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Secrets

What is the great battle of your life?
The ongoing, never-letting-up battle?

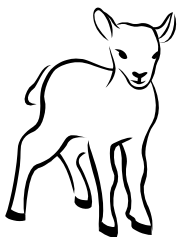
We are in a fierce, unseen, unrelenting battle:
a battle that takes place in the mind and in the spirit--
a battle that determines everything. *Everything*.

It is not a battle to think positive thoughts,
to dream big dreams,
to believe in yourself,
to fulfill your potential,
to self-actualize,
to find your inner strength,
or to free your true self.

It is a battle to believe truth: know it; think it; believe it.

It is a battle to think truth
all the way down into our spirits
so that we believe it.

When we believe truth in our spirits, we have light; we have Life.
When we believe truth in our spirits, we win.



Jesus often taught truth by using word pictures and stories. Throughout the Old Testament, God taught truth by creating dramatic object-lessons on the stage of history. Repeatedly, He painted illustrations of truth through things such as the Passover lamb, the tabernacle and its offerings, and Hosea's marriage to Gomer.

Are you familiar with the story of Jeremiah's linen belt? God told Jeremiah to take a new linen belt and then bury it in the mud. Later, Jeremiah retrieved the belt, but he found that it was mildewed and falling apart. God explained that this was a picture of His relationship with His people. "As a belt clings to a person's waist, so I created [you] to cling to Me." (Jeremiah 13:11, NIV)

This simple picture tells us something profound: God desires closeness with us! The message of the belt is that God's heart longs for us but that we have rejected Him and ruined the relationship.

It is vivid illustrations of truth such as these that I am calling "secrets." The secrets are little pieces of truth expressed through analogy or through story in ways that help me to apply truth to my life.

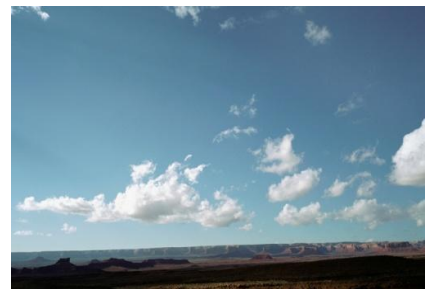
When God says that He loves me, I say, "Okay, that's nice."

But when God says that He loves me
as a mother unconditionally loves her baby cuddled close in her arms
or as a bridegroom passionately loves his bride,
then I say, "Wow,"
and the holes in my heart begin to heal
as the truth of His love moves from my mind down
into my spirit.



When God says that He will be faithful to me, I say, "All right."

But when He says that His faithfulness
is as high as the entire universe,
then I say, "Wow,"
and my life is never the same again
as the truth of His faithfulness moves
from my mind down
into my spirit.



So that's what "secrets" are. In this booklet, we will look at those secrets which have relevance to marriage. In particular, we will focus on secrets that answer this question: how can women thrive in their spirits, regardless of the state of their marriages?



Over the years, God has pressed a message deep into my heart. I think that God wants to encourage every Christian wife as if He were saying: "I can heal you right where you are; I can make you thrive here. I can be a well of living water in the center of your being, giving you health and joy, and making your life one of meaning and purpose—right where you are, in the midst of your circumstances now."

If your heart is in submission to the Lord, and if you are walking in yieldedness to the Spirit, then you are exactly where God can bring healing, fruitfulness, and joy to you.

We have excellent resources in the Church now on marriage—a ton of great books, all kinds of video teaching, seminars, and weekend retreats. These are great, and it is wonderful when both husband and wife are working together on their marriage.

But very often, the wife feels rather alone in her marriage-improvement project. She hears from other people, including other Christians, that marriage is something that requires the diligent work of both partners; she hears, “Now both of you have to be working on this, or it just isn’t going to work.” So if she thinks that her husband isn’t doing what he should be doing on his part, she gets discouraged, she blames him, and she feels justified in quitting. And we like to call this “moving on with our lives.”

Oh, what cruel deception! No, no, please—do not fall for this wicked lie of the enemy! The thriving of your spirit is not dependent upon your husband or your marriage; the health and vitality of your spirit are not vulnerable to your circumstances. *Regardless of the circumstances in your life, if your heart is in submission to the Lord, and if you are walking in yieldedness to the Spirit, then God is able to make your spirit thrive.*

I heard the story of little first-grader who went to school very excited because he had been told that he would learn how to read in first grade, and he just could not wait to learn to read. On the morning of the first day of school, he went off to first grade with great excitement and anticipation.



When his mother picked him at the end of the day, she said, “How was first grade?” Well, this little guy was completely dejected. He hung his head. “I am not going back,” he said. “I was in first grade all day long, and I still don’t know how to read!”

Well, we are not going to master the concept of thriving in the first chapter; and in fact, it may seem that we don’t even get to the topic. But I promise you: that is where we are headed! That is the heart of “Radiance.”

Speaking of “radiance,” do you know where that word is found in Scripture? The NIV uses the word “radiant” in Ephesians 5 to describe the Church, the people of God. As a Bridegroom, Christ does whatever it takes to make His beloved Bride radiant.

Jesus’ stated goal in your life is not to beat you down; His goal is not to make you gray and dull. His goal, the one for which He will make great sacrifice in order to achieve, is to make you radiant!

His goal is to put sparkle in your eyes
and laughter in your voice
and brightness in your face
and unspeakable joy in your spirit.

It is precious to know that! It helps me to relax in His hands when I don’t understand what is going on or when I am hurting on the journey He leads me on. I love that His desire is my radiance!



That radiance comes from thriving. God promises abundant life to His obedient children right now. We are promised healthy bodies when we get to heaven, but we are promised healthy spirits right now as we seek Him. Thriving in our spirits can happen now.

God says that He will give us a spiritual feast for our needy, hungry souls. God promises that in Psalm 23. In verse 5, the psalmist says that God prepares a table for him. The Hebrew word for “table” here refers specifically to a king’s table.¹ This means that God is giving us not just what we need to survive, but He is preparing a full feast for us.



And where does God prepare this feast? *In the presence of our enemies!* We come to great spiritual feasting in the darkest valley.

It is here, too, in the valley, that the psalmist discovers greater intimacy with God: he moves from speaking about God to speaking directly to Him.

¹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7979&t=KJV>. Accessed 25 May 2011.

If you feel that you are walking through a dark valley right now, take hope! If you are a believer in Christ, your Shepherd has never been closer; and it is here in this valley that your spirit will find the richest of feasts, which will not only enable you to survive but actually to thrive.

In the Old Testament, the ceremony of anointing indicated a special choosing. When we read in Psalm 23 that God anoints us with oil, we can know that He has specifically chosen us to be His beloved.

However, the Hebrew word for "anoint" here is not the usual word for anointing; it is not the usual word used when a king or prophet was chosen by God. Instead, it means "to make fat." Now, before you jump back from that word "fat," let me explain a bit.

"Fat" is a bad word to us Americans, but it does not always have a negative connotation. Growing up in Haiti, I learned that it is a compliment for someone to say, "You look big." In a land where many are malnourished and even starving, to grow "fat" is a sign of prospering and health. In a similar way, "to fatten" here in Psalm 23 means to make healthy. God is saying that He makes us radiant; He causes us to thrive!

And where does this thriving occur? God provides this spiritual feasting and spiritual thriving right in the presence of our enemies, right in the darkest of all dark valleys.

In Isaiah 45:3, God says, "I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places." We will receive some of our greatest and most precious spiritual gifts in the midst of our most difficult and painful circumstances.

Secrets of Pink:

God's Design of Women

One of the most beautiful things in all the universe is God's design of women. Women were masterfully designed to reflect the character and nature of God, the One who is Himself breathtakingly gorgeous. God's design for women is not only one of beauty, but also one of strength and honor. And this is true not only of God's design of women, but also of His design for marriage.

I have not always thought that. Many years ago, as I read some of the same Scriptures that we will be discussing in "Radiance," I felt offended. I felt stifled; I felt demeaned. "God," I thought, "how could You say that? How could You treat women like this? God, this really hurts my feelings!"

Have you ever felt that way?

I am glad that I wrestled with God and held on for the blessing, just as Jacob did at the Jabbok River. If you have been angry at God—if you have felt betrayed by God—listen: Don't walk away from the One who loves you more than His own life, who loves you more than you do yourself. Instead, wrestle to find and to know the truth—God will meet you there.

Actually, that is not entirely accurate. I used to think that I was the one holding on to God, wrestling with Him for His blessing; but I have since learned that it is actually God who is trying to bless us, and we are the ones not cooperating with Him. We are the ones struggling against Him because we don't trust that He is perfectly motivated by love toward us and that His heart is to bless us.

I was like a child struggling against the very one who has come to help her—like a drowning man frantically working against the one who has come to rescue him. However, if we will stop fighting against God, we will find that His strong arms are around us to love us, not to harm us.



God's design of women is like a gorgeous, fragrant bouquet of flowers. It has many colors and many delights. Let's look at four of those lovely aspects.



1. Ezer

Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Our culture talks a lot about self-esteem, and we work very hard at trying to generate self-esteem. But we have been given intrinsic value. We have been given "God-esteem."² In all of creation, only people are created in the image of God, and this in itself renders women worthy of esteem and respect.

We're going to look at four ways in which we as women are made to be like God—four ways that we can reflect God in our marriages.

Genesis 2:18: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" And so God made a helper for Adam. AHHA! That word "helper" was one of those offensive things to me—that word "helper" was like fingernails scratching down chalkboard.

To me, it sounded like an adult saying to a preschooler, "You can be my little helper today. Now wouldn't you like that? You can hold the paper towels, if you are very careful, while I paint this grand masterpiece. Holding the paper towels is a very important job!"

² Breaking Free from a Negative Self-Image. Linda Mintle, PhD. Siloam. 2002.

I do not want to hold the paper towels; I want to be the artist! I don't want to be a little helper; I want to be creating. I do not want to be a mindless spectator; I want to be fully engaged.

The Hebrew word for "helper" is *ezer*. After I studied this word, I never again felt belittled by it. I will tell you what I learned, but first I must warn you: You can become so impressed by the significance and honor of being *ezer*, once you learn what it really is, that you may walk away, not feeling demeaned, but instead feeling arrogant! Many women have fallen into that trap of feeling superior, which comes from a lie just as much as the other pitfall of feeling inferior.

The word *ezer* is used 22 times in the Old Testament. Here in Genesis, it is used twice to refer to the woman. But elsewhere, it is used to refer to God! *Ezer* denotes strength; in fact, it is translated as "strength" in Psalm 89.

Here is how *ezer* is used elsewhere in Scriptures:

- Deuteronomy 33:29 "Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and *ezer* and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places."
- Psalm 70:5 "Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my *ezer* and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay."

Does being *ezer* sound demeaning? Not at all! We are called to bring strength to others. The predominant image is that of a powerful warrior.

God is our role-model for *ezer*: God who rescues His people when they cannot rescue themselves; God who fights on behalf of His people. God is our *ezer* who comes to us with His strength. He supplies to us what we cannot supply for ourselves. This is how we are to be *ezer* to our husbands.

Eve was not made to be Adam's "little helper" to do the little things that he didn't want to do. She was made to do what he could not do. Adam could not supply companionship to himself. He could not supply intimate friendship to himself.

God equips women to supply to their husbands what they are lacking. That is a noble thing; it is a sacred thing. No wonder the enemy tries to distort it in our eyes.

How do we serve as *ezer* to our husbands; how can we supply what they cannot supply for themselves? We bring to them these critical things:

- companionship,
- close intimacy,
- confidence, and
- confirmation of their masculinity.



And God wants us to be *ezer* to our husbands in the way that God is *ezer* to us: God does not fuss that we are bothering Him or imposing on Him; God does not scold us because we need help; God does not act burdened or irritated; God does not feel that He has better things to do.

It is remarkable to me that God delights in being *ezer* to us; He helps us eagerly. He supplies us His strength graciously and generously. How often is our help to our husbands given begrudgingly? We reflect God and fulfill our sacred design when we delight in being *ezer* to our husbands—that is, a supporting, supplying strength to them.

2. Eve

The second aspect of our design as women is found in Genesis 3:20: “Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.” It is in our design as women to be mothers. Again, our culture can shape us as women to respond to that statement with hisses and arched backs, hackles fully raised.

But just as *ezer* is really a design of strength and honor, so is our design as mothers. Eve means “life-giving.” We are like God in that we are givers of life. We were designed in both body and soul to be creative, nourishing life-givers. It is a sacred thing to be received with honor and to be embraced with gratitude and humility.

But I am not Whether we physically bear children or not, we are designed as life-givers. Even if we do give birth to children, that is usually just a season in our lives. But all of us as women are called to be life-givers wherever we are in life.

Wives have been given the sacred power to create life in the souls of their husbands. As wives communicate respect to their husbands, they breathe life into them, reflecting what God did at creation. Wives nurture the God-given greatness in their husbands.

Eve was not Adam's mother, of course! As wives, we must not make that horrible mistake of acting as mother to our husbands—acting as one with authority, correcting and commanding. That is deathly to the marital relationship—not life-giving.

But as Eve, we are givers of life. We breathe gently on little flickering sparks and carefully nurture them into strong flames. Little sparks, threatened by doubt and fear, we encourage into blazing confidence and success. We stoke and fan into life faith and health and thriving spirits.

We speak life into others with our words—words of acceptance and affirmation and admiration. We nourish life through our encouragement and praise. We nourish life when we forgive. We nurture life through our prayers and through our obedient acts of holiness.

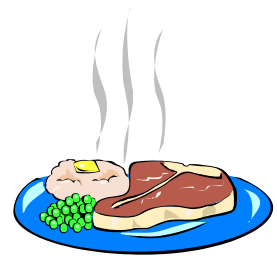
3. Fragrant

In The Message, Eugene Peterson paraphrases the first few verses of 1 Peter 3 like this: ". . . *Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition.*

"Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as 'my dear husband.' You'll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated."

God has given to women the power of invitation and the fragrance of attraction. Imagine this: a man stands in the doorway of his son's bedroom. "Get to the table," he commands. "Now." Hearing the voice of authority, the boy walks downstairs to the dinner table.

Now imagine this same boy in his room the next day. His mother says nothing to him, but as the mouth-watering aroma of apple muffins and grilled steak and cherry cobbler reaches the boy's room, he runs downstairs, nearly tripping over himself in eagerness to get to the dinner table. That's the power of invitation, the fragrance of attraction.



God has designed women with the ability to create a pleasing fragrance in their lives. This fragrance stimulates desire and becomes an attractive invitation. The beauty of a holy woman creates a desire for God. The beauty of her holiness creates a compelling invitation into the beauty and holiness of God.

If a woman wants to effectively minister to her husband, she must understand this principle of attraction. What will draw her husband to God and to herself will be the fragrance of her invitation.

According to 1 Peter, God uses three characteristics to create a powerful attraction to Himself through women who are beautiful in these ways. These three things create a nearly irresistible invitation:



- a peaceful spirit--not one that is fretting or agitated--but one which calmly rests in trusting her God,
- a gentle spirit who handles the spirit of her husband as something fragile and very valuable, and
- a reverent spirit who communicates acceptance and who ministers unconditional respect to her husband's spirit.

This is the kind of beauty that makes God attractive to a man. We are to be a fragrance that invites and draws--magnets, not whips.

Wives can best minister to their husbands as they trust God's instructions to be the quiet but powerful influence of beautiful holiness in their husbands' lives.

4. Feminine

Not only are we to be fragrant with the invitation and attraction of holiness, but we are to be feminine.

Women in our culture have very little idea of the feminine, which is an attribute of God. God encompasses the characteristics of both the masculine and the feminine; together, masculinity and femininity more fully reflect His image.

To be feminine is not the same things as being female. Women in our culture know that they are female, and they flaunt that desperately and pathetically in ways which are demeaning and which invite abuse instead of tender cherishing. To be female only and not feminine is to be reduced to the level of an animal; such a woman is oblivious of her immortal spirit created in the image of Almighty God.



Without understanding what it is to be feminine, women cannot understand the design of marriage. To be feminine is to receive graciously, to welcome with acceptance and respect; it is to embrace with warmth. When others come into our presence, we receive them to our spirit with open arms.

Where do we see a picture of God displaying such qualities? Think of the father of the prodigal son. Those wide open arms—that receiving, accepting, warm embrace—that welcoming spirit is the heart of God.

As Jesus looked lovingly at Jerusalem, He used the analogy of a mother hen gathering her chicks beneath her wings. Those are certainly welcoming wings.



We have a God who graciously helps us. We have a God who gives us life. We have a God who invites us to Himself, and whose fragrant beauty attracts us to Him. We have a God who welcomes us with warm, open arms.

As women, we were made to be like God in these very ways.

The Secrets of Blue:

God's Design of Men

Most of us are walking around with our heads twisted on backwards.

We don't really mind living like this, with our heads twisted on backwards, because we see that this is how everyone else wears her head; this is really quite popular.



The problem, though, with having our heads on backwards is that we keep banging into stuff! We keep falling, and we keep getting hurt. Life can be pretty confusing when your head is on backwards!

Our natural thinking can be completely contrary to truth, 180 degrees backward. In Isaiah's words, we think that dark is light and that bitter is sweet. But the Scriptures tell us what truth really is; and as we learn and believe that truth, we get our heads turned straight. God gets our heads turned the right way.

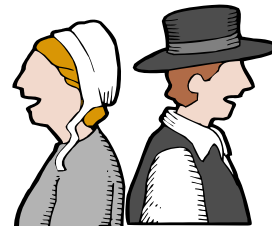
Life makes a lot more sense now; we don't keep crashing around and stumbling about.



If ever we had our heads twisted on backwards, it is in this area of marriage.

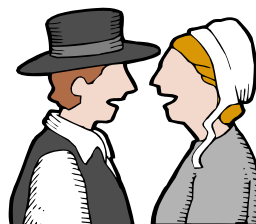
One way that we have our heads on backwards is in believing the "50/50" myth. That is the belief that unless both the husband and the wife are actively working to improve their relationship, then there is no hope for the marriage. We think that unless both people are willing to put attention and energy into the marriage, then it really won't help much. But is that true?

Look at this situation: two people are back-to-back. People in a marriage can easily get turned back-to-back in conflict.



If they will both turn around, then they can see eye-to-eye again. It seems that they both have to turn around in order to be in harmony again.

What can just one person do? Watch this: if just one person will walk around the other and then turn the other way, the two people are again face-to-face. The situation is resolved, even though only one person took action.



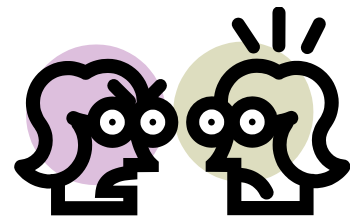
So take hope! One person can make all the difference that is needed.

If you are feeling alone in your marriage, take hope! There is great power in the obedience of one person in her marriage because God Almighty fills those acts of obedience with His incredible power.

In fact, Proverbs 14:1 says, “A wise woman builds her house; but with her own hands, the foolish one tears hers down.” A wise wife is credited with nothing less than the building of the house of marriage. That is meaningful work! That is significant accomplishment!

One wise woman can build a marriage. One can build.

Imagine two people trying to have a pleasant conversation, but each one is speaking a different language. Imagine that the two people become frustrated and angry, unaware that they are speaking two different languages. They are not trying to be difficult, and there is nothing wrong with either one of them. They simply do not understand each other’s language.



A perfect solution to this frustrating dilemma would be for each of them to learn a new language. If they both learned the other’s language, they easily would be able to understand each other. But what if only one of them learned to speak the other’s language? That alone will completely change the situation.

Of course, it is great if the two people will both learn a new language. That would be ideal, especially in a marriage relationship in which the man speaks “blue” and the woman speaks “pink.” But if only one will learn another language, that is enough.

One person—YOU—learning about your husband can make a huge difference.

So...how can we as women learn to speak blue? Speaking blue involves understanding God’s design of men and, more specifically, the needs of men. Just like women, men have God-given needs. As women who are *ezer* and who are Eve, in ways that are fragrant and feminine, we can minister to our husband’s needs. We can speak blue!

We will look at four ways in which we can speak blue, the language of our husbands.

1. What is your husband's deepest need?

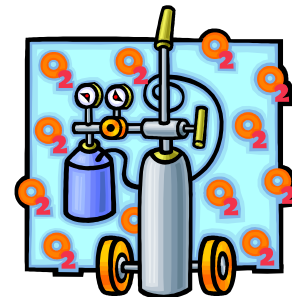
His deepest need is not your deepest need.

Your husband's core need is like the oxygen that his soul breathes. It is an essential. When someone is without oxygen, there is nothing more critical. The need for oxygen has to be met even before the need for food or drink. Your husband has a need which is that critical within his soul.

But this is not a core need for a woman. Unless a woman learns this about her husband, she may unknowingly deprive him of the very air that he must have in order to breathe.

If this deep need is not being met, a man will find it nearly impossible to stay. Indeed, he will leave, either physically or emotionally. He will die inside. If, however, this need is being met by his wife, a man will find it nearly impossible to leave.

Imagine this: a man is sitting on a chair with plastic tubing going from his nose to an oxygen tank; he is absolutely dependent on that oxygen. A woman comes in and, completely oblivious to the tube, stands right on top of it. Unaware that she is blocking off his oxygen, she tries to talk to the man, but he only looks at her with irritation. He completely ignores her questions; he keeps yelling at her about something. Not understanding, she gets her feelings hurt, and she finally walks away in tears, thinking to herself, "He is such a jerk!"



This is going on all over, all the time. Men breathe respect.

If a man feels disrespected, he can't really focus on anything else. If a man doesn't receive respect, he feels as if he cannot breathe. All he wants is to get away to someplace where he can breathe.

Husbands have an innate need for respect, but this is something that women do not understand unless they are taught because unconditional respect is not our core need.

Women generally protest this, saying, “Listen, there is no one who wants to respect my husband more than I do, believe me! And I will . . . when he earns it! I will respect him when he does this and this. . . .” But when we understand that this need for respect is just like our need for love—unconditional, unearned love—then we get it!

As women, our deepest need is to feel loved.

Not only do we women need love—that is, affection—but we want *unconditional* love. We need to feel loved even on days when we are not very lovable. In fact, we need to feel loved *especially* on those days!



In the same way, not only does a husband need respect, but a husband needs *unconditional* respect. He needs to feel respected even when his wife does not think he has earned it. He may need respect *especially* at those times!

Your husband is made in the image of God Almighty. According to Scripture, simply being made in the likeness of God is reason enough for respect. Your husband’s actions may not be worthy of respect. But his spirit is. His spirit is worthy of your respect.

Be in awe of who God made him to be. Focus on his spirit: honor his immortal spirit that was awesomely created for greatness and designed for strength; respect his spirit that was created to be a mighty man of God.



When you cause your husband to feel disrespected, he cannot hear anything else you say because he cannot breathe.

Let’s say your husband comes home one evening and says something unloving to you, and you just can’t get past that comment. You keep thinking about it. Everything else he says to you is filtered through your hurt. Everything else for the rest of the week stands in the hazy background of those words that made you feel unloved.

In a similar way, if we treat our husbands with disrespect, they cannot get past that—they cannot focus on anything else. Everything else moves to the

background. When we fail to give respect to our husbands, nothing else really matters.

One of the greatest things a mother can do for her children is to teach and to model respect for their father. Having instilled in their spirits honor for their father is a gift that will bless those children for the rest of their lives.

Conversely, one of the most damaging things a mother can do to her children is to foster in their spirits dishonor for their father. When people have a broken foundation of dishonor for the father, the other pieces of their lives will be continually subject to brokenness and failure, anger, and sadness.

We are not to honor evil, but we are to honor spirits made in God's image.

We convey respect or disrespect in three ways:

- in our words,
- in our actions, and
- in our body language.

Our tone of voice and our facial expressions are powerful communicators of respect or disrespect. Our nonverbal communication can be more powerful than our words, in fact, because it conveys our attitudes and our feelings.

Would you be happy to receive a love letter? Many wives wish that their husbands would write a love letter to them, and women will sometimes write love letters to their men. But instead of writing love letters to our husbands, we really should be writing *respect* letters.



Have you ever written a letter to your husband that expressed nothing but solid respect? Here's my challenge to you: write a respect letter to your husband that salutes him just as powerfully as you can with the help of God's Spirit. Write a letter that will cause him to walk taller and stand straighter. And if he actually swaggers a bit after he reads your words, then I salute you!

May God forgive us for suffocating our husbands with disrespect. May God forgive us for choking the life out of our husbands and then condemning them for their weakness.

We breathe life into our husbands when we give them the gift of respect.
We breathe life into our husbands when we admire them and honor them.

A man can be wilted with self-doubt, wilted with a sense of failure, wilted with a lack of confidence. But his wife can breathe life into him.

She breathes the oxygen of respect into him, and he can rise up to be a man of strength and nobility. She breathes respect into him, and he can rise up into grand, heroic greatness. It is a glorious thing to breathe life into a human being. It is sacred. It is what God did at creation, and it is what you do in your marriage.

This is the God-given gifting of a wife.

Only when heads are twisted on backwards is this gifting seen as something demeaning or weak. It is a divine gifting, a work that mirrors the very work of God.



“A wise woman builds her house; but with her own hands, the foolish one tears hers down.” (Proverbs 14:1)

As you commit to minister to your husband and to bless him with the gift of respect, remember that no one on the face of the earth can tear him down like you can, and no one can build him up like you can.

2. Let's look at the next aspect of speaking blue.

Have you ever really wanted to talk to your husband? Not about anything in particular--just talk so that you can feel close to him. Just talk face to face so that you can feel connected to him.

As women, we feel that on a regular basis—this strong need to share in conversation, looking into each other's eyes—just to connect. It makes us feel intimate with our husbands.



When that is not happening, we can feel it in a way that is almost physical. It wells up in us, and we feel this strong desire to talk with our husbands.

Well, have you ever wanted to talk to your husband, and he just did not understand that? He said things like, "What did I do now? What do you want to talk about?"

And you said, "Nothing. I mean. . . . everything! I mean, nothing in particular, just talk."

And you stammered and fumbled, and it sounded kind of silly, which was frustrating, because it wasn't silly to you; it was really important to you. And it hurt that he not only did not feel the same way, but he did not even understand it.

Now, listen to a husband respond to a wife's desire for conversation:

Oh, all right. Since this means so much to you. [rolls eyes]

Okay, fine. [heavy sigh of resignation]

Didn't we just do this?

How long will this take?

Are we done yet?

Good.

And then your husband walks away, getting back to what he really wanted to do and thinking that he has done his husbandly duty and that you should feel loved now. Do you? Not really!

Mostly, you feel disappointed. In fact, you are going to be more reluctant to ask to talk to him again. It just means so much more if he wants to talk, too. When he is not interested, when he is still keeping his eyes on the newspaper or the television, you think, *this is not what I had in mind.*

Now, let's take the very same words that we just applied to women and their desire for conversation. Let's image that we are a group of men right now, and let's use these same comments to reflect the desire of men for physical intimacy.

"We [men] feel, on a regular basis, this strong need to share and connect in a physical way with our wives. It makes us feel intimate with our wives. When that is not happening, we feel it; we feel this strong desire to be physically intimate with our wives.



"Well, men, have you ever wanted to be with your wife physically, and she just didn't understand that? It was really important to you, and it hurt that she not only did not feel the same way, but she didn't even understand it.

"Maybe she responded like this: *Oh, all right.*

Since this means so much to you. [rolls eyes]

Okay, fine. [heavy sigh of resignation]

Didn't we just do this?

How long will this take?

Are we done yet?

Good.

"And then your wife walks away, getting back to what she really wanted to do and thinking that she has done her wifely duty and that you should feel loved now. Do you? Not really!

"It just means so much more if she wants to do this, too. When she is not really interested, you think, *this is not what I had in mind.*"

Well, ladies, there seem to be two different gender languages. Women speak a gender language of conversation, and men speak their gender language of physical intimacy.

Who should first learn the language of the other? Let's answer that with another question: How many other people can converse with your husband in his gender language?

Only one! You are the only one who can rightfully and helpfully speak his gender language with him.

But what about the female gender language of conversation? How many other people can speak with you in your gender language? As many godly girlfriends as you can collect!

We need to take note of this: women are not as dependent upon their spouses in the area of core neediness as men are. We need to twist our heads on straight about this, and pay attention.

A husband's core need is met in a healthy way only by his wife. That is a serious responsibility for us.

Here we build, or here we destroy. We alone can do this building, and God has put the tools in our hands.

We live in a sex-saturated society, and we think that we know what men want. We can see that sex is the packaging of what men want, but we are often blind to the real need inside—and that need continues to be unmet in our culture. Inside that surface, physical need is a compelling, driving need to be accepted and to be desired.

If a man does not talk to his wife, she does not feel hurt because she feels uninformed; she feels hurt because she feels rejected. The lack of communication represents a lack of acceptance to her. This sense of rejection is a deep wounding to her.



In a similar way, when a woman does not respond fully to her husband physically, she wounds him deeply. He feels unaccepted by the most important woman in his life. He feels rejected in his soul.

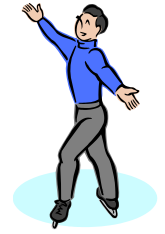
One of the best ways for a woman to influence her unbelieving husband for God is to convey enthusiastic acceptance to him physically. If she does not, then he connects God and wife and rejection all together. The wife represents God to him, and she represents rejection or maybe mere tolerance to him; this does not draw him to God at all.

This also holds true for women with Christian husbands. When our physical responses and our behavior say, "I accept you, and I desire you," *then* is our holiness beautiful to our men. *Then* our holiness can attract our husbands to their wives and to God.

3. The third element in speaking blue is related to respect; I would call it a subset of respect. But it is important to mention it specifically because it is distinct and necessary in itself.

Not only does a man breathe respect, but there is something for which he is listening, something which his male soul senses.

Think of a man testing the ice on a pond: if he senses that it is solid, he gets out there and does impressive stuff. But if he senses that the ice is thin--if he hears cracking sounds of warning--then he leaves that pond. He either waits for the ice to be solid, or else he looks elsewhere for a safe pond.



What is it that your husband is listening very diligently to hear? This is what he must hear in your words or behind your words; "success" is what he must sense in your spirit and behavior. That word "success" gives him a firm platform to move out on.

He is listening for "you are a success in my eyes," or "you are becoming a success in my eyes." Bill and Pam Farrell say that this concept is so critical to a man that it is what "unlocks" his heart. They call it the password to his heart, "the code." When this primary issue is resolved, then everything else can be resolved as secondary details.

A man must know that he can be a success in relationship with you. He is listening for "I believe in you. You will be a great success in this marriage. You will be a great success as a man and as a husband to me."

Your husband wants to succeed as your husband. He very much wants to please you, to impress you. But many men know that they have failed; they know because their wives tell them! We tell them, of course, because we think, "If he knows he's a failure, then he'll change and be a success!" But that is pink thinking, not blue.

Once a man hears the ice is cracking, he is motivated to leave, not to go farther! Men don't stay where they feel that they are failures. They look for ponds that are solid so that they can be successful. It is that solid ice--those messages of success that they hear from their wives--which gives them a platform on which to do great things.



How does God speak to men? Does God speak blue? Man, He really does! God assures men that as they trust Him, they will be successful. He assures them over and over that as they are obedient to Him as their God, then their relationships with God will be successful.

- God told Abraham, "You will be great." God promised him that they would be friends.
- Joseph was given incredible dreams of success, long before any of these great things happened. These dreams were messages of success that helped to strengthen and encourage Joseph on his way to the place of promised success.
- God told Joshua, "You will be prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:7).
- David was anointed to be the king of Israel while he was still just a young shepherd boy. This anointing was a message of success giving him hope and confidence and helping to propel him to actually being the king.

You have heard of "red letter" editions of the Bible. Would you like to see a blue-lettered chapter? 1 Chronicles 12 is completely blue; it bulges with the muscles of mighty warriors and with the heroic feats of fierce fighters. I am especially interested in verse 18, in which these very-blue men speak to very-blue David:

"We are yours, O David!
We are with you, O son of Jesse!
Success, success to you,
and success to those who help you,
for your God will help you."

The word "success" is used three times here! And what kind of effect did such "blue" speech have on David? The rest of the verse says, "So David received them and made them leaders of his raiding bands." These manly guys knew how to talk to David!

What about the wives of David? We find that one was ignorant of "blue," but another one was fluent in "blue." David's first wife, Michal, truly loved David, but her failure to speak "blue" caused her to lose David's heart. In the incident recorded in 2 Samuel 6, Michal essentially says to David, "I don't respect you; you are a failure in my eyes" (verse 20). She belittled

him and scorned him, and—immediately—that was the end of their relationship.

In sharp contrast is David's wife Abigail. Her speech is full of respect and messages of confidence. Her words to David are highly embellished with ornate flourishes of respect embroidered all over them. She is absolutely fluent in "blue." In fact, as she concludes her speech to him in 1 Samuel 25, Abigail creates an effective finale by using the word "success" (1 Samuel 25:31). Abigail's "blue" words grab the heart of David; and the moment she becomes available for marriage, David swoops her up.

Ruth is another fluent speaker of "blue." Her message of success to Boaz changed all of history. Boaz had no idea that the pond was frozen; he was not going to even try it. But after one little whisper from Ruth, he was out there winning the ice-skating championship. Ruth let Boaz know that he would be successful in pursuing her, and he took it from there in a masterful way.



What about the woman from the Song of Songs? We certainly see her speaking messages of success to her lover. Just look anywhere in that whole book, and you will see that. "Success" seems to be the only word this girl knows!

Finally, let's look at the Proverbs 31 woman. Verse 23 says, "Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land." Now this chapter is about the woman, not about the husband, so why is this statement here? The point is not that a godly woman should marry a respected leader; the point here is that this godly wife was the kind of building-up influence that respected her husband into a respected place in the community; she breathed him into that place.

Not only is he respected at the city gate, but he is successful as a leader in the land. This statement about the husband is here in Proverbs 31 because of the role that a godly wife plays in the development of strength in a man's life. The wife's messages of success give him the platform on which to become respectable and successful.

Imagine that across from that city gate, sprawled out in the shadows against the wall there, is another man, the city bum. Perhaps this man had once stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the respected leader now sitting in the city gate. But now the wife of the disgraced man stands there with her hands on her hips, saying, "See, I told you that you were a failure." We cringe, but she doesn't even hear herself; she doesn't realize that she had a determining hand in tearing him down.

God once told his prophet Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel. When David came before Samuel, God said to David, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one" (1 Samuel 16:12). I think God says this same thing to each of us wives: "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

You and I are like Samuel, and our husbands are like David: each day, we choose this one man out of all the other men in the world. We are the ones who see the king in this shepherd boy (something even his family may not see.) Every day, we continue to do this. "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."



The Message puts it this way: "Up on your feet! Anoint him! This is the one." Anointing our husbands involves more than lounging on the couch; we must put some energy into it.

To anoint someone means to choose him, so every day we choose our husbands to "be the one" in our lives. We say to our husbands, "You are the one. You are the one for me. You are the one to whom I am devoted. You are the one to whom I am committed."

What happened after David was anointed? He received the Spirit in power. Which came first—the anointing or the power? The anointing precedes the power. Maybe we need to stop waiting for our husbands to be powerful, and instead anoint them so that they can be powerful.

When we anoint our husbands with respect and messages of honor, they change. This "anointing" brings new strength into their lives.

4. What is the fourth part of speaking blue?

Think again of the situation in which two people are frustrated in their conversation because they are speaking two different languages. They react with anger and feelings of rejection until someone realizes what is going on.

Well, human hearts speak five different languages of love. When a wife understands the concept of love languages, it can be absolutely transformational in her marriage.

Dr. Gary Chapman has specialized in this area. His book entitled *The Five Love Languages*³ describes each of these ways of expressing and receiving love: the giving of gifts, acts of service, physical touch, quality time, and words of affirmation. Although all five languages are valid expressions of love, every person seems to associate love more strongly with one of the languages. Your husband's individual love language is the fourth element in speaking blue.

A woman who speaks the language of quality time does not really feel loved unless her husband spends time focusing on her. But if this is not her husband's love language, he will not understand why this is important to her, and he will not speak it to her. Although the man does love his wife, she won't feel loved because she does not hear it in her heart language, in a way that she understands.

Perhaps the husband, meanwhile, speaks the language of acts of service. He is continually fixing things around the house for his wife or washing her car. He thinks that he is expressing love, but she does not understand that because acts of service is not the native language of her heart.



The husband, for his part, feels quite unloved by his wife because she does not help pack his lunches or fold his laundry. It seems to him that his wife just wants to go on picnics all the time! This creates a great deal of maddening conflict. In reality, it is simply two people trying to say "I love you" in two different languages; they just don't realize it.

But if just one person will learn the language of the other, it will make all the difference. When you first learn this concept of love languages, you may

³ Northfield Publishing. 1995.

think, "Great! I am going to teach my husband my language!" If he is open to that, great. But do not be frustrated if your husband does not learn your language. Instead, focus on speaking in his language—not only speaking his language to him, but also listening to him in his language.

If the wife will recognize that every time her husband takes out the trash, he is expressing love to her, then she can know that she is loved. And if she will express her love by making sandwiches for her husband, then he can feel loved.



When wives become fluent in the love languages of their husbands, life gets much, much better.

Secrets of the Roof, the Pillars, & the Umbrellas: God's Radical Design of Marriage

Imagine watching this short skit:

[Young woman with tiara with feather boa:] *I have discovered the man of my dreams! He is truly a Prince Charming.*

He gives me lots of attention. He's romantic. We talk for hours. I just know that this man is going to meet my needs.



[Woman exits. Without the tiara or feather boa, she enters again, this time wearing an apron, and carrying a mop in one hand and holding a baby doll in the other arm:



Help! I am not happy here!

My dream man has become a nightmare! My Prince Charming has become a couch potato.

This is not what I expected. This is not the man I married.

He is not meeting my needs!

[Woman exits.]

This idea that "my husband will meet my needs" is a very common expectation going into marriage.

But the crown of Prince Charming makes a lousy foundation for a marriage. Sitting on a sharp, pointy crown of expectations, the house of marriage totters and wobbles and collapses.

Our lists of expectations may differ from woman to woman, but every bride has one when she gets married. And who has the longest list? It is often the Christian wife!

It is ironic that Christian women can be more discontent in their marriages than unbelieving women. This happens when a woman takes her list of expectations of a husband and then makes it even longer with all the things that she expects from a *Christian* man.



She can add quite a few more things, such as

- leading family devotions,
- praying heartfelt prayers aloud with her every evening, and
- demonstrating sacrificial love at all times.

She might add

- singing in the choir or
- teaching a Bible study.

As Christian women, we can actually create more arenas in which our husbands can fail to meet our expectations, and we are more dissatisfied as wives than ever.

The Scriptures tell us about another, very different foundation, one that is solid and unshakeable. This foundation has both a primary and a secondary layer of strength.

1. The primary foundation is complete reliance upon Christ.

It is Christ who is my need-meeter.

He is not only the creator but also the sustainer of my life.

He is my provider and my protector.

God may or may not choose to use my husband to meet a need in my life. It does not matter how God chooses to meet my needs. He will meet my needs. He is my Source.



Regardless of the actions of others, I am completely secure in the care of God; I am completely unthreatened.

My well-being is not vulnerable to the actions of others because I am completely sheltered in the protection and provision of God.

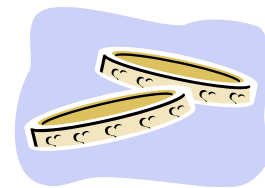
This is the mindset which gives us strength.

This is the mindset which frees us from fear.

This is the mindset which releases us from the need to control.

Our underlying, solid-Rock foundation is this: We rely upon Jesus as our Need-Meeter.

In fact, the Scriptures tell us an amazing thing: God says that He will be our Husband. (See Isaiah 54 and Hosea 2.)



God is willing to enter into a covenant with each of us personally in which He promises to be the One who provides for us, who protects us, and who meets our every need.

He will be unshakeable in His loyalty to us;

He will be steadfast in His faithfulness to us;

He will be fully trustworthy in His commitment to us;

and He will be unfailing in His love toward us.

If we enter into covenant with God, God will be a Husband to us. There is no Lover like God. This puts us into a completely secure place. This is a firm foundation for our entire life, as well as for our earthly marriage to a man.

We need not panic when a man fails as a husband to us.

We need not feel desperate when a man disappoints us.

We need not feel vulnerable when a man fails as a provider to us. We need not fear when a man fails as a protector to us.

We need not manipulate; we need not scheme; we need not run away.

God is our Husband! He will not fail us. He very well may meet our needs through a husband, but He is not limited to that. God can meet our needs in any way He desires as we remain yielded to Him. The LORD is our Shepherd; we have everything we need!

2. The second layer of this foundation is a commitment to minister to the needs of our husbands.

We usually think that our marriages are where we go to get our needs met; marriage is where we go to be nurtured and renewed. We think that our husbands should be our soulmates--able to understand our hearts, able to comfort our hurts, and able to fill up all the holes in our souls.

Sometimes there is even a Christian version of this myth: "My husband should minister to me so that I can go out and minister to other people. If my husband will be good to me, then I can go out and do a lot of good for the world."

But here is the truth: our marriages *are* our places of ministry. Our marriages are our *priority* places of ministry.

If you are married, then your highest calling on earth, your most noble calling, is to your husband as his wife. Your marriage is your primary place of ministry and service.

When a woman is considering marriage, these are not the questions to be asking: "Is this man my soulmate? Will this man meet my needs? Does this man make me happy?"

A better question to ask is this: "Is God calling me to serve this man as his wife?"

This calling to your husband will become an unshakeable foundation for you on all those days when your husband does not feel like a soulmate or does not meet your needs or does not make you happy. It does not matter. You are there to serve, and that commitment does not change.

This second layer of foundation can be poured only after the first one has been built into our lives. Once we know that our needs are being met by God, then we are free to serve our husbands.

Without this foundational security, people can give to someone else, but they must then receive back. Most of our natural giving is actually bartering.

But when we know that our needs have already been provided for, then we can truly serve another person. We may have greater neediness in our own

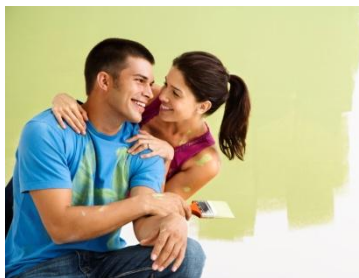
lives than our husbands do, but we can still be committed to a marriage of ministry because we are confident that Christ takes care of all of our needs.

Without the first level of foundation, the second one is merely good intentions without the strength to fulfill them: it is because God meets my needs that I am able to serve others.

Now with this double-layered foundation, a woman views her husband in an entirely different way. Instead of seeing her husband as someone who should meet her needs and as someone who lets her down at times, she now sees her husband as the man that she is called to serve always. He is not her project; but he is the one she serves.

We have been assigned to minister to our husbands. Their reactions and their behavior do not change our assignment at all. Their actions may alter the way we best minister to them, but the goal of ministry is a constant.

You may be talented as a musician or a teacher. You may be skilled as an administrator or a nurse or a bookkeeper or an engineer. That ability that you have is a talent which many other women have, too.



But you are the only woman in the entire universe-- you are the only woman on the whole planet-- who can minister to your husband as his wife.



You have a sacred calling to minister to your husband.

God has uniquely equipped you--and He will continue to equip and enable you--to minister to your husband in a way that no one else can.

Imagine this: A woman accepts an enormous challenge in the business world. She takes on this demanding assignment, but she is truly challenged by it. She is excited to have this incredible opportunity to succeed in an admirable way.

She already has the confidence of having been given the job, knowing that she has been chosen as the one best able to accomplish this significant task. This woman has impressive credentials; she has all kinds of talents and skills

which she applies to this particular endeavor. She devotes herself to this work with energy and creativity.



As she does this, she enjoys a great sense of fulfillment because she is using her unique abilities in a rewarding way. Eventually, she succeeds in creating a strong, profitable business.

And what does everyone say? “Wow! What a woman! We are impressed.” Everyone stands and applauds.

Now imagine this: A woman accepts an enormous challenge in the relationship world: she gets married.

She takes on this demanding assignment, but she is truly challenged by it. She is excited to have this incredible opportunity to succeed in an admirable way.

She already has the confidence of having been given the job, knowing that she has been chosen as the one best able to accomplish this significant task. This woman has impressive credentials; she has all kinds of talents and skills which she applies to this particular endeavor.

She devotes herself to this work with energy and creativity.

As she does this, she enjoys a great sense of fulfillment because she is using her unique abilities in a rewarding way. Eventually, she succeeds in creating a ministry that is full of life and beauty and strength.

And what do some people say? “How demeaning! What a waste! We scorn this.” What?! That is certainly head-on-backwards thinking!

That business success, while it may be worthy of some respect, is only temporary. But your success as a wife is worthy of great respect; your ministry as a wife is attaining treasures with eternal weight.

You are creating noble things;
you are achieving things of great significance;
you are accomplishing things of lasting and priceless value.



Imagine holding a closed box in your hands.

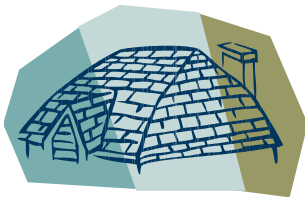
Imagine that a thief in the room knows that a million-dollar treasure is inside that box, but you do not know that. What would that scheming thief do?



He would try to get you to let go of the box; he would want you to grow tired of holding it or even to scorn it. Knowing the true worth of the box, the thief tries to persuade you that the box has little or no value. That way, he can take the box from you when you put it down or when you trade it for something much less valuable.

In the same way, the enemy of our souls tries hard to belittle marriage and to demean the priceless ministry of the wife. The enemy knows the true worth of marriage; he knows the power of a godly wife.

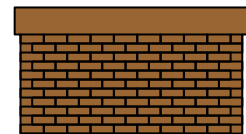
But we are not unaware of his schemes; we will not let go of our commitment to serve our husbands. This unwavering commitment to minister is a crucial layer of the marriage foundation.



Did you sleep under a roof last night? Did you resent that? Did you feel highly insulted?

Once there was a roof. The roof was perfectly engineered and crafted with excellence. The roof was perfectly designed to provide shelter and protection.

The roof lived with walls. The walls were perfectly engineered and crafted with excellence. The walls were perfectly designed to support the roof.



The Master Builder had planned and crafted every detail so that the roof covered the house perfectly, and the walls supported the roof perfectly.



The roof's name was Husband. The name of the walls was Wife.

When the roof and the walls came together as designed, the result was a wonderful, strong building, one able to house harmony and beauty and life.

If the roof crushes the walls, he falls and collapses.

If the walls reject the covering of the roof, she is vulnerable and then ruined.

The fifth chapter of Ephesians reveals God's radical design for marriage. This passage contains the infamous s-word. "Submission" can be an incredibly offensive word in our culture. Many Christian women cringe when the topic comes up, and many would say that they have had hurt feelings over the subject. I think that there are three reasons for this reaction.

First of all, women have been severely abused throughout history and in many different cultures. Some men have been cruel tyrants and dominating dictators. (It is important to note that godly submission did not cause this abuse. We might also note that in response to the sin of men, women have just sinned right back.)

The second reason for being offended by the word "submission" is that we have been deceived, just as Eve was deceived. Someone has lied to us, and we have believed the lie. We have been told that submission is only for the inferior; we have believed that submission is an insult instead of a glory; and we have believed that submission is a weakness instead of a strength.

The third reason for our dislike of the word "submission" is that we have been dissatisfied with our role as wives since the fall. After Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, God said to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband" (Genesis 3:16). The Hebrew word for "desire" here is *teshuwqah*, and it comes from root word meaning "to stretch out after."

Teshuwqah can refer to the desire or longing "of a beast to devour."⁴ The same word is used in the next chapter, Genesis 4:7: "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you."



So, Eve's "desire" was a desire to overtake and to overrule. Instead of seeking oneness, we women often seek overthrow. It is in the sin nature of "the walls" to want to rebel against the "roof." (This is actually rebellion against the Builder, isn't it?)

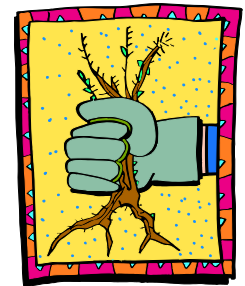
Ephesians 5:21 says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." There are those who like to say that God's design for marriage is all about mutual submission and mutual respect, something which clearly is taught in Scripture. But there is something unique about a wife's submission to her

⁴ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H8669&t=KJV>. Accessed 6-24-11.

husband. Verse 23 uses a word that tells us that there is more than just mutual submission involved in marriage: “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” The word “head” tells us that there is more than just mutual submission in this relationship. There is only one head in marriage; once you have two heads, you have a monster!

God created husbands to be the head—and there is no getting around that. Biblical feminists try to get rid of it in various ways. Some say that the apostle Paul was a chauvinist; others say that these verses are really just marginal notes that were accidentally mixed in with the Scriptures. However, resisting this teaching on headship is a trap; it is a harmful deception.

Is headship a part of divine creation, or is it a consequence of the Fall? This is very significant because anything that is part of creation is a good thing and something to be embraced; in contrast, anything that is a consequence of the Fall is a painful thing which may legitimately be resisted. For example, pain in childbirth is a consequence of sin, but it is something we can try to alleviate; weeds are a consequence of sin, but a successful farmer works to eliminate them; separation from God is another consequence of sin, but Jesus Christ died to remedy that consequence.



The headship of the husband is a part of creation; it is not a consequence of the fall, it is divinely created design. This means that it is something good to be embraced!

Headship includes responsibility and accountability. We can see these principles from the very beginning as Adam carried both responsibility and accountability for the first married couple:

1. Adam named Eve; this indicates responsibility.
2. Although we know that Eve was the one who actually ate the fruit first, the Bible consistently states that Adam was the one responsible for sin entering the world.
3. When God came to Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit, God first questioned Adam. As the head, Adam bore responsibility and accountability for the couple.

God gives husbands unique responsibility for the well-being of their wives. When God gives responsibility, He then gives authority. When God gives authority to people, He always gives it as a tool for service—it is designed to allow the one in authority to serve better the ones under that authority.

Responsibility + authority = greater ability to serve

God gives husbands responsibility for the well-being of their wives, and then He gives the authority to fulfill that responsibility. To wives, then, God gives the job of letting their husbands do their jobs.

To not be submissive is to not accept the masculinity of your husband—it is to reject who God made him to be. He may not articulate it verbally, but he most certainly senses it in his spirit. It is his masculine design to be the roof.

A husband is a God-given, God-designed roof. The roof is a gift, not an insult.

Let's say a limousine pulls up to your house. The driver opens the door for you and says, "You just leave the driving to me. You have a lot that you are thinking about and working on—very important things to do—you concentrate on that, and I will focus on the driving. Now, is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?" Would you slap him



for insulting you? No, of course not! You are more likely to pinch yourself to see if you are dreaming!

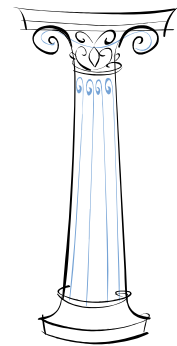
We have a problem with submission because we think it is servility. Submission is not servility, which is forced. (We can all think of false religions which, shamefully, do force women into submission.) We tend to think that submission is craven, that is, submission means giving up; we think that submission is cowardly; we think that submission is abject, which means "to lack self-respect" or "to be cast-down in spirit."

But the truth is that godly submission is a choice; it is a voluntary action. It is a gift. (Submission is not something that husbands are to demand; husbands do not have a "right" to their wives' submission.)

Submission is the gift of support and cooperation that holds up the roof of the man's leadership. This choice to submit--this choice to give--is what makes submission an act of great strength, not a weakness.

The greatest example of this kind of strength is Jesus at the cross. Physically, we see a man taken captive; we see someone powerless; we see a man beaten to a pulp and shredded physically. But in reality, what happened in the spiritual realm was something very different: with spiritual eyes, we see Pure Strength, like a mighty warrior, marching up that hill. We see Solid Strength climbing up the cross by His free choice and by His own will entirely.

Submission demonstrates strength like graceful, strong pillars supporting the walls of a palace. Psalm 144:12 says that women are "like pillars carved to adorn a palace." This imagery suggests a supporting function for wives that is both beautiful and strong.



Submission also provides guidance. The ancient Israelites had a pillar of cloud and fire to guide them. We might think, "Boy, that would be helpful!" But the truth is this: we *do* have pillars of cloud and fire moving before us. You have your own pillar: your husband! The wonderful and amazing thing about this is that our husbands are guiding pillars of cloud and fire to us even when they make wrong decisions.⁵ When a wife follows her husband out of her obedience to God, even when her husband makes a decision motivated by greed or selfishness, this will be something right in the wife's life. (More about this later.)

So, we have seen that submission is a strength freely given to another and that submission brings protection, provision, and guidance.

In general, I find that women embrace the Biblical ideal of marriage-- in theory. Women think, "Roof and walls. Protection and provision. All of that is fine. Fine . . . if you are married to Jesus!" Here is the problem: we realize that some husbands do a terrible job of protecting and providing. If we have to subject ourselves to poor leaders, then we feel extremely vulnerable.

⁵ I am not talking about situations in which the husband is choosing what is immoral or evil. The Scriptures clearly teach that we are to obey God rather than men when the two are in conflict.

Let's say that the husband functions like an umbrella. His wife then comes underneath his God-given responsibility and authority. The umbrella represents the protection, care, and leadership that the husband provides.

But what if the man's umbrella is broken and full of gaping holes? Isn't the wife going to get very wet under that umbrella?

Yes, indeed. A husband's failures to protect and provide can have devastating consequences in his home. However, there is more to this analogy.



If a woman will put herself under her husband's headship, then God raises His own "umbrella" of protection and provision over the husband's "umbrella." At that point, the woman is not vulnerable to the holes and defects, big or small, in her husband's umbrella because God's umbrella covers her fully. However, if she refuses the umbrella of her husband, she is also refusing God's umbrella over her. *God has set things up so that His full and complete covering comes over those who honor the authority structures that He has ordained.* Those who are obedient to God are ultimately not vulnerable to imperfect human authorities but are instead protected by the perfect covering of God's care.

Ephesians 5 also tells us about the husband's role, the "masculine mandate."



The primary reason that women should look at these verses is to gain assurance that God is trustworthy and good! We don't want the enemy to use this teaching to create discontent within us. God doesn't want women to look at the husband's job description and then whine, "My husband is not doing what he is supposed to be doing!" We look at God's plan to appreciate His wisdom and goodness. Learning about the masculine mandate also helps us better understand our own role as wives since the two designs work together.

God gave the husband three primary directives. The first one is to lay down his life for the wife. While Christ "gave Himself up" by dying on the cross for His Bride, other men sacrifice for their brides by giving up things such as their self-focus, their selfish ambitions, their own interests, their own

desires, and their independence. Godly husbands give their time and energy to the needs of their wives.

The second instruction to the husband is to love his wife. The word used here in the Greek is *agape*, meaning to love unconditionally. Without this kind of solid commitment, women feel insecure. As a result, they often try to control their husbands in an unwise attempt to deal with the insecurity. Husbands then feel disrespected, and soon no one feels loved!

Are women commanded to love their husbands? Perhaps you've heard that women are never told to love their husbands because women tend to do this already. However, what about Titus 2:4-5? In that passage, Paul writes: ". . . train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

The Greek word here is not *agape*; it is *phileo*. That is, we are told as women to *befriend* our husbands—not only to love them, but to *like* them! As *ezer*, we are to provide true friendship.

Have you ever wondered what the basis is for the teaching that the husband is to be the protector and the provider? We find that in verse 29 of Ephesians 5. The husband's third directive is to love his wife as his own



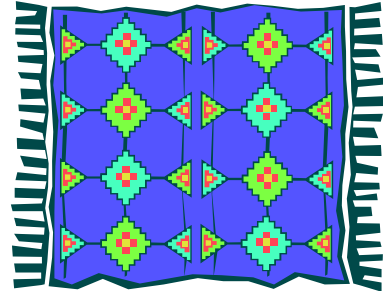
body. Just as a man feeds and cares for his own body, so he is to protect and provide for his wife. "Feeding" involves giving that which makes his wife healthy in body and thriving in spirit. Not only is the husband to feed his wife, who is his body, but he is also to care for her. The Greek word is *thalpo*, meaning "to warm, keep warm; to

cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care."⁶ The imagery is that of a mother bird keeping her little ones warm under her wings.⁷

⁶ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2282&t=KJV>. Accessed 6-11-11.

⁷ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=GetTopic&Topic=Cherish&DictList=9#Vine's>. Accessed 6-11-11.

This is a proper picture of godly covering in marriage: the husband is not to smother or harm, but to nurture and to provide care. This very important Biblical principle is highlighted in the Old Testament book of Ruth. We find there a beautiful word picture for marriage: a covering garment. Marriage is to provide to the wife a protective covering--like a blanket that keeps us warm and like the mother bird's wing that keeps the baby birds warm and protected. A man is to do this same thing in his marriage: with his very life, a man covers his wife with protection, provision, and nurturing.⁸ Ruth asked Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her, which was a figurative way of asking him to become her husband. The Hebrew word for "corner" in Ruth 3:9 is *kanaph*, a word which also means "wings."⁹ Boaz used this same word when he told Ruth that she was under the wings, or *kanaph*, of God (Ruth 2:12). When Ruth married Boaz, she then came under his *kanaph*, also.



According to Ephesians 5:27, the goal of a godly husband is this: a radiant bride! When a husband has a radiant bride, who in the marriage benefits--the husband or the wife? They both do!

What is a godly goal for the wife? According to 1 Peter 3, the wife's goal is quite different. Her goal is to make God attractive to her husband. By conducting herself in ways which are respectful and pure, the wife makes God attractive to her husband. When a husband is drawn to God by the holiness of his wife, who in the marriage benefits? They both do!

Women say that they want their husbands to be drawn to God, but then they ignore the only way to draw their husbands to God. It is very ironic to me that many women say that they want their husbands to be leaders, and then they try to command their husbands into leading. It is like saying, "Follow me so I can follow you." How can the husband follow his wife and lead her at the same time? *A wife can best encourage her husband to be a*

⁸ See Malachi 2:16.

⁹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H3671&t=KJV>. Accessed 6-25-11.

leader by following him. She must do this even when she disagrees with him. Otherwise, she is not really following him, is she?

Our culture does not see leadership and submission as gifts to give, as ways to serve. We often see leadership as something we want to grab so that we can gain something for ourselves. We see something submission as something to despise. But Scriptures teach that through the tool of leadership, husbands are not to dominate their wives but to serve their wives. Through the gift of submission, which is respectful support, wives are not to control their husbands but to serve their husbands.

What other authorities did God establish for people? We know that He also ordained the structures of parenting and of the government. However, marriage is unique as an institution. The key word for this is in verse 31 of Ephesians 5: the word is "one." "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Although there is headship in marriage, there is also the principle of oneness. Oneness is an incredibly powerful force. It indicates ultimate intimacy, but it also means that the service of one is the gain of both.

Do not be discouraged if you feel that your marriage lacks "oneness." Entirely on your own, you can practice oneness with your husband. First of all, stay mindful that as you bring benefit to him, you are bringing gain to yourself. Secondly, you can practice oneness by continually trying to see out of your husband's eyes.



In addition to the principle of oneness, marriage differs from the family and the state in other ways, too. Husbands are not to discipline as a parent does or to punish as the state does. It is healthy for children to leave their parents at some point, but the marriage bond is never to be weakened. A citizen can even separate completely from a particular government, but the marriage commitment is never to be severed.

In verse 32 of Ephesians 5, Paul makes this fascinating statement: "This [oneness in marriage] is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church." Our marriages can be pictures of the nature of God. In the

Old Testament, God revealed His divine character through Hosea's marriage to Gomer. It is an awesome thing to realize that our responses to our husbands and our commitments to our marriages can be incredibly powerful revelation to others of Who God is. Through our marriages, we demonstrate the character of God through our faithfulness, loyalty, exclusive devotion, unfailing love, and undying commitment. These are attributes of God, and when we demonstrate them as wives, we are revealing the character of God to those around us.



It doesn't even matter if our husbands join us in this or not. If a husband is not revealing the nature of God through his behavior, then the wife can still reveal these things. In fact, the husband's behavior may create a contrasting foil that serves to more brightly highlight the wife's behavior. She will be revealing God's commitment to love us even when we fail Him; she will be revealing God's faithfulness to us even when we are not faithful to Him.

Husbands are designed to reveal God as the provider, the protector, the self-sacrificing lover, and the radiance-maker. Wives are designed to reveal God as the helper, as the one who provides for us what we cannot provide for ourselves, as the one who satisfies and delights us, as the one who receives and embraces, and as the one who gives unconditional acceptance and warm welcome.



Paul concludes this section on marriage in verse 33 of Ephesians 5, "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." When the husband protects and cares for his wife, she receives what she needs: cherishing love. As a result of his obedience, the husband then receives from God what he most longs for: significance and honor. When the wife gives the gifts of submission and respect to her husband, he receives what he needs, and she then receives from God what she most longs for: security and cherishing as the beloved.