Biblical submission. It's what Peter is warning us about when he tells the husband he must respect his wife or it will interfere with his prayers. This is what Paul is saying in

Ephesians 5:21 when he says Husbands and wives are to **“submit to one another—OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHRIST.”** In fact the word **“submit”** in this verse is not a command. The command is back in verse 18 where it says, **“Be filled with the Spirit.”** In other words, SUBMITTING to one another is an expression of being filled with the Spirit of God. The text should read, **“Be filled with the Holy Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** You see, if you are a disciple of Jesus, yielding to His lordship, then when a problem comes you’ll let Him take the lead—you’ll submit to what He would want you to do. And you know, it IS impossible to submit like this on your own strength. We have to draw on God’s power. So, as I have often told you, in marriage as God intends there are not two partners but three, and Jesus is the third—the head.

In his book, *A Marriage After God’s Own Heart*, David Clarke says, *“On your own marriage is impossible. It’s not just really...really difficult—not just a tremendous challenge. It’s impossible. You see, marriage is a never-ending series of conflicts, misunderstandings, and mind-boggling missed connections. Now for the good news: Even with all our differences, marriage can work beautifully when we keep God at the center of the relationship.”*

So, Biblical submission is: personal, mutual, beneficial, attractive, and spiritual. That’s what God’s blueprint calls for when it comes to building a marriage, a home; one that brings us joy instead of sorrow, peace instead of stress.

Let’s pray.