

INVESTING IN MY SPOUSE

How do we deal with the hurtful behaviors and attitudes of our partner? In every marriage there are things that our spouse does that we do not like. Some things are not so serious, but we find them very annoying. Then there are times when their actions are very hurtful and even sinful. Their behavior is very damaging to the oneness of the marriage and can cause the other partner to feel unsafe to really pursue intimacy.

How are we to respond to our partner's hurtful actions? Perhaps after tolerating their hurtful and perhaps abusive behavior for a period of time, we come to the place where we say that we cannot take it any longer. Some spouses feel that the only option they have is to leave the relationship and that things will never change. Others decide that their best option is to withdraw emotionally for self-preservation. Yet others try to find ways to change their partner by nagging, controlling, preaching, shaming, with the hope that it will result in a change in their spouse's behavior.

Because we are one flesh, we have a responsibility to respond to our partner in a way that will deal with the deeper needs that will bring healing and oneness.

Examining the Hurts of our Partner

The purpose of the following exercise is for each spouse to identify the actions and attitudes of their partner that are damaging their marriage and what might be behind their behavior. Second, is for the partner to examine how they are responding to their spouse's hurtful behavior, whether it is helping or damaging the relationship.

HUSBANDS

What actions and attitudes do you do that damage the marriage?

Avoid/Withdrawal
Withholding affection
Isolation
Not talking/sharing
Alcohol/drug abuse
Verbal abuse
Anger/temper
Procrastinating
Controlling
Emotional/Physical affair
Pornography
Lying

What are ways your wife Response to you?

Fearful
Angry
Withholding emotionally
Try to fix husband
Withhold affection
Threatens
Encourages
Nags
Takes charge

WIVES

What actions and attitudes

What are ways that your

Do you do that damage the marriage?

Nagging
Withholding affection
Silent treatment
Bitterness
Emotional/physical affair
Not sharing
Acting helpless
Fearful
Incessant worrying
Keeping busy to avoid relationship
Being critical
Unforgiving
Controlling
Angry
Overspending

Husband responds to you?

Gets angry
Avoids
Shames me
Silent treatment
Abusive
Unfaithful
Gives in to keep me happy
Critiques me

How Should We Be Responding to Our Partner?

As we examine the ways that we are responding to our partner's hurtful behavior, we need to ask, is it helping or making things worse? Is our response addressing the real underlying reasons for their behavior? We are not saying that we are responsible for their behavior, nor are we responsible to fix them. But we are responsible for how we respond and how we love them.

- What do you think is behind their actions and attitudes?
- Are there wounds from their past that might be causing pain or emptiness?
- Are there any unmet needs that they are reacting to or trying to get met?
- What is our responsibility for loving our partner when they are acting in such hurtful ways?

Scripture instructs us to build each other up according to their needs, that it may benefit them. In humility we should look to the interests of our spouse.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. - Ephesians 4:29-32, NIV

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. - Philippians 2:3-4, NIV

We have a responsibility to our partner to love them in a way that will offer healing and help them to be the husband or wife that God designed them to be. We are to help them according to their needs. We do not have the option to be selfish and make it all about ourselves. We have a responsibility to help our partner with their needs and struggles and what will bring healing.

An Attitude of Mutual Submission

Paul begins one of the main passages in the New Testament on marriage with how husbands and wives should relate with each other.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. - Ephesians 5:21, NIV

Both the husband and wife are instructed to submit to each other. Submitting to each other in verse 21 is the introductory verse in how the wife and husband should each submit to each other. We get a clear picture of what submission looks like for each of them in the following verses.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. - Ephesians, 5:22, NIV

Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... - Ephesians 5:25, NIV

We usually think of submission in terms of the wife submitting to her husband. Other passages on submission focus on the wife submitting. It seems that wives needed to be reminded to submit. There are two passages in the Bible that focus on an attitude of mutual submission, Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. We will examine these passages in more detail in this lesson.

The message is clear, the husband and wife need each other.

Definition of Submit

The verb, **submit (hupotasso)**, is used in a military context of a subordinate's relationship to his superior in the army hierarchy.¹ The individual places themselves under their superior for a greater purpose.

Submit means: to draw up in order, to arrange under. This is so that there is:

- 1) Order
- 2) Protection
- 3) Victory

For the purpose of this study we will use the following definition for mutual submission:

To submit means ordering yourself underneath your partner for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering their growth as to who God created them to be and their calling.

What Submission is Not

Submission has been misunderstood and at times has led to abuse. Submission is usually thought of in terms of the wife obeying her husband in everything, unless it goes against God's principles. At times it tends to set some husbands up to be dictators. The submissive wife is viewed, as a woman who does what the husband wants. The thinking tends to go

something like this, "if you obey your husband in everything, God will bless you for it and hopefully your husband will change."

An example of this view is from a woman author who wrote, "...know that a husband has authority to tell his wife what to wear, where to go, whom to talk to, how to spend her time, when to speak and when not to, even if he is unreasonable and insensitive, but he does not have authority to command her to view pornography with him or to assist him in the commission of a crime."

This tends to lower a wife to simply following orders, much like a slave or robot.

The word submit (*hupotasso*) in Ephesians 5:21 through 24 is not the word obey in addressing wives. There is a direct correlation between submit and obey, but there is not a direct equivalence between the two. Notice that Paul does not use the word obey when he addresses the wives, but he does use the word obey when he speaks to the children.

Submission does not equal obedience or simply doing what the person says.

Notice the use of the words:

Submit to one another, (hupotasso) Ephesians 5:21 Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord, (hupotasso) Ephesians 5:22 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, (hupakouo) Ephesians 6:1

The Purpose of Submission

God's purpose for submission has a much greater purpose than simply doing what someone says. We submit or align ourselves underneath our partner for the purpose of furthering their growth as to whom God intended them to be as a man or woman, husband or wife.

We are submitting to who God intends them to be as to the role God designed them to be, as the husband being the head and for the wife being the helpmeet.

As we look at the behavior of our spouse we must ask: What would be going on inside a person to act or behave in such a manner? What need is going unmet? Who does God say that they are? Who does God intend for them to be, and how should they be treated? We submit to God's greater purpose that He has designed for them.

Jesus' relationship to His Father was one of submission. When Jesus was facing His crucifixion and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." - Luke 22:42, N1V Jesus was willing to submit to God's greater purpose.

Mutual submission is an attitude that does not seek its own will, but rather seeks the glory intended for our partner.

The Submission of the Wife

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, NIV

God designed the role of the wife as one of submission to the husband as the head of the relationship. God created Adam and placed him in the garden as the one primarily responsible and provided Adam a helpmeet. After Adam and Eve sinned, God's design for their relationship became distorted. Adam would no longer lead with freedom and Eve would no longer offer herself as his helpmeet.

God's curse on Adam and Eve, as the result of their disobedience, would cause each of them to struggle with God's intended role for each of them, the man as the head and the woman as the helpmeet.

God said to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you!" - Genesis 3:16, NIV

Eve would no longer submit to being Adam's helpmeet. She would now seek to take control of the relationship. She no longer felt safe to submit herself to a man who did not have her best interest in mind. Now the man is looking out for himself, being controlling and angry. He handles his responsibility poorly as the leader. The woman now refuses to offer herself as his helpmeet,

God is calling the wife to return to her intended purpose to be the helpmeet. God is asking her to submit to her position as helpmeet. But because of sin and the curse she no longer wants to be a helpmeet.

In essence, Ephesians is saying, "Wife, don't resort to your desire to control or manipulate your husband, rather demonstrate love by offering yourself as his helpmeet to furthering his growth as to the leader who is to subdue and rule the earth.

Paul writes, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. It does not give the option that the wife should submit as long as things fit her perspective. If she is to submit in every situation, then submission must have a definition that does not have any exceptions. The wife is to submit in every situation, but this does not mean she is to obey him in every situation. Her submission should be to who he is, not necessarily to what he says.

Using the definition for submission, ordering yourself underneath your husband for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering his growth as to who God created him to be and his calling, what would submission look like?

Ananias and Sapphira

An example of a wife who should not have obeyed her husband, is the story of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira in Acts 5:1 -10. Ananias and his wife sold a piece of property. They gave a gift to the common

fund of the church from the sale of the land, but only part of the money from the sale, pretending to have given the whole amount. When Peter confronted the husband of his lie, the man fell dead. About three hours later Sapphira returns and is confronted by Peter, not knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter asks her if it was true that what they had donated was the true price of the land that was sold. She acknowledged that it was in fact true. Peter said to her, "How can you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." And at that moment she fell dead.

Sapphira should not have agreed with her husband and lied about the real price of the land they sold. Because she agreed with him, she was just as guilty. She was given the opportunity to do what was right, but rather she chose to agree with her husband.

What would submission look like in this situation? We do not know the reason why they agreed to lie about the amount of the sale of their land. We do not know if she was a willing participant or if she was coerced to go along with him. Regardless, she should have told the truth. Submission would have been for the wife to not enable her husband by going along with the scheme, but rather telling the truth and letting her husband face the consequences of his actions.

Submitting In Difficult Circumstances

- How have you tried to get your husband to change?
- When your husband does something that hurts you, how do you respond?

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your 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, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, 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. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. -1 Peter 3:1-6, NIV

This passage is speaking to wives who are living in the midst of difficult circumstances. The husbands described here are "if any of them do not believe the word." The verb is, "not to allow one's self to be persuaded." This could be a non-believer or a believer. Clearly, it is a husband who is not behaving, as he should. He is one who will not listen to reason. He does what he wants. Paul is asking the wives to submit to these husbands, in the same way as slaves submit to their harsh masters. (1 Pet. 2:18) She should respond as Christ did when treated badly. [1 Pet. 2:21-25) The point is, wives should submit even if the husband is not acting in a responsible way.

The wife is given the responsibility to impact her husband by her behavior rather than by her words. Husbands rarely change due to their wives "straightening them out," or criticizing them. A husband is impacted by the way a wife conducts herself. Husbands usually change when they have to face the consequences of their behavior. An example would be of a wife who has been deeply hurt by her husband, figuratively speaking, she should wear a white dress that shows the damage or wounds (the blood stains) that he has caused.

A wife cannot submit to her husband if she is controlled by fear. She will not be able to respond in a way necessary to demonstrate love and further his growth if she is controlled by fear. When Peter speaks to wives in 1 Peter 3:1- 6, he ends his comments with, "*You are her [Sarah] daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.*"

For a wife to submit, she must put her trust in God, not in her husband. This is what the holy women of the past did. They put their hope in God, did what was right and did not give way to fear. (1 Pet. 3:6)

- How might you be controlled by fear?
- How does fear show up in your relationship with your husband?
- How does your husband's anger affect you?

What Does Submission Look Like?

To submit means ordering yourself underneath your partner for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering their growth as to who God created them to be and their calling.

A wife places herself under her husband, as his helper; for the purpose of helping him be the man God has called him to be.

A wife who is submitting will ask her husband how she can help him in areas where he struggles, instead of criticizing him. Instead of attacking her husband, she can say, "I know that you struggle in a particular way or area, what can I do to come alongside and assist you in this area?"

Questions a wife might ask herself:

- In what ways does my husband struggle?
- Where has he been wounded?
- What hinders him from being the man God designed him to be?
- How can I be his helpmeet in this area?

Helping her husband does not mean that she enables him or makes excuses for him. Rather she responds to him as to the person that he was designed to be. Even though he may act like a little boy, she responds to him as the man that he should be.

The Submission of the Husband

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. - Ephesians 5:25-33, N1V

This message to husbands comes under the main topic of mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul is telling the husbands how they are to submit to their wives. The husband's submission is not the same as the wife's submission as the "helpmeet." A husband's submission to his wife should be like that of Christ's love for the church.

When the husband submits, he is giving up his own interests for the sake of his wife's needs. Just as Christ laid aside his will for the will of the Father when he went to the cross, so also as husbands we are to lay aside our will for our wives. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."- Luke 22:42, NIV. There is no room for selfishness, the husband's own agenda, or "lording over" his wife. Christ did not make it about himself.

Because God has placed the husband as the "head," he is to lead by sacrificing himself for the benefit of enhancing her beauty. Christ submitted to a greater purpose, which was the redemption of mankind to be restored to relationship with God. The husband is to enhance his wife's beauty by helping her become all that God intended for her to be.

Christ's sacrifice was for the purpose of purifying us to be acceptable to God. The husband is to focus on purifying his wife to make her beautifully aware as to who she is to be on the inside. We are to focus on who she is on the inside to make her beautiful. As husbands we do a pretty good job of making our wives beautiful on the outside, by giving them nice clothes and jewelry.

But when it comes to making them beautiful on the inside husbands are more at a loss of what to do. Many men feel very inadequate as to how to offer anything to their wives internally.

External Beauty - the focus is more on providing her money, material things, nice clothing, jewelry, and fixing of her hair.

Internal Beauty - the focus is more on her internal needs to be loved, understood, understanding her fears, insecurities, wounds and offering healing.

- How have you tried to provide for your wife's inner beauty?
- What does your wife need from you that would help her become more beautiful on the inside?

Become a Student of Your Wife

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. -1 Peter 3:7, NIV

The principle of mutual submission is given in this message after instructing the wives to submit to their husbands in 1 Peter 3:1-6. The words, in the same way, carry the idea of "in a similar

way." The husband's submission is not necessarily exactly the same, but the same principle applies.

The husbands are urged to have a submissive attitude toward their wives by being considerate or with proper understanding. The husband is to understand his wife as the weaker partner, not that she is inferior but rather in regards to understanding who she is. Husbands are to treat their wives with respect in that she is different than he is physically, emotionally and relationally.

How do you show your wife the respect or honor that her needs and makeup are different than yours?

God takes our understanding of our wives very seriously. If husbands do not understand or respect how their wives are different and what her needs are, they cannot expect their prayers to be answered.

Thoughts Concerning The Submission of the Husband

- The tendency of some husbands to lord over their wives or demand submission and control often comes from their inadequacies within themselves. Often the more insecure the man is the more he demands submission from his wife. Some husbands feel that they have to prove that they are the "head" by making submission an issue of obedience. Nowhere in scripture are husbands told to make their wives submit
- Submission for the husband does not mean that he is to do whatever his wife wants to make her happy. Rather, he is called to what is in her best interest and help her to grow according to her needs.
- The husband who "rules" over his wife and attempts to exercise authority over her is reinforcing the curse that God placed on Adam. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Genesis 3:16) Husbands are to love their wives and lead by sacrificing for her.

What Does Submission Look Like?

To submit means ordering yourself underneath your partner for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering their growth as to who God created them to be and their calling.

God has given husbands a special gift, a helpmeet. Husbands have the responsibility to protect and cherish the gift that they have been given. The husband's submission is his willingness to sacrifice himself for the care and well-being of the helpmeet.

For husbands to answer the call to submit to their wives, they must give of themselves, physically, emotionally, verbally and spiritually. How can a husband die for his wife as Christ died for the church if he is not there to get on the cross?

- In what ways are you not getting on the cross for your wife?
- What wounds or unmet needs are behind your wife's hurtful behavior?
- How have you contributed to your wife's wounds as the result of your failure to understand her and placing yourself underneath her for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering her growth?

A husband who is submitting to his wife will ask his wife how he can help her in areas where she struggles, instead of withdrawing or becoming angry.

The Decision to Mutually Submit

Both the husband and wife acknowledge that they have been called by God to submit to their partner.

When we submit, we understand that it is for the purpose of demonstrating love and furthering their growth as to who God created them to be and it requires dying to self.

Knowing Our Spouse's Needs

In order to submit to our partner as to who God has called them to be, we need to be aware of our spouse's needs and wounds.

If we want our partner to minister to our needs, it is necessary for us to honestly share our wounds, struggles and who we are with our partner.

Our goal should be to vulnerably reveal ourselves, deeply desiring our partner to lovingly respond, without demanding that they respond to our needs.

We should each help create a climate of non-critical acceptance that will encourage both of us to be vulnerable with each other so that we can minister to each other.

In order to effectively minister to our partner, we need to understand their childhood wounds and unmet needs, along with how we have contributed to their wounds.

What If Our Spouse Will Not Open Up

- We must realize that because they are made in God's image, deep needs do exist, even if they are well hidden.
- We must examine ourselves to see if we are making our partner feel unsafe to open up.
- We must always pray for wisdom from God to understand our partner and their needs.

- If our spouse is unwilling to be open and share, we need to give them time to heal and respond.