

Spiritual Life in Marriage

By John D. Laing

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Study the comments relating to 1 Peter 3:1–2 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share how the Holy Spirit can use the marriage relationship to strengthen the spiritual condition of an unbelieving husband (or wife).

Assignment Two

Study the comments relating to 1 Peter 3:6–7 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share why Sarah called Abraham “lord” and what it means for women to be “weaker.” Why is this term not a criticism of women?

Assignment Three

Conduct some online research on the term *holy*. (Or interview a church leader to find answers). Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What does the term mean? How is it used in the Bible? What does it mean to be made holy?

Scripture to Memorize

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”
Ephesians 5:25

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will have a clear concept of how biblical marriage develops the spiritual maturity of spouses.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

George and Sandra got married right after high school because Sandra was pregnant. Later Sandra became a Christian. She desperately wanted George to come to church with her and their baby girl. However, George had a bad experience with church when he was growing up and wanted no part of it. Sandra prayed for George and encouraged him to come. The issue started to become a real problem in their marriage. Sandra thought about giving up. What was she to do? How do you think she could help George spiritually?

Read 1 Peter 3:1–7 out loud.

Studying the Passage, v. 1

Verse 1. wives, be submissive. Peter begins by encouraging wives to submit to their husbands. This requirement only refers to marriage and cannot properly be applied to dating.

In the previous chapter Peter referred to citizens submitting to the government (2:13) and slaves submitting to their masters (2:18). In each of these situations, Peter put the spotlight on Christ. He is the model to follow. Christ lived righteously (2:22) and gave His life for our sins (2:24), submitting (to death) because of His love for others and God.

Verse 1. husbands . . . won without a word. Peter's primary concern in this encouragement to submission is the transformation of the husband. The holy living of the wife can be used by God to capture the husband for God's kingdom.

Some possibilities are that the Holy Spirit can use the holiness of others:

- to highlight our own sinfulness and need of forgiveness and salvation.
- to promote a desire to be like them.
- to endear them to us (for example, can make a husband love and appreciate his godly wife).

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share a report.

Studying the Passage, 1 Peter 3: 3–4

Verses 3–4. adornment . . . hidden person of the heart. Peter contrasts earthly and spiritual beauty here and encourages Christian women to seek spiritual beauty.

On Your Own

In the space below, list three ways women seek earthly, physical beauty and three ways they may gain heavenly, spiritual beauty.

Discussion Question

What does Peter mean by a "gentle and quiet spirit?"

Studying the Passage, 1 Peter 3: 5–6

Verses 5–6. Sarah obeyed Abraham. Peter appealed to the Old Testament matriarch Sarah as an example to follow. He noted that she obeyed her husband Abraham and called him, "lord." She did not mean he was God (in the way we mean Jesus is God when we call Him "Lord"). Instead, she meant to show him respect as the leader of the household.

The key was Sarah's relationship to God. Scripture says holy women in the past **hoped in God** (v. 5). The verse ties **do what is right** to **no fear** (v. 6). These women made themselves beautiful by their faith in God. This showed their trust that He would work in and through their husbands for the good of their families and God's kingdom. Their trust was in God.

Verse 7. in the same way. Peter's command to husbands also refers back to Christ as the model. There are three important points here.

Verse 7. in an understanding way. First, to live with understanding, husbands must be gentle, sensitive, caring, and considerate toward their wives. **weaker.** This is often seen as negative, as if men are superior, but it shouldn't be. When husbands are told to "live in an understanding way," it literally means "to honor" their wives. Honor was held in high esteem in the ancient world, given to superiors by underlings. In addition, the Bible often turns weakness on its head and sees it as positive (see 1 Corinthians 1:25, 27; 4:10; 9:22).

Verse 7. fellow heir. Second, husbands should honor their wives as *coheirs*, which means they must acknowledge their wives as equals before God. Their wives are equally in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27), equally in Christ (Galatians 3:28), and equally saved ("coheirs"). Women are in no way inferior to men or of lesser value to God.

Verse 7. prayers will not be hindered. Third, the husband's relationship with God is directly related to his relationship with his wife. If he abuses his God-given authority in the home, his prayers will be useless. If he loves his wife appropriately, his prayer life will be effective, and his relationship with God will flourish.

Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share a report.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10–16 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 10–14

Verses 10–11. wife should not leave her husband. Paul offers a command from God: married believers must not abandon their spouses, and even when there is marital difficulty, they must seek reconciliation.

Verses 12–13. he must not divorce her. Paul then addresses a real but less-than-ideal situation, when a Christian is married to a non-Christian. Here again, the Christian is admonished to remain married to the unbeliever. The reason, discussed below, is our primary concern.

Verse 14. sanctified. The Greek word here is a variation of the word for "holy." The unbelieving husband or wife is made holy because of the marriage. This does not mean they are born again because of the faith of their spouses, but it does mean the marriage is holy (see Paul's comments on children in verse 14). God has a claim on the unbeliever because of his or her spiritual union with the spouse.

Assignment Three Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share a report.

Studying the Passage, 1 Corinthians 7: 15–16

Verse 15. the unbelieving one leaves. As we will see in next week's study, this probably does not refer to divorce but only separation, with concern for reconciliation.

Verse 16. whether you will save. Paul asks two rhetorical questions. The focus of the passage is on the spiritual nature of marriage: salvation (to save, Greek, *sozo*). The spiritual union of husband and wife has a real connection to the spiritual well-being of the family. The husband and wife have spiritual responsibility for their children and spouses.

Both passages speak to the spiritual connection between husband and wife and to how that connection should lead to spiritual growth for both. Since love within marriage is to be like that of Christ for the church and marriage is meant to model God's love and care for the creation, then it makes sense that a good marriage should lead to spiritual growth in the people, both individually and as a couple.

On Your Own

In the space below, list things a Christian can do to promote spiritual growth in his or her spouse and in their relationship. Then, compare your class list with the list given in the **At Home: Nail It Down** section of this lesson.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Husbands and wives both bear some responsibility for the spiritual development of the other (and ultimately, the home). The purpose of marriage is glorifying God by providing a picture of Christ and the church. Similarly, love in marriage is akin to Christ's love for the church. Both these statements show the importance of a husband and wife encouraging each other in their relationship with God. They can do this in many ways.

Some examples include:

- Praying together
- Reading Scripture together
- Attending church and worshipping together
- Holding each other accountable for quiet times and the private spiritual disciplines
- Practicing spiritual disciplines together (such as fasting, meditation on Scripture, or memorizing Scripture)
- Loving each other with the love of Christ
- Fulfilling their God-given roles within marriage

In Ephesians 5:26, the husband's love for the wife is shown as a cleansing love, comparable to Christ's sanctification of the church through water and the word. Throughout the Old Testament the husband and father was commanded to teach the Word of God to his family and to make it a natural part of the daily life in the home. This sacred task of the father was meant to promote the spiritual welfare of his family.

Husbands and wives can give a real-life example of the love of Christ. They can bear witness to the way Christ equips them to love each other, their children, and any unbelieving family and friends.

Parent Question

How does the relationship of the husband and wife contribute to the spiritual development of each?

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