

A Wife in Exile **1 Peter 3:1-2**

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I am beginning today by telling you about two influential women in my life. They were not influential directly. But they influenced me as the moms of my two best friends growing up.

The first is Billie Hundley. "Billie" is not a common first name for a woman. She was married to her husband Richard and their oldest son Matt was and is a dear friend to me. I don't know the circumstances of how they got married. What I do know is that Billie was the most unassuming and faithful Christian woman I have ever known. Her husband Richard was not a Christian. He was an intimidating guy whose general demeanor communicated *leave me alone*. I was a little bit afraid of him. Richard didn't go to church. Billie never missed. Her boys Matt and Jason got all their spiritual input from Billie. Week after week she hauled those boys to church, and children's ministries, and later to youth group. Billie was totally committed to God and her marriage to a man who didn't have any spiritual interest at all.

Brian Woodbury goes down as my dearest childhood friend. His mom Linda was married to Larry. Larry and Linda. Larry was a very committed family man, but spiritually had no interest. He was a bowler, a smoker, a softball player, a non-Christian, and non-interested. Just like Billie, Linda was the spiritual influence in the home. She was a fixture at church. Her kids grew up knowing about Jesus, the gospel, Bible verses, and stories because Linda made sure they knew.

Between those two families, there are now five adult children. All five are practicing Christians. All five are raising the grandchildren in the faith. What can we say about the importance of these two Christian wives and moms and what they did for decades? We look at the faith of the children and grandchildren and realize their powerful influence.

What about the husbands – Richard and Larry? Today, both are dead. Both are in heaven. What? Yeah. Both Richard and Larry submitted their hearts later in life to the Lord in faith. Both became involved in a local church. Both died and are now in heaven.

What can we say about the incredible power of a Christian wife in a marriage? It's a little heaven on earth which powerfully draws unbelieving husbands to consider the reality of the Christian faith.

We are studying a letter the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians who are in all kinds of awkward relationships of spiritual conflict. He's addressed how Christians live when government is hostile to their faith; how Christians live when their employer is antagonistic. Christianity in exile is whenever and wherever following Jesus creates conflict or suffering. Peter's answer in these cases is twofold: *"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."* (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

The character of our lives is to be a testimony to an immoral world that there is something to this Christianity thing. Secondly, as we saw last week, we are to follow the example of Jesus when he suffered unjustly. *"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."* (Verse 23)

Jesus handed the betrayals, slander, pain, and injustice over to his heavenly Father knowing God would make it right. This freed him to love even those who nailed him to the cross. He said, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" (Luke 23:34) We follow his example when we don't retaliate, but instead respond with kindness.

Citizen. Got it. I'll try. Employer. Check. But both of these are relationships we can get away from. I leave work and always have the weekends. But what if you can't get away from the relationship in spiritual conflict? Like in marriage? What if your calling is to live out the gospel with an unbelieving spouse in the privacy of a marriage, a home, and even the marital bed? That is Peter's focus in 1 Peter 3. We are spending the whole month on what is biblical marriage. Today we look at verses 1-2:

"Likewise, 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."

This begins chapter 3 but notice the verse begins "Likewise." He is tying what he says here about Christian wives in exile to what he has said about Christian citizens, employees, and even Jesus in exile. In each case, the character of the life lived says something profound to those who oppose the Christian faith. *Likewise...Christian wives.*

The reality on the ground in the 1st century is that Christianity spread across the Roman Empire. Marriages were impacted as one spouse turned in faith and the other did not. A quick look at any church will show that as a percentage, women are the first responders to the gospel. I doubt there is a church anywhere with more men than women. Why, is another message.

He doesn't write to Christian husbands with unbelieving wives, although the principle applies. He writes to those Christian women who involuntarily find themselves married to men who do not share their faith.

As a side note, these women were in this situation by circumstance, not choice. If you are dating an unbeliever, don't look at this as a sanction for marrying an unbeliever. "*A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*" (1 Corinthians 7:39, emphasis added) It is never God's will for a Christian to marry an unbeliever. Period. No matter how dashing or nice he is.

Peter is writing to wives who come to faith after they are married. Even here we have some scandal as the Greco-Roman world expected the wife to follow the religion of her husband. Most husbands at least socially worshiped the Roman pantheon of gods. For a Christian woman who has trusted in Jesus, this created a great dilemma. Should she hide her faith and go worship Zeus? Should she leave the marriage? Peter affirms what Paul says as well. A different faith is not a reason to leave a marriage. "*For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*" (1 Corinthians 7:16)

The underlying concern is the salvation and eternal state of the unbelieving spouse. The Christian in the marriage is in a powerful position of influence, and might be the tool God uses for the spouse to see the glory and beauty that Jesus died for them. This is where Peter goes. Wives, see yourself as a gospel witness to your husband. Now if being a missionary makes you think you have to live perfectly, you haven't spent time with many missionaries. The best of them are sinners and flawed and imperfect. This is not a call to

fake perfectionism anymore than the gospel says we are perfect people. The gospel says the opposite. We are not perfect. We are sinners saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. Missionaries aren't perfect, they are forgiven and live out a gracious forgiving truth before the people they are seeking to reach. A Christian wife should do the same.

So how do Christian wives reach the heart of their husbands?

The Attractional Beauty of a Submissive Spirit

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands." (1 Peter 3:1)

The culture of the day required that a wife follow her husband's religion. A wife that became a Christian would be perceived as a woman in rebellion. (See Karen Jobes, *1 Peter: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 203.) Peter wants the wives to counter that perception by affirming with their attitude that they willingly accept the leadership of their husbands.

We are going to spend time on God's basic blueprint for marriage the rest of this month. But just to note here, God created marriage and designed it to function with servant leadership by the husband and willing submission to that leadership by the wife. That goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Sin has created husbands who don't lead and wives who don't follow. So when the New Testament talks about marriage redeemed it always calls us back to God's original plan of serving-leading husbands and wives submissive to that leadership. *"Submission is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband."* (Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 196.)

Even unbelieving husbands are still wired to find this attractive in their wives. Let any husband have the choice between gentle and submissive or abusive and combative, submissive wins every time. The angry, fighting, nagging wife will do little to draw her husband toward faith. But a wife whose spirit is gentle, even in disagreement or conflict, will amaze the perceptive husband. Over time, it says something powerful to him.

It's so powerful that Peter says a wife can win her husband without words. That doesn't mean the gospel in words isn't known by the husband. A wife will no doubt share her beliefs. This is life enforcing and enhancing the claims of the wife's Christianity. He sees her life up close including how she responds to her own failures and it garnishes her faith.

The Attractional Beauty of a Holy Life

"When they see your respectful and pure conduct." (1 Peter 3:2)

This is a day-to-day challenge, even for wives of mature Christian men. It's one thing to say it; it's another to put it into practice. What would this look like? Peter lists two qualities to aim for. *Respectful* and *pure*. I take this to be morally pure and we see that submission has its limits. It never includes any behavior that would displease God. If a husband requires it, a godly wife must stay no.

But in all other categories to strive for, her walk is to be consistent with her talk. No wife will do this perfectly or even close. As we say here, it's not perfection but direction. Is the direction of the wife's life toward a lifestyle of respect and purity? In public? In private? If there are children, as a mother? All of these priorities should reflect a woman who is morally upright in life and a respectful friend, lover, and companion to her husband.

The Priority of Inward Beauty

"Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

We are going to do a whole weekend message on this so I am only noting here that Peter emphasizes the inward over the outward. As he says it, *"the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."*

Just to note, my two friends' dads became Christians after retirement. Linda and Billie were older women. They weren't more beautiful outwardly at that point in life. It wasn't their outward beauty that drew their husbands to believe in Jesus, it was the inward. And that inward beauty lived over decades, growing and maturing right before the eyes of the husbands.

The first priority for Christian women and wives is internal beauty for many reasons. The one here is its evangelical power. Real feminine beauty is beauty of character, love, kindness, and grace. It shows itself in innumerable moments of sacrifice, giving, and gracious words. When a wife's life is graced with the gospel, it is a better evangelist in the home than Billy Graham.

This goes beyond the text, but I think it is a faithful application to think about a Christian woman's powerful witness to her children.

Moms in Exile

Christian wives may or may not be married to Christian men. But those who have children all become mothers of unbelievers. Children come out of the womb without knowledge of Jesus or an awareness of their need for salvation. Can anyone deny children are born selfish?

Here is where biblical Christian motherhood is such a powerful witness. Typically, children spend exponentially more time with mom than with dad. We would never understate the importance of dad (and I can't because I am one myself). But the hand that rocks the cradle rules the heart. Imagine where families and churches and communities would be without the indestructible love of a mother.

Combine that with a mom who interweaves prayer, Bible reading and teaching, attending church, serving others in Jesus' name, celebrating Christmas and Easter, and her own example, and you have a powerful spiritual evangelist for those children. Is there any more effective way to make disciples of Jesus than for moms to live out Christianity before their children?

My two best friends got no spiritual direction from their dads. They were adults already serving in churches and raising their own kids in the faith by the time either dad became a Christian. Who gets the credit? God. But humanly speaking, mom.

A few weeks ago I told a story and I said I was going to tell it again. Many years ago, when I first came to Bethel, I got a call from an elderly woman, we will call her Jan, that her husband was dying in the hospital and she asked if I would go see him. I had never met

him. I understood that he was a tough sort of guy with no interest in Christianity. The family was praying as they viewed this as kind of a last chance for him to believe.

I went to the hospital and came into the room. Jan's husband was on the bed with tubes everywhere. Jan was on the other side, holding his hand and slowly rubbing it. I sat down next to him. I sensed he wasn't really too interested in me being there but I commenced with some small talk. Very abruptly he said, "Pastor, if you have something to say, you say it, 'cause I got to pee." There was a disdain for me in his voice that honestly ticked me off. I rose from my chair and got right in his face and I said, "Well then let me get right to it. You're about to die. Without Jesus you are going to hell. You can deny it all you want but you can't deny it in your wife."

He looked like he might take a swing at me but the moment I pointed to his wife, his whole face changed. He looked over at her. There she is holding his hand. He said, "*Yep, you're right. She's one fine cookie.*"

Think of Jan all those years taking the kids to church, reading them the Bible, with no spiritual support whatsoever from her husband. Think of all the faithful wife responsibilities she did for him. Year after year. And now she was holding his hand on his death bed.

The effect? At the end of his life, he couldn't speak evil of Christianity because he had seen it all those years in his wife.

I wonder if today, on Mother's Day, we may have a husband or a child sitting with mom. You've seen her faith. You know how happy she is that you are at church with her today. She has loved you and you know it. Yet, her faith is not your faith. You respect it in her but you've been busy with other things. But here you are. And once again, you have an opportunity to consider that maybe this Christian thing is true after all. There are lots of questions and what about this or that but the bottom line is, your wife or mom has something real. It is Jesus. Could today be the day when you embrace the faith of your wife or mom?

Wives and moms, may this Mother's Day renew your commitment to be a beautiful evangelist to your husband and, if you have them, to your children.

"Likewise, 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." (1 Peter 3:1)

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