

Daughters of Sarah

For Better or For Worse, Part 4

1 Peter 3:5-6

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Peter urges Christian wives to pattern their lives around the character of Abraham's wife Sarah. The way to glorify God is by submitting to your husband and following the complementary nature that God instilled between the sexes. Submitting to your husband's headship displays the creation order and also gives a picture of how the church should live in relation to Christ. Sarah is set forth as an model of a holy woman who exemplified the freedom that comes through submitting to your husband.

Discussion Points:

Marriages are difficult. They will always be that way because they unite two sinful people through a covenant under God. The Fall in the Garden of Eden caused both men and women to desire control over their own lives. The sinful nature is selfish, so conflict arises in a marriage where two sinners are brought together.

- How would you describe headship and submission as taught by the Bible?
- How does the teaching on male headship in the Bible help couples today understand how to glorify God?
- How does living according to the gender roles God created help to alleviate conflict within a marriage?

In the previous verses, Peter outlines what godly character looks like for a woman who is a believer in Christ Jesus.

- How do these character traits of the heart relate to the topic of submission?
- How did Sarah show these character traits throughout the narrative in Genesis?
- Does having these character traits make it easier or harder to submit to your husband?
- Do you feel like you exemplify the character traits that come along with submitting to Christ?

Discussion Guide cont.

In the context of this charge of submission to husbands, Peter is talking directly about Christian women submitting to their unbelieving spouses.

- How is it possible to submit to a sinful man?
- What does it mean for God to create Eve as a suitable helper for Adam?
- How does submission of a godly woman help to complement her husband's role?

Submission does not imply lesser value. It does not mean that a woman is inferior in any way to her husband. It does not mean to be blindly or mindlessly following no matter the circumstances. Submission is all about structure and function for how a Christian house is to run.

- How does this description of submission differ from that of the world?
- Can Christians expect the non-believing couples to model the submission and headship roles that Christians are called to?

The Bible uses Abraham as a great example of a man displaying faith. Others who are known for their faith are considered to be like "children of Abraham". Peter, here, gives the example of Abraham's wife being a good example of how a wife should submit to her husband and how those who follow the same pattern are considered her children. If those examples are followed, there should be no room for fear.

- How does the pattern of headship and submission bring peace to a relationship?
- How does following the complementary gender roles eliminate fear?
- Are there women you know who show how to submit rightly? How can you learn from them?

Gospel Connection:

Submission can be a scary topic to cover for couples because of so many misconceptions about what the term actually means. The Bible outlines the creation order in the Garden of Eden and how God originally designed men and women to relate to each other. It also tells of how a marriage should exemplify the way that Jesus loves and cares for the church and, in return, the church submits to his leading. The church is said to be a co-heir with Jesus. In the same way, husbands and wives are co-heirs. There is no superiority or inferiority within the model of headship and submission. The grace given by God makes it possible to lay aside personal agendas and selfishness and cling to the gospel example in loving each other to honor and glorify God.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Are you fulfilling the role that God has for men and women? Are you consciously seeking to understand what the Bible says on the topic?
- Pray:** Thank God for his glorious design. Ask him to help you to serve him best to bring him glory. Ask God to help you find other examples of godliness around you that you can follow.
- Do:** Look for godly examples of manhood and womanhood around you that to learn from. Join with others in encouragement to continue to walk in godliness and bring God glory.

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For Better or For Worse, Part 4

1 Peter 3:5-6

If A London-based luxury travel company is offering to plan your destination wedding down to the last detail. In fact, they guarantee that rain will not ruin your wedding day. Is this really possible? According to their website, the answer is “Absolutely, yes.”

Their site promises, “in order to ensure the most perfect of perfect days, we can now offer our customers a ‘cloud-busting’ service that can 100 percent guarantee fair weather and clear skies for your wedding day! Currently available to customers organizing a destination wedding in France . . . our service employs the talents of pilots and meteorologists and takes just three weeks to plan; we’re prepared to drop silver iodide and ‘seed’ the clouds by our pilots who are on standby—essentially giving the water vapor something to condense around to produce rain [so that by the time of your wedding, the skies are clear.] The cost for the perfect weather for your perfect wedding starts at \$150,000 . . . but then again, you can’t put a price on perfection.”ⁱ

Frankly, I doubt anyone has ever had the perfect wedding ceremony. Whether you realized too late that you spelled your grandmother’s name wrong in the wedding program or, as I read recently, listed the wrong passage from the Bible. The couple caught it in time; had they not, their cousin would not have read a passage on the love of God, but a passage on the anti-Christ.

A friend of mine in the pastorate told me several years ago about a wedding ceremony he performed in a small country church in the dead of winter. The heating system included those metal running boards along the sides of the little chapel that clicked and popped with dry heat. Unfortunately the janitor had waited too long to

turn on the heat and so, just before the guests began arriving, he went down into the basement and turned it up really high to try and warm the chapel quickly. Then he forgot about it and went home. By the time the ceremony began, the chapel was hot and stuffy. My friend told me, as you would imagine, one bridesmaid fainted – and then another.

Finally, the bride herself fainted – they revived her, and moments later she fainted again. Someone ran and put some cold water on a towel and she spent the rest of the ceremony on the kneeling bench with that towel on her face. After the ceremony was over, and the couple had planned to race off on their honeymoon, but the bride refused to go; she simply couldn’t remember saying any vows! In fact, she couldn’t remember getting married. It was only after they hurriedly played the video in the pastor’s office and she saw herself getting married that she agreed to leave.

My friend told me that he hoped the honeymoon went better than the wedding.

There is no such thing as a perfect wedding ceremony. And the truth is, even if you had a near-perfect wedding ceremony with just the right weather and climate control – and nobody fainted and everybody’s name was spelled correctly and the flower girl and the ring bearer did exactly as they were instructed – that near-perfect wedding was soon replaced by a not-so perfect marriage.

And that is because marriage is the union of imperfect people. Marriage is two sinners – uniting in covenant together – under God.

For the first couple recorded in human history – all the way to the 21st century church – we are still in need of answers to the same basic questions about marriage. And the questions all

revolve around the same issue – how is this thing supposed to work?

And the Apostle Peter has been delivering Spirit-inspired truth in his first letter. Let's go back there today – to **1 Peter chapter 3**.

The Apostle Peter has opened his comments by addressing wives, and the opening subject has revolved around the concept of submission.

Then Peter moves on to the appearance, the behavior and the internal attitudes of a godly wife – in fact, believing women in general can apply these truths.

Peter is in the process of turning the tables on contemporary thinking; he makes it clear that true beauty isn't the fact that you can make heads turn as you take a spin down the red carpet.

True beauty isn't external – beauty is from the inside out – and the wardrobe of genuine beauty is graciousness and composure. A godly woman gets dressed from the inside out.

Peter has spent several verses on giving wives – and women in general – *instruction* and *motivation*. Now, Peter gives an *illustration*.ⁱⁱ

Let's pick it back up there as we arrive at **verses 5 and 6** as his comments to wives come to a close.

Notice, **1 Peter 3:5** *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; 6. just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.*

That right there is a husband's favorite verse, isn't it? **Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.**

Now *there* is a verse to write out on a 3x5 card and tape on the refrigerator. If she starts to tell you a thing or two, you can just point toward the refrigerator. This is inspired scripture.

We'll come back to this "calling him lord" in a minute; but first, let's go back to the fact that Peter is indeed circling back around to this issue of submission. He began with it in **verse 1** – **"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands"** . . . and now he brings it up again at the end of this paragraph – **middle**

part of verse 5 – being submissive to their own husbands.

Peter is a married man, by the way; the Lord Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, we are told in **Matthew 8:14**, and you typically don't get a mother-in-law without getting the benefit of a wife.

Well, is this subject stuck on Peter's mind because maybe his wife is acting up; she isn't cooking his favorite meals? Probably not.

He is delivering what every generation needs; this is a wedding rehearsal on the core issues of how to leave that ceremony and engage in married life.

Now as we learned in our previous exposition on **verse 1**, the Greek word for **submission** here means "to willingly rank under."ⁱⁱⁱ

It can be expanded to refer to voluntarily arrange and adapt and serve with deference and respect.^{iv}

The word is actually an administrative term, which carries the idea of voluntarily assisting in order to bring to completion.

God created the wife's role to serve as a divinely ordained assistant to her husband. In fact, God uses that same language as Moses quotes God all the way back in the Garden of Eden as He is about to create Eve – and walk her down the aisle to Adam; God says, **"I will make him a helper suitable for him."**

"I'm going to give Adam a helper!" That is another way of saying, "The man *really* needs help!"

And all the married men in here said a hearty, "Amen!"

One author I quoted several weeks ago pointed out that a wife who embraces this God-glorifying perspective understands that as she voluntarily submits to her husband, she is actually completing him. She is helping him fulfill his responsibilities; helping him become the man, the husband, the leader God intended him to be.^v

The trouble is, you mention the idea of submission today and people in your world

immediately assume you came to America on the Mayflower.

The idea of submission is archaic at best; tantamount to slavery, at worst.

But God calls it strength. As we learned in our last discussion, this is a woman of power, under control.

Since my sermons are not only heard in here, but out there through internet and radio and Facebook, there is a lot of exposure to this exposition and, as you can imagine, a lot of reaction.

My first sermon in this chapter on the subject of submission led to responses that ranged from anger and charges of false teaching to frustration and even sadness that husbands weren't really living a life worth following.

Even though we are going to get to the men in the next paragraph, for now, remember that God has defined roles for husbands, wives, children, kings, legal authorities, government workers and elders in the church.

Submitting to a person who has a position of authority doesn't mean a woman has less value.

In fact, keep in mind that submission doesn't have anything to do with less value or character, but with structure and function in the home.

That policeman who stops me on the interstate for not reaching the minimum speed – happens to me all the time – has unique authority I don't have and it has nothing to do with character or holiness or value; he occupies a role I don't have.

Submission in marriage doesn't mean that a wife is inferior as a person to her husband – in fact, any man who thinks submission of a wife is based on the inferiority of women is revealing his own inferiority complex.

And let me add another thought: submission does not mean blind obedience. God's idea of a wife serving as her husband's helper means that she has things to contribute and add and improve and even correct and warn – as we will see in a moment.

Any man who believes submission is blind obedience is himself blind.

For the women hearing this letter read in the first century assembly, one of their great challenges would have been the fact that there weren't elective courses on marriage and family; the church was young and materials were only now being written for the New Testament church.

Not only was the church relatively young, but there weren't books being published on how to be a wife. Just go to Amazon.com and you will find a quarter of a million books on marriage alone. And not all of those books will get it right.

And in this immediate context, this is directed to women who are in very difficult marriages to unbelievers – a man, Peter describes in *verse 1* as, ***disobedient to the word*** – an expression of unbelief, but perhaps broad enough to include men who claim to know Christ but live ungodly lives.

For believing women scattered throughout the Roman Empire, there were little resources to draw from, which is why Peter reminds them of the Old Testament which they would have known well.

Verse 5 again – ***For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.***

Peter is essentially telling them that submission isn't new – and even more encouragingly – these women aren't alone. In fact, he reminds them that believing women throughout the past history of redemption were adorned by these same submissive qualities of graciousness and composure.

And did you notice his description of them here in *verse 5*? **Two descriptions** are provided; first, they are ***holy women***. That doesn't mean they were perfect women; the word holy means separated for God's glory. In other words, these women lived their lives for God's glory. Secondly, they ***hoped in God*** – “that is they looked to God as their source of strength.”^{vi}

They looked to God for their provision and for their courage and purpose in life. Their *hope* – that is, their settled conviction in God – wasn't determined by their culture or by their peers or even by their husbands.

They were *holy women who hoped in God*. These were women of old who lived their lives for God's glory; depending every day on God's power.

Their hope was *in God!* There is your rock – there is your fortress. He is your strong tower and safe refuge.

Peter writes to women in the first century that these women in past centuries were known for their character and holiness and trust. They were not inferior intellects or moral cowards.

Peter doesn't stop to list these Old Testament women of holy courage and character, but you can imagine many in the assembly as this letter was being read would have sort of mentally wandered off into the corridors of Old Testament history and recalled some favorite names of holy women from the past.

Perhaps they would have thought of Abigail – the woman of composure and grace who was married to a foolish, arrogant farmer named Nabal.

When young David and his troops were in hiding from King Saul, David and his men were on Nabal's property and they graciously protected Nabal's flocks and herds from thieves and wild animals.

When David needed food he sent a message to Nabal asking for provisions. Nabal responded in arrogance and mocked David and his men and refused to feed them. David and his men mounted up and planned to get revenge.

Abigail overheard what was happening and took matters into her own hands to save her foolish husband's neck; she loaded up food and then met David and his men before they reached the family estate.

She wisely diffuses the situation and ends up sparing her husband's life and giving David and his men food and provision – David praises her wisdom and returns home.

And Abigail returns home to a difficult marriage to a selfish and arrogant husband, but she doesn't keep from her husband the truth of what happened and how his foolish decision almost cost him his life. Early the next morning she tells him that David and his men had planned to kill him because of his foolish decision.

We are not told how that conversation went or what kind of tone she had – although you can imagine it wasn't pleasant – and after she finished confronting him and telling him the truth, he had a heart attack and died.

The point isn't that she confronted him and he died. The point is, she did the right thing and took initiative and communicated grace and a warning to David and the truth to her husband. You can read the full account in *1 Samuel 25*.

Peter assumes the early church knew the narratives and left it to them to do their own study. The reason I thought of Abigail is the fact that her testimony of courage and faith would resonate with these women in this specific context in 1 Peter who were married to unbelieving men.

Peter is providing for the church an illustration: these women of old who were clothed with this kind of character and grace and strength and value were also clothed with submission to their own husbands – that is, they were dedicated to supporting and encouraging and helping their husbands.

Now Peter shifts his focus to one woman in particular. Notice *verse 6, just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord*.

Peter is referring to that moment in their marriage where the angelic visitors are announcing to an elderly Abraham that he and his elderly wife, Sarah, are going to have a child.

For the sake of time we won't turn there, but the event is detailed in *Genesis 18*.

When she hears the announcement of bearing a son, Sarah laughs to herself at such a thought – which was indeed rather ludicrous, given the fact that she was 90 years old at the time and Abraham was 100.

The Bible records in *Genesis 18:12*, Sarah **laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**

This is where that expression, *my lord* is used. It has immediately given people an opportunity to jump all over this expression and prove that the patriarchal concept of submission is tantamount to slavery.

But all you have to do is read the text about their marriage, and you will discover that Sarah isn't the household servant. She isn't bowing and scraping. She wasn't a wallflower, or weak minded, and she definitely wasn't a doormat.^{vii}

“My lord” was simply an expression of respect that was ongoing.

And as Peter describes her attitude, he uses a present tense participle when he says Sarah was **calling him lord**. In other words, this was ongoing.^{viii}

There was a pattern of respect in her heart and life for her husband; it was an ongoing, undergirding attitude of deference and consideration and esteem toward Abraham.

In the ancient world – in fact, up until a few centuries ago – *my lord* was one of the expressions you might use to show deference and courtesy.

Just keep in mind, this is lord with a little l, not a capital L.

And if you look closely at their marriage, what you discover is that Sarah, more than once, challenged her husband to think differently and act differently. Keeping it in balance was the issue.

I read this recently: a young bride-to-be was very nervous on the day before her wedding, so she went to speak with her minister. “I'm afraid I might not make it through the ceremony – I'm just so nervous I can hardly breathe!”

The minister assured her that everything would be fine. “Look,” he said, “when you enter the church tomorrow and the processional begins, you will be walking down the same aisle you have walked many times before. So concentrate on that aisle. Then, when you get halfway down the aisle, look up a bit and you'll

see the altar in the front which you have seen a thousand times before. Concentrate on that table; the cross sitting on top of it, next to the Bible and then, when you are almost to the altar, you will see your groom, the man you love. Just concentrate on him.” The bride was relieved with this advice and left to prepare for her big moment.

The next day, right on cue, as composed as ever, she walked down that aisle with confidence. If you looked carefully, you would have seen her lips moving and the people closest to the aisle heard her whispering to herself over and over again, “Aisle, altar, him. Aisle, altar, him.”

Therein lies the challenge for any godly wife – how to balance with wisdom the needed improvements and changes that you will observe, more than anyone else, in your husband.

Learning to become an instrument in the hand of God to offer wise counsel and to make gracious alterations without cutting your husband off at the knees or wounding his spirit.

Sarah definitely created a set of problems, by the way. Some of her most sound advice was self-centered and not influenced by God's Spirit. And combined with Abraham's lack of spiritual leadership at times, they ended up heading in the wrong direction on occasion.

The Spirit of God, through Peter, is illustrating submission with the life of Sarah – not because she was perfect – and not because she had a perfect marriage – and not because she had a perfect husband. She was chosen *in spite of that!* She didn't live out perfection, but she pursued a pattern of submissive cooperation and assistance.

In fact, the courage of her own willingness to follow her husband into unknown territory out of obedience to the call of God and the promise of a covenant through their descendants and to go through all the challenges of where that narrative of faith would take them – ends up landing her in *Hebrews 11* as one of the signature heroes of the faith.

And for every wife who makes Sarah a spiritual mentor, Peter writes that you bear a family resemblance to this spiritual mother figure you may not have known you had.

Notice *verse 6* again - ***and you have become her children if you do what is right.*** The English translation makes it sound like you can earn your way into Sarah's family of faith.

A better understanding of what Peter is saying is that you demonstrate that you have become her daughter when you do the right thing. You bear this family resemblance.

And then notice – ***without being frightened by any fear.*** At times, it is a fearful thing to follow your husband. At times, it is a frightening feeling to follow his lead knowing he can make mistakes.

So remember, your hope – your confidence – is ultimately in the sovereignty of God who watches over you.

And in this immediate context, these women were harassed and intimidated by their unbelieving husbands, along with a culture that had little patience for the gospel.

Peter is effectively saying that she will not allow the obstinacy of an unbelieving husband or culture to scare her out of her faith or intimidate her into denying her Savior.^{ix}

Before we wrap up this study, you might be asking the question, “What do I do if I have an unsaved or spiritually disobedient husband?”

Let me offer four practical suggestions:

1. First, find a godly woman who can become your mentor – a Sarah in real time. If you are married to a husband who doesn't lead, love, or care for you, then you need a woman who can give you wise advice and help you entrust

yourself to God so that you can stay balanced, rather than grow bitter.

2. Secondly, take a life inventory to see if there are things God is communicating indirectly through your husband's attitudes and actions that He wants to change in your heart and life. What action do *you* need to take?
3. Third, ask a very small circle of friends to pray for your husband. This isn't another word for “Guess what my husband just did” but, “pray for my husband to trust in Christ, or begin to walk genuinely with Christ.”
4. Fourth, stay committed in your own study of the word and in your prayer life. Only the Spirit of God can comfort and heal and help you handle the pressures that are so overwhelming at times in your life.^x

For wives who submit to their husbands out of obedience to God; for wives who desire to honor their husbands and assist their husbands and encourage with support and confront with grace and counsel with godly wisdom – you are in a sorority of faith. You are demonstrating that you are daughters of Sarah.

For the betterment of your husbands, and the church, and the gospel – and you – along with many other holy women, hope daily in God as you trust in Christ and dedicate yourselves to assisting your husbands. And as we learned in our last study, you – daughters of Sarah – you are precious in the sight of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/20/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Matt Woodley, PreachingToday.com; Oliver's Travels, *Guarantee Perfect Wedding Day Weather with Oliver's Travels*, (Posted 1-23-15)
- ii Adapted from David R. Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude* (Crossway, 2008), p. 105
- iii John MacArthur, *1 Peter* (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 177
- iv Dennis Rainey, *Staying Close* (Word, 1989), p. 158
- v Adapted from Rainer, p. 158
- vi Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 188
- vii Adapted from Helm, p. 105
- viii Adapted from MacArthur, p. 180
- ix Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (BMH Books, 1984), p. 204
- x Adapted from Rainey, p. 165