

Husbands and Wives

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Date: 13 March 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. We are continuing our series in 1 Peter today, and our text is chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. That's page 954 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to open one of the Bibles. We will have the passage on the screen, but let me encourage you to open one of the Bibles because this morning we're going to be looking at a couple of other key texts across Scripture that will help us to better understand what Peter is saying here. I wonder if you've ever had the experience of walking into a room and stumbling into the middle of a conversation. This happened to me the other day, and I heard one of my kids say, go hang a salami. I'm a lasagna hog.

And I thought, what? Go hang a salami. I'm a lasagna hog. I mean, I agree that lasagna is delicious. But what's so bad about salami? Well, it turns out my kids weren't talking about foods they really liked or disliked. They were talking about palindromes, words or phrases that are spelled the same forwards and backwards. And as it turns out, go hang a salami. I'm a lasagna hog is actually spelled the same forwards and backwards. I don't know who actually figured that out, but it's pretty funny. Now, okay, 1 Peter 3, 1 through 7 is not a palindrome, but it can feel a bit like walking into the middle of a conversation, except that what we first overhear strikes us not as silly, but as offensive. In what we're about to read, Peter is giving specific instructions to husbands and wives. But in order to understand what he means and how it applies to us today, we have to get the context of the broader biblical conversation. This context that starts in Genesis 1 and 2 and runs through the gospel and ends in the new creation. Then we can come back to Peter's specific context and see what he's really saying to his beloved friends and how to live for Jesus in the context of their marriages. So I'm going to read 1 Peter 3, 1 through 7. Then we'll step back and consider context. And then we'll return to Peter and see if we can understand a bit better what Peter has to say to us today. So look with me at 1 Peter 3, 1 through 7. Peter writes this. He says,

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external, the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry or the clothing you wear, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. And you are her children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs, with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. Okay, let's pray.

Father, help us today to understand what you have for us in your word. Clear away, God, the false misunderstandings and misapplications, and help us hear your life-giving voice afresh in this text. For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. So I mentioned that in order to understand what Peter says here, we have to take a look at the broader biblical conversation about marriage across Scripture.

[3 : 47] But before we even do that, I want to express some sorrow as we begin today. Because the reality is, is that in the history of the church, texts like this have been misused and abused to prop up false, sinful, and destructive views of women, of men, of marriage, and of God. And these false, sinful, destructive views aren't just in the far past, but some of them in our recent day.

Some of you here maybe have been in churches or have read books that justified unhealthy and ungodly and unbiblical views of women and men, of marriage, and of God on the basis of texts like these.

And I want to say publicly on behalf of the elders here that we are opposed with every fiber of our being to any form of toxic masculinity or patriarchy or supposed headship and submission where women are abused, demeaned, or objectified by men. But I want to say something personally too.

This is a subject that is not just a theoretical one for me.

Now, I don't often get super personal in front of you all while I'm preaching because ultimately I'll cry like a baby, as I'm going to start doing right now. But I want you to think ultimately in these moments of preaching, and I know Matt shares this, you know, ultimately we want you not to think about us, but to think about God and what God says in His Word. So, you know, we don't often get like super-duper transparent. But, you know, on this topic of women and men in marriage, this is one that hits pretty close to home for me because, not just because I'm married, and not just because I have a daughter and two sons who God might call one day to be married, but because I personally know what it's like when marriages are destroyed by abuse and harm. When I was a toddler, my parents' marriage was ended because of those things. My mother had to separate and divorce my father, so she had to remove herself and her three young boys from a toxic marriage and a destructive relationship.

[6 : 04] And I'm actually very proud of my mother for her courage in doing that. So, this is a personal topic for me because I've seen the effects and the pain firsthand of a destructive marriage. And in this church, we will do our best to teach God's Word rightly and faithfully and to stand with those who are oppressed and abused. Now, by God's grace, He used my mother's courage and the ending of my parents' marriage to actually convict my father of his sin and to lead him to Christ. My parents didn't get back together, but they both remarried, and they went on to have healthy godly marriages. Not perfect by any means, but by His grace, God took what was broken and made something new. He restored the years that the locust had eaten, as the prophet Joel says.

So, this is a topic that I think is very real and very personal, not just for me, but I know it is for all of us. So, with that being said, we want to come to Peter's text this morning, acknowledging that, but also putting it into broader biblical context so we can actually hear what Peter is saying through all of the noise that there has been in the history of the church. So, let's take a look then at this broader biblical picture of marriage, this broader picture of marriage that was created by this God who is on the side of the oppressed and who can make things new. And that story starts right in Genesis chapter 1. So, turn with me in the Pew Bible, you guessed it, to page 1.

Page 1 of your Bible, and we're going to pick up in verse 26. Now, the last couple of weeks, Matt has put some verses on the screen, but we're just going to look at them because there's only a handful, and I want us to just see them for ourselves right in the Scriptures. So, Genesis chapter 1, let me read verses 26 and 28. Okay, then God said, let us make man, or humanity, in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Now, okay, Genesis 1, verse 1, through Genesis 2, verse 3, is like a symphonic kind of introduction to the whole of Scripture. It's this kind of set piece, exalting God as the creator, and sustainer, and king of all things. And at the pinnacle of God's creative work, God makes humanity, male and female, in his own image. And now notice from this text that both men and women share equally in being image bearers of God. They are equally, in this text, blessed by God, and they share equally in the mission that God gives to humanity.

So everything that the Bible will say about women and men starts here. It starts here, and it never leaves it behind. In dignity, in worth, in mission, in purpose, both men and women are co-regents with the king, his image bearers on earth. Now, think about how radical that would have sounded in the ancient world, where men and women were not viewed as equals. But the Bible begins by telling us the true story of men and women, and by casting a vision that honors and dignifies both in the highest possible way. Okay, that's where we begin. Now turn to Genesis chapter 2. After this kind of symphonic introduction, the story begins. And the story begins by describing not just the first sort of human couple, but also the first human marriage. After creating the man and putting him in the garden, after explaining to this man the mission that God has for humanity to work and to keep the garden, that is to bring out all of its creative potential to be sort of culture shapers and formers to the glory of God, God says this in verse 18. Then the Lord God said, it's not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. And the man said, this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

[10 : 59] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now this verse, Genesis 2, 24, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. That becomes the kind of key verse about marriage in the whole Bible.

Jesus will come back to it when clarifying what marriage is all about. The apostles will come back to it when unpacking what marriage is all about. But I want to point out a misunderstanding that can sometimes distort what the Bible is really saying about men and women in marriage. And that's found in verses 18 and verse 20 in a little word translated helper. Now I don't know about you, but the word helper in my ears doesn't really sound all that great, right? I remember when I was a kid, and I would sometimes get to be my stepdad's helper when he worked on our cars. I was actually really helpful about that because I actually learned a couple things. But to be his helper pretty much meant that like I held the flashlight and handed him the screwdrivers, right? While he did the real work.

I got to be the helper. Ah, okay. But the Hebrew word for helper, ezer, it means nothing of that sort.

In fact, you know, in the rest of the Old Testament, the word ezer is used most often of God himself. God is Israel's helper in the sense that he comes with strength to Israel in their hour of need, to supply what they lack, to accomplish what they cannot do on their own.

God gives humanity a mission in Genesis 2, and Adam cannot complete it on his own. For the first time in Genesis, right there, we're told that something is not good. After a whole symphonic introduction of saying everything is good, we're told something's not good. Adam, it's not good that he's alone. You know, a better sort of translation maybe of this word ezer might be strong ally.

[12 : 57] One who brings their gifts, their strengths, their powers to accomplish together what you could not alone. And that means whatever the rest of the Bible has to say about marriage, women are not inferior to men. They are different. There is a beautiful diversity between the sexes, but there is no inferiority. So here's what Genesis 1 and 2 say about men and women as a background to marriage. There's dignity, there's diversity, but there's no inferiority. Dignity and diversity without inferiority. Now, okay, there's a lot more we could say about Genesis 1 and 2. And after the service today, we're going to have a Q&A; afterwards, a good discussion time down in the lower level meeting room. So I'm sure you'll all have like a bazillion questions about what we talk about this morning. Come downstairs and we'll have a good conversation together. There's a lot more we could say about Genesis 1 and 2. But for the sake of time, I want to jump ahead to the New Testament.

We could stop at a number of places in the Gospels where Jesus talks about that key verse, Genesis 2 24. But I want to jump all the way into the New Testament letters, all the way to the book of Ephesians chapter 5. And that's page 919 in the Pew Bible, 919. And I want to jump into verse 31.

Ephesians 5 verse 31. This is the Apostle Paul talking about marriage. And you'll notice he brings up that key verse from Genesis again, Genesis 2 24. Ephesians 5 verse 31, page 919. I think it's actually all the way down in that right-hand column if you're looking at a Pew Bible. Paul picks up, he says, quoting Genesis, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, Paul says. And I'm saying that it refers to Christ in the church. So what is marriage, the Apostle's asking us? Well, according to Genesis 2 24, it's a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman. They leave, they hold fast or cleave and become one flesh. But what's it really all about? Paul's asking us. Is it for companionship?

Well, yes. Is it for procreation? Well, yes. But is that all? What's it really all about? Well, Paul says, look long enough. Stare down into the depths of this clear ocean water, and you'll see a profound mystery. And by mystery, Paul doesn't mean a sort of riddle that you can't figure out. He means something that was hidden, but now is coming to light. A surprise that was there all along, but only now in the light of the gospel can we truly see it. And the mystery is that marriage all along has been about Christ and the church. When a man and a woman in their dignity and diversity without any inferiority enter into a lifelong covenant, it refers to, Paul says, it's a picture, it's a sign, it's a display of Christ and the church. Imagine that. When God instituted marriage all the way back in Genesis chapter 2, that's what it was about the whole time.

Imagine we're in sort of a great hall, as it were. You know, it's filled with men and women, and there's talking, and there's laughter, and there's mutuality, and there's camaraderie.

[16 : 31] And then the music strikes up. A string quartet plays, and the dance floor opens. What is marriage? Marriage is when a man and a woman come together, step out onto the floor with their full dignity and diversity, and they begin a dance that displays to the world Christ and the church. That's marriage. But what does this dance look like? How do they do it?

Well, listen to what Paul says in verse 25 of Ephesians chapter 5. What are the dance steps? 525. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

So the husband in this dance, according to Paul, represents Christ. What does that mean? Well, it means that he leads the dance, but how? He does it by laying down his life, by giving himself up so that his wife might flourish. Do you remember Jesus in the Gospels?

He took all his authority and dignity, and what did he do with it? He washed his disciples' feet, and then he went to the cross to give his life as our ransom. And so husbands lay down their lives. They make it their aim to give themselves up so that their wives might truly flourish, just like Christ did for the church. Now listen to what Paul says to wives in this dance of marriage. Verse 22, wives, submit to your husbands, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. That is, Paul's saying, you're worshipping the Lord. Now out of that worship of the Lord, here's the dance step. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Okay, now, if you're like me, the word submit just rubs you in all the wrong ways, right? Can we just sort of agree to that this morning? We don't like the word submission. And I think because submission just sort of carries with it all of these overtones of subjection and rule and becoming less of a person and all of these sort of things. But remember, when Paul's using this word here, it's being defined within the dance of the gospel.

The wife is an azer, a strong ally. She doesn't come to this dance in weakness or inferiority, but in strength. And the headship of the husband is defined here, not as some sort of absolute rule of a despot or some military commander. No. How does Paul define headship? Headship's defined by the caring love of our Savior. Paul says the husband is the head of the wife. But how? Even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. So submission here does not mean some sort of unthinking obedience to a husband's rule. No, no, no, no, no. Rather, it looks more like the grateful acceptance of his care, an honoring of his Christ-like lead in the dance.

[20 : 07] And this kind of submission is not forced, but it's freely given. It's given in love. It's given in strength. Now, there are a lot of things that submission does not mean, right? Submission does not mean that wives give sort of unflinching sort of deference to their husbands and everything.

Submission does not mean that, you know, you don't talk about decisions and you don't disagree with each other. Submission contains all of those things because you're strong allies. But it does mean in this dance of marriage that there is a loving yielding, a kind of grateful acceptance of that care along which this particular dance of marriage works. But keep in mind, all of this grows out of the mutuality of joint image bearers. Brothers and sisters in Christ, co-heirs of the kingdom, freedom. You don't leave behind the fact that you're brothers and sisters in Christ first.

And it should be said that there's a lot of freedom about how this dance sort of works itself out in practice, right? Isn't it interesting when we come to a text like this, we have all sorts of questions. What about this? What about this? What about this? How do I do this? How do I do that?

And you know what? The New Testament is pretty silent about that. It gives us some basic dance steps and then says, go, work it out together in community. As the husband leads in sacrifice, as the wife submits in strength, the actual steps might look a lot different from marriage to marriage.

And God, I think, delights to see his gospel, this picture of Christ in the church, kind of reflected and refracted in all the beautiful distinctions of each particular couple. You know, for some of us, it might look like a waltz. For others of us, it might look like a breakdance. And that's okay, right?

[21 : 59] Okay, now that's the biblical background. That's the biblical kind of conversation, as it were, when we step into the room of 1 Peter 3. So let's turn back to page 954 in the Pew Bible.

954. With that kind of biblical understanding of marriage in mind, let's hear what Peter has to say. And the first thing we notice is that Peter is applying all of what we just talked about to a particular situation. And that situation is, what do you do when your spouse is not a believer?

Peter's writing first in verses 1 through 6 to wives, wives whose husbands do not obey the Word. And remember, for Peter, obeying the Word is how he talks about conversion to Christ. We've seen that a number of times in 1 Peter, that the way Peter talks about becoming a Christian and giving your life to Christ, he says that's obedience to the Word. So he's talking to wives whose husbands are not followers of Jesus. What should they do? These husbands don't know anything about the dance of marriage around the gospel. Most of them probably, you know, some of them, many of them maybe don't even believe in the basic biblical truth of male and female dignity and diversity without any inferiority.

What should these wives do? Having come to faith in Jesus, having learned these wonderful things, are all bets off for them? Should they leave the marriage altogether?

Well, remember what Peter's thesis is for this part of the letter, back in chapter 2, verses 11 and 12.

[23 : 38] In verse 12, he says, Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Okay, how do wives do that in marriage to an unbeliever? Peter says, As best you can, stay in the dance. Be subject to your own husbands. And the word there is actually submit, the same one that Paul uses in Ephesians 5. Bring your strengths to the marriage and gratefully accept his care as best you can. Now, obviously, there are some very clear things that submission does not mean. And we see all of these right here in 1 Peter, right? You know, submission cannot mean just agreeing with your husband about everything, right? Because fundamentally, these wives do not disagree with their husbands about everything, correct? Right? Of course, if a husband tells you wives to do something that God forbids, or if he tells you to stop doing that something God commands, then you must obey God and not another human. And of course, if there is abuse in the marriage, wives have every right to separate, find a safe place, and seek help from all the necessary authorities. Peter is not condoning or excusing or giving any leeway for any kind of abuse in marriage.

But with those things clearly in mind, Peter is saying, as much as you're able, stay in the dance. Respect him, honor him, gladly receive his care. And as you do this, Peter says, God can use it as a means to win him for Christ. Perhaps you've had this experience.

You've shared Christ with your unbelieving spouse. You've done your best to tell them the good news about who Jesus is and what he's done. But maybe they don't want to hear it. Maybe they've even ridiculed you for it. If that's the case, Peter says, then let your life speak. Let them see your conduct that is pure and respectful, as verse 2 says. And the word respectful there most likely refers not to just, not to respecting the husband, actually, but to respecting God. It's amazing.

Almost every commentator I read says when Peter says respectful conduct, he means respect God. That's your conduct. So, Peter is saying, God is first in your life. And as you live a life that honors God, as you worship God above all else, that will be your greatest witness to your unbelieving spouse who doesn't want to hear it anymore. Of course, none of that is easy, is it? Being married to an unbelieving spouse is a painful and complicated road. You know, maybe you pray for years, but their heart is still hard, and you get tired, and you feel alone. If that is you today, listen to God's words of comfort. Psalm 34, verse 18 says, the Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and he saves the crushed in spirit.

[26 : 59] Your Lord has promised to be your God, to never leave you or forsake you, and he will continue to carry you and care for you no matter what.

So, be strengthened and be comforted by the Lord's word to you today as you walk this hard road. But there are some dangers on the road. Mary Wilson Hanna, who's a theologian and an author, I recently read an essay of hers on this passage of 1 Peter, and she says that, you know, what Peter's talking about here or addressing here are some temptations that can crop up along the way.

And the first temptation, she says, is the temptation to be distracted by the external and the material. In verses 3 and 4 of our text, Peter reminds his readers not to find their adornment in what they wear, but rather in their increasing Christ-likeness. Now, in these verses, Peter isn't saying that fashion or clothing or combing your hair is necessarily evil or bad, right? If that were the case, if Peter said, don't let your adornment be the things you wear, that would make for very awkward church services, right? Okay, so he's not saying that clothing or fashion or looking nice or taking care of yourself is bad. What's he talking about? Well, we know what he's talking about. He's saying, don't make that your identity because that's not what truly adorns you. It's not where real beauty or strength is found.

Rather, it's found in being formed more and more in the character of Christ. A gentle and quiet spirit, he says. And you know that that gentle and quiet spirit, where does Peter get that from? The Lord Jesus. In Matthew 11, 28, or excuse me, 11, 29, our Lord says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. And because this is a primary characteristic of Jesus, that's why we see these same virtues, gentleness and quietness commended for all believers in the New Testament, not just wives.

Jesus pronounces a blessing on the gentle or meek in Matthew 5, 5. Peter will exhort all Christians to show gentleness in 1 Peter 3, 15. Similarly, Paul says quietness is an ideal for the whole Christian community in 1 Timothy 2, 2, as well as for individual Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4, 11, where he tells Christians to aspire to live quietly. So, a gentle and quiet spirit is something we must all desire more and more, men and women. But for those married to unbelieving spouses who are walking the road of loneliness or discontentment, it's a particularly relevant virtue. When we are tempted to fill our emptiness with material things or with outward appearances, Peter encourages us to find in Christ that peaceful center, that gentleness, that quietness that is precious in God's sight.

[30 : 13] The second temptation that Mary Hannah points out in her essay is the temptation to fear and anxiety, and we see that in verses 5 and 6 of Peter here. Peter encourages wives of unbelieving husbands to do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. Of course, humanly speaking, these wives had reasons to be afraid. In the Greco-Roman world of Peter's day, a wife who didn't share her husband's gods was seen as actually upsetting the social order. This was creating topsy-turvy chaos. I mean, how would a husband react if his wife refused to bow to his false gods? How would her neighbors react? Lots to be anxious about.

But in the face of these fears, Peter points to the examples of the holy women who hoped in God. Like Sarah, these women stayed in the dance as best they could. At one point in Genesis 18, Sarah refers to Abraham as her Lord, which was a term of respect and honor at the time. And of course, we have different ways of doing that today, right? I don't think many of us are going to run home and call our spouses Lord, right? You know, that would be more than a little weird. But the point is, is that Sarah showed courageous and strong submission to Abraham even when the road before them was uncertain, even when God told them that they were going to have children in their old age.

Probably a scary thing. And the thing that fueled this courageous submission, the thing that kept Sarah in the dance, was hope in God. Again, the God who promises to keep us and be near to us in every trial. The God whose rod and staff comfort us even when we walk through the darkest valley so that we need fear no evil. The God who sets a table before us in the presence of our enemies. The God who promises that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. The God who promises that we'll dwell in his house forever. And this good shepherd is Jesus himself, who rebuked the wind and the waves and said, we need not be afraid. And who promised that no one would be able to pluck us from his hand.

Again, let it be clearly said from this pulpit that this is not a just, what Peter is saying here is not in any way telling wives to stay in an abusive marriage. No. But he is saying, as best you're able, stay in the dance. Don't be afraid. Do good. Be strong.

Peter then turns in verse 7 to husbands. And things shift a little in this verse because Peter seems to be talking now to a situation where both spouses are believers. They are co-heirs of the grace of life.

[33 : 15] But one would imagine that if Peter were addressing a husband with an unbelieving wife, his basic advice would be the same as verses 1 through 6. Stay in the dance. And what would that look like for a husband?

Love your wife the way Christ loves the church. Lead in such a way that you give yourself up for her that she might flourish. Even if she doesn't believe, perhaps you will win her without a word by your respectful and pure conduct. But as we said, verse 7 seems to envision now a believing couple.

And what is Peter's instruction? First, he says, live with your wives in an understanding way. Literally, it's according to knowledge. In other words, he's saying that husbands must really know their wives.

husbands must take the time and care and engagement to really understand them as best they can. Husbands must be ever curious and ever interested in their wives. What do they like or dislike? What are their passions or dreams? What are they afraid of? What are they hopeful for? Who are their friends?

Who can't they stand? Now, some of you might be thinking, hey, look, I've been married a long time. I don't need to stay curious about my spouse. I know everything about her. But you know, sometimes our understanding of our spouses are like an old map, right? Ten years ago, they were spot on the money. I could have gotten anywhere in New Haven with that map ten years ago, right? But things change over time. New neighborhoods crop up. New roads are built. Old roads are closed. You might be surprised at how quickly your map gets out of date. And just think, how well does Christ know you?

[35 : 02] Christ knows you perfectly. Jesus has like the Google map of your soul. It's always up to date, right? He knows you perfectly, and that's why he can perfectly love you. Husbands, love your wives the way Christ loves the church. And at the very least, that means keep growing in your knowledge of them. Live with them in an understanding way. And you can't do that if you don't really know them.

How much time do you spend on your hobbies or just mindlessly poking around on your phone? What if you used as much time showing a genuine, curious interest in your wife, getting to know her better? How much better would you be able to love her?

But then Peter says that husbands must not just only understand their wives, but must also honor them. Verse 7 picks up and says, show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. Now, of course, we have to ask, in what sense is the wife the weaker vessel in marriage? Well, again, this is why the biblical background about marriage is so important. We know from Genesis 1 and 2 that weaker vessel cannot mean that she's inferior. As image bearers of God, there's nothing inherently weaker intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually about women. They are co-regents of creation. And as Peter says right here, they're co-heirs of the grace of life. So, weaker can't mean those types of things.

Some have wondered if Peter is making a reference to the fact that in general, a wife is physically weaker than her husband, and that's possible. But I think the better understanding is that in Peter's day, and in most cultures, right, women were socially and culturally in a position of greater weakness.

Both husbands and wives, both men and women, are vessels, right? And that term in the Bible just means you're a created creature of God. With dignity, you belong to your creator. But in Peter's day, culturally, socially, women were in the weaker position. They didn't have the same rights and privileges as men. They weren't afforded the same status and freedom. They were culturally more despised than men. But for a Christian husband, the gospel turns all of that on its head. In the world, right, we honor the things that are supposedly strong. But what does the gospel say? Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians? God chooses the weak things of this world to shame the strong. God chooses what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. This is the very heart of the gospel of grace. God humbles the exalted and exalts the humble. On the cross, Jesus became utterly weak so that the weak might be made strong. So, for husbands in Peter's day, the fact that wives were socially and culturally in a weaker position was all the more reason to show them countercultural honor, to lift them up, to reaffirm their God-given dignity. Husbands, honor your wives.

[38 : 13] Don't just know your wife. Prize her. Tell her what you appreciate and admire in her. Celebrate her strengths. Accept her influence and wisdom. Let her change your mind. She is your strong ally. Let her know that that's true. And then Peter ends this passage where it seems like a strange warning. He says, Know and honor your wife so that your prayers may not be hindered. In other words, God cares so much about how husbands treat wives that if they refuse to know and honor their wives, God will refuse them.

In other words, ultimate things are at stake here. Do you want a deeper communion with God, husbands? Do you want to launch out into the deeps of God's being in prayer? Peter's saying you can't do it unless you make knowing and honoring your wife your priority. Until you do that, your spirituality will be a fake and a sham, a lifeless, powerless, prayerless thing.

But in this warning, there's also a promise that through knowing and honoring your wife, you will get not just the joy of deeper communion with her, but of deeper communion with God as well.

Now, I know this sermon's been long, but let me conclude with this. What is it that helps us stay in the dance of marriage even when it gets hard? And what helps us to keep on the path of faithfulness when we wish we were married, but we aren't? What helps us when our marriages fall apart and end and we're broken? When both marriage and singleness are hard, where do we turn? The answer in many ways is found in how the biblical story about marriage ends.

In the book of Revelation, the great feast at the end of the age that inaugurates the new creation is described as a marriage supper. No matter what marriage looks like for us in this age, whether it's great or hard or utterly broken or if you're not married at all, the story ends the same for all of us in Christ. We gather around His table and we feast with our perfect bridegroom, our heavenly spouse who will welcome us with joy and He will delight over us with singing and the joy will know no end.

[40 : 44] And everything that was good in our earthly marriages will find their supreme consummation. Everything that was broken in our marriages will find their healing in the heart of every believer, married or single, will find complete union. They'll find the eternal dance that it was all about, for which marriage was only a sign, that deep, eternal, unbreakable love between Christ and His church.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask that as we consider these things, You would fill us with Your Spirit and give us the strength to walk with Jesus in the callings that You've given us.

God, I pray that You would help us to be resilient and strong as we live into our marriages, and I pray that our church community would be a place that is full of love and encouragement, both for marrieds and for single people.

Lord, as we run this race together, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.