

God's Design for Marriage - Session Four

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Welcome to our fourth session in our video series of God's Design for Marriage. This week's topic is the role of the wife. And so now it's our turn to study what the Bible has to say about what wives can bring into a marriage situation.

And this is a particularly important session, so much so because society has created so many pressures upon women to conform or not to conform to certain ideals.

And this is an opportunity, I think, for the women to come to a place of getting a real Biblical foundation and Biblical understanding for their role in marriage. So let's get started with session number four.

I want to be clear as we get into what we're dealing with tonight that we're going to address the role of the wife in marriage; specifically as it relates to her relationship as a wife. We're not going to be addressing her role as a mother. There's a lot to say to a woman, but this whole series is, God's Design for Marriage. And so we're going to be bringing it and keeping it kind of right there.

But what we're going to do as we get into this tonight is we're going to begin back where we started in our first session, and that is in the book of Genesis. So I'm going to put a passage up on the screen for you that we're going to look at together and talk about— what it, or how, I should say, it relates to the role of the wife in marriage. Genesis 2.

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Genesis 2:18, 20-22 (ESV)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 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 a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the LORD God said, (you'll remember, this is still, we're still in creation week.) "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him." And the man gave names to all the 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 a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Now, as we leave this passage up for you to look at for a little while, I want you to notice that twice in that passage we encounter the word, helper. And when you look up the definition in a Hebrew dictionary of that word, which I did, it's kind of uninspiring actually.

I mean, you don't really see much there that's special about it. The basic definition of the word is exactly what you see in your English Bible. And that is helper. It means, a helper. But I looked a little bit deeper into the root words and the words that relate to this in the Hebrew and there are some shades of meaning that may not be immediately apparent. I found that this word also means, to give assistance and support in times of hardship and distress.

Now that gives a little more dimension to this idea of what this woman is called to do as she comes alongside the man as 'the helper. It helps to give a little bit more practical information: 'to give assistance and support in times of hardship and distress.

And that's one of the reasons I believe that God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone.*" I'm going to make someone who will be able to come alongside and be that helper; to offer assistance, to be there in times of difficulty when life gets challenging; when his heart is busy with anxiety and concern. She's going to come and she's going to come alongside and help.

And you'll recall from our very first session when we were talking about God's intention for marriage, that God did not say, I will make a commander for the man. He said, I will make a helper—suitable for the man. And that's an important thing to remember. Unfortunately, there are a lot of marriages that I run into where the woman tries to take that role and walk in that role of a commander.

And that's not going to be... it's not going to bode well for the marriage because he's not going to respond well to that. When a woman begins to rise up in a

position of leadership that actually usurps his role, many times what a man will do is he will just simply become passive.

He may not, probably won't get angry— depending on his personality. He's just going to back off and he's going to let her; he will let her lead in the areas where she seems to desire to want to lead. But that's not going to work in the long term.

And it's challenging, I think, for women to deal with because I find that most often women make good leaders; really good leaders. Some of the most impressive leaders I've ever seen are female, and that can really make things challenging in the home when the man doesn't step up into his role of leadership. And I want you to kind of think about what I'm saying right now because first of all, we know that women are equal to men in God's eyes.

The Bible tells us this in no uncertain terms. It says whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, we are all; it's all the same, in Christ (Galatians 3:28)

So there is— we know that there is equality between men and women. And we also know that women are good leaders; often make some of the best leaders. And yet God speaks to them specifically from the Scripture related to their marriage. And let me show you what He says in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 22:

Ephesians 5:22 (ESV)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

And I read a verse like this and I have to admit, if I were a woman, I would— this would be a little bit of a letdown. I would kind of think to myself, Come on Lord, because here God has made women equal to men in so many, in all the ways that matter.

He has given them wonderful leadership abilities, and then He tells them to subordinate themselves to their husband's leadership role. And it, and you kind of ask yourself, Why? Does that make sense that He would give these women so much in the way of ability and so forth, and then ask them to submit to their husbands?

Well, if you think about it a little bit, the reason behind it is because it gives women in marriage something to lay down. It gives them something to sacrifice. I mean, if women were really truly inferior to men and if they possessed no leadership abilities, God wouldn't have to say, "*Wives, submit to your husbands.*"

Because they would naturally submit. They would have no other choice. Because they were already inferior. Do you get it? Because they are not inferior, but in fact are equal to men, and because they possess such great leadership qualities, they now have something to lay down. They now have something to sacrifice. They now have something to surrender.

And that means they now have a choice. They have a choice to respond to what God is saying in the Word. God gave them gifts and abilities, aplenty. And then He asked them to set those aside in marriage in deference to the leadership role of their husband. So that's a challenging call that God has put into the lives of women.

And as a man and a husband, I can tell you right off, that's difficult. That's hard. So immediately women might be thinking, Well, what's my example? We talked about the fact that Jesus is the example for men. When we discussed the role of the husband to live and to love sacrificially toward his wife.

We talked about the fact that Jesus is the one that men can look to. "*Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" (Ephesians 5:25) And so forth. Oh, that's easy. You know, men can just look to Jesus and say, just as Jesus sacrificed for His bride, men are to do the same.

Well, who's the example for women? We go through the Scripture and we ask the question, Who are women going to look to? Who are they going to look upon and say, This is the example for me. Well ladies, you might be surprised that your example is the same. Your example is your Savior, Jesus Christ, your Lord.

And I'm going to show you a passage in just a moment, but I want you to know something about this passage. It wasn't written specifically for women. But it applies to women in that what you're going to see in this passage is an example of what God calls women to do. And it's from Philippians chapter 2. Up on the screen, it goes like this.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV84)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, (and that means literally, being equal to God, alright? This is the first place where this passage applies to the relationship of a wife to her husband. Notice here it says, **Who being in very nature God**) did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (And that word, grasped in the Greek means, to be held on to without letting go,) but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

Well, once again, this isn't written specifically for women, it's written for all Believers, that we might have the attitude of Christ. But there are some things in this passage that are just so powerful as they speak to this example. And ladies, you can take great comfort from knowing that what God is asking you to do in your marriage, Jesus has done before you.

And so what I want to do is I want to highlight some of the phrases from this passage that I think are very specific and that we would be wise and we'd benefit from looking at. The first one, and we'll highlight these in yellow is, you'll notice, on the screen, is that phrase:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV84)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Once again ladies, I want to just remind you: this is this perfect picture of your equality to your husband, but it was something that Jesus did not try to hang on to in terms of how He operated.

Now I'm not saying that Jesus ever surrendered His equality because He didn't. He was fully God at all times. And fully man. What He surrendered or what He subordinated Himself to was to the will of His Father, the directives of His Father. He followed those directives; willingly submitting Himself to His Father, not considering that equality something to be demanded or necessarily His right.

And this really comes down to this issue of rights. And this is a big deal here, especially in the United States of America. We're all about rights. I mean, good grief, we have a bill of rights written into our Constitution and all the things that we follow— and as well we should.

I think we live under what was originally a very good system of government. We are people who are very protective of our rights and that can make us a little agitated when somebody tries to walk on them. Why in the world should I lay down my rights in any way? I have the right, through the equality of my life, to demand my way. And ladies, you do. You have that right.

And so did Jesus. But He did not consider that right something to be grasped, held onto, and to the point of being unwilling to let go.

The next thing we're going to highlight in this passage is the next phrase that says,

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV84)

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **but made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

but (He) made himself nothing,

I want you to notice, and by the way, this literally in the Greek means, He emptied Himself. And we're talking again of His rights, and so forth. He made Himself nothing.

But who is it that caused this to happen in Jesus' life? It says, He made himself, He emptied Himself, He “*made Himself nothing.*” And this is an important statement to the women.

Women, I want you to know and understand that your husband doesn't have the right to speak to you along the lines of your submission. This is something God speaks to you about.

A man does not demand of his wife, You must submit. God speaks to her about it and she must willingly obey her Lord. And that's capital L. This is between her and Jesus. And her response to her Lord is to willingly respond out of obedience to Him and then subordinate herself to the role that God has given to her husband. But he does not demand it of her.

Men do not have that right. It's just simply not there. This is God's right to speak into the life of a woman. And this is really repeated in the next thing that we highlight in this passage as well, which is the statement that,

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV84)

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!***

he humbled himself and became obedient.

Again, this is this perfect example that Jesus gives to women of the willing subordination of her life to her husband in response to obedience to the Lord. A woman is never to look at her husband and ask the question, Is he worthy of my subordination? That's not the question that should be asked.

It's Is Jesus worthy of my obedience? Because I can tell you right now, if you— however long you've been married, your husband will prove to you at some point in time that he is not worthy.

We will show you somewhere along the line through our mistakes and our blunders that it's really not about us and our leadership role that should cause that willing subordination or that attitude of submissiveness. That's not where it's going to come from.

And if you're looking to your husband to provide the impetus for you to walk in that attitude of willing subordination, you're going to wait a long time. And you're going to find that it comes up empty. This, once again, is between a woman and her Lord in response to His Word related to these things.

As we talk about this issue of subordination or submission, we have to ask the question, What does it look like? Well, it looks like Jesus. It looks like Jesus as He responds to His heavenly Father.

And I encourage every wife to study the heart attitude of Jesus in the Gospels. See how He responds to His Father. See the things He says about His willing subordination to His heavenly Father. Notice His heart. Notice His attitude. Notice His words. Notice His actions. That's what it looks like. And that's the best example that I can give you.

Now, I can just about understand at this particular point in time, where a woman who's hearing this might object to what I'm saying in terms of looking to Jesus as the example by saying something like, but He submitted to His heavenly Father who is God and who is perfect. My husband is not. And so how is this supposed to happen?

Well, that's very true. As husbands, as I've already said, we make a lot of mistakes. We prove that we are quite flawed. And so, the question comes up, How should a woman respond when she sees her husband in the midst of his mistakes? How should she respond when she recognizes that he's stumbling, in fact, over the Word of God?

There's some element of the Scripture that he's just not walking out in his life, or maybe she's even seeing his heart become hardened. How is a woman supposed to respond? I mean, God has called her to this role of submission and subordination to his leadership role. What if he's not acting like a leader? What if he's not fulfilling his purpose as a leader?

Well, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter shares some insights in the scriptures for women related to this very question. And we'll start with 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 1 and 2 that simply says,

1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV)

...wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

“...wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, (And that's really what it comes down to ladies, whatever you're seeing in your husband's life that just isn't measuring up— it is a lack of obedience to the Word ultimately. So what's a woman to do? He says that) *they may be won*

without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

And then he goes on to write in verse 6. As we look at that, he says,

1 Peter 3:6 (NIV84)

... like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

...like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Now, these passages are important, but there are two specific things that I want to bring out here— specifically for you wives. And the first is where Peter says that you are to win over your husband without words— and instead speak to him through your conduct.

And this can be very challenging, very challenging thing for women to lay hold of. But it is an encouragement for a wife to pray about how to go about this. Because it would be impossible for me to even give you some practical suggestions because it's different in every relationship: how a man is going to be reached through your conduct or by what specific conduct.

You, ladies, have to pray about it. You have to just simply know in your heart that God's Word has told you that when you see your husband stumbling over some aspect of obedience to the Word, you are to respond to that without words; but in conduct that he's going to see and that is going to make a difference. And again, that might be different for every couple who's here and how that applies.

I can tell you though, ladies, don't underestimate your conduct. Don't underestimate the example that you convey to your husband simply by being faithful. You know, if I'm not being disciplined enough to be in the Word like I should in the morning, nothing is more convicting than for me to get up and find Sue sitting there in her favorite chair, reading her Bible. She doesn't have to say a word to me. She doesn't.

She could, and believe me, some wives do. You know, don't you think you ought to get out your Bible? I think it's getting a little dusty there. I think you can write your name in the dust there, Pal. Or make some other comment, you know.

Best thing she can do is just be in the Word herself. And believe me. That has an impact. The conduct of a woman has incredible impact, and that's why God's Word encourages women to walk that out. But again, that's something you're going to need to pray about as to the specifics of how you walk that out.

But secondly, I find it very interesting in that last passage we looked at in verse 6, where Peter encouraged wives to be careful not to give way to fear. And this is a very important word for women. Be careful not to allow fear to be the reason behind your words and actions.

There was a time in my life when I read this verse and I wasn't really sure what it was talking about. And I was kind of thinking to myself, well, why would God's word say that to women not to give in to fear? I mean, what's the big deal? What do they have to be afraid of? And then I started looking at myself.

And I realized that I've given my wife over the 45 years that we've been married, opportunities to be fearful because my decisions weren't the best. They hadn't been prayed through. They were emotional in nature or something like that. And it can send shock waves into the heart of a wife, because this is the man that God has called her to subordinate her life to, to submit to his leadership role, and he's just made one of the biggest blunders of their marriage.

And how's— what's her response going to be? Well, it could be very natural for a woman to become fearful in response to what her husband has done. And that's why God's Word encourages a woman not to give into fear.

Ladies, I want to encourage you by reminding you that God knows that He has called you to willingly subordinate yourself to a very imperfect and flawed individual. God knows that.

And so that means that your role as a wife is going to require you to stay close to the Lord in prayer and to trust that God is working in your husband's heart in response to your prayers and your actions. Because, as I said before, we husbands, we give our wives lots of reasons to give in to fear. And truly, a wife needs to keep the shield of faith, always at the ready, in those kinds of situations.

As Peter writes to wives, he also goes on to say something about the issue of beauty. Now, I really don't know if there were as many social pressures back in Peter's day on women to live up to some standard of beauty as there are today. It's hard to believe that it was like that, but who knows, it could have been. And yet, this is something that really does apply to the pressure that we see on

women to be physically beautiful. I want to show you this one on the screen from 1 Peter chapter 3.

1 Peter 3:3-5 (NIV)

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. 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. 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,

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.

Now that's the first thing that he says. Now, if you read the New Testament with an Old Testament legalistic mindset, you're going to come away saying, Oh, God forbids women to braid their hair, wear fine clothes or gold jewelry. Well, that's not what Peter is saying.

It's not what he's saying at all. He says, don't let that be where your beauty comes from. He's not forbidding it. In fact, if you go back to the Book of Proverbs, the very last chapter, I'm not asking you to do that now, but if you go back and read about the wife of noble character, You're going to see that she dressed in fine linen. (Proverbs 31:22)

She wore fine clothes, and she was a woman who was exalted in the Scriptures. So, we can see here that this is not a prohibition about a woman dressing a certain way— never wearing jewelry or never wearing makeup or any kind of outward adornment. He says, don't let that be the only source of your beauty, because that's only skin deep. He goes on to say that a woman's beauty instead,

..., it should be that of her inner self, (which he calls) the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (He goes on to say,) For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,

Peter through again, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives wives some important insights here on the issue of beauty. Make sure that your beauty is not simply external. I will tell you right now, and ladies, this is not going to be any sort of surprise to any of you, but women who are attractive are going to get a

man's attention because men are visually attracted. We know that. You know that. We all know that.

So when a woman walks by who's just very attractive, a man's going to notice. But let me tell you something else. If she begins to open up her mouth and out of her mouth come vulgarities and profanity and things like that, a man is going to be put off and he's going to realize very, very quickly that the beauty of this woman is only skin deep.

And what the Word of God is encouraging for women here is to make sure that your beauty is not just skin deep, because that can be a fairly easy thing. It doesn't really require— I mean certainly there's time and effort that you have to put into it... and money; I know that. But the real challenge is what's going on in our hearts and how the, as Peter calls it, the inner self, is dealt with as it relates to walking in holiness and beauty. Peter calls it “*the unfading beauty.*”

Another thing that the Book of Proverbs tells us is that beauty is fleeting (Proverbs 31:30) and it is, and that's talking about external beauty. But there is a beauty that remains. He tells us in that passage where it comes from. It comes from a gentle and quiet spirit that trusts in the Lord and walks in submission to their husbands out of obedience to Jesus. That is where the inner beauty comes from. And it is a beautiful thing.

I've met many women who have walked in this beautiful inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which Peter tells us is of great worth in God's sight. So it kind of comes down to who you're trying to impress, ultimately. The inner beauty is of great worth in God's sight. (1 Peter 3:4) And if that's your heart to please the Lord above and beyond anything else, not saying that a woman shouldn't try to look attractive for her husband— nothing wrong with that at all. But ultimately it can't stop there.

Our world, our culture, just puts so much focus on youthful looks. And, ugh. And so what happens is women who get caught up in that cultural demand for youth, good grief, they give in to things like Botox and plastic surgery, and they end up just looking flat out scary toward the end. I mean, it's just scary because it's not natural and everybody knows it's not natural.

Nature is going to have its way ultimately, but there is an unfading beauty, a beauty that will not, does not fade, that a woman can lay hold of. Once again, the beauty of a gentle and a quiet spirit of great worth in God's sight.