

The 21st Century Woman of Grace: Wives Loved by Titus 2 Husbands: Who Love as Christ Loved Ephesians 5:25-33

When the believers in Crete listened to God's Word, they heard the voice of God asking them to start making specific, personal choices to obey His Word. Sanctification is when believers respond to God's plan as stated in His Word, and as empowered by His Spirit.

To the Cretan believers, those choices were a personal response to God's desires for their personal lives, their marriages, and their families.

The pathway God asked them to follow in Christ's church was absolutely revolutionary from their perspective, but from God's perspective it was just going back to the pathway He presented in the Garden of Eden. The Titus 2:4 godly older woman's lessons: instructing younger women to be the closest companions and friends to their husbands, was just:

Getting Back to the Original Settings

Titus 2 women of grace are called to live and teach about marriages that are reset to the original settings, to the relationship with their husbands that God established at Creation.

When the Spirit of God directed Paul to write these words we are reading, it was a return to 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 the original marriage, it was the perfectly completion of those He had fashioned in His image. God established a vital truth: a fulfilling, harmonious marriage could be one lived the way God designed it to be. Sadly, most marriages are not operating the way they were designed. But God does offer a service call, and He can reset any marriage to the original settings.

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.

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 I understand that:

Marriage was Designed by God

The focus of God's plan and design for marriage is simple; and the description is short. God says that His intentions for marriage are that men love their wives 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 was 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 a world that is increasingly: **emotionally** empty, **tenderness** desolate, and **relationally** hopeless.

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!

Marriages as God Designed them to be

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.

There are many scriptural passages that reveal what God has designed as the 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)

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).

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, 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).

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

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,

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.

and work through the way that we will fill our lives as a couple, based on His Word.

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 Christ is the example we are to follow. Why not start today? The Gospels are filled with Christ giving us the pattern for how to love and lead.

Here are just a few of the actions of Christ reduced down to:

Simple Choices to Model Christ to Our Wives

What are some ways Christ disciplines us that we can use to help our wives also be conformed to the image of Christ?

1. Christ Guided His disciples Into Truth— We Must Guide Our Wives Into Truth.

“[When] He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak of His own [authority], but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare [it] to you” (John 16:13-14).

We must first discipline ourselves to hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate upon the Word regularly in order to effectively disciple. We will then know the Word sufficiently enough so that our wives can learn from us, as directed in 1 Corinthians 14:35: “If they [wives] want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home”

2. Christ Prayed for His Disciples— We Must Pray for Our Wives.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. ... [Christ] always lives to make intercession for them” (John 17:20; Hebrews 7:25b).

Christ faithfully prays that the Father will protect us from Satan and his schemes, and set us apart for God’s service (John 17:15-17). What a comfort! Our wives will likewise feel comforted to know that we are praying for them daily, just as Christ does.

3. Christ Provided for His disciple’s Needs— We Must Provide for Our Wives’ Needs.

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

This is a wonderful promise! In Matthew 6:31-33, Christ tells us not to worry about the basic necessities of life, for He already knows we need these things and promises to provide them. We are not to worry about needs for tomorrow either, because tomorrow will take care of itself v. 34.

4. Christ Kept His Promises— We Must Keep Our Promises.

Keeping promises by following through with commitments is a matter of integrity, which is part of what we learn to be as Psalm 15 men.

Remember: Psalm 15 is to men what Proverbs 31 should be to women. Proverbs 31:11a says that “the heart of her husband safely trusts her” This matter of integrity applies to both husbands and wives. If either the husband or wife lacks integrity, repentance is in order. (Breaking promises can also spill over to children by provoking them to anger.) We should faithfully follow: “He who is faithful in [what is] least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in [what is] least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).

5. Christ Bore Our Burdens— We Must Bear Our Wives’ Burdens.

“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. For My yoke [is] easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).

Modeling this attitude will cause our wives’ hearts and spirits to leap for joy! And in today’s stressed-out society, most wives long for their husbands to be servant-leaders—to come alongside and help them carry the loads they bear.

6. Christ Comforted them— We Must Comfort Our Wives.

“Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

How to effectively minister comfort is often a puzzle to husbands. Yet, as imitators of Christ, we must learn to sensitively care for our wives’ emotional needs. When we agreed to take them in lifelong companionship, we were agreeing to an emotional, spiritual, and physical responsibility. One of the hardest and yet most rewarding pursuits we can have as husbands is to get to know and understand our wives.

Paul calls this comforting relationship we are to have as believers *sumpatheo*, in the language of the first century. That word means “to share feelings,” which is where we get the English word “sympathy.” The biggest step we can take as husbands is the step of earnestly learning to communicate—by our faces, words, body language, and time—that we really do want to understand a bit more each day of how our wives feel.

7. Christ Didn't Expect Perfection— Don't Demand Perfection.

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind ..., I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

We should not expect perfection, as it will never be achieved this side of heaven. But God does want us to forsake every sin that can hamper running the race of life with endurance. We must fix our eyes on Jesus, and not look back, slow down, or give up (Hebrews 12:1-2a).

We must forget past failures, or even successes, and run in a way that we may obtain the highest prize—Christlikeness, both now and in the future.

Simple Choices to Grow Closer to our Wives

Marriage, over the years, gets deepened and enriched by the hundreds of tiny choices we make over the years. Here are four valuable lessons we all can learn from.

- **Biblical Husbands learn to: 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.

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.

- **Biblical Husbands learn to: 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.

- **Biblical Husbands learn to: Confess struggles.** No one can protect our integrity better than our wives. We therefore ought to share our struggles with them. 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!

- **Biblical Husbands learn to: 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 *these simple choices will become your habit*—that you are going to become the closest friend on Earth to your wife. The rewards will last forever!

Start Seeking a Sanctified Marriage

When the believers in Crete listened to God's Word, they heard the voice of God asking them to start making specific, personal choices to obey His Word. Sanctification is when believers respond to God's plan as stated in His Word, and as empowered by His Spirit.

When God designed the original marriage, it was the perfectly completion of those He had fashioned in His image. God established a vital truth: a fulfilling, harmonious marriage could be one lived the way God designed it to be.

Today, if your marriage is not operating the way it was designed by God—why not ask Him to do a system reset. Ask Him to rekindle your love, your leadership, and your desire to be the closest and best friend on earth to your wife.

God can reset any marriage to the original settings.

Appendix:

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:

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:

Intimacy: Your God designed Direction for Marriage

1 Peter 3:7 (New King James Version) Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

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!

Romance: Your God designed Glue for Marriage

A godly husband understands that intimacy opens the way for the ultimate union of life with his wife.

If a husband has a wrong view of intimacy in his marital relationship, he will have an unsatisfying marriage, an unfruitful personal life, and an unfulfilled family. 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. "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 7:3-5, 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!

Humility: Your God designed Goal for Marriage

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!

Transparency: Your God designed Habit for Marriage

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.

Why Not Start Two Simple Habits?

Life is so full, days are so short, and time passes so swiftly—so I have chosen two simple habits to freeze time into precious snapshots of my love for my wife and children. Here they are; think about them and try your own version in your family. I'm sure you will be glad you did.

First, I have an ongoing list that I have made for Bonnie. It took about an hour to start, and now I add to it whenever I can. I call it my **"Reasons Why I Love You"** list. I took her out to eat, talked over our wonderful blessings, and then read it to her the first time. Need I say how she received it? She was overwhelmed, overjoyed, and blessed beyond measure. Since then, I add at least one new reason before the special events in the life of our marriage. I give my wife a new and updated list on each of her

birthdays and our anniversaries. (I even find the list taped in a place where she can read it over and over each day—to remember just why I love her so much!)

My second simple habit is another important list. Bonnie and I, as a couple, sat together and prayerfully assembled a list we call “**Spiritual Goals for Our Marriage and Family.**” It will bless your wife and children if you do the same; begin simply, and watch the list grow.

Start with a simple habit like one of these, keep going on it, and you will be amazed at how it keeps your marriage and family focused on what will really last!