

WHAT'S A WIFE TO DO?
For Better, For Worse – Week 2
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Story: A young preacher was getting ready to pastor his very first church. He was nervous, so he went to his old pastor and mentor and asked him for advice. The old pastor said, “Whenever I get into a tight spot and don’t know what to do, I just quote scripture, and it all works out.” A few weeks later the young preacher was already in a tight spot. He was preaching a wedding; 500 people were there. Everyone was waiting for his first words, and when he looked down at his Bible he realized that he had forgotten his sermon notes. They were on his desk in his office. He was in a mess. He stammered and stuttered and all he could remember was the advice of his mentor, to quote scripture. The only Scripture he could think of was the text for that next Sunday’s sermon, so he looked right at the bride and groom and said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
2. We laugh at that story because there is some truth to it. When you first get married, you really don’t know what you’re getting into. You don’t understand that even though you are in love, marriage can be very challenging at times.
3. And that’s why we’re doing this sermon series: For Better, For Worse. We’re looking at God’s wisdom for the challenges of marriage.
4. God created marriage, and He gave us an instruction manual that tells us exactly how marriage is supposed to work. It tells us exactly what we need to do to have a good marriage. When you follow God’s instructions, the marriage works. Marriage is wonderful. But when you reject God’s instructions, the marriage will fail.
5. So, if your marriage is struggling, it could be that you have drifted from God’s instructions about marriage. If you want to heal your marriage, all you have to do is return to God’s blueprint for marriage.
6. Right now we’re looking at the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives. God has a specific role and responsibility for every husband every wife to fulfill.

7. Last week we looked at the role and responsibility of the husband. Do you remember what we said? The husband's role in marriage is headship. He is to be the leader of the marriage. He is responsible for it. And the husband's responsibility is to love his wife as Christ sacrificially loved the church.
8. Today we are going to look at the role and responsibility of the wife in marriage.

II. THE WIFE'S ROLE

1. The wife's role is helper.
2. **Genesis 2:18** Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him."
 - i. God created Adam first, and he was alone. Sure, he was surrounded by the animal kingdom, but the Bible still says he was alone, and it was not good. So, God brought all the animals to Adam so he could name them, but still, there was not helper corresponding to him (suitable helper). So, God, put Adam to sleep, took one of his ribs, and using that rib God made a woman, Eve, to be his wife. Now he had a suitable helper.
3. What does it mean to be your husband's helper? It essentially means that your role is to help your husband succeed in life.
4. **Gene Getz** "A helper is one who shares man's responsibilities, responds to his nature with understanding and love, and wholeheartedly cooperates with him in working out the plan of God." *The Measure of a Woman*
5. **Elizabeth George** "Oh, I have many things to do, but my primary purpose and role each day is to help Jim, to share his responsibilities, to respond to his nature, and to wholeheartedly cooperate with him in God's plan for our life together." *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, 60
6. **Bruce Wilkinson** "A helper is someone who comes alongside to meet the needs of another. She supplies what is lacking, nurtures, protects, and lends support where the other is weak or faltering." *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs*
7. Now, if this is new to you, you might not like the idea of being your husband's helper. It might sound like you are inferior to your husband.

But helping and serving does not mean inferiority. Do you know who is most described as helper in the Bible?

- i. **Hebrews 13:6** “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”
- ii. **John 16:7 (NCV)** “But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away. When I go away, I will send the Helper to you. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come.”
- iii. The Bible describes God as our helper, but that doesn’t mean He is inferior to us.

8. **Elizabeth George** writes about how to be your husband’s helper:

- i. Make a commitment to help your husband.
- ii. Focus on your husband. God wants us wives to focus our energy and efforts on our husbands – on his tasks, his goals, his responsibilities.
 1. Ask him two questions daily: What can I do for you today? What can I do to help you make better use of your time today?
- iii. Ask of your actions, “Will this help or hinder my husband?”

9. **Julie Nixon Eisenhower** wrote about Mamie Eisenhower, the wife of former president Dwight D. Eisenhower. “Mamie had seen her role as one of emotional support for her husband.... She had no interest in promoting herself. Most of all, she was the woman behind the man, the woman who proudly proclaimed, ‘Ike was my career.’”

10. The primary way that a wife fulfills her role as helper is by being an effective homemaker. A homemaker is a woman who priorities the health of her home. By home, I mean her husband, children, and her actual house environment. Let’s look at a few verses together.

- i. **Proverbs 14:1 (NLT)** “A wise woman builds her home, but a foolish woman tears it down with her own hands.”
 1. **Robert Alden** (*Proverbs*) “... [T]his verse does not speak of house construction, masonry, or carpentry, but of home building; the knitting together of family and the day-by-day routine of creating a happy and comfortable place for a family to live.”

2. One **author** says this means the wife “sets the mood and maintains the atmosphere inside the home.” (Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God’s Own Heart*, p. 134.)
- ii. **Proverbs 31:27** “She watches over the activities of her household and is never idle.”
1. **GW** “She keeps a close eye on the conduct of her family”
 2. **CEV** “She takes good care of her family”
 3. **Strong’s Concordance** says, “*To watch* means ‘to hedge about,’ as with thorns, much like a mother bird or animal might do to protect her young. The verb expresses the active guarding, protecting, saving, and attending to something precious. This kind of watching involves observation and preservation.”
 4. One female Christian **author** wrote, “In my home, I am the one who watches over safety, health, sanitation, cleanliness, and security. And then there is the money – recording, saving, supervising, giving, spending, and stretching it. I also take care of clothing needs and mending, the appliance warranties and service contracts, and the food planning and preparation. As the one who does the grocery shopping and stocks the pantry and refrigerator, I watch over the nutrition, the selection, and the types of foods and beverages available in the house. I also oversee the calendar, keeping an eye open to upcoming events, and trying to anticipate future needs. All the while I intently watch over the attitudes and unexpressed needs of each family member.” (Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God’s Own Heart*, p. 145.)
- iii. **1 Timothy 5:14** “Therefore, I want younger women to marry, have children, manage their households, and give the adversary no opportunity to accuse us.”
1. **NLT** “and take care of their own home”
 2. **AMP** “guide the household”
 3. **CEV** “and look after their families”
 4. **NTMS** “rule in domestic matters”

5. **Other translations** read, “preside over a home, or be mistress of the house.” (Curtis Vaughan, ed., *The New Testament from 26 Translations*.)
 6. **Elizabeth George** describes what it means to manage the home with a question. “What do people see when they enter your house? Do they find calm – or chaos? Peace – or panic? Palace – or pigpen? Evidence of preparation – or procrastination?”
- iv. **Titus 2:4-5 (HCSB)** “4 so they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, homemakers, kind, and submissive to their husbands, so that God’s message will not be slandered.”
1. **NIV** “to be busy at home”
 2. **NLT** “to work in their homes”
 3. **KJV** “keepers at home”
 4. **NTMS** “industrious in their homes”
 5. **MSG** “keep a good house”
 6. Commenting on Titus 2:5, **Stanley N. Helton** defines a homemaker as “supervis[ing] their households with discretion and industry.” (“Titus 2:5—Must Women Stay at Home?” *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*,” ed. Carrol D. Osburn, 376.)
 7. **Donald Guthrie** (*Tyndale NT Commentaries, The Pastoral Epistles*) “A woman’s primary sphere of activity and contribution is the home.”
 8. So, the wife’s role is helper. She is to help her husband succeed in life. And the primary way she does that is by being a good homemaker – she prioritizes the health of her home. Her primary focus is the home. Her primary ministry is the home. Her primary job and vocation is the home. Her main responsibility is the home.
 9. Can a wife work outside the home? Can a wife have a ministry outside the home? Of course. But your husband and your children and your home must be your top priority. You must make sure that your husband and children and

home are not missing out on your best because of your career, or because of another ministry.

III. THE WIFE'S RESPONSIBILITY

1. The wife's responsibility is to submit.
2. **Ephesians 5:22** "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."
3. What does it mean to submit?
4. One **author** writes, "In the Bible, submission is primarily a military term meaning to rank oneself under someone else. This attitude is lived out by subjection and obedience, by leaving things to the judgment of another person and yielding or deferring to the opinion or authority of someone else (Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, p. 65, referencing Vine's Expository Dictionary and Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)."
5. Let me point out two insights about Ephesians 5:22.
 - i. It is unqualified: It is given to all wives, no matter your spiritual maturity, or how long you've been married, your intelligence, your education, or skills and talents, etc.
 - ii. It is unconditional: It doesn't matter if your husband is worthy of respect, or if he is a Christian. In this way it is no different than the unconditional command to husband to love their wives. They aren't required to love merely when the wife is lovely or treating them right, but always.
6. Once again, submission does not mean inferiority. Remember, we are not talking about intrinsic worth and value, but about roles and responsibilities. The wife and husband are equal in worth and value but have different roles and responsibilities. Consider Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that He submits to the Father, yet He is not inferior to the Father; He is equally God. He is fully God. In the same way, the wife is not inferior, but she is commanded to voluntarily place herself under her husband's leadership.
7. Let me clarify the Bible's teaching on submission wife SEVEN INSIGHTS ABOUT SUBMISSION¹:
 - i. The Fact of Submission:

¹ These insights come from Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, p. 66.

1. **Titus 3:1** “Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities”
 2. Submission is not unique to wives, as if God is picking on them. All Christians are called to submit at times: Citizens must submit to government authorities; employees must submit to employers; children must submit to parents; soldiers must submit to their superiors; church members are called to submit to church leaders; church members are called to submit to one another (i.e., we move away from selfishness, and, acting out of honor for other people, defer to them; see Eph 5:21). Submission doesn’t imply inferiority; it is necessary for order.
- ii. The Decision to Submit:
 1. **Ephesians 5:22** “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”
 2. It is the wife’s decision to submit.
 3. The word “submit” means to voluntarily place yourself under the authority of another.
 4. The husband is not to force the wife into submission.
 - iii. The Who of Submission.
 1. **Ephesians 5:22** “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”
 2. You are to submit to your own husband; not to all men, or all husbands.
 - iv. The How of Submission.
 1. **Ephesians 5:22** “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”
 2. “As to the Lord.”
 3. This is not a call to give your husbands the same unlimited obedience that you give to Christ.
 4. “As to the Lord” means as an act of service to the Lord. It is part of your duty to the Lord.
 5. In other words, you are not submitting to your husband because he deserves it, or because you feel like it, but to please the Lord.
 - v. The Scope of Submission.

1. **Ephesians 5:24** “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.”
2. “In everything.”
3. This doesn’t mean that you must submit to your husband’s lead to do something dangerous or sinful. Your first and primary allegiance is to Christ.
1. **Bruce Wilkson** “The English word submit is another compound in the Greek, hupotasso. It combines roots meaning ‘under’ and ‘to arrange together.’ In its narrowest definition, submit means to arrange all parts underneath. The wife, then, is to arrange all parts of her life under the leadership of her husband. This is why the Bible doesn’t use a word like obey instead of submit. To submit to someone goes far beyond mere obedience. For example, you can obey another without bringing anything under his or her authority except that single act. Submission focuses on the deeper and more important issues of one’s heart and intentions.” *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs*, p. 155.

vi. The Strength to Submit.

1. What happens when you are afraid of what might happen if you submit to your husband.
2. **1 Peter 3:5-6 (NLT)** “This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.”
3. Where did the women of old find the strength to submit to their husbands? They put their trust in God.
4. **Elizabeth George** “It is by faith that you and I believe God works in our life directly through our husband. It is by faith in our sovereign God that we submit to our husband, trusting that God knows his decisions and the end results of those decisions, and trusting that God redeems, if not

guides those decisions. And so it is by faith in God that our fear is dispelled and we gain the strength to submit.”

vii. The Motive for Submission.

1. **Titus 2:4-5** “4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered.”
 2. Notice the last phrase, “so that God’s word will not be slandered.”
 3. The motive for submission is the glory of God. To make God look God. To make unbelievers want to become Christians.
 4. When unbelievers look at a Christian marriage, God wants them to see peace, harmony, order, love, and respect. He doesn’t want them to see division, discord, disunity, fighting, anger, and bitterness.
8. Remember, submission doesn’t mean he makes all the decisions, he always gets his way, he is the smartest, or he is the most important. It simply means the wife willingly placing herself under the leadership of her husband.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. So, what we’ve learned over the past two weeks is that God created marriage, and He designed it in such a way that husbands and wives have certain roles and responsibilities.
2. The husband’s role is headship, and his responsibility is to love his wife.
3. The wife’s role is helper, and her responsibility is to submit to her husband.
4. I’ve also heard it put like this: The husband’s job is to lead and love, and the wife’s job is to support and submit.
5. Here’s what we know about God. He loves you. When He commands you to do something it is for your own good. Embracing God’s plan for your marriage will not only improve your marriage, but it will give you the most fulfilment and the most joy.

6. The Biblical teaching on marriage is highly counter-cultural. I understand that. But this is where faith comes in. To have faith is to obey what God says about marriage, believing that His plan is best.