



THE PILLARS OF MARRIAGE

MEN OF THE WORD | GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

PILLAR 2 – COMPLEMENTARY: I WILL MAKE HIM A HELPER

Introduction

Genesis 1:27 – “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Genesis 2:18 – “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”

Genesis 2:21-22 – “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.”

Marriage is complementary. In marriage, the husband and wife are **equal in essence but different in roles**. As Genesis 1 and 2 explains, God did not clone Adam to create Eve, but made her from Adam’s substance—a rib. She was created from the same essence. As such, she, too, reflected the image of God. She was not made inferior but shared **equality** with Adam.

Yet Eve was also created *to be different*. This difference is to be understood, respected, and even celebrated. Adam and Eve were created as equals to serve in different roles that, when combined, would allow them to accomplish the purposes of “man” on this earth (Genesis 1:28) as could never be done alone.

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

To understand how “equal but different” works in a marriage, we must understand God’s intent for the role of men and women in marriage and family. It is important to note that these unique roles are in the context of marriage and the family; they do not exclude additional roles in this life. They are fundamental, however, for living in accordance with the Creator’s design. If these qualities are not adhered to faithfully, there will be trouble, and the full blessing of marriage will be missed.

Genesis 2:18 – “. . . I will make him a helper suitable to him”

1 Corinthians 11:9 – “. . . for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.”

Before God created Eve, He established her purpose and role inside the marriage relationship and in the family.

1. Helper

“Helper” is a very important word. It is a despised word to feminists, and even some women in the church find it challenging. It is also misunderstood and wrongly implemented by men—even men in the church. The use of the term “helper” reflects the need of Adam (man) and his incompleteness without Eve (woman), and the unique role of the woman to fill in the God-ordained gaps and inabilities in man. God did not discover a design flaw when He said, “*It is not good for man to be alone*” (Genesis 2:18). Instead, He revealed the humble need of man and the exalted and honored role of a woman.

The same word used in the original language to describe Eve (“helper”) is used elsewhere to describe God. Indeed, it is not an inferior thing to render *help*:

- **Psalms 33:20** – “Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our **help** and our shield.”
- **Psalms 54:4** – “Behold, God is my **helper**; the Lord is the **sustainer** of my soul.”
- **Hebrews 13:6**, quoting **Psalms 118:6** – “The Lord is my **helper**, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”

We see this concept of “help” in the New Testament as well. As Christ was preparing for the cross, He made a promise to His disciples: “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may be with you forever.*” (John 14:16). Certainly, your wife is not the Holy Spirit, but His ministry to each of us (John 14:16–17; John 15:26–27; Romans 8) is illustrative in how the godly woman is understood: He knows you better than anyone (searches our hearts), He is given by God (gift), He is with you forever (permanence), He is exclusive (“*the world cannot receive*”), He loves you, He reassures, He teaches, He reminds you of what we know (truth), He guides, He protects, He encourages, He convicts of sin, He directs you to worship, He points you to Christ, He loves you, He gives you peace, He helps your weaknesses, He comforts you,

and He prays for you. This is a model of the “helping” ministry a wife can and should have in a marriage. So many men stifle this kind of help from their wives! Her equality and difference in marriage puts her in a unique place of significant influence—for your good!

2. Wife/Mother

The entire context of Eve’s creation was in response to the five commands to man (Genesis 1:28) and Adam’s inability on his own to fulfill that God-given purpose (2:20). Eve was needed to complete him. Only she can bear children. Only she can be the companion and wife to Adam “after his kind.” Only she can help him in a way that nothing and nobody else can.

This role was established *before* sin entered the world. Before sin entered, all creation was “very good” (1:31). Yet the role of wife and mother is implied in the curse after sin entered the world. Sin did not change this role; it just made this role more difficult. Genesis 3:16 states, *“To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’”* Just as with Adam, the curse was brought to bear upon Eve’s specific sphere of responsibility—helping her husband and raising their children.

The woman’s role as wife and mother is affirmed throughout the Bible, most directly in Titus 2 where older women are instructed to encourage the younger women *“to love their husbands, to love their children, . . . [and be] subject to their own husbands”* (Titus 2:3–5), and 1 Timothy 2:15, where the role of the woman is preserved through the bearing of children and faithful living (*“But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint”*).

ROLE OF THE MAN IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

1. Worker/Provider

The intent of the Creator was established before Adam was created but clarified and reaffirmed in the curse.

Genesis 2:5 – *“Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.”*

Genesis 2:15 – *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.”*

Genesis 3:17-19 – *“Then to Adam He said, ‘... Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”*

Before the curse, work was a joy; it was easy. The curse established a new relationship between work, difficulty, and survival. Work itself was not the curse. However, now the difficulty of work and its necessity for eating (survival) was introduced by the curse (see also **2 Thess. 3:10** – *“... if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either”*).

2. Leader/Protector

God created man first, put him to work naming the animals, tasked him with exercising dominion and rule over every living thing and the earth, while also showing him his need for help. His roles and function were established before Eve was created and most clearly seen in the record of sin in Genesis 3. Adam was right next to Eve during the entire exchange with Satan. He allowed Eve to be deceived and to fall into sin. Then, he joined her. Adam’s failure was not merely eating from the tree. As Genesis 3:17 says (*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife . . .”*), Adam also failed in his role as the spiritual and physical protector and ceded the leadership and influence of his wife to Satan. He did not lead. He did not protect. In that epic failure is a profound lesson and warning. Every man is a leader and is to protect his wife. That is what you were created to do and be.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE IN MARRIAGE? — 1 PETER 3:1-8

Two sinners come together and become one. They are equal (created in the image of God) and different (strength, role, influence). It seems impossible that combining the sinfulness of two people in one household could possibly result in anything good. But, by God’s design—and through our submission to that design—marriage is still *good*. In fact, it can be an exceptionally good thing, even in this fallen world.

The key word is *submission*. In 1 Peter 3, Peter addresses the issue of marriage and family life, all under the umbrella of *submission*.

1 Peter 2:13 – *“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution”*

Peter addresses several contexts of submission in 1 Peter 2 in light of the difficulties of life (e.g. unreasonable employers). In chapter 3, he finishes with marriage. It is significant that the source of most of the difficulty submitting in marriage is due to the disobedience of the husband! In 3:1-7, he addresses marriage and says to the wife (v. 1) and husband (v. 7) that they are *“in the same way”* to submit within the institution of marriage. This is the key to reconciling and living in the tension of two people who are equal before the Lord while recognizing, understanding, and submitting to their differences in marriage.

The Woman (Wife)

Peter first addresses the wife and gives four descriptions of a woman living in submission in marriage. The husband must be aware of these qualities and appreciate what the Lord looks for in a woman. The husband needs to shepherd and lead his wife toward these qualities. Single men need to prepare to lead in this manner when they get married. Ephesians 5 will be addressed in a future session but is relevant to mention here: the goal is for a man to present his wife *“holy and blameless”* (Eph 5:25). Peter describes what that goal looks like. He presents four qualities of a godly and content wife:

1. Biblical Submission (1 Peter 3:1-2)
2. Inner Beauty (1 Peter 3:3-4)
3. Influence through Example (1 Peter 3:5-6)
4. Courage (1 Peter 3:6)

The Man (Husband)

Peter then addresses the husband in 1 Peter 3:7 and issues four commands about how we are to live in and enjoy marriage as God designed it.

1. Live With Your Wife – *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives”*

God created the man to live with a woman after leaving his father and mother’s home (Genesis 2:24). The husband and wife are to live together and be joined together in every way. A man is to leave his family and cling/cleave to his wife—his new family. Life is to be shared together in the most intimate, personal, and private way. It is an exclusive and complementary sharing of every aspect of life.

Divorce (Mark 10:9) and marital separation (1 Corinthians 7:5) are not acceptable except for very rare circumstances and even then, it is to accommodate the weakness of men—the hardness of hearts (Matthew 19:8). Divorce and separation (physical, emotional, and/or spiritual) should never be seen as an option or a habit.

2. Understand Your Wife – *“. . . in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman”*

This affirms that the role and place of a woman in marriage is different and the husband is to labor over how to live with his wife as an equal with different roles. This is a challenge for every man due to the unique personality, strengths, and weaknesses of his wife. This is a command to pursue understanding the woman God has given you!

“As with someone weaker” is not a pronouncement that women are utterly devoid of strength. That would contradict the rest of Scripture and experience in general. Proverbs 31 describes the physical strength of a woman: *“She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight. She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household. . . . She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. . . . Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future”* (Proverbs 31:13–14, 17, 25). You cannot reconcile such descriptions with an opinion that women are deficient. Hopefully you recognize the unique strength of a woman in your own wife—especially as she cares for your children.

What is Peter saying then? Treat her as if she is delicate. Your care for her must not be through domination or from pity, but in consideration, chivalry, gentleness, kindness, discernment, and grace. Consider your wife the same way God considered Adam. When God created Eve to be Adam’s helper it was not because Adam was completely inept. Adam was equipped to do a lot, but he still needed help. In the same way, you are to treat your wife with all the same kindness, deference, and concern that you would for someone who is weaker. Study her. Know her. Fill in her gaps as she does yours.

3. Honor Your Wife – “. . . show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life”

This affirms that *she is equal* and that you must treat her as an equal:

- Love your wife as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5). Ephesians 5 is overwhelming as both a standard and a model. But it is the expectation for every man who is married. It is the goal that must be pursued.
- Honor your wife publicly: Proverbs 31:28, 29 – *“Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her saying: ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.’”*
- Honor your wife privately: Proverbs 31:10, 11- *“An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of the husband trusts in her.”*
- Train your children to honor her: Proverbs 31:28 – *“Her children rise up and bless her.”*

4. Keep Your Promises – “. . . so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

There is no clearer passage linking the relationship of the husband to God than Peter’s reference here in verse 7 and in **Malachi 2:13–14** – *“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”*

This will be the subject of a future session on the pillars of marriage. Keeping the promises you made to your wife is a unique and important reflection of your relationship with the Lord. In fact, failing to do so is called treachery and Malachi goes on to say in that same passage that a man who deals treacherously with his wife does not even have a remnant of the Spirit.

PETER’S SUMMATION – 1 PETER 3:8–9

“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

A DIFFICULT MARRIAGE

Some men are in marriages that reflect a very difficult relationship. Sandwiched between Peter’s discussion of difficult relationships (church, government, employment) in chapter 2 and marriage in chapter 3 is a remarkable and extremely important admonition: Imitate the long-suffering of Christ in your marriage.

1 Peter 2:21–25 – *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”*

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. How do the commands in 1 Peter 3:8–9 explain and fulfill a man’s role in marriage and family?
2. For married men, what elements in 1 Peter 3:7 are encouraging (you seem to be doing well)? What elements need work?
3. For single men who are anticipating marriage, how do you prepare now to live in accordance with 1 Peter 3:7?

Additional Resources:

1. Sermon by John MacArthur, June 18, 1989: *“How to Win Your Unbelieving Spouse,”* <https://www.gty.org/sermons/60-31/how-to-win-your-unbelieving-spouse>.
2. Sermons by Rick Holland, December, 2007: *“Biblical Masculinity,”* <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/643> and <https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/644>. (These sermons address 1 Peter 3:7 and were taught to single men preparing for marriage.)

Audio, video, and handouts for this session: www.gracechurch.org/motw

Next meeting: November 19, 7pm, “Assurance and the Persistence in Truth,” 1 John 2:18–27 (Brad Klassen)