

The Perfect Plan



One warm afternoon in Valdosta, Georgia, Margie Maulsby, an attractive woman in her thirties, was seriously planning her future apart from her husband, Joe. Although they had been reunited for six months following a separation she had forced, their life together had not improved. The next day, a casual acquaintance invited Margie to attend a neighborhood Bible class featuring my taped messages on biblical principles from this book. But she had no intention of going. After all, what could possibly help her hopeless marriage?

Nevertheless, God knew her need and drew her to the class. Her letters to God, written after the first and second sessions respectively, reveal her heart:

Dear God,

Can you believe I attended that Bible class? Don't ask me why! Before I knew anything, I was ringing that doorbell, introducing myself to the Bible-class leader and hostess, and taking a seat among ten other strangers.

Did I enjoy the class? I don't know; I can't remember too much. However, I do have homework. This is ludicrous; I have enough schoolwork

to do as it is. After all, Father, I am an English teacher. I really don't have time for this; I probably won't go again. That lady on the cassette tape can't tell me anything that I don't know. I've read lots of material on marriages. I'm still trying to apply some of those principles. My marriage is okay anyway. It's about as good as most. Everybody has problems. Anyway, I don't want to think about marriage; I want to think about you and Christ.

Margie

Dear God,

I'm still in a state of shock after last night in that ladies' Bible class! Yes, I went again!

Well, I received quite a blow; it was truly a bolt! I discovered that I didn't really love my husband. Can you believe this? I couldn't. I thought I had always been a good wife. However, when I began to listen to the words from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 for the first time, those words describing love began to have some merit—"is kind, not jealous, thinks no evil, seeks not her own, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." I realized that I am kind to Joe only when he does what I want him to do. I've got a lot to learn!

You see, God, I am actually jealous! At night, I search Joe's wallet. I also check his stories when he comes home so that I can make sure that he is telling the truth. How else would I know? Sometimes I wait up for him just to attack him with threatening words and accusations. At these times, I am constantly thinking evil. I have looked at Joe for so long; I had no idea that my mirror held so much evil.

In addition to all that has been said, heavenly Father, I seek my own way. I never really give any thought to Joe's dreams; I'm only interested in mine. I never let him be free to think, to plan, or to


dream. I try only to make my values his values. You see, Joe belongs to a club, and I'm always afraid that if he behaves badly at a nightclub or if he stays out too late that someone may think less of me or even less of my marriage. Stupid, I know. However, for this reason, I have always tried to get him to watch his behavior. Not only is this wrong according to your Word, but it doesn't work anyway. If I lecture for a long time or if I become angry and threaten to leave him, he does seem to behave according to my standards for a while.

During these times, I am on top of the world. Then boom! Back to his same old habits. I should have known something was wrong, but I didn't. I thought this was just the way to live. Then I read, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127:1). I give you my house to build. Father, teach me how to love my husband.

Margie

After the second class, Margie placed her life and marriage completely into God's hands. She began dying to her old ways and in turn was free to begin loving God's way. During the next difficult year, Jesus gave her the strength to love Joe unconditionally. Shortly thereafter, with much tenderness and a new consideration for Margie, Joe said, "I want the Lord to give me a portion of what you have."

She and Joe now enjoy a new love for each other and the



God did

*not create you
and put you on
this earth to live
an apathetic,
frustrated, or
discouraged life.*

marital fulfillment that God wants to give all couples. God has also used Margie mightily to teach others in the town where she lives.

A SATISFYING LIFE

God did not create you and put you on this earth to live an apathetic, frustrated, defeated, or discouraged life. He meant for you to be happier than you ever dreamed possible. “Now glory be to God who by his mighty power at work within us is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of—infinately beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes” (Eph. 3:20 TLB). Jesus Christ said that He came to provide a satisfying, complete life for you and me. He came that we “may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

This life is available to you regardless of your background, education, nationality, or present circumstances. There is no problem too large or too small for Christ to work out in your life. All that he requires from you is a willing heart and obedience to his plan. “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land” (Isa. 1:19). The “best from the land” can be compared to an abundant life for you.

A PERSONALIZED PLAN

God loves you so much that he has worked out a personal plan for you so that you will experience growth, development, and fulfillment. You might think of your life as a divine prescription from his hand. Consider these words written by the psalmist David:

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body,
and knit them together in my mother’s womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is

marvelous—and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your Book!

How precious it is, Lord, to realize that you are thinking about me constantly! I can't even count how many times a day your thoughts turn towards me. And when I waken in the morning, you are still thinking of me! (Ps. 139:13–18 TLB)

God cares so much for you that he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you. No accidents occur in the lives of God's children. He desires to use your personality, physical body, and background to your advantage.

If you trust him, he can take all the things in your life that you would like to change and work them out for your ultimate good. "We know," the apostle Paul wrote, "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Notice that he did not say that all things are good, but that God will work out all things for your good. Only he can perform such miracles.

It's true that not everything will always seem to work out for your good here on earth. You will no doubt face difficulties and challenges, and so will your loved ones. But do not



*If you
trust him, God
can take all the
things in your
life that you
would like to
change and
work them
out for your
ultimate good.*

question what God is doing. Simply trust him to know what is best for you. “Who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?’” (Rom. 9:20). This means that you are not to question why you are the way you are or why your husband is as he is. Rather, you are to discover and accept God’s plan for your life so that he can work out all things to your ultimate good.

MARRIAGE—A FULFILLING RELATIONSHIP

Everything God has designed for us is for our ultimate benefit. Thus, God designed the covenant of marriage to give those of us who have chosen to get married great human happiness.

I believe the role of the wife in the marital relationship is the choice role. We are to be loved, protected, and cherished by our husbands in the same way that Christ gave himself for the church (all believers).

Think about these words from the book of Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.... Even so, husbands should love their wives as [being in a sense] their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and carefully protects and cherishes it, as Christ does the church ... For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.... However, each one of you [without exception] love his wife as [being in a sense] his very own self; and let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband” (Eph. 5:25, 28–29, 31, 33 AB).

But there’s much more to think about than these verses! Ephesians 5:22–24 reveals how such love is to be expressed in everyday life: “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.”

In recent years, the word *submission* has created much conflict among women. There are many reasons for this: the rise of feminist thinking, the false linking of biblical submission to women whose husbands are abusing them, the increasing number of women who have chosen to enter the workplace and work alongside men, and so forth.

Rather than spending many pages on this topic, I’d like to share some principles that, in addition to being biblical, have helped many women—myself included—understand our roles in marriage and thereby be able to reflect who God wants us to be in our marriages.

The words “submit to” describe the way you and I are to relate to our husbands. Another way of saying this is that we are to be responders to our husbands’ love, protection, and leadership. Submission never means that our personalities, abilities, talents, or individuality should be buried. Rather, they are to be directed so they can be maximized and reflect the goodness and glory of God.

Matthew Henry wrote, “Woman was created from man, not from his head to be commanded by him, nor from his feet to be his slave. Rather, she was taken from his side to complement him, near his arms to be protected by him, and close to his heart to be loved.” Submission never imprisons us. It liberates us,



*We are
to be
responders to
our husbands’
love,
protection,
and leadership.*

giving us the freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authority.

Most likely, before you got married you responded to your man's love and leadership. He expressed his love and leadership by being thoughtful, complimenting you, and bringing you gifts. You responded, in turn, by making yourself attractive, seeking to please him, and by going places with him you may not have really cared about simply because you enjoyed his company. Then, after your marriage, things began to change for the worse. What happened? Could it be that you gradually left your role of



Submission

never

imprisons us.

responder by no longer taking time to look your best for your husband or refusing to share his interests? Yes, it is easy to stop responding to your husband without even realizing it. So many things pull us in the opposite direction.

However, a wise woman knows that she cannot take her role as a wife lightly. She must seriously


work at building a lasting, fulfilling relationship with her husband. "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down" (Prov. 14:1). A woman can act foolishly and destroy her marriage, yet not be aware that she is violating principles on which a successful marriage is built. That is why women must be taught "to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God" (Titus 2:4-5).

Because the secular world has done an effective job of distorting the marriage relationship and its respective roles, many women feel unfulfilled. They are convinced that their unhappiness is caused by various factors such as child-care responsibilities

and not working outside the home. Actually, their unhappiness is a result of their failure to understand and fulfill the role God designed for them in marriage.

Let's go back to the illustration of the wise and foolish women mentioned in Proverbs 14:1. The wise woman recognizes God's principles for building a successful marriage and applies them. She realizes that a successful marriage requires planning, in the same way any successful venture does. For instance, in order to bake a light, delicious cake, she must put in the right ingredients at the right time, using the proper proportions. Likewise, in order to develop a happy marriage, the wise woman will use the proper principles at the right time with a divine balance. A strong marriage does not just happen accidentally. It is deliberately built through the years, through the work of both spouses. A wise woman will focus only on her role not her husband's. She will trust God to work in her husband's life. However, she will not be surprised should God work differently than she expected.

The Old Testament book of Esther gives examples of a foolish woman and a wise woman. Foolish Queen Vashti did not respond to her husband's leadership when he requested that she join the party he was giving and allow his guests to observe her beauty. Although today we might second-guess her motives and try to justify her disobedience, she nevertheless made a foolish choice in the culture of that time. As a result, the king banished her from his presence, and he later chose Esther to be his queen.



*A successful
marriage
requires planning
in the same way
any successful
venture does.*

Esther, a wise woman, responded to King Xerxes' leadership and the results were wonderful! During a period of crisis when she could have lost her life, her submissive attitude and wise actions caused the king to say, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you.... Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted" (Est. 5:6). The crisis was resolved soon afterward. Esther's life and the lives of the entire Jewish nation were saved because of her right and wise actions that God blessed.

A wise woman will build a successful marriage by meeting her husband's needs as described in Proverbs 31:12: "She comforts, encourages and does him only good as long as there is life within her."

I suggest that we use this verse as a measuring stick to evaluate our attitudes and actions toward our husbands. Let's each ask ourselves, *How can I comfort, encourage, and do other good things for my husband?* This may mean comforting him when his boss has made his life difficult at work or encouraging him when he begins to doubt his ability to provide financially for his family. As you act wisely, over time you will see a miraculous blossoming of your marriage relationship.