

*"Marriage God's Way is a thorough and comprehensive treatment of marriage. The reader who works his way through this volume will be richly rewarded."*

Tedd Tripp—Husband of 48 years and best-selling author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

# MARRIAGE GOD'S WAY



*A Biblical Recipe for Healthy, Joyful,  
Christ-Centered Relationships*

Scott LaPierre

*"This is what every marriage needs! Your mind will be filled with the pure and perfect word of God. If you want a book that is built on the foundation of scripture, Marriage God's Way is for you."*

Scott Brown—Husband of 31 years, director of The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, and author of *A Theology of the Family*

Nearly everything in life comes with instructions—from the cell phones we use to the automobiles we drive. Yet when it comes to marriage, many people struggle without proper guidance. Couples experience pain and conflict when love and joy should flourish. The good news is there are instructions for marriage too, written by the One who created marriage. In *Marriage God's Way*, Pastor Scott LaPierre presents these biblical instructions combined with:

- Personal stories and application to daily life
- Explanations of the roles and responsibilities God has given husbands and wives
- Answers to common questions about godly love and how to show it, headship and submission, intimacy, and establishing an indestructible foundation for your relationship

God intended marriage to be one of the greatest gifts on this side of Heaven. In *Marriage God's Way*, whether you are preparing for your wedding, newlyweds, or marriage veterans, you will learn the *Biblical Recipe for a Healthy, Joyful, Christ-Centered Relationship*.

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Scott is the senior pastor of Woodland Christian Church in Woodland, Washington and a conference speaker. He and his wife, Katie, grew up together in northern California, and God has blessed them with six children and a seventh on the way.



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## Praise for *Marriage God's Way*

“*Marriage God's Way* is a thorough and comprehensive treatment of marriage. The reader who works his way through this volume will be richly rewarded.”

**Tedd Tripp**—Husband of forty-eight years, pastor, speaker, and author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

“Most Christian books on marriage today don't have much Scripture in them. Not this one. It is saturated with the Word of God. If you want a book that is built on the foundation of exposition of Scripture, this book is for you. While Scott offers many practical insights, they are all grounded in the biblical text using biblical language. *Marriage God's Way* will fill your mind with the pure and perfect Word of God. This is what every marriage needs.”

**Scott T. Brown**—Husband of thirty-one years, director of the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, pastor, speaker, and author of *A Theology of the Family*

“With the divorce rate for believers lagging just behind that of unbelievers, there is no shortage of Christian books on marriage. Unfortunately, few of these books offer lasting effectiveness, because they lack the authority and wisdom of Scripture. Most merely weave together tidbits of human wisdom and pop ideas spiced up with random verses. Pastor Scott understands that strong marriages need more than tidbits of wisdom and pop ideas. He knows that as the Designer of marriage, God gave us His Word as an owner's manual. Therefore, in *Marriage God's Way*, Scott draws upon the authority and wisdom of the Bible to help every couple find the passion, intimacy, and romance that God intended.”

**Reb Bradley**—Husband of thirty-eight years, pastor, speaker, founder of Family Ministries, and author of *Child Training Tips*

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Part I: Recognize That . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Your Marriage Reflects Your Relationship with Christ	3
2. Marriage “Problems” Are Really Symptoms	11
<b>Part II: Genesis 1–3 Creation of Marriage and the Fall</b>	<b>19</b>
3. God’s Establishment of Adam’s Headship	20
4. Male Leadership Is God’s Pattern	29
5. The Help a Man Needs	39
6. Consequences of the Fall for Husbands and Wives	51
<b>Part III: Understanding Love</b>	<b>63</b>
7. What Is Love?	65
8. Characteristics of Agape	73
<b>Part IV: Ephesians 5:25–33 A Husband’s Call to Agape and a Wife’s Call to Respect</b>	<b>81</b>
9. A Husband Should Agape His Wife	83
10. Protecting the Sanctity of Marriage	95
11. A Wife Should Respect Her Husband	105
<b>Part V: Understanding Submission</b>	<b>117</b>
12. Equal Opportunity Submission	119
13. What Submission Does Not Mean	131
14. Putting Your Husband in a Position to Lead	141

<b>Part VI: 1 Peter 3:1–7 A Wife’s Beauty and a Husband’s Treatment</b>	<b>151</b>
15. Winning Over Your Husband	153
16. A Woman’s Greater Beauty	165
17. The Bible’s “Perfect” Wife	175
18. A Husband Treats His Wife Well By . . .	185
<b>Part VII: I Corinthians 7:1–6 A Biblical View of Intimacy</b>	<b>195</b>
19. The Case for Intimacy	197
20. When Intimacy Is Threatened	205
<b>Part VIII: Matthew 7:24–27 A Strong Foundation</b>	<b>211</b>
21. Building on Christ	213
22. The Importance of Obeying	217
<b>Epilogue: The Mystery of Marriage</b>	<b>221</b>
About the Author	224
<i>Marriage God’s Way Workbook</i>	225
Would you (or your church) like to host a Marriage God’s Way Conference?	226
<i>Enduring Trials God’s Way: A Biblical Recipe for     Finding Joy in Suffering</i>	227

## Introduction

**T**here are thousands of marriage books, so why another one? What makes this one different? Is there any reason you should trust me to write it?

First, and of greatest importance, I am not asking you to trust me. This book is not a collection of my thoughts about marriage. Rather, I am inviting you to trust God because He is the author of marriage. He designed the roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives. He knows what a couple needs to have a healthy, joyful, Christ-centered relationship, and He provided a recipe for that in His Word. My desire is to present that recipe clearly and biblically in *Marriage God's Way*.

Second, I wrote this book because I am passionate about this area of Scripture and life. God designed the family as the primary unit for every other segment in society, including the church. And marriage is the heart of the family. As a marriage disintegrates, the family disintegrates. As families disintegrate, churches disintegrate. As churches disintegrate, society disintegrates.

When marriages are strong, however, families are strong. When families are strong, churches can be strong because strong churches are made up of strong families. As a pastor, I have seen many struggling marriages, but I have also seen couples find the solutions to their problems in Scripture. The truth of God's Word has the power to heal and strengthen any marriage.

Third, because the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and His relationship to the church, it is one of the greatest evangelistic tools believers have. Godly marriages have the potential to reveal Christ to an unbelieving world. That alone is a reason I am passionate about seeing marriages strengthened.

Finally, I wrote *Marriage God's Way* because as a husband I have experienced firsthand the blessings that come from obeying God's Word and the negative

consequences that come with disobedience. My wife, Katie, and I grew up in the same small town (McArthur, California) and went to school together. We both became Christians in our twenties, and soon after were married.

At times the stresses of being a husband, a father, and a senior pastor (a role that alone could keep me busy from the moment I get up to the moment I go to bed) have put a huge amount of pressure on our marriage. In the following chapters, I will share some of our personal struggles. When I ask you to trust that God's Word provides a recipe for healthy, joyful marriages, I do so because I have experienced this truth in my relationship with Katie.

## **Part I:**

### ***Recognize That . . .***

## Chapter One

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# Your Marriage Reflects Your Relationship with Christ

A few years ago, Katie and I faced the biggest crisis of our marriage. I started pastoring Woodland Christian Church when it was fairly small, but within three years the congregation had tripled in size. I admit that before I became a pastor, I was completely unaware of how much work is actually involved in shepherding a church of even a few hundred people. I had been an Army officer, a supervisor at a distribution center for Target, and an elementary school teacher. But none of those occupations approached the amount of mental and emotional energy and sheer hard work pastoring entails!

Almost all my waking hours were packed with studying, teaching, counseling, making phone calls, sending e-mails, attending meetings, addressing administrative responsibilities, and tending to benevolence issues. When I was home, where I should have been an engaged father and husband, I did not have much left for my family emotionally, mentally, or physically.

Although I was failing as a husband and father, I was able to convince myself I was still pleasing the Lord. I compartmentalized my life by saying, “I am a Christian first. I am a spouse second. I am a parent third. I am an employee fourth.” Instead, I should have said, “I am a Christian spouse. I am a Christian parent. I am a Christian employee.” The danger of seeing ourselves as a Christian first and a spouse second is we can find ourselves believing the

lie I bought into at the time: “If I can be a good pastor, I can please God even though I am not the best husband.” The truth is that I was a poor husband, and I should have recognized that meant I was *not* pleasing the Lord.

The reason we cannot please the Lord while failing as a husband or wife is that our Christianity is directly related to the way we treat our spouses. Our marriages are an outpouring of our relationship with Christ:

- In Matthew 7:16b, Jesus asked: “Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?”
- In James 3:12, the apostle James asked: “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?”

The point of these verses is that we reveal our Christianity by the way we live. As Jesus clarified: “You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16a).

Since our relationships with our spouses are our most important earthly relationship, what we are as spouses is a reflection of what we are as Christians. Later, we will discuss the marriage passage in Ephesians 5:21–33, but for now it is worth mentioning two commands that give us the standard for marriage:

- Ephesians 5:25—Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.
- Ephesians 5:22—Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Lord gave us these commands, our obedience to them reflects our relationship with Christ. This is why there is no such thing as a spiritually mature man who does not love his wife nor a spiritually mature woman who does not submit to her husband:

- A husband cannot love Christ without loving his wife.
- A wife cannot submit to Christ without submitting to her husband.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 13 addresses the “what-ifs” of submission: “What about an abusive husband? When does a wife not need to submit?”

A husband is to love and cherish his wife not because she is perfect, or because she treats him the way he wants to be treated. A husband loves and cherishes his wife because he loves Christ. Likewise, a wife submits to her husband not because he is a wonderful spiritual leader, or because he loves her the way she wants to be loved. A wife submits to her husband because she wants to submit to Christ.

A husband's love and a wife's submission is not a test of their obedience to their spouses. It is a test of their obedience to the Lord. This might sound discouraging, but it should actually be encouraging. When a husband knows his love and a wife knows her submission is an act of obedience to Christ, it can be that much easier. There will be times when a husband does not want to love his wife and a wife does not want to submit to her husband. In those moments husbands and wives can tell themselves: "I am doing this out of my love for Christ. I am submitting to the Lord, because of what He has done for me."

I would never try to convince a husband that his wife is worthy of his love, or try to convince a wife that her husband is worthy of her submission. The fact is, their spouses are not. But Christ is worthy of a husband's love and a wife's submission. It is important to understand this principle before we examine God's instructions for husbands and wives because this will give us the necessary motivation to obey.

The obvious questions, then, are: How can a husband love his wife just as Christ loved the church? How can a wife submit to her husband as unto the Lord?

## **Trust the Holy Spirit to Help You**

Unfortunately, when it comes to our marriages we often feel alone. God's standard for husbands and wives is so high that we ask, "Who is going to help me obey these commands?"

Two words that summarize what it is like thinking about being the husbands and wives God commands us to be are "intimidating" and "overwhelming." As a husband, it is intimidating to think of being to your wife what Christ is to the church. If you are not intimidated by it, you do not

understand what is expected of you. As a wife, it is overwhelming to think of submitting to your husband as you should to the Lord. If we had to obey God's commands on our own, we should feel not only overwhelmed or intimidated but completely hopeless. Because of a promise Jesus made us, though, we can feel hopeful.

Jesus told His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). If you have embraced the gospel, then the Holy Spirit lives in you. You are not alone! The Holy Spirit will empower you to do what God has commanded you to do.

The first half of Ephesians 5 is about living in the Spirit, and the second half is about marriage. This is fitting because if there is any area of the Christian life in which the Holy Spirit's help is necessary, it is marriage. In Ephesians 5:18, the apostle Paul states, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." It might sound odd to compare drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit, but we can sum up Paul's point with the word "influence." People who are driving drunk are "driving under the influence." Just as alcohol has the potential to influence, so does the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for "be filled" is *pleroo*, which means "keep on being filled" or "stay filled" with the Spirit. Paul is talking about something that should be ongoing in the lives of believers. Christians need to allow—and trust—the Holy Spirit to influence them as husbands and wives. The following verses are promises from God's Word. As you read them, consider how they apply to marriage:

- 2 Corinthians 9:8—God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.
- Philippians 2:13—It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
- Ephesians 1:19–20—The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

- Hebrews 13:20–21—May the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.

God gives us what we need to obey His commands. He is the One working in and through us to accomplish every good work. He makes this possible through the incomparably great power that raised Jesus from the dead. God wants us to be equipped to do what He has called us to do, and of all God wants from us, what could be more important than our relationships with our spouses?

Marriage is a reflection of Christ and the church. Does God want Christ and the church to have a great relationship? Absolutely! Does God want the world to witness Christian marriages that wonderfully represent Christ's relationship with the church? Without a doubt! God has given us His indwelling Spirit to help make that happen.

When we become discouraged in our marriages, these are the truths that we need to remember. It is as if God has said, "The standard I have set for husbands and wives is high, but you do not have to do this alone. I would not command you to do something without also giving you what is necessary to obey."

## **We Cannot Just Sit Back**

Let's bring some balance to this discussion by understanding the word "help." "I will help you" is very different from "I will do everything." The Holy Spirit helps us, but we need to remember that He does not do it all for us. We still have responsibilities. The Holy Spirit is not going to supernaturally take control of a marriage when the individuals involved are not committed to putting forth the necessary effort.

The apostle Paul reveals the relationship in Ephesians 2:10: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God prepared good works for us, but we have to "walk in them." We do not want to miss out on what God

wants to do in our marriage because we are being lazy or selfish. Consider the responsibilities placed on our shoulders elsewhere in the New Testament:

- Romans 13:13–14—Let us *walk properly* . . . *Put on* the Lord Jesus Christ, and *make no provision* for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.
- Colossians 3:12–14—*Put on* tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; [*bear*] *with* one another, and [*forgive*] one another . . . *Put on* love, which is the bond of perfection.

Note the calling we are given: walk, put on, make no provision for, bear with, and forgive. What does this look like in practical terms? How does the Holy Spirit's help work with our free will? Here are some examples.

Husband, you normally plop yourself down on the couch next to your wife, but the Holy Spirit has been compelling you to be more affectionate. So the next time you sit next to your wife, you put your arm around her. The Holy Spirit has also been leading you to be a better listener. Instead of simply hearing your wife speak, this time you nod and verbally affirm what she says. Perhaps even paraphrase her words to validate her sentiments. Since she is not used to this, your wife will notice and appreciate the extra effort.

Wife, you are riding in the car with your husband when you notice the low fuel light come on. Normally you point this out and “remind” him until he pulls into a gas station. Though he does not like this, you think it beats running out of gas. Lately, however, the Holy Spirit has been directing you to trust your husband, so this time you simply mention it and let it go. He pulls into a station, and since you have had a habit of telling him what to do, he notices the difference and is pleasantly surprised. Maybe at the pump he even says, “Thank you for not repeatedly telling me to pull over!”

In each case, the spouse would do well to verbalize his or her appreciation for the changed behavior.

These are only simple examples of how the Holy Spirit works with us. As you continue through this book, look for other ways. Be submissive and receptive to His guidance. Consider this encouraging verse that ties these thoughts together: “To this end I labor, according to [God's] working which works mightily in me” (Colossians 1:29).

The apostle Paul was discussing working side by side with God to accomplish His work. Similarly, we should see ourselves working side by side with God in our marriages. Yes, we labor to be the husbands and wives He wants us to be. But what an encouragement that while we are laboring, He also “works mightily in” us.

## Chapter Two

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# Marriage “Problems” Are Really Symptoms

**B**ecause our relationships with our spouses are a reflection of our relationship with Christ, our marriage “problems” are really only symptoms. The actual problems are in our relationship with Christ. In my own marriage, for instance, the “problem” looked like I did not have enough time for my wife and children, but that was only a symptom. The problem was that I would not listen to the Holy Spirit’s prompt to meet my family’s needs, and I was not trusting Christ enough but instead letting anxiety consume me.

This is why any biblical marriage counseling must address the couple’s relationship with the Lord. Couples I counsel are often confused when they share a problem they are experiencing and I respond by asking, “So what does your time in God’s Word look like? How is your prayer life? What about your involvement in the church?” A wife will say, “I just told you my husband yells at me. Why are you talking about his time in the Word?” Because the hope is that as a husband reads God’s Word he will become convicted of his sin and repent. He will become a more patient and loving man. I do not have the power to change a husband’s heart (and apparently neither does a wife or there would be no need for counseling). A husband can only become a new man through a relationship with Christ.

Likewise, a husband will respond, “I just told you how my wife humiliates me in front of our friends. Why would you mention joining a small group?” Because other believers can provide accountability, vulnerability, and

transparency; you can learn from others and be challenged by their examples. When you are not involved in the body of Christ, you will not receive the encouragement and exhortation God wants you to have. You will feel alone, as though you are the only couple having these problems. You will not have anyone in your life through whom God can regularly speak to you. We are made to have fellowship with other believers, and when we do not have it, that lack manifests itself in other areas, including our marriages.

Here are two situations I have witnessed many times. A husband and wife are having marriage problems. They submit to Christ, and soon their marriage improves. Why? Did their difficulties simply disappear? No, those difficulties had been symptoms of the real problem—Christ was not supreme in their lives. When they put Christ first, their marriage improved.

Similarly, I have seen a couple plugged into church. The husband and wife pray and read the Word together. They are doing well spiritually, and their marriage is healthy. Then, for various reasons, they get distracted from the Lord and their priorities shift. They start wavering in church attendance and spiritual disciplines. They fall out of fellowship. Soon their marriage suffers.

So remember: Marriage “problems” are really only symptoms—or negative consequences—of not having Christ as the focal point in the marital relationship. If couples want a strong, healthy marriage, they need a strong, healthy relationship with Christ. When a couple’s relationship with Christ is weak and unhealthy, the marriage will be weak and unhealthy.

## **Handling Frustrations**

*Marriage God's Way* is not split into one section for husbands and another for wives. The biblical passages on marriage, such as Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3, contain intertwined exhortations for both spouses. Husbands should read the instruction for wives, and wives should read the instruction for husbands so they can understand what is commanded of their spouses. If a husband knows what is expected of his wife, and a wife knows what is expected of her husband, they can help each other fulfill their biblical responsibilities.

Although, there is also a danger associated with this approach. Since the standard set by God’s Word is so high:

- A husband could easily become frustrated that his wife is not more respectful or submissive as God's Word commands.
- A wife could as easily become frustrated that her husband does not cherish her or provide the spiritual leadership God's Word commands.

This is illustrated by a situation that took place years ago when I was teaching on marriage. A woman stood up and began criticizing her husband in front of everyone. I could have interrupted and said, "Can we all just pray for you two?" or "Why don't we talk about this after the study?" Instead, I was caught so off guard that I did the worst thing possible—nothing! I simply stood there with my jaw dropped while the angry wife finished berating her husband.

After that, I decided that whenever I taught on marriage, I would remind people that the goal is to improve marriages, not to arm couples for World War III. So here are three encouragements for handling any frustrations:

1. We all have plenty of weaknesses that need to be addressed. Instead of keeping a mental account of all that your spouse does wrong, remind yourself of your own struggles.
2. Ask yourself: "How can I encourage my spouse to fulfill the role God has given him or her? Is there anything I can do that will make being married to me easier?" If you cannot think of any answers to these questions, you are not thinking hard enough.
3. Whenever you start to become frustrated toward your spouse, turn any frustrations into prayer. Take any feelings of hurt, betrayal, or disappointment, and pray that God will help your spouse grow in the area that is upsetting you. Pray also for God to help you be as forgiving and gracious as necessary. When it comes to our spouses, most people—myself included—are far more likely to complain, gossip, yell, threaten, pout, or ignore than to pray. If we would spend as much time praying for our spouses as we do on these other things, our marriages would be much better.

## **Embrace the Struggle**

As you work through this book, recognize the tension created in your marriage is a good thing. God is introducing areas that need to be improved, and the best way to do that is by asking each other tough questions. A husband might say, “Outside of the Lord Himself, do you feel like you are taking second place to anything in my life?” If a wife answers that she does not feel she is the supreme relationship in her husband’s life, the husband should not try to talk her out of the way she feels or persuade her to see things differently. Likewise, a wife might ask her husband, “Do you feel like I respect you?” If the husband explains how she makes him feel disrespected, the wife should not argue with her husband and try to convince him he is wrong. Instead, each spouse should listen to the other and try to make the appropriate changes.

When couples ask each other these difficult questions, they should expect some painful discussions. That’s great. Let me give you an analogy. A few months ago, I hurt my lower back. It is a recurring injury that reminds me I am getting older. So I returned to the chiropractor. If you have ever been to a chiropractor, you know they can be pretty forceful—pushing, twisting, snapping, and popping. Sometimes you are left feeling sore, but that is supposed to happen. That is how the chiropractor makes adjustments and straightens things out.

But what if you went to the chiropractor and all he did was rub your shoulders, pat your back, and tell you everything looked fine? After that, he sat next to you and asked how your day was going. How would you react? I know how I would react: “This is not why I came here. I know if you are going to help me, you are going to have to apply some pressure and do some pushing and pulling. There is going to be some tension. There will even be a little soreness afterward.”

Likewise, if we are going to improve our marriages, there is going to be some discomfort. There is going to be some struggle and tension. We should not be alarmed, because this is part of the natural healing and strengthening process as God works in our hearts. And what is the alternative? Simple. Close

this book. Be lazy. Do not ask each other the tough questions or talk about the tough issues. Do not take your marriage seriously. Do not improve as a husband, a wife, or a Christian.

If you avoid discussing the biblical teachings in this book with your spouse, you will not have any tough issues with which to wrestle. But you will not grow either, and your marriage will not be strengthened. Even if you avoid the difficult discussions and the discomfort that accompanies them now, you will more than likely experience even tougher, more uncomfortable situations later.

So I want to encourage you to embrace the struggles because of what they are going to produce. The apostle Paul tells us: “We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character, and character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). Glory in the struggles you are having, knowing that they are producing something good as you, your spouse, and your marriage are refined!

## **God's Chastening Is Not Punishment, but a Father's Loving Discipline**

Hebrews 12:5–6 discusses the way God produces good in our lives:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

We often apply these verses to God's punishment of sin, but the real context is God working out certain issues to produce fruit and righteousness in our lives. Since none of us is a perfect husband or wife, we all have sin in our marriages. That means each of us has certain behaviors and struggles God needs to fix as we grow in our sanctification and become more like Christ. God will chasten us to make that happen. While that does not always feel good, we should embrace the chastening, understanding that God is doing something good and worthwhile in our life.

The author of Hebrews goes on to say in verses 11–13:

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

How true are these verses! Nice, gentle back rubs feel good. They are enjoyable. But they do not do much for our lower back problems. If we really want solutions, we must experience some discomfort. Likewise, it is not easy or enjoyable to deal with our weaknesses. People do not want to talk about their struggles as a husband or wife. But that is how we grow, and that is how we allow God to work. Indeed, that is how “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” is produced in our lives.

Interestingly, the above passage suggests that this does not happen for everyone. Only certain people receive the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” According to verse 11, it is those who “have been trained by [the chastening].” The Greek word for “trained” is *gymnazo*, related to our word “gymnasium.” It means to exercise vigorously. Improving our marriages is hard work. As we embrace the struggles in marriage, talking about them and working through them, we need to give ourselves the exhortation the author of Hebrews gives his readers. Let’s strengthen our weak hands and feet, trusting God to make straight paths for our marriages to be healed.

As I look back at that painful time in our marriage that I discussed in the previous chapter, I am very thankful for it. Like all trials, God used it for our benefit. James 1:2–4 says:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

One of the greatest blessings from this trial in our lives—one of the ways God used it powerfully—relates to what He taught Katie and me through it. It is not easy to understand how powerful God’s Word is when you have not seen it work. It is not easy to understand the importance of obeying Scripture

until you have disobeyed it and personally experienced the negative consequences.

That difficult season in my marriage taught me a number of the principles I share in this book. This is when I learned how important it is to apply God's Word and lean on the Holy Spirit for help. This is when I had to embrace the struggles Katie and I experienced so our marriage could improve. I had to ask my wife the tough questions, such as: "What do we need to do to make this work? What do I need to change? How am I failing you?" I also had to ask her to forgive me for not making her the supreme relationship—second to Christ—the Lord wanted her to be in my life.

## **Part II: Genesis 1–3**

### ***Creation of Marriage and the Fall***

## Chapter Three

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# God's Establishment of Adam's Headship

**T**wice the apostle Paul stated the headship of a husband:

- 1 Corinthians 11:3—But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.
- Ephesians 5:23—For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Although these verses are found in the New Testament, a husband's headship did not have its beginning under the New Covenant. Neither does male headship have its beginning in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant. It does not even have its beginning at the fall.

Male headship actually had its beginning at creation itself. This is important, because if we think headship began after the fall, then this leadership becomes part of sin's curse. If we understand that man's headship began at creation, we will see it as part of God's natural, healthy, divine plan for husbands and wives.

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and the rest of the chapter gives an overview of all six days of creation. God created man and woman on the sixth day. Then, in Genesis 2:7–25, God zooms in on the creation of Adam and Eve since mankind is the pinnacle of God's creation. We are so familiar with the account that it is easy to miss the

significance of some of the details. Therefore, let's approach this passage as though we are reading it for the first time. It is in this account that God established man's headship.

Since God created the animals in pairs, male and female, what would we expect Him to do with the creation of humankind? We would expect Him to create the first man and woman at the same time—as a pair, male and female. But that is not what He did, and in creating man first and woman second, God revealed a number of important details.

## **God's First Command**

After God created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden to work (Genesis 2:15). Creating Adam before Eve allowed God to give His first command to Adam alone. Genesis 2:16–17 says:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

God gave the command to Adam as he stood there alone. Managing the garden was his duty, but when Eve was eventually fashioned, he had the responsibility of passing along to her what he had learned from God. Then Eve had the responsibility of trusting her husband's account. God did not have to do it this way. He could have given the command to both of them after Eve was created, but in doing it this way, God established Adam's headship in the relationship.

## **Adam Names the Animals and Eve**

God had Adam name the animals, which disclosed his lack of a companion. Genesis 2:19–20 says:

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to

every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

Again, we see God do something with Adam that He could have had Adam and Eve do together. There are two reasons for this. In Genesis 1:26, God said:

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

First, God wanted man to have authority over creation, and He established that authority by directing Adam to name the animals. Second, instead of simply giving Adam a helper or telling him he should desire one, God chose to reveal this lack to him by bringing the animals to him in pairs. Adam quickly noticed that the animals were in pairs, but he himself was not part of any pair! As Genesis 2:20 describes, he noticed there was no “helper comparable to him.”

With Adam now longing for a mate, God was ready to fashion Eve. Here again, familiarity may cause us to miss the significance of certain details. Up to this point, one recurring theme has been God’s creation of living things from ordinary dirt:

- Genesis 2:7—And the LORD God formed man *of the dust of the ground*, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
- Genesis 2:9—And *out of the ground* the LORD God made every tree grow.
- Genesis 2:19—*Out of the ground* the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air.

With this repetition, we would expect to read: “The LORD God formed woman *of the dust of the ground*, and breathed into her nostrils the breath of life; and woman became a living being.” Instead, Genesis 2:21–23 says:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: “This is now

bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Earlier, God brought the animals to Adam to be named, demonstrating Adam’s authority over them. Adam then named his wife, demonstrating his authority over her: “She shall be called Woman.” This is one more indication of God establishing Adam’s headship within the marriage relationship.

## **History’s First Surgery**

God performed history’s first surgery by using Adam’s body to fashion Eve, and what modern science reveals about this is fascinating. Every cell in our bodies contains our entire genetic blueprint or DNA. Therefore, God could take some of Adam’s cells and use their DNA to create Eve. The reverse, however, would not have been possible, because men’s DNA contains both X and Y chromosomes (XY), while women’s DNA contains only X chromosomes (XX). If God had created woman first, it would have been impossible to create man, because there would be no Y chromosomes, which is the chromosome that determines male gender. Adam had the genetic material—both X and Y chromosomes—for a woman to be created from his DNA, allowing for the reproduction of men and women.

In being fashioned from Adam, Eve has the unique distinction of being the only part of creation not created out of the ground. Since Adam was created in the image and likeness of God, Eve was just as wonderfully created in the image and likeness of God. It should also be pointed out that while God created woman from man, He brought forth every other human being since Eve from woman. The apostle Paul explained it like this:

For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man . . . Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman (1 Corinthians 11:8–9, 11–12).

A final detail of significance is that God's creation of woman from man involved far more than Adam's rib. The Hebrew word for rib is *tsela*. The word occurs forty-one times in the Old Testament, but only here in Genesis 2:21–22 is it translated “rib.” Nineteen times *tsela* is translated as “side” and eleven times as “chamber.” Here are a few examples:

- Exodus 25:12—You shall cast four rings of gold for [the ark], and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side (*tsela*), and two rings on the other side (*tsela*).
- 2 Samuel 16:13—And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside (*tsela*) opposite him and cursed as he went.
- 1 Kings 6:8—The doorway for the middle story was on the right side (*tsela*) of the temple.

Eve came from Adam's side, not only from his rib, which is also made clear in Adam's words in Genesis 2:23 when he calls Eve “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

Why did God choose to create Eve from Adam's side instead of creating her from the dust of the ground like everything else? God wanted Adam and Eve to understand the unity between them. This is why the next verse, Genesis 2:24, says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This is a very odd statement since Adam and Eve are the only two people in history with no “father and mother.” Therefore, this verse is not primarily about them but is instructive for all future marriages.

Genesis 2:24 further supports male headship. Why does the command mention a man leaving his father and mother but not a woman leaving her father and mother? It is because the man is moving out from under his parents' authority and establishing his own headship—or authority—over his family. But the woman is not doing the same. She is simply moving from being under her father to being under her husband.

This is why 1 Corinthians 11:3 does not say, “The head of every man and woman is Christ.” Instead, it states, “The head of every man is Christ [and] the head of woman is man.” Women remain under a man's authority, first her

father's and then her husband's, and these men are under Christ. This biblical principle is played out at weddings symbolically when the father walks his daughter down the aisle and gives her to the man who is about to become her husband. The image is of a transfer of authority from father to husband.

## **Egalitarianism Versus Complementarianism**

Egalitarianism is the rejection of the authority God established between husbands and wives. Egalitarians believe God does not have separate and distinct plans for men and women but that they are interchangeable in terms of their roles and responsibilities. Homosexual marriage, transgenderism, and bisexuality are simply extreme forms of egalitarianism.

The Scripture most cited by egalitarians is Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Using the verse to support egalitarianism is taking it out of context because it deals with salvation. Everyone, whether Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male, or female is saved in the same manner—by grace through faith apart from the law and works (Galatians 3:1–25). If Paul were saying men and women are identical in terms of responsibilities, he would be contradicting numerous Scriptures he wrote outlining the differences between the gender roles.

Bible scholar James Fowler explains:

Egalitarian assertions are based on false premises. [Identical] responsibilities and authority produces the chaos of no one having ultimate authority or responsibility. The egalitarian premises of socialistic communism are unworkable. Identity, value and worth are not found in gender function, but in a personal Being beyond ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Complementarianism, on the other hand, teaches that God has separate and distinct responsibilities for men and women that allow them to balance

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<sup>2</sup> James Fowler. “Women in the Church.” *Christ In Your Ministries*. 1999. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://www.christinyou.net/pages/womeninchurch.html>.

and support each other. Complementarians recognize the gender roles in Scripture are meaningful and, when embraced, promote spiritual and emotional health that allows people to reach their God-given potential.

Scripture says, “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27, 5:2; Mark 10:6). The emphasis is not on God’s creating people but on His creating two different types of humans: one male and one female. The rest of Scripture goes on to reveal the distinct plans God has for each. Although men and women equally share God’s image and together have dominion over creation, God designed them differently in order to accomplish His purposes.

A common criticism of complementarianism is that it is chauvinistic in that it identifies one gender as superior to the other. Egalitarians will insist a difference in roles and responsibilities implies a difference in equality, but two people can be different and equal. Men and women can have the same value and significance while not being identical in their roles or responsibilities. God’s very nature supports this in that there are three different Persons with distinct roles, but there is still equality.<sup>3</sup>

Pastor David Guzik states:

In our day, many say there is no real difference between men and women. This makes sense if we are the result of mindless evolution, but the Bible says “male and female He created them.” To God, the differences between men and women are not accidents. Since He created them, the differences are good and meaningful. One of the saddest signs of our culture’s depravity is the amount and the degree of gender confusion today. It is vain to wonder if men or women are superior to the other. A man is absolutely superior at being a man. A woman is absolutely superior at being a woman. But when a man tries to be a woman or a woman tries to be a man, you have something inferior.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Read more about this in Chapter 13.

<sup>4</sup> David Guzik, “Genesis 1” Enduring Word Media. 2013. Accessed March 7, 2016. <http://enduringword.com/commentaries/0101.htm>.

We should never expect the secular world to agree with God's Word and accept complementarianism. The real tragedy, though, is when Christians hold to an egalitarian view, seeing no differences between men and women's roles in the home or the church. Such individuals may not condone such outright sins as homosexuality and transgenderism, but they will subtly support these agendas as they deny gender roles and undermine God's Word.

Just as men are needed in the home and the church in crucial ways, so women are needed in the home and the church in crucial ways. But the way each gender is needed is different, and we must maintain the distinctions between the roles and responsibilities if we are to obey God's Word.

## **Better Together**

We will look at Genesis 2:18 later, but for now it is worth noting God called Eve “a helper comparable to [Adam]” and the Hebrew word for “comparable” is *neged*. Other translations say “suitable for him” (NASB, NIV) and “fit for him” (ESV). The literal translation actually means “opposite or contrasting.”

Men and women were designed to fit perfectly in all ways—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. When a husband and wife become one flesh on their wedding day, they are two people who complement and complete each other. Together, they become something stronger and more magnificent than they could ever be alone. The strengths of each compensate for the weaknesses of the other:

- When a husband thinks about his wife, he should see her as God's suitable companion for him.
- When a wife thinks about her husband, she should see herself as God's perfect fit for him.

We should give thanks to God for His wonderful design and do everything we can to fulfill the roles He has given us as husband and wife.

## Chapter Four

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# Male Leadership Is God's Pattern

The pattern of male leadership in the community of faith began at creation and is maintained throughout Scripture:

- There were patriarchs instead of matriarchs.
- The tribes of Israel were named after men.
- The only legitimate mediators between God and people were men (i.e., priests instead of priestesses).
- God appointed kings instead of queens.
- God called men to be the focal points of His covenants with mankind (i.e., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus).

So why do we see examples of female leadership in Scripture? What about queens, prophetesses, at least one female judge—Deborah? Were these women an anomaly? Are they examples of rebellion against God's design, or is there another explanation? To answer these questions, let's look at them individually.

### Queens

Scripture mentions three prominent queens, and they fall into two categories. Jezebel (1 Kings 16–22; 2 Kings 9) and Athaliah (2 Kings 8, 11) were evil women who seized control and became tyrannical leaders. Jezebel instituted the worship of the false god Baal across Israel and persecuted followers of Yahweh. Athaliah murdered her grandchildren upon the death of her son and then seized the throne of Judah. Clearly, neither woman serves as a good example.

On the other hand, Esther stands in contrast as a godly queen. She supported male leadership through her submission first to her adopted father, Mordecai, and then to her husband, King Xerxes of Persia. In doing so, God used her to save her entire people from annihilation (Esther 5:1–8, 8:1–8).

## **Priestesses**

Under the Mosaic Covenant, only men could be priests because they were the teachers: “[The priests] may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken” (Leviticus 10:11). When female priestesses are mentioned, they are associated with pagan religions such as the worship of Astarte or Baal. Wayne Grudem, professor of theology and co-founder of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, explains: “Think of the Bible as a whole, from Genesis to Revelation. Where is there one example in the entire Bible of a woman publicly teaching an assembled group of God’s people? There is none.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Prophetesses**

No negative association is attached in Scripture to women being prophetesses. They could occupy this office for the simple reason that it was not a position of leadership. Authors John Piper and Wayne Grudem explain:

It is instructive to note in the Old Testament that some women were prophets, but never priests. It is the priests who had the more settled and established positions of leadership in Israel. Prophecy is a different kind of gift from teaching, and when women functioned as prophets they did so with a demeanor and attitude that supported male leadership. Women who had the gift of prophecy did not exercise it in a public forum as male prophets did. The reason for this is that such a public exercise of authority would contradict male headship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Crossway, 2012), p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway, 2006), p. 217.

If we consider briefly two examples of the most prominent prophetesses in the Old Testament, we see how they not only do not conflict with male headship but actually support it. The first example is Moses's sister Miriam. After Israel crossed the Red Sea, Moses led the nation in a song of praise (Exodus 15:1–19). Then Miriam did something similar in Exodus 15:20–21, but with an important difference: “Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: ‘Sing to the LORD . . .’” Note that Miriam led only the women in singing, as opposed to leading both women and men as her brother had done.

Conversely, consider what happened when Miriam joined Aaron in challenging Moses's leadership. In Numbers 12:2 they claimed, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through [you]? Has He not spoken through us also?” Apparently, Aaron and Miriam thought they should have some of Moses's authority. God quickly called the people of Israel to the tabernacle of meeting, appeared in the pillar of cloud, rebuked Aaron and Miriam, defended Moses, and gave Miriam leprosy (Numbers 12:4–10).

After Moses interceded for Miriam, her leprosy was removed, but God still commanded that she be put outside the camp for seven days (Numbers 12:13–15). Considering that Aaron engaged in the same sin as Miriam, why was she the only one punished in such a way? While it was bad for Aaron to try to usurp his brother's authority, it was even worse for Miriam, as a woman, to do so.

Another prominent prophetess was Huldah. During Josiah's restoration of the temple, the Book of the Law (Pentateuch) was discovered. When it was read before Josiah, he was grieved to discover how far his nation had strayed from following God. Tearing his clothes, Josiah sent messengers to “inquire of the Lord” (2 Kings 22:13). Those messengers went to Huldah the prophetess. The significance of Huldah's response is that she did not publicly proclaim God's Word. Rather, she explained it privately to the messengers (2 Kings 22:15–20). She exercised her prophetic ministry in a way that did not obstruct but instead supported male headship.

Numerous other prophetesses are listed throughout Scripture, making clear this was not an anomaly:

- Deborah, who also served as a judge (Judges 4:4)
- The wife of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 8:3)
- Anna, who spoke about Jesus's birth in the temple (Luke 2:36–38)
- The four daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9)

In each case, however, like Huldah, there is no record of these women having the public ministries of their male counterparts.

Other women are not called prophetesses but are recorded as prophesying:

- Hannah, mother of Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 2:1–10)
- Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39–45)
- Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46–55)

But in each instance, the women prophesied under the headship of a husband or father or, in the case of the widow Anna, the temple's own male leadership.

## **Deborah the Reluctant Judge**

Judges were Israel's primary rulers for almost three-and-a-half centuries. They also commanded armies, making them some of the strongest leaders in Scripture. So why did Deborah serve as judge? Her position is often the first brought up to support female leadership. Since Deborah raises understandable confusion, I would like to examine her situation in a little more depth to demonstrate how she also supports the principle of male headship.

Throughout the book of Judges, as men rise to leadership, we read verses identifying them as chosen or empowered by God:

- Judges 3:9—The LORD raised up a deliverer . . . Othniel.
- Judges 3:15—The LORD raised up a deliverer . . . Ehud.
- Judges 6:14—The LORD [said to Gideon], “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel . . . Have I not sent you?”
- Judges 11:29—The Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah.

- Judges 13:24–25—Samson . . . grew and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him.

But with Deborah there is no recognition of God's appointing. Judges 4:4 simply says, "Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time." Her introduction emphasizes that she is female, but in a negative light. Wayne Grudem writes:

Judges 4:4 suggests some amazement at the unusual nature of the situation in which a woman actually has to judge Israel, because it piles up a string of redundant words to emphasize that Deborah is a woman. Translating the Hebrew text literally, the verse says, 'And Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she was judging Israel at the time.' Something is abnormal, something is wrong—there are no men to function as judge! This impression is confirmed when we read of Barak's timidity and the rebuke he receives as well as the loss of glory he could have received.<sup>7</sup>

Judges 4:5 says Deborah "would sit under the palm tree . . . And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." The nation approached her privately. She did not publicly teach the Word of God. Like Huldah and other prophetesses, she is another example of a woman limited to private and individual instruction. Even when Deborah calls for Barak, Judges 4:6–7 shows her speaking to him privately:

Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'"

Let's take note of several phrases in these verses:

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Crossway, 2012), p. 134.

- The statement “Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded?” should not be understood as Deborah giving orders to Barak. As a prophetess, Deborah received a word from God and passed it along to Barak, confirming what he already should have known—that God commanded him to lead the army.
- The directive, “Go and deploy troops,” is particularly significant because Deborah was judge at the time. She was in the position typically occupied by Israel’s commander, but rather than summon or command troops herself, she let Barak know that God had called him to lead.
- The phrase, “against you I will deploy Sisera,” clarifies God’s plan for Sisera to attack Barak, not Deborah.
- “I will deliver him into your hand” indicates God wanted Barak, and not Deborah, to claim victory over Sisera.

All this shows that even while serving as judge, Deborah affirmed the rightness of male leadership, not only looking to Barak to lead but letting him know this was what God wanted. Sadly, Barak did not step up but instead told Deborah, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go” (Judges 4:8). We recognize something is not right about a man telling a woman, “I will not go to battle unless you go with me.”

Not surprisingly, Deborah rebuked Barak’s reluctance: “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (Judges 4:9). Deborah’s prophecy came true. God routed Sisera’s army before Barak, but it was a woman, Jael, who ended up defeating the enemy commander (Judges 4:17–22). Barak should not have insisted Deborah accompany him but instead taken leadership himself.

This entire account is not advocating for female leadership but is instead presented as a criticism of Barak. The book of Judges records some of Israel’s worst days, and the absence of male leadership is a strong reflection of the time. Deborah’s judgeship actually served as a rebuke to the nation regarding the absence of male leadership. Later, during another dark period in Israel’s history, the prophet Isaiah asserted that women ruling was a sign of God’s

judgment: “As for My people, children are their oppressors, *and women rule over them*. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths” (Isaiah 3:12).

Neither the book of Judges nor the account of Deborah and Barak is presented as an example to follow. The book of Judges is largely an example *not* to follow, as it recounts the breakdown of leadership among God’s people: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

Is there application for marriages in this? Definitely:

- When men need their wives to tell them to take the family to church, pray, or read the Word, they are acting like Barak.
- When a wife is urging her husband to lead and a husband resists or prefers that his wife take charge instead, he is following Barak’s example.

If there is an example to be followed here, it is Deborah. She encouraged Barak to lead, told him what God desired of him, and rebuked him when he would not take charge. It is also worth noticing what she did not do. When Barak refused to lead, she did not take control of the situation herself but rather let God direct Barak’s steps and victory. Her story should motivate women to do what she did, and Barak’s failure should motivate men to avoid the mistakes he made.

## **The Pattern Continues Today**

The pattern of male leadership established at creation is maintained throughout the Old Testament and then carried into the New Testament. The Twelve Apostles were men. Jesus could have chosen six men and six women, but He chose all men for these important leadership positions. The Seventy who were sent out after the Twelve were all men (Luke 10:1). Again, though He could have chosen thirty-five men and thirty-five women, Jesus chose all men.

Church elders are identified as men. Consider the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1–5: “If a *man* desires the position of a bishop, *he* desires a good work . . . the *husband* of one wife . . . one who rules *his* own house well, having

*his* children in submission.” We see the same when Paul discusses elders in Titus 1:6, 9: “If a *man* is blameless, the *husband* of one wife . . . holding fast the faithful word as *he* has been taught.” When churches have female pastors or elders, they have rejected the teaching of God’s Word. God does not recognize women in those positions, because only men can occupy the office.

In 1 Timothy 2:12–14, the apostle Paul instructs: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” The foundation of these verses comes from two truths we already discussed:

1. Adam was created first.
2. Eve was deceived. While it sounds as though Adam is commended for not being deceived and Eve is condemned for being deceived, it is actually the opposite. Eve was not as much at fault because she was deceived while Adam was more at fault because he sinned knowingly.

Sometimes people ask: “Why can’t women be in leadership over men in the church or in the home?” It has nothing to do with talent or gifting. Some women are fantastic teachers and leaders, and they should use their skills over other women and children.

What it does have to do with is Adam’s being created first and Eve’s being deceived. Beyond that, I cannot say because those are the only two reasons Paul gives in 1 Timothy 2:13–14. The real question is not “Why can’t women?” The real question—and it is the same question we often face—is: “Will we submit to God’s Word?”

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## ***About the Author***

Scott LaPierre and his wife, Katie, grew up together in McArthur, California, and they have been blessed with seven children. After college, Scott served as an Army officer before becoming an elementary school teacher. While teaching, he began working part time as an associate pastor at Grace Baptist Church in Lemoore, California. When the church grew, he was hired full time and remained there until becoming the senior pastor of Woodland Christian Church in Woodland, Washington, in 2010.

Scott has a bachelor's degree in business administration and two master's degrees, one in education and the other in biblical studies. He enjoys spending time with both his home and church families and studying and teaching God's Word.

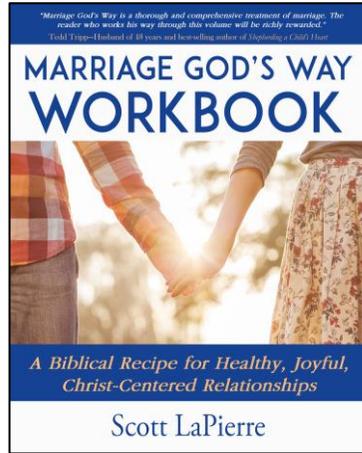
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