

Unexpected | Week 3

By Lisa Scheffler

Our culture is seeing a rise in people delaying marriage or deciding not to get married at all. Many fear that married life will either be an endless string of conflicts, a tedious, boring existence, or a combination of both. To them marriage means giving up freedom, independence, and their sense of self. One writer sums up this perception with, “Less work, fewer headaches, fewer heartbreaks, and more sex. That’s what you’ve got to look forward to if you’re NEVER planning on getting married throughout this lifetime.”¹

As Christians, we believe that God designed marriage. That doesn’t mean there aren’t good reasons to remain single. After all, Jesus never married. But for those who do marry, God’s intent for that relationship is far from a lifetime of headaches and heartbreaks. As followers of Jesus, our marriages can be something unexpected.

Day 1

Before we dive into our passage for the week, let’s acknowledge that marriage can be a touchy subject. Some of you may be single and wish you were married. Unfortunately, some of you may be married but wish you were single. Depending on your circumstances, Peter’s words may resonate differently with you. So, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your reactions and speak to you through God’s Word. He knows what you need to hear.

This week we’re going to focus on Peter’s instructions for marriage from 1 Peter 3, but our larger goal is to contrast God’s intent for marriage with what was common in the Roman world that Peter’s original audience was living in. We’ll end the week thinking about how to live out these principles in our own lives.

In ancient Rome, marriage was less about love and romance, and more about procreation and maintaining the social order. Marriages were often an arrangement between families. For Roman males, it was not considered adultery for a man to have sexual relations with slaves or prostitutes. Divorce was not uncommon, but more much difficult for women. If she was not welcomed back into her father’s household, or could quickly find a new husband, a wife could end up on the street with nothing.

Roman society was highly stratified, and households were ruled over by the *pater familias* who assumed complete control over his family. On the whole, women were considered less valuable than men and less capable of attaining virtue or wisdom. Roman society mostly

¹ Frank Moretti, “Reason to Never Get Married, EVER!” *The Nut Job: The Voice of Single Men*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.thenutjob.com/reason-to-never-get-married-ever/>

shared the view of Aristotle who said, “as regards the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior.”

As you read through Peter’s instructions for marriage, keep in mind the cultural context of the day, but also consider the life that Jesus modeled. Peter knew firsthand how the Lord treated all people, especially those at the bottom of the social hierarchy — with love, compassion, and kindness. Jesus demonstrated sacrificial love, even to the point of dying on the cross to save humanity —males and females.

Our task this week is to think about how Peter confronts the way of Rome with the way of Jesus in his discussion of marriage.

Read the Word

1 Peter 3:1–7 (NIV)

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

⁷Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Reflect

- What is your reaction to this passage?
- Do you see any ways that Peter is challenging or subverting the Roman view of women or conception of marriage?

Pray

If you are married, take time to pray for your marriage every day this week. If you are not married, pray for the marriages of people in your life. If you hope to marry one day, pray that the Spirit will be transforming you into a man or woman who will be a good husband or wife.

Day 2

It is often said that men and women are engaged in a “battle between the sexes.” This war has both sexes trying to outdo, one-up, or dominate the other as if one were superior. But that’s not how God designed it! Today we’re leaving 1 Peter to go back to the very beginning and Genesis 1 and 2.

Read the Word

Genesis 1:26–28 (NIV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

- Who did God create male and female to be like?
- What were male and female created to do? What commands were given to them?

Genesis 2:15–25 (NIV)

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” ¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs

and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

*²³ The man said,
“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”*

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

- How was woman created? What need was she to fulfill?
- How is marriage described in this passage?

Reflect on the Word

Humanity has always struggled to understand what it means that “male and female God created them” (1:27). The distinctiveness of each sex can sometimes be over-emphasized as if men and women were a completely different species. While at other times differences can be treated as nonexistent as if gender were only a product of socialization and had nothing to do with how we were created. What’s missed at either extreme is the beautiful way men and women were designed to complement each other so that together they could achieve God’s purpose for humanity.

Contrary to what many in the ancient world may have thought, women were not created as some sort of optional accessory — useful for sex, bearing children and doing household tasks. The Hebrew word translated as “helper” in Genesis 2:18 and 20 is *ezer*. When this word is used elsewhere in Scripture, it mostly refers to God as he provides vitally important acts of help and support to Israel. For this reason, some scholars have proposed translating *ezer* in Genesis 2 as “necessary ally” because man needed woman. Men and women were created to reign as God’s co-regents, multiply and fill the earth, and cultivate his creation — together.

Out of one, God created two who became one. Adam instantly recognized that Eve comes from him. She shares the same flesh and bone, and together they reflect their Creator. That is not to say that individual men and women must be married to image God and live out his purposes for their lives. But when a man and a woman come together in marriage, this oneness should be at the core of what it means to be husband and wife.

The original couple “were naked and felt no shame” (2:25). There would have been no reason to feel vulnerable, exposed, or insecure in front of one another. Joy, acceptance, and unity characterized this first union. If love is best defined as passionately desiring the good of the other person, even at your own expense, Adam and Eve were completely and perfectly loved by the other, and by their Creator.

Of course, the sin recorded in Genesis 3 disrupted and corrupted God's design. Selfishness, manipulation and a quest for dominance became possibilities in every human relationship but are especially destructive in marriage. Instead of joyfully putting aside one's own desires for the good of the other person, many people treat their spouse as a commodity to be used for one's own happiness. The focus can be on "me" instead of "us." Instead of the unity God desired, there is the potential for tremendous conflict and strife between husbands and wives. But in reconciling us to God by his death on the cross and sending the indwelling Spirit after his resurrection, Jesus has given us a way to love our spouses as God intended. We can work toward peace, love, and unity and in so doing, demonstrate the unexpected love of God in our marriages.

- Think back to yesterday when we discussed marriage in ancient Rome. How does it contrast with God's original design?
- Think about your own experience with marriage, either your own or one that has impacted you. Why is unity so hard? How can it be pursued?

Pray

In light of Genesis 1 and 2, how can you pray for your marriage and/or one that is personally important to you (your parents' marriage? Your son or daughter's marriage? A close friend?) Take some time to pray.

Day 3

Today we're returning to 1 Peter to take a closer look at his instructions to the women in the first century churches. Although culture and context has changed over the centuries, there are timeless truths we need to take from God's word and apply to our own marriages. If you are a wife, Peter's words are directed to you. If you are a husband, these verses can help you know how to pray for your wife.

Based on what we know of God's original design for marriage and what marriage in the first century Roman empire looked like, let's read Peter's words again.

Read the Word

1 Peter 3:1–6

¹Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵For this is the way the holy women of the past

who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

- What are wives told to do in verse 1? What does that word mean to you? What reason does Peter give?
- Where should a woman's beauty come from?
- What dangerous emotion does Peter warn against in verse 6?

Reflect

In any time or culture, peoples' faith in Christ will disrupt their status-quo. Because he calls for a life-changing realignment of priorities and allegiances, following Jesus had the potential to cause problems for marriages in the Roman world. This was true when only one spouse converted and especially true if the person was the wife. With its message of salvation, hope, and image-bearing dignity, the gospel was eagerly received by women, slaves and other groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Yet, "the very fact that a woman would adopt any religion other than her husband's violated the Greco-Roman ideal of an orderly home."² All women struggled to understand how their new identity in Christ impacted their role as wife and mother.

Peter upholds the authority of the husband and father over his household while also affirming a woman's ability to make her own decision to follow Jesus. He instructs wives to respectfully submit and also indicates that they were to grow in faith and holiness alongside their brothers in the faith and be full participants in the life of the church. A woman with an unbelieving spouse could perhaps win her husband over with her Spirit-transformed, Christ-imitating behavior. By honoring her husband in this way, she also prevented his shame. If a man was seen as unable to rule over his own households he could "suffer harsh criticism that might damage his social standing, even to the point of disqualifying him for certain honors and offices."³ Being visibly subject to her husband was one way she could show her desire to seek his good.

With his instructions beginning in verse 3, we see Peter granting women dignity that they may not be accustomed to receiving in the ancient world. Recall that women were seen as less capable of virtue. Here Paul is exhorting women to be of good character because that pleases God, their ultimate Lord. In a lesson that should bring relief to women today, Peter insists that the measure of a woman is not her wealth or physical beauty. By the power of the Spirit, she can cultivate a beautiful and virtuous inner life characterized by peace and hope in God. Her identity is not found in looks that will fade or riches that can be taken, but in Jesus.

To be a woman in the ancient world was to live a life completely dependent on a man. Women with God-fearing, virtuous husbands benefitted from their protection and care. Women with

² Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 203.

³ Jobes, 203.

domineering, difficult or unreliable husbands faced a more uncertain future. Yet Peter exhorts all women to not succumb to fear but to trust God and submit to their husbands just as the virtuous women of the Old Testament did. At its heart, submission is an act of faith, not in a husband, but in God.

None of this means that a wife should placidly accept abuse from her husband in the name of submission. Unfortunately, these verses have sometimes been interpreted and taught in just this way. Women, your loving and righteous heavenly father is incensed by the abuse of his daughters. Please reach out for help from your brothers and sisters in Christ if you are experiencing abuse. The body of Christ must stand with the mistreated and abused — Jesus does.

In the Gospels we see Jesus elevating women and treating them with compassion, respect and dignity. He is our model in all our relationships. We are to lay down our lives for one another. As we saw in Genesis, God's design is that husbands and wives love one another sacrificially and pursue the unique oneness found in marriage. Wives are to lay down their rights for the good of their husbands and the good of their marriage — that's what submission is ultimately about. We should serve our husbands, lift them up, and encourage them to be the men God created them to be. After all, we are their "necessary ally." We should prioritize unity above our desire to get our way as we allow the Spirit to cultivate in us the peace and hope that comes from being a daughter of God.

- Every marriage is unique and will apply these principles a little differently. Prayer and honest communication with our spouse are key. If you are married, are you engaged in both? Spend some extended time in prayer today and think about how you be more intentional in pursuing love and unity in your marriage.

Pray

Based on the passages we've looked at this week, what specific prayers do you have for your marriage? If you're not married, pray for someone who is.

Day 4

By Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor

After looking at Peter's instructions to the women in the early Church, we turn our focus to his commands for the husbands. While parts of this passage seem out of step with today's cultural language and norms regarding gender and marriage roles, his writing to the husbands would have been seen as abnormally gracious for his day. Furthermore, the truths he espouses here are timeless and foundational to healthy marriages. Wives, use these verses to direct your prayers for your husbands just as they did for you yesterday.

Based on what we know of God's original design for marriage and what marriage in the first century Roman empire looked like, let's read Peter's words again.

Read the Word

1 Peter 3:7

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Reflect

A few months ago, our family was enjoying a slow Saturday - a rare event in the Morrison household. We took advantage of the time to catch up on laundry and feed the massive mountain of clothes piling up on our couch, which we've affectionally termed "Mount Laundry." However, as the first few loads came out of the dryer, we discovered a problem. They were still wet. Even after two or three cycles, they still felt relatively damp.

After several days of dealing with the issue, Holly had enough with it. On one of her precious days off, she went online, learned all about dryer exhaust pipes, and resolved she was going to fix it. If you have spent more than ten minutes with my lovely but germophobic wife, you know this kind of determination from her is pretty remarkable. From my office that day, I received proud photos and text messages from my dust-bunny-covered wife as she managed to move the dryer, climb behind it, and attempt (unsuccessfully) to unclog ten years' worth of lint from the exhaust pipe.

It was one of those fun (and funny) reminders of Holly's capabilities when she is truly determined to make something happen. After 10 years of marriage, I've learned never to doubt her strength, intelligence, or resolve, even in the face of dust and lint. Still, she's a girly-girl at heart and much prefers to laugh at me while I accomplish the more physically-challenging aspects of our housework.

As Peter addresses the husbands in verse 7, he refers to the wife as the "weaker partner." It's important to note what Peter *doesn't* mean here. He isn't referring to women as less intelligent or of less value than men. Nor does his terminology bear any reference to a woman's spiritual or moral significance. Rather, he is identifying a common generality that was well accepted in his first century context, that women enjoy less physical strength. Though, as we would all recognize today, there are very many exceptions to this stereotype - my wife included.

It's easy for the modern reader to get hung up on this reference and miss the broader context of what Peter is really trying to say. He's commanding husbands to honor and respect the wives God has so graciously given them.

In recent months, much has been said and written on the subject of masculinity. When expressed biblically, it is both edifying to the family and a beautiful compliment to femininity. Unfortunately, too many women have experienced a more toxic form of masculinity, the kind that degrades, uses, and abuses them. This toxic masculinity begins with a weak view of women. From there, it attempts to exploit the intellectual, moral, and physical weakness that it erroneously perceives. The results are written all over today's headlines and into the hearts of women who have experienced its impact firsthand.

This false masculinity was even more prevalent in Peter's day. That's why this verse is so critically and intentionally placed in his instructions. He's calling on men to value their wives as gifts who should be honored and esteemed, rather than possessions to fulfill their desires. Some scholars even believe his phrases "*as you live with your wives*" and "*the gracious gift of life*" have sexual overtones, that Peter is referring to this respect in the context of the bedroom.

Men, his point is clear. We must never fail to recognize the intrinsic worth and value of the women we've married. We can't tolerate any hint within ourselves that devalues, disrespects, or despises them. Especially when you consider his instructions for them in the previous verses, we should be in awe of them.

- Husbands, as you reflect on this instruction, how well are you showing respect and honor to your wife?
- In honestly assessing your own marriage, does your wife deserve an apology from you? How can you better show her the honor she deserves?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father,

Please forgive me where I have failed to show the honor and respect my wife deserves. Give me the insight and discernment to know how I can affirm the value you have bestowed on her and I see in her.

Amen.

Day 5

It's Friday! How has this week's reading impacted you? I imagine that the reactions vary from person to person and marriage to marriage. Today, spend some extended time in prayer and consider your next steps in following Christ.

Reflect on what you've learned

According to the passages we looked at this week, how should a Christian marriage be unexpected? How can our marriages reflect the unexpected love, grace, and compassion of Jesus?

Pray and consider your next step

When we go to the Bible for instruction on marriage, we tend to spend most of our time focused on the few passages that specifically address husbands and wives. We seem to forget that there are many, many more passages that show us how to relate to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps those contain the "marriage advice" we should turn to first.

According to the Overview Bible Project, about one third of these "one another" verses deal with unity, another third focus on love and an additional fifteen percent on humility. Consider this: what if we intentionally focused on cultivating unity, love and a spirit of humility in our marriages? Our marriages could be something truly unexpected!

Read through all the "one anothers" listed below. (Or check them out on this handy infographic from the Overview Bible Project <https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/>.) Pray over which ones you'd like to focus on in your marriage, share them with your spouse, and then ask the Spirit to transform your thoughts and empower your actions. If you're not married, you still need to focus on these commands. Married or single, let's all commit to showing unexpected love to one another!

Unity

1. Be at peace with one another ([Mk 9:50](#))
2. Don't grumble among one another ([Jn 6:43](#))
3. Be of the same mind with one another ([Ro 12:16](#), [15:5](#))
4. Accept one another ([Ro 15:7](#))
5. Wait for one another before beginning the Eucharist ([1 Co 11:33](#))
6. Don't "bite, devour, and consume" one another. ([Ga 5:15](#))
7. Don't boastfully challenge or envy one another ([Ga 5:26](#)).
8. Gently, patiently tolerate one another ([Ep 4:2](#))
9. Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another ([Ep 4:32](#))
10. Bear with and forgive one another ([Co 3:13](#))
11. Seek good for one another, and don't repay evil for evil ([1 Th 5:15](#))
12. Don't complain against one another ([Jas 4:11](#), [5:9](#))
13. Confess sins to one another ([Jas 5:16](#))

Love

1. Love one another ([Jn 13:34](#), [15:12](#), [17](#); [Ro 13:8](#); [1 Th 3:12](#), [4:9](#); [1 Pe 1:22](#); [1 Jn 3:11](#), [4:7](#), [11](#); [2 Jn 5](#))
2. Through love, serve one another ([Ga 5:13](#))
3. Tolerate one another in love ([Ep 4:2](#))
4. Greet one another with a kiss of love ([1 Pe 5:14](#))
5. Be devoted to one another in love ([Ro 12:10](#))

Humility

1. Give preference to one another in honor ([Ro 12:10](#))
2. Regard one another as more important than yourselves ([Php 2:3](#))
3. Serve one another ([Ga 5:13](#))
4. Wash one another's feet ([Jn 13:14](#))
5. Don't be haughty: be of the same mind ([Ro 12:16](#))
6. Be subject to one another ([Ep 5:21](#))
7. Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another ([1 Pe 5:5](#))

The Rest

1. Do not judge one another, and don't put a stumbling block in a brother's way ([Ro 14:13](#))
2. Greet one another with a kiss ([Ro 16:16](#); [1 Co 16:20](#); [2 Co 13:12](#))
3. Husbands and wives: don't deprive one another of physical intimacy ([1 Co 7:5](#))
4. Bear one another's burdens ([Ga 6:2](#))
5. Speak truth to one another ([Ep 4:25](#))
6. Don't lie to one another ([Co 3:9](#))
7. Comfort one another concerning the resurrection ([1 Th 4:18](#))
8. Encourage and build up one another ([1 Th 5:11](#))
9. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds ([He 10:24](#))
10. Pray for one another ([Jas 5:16](#))
11. Be hospitable to one another ([1 Pe 4:9](#))