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Chapter One

What Was God Thinking?



“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

—ISAIAH 55:8–9

I am opinionated. I am independent. I am strong-willed. I am not afraid to make decisions. I am happy to take leadership. I am confident. I am also . . . submissive to my husband. To many women, this seems much like the confession of a person at Alcoholics Anonymous. You know, “Hi. I’m Cindy, and I’m submissive.”

Even writing those words rankles me. If I am all those things I say I am—opinionated, independent, confident—why did God choose me to be submissive? What was God thinking?

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It All Started in the Garden

Let's look at the beginning. That's where it all started. Pick up a Bible and look at the very first book, the very first chapter, Genesis 1, where we read about God creating the heavens and the earth. Right from the start you can see that God created the world with order. God made light, and separated it from the darkness. He made water and dry land. Then He moved on to vegetation and plants and fruit-bearing trees. On the fourth day God created the stars and sun and moon. Then He created all kinds of fish and birds and things that swarm. On the sixth day God made animals and everything that creeps on the ground. And on that day God also created His crowning achievement:

God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:27 KJV).

Did you notice the progression? God brought order out of chaos. Our God is a God of order. But we can't stop there. Genesis 2:7 explains the creation of man and woman in more detail: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."

After God created man, God gave him his work orders. God planted a beautiful garden, and placed Adam in the middle. Adam's job was to take care of the garden. And *then* God created the woman. God saw that it was not good for

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man to be alone, and fashioned a helper specifically designed to meet the man's needs:

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18).

Now you may think, *Wait a minute. What's this helper thing? I don't like the sound of that at all!*

Frankly, I didn't either . . . until I understood what the word "helper" really meant. In our culture we tend to think of a helper as someone who is subservient. But in Scripture, the designation of "helper" is given to God Himself.

"Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me; O Lord, be my help" (Ps. 30:10).

"Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me" (Ps. 54:4).

These verses use the same Hebrew word for "helper" (*ezer*) as in Genesis 2:18. God is *my* helper. He is *your* helper. And I'm certain God did not intend for us to assume that being our helper puts Him in a position of inferiority.

So even in the garden, God created order in marriage. In Paradise, before sin entered the equation, God designated the woman as the helper of man.

Biblical Lines of Authority

We all live under authority. Scripture does not single out wives for submission. God has placed everyone in subjection to the government (Rom. 13:1-2; Titus 3:1). We recognize this

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authority in our lives and choose to obey it or suffer the consequences. We obey the speed limit, pay our taxes, and even keep our grass cut so we don't have conflicts with our federal, state, or local governments. We may complain, but we comply because we don't want to suffer the penalty for not following the laws of the land.

God has also established a line of leadership in our homes. Ephesians 5:22–6:9, as well as Colossians 3:18–4:1, describe this authority: Children are subject to parents, wives to husbands, and husbands to God. Additionally, God reminded slaves to be obedient to their masters as to Christ, which we can apply to employees today and their bosses (Eph. 6:5).

In both of these passages, the *reason* we are to follow these lines of authority is because, ultimately, we are doing it for Christ's sake:

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Col. 3:23–24 NASB).

Even Jesus submitted to authority in His life. You probably remember the story of Jesus going to the temple with His parents when He was twelve years old. As Mary and Joseph left Jerusalem, they noticed that their son was not with them. As a parent, I can imagine their panic. They thought He was with friends or family, only to discover He was not even in the caravan returning to Nazareth. They eventually returned to the temple complex and found their son sitting amid the

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teachers. Scripture tells us that Jesus' maturity and spiritual understanding amazed those who heard His answers.

Apparently Mary wasn't quite so easily impressed. She gave Jesus a quick tongue-lashing, as any panic-stricken mother would, and took Him home. Luke 2:51 ends the story with these words, "And He [Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them" (NASB).

Wait—what? Jesus, who had just wowed the teachers in the temple, was submitting to His parents. This is not some ordinary twelve-year-old. This is Jesus, also known as the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Now, before you run to your twelve-year-old son and throw this verse in his face, reflect on how it applies in your own life.

If Jesus, who created the world, willingly submitted to His fallible parents, wouldn't it follow that wives should be willing to submit to fallible husbands? We might like to believe that God really didn't mean this when He assigned our roles in marriage. Or that He certainly must have changed His mind as He realized how progressive His creation had become. But God allowed His own Son, the sinless One, to be placed under the authority of sinful human parents. I have a hard time believing that God would allow Jesus to be placed in a submissive relationship yet let me off the hook just because I don't always like submitting.

Scripture seems to indicate that God likes order. We've

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seen it from the creation of the universe through the management of the family. God knows that His creatures function best with disciplined, organized lives. God didn't intend for our marital roles to be a burden to us. In fact, God gave us a mission: to be a living, breathing example for the fallen world. Our marriages are sacred, and our complementarian roles are a high calling.

A Unique Relationship

God continued His thoughts on marriage through the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesian church: Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22 NASB).

The first thing that strikes me about this verse is the little word "own." Wives, be subject to your *own* husbands. This is not a directive to every male/female relationship. This is not addressed to women in the workplace, nor does it even refer to how a woman treats her boyfriend or fiancé. The only man a woman should be subject to is her *own* husband. This is a relationship like none other. Although it might seem contrary to our expectations, a woman can function in a position of authority in the workplace while she still lives in a position of submission in her relationship to her husband.

Interestingly, the word "subject" comes from a Greek military term that means to arrange troops under the command of a leader. In nonmilitary terms, submission is an attitude of

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voluntary cooperation. I like that. It's something I can comprehend as I ask myself, "Am I choosing to voluntarily cooperate with Michael?" When I do, I am giving him the respect he longs for.

But read on. This verse also says a wife should be subject to her own husband, *as to the Lord*. For whatever reason, God chose to place the husband as the head of the relationship. When we refuse to accept God's design, we are, in essence, telling God we don't trust Him. At times, being willing to follow our husbands is certainly difficult, yet that is what God asks of us.

God will use your willingness to cooperate with Him and your husband to work in both of your lives. I have been amazed as I look back over my own life to see how this principle has repeatedly come to fruition. When I submit to Michael's leadership, God works in both of us. That leads me to wonder if I am hindering God's work in our lives when I'm not willing to submit to Michael.

Let me give you an example. Although I am pragmatic, I still tend to make decisions that satisfy my emotional bent. Michael, like many men, is much more deliberate in his decisions. He looks at the facts, weighs the possibilities, and chooses what he perceives to be the best option. It drives me crazy! He can take months to make a major purchase, like buying a car. I can do it in an afternoon. I don't really care about the best ratings or gas mileage or service record. I want the cute one. Obviously, it is to my personal advantage to

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follow his lead. The cute car isn't so appealing when it's in the shop . . . again.

God has wired our husbands to need our respect, just as we are wired with the need to be loved. When I willingly submit to Michael's leadership, I receive another bonus. He takes his position of leadership more seriously, realizing that I will follow. I expect Michael to listen to my desires, and my advice when I have more knowledge than he does on a specific subject. However, I've found over and over again that it is in my best interest to allow him to play the role that God gave him.

When we are willing to cooperate with our husbands' leadership, they stand taller, feel prouder, and become the men we know they can be.

A Divine Picture

Maybe you've heard that old saying, "You may be the only Bible that some people ever read." Perhaps that is what God intended in a Christian marriage, as described in Ephesians 5:23-27 (NASB):

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself

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the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

What an awesome responsibility! When Michael loves me as Christ loved the church and when I respond in submission to him, we are a divine picture for the entire world to see.

This certainly makes our marriages appear different from the model the world is trying to sell! The husband is to sacrificially love his wife. The wife is to voluntarily cooperate with her husband in everything.

What if every Christian marriage lived by these principles? Our marriages would be divine! Our neighbors, our coworkers, and our families would all demand to know how to achieve such great marriages for themselves. And we would have the answer! We would be in the perfect position to share the love of Christ with them.

Yes, God, I Get It!

As I have chased the idea of submission through the Bible, one portion of Scripture was the final straw that convinced me of God's opinion on this subject:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
(Phil. 2:5–8)

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Jesus Christ chose humility over pride. He is equal with God in all respects, because He is God. Yet He willingly left the throne of heaven to live as a servant on earth. Jesus took on hunger, exhaustion, grief, temptation, disappointment, and abuse from the very people He came to save. He voluntarily cooperated with God the Father in a plan that required His painful death on our behalf. He humbled Himself.

Humility seems to be an important character trait in God's economy. The Bible is full of Scriptures that reveal God's attitude toward those who are humble in spirit. This, more than any other argument, has clarified my thoughts concerning my role in the marriage relationship:

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Submission requires humility. I am a proud creature. I can't think of a better way for God to mold me in His image on a daily basis. When I choose to humble myself and respect my husband, placing myself under his authority, I can almost feel God whisper, "Well done."