

Script: Pastor Frank Johnson
First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners
“The Servant-Life in Christian Marriage”
First Peter 3:1-7

Take a first look.

I. Without question, ideas about marriage have changed in the last generation. Over twenty years ago, according to Professor Paul Vitz, educational literature has contributed directly to this change. Consider this segment in the *Better Families* bulletin from March of 1998. Professor Vitz was a teacher at the State University of New York and spent a career reviewing school textbooks, examining their presentation of values. After reviewing 40 social studies textbooks for grade 1-4, he said, “There was not one text reference to marriage as the foundation of the family. Indeed, neither the word ‘marriage’ nor ‘wedding’ occurred once in the 40 books! Further, it is relevant that neither the words ‘husband’ nor ‘wife’ occurred once in any of these books” aimed at children approximately ages 6-10. I might add, the terms “man” and “woman” are now being called into question, by many of those (now) young adults who are in their 20s and 30s.

Should this not be of grave concern to us? Does it surprise us that we have seen a radical redefinition of marriage in our time? The absence of information speaks loudly about what is *not* important, especially to these young minds that are in formation.

II. On the contrary, our Jewish and Christian founding documents (taken together, *the Bible*), call us to recognize that not only is marriage the foundation of the family, it is also the foundation of society. The basic social unit is meant to be the man and woman in a covenant-relationship for a lifetime. The health and life of the family are directly connected with the health of this vital relationship. As goes the family, so goes the Church and by extension the society.

III. As Peter develops the implications of living holy lives in this temporary world, he turns to Christian marriage. Marriage is the most intense of human relationships. It can be intensely good, or intensely bad, depending on the choices and attitudes of those involved. Peter writes to make it intensely good. We need his emphases today. It is almost like he agrees with my simple hope for the sexual fulfillment of human beings: *get married (according to God’s plan), stay married, and like it!*

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 3:1-7.

I. ASSUMPTION: THE SERVANT-LIFE IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. See 1 Peter 1:22; Mark 10:42-45; 1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Ephesians 5:21; et al

1. *There is little difference between what Peter says to wives and what all New Testament writers say to all Christians.* The other passages I have included in your *Listening Guide* [see above] show clearly that the servant-life *is* the *Christian* life. There is nothing especially unique here in what Peter says to wives. He asks the wife to put her husband first, just like all Christians should do with other Christians. Jesus’ own words are authoritative here (Mark 10:42-45, NIV):

“*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. No so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

I—Vernon Grounds, then president of Denver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, challenged the graduating class of 1973 with the truth of John 13:15. Dr. Grounds told the graduates that he was going to present to them a tangible symbol that could help them in

their future ministries. As the classmates filed quietly to the front, they wondered what it could be—a special Scripture verse, a little book, an inscribed medallion? To their surprise, it was a small square of white terry cloth. One graduate, who has served as an overseas missionary, says, “We were commissioned to go into the world as servants. That small piece of towel, frayed and grubby from years in my wallet, is a constant reminder of that moving moment and of our basic call to serve.”¹

2. *An attitude of submission, a desire to put others first, an intention to make others successful—all are the general demands of the servant-life all Christians are called to live.*

A—Here is a good test for all of us: what evidence can be found in our lives that demonstrates a servant-spirit?

I—***The Gospel Herald* once published this pointed story: “When little Wilhelmina was crowned queen of Holland, the happy child was too young to realize the gravity and importance of the occasion.** She was overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the festivities. As thousands cheered when they saw her, she wondered what it involved on her part. ‘Mama,’ she asked, ‘does this mean that all these people belong to me?’ Smiling, her mother shook her head and replied, ‘No, dear child, it means you belong to all these people!’”²

This is the challenge of the servant-life. Even authority is a responsibility and a calling to serve, not to rule. All Christians have such a calling and responsibility.

II. IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE, THE SERVANT-LIFE CALLS FOR A SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION FROM THE WIFE TO THE HUSBAND. vv. 1-6

1. *This simply means recognizing the family leadership role of the husband.* This challenges a husband to take an active, responsible role in the family, not a passive one.

A—Wives, are you practicing a servant-spirit toward your husbands?

I—**A woman told psychologist George W. Crane that she hated her husband and wanted a divorce. “I want to hurt him all I can,” she declared.** “Well, in that case,” said Dr. Crane, “I advise you to start showering him with compliments. When you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him devotedly, then start the divorce action.” The woman was intrigued by this novel approach. A few months later she returned and said that all was going well. “Good,” said Dr. Crane, “now’s the time to file for divorce.” “Divorce?” she responded. “Never! I love my husband dearly.”³

A servant-spirit yields *actions* of love that in turn yield *feelings* of love. Feeling follows action. Perhaps our own experience will not be quite as dramatic as that of Dr. Crane. Don’t sell this principle short, however. The discipline of worship will yield feelings of awe in the presence of God. The discipline of kind words will yield feelings of affection toward those to whom you speak those words. Loving actions will yield loving feelings. This is why the command to “love one another” uses the word *agapao* [ἀγαπᾶω]. This is the Greek verb that describes loving *actions*, not loving *feelings*. “For God *loved* the world in such a way ...” (see John 3:16). He did not have gushy and mushy feelings for the world. He *acted* through His Son Jesus Christ for the good of the world. *To choose to act for the good of others*, especially in such close and personal relationships, however we might feel toward them, is to *love* them as God loves us. Supremely in marriage, this can be transforming.

2. *Such a Christian servant-spirit can lead to the salvation of an unbelieving husband.* Peter argues that *behavior*, your “way of life” (the meaning of the Greek term), can truly lead to salvation,

¹ I.S., an illustration database.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

even if the unbelieving spouse is not open to the witness of *words*. This is true in a wider context, also. Why? Since the servant-spirit is so radically different in a world that tends to emphasize self-interest over consideration of others, it will stand out and be noticed.

A—Are you the wife of a man who is not a believer or the husband of a woman who is not a believer? You will never nag your spouse into the kingdom, but you may be able to love him/her into it.

I—This is the witness of Lee and Leslie Strobel. Lee is the notable defender of the Christian faith in our time and author of such books as *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, and *The Case for a Creator*. In his first book, *The Case for Christ* (made into a movie of the same title), Strobel tells how he went from hardened anti-believer to true believer in Jesus Christ. He described himself as an atheist when his wife walked in one day and announced that she had become a Christian. He rolled his eyes, and as he recalled, “braced for the worst, feeling like the victim of a bait-and-switch scam.” He writes, “I had married one Leslie—the fun Leslie, the carefree Leslie, the risk-taking Leslie—and now I feared she was going to turn into some sort of sexually repressed prude who would trade our upwardly mobile lifestyle for all-night prayer vigils and volunteer work in grimy soup kitchens.

“Instead, [he] was pleasantly surprised—even fascinated—by the fundamental changes in her character, her integrity, and her personal confidence.” He admits, “Eventually I wanted to get to the bottom of what was prompting these subtle but significant shifts in my wife’s attitudes, so I launched an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity.”⁴

The most powerful testimony to the grace of God is a life permeated by His presence, expressed in the servant-life. It can be intriguing to one who sees it closely and feels its power. The impact of Leslie Strobel’s example of Christian life, even in its first stages, has rippled out over the globe through the influence of her husband.

3. *Such a spirit develops the inner beauty of character more than outward beauty alone.*

There is a uniform emphasis throughout Scripture on the importance of the inner character over the outward appearance. Peter applies this theme to Christian marriage. There is no blanket prohibition here of makeup or jewelry, as such. But there is a strong matter of *emphasis*.

A—Where is the emphasis of our focus on beauty, the inner person or the outer person? Two questions for you ladies—married or not:

(1) Are you developing *purity*? This means that you are living a life that reflects the holy presence of God. This Greek word originally referred to the Deity Himself and all that belonged to Him. We would call that *holy*, a word that describes *spiritual purity*. Then it extended to the idea of *moral purity*.

(2) Are you developing *reverence*? Again, this is closely related to the first word. Does your way of life speak of the Lord in every aspect?

I—The story is told about the great football coaching legend Vince Lombardi that he came home late one night in the cold winter of Green Bay, Wisconsin, and crawled into bed with his wife. She was still awake, and when he got in and snuggled up to her, she cried out, “Lord, your feet are freezing!” His reported response was, “Dear, in the privacy of our own home, you may call me Vince.” Perhaps she was just following the example of Sarah in the Old Testament story of Abraham. 😊

⁴ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 1998), p.14.

I—I was attracted to my wife some 51+ years ago because she was friendly, she was cute, and she laughed at my bad jokes and one-liners (that giggle would have made the cut in a Hallmark movie). I still consider her “the fairest flower in all the land”—among many other fair flowers, I might add. But I have watched something in her life over this over half a century. As she has grown more and more in the grace of God, she has cultivated an inner beauty that is compelling. I know that I play second fiddle in her life, but only to God. She has put my needs and wants above her own more times than I can count. She is diligent in her pursuit of truth, reading through the Bible every year and praying consistently through a long list of family members, friends, and church family. I can’t count how many times she has said, after reading a text message from a friend, “We need to stop and pray right now for _____.” And we do, whether we are watching a video, eating a meal, or driving down the road. She has a servant-spirit, a giving-spirit, a gift of hospitality that puts me to shame on a regular basis.

Young women, look to my wife if you want to know how to succeed as a wife and mother! You may think she has bad taste in men, but nobody’s perfect. 😊

I—Peter looks back to Abraham’s wife Sarah for a historical example of what he is speaking about. “You are her daughters if you *do what is right* and *do not give way to fear*,” says Peter. This is a description of godliness and the resulting courage it brings.

III. IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE, THE SERVANT-LIFE CALLS FOR A PRACTICE OF CONSIDERATION AND RESPECT FROM THE HUSBAND TO THE WIFE. v. 7

1. When Peter says, “Be considerate as you live with your wives,” he is urging husbands to *know their wives well*. The words can be literally translated, “live with your wives according to knowledge.” In other words, “*Know your wife* so well that you can meet her needs with self-giving love as Jesus would have you do it.”

A—Husbands, how well do we really know our wives? The servant-life demands an answer.

I—Here is an I-Know-My-Wife Quiz for each of us (I ask myself the same questions):

- (1) What is your wife’s favorite color?
- (2) What does she like to order at a restaurant? What is her favorite restaurant?
- (3) What is your wife’s idea of a good time? The perfect vacation?
- (4) What does she find romantic?
- (5) What could have possibly attracted your wife to you in the first place? [How long has it been since you acted like that?]

I—In that same issue of *Better Families*, there is a dialogue between a daughter and her mother. Sue loves Steve, but she worries about all the money he squanders when they go out together. She asks her mother, “How can I stop Steve from spending so much money on me?” Mom answers, “Marry him.” Should that be true? Of course, it shouldn’t.

More of our quiz:

- (6) What kind of clothes does she like to wear?
- (7) What does she hope will be the first thing you do or say when she meets you at home?
- (8) Does she need a break from the children or from work? What is her level of stress right now?
- (9) What do you do or can you do that will convince her of your lasting love for her?
- (10) What are your wife’s spiritual gifts? Her creative abilities? Her secret aspirations—hopes and dreams?

If we can get about an 85% grade on this quiz, we are at least making an effort. I haven’t always aced this test myself. A few years ago, I went to the J. C. Penny’s store in our

town to buy Jeannie a dress for her birthday. I picked one that I thought looked good and bought it. The moment she opened the package and took one look at that dress, I knew I had missed by a mile. Later she confessed that she thought it was a joke! Ouch! When we took it back, even the woman behind the counter said, looking at Jeannie, “Oh, it was for *you*. This style is perhaps a bit more mature.” You know what that meant, don’t you? “Your grandmother might have worn this, but not within the past fifty years!” Not to be a total failure, I have tried again and again to buy her clothing—usually getting advice from our daughter or daughters in law—and I think I have finally figured some things out.

I had this wild thought a few years ago, that if I followed one simple rule in my actions toward Jeannie, our relationship would be ten times better. If I just treated her in such a way that every time she thought of me—what I have said to her, how I have spoken about her, how I have acted toward her—if every time she thought of me, *she felt loved*, our relationship would greatly improve. So, that one simple thought has been going through my mind a lot over these past few years. I hope it has helped!

2. *Such knowledge comes as the husband honors and respects his wife as a fellow-heir of the gift of life.*

3. *To resist such a servant-spirit as a husband can hinder one’s prayers, according to Peter.* This brings the whole question of marital relationships into the wider realm of our relationship with God.

A—If we married men are not expressing the servant-life to our wives, our sense of God’s leadership in our lives is hindered.

I—I know this by personal experience. At times, Jeannie and I have had a row over something, and I have left the house in a huff. I get to the study and realize that my task for the day is to study the Bible in preparation for preaching and teaching. As I look at the text, no matter what the words say, all I can see is, “You bonehead, go make things right with your wife!” I have sometimes been able to hold out for several hours in misery before going home and trying to work things out. I became convinced early in our marriage (now past fifty-one years!), that the key verse for Christian husbands—or at least the one that applied most to me—was “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Humbling myself and asking forgiveness of my wife (or children) has been the most difficult and the most beneficial practice of my life.

Take it home (applications).

I. All of us, do we have the power of the servant-life coursing through our hearts? If not,

1. We must repent of our self-centeredness.
2. We must turn to Christ for forgiveness and renewal.
3. We must confess our faith in Him and allow His Holy Spirit to reshape our inner person.

II. Are we expressing the servant-life in our family relationships?