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Chapter One
by divine
design

when a
woman
loves
a man,
she fulfills
God's design

YOU'RE PROBABLY familiar with the old motto: A woman's place is in the home. Well, in today's society that idea has changed drastically. I know some women are saying, "Thank God things have changed." As a matter of fact, the change has been so dramatic that I actually saw a bumper sticker that read: A woman's place is in the mall.

With the prevalence of this postmodern mind-set, a woman's world has been transformed exponentially. But you may be surprised that a few women believe it has expanded too much. They feel that too much is expected of women and wives today. Someone once

said, “They expect us to look like a girl, dress like a boy, think like a man, and work like a horse.”

However, when you stop and consider what the Word of God has to say about the woman’s role in marriage, there is a good deal of truth revealed in that comment. That’s why, if you want to know the real truth about anything, you have to go back to its source. In this case, I’m referring to the Word of God. It contains the Divine Design, the blueprint of God’s plan for all of creation.

A PERFECT WIFE?

When a woman loves a man, God has equipped her to give that man something he can feel—physically and spiritually. As I was thinking about the concept of what makes a good wife, I asked myself the question: What would the average man consider to be the attributes of a perfect wife? No doubt most men would agree with my answer.

The perfect woman looks like Halle Berry, has a body like Tyra Banks, keeps house like Martha Stewart, cooks like Paula Deen, has the mind of Mae Jemison, and possesses a fortune like Oprah Winfrey. Moreover, the perfect wife exemplifies the personality of Phylicia Rashad, the compassion of Mother Teresa, and the sex drive of Madonna. Can I get an Amen from the brothers?

When I put all of these traits together, I conclude that she needs to be a woman just like my wife.

Yet, it shouldn't be a surprise that the passage in chapter 31 of the book of Proverbs portrays a completely different picture than the amusing one described above.

Great Expectations

The truth is, everyone has expectations. Husbands have expectations for their wives as much as wives have expectations for their husbands. Sometimes those hopes are met, and sometimes they're not. Not only that, but many times the expectations are not known, so a lot of friction comes into play because of these hidden expectations.

So what does a man expect from the woman he marries? Here's one person's take on the answer:

A man wants his wife to be beautiful without ever needing to get her hair done. She doesn't like manicures and pedicures. She's always cheerful and never gets sick. Fortunately for her husband, she's allergic to jewelry and fur coats. She's an expert in keeping quiet. Her favorite pastime is taking out the garbage, and she loves to mow the lawn. She's got Einstein's brains and the body of a goddess. Lastly, and this is extremely necessary, she wants you to go out with the boys often so she can be free to sew and iron.

Well, ladies, please forgive me for that bit of levity. It's merely a little attempt at amusement and I just added it because the brothers always say that I dog them out. So I hope this makes me an equal opportunity commentator.

First Things First

Putting all humor aside, I want to begin by addressing the subject of what God anticipated when He created man and woman. After some careful consideration of God's Word, we can find out what God expects from both genders. This is important for all of us to know because He will hold every individual accountable for our actions.

So let's back up to the beginning and find out what was going on in the book of Genesis because it's time to set the record straight. Listen to this account from Genesis 2:

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:15–17)

In this first verse we find that God put the man He created in the garden and told him to take care of it. By these actions, God gave Adam dominion and stewardship over the rest of creation. Dominion meant he was to rule well. Stewardship was to rule and take care of it. Cultivate it to keep, nurture, and do what needs to be done to ensure healthy growth. In the next two verses, God told Adam

what He expected of him. “*You may eat freely,*” God said, indicating His provisions for the man. When Adam heard this gracious invitation, worship was to be the proper response because man was created to worship the Almighty God.

This applies to all of us. We should be eternally grateful in worship to God because of His bountiful blessings. Then, the final instruction for Adam was a warning from God: “You shall not eat . . . you will surely die.” Altogether, this interaction between God and man bound the two of them in a mutual relationship.

But from Adam’s viewpoint, this is where the story gets real interesting. Scripture says God saw that none of His created beings were compatible with the man, and He declared, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” (Genesis 2:18a). Having Adam’s needs in mind, God was ready to create a suitable companion for the man, a partner with whom he could fellowship. Clearly, God wanted Adam to have someone he could connect with; someone who looked like him. I can only imagine what Adam was thinking when he opened his eyes and discovered his lovely bride—Eve, who resembled him in form but not aesthetics. Thank God! This new creation of God’s thought like him, moved like him, felt like him, talked like him. In other words, God presented Adam with a creation designed specifically to complement him.

Who's in Charge?

In all of His creation work, God set definite patterns for how things should function. Adam and Eve were first, but they represent every man and woman. Through the first couple, God established the details of the relationship He envisioned for married couples. However, we have a lot more to learn about the very specific roles that God intended for us and how we are to relate with our Creator.

The apostle Paul reiterated God's plans when he laid out the divine hierarchy for our relationship with God in this way,

“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 . . . For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.” (1 Corinthians 11:3, 7–9)

When God drew up His master plan, the blueprint for all of creation, this is the way authority was designated. According to His divine design, there is absolutely no inferiority implied between God and Christ, nor between man and woman. Following this

analogy, there is equality in the respective relationships with distinction in the definition of roles.

Here is where we also find that God made Adam in His image, the *Imago Dei*. Endowed with a personality, intellect, emotion, and will, Adam became a human reflection of God's own image. He holds the distinction of being created first and was given the responsibility of being the spiritual leader in his household.

Eve was the prototype of the model woman. As the reflection of every woman, we study her to learn how she was designed to function. Since she came "out of the man," Scripture identifies her as "the glory of man." Clearly, the Master Designer established these role assignments out of His infinite love and wisdom. I believe that it causes God much pain when He watches us misuse and abuse His excellent plan.

Follow the Blueprint

So when God created marriage, what did He create it to do and to be? Sounds like a good question to me. The reality is that no one knows better than a designer what the intent of a respective design should be. For the purpose of understanding marriage and our roles in it, we can find the answer when we consult with His divine blueprint. God gave us the diagram for marriage by laying out His instructions in His Word. This is what He said:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”
(Genesis 2:24)

This Scripture encapsulates God’s view of marriage. When a man and woman are joined together they are no longer “me and you.” They become “we.” God considers the two individuals as one cohesive unit. As a result, sharing “one flesh” involves physical and spiritual intimacy and it is the greatest human bond that exists. It is even greater than the bond between a mother and child because without two parents first coming together, there can be no child.

But too often you and I abandon the divine blueprint and reject the design of God for our marriages. Both men and women are guilty of this. We set aside God’s plan and adopt that which the world has offered us. Instead of listening to what God says about who we are as husbands and wives, we listen to the voices of society spouting secular wisdom. We would be so much better off if we understood that God has a purpose in mind and He wants that purpose to be fulfilled in us.

In case you’re searching for the meaning of your relationship, find out by checking the divine blueprint. That way, whenever your marriage hits the wall of adversity, you and your mate will rise up with a stronger bond. I like to put it this way. As long as you’re working with God’s instructions, you’ll bend where you’re

supposed to bend and hold where you're supposed to hold.

If you want to be on the right side of life, you have to understand that God's view and the world's view are in direct opposition. The world says, "Until debt do us part," but God says, "Until death do us part."

Therefore, when God's Word of instruction is hidden in our hearts, we don't look for reasons to abandon the marriage, we unite in our determination to stay together. Marriages can endure until death because God designed them to. They don't because we have altered God's plan. We have made changes to the original blueprint and as usual we have created a mess. Financial problems may arise, but they don't make us want to get rid of each other. That's what the world says we ought to do. But the divine blueprint says, when a marriage faces trouble, a husband and wife can withstand it regardless of personality differences or disagreements. The marriage can endure to the end because that's the way God designed it.

To get a better picture of this, here is an illustration. The designer of an automobile will test his concept car to see if it will perform the way it was intended. He pays careful attention to every detail and meticulously crafts his design so that it meets his stringent specifications. In other words, he wants it to bend where it's supposed to bend and hold where it's supposed to hold. The ultimate goal is to put the finished product on display when it reflects the image he had in mind.

In a similar way, God made marriage the way He did so He could put it on display for the world to see. Did you know that godly marriage is a picture of Jesus Christ and His church? God has given us a priceless image of what a marriage is like when He's in control of it. When such a marriage is exhibited, people will know that Christ is in the midst of it. The two partners don't act like people without God in their lives. The relationship becomes a tested and proven representation of God's standard much the same way people can spot a Porsche when they see one. This was God's plan for marriage. People should look at a Christian marriage and see Christ.

As a woman who desires to be a virtuous woman, you want to know how to govern yourself. Don't consult with someone's philosophy or rely on anyone's educated opinion. If you want to know how to be a godly wife—don't talk to any woman or man. If you want to be a virtuous woman and godly wife, consult the Designer. There are godly women, mature women around, and the Bible tells them to instruct the younger women. But keep in mind that God is the ultimate and final answer. After all, it is His creation, and who knows it better than Him? When you're ready for the righteous answers, you must go back to the divine design and rely on the unadulterated Word of the living God to show you the way.

When you consult with the Divine Designer of the marriage institution, you will find that the wife was intricately fashioned in these three ways:

- a) to fulfill the purpose God gave her
- b) to prepare for her God-given role
- c) to complete the life-giving process

Her Purpose

The overall design of God for a woman comes together in how she loves a man. Just as Adam was fulfilled in her, Eve was fulfilled in him. God's blueprint describes how He has created woman so that her role would reflect the reason for which He made her. She was equipped for the man that He was going to bring into her life.

Eve was given a specific role and certain things were expected of her. In fact, the first reference God made to Eve became her number one purpose. God said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18b).

So here we have it. Eve was designed to be her husband's helper. The reason her role was so special is because there are only two people called "helper" in the Bible. Eve was one of them, and you may be surprised to find that the other was God. Before He gave her to Adam, God instilled in the woman's design the ability to be a natural source of protection and support for her man. If you have ever wondered why women are natural nurturers and fiercely protective, now you know.

The word "helper" comes from the Hebrew word *ezer*, which

means “one who helps.” It is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Now get this: nineteen times the word is used about God. The other two times it describes the woman. Please don’t miss this. God has given woman a designation that she alone shares with Him.

Let me clear up any misunderstanding that may exist right here and now. The woman’s role cannot have anything to do with inferiority because there’s nothing inferior about God. She and God share a role and God is Supreme, Majestic, Magnificent, and Marvelous. God is everything that is good. He wouldn’t give Himself a designation that would degrade Him.

Now think about how incredible this is. The woman alone shares the name that God has taken for Himself. To show you the tremendous effect this produces, I want to give you some examples of where that name is used in reference to God. Keep in mind some of the synonyms for the word “help” are “support,” “rescue,” “improve,” “assist,” and “relieve.”

“Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help [*ezer*] and our shield.” (Psalm 33:20)

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help [*ezer*] in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

“But I am afflicted and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help [*ezer*] and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.” (Psalm 70:5)

“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help [*ezer*] come?” (Psalm 121:1)

Do you see the awesome power God has instilled in the workings of a virtuous woman? By calling both Him and the woman *ezer*, He has given the woman a position like none other. But I must point out the main distinction here. *Yahweh* is the Big Ezer and the woman that He created is the little ezer. You see, God wasn't going to supply some things for Adam. Through Eve, He could channel blessings to the man that was her counterpart.

As a result, there are some blessings that God has reserved for a husband that he will only get through his wife. God made Eve to protect Adam in certain ways and to cover his back. Because she was in relationship with God, guess what she was to remind Adam of when he looked at her? That's right, the Big Ezer.

Let me illustrate what I'm talking about. My oldest grandson, Little J, and I hang out together. We were on our way down to his daddy's barbershop so I could get a haircut. But first we stopped at the gas station. I had given him five dollars, and you know how it is when a five-year-old has five dollars in his pocket. He is rich and has a burning desire to start spending his wealth.

And so he said, “Papa?” I said, “What, man?” He said, “Papa, can I get a pop and some potato chips?” I said, “Yes, but you will wait.” He got the *yep* part, but he had no interest in the *wait* part.

“Wait” doesn’t register in the five-year-old brain.

As we were driving to his daddy’s shop, he was blown up like a bull frog. I said, “What’s the matter, man?” He said, “Nothing, Papa.” Then he kind of rolled his eyes at me a little bit. I already knew what was wrong with him so I said, “You want a pop and potato chips and that five dollars is burning a hole in your pocket.”

He said, “Yes, sir.”

I said, “But I asked you to wait. Now let me tell you why I asked you to wait. We’re going to your daddy’s barber shop. And one of the things that your daddy has at his barber shop is pop and potato chips. Right? You were going to spend your own money to get what you want. But when we get to your daddy’s shop, both of us are going to have free pop and chips.”

He started smiling and said, “Oh yeah, so I keep my money and I still get pop and potato chips.” I replied, “Now you’ve got it.” His whole demeanor changed, because even a five-year-old understands free.

Let me explain. God is saying to us, “I’m the Big Ezer and I have insight and foresight that you don’t have. You see, I have already calculated how we’re going to get what you need so you can keep what I gave you. You don’t have to worry about spending what I gave you because I’m going to get you what you want and it’s not going to cost you anything.”

For those of you who are single and desire a husband, know that

you have God's virtue and God's virginity. You don't need to bargain. God is saying to you, "Look, I've got a blessing for you. You don't have to spend what I gave you because I'm going to give you what you want and I'm going to make sure it doesn't cost you anything."

It would be better for you to wait on God because it will be a blessing and not a constant headache. Notice I didn't say there would be *no* headache at all because that is not the reality. In life, there will be some headaches and we can't avoid that, but even with the headache, God supplies the headache reliever. But God doesn't want you to have to pay a large price for what He wants to freely give you.

Taking Care of Business

When you study the description of the virtuous woman, you will find out how the woman of virtue conducts herself. Here are some of the many activities that define this ideal individual. In verse 14, we find her willing to travel a distance to save money when she needs to make purchases that will benefit her family. She cuts coupons, shops at Aldi, and catches items on sale.

In verse 15, she gets up late at night and prepares dinner for her household. In verses 21 and 22, she is noted for her ability to make fine clothing for her family, and verse 27 says she lovingly watches over her home. She has learned skills that benefit her family, and

she lovingly exercises those skills. As her husband and children observe the tender and adept care that she demonstrates, they are moved to praise her.

Some people may assert that this kind of woman doesn't even exist. Let's face it. There are women who don't embody the wives that God wants them to be. To make matters worse, their husbands aren't what God desires them to be either. Then life gets messy. The roles of the two mates are so intricately entwined that they need each other to function in a healthy and holistic manner.

But the point of Scripture providing all of these details is to set forth an example for godly women to emulate. The central idea of Proverbs 31 is that a wife is to be an asset to her husband and not a liability.

In stark contrast to such potential negativity, the Bible says that a good wife is trusted and revered by her husband. And contrary to what the skeptics may think, there are some very good examples of the virtuous wife.

You may have heard of the late Edward Victor Hill who is better known as Dr. E. V. Hill. Once at a pastors' conference I heard him say, "Well, I have had two wives." He explained that one was in heaven and one was on earth and that was far enough apart to keep him out of trouble. Then, referring to his deceased first wife, he said, "But I want to tell you about my baby." At that time he was combating with the gangs in Los Angeles. Someone sent

Dr. Hill an ominous note that read, “We’re going to kill you. We’re going to put a bomb in your car.”

The next morning he awoke to the scrumptious aroma of the breakfast that was waiting for him. As he sat down to eat, he wondered, *Where’s my baby?* When she finally entered the room, he told her that he was getting ready to go out. He said, “Don’t worry, if I blow up, you’ll be well taken care of.” Then she handed him his keys and told him the car wasn’t going to blow up. She informed him, “I went out this morning and started the car to make sure that there was no bomb about to go off.” Amazingly, she was willing to put her own life on the line to save his.

Here is another good illustration. It is said that Winston Churchill’s marriage was considered one of the best examples of trust and loyalty in England. Before he would give a speech in the House of Commons, he wouldn’t even begin until he got a sign from her. The story goes that later on in life he was asked the question in an interview, “Mr. Churchill, if you could live again, what would you want to be?” With a twinkle in his eye, Churchill simply replied, “Mrs. Churchill’s next husband.” What a testimony!

These women exemplified what Proverbs 31:12 has to say about a woman who loves her man: “She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

Attitude Matters

Not only will an excellent wife treat her husband well by her deeds and actions, he will reap the benefit of her righteous attitude. Her approach will be that she only wants the best for her husband. Can you see how a woman of virtue functions as a channel through which God sends blessings?

Notice also that the Scripture says the virtuous woman will regard her husband in this way all of her life, not his life. In other words, after he is dead and gone, the memory of that man will still dwell within her. She will honor him even when she's not in his presence.

Her Preparation

The reason a woman can display such a confident and supportive demeanor is because of the innate ability she possesses. Here we get a glimpse of the circumstances surrounding God's preparation for her. It tells me that, even before Adam was aware of his incomplete state, God anticipated his need and planned for it. Here is how the Word of God describes the situation before Eve came into being.

“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:19–20)

We see that Adam’s wife was in the mind of God before she was ever in the arms of Adam. Moreover, Adam was numb to his need until God had him name the animals in nature. As he went through the garden doing what God had commanded him, it became apparent that none of the creatures could match Adam’s intellect, character, ethical abilities, and spirituality. Adam was faithful in his service to God, and it was time for him to be rewarded.

I cannot help but wonder, *Was he looking for a woman? What did he know about a spouse?* I suppose we will never know. But one thing the Bible does tell us—there was not one found for him. Without a doubt, God created that desire in Adam. Here is the principle. He was committed to God first and, as a result of his dedication, God added to him a companion for life.

FOR SINGLES ONLY

This is a note specifically for the women who are single. Please know that you’ve got to be very careful and wait for the one God has prepared for you. Otherwise, if you’re too impatient and impulsive to wait, you will wind up taking the first thing coming with two legs and a pair of pants. Let me caution you. If you do that, you’d

better check first to see if there's a wallet in his pocket. And that it's not empty.

I've said this to single women before, and it's important enough to repeat. You need to get off of the yellow brick road of relationships, messing with scarecrows, folks that have no brains. Stop playing around with tin men who don't have a heart. Stop wasting your time with cowardly lions; by that I mean, men who will slap you. Otherwise, you'll wind up looking for love in all the wrong places.

Prayerfully, you will be able to avoid the inherent trauma of being in such dire circumstances. As a single person, your primary focus should be on your ministry to God. It is out of the context of your service to Him that God is going to do for you whatever you need Him to do. But the reality is, many of you are seeking a spouse instead of seeking to serve and that's what will prevent you from finding the right mate. You have never been instructed to search for a spouse. The Bible tells us that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart. Our hearts will desire what delights God. You will want what God wants and what He wants for you. If you're not careful you could get an Ishmael instead of an Isaac because God is only going to give His best when you put Him first.

Furthermore, be cautious of folks who tell single people that they shouldn't want anybody but God. The implication is that

God wants them to be single. (Have you noticed that this usually comes from married people?) Guess what? Adam had God—and God provided a companion for him. After all, God is the One who said it wasn't good for man to be alone. Following God's order is what's really important. Scripture says to

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

It doesn't say to seek only God; just seek Him first and He will fulfill the desires of your heart.

This is what preparation is all about. When you're standing in a position of righteousness, then He'll line you up with the right mate for you. So, don't worry, it's all right to want to be married; it's not all right to pick your own spouse. Trust me, you'll mess it up. Just do it God's way and you'll get the right results.

Her Process

Everything that God does is for a reason and all things are done in the proper season. Have you ever noticed that He takes us through a process before we receive a blessing? That's God's way. The process He went through to create the woman followed this same pattern. Here's what happened.

“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and

he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:21–22)

Notice the method God used in the process of making the woman. He put Adam to sleep. My good friend Kenny Grant once said and I will repeat it: “Man will never fully understand woman because we were asleep when God made her.” I believe that’s about as good an explanation that we’ll ever have in describing the differences between the two sexes.

But God knew that we would need each other. Scripture says here that God produced the woman from the man by taking one of Adam’s ribs and fashioning Eve. The Bible actually says that God *yatsa* the woman for the man. The Hebrew word *yatsa* can be translated into the word “built.” So God literally built the woman for the man, according to His divine design. Then He presented her to Adam.

Remember, everything else that God created came from the dirt, including Adam. But the woman did not. This time God used a piece of the man’s flesh and bone.

Now, here is a divine rule of which women must be aware. Every man who has a wife or will have one in the future must be willing to give something up because Adam had to give something up. He gave up a rib, according to the Bible, and with that action God

established this fundamental principle that actually applies to both men and women: Give to God what you have as a sacrifice and allow God to give you what you need in return.

For example, recall the account of the fish and the loaves in John 6:5–13. Jesus took the boy's fish and loaves, multiplied them, and fed the multitude. Although it wasn't enough, it was all that the boy had to offer. Through this object lesson, Jesus demonstrated that God is not concerned about what you don't have; rather, He's concerned about whether you are willing to offer whatever you do have. In His own way and timing, He will increase it and give you back more than you could even imagine.

You may be feeling overwhelmed and at the end of your rope, you may be feeling as though you can't go on. Give God those feelings; He can handle them for you. If you need to give Him your pride or your will, do that and the God of all grace will strengthen your relationship and increase your marriage in wonderful ways. Or, if you are a single woman, offer Him your heart and He will grant you the desires of your heart.

As I study Scripture, whether the thing you have to give is something good or bad—it works both ways. God will take what you put on the altar and give you back whatever you need. You can rest assured that it will be more than what you sacrificed for Him.

Think *about it*:

1. Are you satisfied with the personal relationship that you share with the Lord?
2. In what ways can you make improvements that will bring you closer to God?
3. Based on the Proverbs 31 description, tell in your own words what it means to be a virtuous woman.
4. How well do you understand your husband's needs? Do you think that you were adequately prepared to be the wife that your husband needs?
5. In what areas do you think you could better satisfy the expectations your husband has for you as his wife?
6. Have you prayed consistently for God to give you a strategy that will change you in these areas?

Live *by it*:

Dear Heavenly Father, give your precious ones Your bountiful grace as they show a desire to follow Your divine blueprint. As the most gracious Helper that You are, You embody the divine design that You desire all women to emulate. Teach them how to become the helper and support their husbands need so that You can channel blessings to their mates and bless their marriages, in Christ's name. So be it.