

# A Husband by Design

## 1 Peter 3:8

**May 17, 2015**  
**Steve DeWitt**

Our series on marriage in 1 Peter brings us to the role of the husband by God's design. Over the many years I have spoken on this subject many times. However, this is the first time speaking on being a husband as a husband myself. I told Jennifer it feels different. The truth is the same but rather than talking in the theoretical, I am battling myself to apply it in the practical day-to-day of life. My almost three years of marriage have been the greatest years of spiritual growth in my whole life. I attribute most of that to the fact that successful marriages require growing in character qualities that also align with Christ-likeness.

As we look at God's model or blueprint, please know that I am in the struggle with you husbands to die to myself and to lead, love, and serve my wife and family.

*"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."* (1 Peter 3:7 ESV)

The first word, "likewise," continues the chain link starting in verse 1 challenging us to live lives that are honorable before the unbelieving world—lives that enhance and empower the gospel of Jesus we champion—essentially our talk matches our walk. Peter has described a series of relationships: Christian citizen to secular government; Christian employee to unbelieving employer; Christian wife to unbelieving husband. And here, Christian husband to his Christian wife. Why not Christian husband to unbelieving wife? The assumption was that the wife would follow the faith of her husband. That was the culture of the day. That's not necessarily absolute and we all probably know examples of believing husbands and unbelieving wives. That is much rarer.

So how does a Christian husband conduct himself within his marriage in a way that his husband walk aligns with his Christian talk? Peter highlights two qualities of a Christian husband and two reasons they must be a priority.

### **Two Qualities of a Christian Husband**

#### **Lives with his wife in an understanding way**

*"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way."* (Verse 7)

This may seem self-evident, but a Christian husband lives with his wife. The word here for "live" was used in antiquity for a marriage that is sexual. In other words, they are in such closeness to each other that intimacy is possible, even probable. They aren't simply married on paper, they are married geographically. They are married by address. They don't just live under the same roof; they live together and sleep together.

The old KJV translates it, *husbands dwell with your wives*. Over the years I have run into situations where couples were married and one or the other decides they don't want to be divorced but they don't want to live together either. These kind of perpetual separations say something that isn't true spiritually. When you are married, you become one flesh and this is more than sexual. It is the joining of two lives together and the living of those lives

together. These permanently separated but still married situations call for the church to discipline the spouse who has left and then let the remaining spouse rightly and biblically divorce for abandonment (1 Corinthians 7).

Further, if you are thinking about getting married, realize that this person you are marrying will be in your space and in your face for the rest of your life. Choose wisely. But notice that you aren't just roommates in a dorm room. The husband is called to live with the wife in an "understanding way." Literally, "dwell with her according to knowledge." He is calling husbands to be students of their wives. Get a PhD in the study of your wife. How are they wired? What communicates love to them? What are their physical or emotional or spiritual needs?

This says something about the emotionally absent husband. You may dwell together in the same house and you are all about dwelling together in the bedroom, but dwelling together means engaging according to knowledge with your wife through the week.

I have a book somewhere that says on the front cover, *Everything Men Know About Women*. Then you open it up and it's just empty pages. It's supposed to be funny. If that is true of a husband with his wife, that's not funny, is it? That's a sad marriage with a sad wife who doesn't think her husband listens or cares. A more experienced theologian and husband, Wayne Grudem, says this,

"The 'knowledge' Peter intends here may include any knowledge that would be beneficial to the husband-wife relationship: knowledge of God's purposes and principles for marriage; knowledge of the wife's desires, goals, and frustrations; knowledge of her strengths and weaknesses in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms; etc. A husband who lives according to knowledge will greatly enrich his marriage relationship – yet such knowledge can only be gained through regular study of God's Word and regular, unhurried times of private fellowship together as husband and wife." (Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 143)

Husbands, what do you think of that paragraph? I suspect we have more than a few wanting to roll their eyes or wishing they could without getting in trouble. The thought of actual conversation about her needs or feelings is enough to send you to the man-cave for a week.

We don't naturally want to consider someone else's needs. My needs? Sure. Sex life? Let's talk at length about that. Her needs? That inner despair is exactly what God is aiming at killing. As C.S. Lewis once said, "Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 227) Marriage is the slow and agonizing death of a man's idol of independent and me-first living. But in that death resurrects something better, a selfless man whose joy is producing joy in his wife. That is the essence of love, living for the joy of another, just as Jesus did for us.

### **Shows her honor as the "weaker vessel"**

"...showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel." (1 Peter 3:7)

How is a woman "weaker"? The obvious answer is that on average, a man is physically stronger than a woman. That said, there are a few sisters in the church I wouldn't want to make mad. For the most part, the female gender is physically weaker. This truth has led to the exploitation of women and tragically grotesque sins against them.

I think this goes beyond the physical to the emotional. There are many exceptions, but women tend to be more emotionally fragile as well. Ask a parent of daughters and sons and they will likely affirm the difference. Ask a girl's high school coach and they will affirm the difference. Ask the resident director of a women's dorm and they will likely ask you for a new job.

God made women with a more delicate constitution. The carnal man sees this as a weakness to exploit. The world is filled with the exploitation of female weakness with rape, wife abuse, human trafficking, online predators, and any number of other sins against women.

Peter calls husbands to honor the delicate beauty of their wives. The highs and lows of the feminine experience are part of how God made them to complement the strengths of a husband. Don't exploit her weakness or resent it. Honor it.

We may not think a man can honor something delicate but have you ever seen how a man acts around a fine sports car? I have a friend who owns a first edition Dodge Challenger. It is his baby. I swear he waxes it every day. You could do brain surgery in the reflection off the paint. He's explained to me the special processes he uses on the car. You have to take care of it! It's so valuable. The paint is so easily scratched. You only drive it on sunny days. Never on gravel. Drive it around the block then quickly clean it again. That car guy walks in to the house and finds his wife being "delicate" and brings out the sledgehammer of masculine strength. He would never do it to the car but he'll do it to his wife.

Honor. Honor means masculine deference to a woman's needs. If you can't treat her as good as Peter says, treat her like your sports car and we will call it a step in the right direction. And all the wives said? *Vroom-vroom!*

Husband, you may be stuck thinking, it isn't worth it or she isn't worth it. Peter blunts this carnal thinking by pointing out two reasons to understand and honor your wife.

### **Why Should Husbands Seek to Understand and Honor Their Wives?**

*"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." (Verse 7)*

### **So God hears your prayers**

Does that sounds strange? What does how I love my wife have to do with God hearing my prayers? If you look over to verse 12 Peter quotes Psalm 34 which says God hears the prayers of the righteous. Does he hear the prayers of the unrighteous? Does he heed the prayers of the husband who mistreats his wife? Why should he? If a Christian husband doesn't care about his clearly revealed will (to love your wife) why should God answer his request for guidance or help or anything else? "As the closest human relationship, the relationship to one's spouse must be most carefully cherished if one wishes a close relationship with God." (Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter: New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 123)

## **Because God saved her, loves her, and eternally treasures her**

*"...Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life." (1 Peter 3:7)*

Peter says, husbands, wake up. Do you realize who you are married to? That Christian woman is loved by the Almighty. Jesus loved her to the cross and willingly died in her place to secure her salvation. God has promised her an exalted and eternal status in eternity as a co-heir with Christ of the inheritance promised to God's children. Daughter of God. Friend of Jesus. Fellow recipient of grace. A woman who, if you could see the glory that will be hers in eternity, you would possibly be tempted to worship her.

There's a husband saying...*not my wife*. That says more about you than it does her. You see her weakness, her sin, her failures and it makes you want to compare her to other women or wonder why you married her. God sees her sin even more clearly than you do. Yet, he loves her. God's love for her says something about how you should treat her.

I'm a long way from my daughter going on a date with any young man. I've already been thinking about it mostly in terms of electronic surveillance and what caliber ammo to buy. That boy is going to fear for his life. She will not go out the door with any boy that I don't sense fears for his life. Besides fear, what does he need to know and respect? How much I love her. I expect him to treat her according to my love for her, not his. Not his lust or hormones or foolishness. Not his stupidity. My love and care for her will be the measure of how he treats her. He needs to see that she is my daughter first, his friend or girlfriend second. Then we can get along without bloodshed.

Isn't that what God is saying to the Christian husband? You are married to a co-heir of the grace of life. She's really, really special. Notice it is the "grace of life." Grace. She's a sinner. She needs grace. She didn't earn this status as a Christian. It was given to her just like it was given to us. She has it by faith in Jesus. She has it because of God's electing and adopting love. She is really, really special and will be forever because of God's love and grace to her.

Treat her accordingly. Don't exploit her. Don't ignore her. Don't fail to meet her needs as much as humanly possible. Don't live in your man-cave. Dwell with her. Seek to understand her. Honor her even when she doesn't deserve it. Do it with the same grace you received from God that allows you to be a co-heir of the grace of life with her.

Pursue her. Lead. Love. Fulfill your call as a servant leader by leading in love and sacrifice. Guess what happens when husbands love and lead their wives in this way? That feminine and delicate beauty flowers under the protection of your masculine servant leadership. Your death to self allows a resurrection of a new you, a Christ-like you, a you who has at your side a friend, lover, and companion.

I received a letter some years ago from an anonymous woman. I don't know who this is from which makes it safe for me to read. It is from a Christian wife in our church describing her experience being married to her husband. In light of 1 Peter, listen for key failures to live, love, and honor his wife and what that leads to over time.

*Pastor Steve,*

*I found myself thinking about your words from Sunday's sermon. Usually things are more complex than we think. I know before I married, I never imagined the complexities of marriage and family that would occur. I am not faulting you for being single, but I do*

*think the understanding is lacking. I have discovered that intimacy hinges on the emotional bond I feel for my husband. Over the years he has changed and fallen into a pattern of work, sports, TV. Spiritually, he does not lead the family. He does not pray, ask me about my needs, or direct our children into spiritual avenues. He does not attend Christian men's programs, opportunities, or ministries offered at church....*

*I feel alone in my spiritual life, not sharing discussion, goals, or concerns with him because of his lack of communication or interest. God has met those needs through friends and a Bible study for which I am grateful. We do not have interests we share. I am not much of a TV watcher or sports nut. We have fallen into separate lives in the same home.*

*I feel alone in the family life much of the time. He refuses to lead in finances. I handle the pressure of bills, savings, cut-backs, and our children's future needs for college. He does not plan outings, vacations, or dates. Yes, I was the planner in the past, but I stopped, hoping he would miss them, desire time, become more actively involved. Consequently, we haven't done much together in years.*

*Yes, I have gone to counseling. Yes, I have prayed regularly. Yes, I feel guilty for not responding to his needs in intimacy. I find it impossible at times to love him, give to him, or enjoy him. So much is missing...The respect that women need to feel is so key to intimacy. Leadership in the home is an attractive thing.*

*When you challenged men on Sunday to not be demanding, but give their wives understanding, I thought you missed the point. Yes, it is important to be gentle, understanding, and caring during intimacy. The bigger picture is to be a leader in the home. Without it, the weight of leading is on the wife and is an overload of what God intended. A strong leader is appealing and attractive to women.*

*This lack of relationship in marriage produces guilt and hearing your words on Sunday produces more. This type of relationship isn't what I signed up for. It isn't what I ever expected. This lack of intimacy has resulted from years of neglect, care, and unattended leadership.*

*I am not looking for you to address this. I just wanted to give you some insight into our relationship and why things have soured. I know that biblically God gives us principles to live by, but I find it so hard to know how to change the direction of my marriage. There are Scriptures for the unbelieving spouse, the spouse who's been cheated on, and the abandoned spouse, but what do I do? I am married to a man who is a Christian, but I haven't seen growth change, or the leadership of a godly husband.*

*Thank you for reading this. I hope in some way this helped you see marriage and intimacy from my eyes. I wish it was as easy as you painted it this past week.*

An experienced biblical counselor would have helpful guidance for this woman but this is a message to Christian husbands. Brothers, what letter would your wife write? Jennifer has written me notes both of encouragement and areas she thinks I need to grow in. Those are difficult to read but what is the path forward?

We always come back to God's design—husbands as servant leaders and wives who love them. Peter's words here are as relevant today as ever. If your marriage is broken, it's worth every effort to save it. How? Why not start right here. Start with seeking

understanding. Listen to her. Study her. Show her honor with words, time, provision, gentleness, patience, and love. She is God's daughter. Treat her accordingly.

One final thought for my dear single sisters. Hear old pastor Steve. As you consider the kind of man you will be attracted to and consider marrying, put first on that list his relationship with Christ AND how much he resembles these qualities now. If he doesn't lead spiritually now, he probably won't someday. If he doesn't pray with you now, he probably won't someday. Save yourself a life of heartache by choosing to be attracted to the right kind of man—one who will seek to understand, honor, and love you as Christ loves his church.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2015 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) on the copied resource.