

Bucked, Buckled, Blessed

One woman's journey to an understanding of submission

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.
Ephesians 5:22-24

We got married young. Perhaps I'm just getting older, but in retrospect, we were very young. Because we started young, we've been blessed with many years of companionship and love, but there were some draw backs as well. Like most young couples, we were head over heels in love when we started our marriage, but it wasn't easy. We struggled with misunderstandings, selfishness and immaturity but God helped us grow on our journey together. How gracious God is when He forgives our continual failures and keeps teaching and strengthening us through His Word. That is how He helped me learn His beautiful design of submission in marriage: slowly, through many failures and with much forgiveness.

When we got married we were also very young in our faith. We believed God's Word was true, we just didn't understand it very well. We often talked about the Lord in our lives and wanted His plan for our marriage, yet I was trying to make His plan fit my own ideas. We had read the section in Ephesians about submission and it seemed a little awkward but I could deal with it. I figured anytime my husband agreed with me, I would very openly and lovingly submit. I could make that fit with Scripture, so it seemed like a good plan and I patted myself on the back. When situations arose where we didn't agree, well, that created a problem. As we struggled to resolve our conflicts I knew in my heart that my attitude wasn't right. Something wasn't fitting together the way it should.

There were other times, I'm ashamed to admit, that I was manipulative because I knew I wouldn't get my way. I offered to pay bills because I was better at details but in my heart I had selfish motives. I wanted to do it my way and I used the excuse that I was more gifted at those things. Yeah. That was my idea of godly submission – do it when it fits your agenda, and if it doesn't, then buck the system and manipulate things so you get your way. Sorry to disappoint you, I'm just being honest about how I've struggled against God's design for marriage.

But God loved me too much to let me keep that mindset. Through His Word He continued to nudge my conscience with a desire to grow and really understand what He was saying. We read and read, but I still struggled to understand how to live a life of submission the way He wanted. One day I buckled, threw in the towel and decided to go all out on the submission concept (I am at times prone to extremes). I would be the quiet, passive wife I thought God wanted me to be, and then some. There were all kinds of changes. My husband started paying the bills because he should be the head of the house - and what else could that possibly mean? When there was a discussion, it was pretty one sided as I smiled and said,

“yes, dear.” My husband knew I had lots of things going on in my head and asked what I was thinking. “Nothing, really” didn’t satisfy him or me. It drove us both crazy and he struggled finding time to pay the bills. I hated feeling like a door mat and resented thinking I needed to act like one. I would cry on my bed at night, “If you don’t want me to use my brain, then why did you make me this way!” Recognize the pattern of blame? I could tell my husband wasn’t happy either because I wasn’t being myself. He missed the openness of our communication and the closeness that came as we shared our thoughts and feelings. Thankfully that stage didn’t last very long!

So what was left? I did it - and I didn’t do it -and neither worked. What on earth could God want from me as a wife? How could I follow His Word with actions that flowed from my heart? His name is Jesus. The journey takes me to the same place, the foot of the cross in need of forgiveness. I was still trying to make God’s plan fit my brain and He was still willing to forgive me and encourage me through His Word. So I admitted I was doing it wrong (again) and that I didn’t really understand. My husband and I both prayed that God would help us learn and grow into a better understanding of His plan for our marriage.

Was there a magic moment? No, there wasn’t. There were still tears and failures but there were also insights and moments of understanding. There continued to be forgiveness and encouragement. I began to see that having a quiet and submissive spirit wasn’t a belittled participation in our marriage but an attitude of respect in my heart as a specially designed helper. As the Word of God continued to reshape my thinking and renew my heart, things became clearer. All the little verses of Scripture began to come together. I saw how important it was to respect my husband, and not make him feel like he had to earn that respect. Scripture affirmed that I did have gifts to bring into our marriage and they were unique and different than my husband’s. We agreed that my abilities are geared better toward paying bills, but we make our financial decisions together, and I don’t carry that burden alone or manipulate it.

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I do remember a huge step when we discussed a decision and didn’t see things the same way. After a long talk and time in prayer, my husband made a decision that I didn’t think was right. As it turned out, things didn’t go as he had hoped and it didn’t work out very well. It was a moment of vulnerability for both of us. “I told you so!” crossed my mind but not my lips. He had listened so lovingly and labored so prayerfully over the decision, all I could do was give him my respect, support, and love. And then I really saw how beautifully God’s design worked.

I must admit he made it so much easier because his headship of our home is so loving and Christ-like. He makes sacrifices for me as a wife, which motivates me to love and respect

him, which turns his heart to love me even more. Rather than focusing on the failures we see in each other (because they are there), we focus on the love of Christ and try to see each other through His eyes. Sin loves to throw a wrench in that beautiful cycle but we both know where to go with our sins and failures. We've both realized that we need to do what is right in God's eyes, even when we think the other person doesn't deserve it - because we usually don't. Whether that means forgiveness, love, or submission, Christ is at the heart of our actions. My love for my husband isn't perfect, and sometimes it doesn't motivate me to make the right decisions. But God's love for me is perfect, so as I look to His forgiveness and find His strength in the Word, He guides and teaches me. Then in His kindness, He blesses those choices with peace and joy in our relationship.

God's design works. Really. I am a just one of many creative, idea-driven, energetic women who have been blessed by God's design. My personality hasn't changed, my heart has. I still think deeply and express myself passionately but I am free from the constraint of getting my own way. We talk openly about things and agree about almost everything. But because of Christ there are times I yield my rights out of loving respect for God and my husband. I can long for the greater good, not my own. My peace runs deeper than you could imagine and I love being a woman of God – with all the blessings and gifts He has given me, including a quiet and submissive heart.

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Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your patient love that pursues me when I make a mess of things. You forgive me over and over; you gently teach and correct me. You are the Good Shepherd that guides me in paths of righteousness for your name's sake. Keep your Word in front of me and help me to understand it more clearly. Shape my thinking and actions to reflect you with purity and grace that my marriage and life may please you. In His Holy name, Amen.

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