

## **HOW TO BUILD A PREVAILING MARRIAGE**

**Colossians 3:18-19**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Every year the Louisiana Family Forum honors the state's longest married couple. The 2025 winners were Ira and Margery Milan of New Orleans, who have been married for 83 years. That's what I call a prevailing marriage. And that's God's will for every marriage – that your marriage lasts “until death do us part.” So, because it's the month of February, the month of love, I want to preach a special sermon on how to build a prevailing marriage.
2. To build a healthy marriage, you need a good foundation. The foundation is the definition of marriage. If you don't know what marriage is, then you are more likely to avoid marriage or to get a divorce.

### **II. THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE**

1. The Bible teaches that marriage is not a man-made institution, but that God created it. Therefore, we can't just make up our own definition of marriage. Instead, we need to get our definition of marriage from the Creator. And the good news is that in the Bible God has clearly defined marriage for us. In a nutshell, marriage is the union of one man and one woman for a lifetime. But let's go deeper.
2. Nine Aspects of a Biblical Marriage
  - i. One, marriage is a permanent union. Jesus said, “... what God has joined together, let no one separate (Mt 19:6).” Marriage is intended to last until death; divorce is not an option, except in cases of infidelity.
  - ii. Two, marriage is a monogamous union. Jesus said, “... and the two will become one flesh (Mt 19:5).” Marriage is not the union of three people, or of two couples; it is the union of two.

- iii. Three, marriage is a heterosexual union. Jesus said, "... he who created them in the beginning made them male and female (Mt 19:4)." Two men or two women do not equal a marriage. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman.
- iv. Four, marriage is an exclusive union. The Bible says, "Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled (Heb 13:4)." Marriage is the only allowable context for sexual intimacy, and spouses are not to deprive each other of this privilege (1 Cor 7:3).
- v. Five, marriage is a primary union. Jesus said, "... a man will leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife (Mt 19:5)." Once you get married, your spouse becomes and is to remain your most important relationship after God. Your spouse is to come before parents, children, and friends, and even self.
- vi. Six, marriage is a complementarian union. In a biblical marriage, the husband and wife, while equal in dignity and value, have different roles. The husband's role is to love and lead, and the wife's role is to submit and support. The Bible says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:22, 25)."
- vii. Seven, marriage is a beneficial union. Marriage is not the "ball and chain" that it is often portrayed to be. The Bible says, "A man who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord (Pr 18:22)." Studies show that married people live longer, and are healthier, happier, and wealthier. Studies also show that children do best when they are raised by their married biological parents. Marriage and parenting are God's two greatest blessings this side of heaven.
- viii. Eight, marriage is an integrative union. To integrate is to blend into a functioning or unified whole (Merriam-Webster). Jesus said, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh (Mt 19:6)." Marriage is the end of independence – of independent thinking

and acting. It's no longer his bed and her bed; goals and her goals; his plans and her plans; his values and her values; his stuff and her stuff; his finances and her finances. In a truly biblical marriage, everything is shared – dreams, goals, possessions, finances, property, decisions, hardships, victories, etc. Dave Ramsey recommends combining your finances with your spouse because it forces you to set goals together instead of having independent goals. His organization surveyed 10,000 millionaires and found that they combined accounts with their spouse.

- ix. Nine, marriage is an illustrative union. God didn't create marriage only to foster human flourishing, but also to illustrate the gospel of Jesus Christ. In writing about marriage, the apostle Paul wrote, "This mystery is profound, but I am talking about the church (Eph 5:32)." Your marriage is to be a living sermon. The husband's love is to illustrate Christ's sacrificial love for the church, and the wife's submission is to illustrate the church's reverential obedience to Christ.
- x. Now that we have laid the foundation for a prevailing marriage, let's talk about the two essential building blocks that you need to make it last.

### III. TEXT

- 1. **Colossians 3:18-19** "18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.

### IV. TWO ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS IN A PREVAILING MARRIAGE

#### 1. Wives, submit to your husbands.

- i. **Colossians 3:18-19** "18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
- ii. This may be the most hated verse in the Bible, but before you go on assuming that God is picking on women, you need to remember that the command to submit is given to everyone.
  - 1. James 4:7 commands all Christians to submit to God.

2. Luke 2:51 says that Jesus submitted to His earthly parents when He was a child – and all Christian children are called to submit to their parents.
  3. Romans 13:1 says that all Christians are to submit to the government – to obey the law.
  4. Titus 2:9 says that all Christian employees are to submit or be obedient to their bosses at work.
  5. 1 Peter 5:5 says that all church members must submit to their pastor when it comes to church matters.
  6. Ephesians 5:21 says that all Christians are to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.
- iii. To understand submission, it's helpful to begin with what submission doesn't mean.

**iv. WHAT SUBMISSION DOES NOT MEAN:**

**1. It doesn't mean that women are inferior to men.**

- a. The Bible does not teach that women are less valuable, or less intelligent, or less loved by God. And submission does not imply that. For example, as a Christian employee you are called to submit to your boss; does that mean you are inferior to your boss?
- b. Submission is about order, not value or ability.
- c. The **NIV Study Bible** puts it this way. "Inferiority is not implied by this passage. The submission is one of role or function necessary for the orderly operation of the home."
- d. Someone said "Biblical submission isn't yielding to your husband's will. It is embracing the order Christ established and submitting to Him."

**2. It doesn't mean that the husband has to make all the decisions alone.**

- a. Some mistake submission in marriage to mean that the wife is not to have any say. She is not to give her

opinion. She is not to try to sway her husband one way or another. He is not even supposed to ask for her opinion. He is the decision maker, and she is just supposed to live with whatever he decides. That's not submission. The wife is free to give her opinion; and to offer insight; and the husband and wife can and should put their heads together when they make decisions.

**3. It doesn't mean that the wife can't make any decisions alone.**

- a. Some mistake submission to mean that the husband must be involved in every decision. That's not the case. Just because you are in charge doesn't mean you need to micromanage every little detail in your family.
- b. So now, let's look at what submission does mean. Now I want you to know, wives, that I got these points from a woman. These points come from a wonderful little book called, *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, by Elizabeth George. And she got these points right from Scripture.

**v. WHAT DOES SUBMISSION MEAN?**

**1. The what of submission: Voluntarily allow your husband to be your leader, giving him the final say.**

- a. **Elizabeth George** writes, "Submission is primarily a military term meaning to rank oneself under someone else. This heart 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 (*A Woman After God's Won Heart*, p. 65)."

b. Notice that I used the word “voluntarily.” Submission is the wife’s decision. It’s really between her and the Lord. The Bible does not command husbands to bring their wives under submission, or to discipline their wives when they disobey. Submission is the wife’s decision.

**2. The how of submission: Unconditional and respectful.**

a. **Colossians 3:18** “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

b. First, submission must be unconditional.

i. The Bible doesn’t say submit to your husband when you feel like it; or if he’s being good to you; or if he is meeting your needs; or if this or that. The Bible says to submit unconditionally.

ii. Now on the surface that sounds very challenging, but isn’t that similar to what God calls husbands to do? God calls husbands to love their wives unconditionally – not just when she smells good and looks pretty.

iii. I found this quote by author **Emerson Eggerichs** to be very challenging. He wrote the book, *Love and Respect*. “The problem many women have today – including Christian wives – is that they want to be treated like a princess, but deep down they resist treating their husbands like the king.”

c. Second, submission must be respectful.

i. **Ephesians 5:33** “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.”

ii. Let your husband have the final say, and do it respectfully. That means don’t criticize him;

don't complain; and don't rub it in his face if the decision turns out bad.

**3. The scope of submission: Submit to your husband in everything.**

- a. **Ephesians 5:24** "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything."
- b. You are to let your husband have the final say in every area of your life. Do you know what everything means? Everything.
- c. Now there is one exception to this. You must not submit to your husband if he is leading you to disobey God.

**4. The strength of submission: Trust in the Lord to take care of you through your husband's leadership.**

- a. This is all very challenging. Where do you find the strength to submit like this? It comes from faith. You have to have faith that God will take care of you through your husband's leadership.
- b. **Matthew 6:31-33** 31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

**5. The motive of submission: Submit in order to win your husband over to a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.**

- a. **1 Peter 3:1** "In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live."

- b. This verse was written to Christian wives who had unbelieving husbands. And Peter said that your best tool to evangelize your husband, to win him to Christ, is not to preach to him, not to argue with him, but to submit to him. And there's something magnetic, and attractive, and winsome about godly submission.
- c. And I believe this also applies to women who have Christian husbands who are backslidden. How do you influence him to turn back to the Lord? Your best tool is submission. There's something about submission that God can use to grab your husband's heart and pull Him to the Lord.

## **2. Husbands, love your wives.**

- i. **Colossians 3:18-19** "18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them."
- ii. Two observations:
  - 1. Wives are given one command, but husbands are given two – love your wife, and don't be bitter toward them.
  - 2. Both wives and husbands are commanded to submit in marriage. Wives must submit to their husbands, but husbands must submit to the commands to love and not be bitter. Marriage is a submission competition.
- iii. What does it mean to love your wife?
  - 1. "Love" – agape. This is the same word used to describe God's love for us in John 3:16. We must love our wives the way that God loves us.
- iv. **Four Traits of Biblical Love**
  - 1. **Your love must be steadfast.**
    - a. That is, unconditional, unwavering, unending.
    - b. Christ loves us even though we don't deserve it.

- c. **Romans 5:8** “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- d. **Commentary** “Love, exemplified by Christ’s sacrificial love, is willing to pay the supreme cost and cherish the beloved even when the beloved is unworthy of that love.”
- e. Our love must be the same. Don’t love your wife only when she deserves it, but all the time. Not only when she is lovely, but when she is rude. Not only when she is young, but when she is old. Not only when she is beautiful, but even when her beauty fades. Not just when the house is clean, but even when it is messy.

## **2. Your love must be sacrificial.**

- a. Jesus gave up His safety, comfort, and glory, to save us.
- b. **Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”
- c. We must do the same. Sacrifice your desires, preferences, and comfort for her benefit. Put her well-being before your own.
- d. You want an SUV and your wife wants a minivan, get her the van. You want to go to the beach for vacation and she wants to go to the mountains, go to the mountains. You want to get leather furniture and she wants cloth, get her the cloth. You want to have sex but she is not in the mood, let her have the night off. You want to watch “The Walking Dead” and she wants to watch “When Calls the Heart,” buy a second TV.

## **3. Your love must be sinless.**

- a. Jesus never sins against us – in word and deed. **1 John 3:5** “there is no sin in him”
- b. Our love must be the same. Never sin against your wife. Sin and love are opposites. The most important way to love your wife is to be obedient to God.
- c. You may give the best foot massages, but if you are physically abusive then it doesn’t matter. You may buy your wife the most beautiful things, but if you don’t show her any affection it doesn’t matter. You may take your wife to church every Sunday, but if you are unfaithful then it doesn’t matter.
- d. This is why the best thing you can do for your marriage is to commit yourself wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ.

#### **4. Your love must be servant-minded.**

- a. What is agape-love? It is servanthood. It is meeting your wife’s needs. Not necessarily her wants, but her needs.
- b. That’s what Jesus does for us. He meets all our needs.
- c. **Philippians 4:19** And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
- d. What are your wife’s needs. Jimmy Evans wrote about the **Four Major Needs of Women** in his book *Marriage on the Rock*:
- e. First, security: She needs to know she is safe and well provided for in every respect. A husband must communicate four things to his wife to satisfy her need for security:
  - i. He must communicate that he cares for his wife above anyone or anything, except God.

- ii. He must communicate his admiration and love for his wife.
  - iii. He must communicate his faithfulness.
  - iv. He must communicate his dedication to provide financially.
- f. Second, non-sexual affection: Kisses, hugs, hand-holding, snuggling on the couch together, softly caressing her.
- g. Third, open communication. Wives have a need for detailed and honest communication. A wife wants a detailed conversation on what is going on in your life and mind every day.
- h. Fourth, leadership. A woman desires her husband to lead in the spiritual life of the family, the finances, discipline and training of the children, and in every other arena. She doesn't want to be dominated or controlled, but she does want to be led.
- v. The second command given to husbands is to not be bitter toward their wives.
- vi. **Colossians 3:19** Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them.
- vii. What does that mean? The NIV translates it "harsh." It means being hurtful.
- viii. Common Hurtful Behaviors: Physical abuse. Verbal abuse. Sexual sin – adultery, pornography, etc. Withholding affection. Depriving her of sex. Holding on to distasteful habits. Spending too much time away from home.
- ix. **Matthew Henry** "The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

## **V. CONCLUSION**

1. This month Lydia and I celebrated our twenty-fourth anniversary. We hope and plan is to celebrate 24 more.
2. One of the things that has helped us over the years is that we have never stopped dating. Ever since we got married, we have a weekly date night. Right now it's on Friday night. Every Friday night, Lydia and go out on a date. There were times when we couldn't afford to go out, or we couldn't find a babysitter, but we didn't let that stop us. We would feed the kids dinner and put them to bed or give them a couple of movies to watch, and we would set up a table in our bedroom and have dinner in there, and the kids were trained to leave us alone. That has been something that has really helped us, and I encourage you to try it. Keep dating your spouse.