

Wives Loved by Grace-Energized Husbands: Who Love Like Jesus Ephesians 5:25

As we open to Ephesians 5, think about the end of Creation Week, as God looked over the entire scope of the Universe He fashioned, only one element was “not good”. It was man. Adam was alone, and God said that wasn’t good. So God crowned the six stellar days of creation with Eve, the perfect partner and friend for Adam. When God designed marriage, it was to perfectly complete those He had fashioned in His image. God established a vital truth: a designer marriage would be one lived the way God designed it to be. Sadly, most marriages are not designer marriages.

This morning if you are married, or ever want to be—it would be wise to seek out having a marriage as God the Designer wants it to be. In modern society families are drawn to buying “designer” clothes, or living in “designer” homes. That means clothes or houses that were specifically designed by a master at the art of clothing or home comforts. Usually, designer property and clothes are better made, more beautiful, and much different than run of the mill, average things. But often those same people who prefer everything else to be top of the line, neglect to see that at the deepest level of their life, home and family they are missing the best “designed” element—a designer marriage.

Today, as we celebrate marriage, and the relationship God designed for us in His image to have, do you have one of those “designer” marriages?

Any believer, at any stage of life or marital status can cultivate a marriage as God designed it to be. That means a marriage that follows the layout and plans fashioned by the Designer Himself. All the codes, passwords, and instructions to access a marriage as God designed it to be, are in this Book, God's Word the Bible. So the first question we all need to ask ourselves is:

Do you have a Designer Marriage?

The focus of God’s plan and design for marriage is simple; and the description is short. God says that a designer marriage starts with a man who will love and lead His wife in the same way Christ loves His Church. Please open there with me to Ephesians 5:25-33, and **stand as we listen to God**, the Designer of Marriage, share that design planned by Him, to make every marriage good.

*Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ** also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 **So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies**; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as the Lord does the church**. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church**. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Pray

As we comb the Scriptures we find that marriage is the crowning point of creation. God's Word begins with a wedding in the paradise called Eden, and ends with a marriage banquet. Marriages as God designed them become wonderful, joy filled havens in an increasingly emotionally empty, tenderness desolate, and relationally hopeless world.

As believers, all husbands are to be growing representations of Christ. That means that born-again husbands will seek to love and lead like Jesus. Few words can describe the sheer delights of marriage lived in this manner—one day at a time—just as God designed it to be!

Descriptions of God-Designed Marriages

If you are carefully following the instructions in the Scriptures, here is what God designed your marriage to be. We can each check these Scriptural portraits to see how we're doing in our marriage:

- A God-designed marriage is one we enjoy so much that for the past 4,000 years godly men *get so deeply in love with the wife God blessed them to have, they can't hide their complete attraction to their wife*—just like Isaac and Rebekah got caught "sporting" (Genesis 26:8, KJV).
- A God-designed marriage is *such a wonderful gift* that, like Jacob, waiting for your bride seven years, even at the cost of hard labor, would seem but a moment (Genesis 29:20).
- A God-designed marriage is like *a joyful river of intoxicating blessings* (Proverbs 5:18-19); that becomes like *a fruitful vine delightfully growing* around two covenant-joined lives (Psalm 128:3).
- A God-designed marriage is *an endless subscription to regularly delivered packages* of goodness and favor from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).
- A God-designed marriage gives the *complete security of a trusted companion*—with whom we share a God honoring, not to be broken, life-long covenant (Malachi 2:14-15).

All who are blessed in marriage can testify that what has just been described in the Scriptures really is exactly what we, who follow the Lord, experience. A Word-filled marriage becomes a no-regrets marriage, and reflects a small snapshot of the delights of heaven. Such a marriage is a living portrait of the perfect love of Jesus. No one can understand or plumb the depths of Christ's love, but this much we can know and experience by His grace.

Husbands, if I were to confidentially ask your wife would she know that Christ is the One whose love you seek to model? Does your wife know that you are striving to be more like Christ in your relationship with her? Would she understand that the pattern of God's Word is where you seek to head your marriage?

You will never get to your destination or goal unless you have a plan for getting there. All unattended marriages begin to slowly decline in closeness, intimacy, fruitfulness, and blessing. Therefore, it is a good idea to periodically have a refresher course in what the Lord has to say about our God-designed responsibilities as husbands. God simplifies the plan to just two aspects:

Grace-Energized Husbands Love and Lead

There are many scriptural passages that reveal what God has designed as a husband's responsibilities in marriage¹. God has given the plan in His Word, and the power by His grace empowering us by His Spirit living within. God clearly revealed, as you read through His Word, that the husband has two primary responsibilities to his wife.

1. Godly Husbands Love with Sacrifice (Ephesians 5:25-33) This week

Love is imperative. That is what the Spirit of God told Paul. Three times, in almost as many verses in Ephesians 5, Paul commands that husbands love their wives. Either they really need love, or we really have trouble loving. Either way—love is the imperative of a Word-filled husband's life. Paul says—to help us men who need guidance—to love our wives with the same attention we care for ourselves (v. 28, 33); and love them with the same selflessness as Jesus shows His bride, the church (v. 25).

We as men carefully protect and provide for the needs of our bodies. We do not deliberately do anything to harm ourselves. When we are hungry, we eat. When we are thirsty, we drink. When we are tired, we sleep. When we are in pain, we go to the doctor. When we cut ourselves, we wash the wound and bind it up. When we see an object coming toward us, we put up our hands for protection.

In other words, we very carefully and fervently nourish and cherish ourselves. So God says, "Love your wife as carefully as you care for yourself. Nourish her,

¹ Some key passages are: Genesis 3:16; Psalms 127-128; Proverbs 5:15-19; 1 Corinthians 7:3-4; Ephesians 5:23-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; and 1 Peter 3:7.

cherish her, protect her, satisfy her, provide for her, care for her, and sacrifice for her to the same degree and extent, and in the same manner, as you do for yourself.”

Wow! That is a high standard of love for a husband to keep, but there is an even higher standard God adds: “*Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25).

There is no mystery to how Christ loved. It is practical, plain, and simple. It is the record of the Bible. The Scriptures are the Word of Christ. In them we find countless examples of how Christ Jesus loved individuals. And it is with this caliber of love that we must sacrificially love our wife.

2. Godly Husbands Lead with Humility (Eph. 5:23; I Cor. 11:3) Next week

If we want to be godly leaders, and follow Christ’s example, we must lead our wives with love (Matthew 20:20-28). Like Christ patiently explained His ministry to the disciples, we must invest the time together with our wives to explain, discuss, and work through the way that we will fill our lives as a couple, based on the Designer’s plans in His Word.

Godliness is always the key. Nothing is more irresistible for a spiritual woman than a godly man. (And correspondingly, the woman clothed in a meek and quiet spirit is beautiful in God’s sight—and a godly husband’s.) Just as Jesus led in love, ministered with love, and expressed His love, so a godly leader must also be a passionate lover to his wife. So how can we as husbands love our wives with that quality of love?

So God says love and lead. He calls husbands to model that plan—not perfectly, but humbly, as fellow heirs of Christ. Peter explains more about sacrificial love and humble leadership in husbands than any other New Testament writer. Turn there to I Peter 3:7 for a moment. Peter explains that every husband needs to learn:

How to Love Our Wife With Christ’s Love

Jesus wants us to intimately know Him; He has promised that He is engaged to us (2 Cor. 11) and will soon return to marry us (Rev. 19)—all of which speaks of an intensely loving relationship. What are the elements of loving our wives like that? By God’s grace, a husband who believes that his primary ministry is his marriage will faithfully strive to be like Jesus wants him to be. What are the characteristics of such a man? Peter introduces us to the first of these five elements of Christlike love which God designed for marriages that operate according to His plans:

- First, *spiritual intimacy is the direction* a godly husband moves his marriage;
- Second, *godly romance is the glue* that God designed for keeping marriages closer and closer;

- Third, *genuine humility is the model* of Christ's love and must be for ours;
- Fourth, *growing transparency is the habit* of a godly follower of Christ; and
- Fifth, *humble service is the plan* for each day of his marriage.

Now, looking closely at Peter's explanation of God's design for marriage we see that in a husband who is committed to God's Word, first:

1. **Intimacy is his direction.** A husband who follows God's plans allows his wife to share his life fully, for they are "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7). This grace-energized husband will allow his wife to see and hear that he cherishes her, and delights in her as a person, just as Christ delights in His bride (as we saw in Eph. 5:28-29). Part of God's blueprint for marriage in Genesis 2 was that husbands by God's design are to cleave to their wives.

Cleaving means intimacy, which transcends sex; God expects husbands' lives to encompass every dimension of their beloved wives' lives—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. This requires a great amount of time just plain old "being around each other." Life so often becomes like a busy highway in which marital partners are always heading in different directions. We must choose to stop this treadmill lifestyle and take conscious steps to stay close to each other—in conversation, with eyes locked onto theirs, and most of all with our hearts listening and sharing.

That is cleaving—intimacy—and that should be our direction.

A husband that wants to grow closer to his wife, as God wants him to do, will assure his wife that he is listening, agreeing, and understanding on major issues. This strengthens spiritual harmony, displays a sensitive appreciation of a mate's physical and emotional responses, and encourages deeper sharing. As the discovery of similar values is strengthened, there can be even more imparted secrets.

Cherishing your wife like this leads to a lifelong delight in her as the one with whom you have developed a genuine understanding of goals, plans, desires, feelings, and fears. Tragically many wives have only developed this with either their mothers, sisters, and closest of friends; and similarly many husbands only come to this level with a cherished dad, or very close friend, and rarely with their life-long partner.

Husbands, decide right now that *intimacy is your direction*—you are going to pursue being closer than anyone else on Earth with your wife. The rewards will last forever!

2. **Romance is his glue.** A Word-filled husband understands that intimacy opens the way for the ultimate union of life with his wife. Sex is so much more than body; it is soul, spirit, heart, and mind.
- *Romance starts* at the kitchen sink when a husband steps up behind his wife (like he used to do in those first weeks of marriage) and says with all his heart, "You are all my dreams come true!"

- *Romance builds* by calling our wives sometime in the day and honestly expressing that we can't stop thinking about them, and just had to hear their voice.
- *Romance fills* the room with the fragrance of love. It is not a stop at a fast food drive-through.
- *Romance flavors* life like an exquisite five-course meal which causes you to savor every bite ... each course ... and, at the end of the meal, you sit back and feel satisfied—completely. **Always remember that sex is beautiful and godly because the Lord designed it, commanded it, and blesses it.** The Lord even inspired Solomon to use sexual terms to help us understand the beauty of Christ's love for His bride.

If a husband has a wrong view of the marital sexual relationship, he will have an unsatisfying marriage, an unfruitful personal life, and an unfulfilled family. God points out the importance of loving a wife intimately in what is often called the "newlywed verse":

"When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken" (Deuteronomy 24:5).

God in the New Testament again instructs husbands (and wives) to not be neglectful in loving each other in this manner:

"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:3-4, NIV).

"Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self control" (1 Corinthians 7:5, NIV).

A godly marriage is like a fountain that overflows with delights. But if that fountain is unkempt, the spring can get fouled, and the waters polluted. So the joys of those early days of marriage can fade fast. Therefore, never take your wife for granted.

- *Talk to her* often of the vital role she plays in every part of your life.
- *Share with her* often of your loving need of time with her.
- *Write to her* many love notes and cards—rather than regretfully wishing someday that you wish you'd done more.
- *Say to her* daily "I love you" in some manner every day!

Husbands, decide right now that *romance is your glue*—that you are going to stick closer than anyone else on Earth to your wife. The rewards will last forever!

3. **Humility is his goal.** Husbands in God designed marriages will lead as Jesus did, who Himself was, first and foremost, a servant. John 13:1-15 provides the same picture of leadership. Like Jesus, godly husbands are to lead by being servants.

Just as Jesus knelt and washed the feet of His disciples, we kneel in our hearts and humbly serve our wives. Our emblem of servant leadership is the basin and towel. And the greatest is the one who serves the most. This principle is found in 1 Peter 5:3: "... *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock*" Nothing can destroy a marriage faster than a husband's unyielding pride.

Why not practice saying some of these words: "*Honey, let me do the dishes tonight and you go sit down.*" Or rush after her and say, "*Why don't you go to the grocery store without the kids, I'll watch them for you and give you some time alone.*"

This simple, practical way of modeling humility is the very best way to love our wives (and children)! Paul told us that in our pursuit of Christ we must seek His attitude:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, ... He humbled Himself and became obedient [to the point of] death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5, 7a, 8).

Husbands, decide right now that *humility is your goal*—that you are going to become the greatest servant on Earth to your wife. The rewards will last forever!

4. **Transparency becomes his habit.** Husbands who live the way God designed them to live give their wives complete openness, communication, and vulnerability. Just as Jesus loved His own to the end, so we should love our wives. Just as Jesus will never leave us or forsake us, our wives need to know, feel, and hear from us of our lifelong loyalty. One of the best ways to encourage our wives is to clearly and regularly say how much they fulfill our lives.

I tell my wife, Bonnie, in every way I can think of, just how much I need her help, her counsel, her companionship, and her presence. If she loves my time—I give her time; if she loves gifts—I give her something she'll cherish; if she loves words—I give her quiet times of talking about whatever she needs to hear. It is vital that she feels all of her needs are being met in a loving manner.

Our marriage, over the years, has truly been deepened and enriched by the hundreds of godly couples we have met, known, loved, and learned from in the ministry. Here are four valuable lessons others have shared with us.

- **A Biblical Husband will: Ask for help.** Some husbands are like cavemen—they mumble, grunt, and go through life in a cloud of silence at home. But the way God wired wives is so that they want to be asked to help because they like to spend time with us. Therefore, we must leave the cave of silence, and let them know what we are doing. We should ask our wives to do things, even if it is something simple like holding a tool we need for a project or going

somewhere together to buy this or that. In other words, as our best friends, they should be included in our lives, words, and thoughts, and in doing this, it will make our wives feel like a valuable member of the team.

- **A Biblical Husband will: Share burdens.** A burden shared is cut in half; a blessing shared is doubled. God's math in marriage is perfect. We should share the load, as Galatians 6:2 directs. If we don't, we are robbing our precious wives of what God has made them to be—lifelong helpmeets. If we pray about our burdens with them, soon they will likely open up to us and share their own burdens, so that we can help them better bear them. A marriage is only complete when both partners love one another, fulfilling the law of love God calls us to obey.
- **A Biblical Husband will: Confess struggles.** No one can protect our integrity better than our wives. We therefore ought to share our struggles with them. For example, whenever I think a woman is too friendly, I talk about it with Bonnie. She can see things as a woman I never could as a man. As husbands, we should discuss with our wives any ideas, problems, fears, or pains we're going through because they want to share real areas of our lives—to know our struggles. Such shared burdens will bind hearts together like nothing else. The vulnerability of sharing honest struggles will do far more to affirm a vital partnership with our spouses than any fancy presents or expensive toys ever could. Our wives will know that we belong to them if we share our real problems in life!
- **A Biblical Husband will: Express needs.** Nothing motivates a godly wife more than knowing that her husband truly needs her. Remember—God designed women to be completers. Wives want to invest their time and strength in what will matter to their husbands in life. Nothing will warm their hearts more than to hear these words: "Honey I really need—(you fill it in)." Perhaps time to talk, time alone with them, to get away for a night, or whatever you really need. **Telling your wife how much you need her is the greatest thing you can do because she longs to meet your needs!**

Husbands, decide right now that *transparency will become your habit*—that you are going to become the closest friend on Earth to your wife. The rewards will last forever!

As believers, all husbands are to be growing representations of Christ. That means that born-again husbands will seek to love and lead like Jesus. Few words can describe the sheer delights of marriage lived in this manner—one day at a time—just as God designed it to be!