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THE SKILL OF SUBMISSION

The story is told of two escaped prisoners who were on the run through the woods when they heard the tracking dogs barking behind them and realized the guards were closing in. The first prisoner scrambled up a tree in the hopes of throwing the dogs off. The second prisoner decided he would do the same thing and ran to a nearby tree, which he also climbed.

As the prisoners hid among the branches and listened, the dogs grew closer. Before long they were barking at the base of the tree where the first prisoner was hiding. He was a quick thinker, so he started saying, "Coo, coo, coo."

The prison guards jerked the dogs back from the tree and said, "Come on, let's go. There's nothing up there but a bird."

Then the guards came to the tree where the second prisoner was hiding. As the dogs started barking and jumping at the tree, this prisoner panicked. He wasn't as quick as the first prisoner, but he had heard the guy throw the dogs off by making a bird noise and realized he also needed to make some kind of animal sound. So he thought for a second and then said, "Moo, moo, moo."

When you're confused about what you are supposed to be doing, you wind up making the wrong noise at the wrong time in the wrong place! We see Christian couples today who are making a lot of noise, complaining about their spouses and their marriages, when the truth is they have neglected their own biblical roles and become confused about what they are supposed to be doing. We could say they're mooing when they ought to be cooing.

Now I want you to know right up front that even though this booklet focuses on the woman's role in the home, nothing we have to say here is meant to excuse men who aren't performing their God-given role as husbands. In fact, when I presented this material on marriage to the congregation at our church in Dallas, I began by addressing the husbands as those commanded to lead, not the wives.

Since you don't have that material in front of you, let me summarize it by saying that the primary responsibility for the health of a marriage falls on the husband, not the wife. It's true that there are wives who are not fulfilling their biblical role, but that doesn't change the fact that husbands are charged with the primary responsibility to

see that their marriages function as God intended. And the best way they can do this is by taking seriously their role as spiritual leaders.

I say this so you won't think that wives are being singled out to bear the primary load of responsibility to make their marriages function as God intended. Many women say they want their husbands to step up to the plate and assume leadership in the home. They long to be relieved of a burden they know they are not designed to carry and would gladly yield if their husbands would come through for them.

Since we deal with the husband's responsibilities in detail in *For Married Men Only*, I want to focus on the wife's role here. Actually, both spouses' roles are summarized in Ephesians 5:33: "Each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband."

A husband is commanded to love his wife, and that is not dependent on his emotions. A wife is commanded to respect her husband even if he hasn't earned that respect in her mind. But too many Christian women are taking their marriage cues from television or their girlfriends instead of from God's Word.

Many women were raised in single-parent homes and in a matriarchal environment over which they had no control. The problem is that they have come to think this is how things are supposed to be. Since mama ran their home, they figure they need to run their home now that they're married.

But a woman who tries to take charge of her marriage is trampling on the respect that she owes to her husband through God's command to her. Many men are functioning as poor husbands at least in part because their wives are operating far outside of God's standard.

So in this booklet we want to find out what a wife's biblical role entails and what a woman looks and acts like when she is fulfilling her calling from the Lord in relation to her husband. Over the next three chapters, I plan to cover the following areas: submitting to your husband, seducing your husband, and surrendering to your husband.

SUBMITTING TO YOUR HUSBAND

Now I know that the mental defenses go up for many women when they hear the dreaded "s-word," because the concept of submission flies in the face of everything that our culture today teaches, models, and values. But God's Word sits in judgment on our culture, and not vice versa.

One reason that submission is such a hated word is that it has been so badly misunderstood and misused, often intentionally, that few people know what it really means. Submission is not a bad word, but when people make a good word bad, it becomes bad even though it's good.

I was speaking at a Promise Keepers conference for men at a time when members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) were protesting against the idea of submission, saying that it turns women into second-class citizens.

But at the same time that the president of NOW was complaining about the terrible oppression of women being perpetrated by Christians who teach submission, I heard her call the organization's vice president and give her instructions to fulfill a certain task.

WE MEN WANT AND NEED
TO HEAR, "I RESPECT YOU."

In other words, the president of NOW was asking her subordinate to submit to her leadership. Feminists recognize that submission is appropriate in some roles, and they practice it themselves in these settings. They just don't want to see the concept of submission introduced into marriage because they want to insist that marriage is a totally egalitarian relationship with no one in a leadership position. You see, submission is only a bad idea when it's used in an arena where we don't want it to appear. But it is God's idea, so it can't be bad. In fact, we'll see below that the members of the Godhead practice submission to one another.

The biblical word "submission" means "to line up underneath." It's a voluntary word, an act of the will. In other words, we must choose to submit. Perhaps the best illustration is a yield sign on the highway. Whereas a stop

sign means stop, period, no questions asked, you have a choice to make at a yield sign. But your choice carries certain consequences.

If you think you can beat the oncoming car and get out of its way, you may decide to shoot on through the intersection instead of yielding. But if you do, and a collision occurs, you will be at fault because the other vehicle has the right-of-way. Regardless of your view that you were right, the law will consider you to be in rebellion against its statutes.

The same is true in a wife's relationship with her husband. God tells wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). A wife may choose to reject that word, but that decision will put her and her marriage on a "collision course" with God's principles.

But the reverse is also true. When we line up in obedience under God's Word, we please Him and open our lives to His blessing. I believe this is the choice you want to make, so let's see what biblical submission that pleases God looks like.

SUBMITTING TO YOUR HUSBAND BY RESPECTING HIM

God commands a wife to respect her husband. This word means to hold in high esteem, to lift up. It's closely connected with the word "reverence." Ladies, what your husband needs and craves from you more than anything else is respect. While you love to hear, "I love you," we men want and need to hear, "I respect you."

Without respect, men shrivel up and die. I know some women are already objecting that their husbands aren't worthy of respect, and we'll deal with that issue. But I need to make clear that showing respect to your husband is not optional, just as his responsibility to love you with Christlike love is not optional. God can command love and respect on the part of a husband and wife because both are an act of the will, a matter of obedience.

The Bible doesn't give a lot of specifics about how a wife is to show respect to her husband. But we do have one clear example in 1 Peter 3:1–2, where the apostle wrote: "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior."

Here are the two concepts of submission and respect side by side again, just as they are in Ephesians 5 (see vv. 22 and 33). Peter reinforced Paul by indicating that the primary way a wife respects her husband is through her submission. But Peter added an important description of what respectful submission looks like.

Peter called it "chaste and respectful behavior," which basically involves a wife's godly attitude that can draw an unbelieving husband to Christ without her having to preach to him, continually criticize his lifestyle, or pin Bible verses to his pillow at night. A wife respects her husband, even if he's an unbeliever, by refusing to browbeat or manipulate him into doing what she wants him to do.

The kind of respect the Bible is talking about here is the kind we all want to be shown at work and among our friends. If your boss constantly stood over you and told you how to do every detail of your job, you'd get very tired of not being shown any respect for having a brain, and you'd probably quit. It takes respect for a wife to forego criticizing or manipulating her husband even when she has a valid point.

SUBMITTING TO YOUR HUSBAND AS HIS EQUAL

Now at this point some women object that this isn't fair. "Why should I have to submit and defer to my husband when I have a better education than he has and bring home more money than he does?" Or, "If I didn't take charge at home, nothing would get done. I'm much stronger and less passive than my husband."

All of these are issues that may need to be addressed in a marriage, but the biblical doctrine of submission has nothing to do with how much clout a wife brings to the table as opposed to her husband, or who has the stronger personality. To submit is to recognize that God has given the wife the yield sign.

Submission has to do with function, not being. It does not signify that a wife is inferior to her husband in terms of her worth before God. Peter dealt with that when he told husbands to consider their wives as a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). Men and women have equal worth in God's eyes.

Submission also doesn't mean that a wife has been relegated to an inferior position of servitude that denies her gifts and abilities and leaves her unfulfilled. How could this be if submission is the will of God?

The woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31 wasn't some passive, mindless person standing around waiting to be told what to do. This lady was awesome. She had her MBA, because the Bible says she negotiated with merchants from afar. She had her real estate license, because she bought and sold property. She also managed the family's finances, supervised a household staff, and had her own ministry to the poor.

But in terms of her marriage, she used her considerable skills in such a way that they enhanced her husband in his role instead of usurping him or tearing him down. Proverbs 31:23 says her husband was one of the leaders in town who was well known, which suggests that he benefited from his wife's ministry.

Submission does not mean that a wife has to deny who she is. But when all of the facts are on the table and a decision has to be made, the wife has the yield sign. She may have equal input to offer, and a wise husband will listen to a wise wife, but he is charged with responsibility for the decision.

Many wives wonder how often this arrangement applies. Let me cite Ephesians 5:24 and then discuss it: "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

The Bible says that wives are to submit to their husbands

in every area of life. The example is the church's submission to Christ. In fact, two verses earlier we read, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (v. 22).

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This is a sweeping principle, but we need to mention one exception that can arise in a marriage. When a husband requires his wife to do something that is clearly against God's will and would cause her to dishonor her relationship with Christ, then she has a greater duty to obey God and not submit to her husband (see Acts 5:27–29 for a statement of this principle).

Cases like this reinforce the truth that a wife is her husband's equal in terms of her intrinsic worth before God. When God refers to submission, He is talking about the carrying out of a divinely ordained program, which in this case is the home. A home is not designed to function

with two heads, just as a human body is not meant to have two heads.

By the way, the greatest example of submission in function on the part of equal beings to accomplish a divine program is not marriage but the Godhead itself. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), but throughout His ministry Jesus spoke and acted in submission to His Father (see John 8:29; 12:49). His submission to the Father is also underscored in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which we'll look at below.

Christian wife, you are equal to your husband by being made in God's image and being the object of His saving grace. Submission is a voluntary act of obedience to God on your part that does not diminish your worth in any way.

SUBMITTING TO YOUR HUSBAND'S POSITION OF HEADSHIP

The Bible gives us a very helpful analogy of how submission and authority are to operate in marriage. The relationship between a husband and wife is not that of a master to a slave (although some couples think it is), but that of a head to a body.

I discuss this next passage in our companion guide on covenantal marriage, *Marriage Matters*, but I want to address it here as well. Paul wrote, "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3). The job of the head is to give guidance and

direction to the body. The job of the body is to follow the direction of the head.

If your arms or legs start moving independently of signals from your brain, or in rebellion to the signals from your brain, you need to see a doctor because that's a sign of physical sickness.

In the same way, a wife who refuses to follow her husband's leadership is spiritually sick because she is not functioning in line with a body's relationship to its head. Whenever a believer operates outside of God's standard, God does not respond to that person, because He will not participate in or endorse rebellion.

Some Christian women are not getting their prayers answered or seeing God move in their lives as a direct result of their refusal to submit to their husbands. Some husbands are discouraged from taking their rightful leadership roles because they are "sleeping with the enemy." They are married to women who have decided that their job is to find out which way their husbands want to go and head in the opposite direction.

This problem started in the garden of Eden when the Devil persuaded Eve to act as the head and make the decision to disobey God and Adam acted as the body by following Eve in her sin. Now Adam still bore the ultimate responsibility as the head although he had abdicated his authority, and the disease of sin was passed through the man. But don't miss the fact that Satan engineered a great reversal, leading Adam and Eve to switch roles.

By reversing the roles in the marriage, one vital part

of the covenant of marriage was broken and that is the part that deals with hierarchy. In a covenant, as I describe in more detail in our companion marriage guide, hierarchy is the establishment of a certain order within a covenant relationship—in other words, a chain of command. When this facet of a marriage covenant was broken between Adam and Eve, hell broke loose in the family. A woman who wants to be the head of her home invites the Devil to take over her family. And the Devil has taken over many homes because the wife has refused to submit to the legitimate, biblical authority of her husband. The result is spiritual sickness and dysfunction.

So a wife is to look to her husband for direction the way a body looks to its head. But Satan is going to do everything he can to keep that from happening in your home. He will bring people into your life who will tell you, "Girl, you're crazy to submit to that man. No man is going to tell me what to do!"

You'll also find plenty of reminders that your husband is far from perfect. Now don't misunderstand. This is no excuse for a husband to justify his failure to follow God and to try to be all that God wants him to be. But there's a larger principle of hierarchy at work here, which is that a husband is his wife's head by position even if he is not fulfilling that role in his practice. And God calls the wife to recognize and honor that position.

The problem is that we want to respond to a person's practice only—instead of that person's position of authority—which we think gives us permission to rebel. So

we have wives who refuse to submit to their husbands' leadership because they don't believe the husbands are worthy of their respect.

But a wife owes her husband respect because he is her head by God's design. That's his position—and there are all kinds of situations in life in which we are called to honor and serve leaders who are not fulfilling the ideal.

If employees only worked for bosses who are ideal leaders, there would be massive unemployment in America. Your boss may be a poor leader, but you still do your job and say, "Yes sir, Mr. Jones," or, "Yes ma'am, Ms. Wilson," because the company says you must acknowledge your leader's position. And the rewards come when you get your paycheck, or even that promotion.

I know that some Christian wives are facing the trauma and the dilemma that I call "trying to follow a parked car." That is, their husbands aren't going anywhere spiritually. God understands this trauma, which is why the Bible adds this crucial qualifier to the command for wives to submit to their husbands: "So that even if any of them [husbands] are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (1 Peter 3:1).

Christian wife, don't ever think that God isn't interested in bringing your unsaved or spiritually weak husband into line. He wants your cooperation in the process, but not in the way many women think their husbands need help. God doesn't need you to be your husband's critic, his conscience, or his mother. Neither does he need you to sit down, fold your arms, and say, "Okay, that's it.

I'm not going to do what I'm supposed to do until my husband starts doing what he's supposed to do."

So does that mean a wife can't do or say anything to help her husband embrace his God-ordained role? Of course not. "Without a word" is an idiom that means "don't preach at your husband." It doesn't mean you can't communicate your concerns. The idea is to avoid the kind of nagging, condescending, critical conversation that can drive a man further from Christ.

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We all know people who are living proof of the fact that years of fussing and cussing and riding someone verbally doesn't produce the desired change. God says it's time for a different approach.

For a Christian wife, that approach is "chaste and respectful behavior" that a husband can see (1 Peter 3:2).

We learned that this is best exemplified by a wife's willing and wholehearted submission to her husband. But we have too many marriages even in the church in which the husband doesn't know what this looks like because he has never seen it.

A wife may object, "Oh no, my husband has seen plenty of submission because I'm always giving in to him." Well, the problem there may be with the word "respectful." Some wives take the approach, "Oh yeah, I'll submit to my husband all right, but I'm going to take him down with me and make his life miserable in the process."

There may be a hundred reasons that a husband is not fulfilling his role as the head of the home. But a wife who rebels against her head is only introducing a new element of spiritual sickness and dysfunction into the family.

Earlier we referred to a husband in this situation as a parked car. Admittedly, it's hard to follow a parked car. But there are two ways you can deal with a car in front of you that won't move. You can either get ticked off and start honking your horn and waving your fist at the driver, or you can find out what the problem is and help get the car moving.

I've never seen a car suddenly come to life and take off simply because the person behind it was steaming and yelling and honking. You can practice all of your vocabulary on a stalled car, but it won't get either one of you anywhere.

What a stalled car needs is someone to assist it in moving. That's what God has given to husbands in their

wives. God calls a wife to be her husband's helper, to urge and encourage him along in the task of leading his marriage and his home.

But when a wife decides to become a "hurtmate" instead of a helpmate, the marital roles get turned upside down and the Enemy sows spiritual chaos in the home. Even well-meaning wives can do damage by criticizing their husbands and complaining about them. And in the process, the good result they are trying to achieve is actually undermined.

I really believe that there are Christian wives who need to go to their husbands and say something like this: "I am sorry for disrespecting you, and for talking to you disrespectfully in front of the children. I have been unwilling to serve you in the way God expects me to, and I have used your weaknesses as my excuse for not submitting to your leadership."

It's been a long time since some husbands have had a kind word or reassurance from their wives that they're doing something right. You may say, "I'd compliment him if he did something right." Well, he did at least one thing right. He married you!

Women who don't really believe that God can change their husbands through the Holy Spirit's work figure it's now their job, so they are going to help God out. As we move on through 1 Peter 3 we'll see that there is plenty a wife can do to influence her husband. So don't worry that you have to be invisible or mere window dressing in your marriage.

Have you ever seen eagles fly? They are known for soaring and gliding as their wings catch the wind. But did you know that if eagles could not soar, they would crash? Their wings are too heavy for them to flap continually the way some birds do. So eagles flap their wings until they catch an air current, and then they soar.

A lot of wives are trying too hard to make their marriages work, but they can't sustain the weight of what they're doing, and they crash. God says, "I want you to soar on the wind of the Holy Spirit. Position yourself in Me, and let Me glide your marriage into a changed relationship." When you are doing it God's way, you don't have to flap because you can soar.