

## HE MARRIED A PRINCESS

### **SHE'S A PRINCESS OF A WIFE!**

“Her husband ...praises her” (Prov. 31:23)

A couple of ladies were chatting together on the sidewalk when they saw a couple go by in a car. “Isn’t that shameful?” scolded one.

The other was puzzled. “How do you know she’s not his wife?” she asked.

“Just look,” her friend answered. “They’re having too good a time!”

#### **Whatever happened to Those Dreams?**

The critical lady may have been mistaken about the happy couple passing by, but her observation was based on a very general and sad condition. Young people start out their lives together full of dreams and plans for the future, determined that theirs will be the perfect marriage. But little by little the romance begins to cool and the dreams fade. One begins to criticize, and the other starts to nag. Quarrels break out over tiny matters, and bitter words are followed by tears and sobs, or sometimes by sullen silences, which may hurt even more.

Is your marriage what you dreamed about? Are you as nice to your husband as you are to strangers? Or is there often quarreling in your house until, at least, someone comes to the door? You open it and talk, full of friendliness and charm. The friend leaves, you close the door and start to snarl at each other again, right where you left off before the interruption.

Or perhaps you and your husband have stopped talking. Hours pass in complete silence, and then one of the children comes in. You both start talking, but only to the child. The child leaves, and again the house is dead silent. And the silence is menacing.

This is the sad condition of many marriages. Anger, bitterness, loneliness, depression, rejection and guilt stalk through our homes, and divorce or desertion has become an ever-growing plague. Tragically, a phenomenon new today is that Christians are not free from this deadly plight.

Sometimes couples stay together, but stresses within their marriage keep them from realizing their potential and they become bitter, unhappy and warped. This is not the Christian ideal, not the way God wants it to be.

Whatever happened to those dreams’?

#### **Why Has It Happened?**

God initiated the family; it is His concept, and He loves it. And Ephesians 5 shows us that the marriage relationship is an object lesson of Christ’s love for the Church. He wants it to be a holy, beautiful institution, a shining picture to all the world of His pure and perfect love for His Bride.

Just because He loves it so, Satan, the arch-enemy of God, detests it. He is out to destroy it, because he longs to frustrate the purpose of God.

There are normal stresses in our highly complex civilization that imperil the family. But worse, demonic forces are aligned to besiege it as part of their unceasing warfare against the holy God of the universe. Many times they bring their battle right into the parlors of men and women who have solemnly pledged before the God they love that they will love, cherish and honor each other till death do them part. Their marriage begins to fall apart, and they are hurt and puzzled. How could this happen to their story-book romance? Their hearts break—and hell’s demons gloat.

You must expect opposition to the ideal God has for your home. This started way back in the Garden of Eden, and it has never stopped. It is not easy, but the woman who is a true Christ-follower has no greater task in life than to make her home a demonstration of God’s ideal.

This is a spiritual challenge, and only God can defeat the enemy of men's souls—and of women's—, especially when he is warring in our own homes. But the exciting truth is that He can do it. A man and a woman who love Him more than anything else in life, even than each other, and who study His Word and pray together will have His great power to withstand any attack by the enemy. No advice from any marriage counselor can equal that truth.

But that isn't the complete story. There are also practical day-to-day ways to improve the happiness of living together, to help keep fires of love glowing brightly, and they will be the center of discussion in the rest of this book. Let us begin with a subject that is proving a thorny issue among women today in many parts of the world.

## **What About Submission?**

“My husband does everything I tell him,” boasted one lady to her friend. She didn't realize it, but her marriage was headed for trouble. God has a better plan for a family, and He has clearly indicated that the husband stands as the head of the house.

A well-run office or business must have a clear line of responsibility, and the executive director is put in charge to see that every detail is functioning to the best of its potential. This avoids confusion and wasted effort. If there is a breakdown, the director must bear the responsibility for the failure.

This is the pattern that God, in His perfect wisdom and love, has established for the home. The husband is the executive director. It is his duty to see that everyone in the household functions according to his best potential. The husband is not to be a harsh taskmaster; rather, he is to orchestrate the affairs and the people of the household in harmony and in love.

Men are commanded to love. It costs to love. “God so loved that He gave”—and giving always follows loving. How much is the husband to love his wife? The extent of that love is beyond measure, “even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25 ).

We women, by the way, are told to submit to our husbands. We are not told to submit as women to all men, but as wives to our own husbands (see I Pet. 3:1, 5). We women need protection and security in the home. We can sleep better when we know we are being cared for and the home is filled with peace and love.

## **Helping Him Love**

We mentioned above that the husband is commanded to love his wife. We wouldn't want to admit it when our husbands are around, but just among ourselves we can confess that sometimes we aren't completely lovable! Maybe it would be helpful to talk about a few ways we can make it easier for our husbands to obey God's commandment about love. Let me ask a few questions. Think about them seriously and take an honest inventory of your attitudes and habits. And then consider what changes could be made to improve your marriage and to guarantee its endurance.

1. Do you smile often, even at home? If you came to breakfast with a happy face, would your marriage be better? There are times, of course, when a smile is not appropriate. If you scorched your husband's favorite shirt or dented the fender of his new car, he would probably not understand a happy grin when you announced the disaster. But if your general disposition shows a happy attitude, the home will be a sunny place and your husband will bring his friends to visit it with pride and pleasure. Do you smile often, or is your at-home expression a scowl?

2. How do you look? A wife dropped in at her husband's office and saw the beautiful receptionist at work there. “All at once I felt like a rag,” she said. She decided it was time to pay more attention to her appearance and try to become again the pretty little lady her husband had first wed.

3. Are you interested in his interests? Do you like it when you talk and no one listens? Soon you begin to think, I'm nobody. And that is exactly how a husband feels if his wife takes no part in his life and work and interests. Little by little he decides that he must go elsewhere for pleasant conversation, stimulation and relaxation. For love to grow, a couple must share honestly with each other. Many times

a husband comes home tired and needing someone to listen. If a wife hears of some discouragement he has experienced and reacts critically with a negative comment— “But why did you do that?”—, he will be very reluctant to share again. She is really saying, “How stupid you were!”

If, instead, she meets him at the door, freshly combed and pretty in a sparkling bright dress, and says, “I’m so happy you’re home. Let’s have a cool drink while you tell me all about your day,” he will think, “This is home, a refuge. I love it!” And he will love his wife more than ever.

4. What about sex? A few years ago Christians did not talk about sex; they thought it was somehow a dirty word. But now we realize that the bedroom, too, is a part of the house and “marriage is honorable . . . and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4).

The wise wife will realize that men are different from women and their sexual drives are more constant. Her husband needs to feel a success, fulfilled and appreciated in the bedroom just as in the rest of the house. And she will never withhold sex as a punishment, sitting silent and pouty on her side of the bed after a tiff.

5. Do you appreciate him? Psychologists tell us that women have two basic drives, security and affection. A woman wants to feel safe, and she wants to be told that she is loved. But what a man needs most, say the psychologists, is self-esteem.

Practice complimenting your husband. Nobody ever gets too much praise. A husband will do almost anything to live up to the compliments and praise of his wife.

One wife said, “Everybody else tells him how wonderful he is. Somebody needs to keep him humble.” And so she needled him and joshed him about his clumsiness and inadequacies.

Unfortunately, her criticism and antagonism helped drive him toward another woman. He confided to a friend, “I want to be important to her. But it seems that nothing I do pleases her.” He felt like a failure at home.

Sarcasm is the cancer of marital communication. Everyone may laugh when we make a joke about our mate, and he may smile, too. But his tears are falling on the inside.

Never fall into the habit of putting each other down. Do all you can to build each other up. Others will do the tearing down.

In Psalm 38 we have the picture of a miserable man. This particular man was King David, who had held sin in his heart for a year. Verses 3 and 6 in the psalm tell of the mental unrest and physical distress that resulted from his alienation from God. How many of us suffer like this! Depression and tears, palpitation, estrangement in inter-personal relationships and feelings of persecution—all these result from our inner spiritual defeat.

But how did the great king David fall into such a pitiful condition? The grief of Psalm 38 began in 2 Samuel 6, for he was confessing his sin with Bathsheba. This happened because his beloved wife Michal despised him. David had brought back the Ark of the Covenant, a truly great, high and holy moment. He came in to bless his house and his wife’s response was, “What a fool!” This turned him off, bruised him. It left a permanent wound, and David “knew her not again”. In his loneliness, David turned to Bathsheba, and she overwhelmed his judgment.

David confessed his sin. In the great prayer of confession, Psalm 51, he cries out to God. “Against You, You only, have I sinned” (v.4). He was forgiven and restored to God’s favor, but the love between him and Michal was forever dead.

Too many Michals have insisted upon perfection in their husbands and wrecked their marriages by their impossible demands.

### **Maybe I Can Change Him!**

Changing a husband is no easy matter. More often than not the man senses a spirit of criticism in his wife and retorts, whether in words or actions, “I don’t want another mother!” And have you ever noticed what happens when you comment to your husband, “I don’t like that shirt and tie together very well”? That’s the shirt-and-tie combination he’ll wear every day for a week!

Even if your husband is full of faults, God can use him to make you a far more queenly woman. You see, the Lord chose your mate for you. He wants the very best you, and He knows how to produce it. Jewels result from pressure. God knows the type of husband who can best make you into a priceless and beautiful jewel.

When a lesson is learned the pressures pass. God does not delight in frustrating us without a reason. Instead of rebelling in an unpleasant moment the woman who is seeking God's best in her life will ask, "What do You have for me in this, Lord?" She will find peace, and the Lord will be able to accomplish His high purpose in her life.

In the 25th chapter of 1 Samuel we have the intriguing story of a woman "of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance" (v. 2). This means she was a real beauty queen as outstanding for her intelligence as for her appearance. Nothing can surpass this combination of winsomeness and wisdom in a woman. Her name, Abigail, meant "Source of Joy".

Strangely, this beautiful girl married a horrid man, selfish, unmanageable, stubborn, ill-tempered and stupid, a drunken wretch. Worst of all, he was an unbeliever, a "son of Belial" (v. 17). Why did she marry him? How could so lovely a girl throw herself away on so horrid a man as Nabal?

Marriages were family-made in those days, and women had very little to say about the selection of their husbands. Verse 2 says that Nabal was "very great"—that probably means he came from a wealthy family, for we read that he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. Perhaps Abigail's father considered so wealthy a man a suitable husband for his joyful, beautiful daughter, but what a sad, distorted sense of values!

Perhaps Abigail thought she could reform Nabal after they married. Many girls fail to realize that unequal yokes do not promote true and lasting happiness and that heartbreak almost always comes to the Christian woman who marries an unbeliever.

When David asked for hospitality after he had helped Nabal's herdsmen, he received an insulting refusal. Angered, David threatened to kill Nabal and all his followers and to plunder all his possessions. And then Abigail intervened in the nick of time. Probably she often had to make amends for the infuriated outbursts of her surly husband. She showed great generosity; her husband refused meat and bread to the 600 young men, but she gave that and added figs and raisins. Instead of water, she served choice wine.

Notice what Abigail then did. She did not leave her godless husband or ask for a divorce. She had taken him for better or for worse, and she stuck with the bargain she had made. She must have had a wretched life, but she remained a loyal wife and protector of the man to whom she had promised to be faithful.

She knew God and she waited for Him to bring about a change in her miserable home. In His own time He did just that, and by a divine stroke Nabal's worthless life was ended and Abigail became the wife of Israel's most illustrious king. She had no tears of regret.

God makes no mistakes. The only way to joy is in the path of obedience to Him.

### **What About My In-Laws?**

"I've had all I can stand. You'll have to choose between your mother and me!" And with those words, the stormy wife stomped her feet and walked away from her husband.

But she left him with an impossible dilemma. How could a man choose one to the exclusion of the other? He has already chosen his wife and sworn before God to love and cherish her till death. But his parents were chosen for him long before he was born and, besides the natural bond of gratitude, love and respect that he feels, God has firmly commanded him, "Honor your father and your mother."

The angry tirade of that young wife may seem extreme, but countless couples suffer strain in their relationship because of misunderstandings that arise over in-laws. The love that existed between Naomi and her daughter-in-law is seen only rarely, and we cannot know if that was so warm when the young husband was still alive.

This is a sad situation, and it exists in almost all parts of the world. Who is at fault? Can anything be done to help? Since we are a mixed group of women, let us examine both sides of the problem.

The mother has probably been the most important woman in her son's life all through his childhood and youth. When he marries she senses that he has turned to another woman to meet his needs. Already fearing old age that may make her unattractive and feeble; she now realizes that she is no longer needed by her beloved son, and that hurts. In the face of the young couple's shared, exuberant joy, she feels rejected, a discard.

Her loneliness—part of what is sometimes called the empty-nest syndrome—is easily understood. The problem becomes far more acute when she tries to recapture a relationship that is inexorably changed and fights to retain her son's dependence upon her. Leave and cleave—this two-fold duty of a man—was clearly understood by Adam at the very beginning of family life, before the birth of any children on the earth. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen. 2:24), and Jesus quoted those words exactly (Matt. 19:6). This is the pattern that God established, and it is a normal and healthful progression to maturity and independence. Happy is the woman who, upon first cradling her newborn son in her arms, accepts and welcomes the day when she will lovingly step into the background and relinquish him to another woman for the establishment of another home where Christ will dwell and love will reign.

One wise woman presented her son with a beautifully wrapped box on the morning of his wedding day. He opened it and found, instead of a wedding gift, the cut-off strings of her well-worn apron. She said to him, “I just want you to know that you're no longer tied to your mother's apron strings.”

And what about the young woman—is she sometimes at fault in in-law troubles? Yes, for she too faces a myriad of adjustments in becoming a wife and undertaking the management of a household and some are painful. When she feels insecure and inadequate in some of her tasks, she dislikes having an experienced eye upon her, and she often suspects that her mother-in-law is spying upon her and criticizing her. Too, her intense love for her new husband may keep her from wanting to share him with anyone else, and she may look upon her mother-in-law as competition for his interest and love. Tormented by self-doubts and fears, she decides to build a wall and keep her in-laws far on the other side.

But this is wrong, and it is tragic that lovely young women are sometimes blind to the pathos of separating walls. They are nice to other people—why not to their husband's family? When Christ commanded us to love one another, did He add, “Except in-laws”?

One young woman confided, “I couldn't stand the old woman, always telling me how to do things. I asked God to keep her away for my peace of mind. And then I began to think about myself and my hateful feelings, and I asked God to change me. And you know, the strangest thing happened. When I asked Him to change me, she started getting nicer.” Problems began to melt away into nothingness, and this is the way God wants our families, even including the in-laws, to show His love.

“Your people shall be my people.” This is certainly the ideal arrangement for merged families. “Great—now I have two sets of parents” is a wholesome attitude for the newly weds to have. And when both sets of parents spread their arms and their hearts wide to the new daughter or son, happiness is almost guaranteed.

True, there will be strangeness to overcome, and the new child or set of parents will not replace or compete with the old, dear familiar ones. But appreciation and love will grow, and the relationship will become richer with each passing day.

For the King's daughter, even in-laws can be a blessing.

Oh, Dear, He's Not a Christian

The woman whose husband is not a Christian has a mission field all her own. Her life must be a daily object lesson of Christ's presence right where it is hardest, in her own home. She must see to it

that her husband knows the way of salvation and has frequent opportunities to accept it. But in this she must not nag, or be preachy, lest he become resentful and hard. She must be faithful in prayer for him and always trust God to bring about the needed miracle in his life. And, though she carries a burden for him and feels lonely in her Christian walk, she must be a joyful, hopeful woman, rejoicing in the Lord and allowing Him to use her.

Does all this sound difficult? It would be—almost impossible, really—in our own strength. But our Lord's strength is sufficient for every circumstance (2 Cor. As:9), and He can give us His joy that will make us contented and happy women. Our homes will sparkle with the joy that overflows from our hearts. And in that atmosphere, day by day, God can work in the heart of an unsaved husband. Expect His miracle in your home!

### **Does Your Husband Need Help?**

In the early Church period there was a couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were earnest and valued Christian workers. They must have been very close, for in the four times they are mentioned in the Scriptures (Acts 18:2 and 26; Rom. 16:3 and 2 Tim. 4:19), their names are always linked together. Not once do we read of Aquila without Priscilla, nor of Priscilla without Aquila.

We see how Priscilla was used of God to be a great help to Paul and to Apollos, His servants, but they were not the only men to whom she ministered. More important in her life, she was a genuine help-meet to her husband. She and Aquila were a team; they worked together in making tents, and they worked together in serving their Lord. Priscilla certainly contributed to Aquila's spiritual growth and walk with the Lord. No greater task is given to any woman.

All over the world there are men who are sacrificially serving the Lord in difficult places because their wives are willingly standing behind them, encouraging them to do more and ever more for the Master. Many of them have grown weak at times and nearly faltered, but their wives prayed them through the hard spots and on to complete victory. The husband's names may be well known on earth and the wives may be completely forgotten, but God keeps perfect records, and He will reward them both together.

For ten years the writer taught at a Bible Institute in Zaire. There God was working in an unusual way in that period and scores of young men heard His call to leave their lucrative employment and become his full-time servants. They would bring their families to the school for three or four arduous years. The help they received from their churches was minimal, and many went through times of great privation, sometimes actual hunger, during their school years.

Graduation was always a festive time, and a highlight each year was the "Looking Back" service, when graduates shared from their experiences in the Bible-school village. Year after year this thought was shared: "I was terribly discouraged, and ready to quit. But my wife told me we couldn't turn back, so I stuck it out. I'm so glad she wouldn't give up." And today many of those couples are serving the Lord joyfully together. Praise God for those wives!

Conversely, we wonder how many men have failed in their Christian walk and work because their wives were stumbling blocks. What a load of guilt those women will have to bring before the judgment seat of Christ!

Husbands are usually taller than their wives. Their bulging muscles indicate their superior physical strength, and many a he-man speaks deprecatingly about the "little woman" he married.

Little she may be and frail to the eye, but, given normal circumstances, she will probably outlive that great brute of a husband hers by six or seven years. And insurance statistics suggest that her emotional frame is more rugged than his as well, for men are far more prone to bouts of mental depression than women, and their suicidal rate is appreciably higher. Never forget, little wife, he may seem strong, but he needs a helping hand!

And this is one of the beauties of a loving marriage. Husband and wife merge both their weaknesses and their strengths, and both reach new potential. In the essential, mystical union of two

independent individuals, a new unit emerges for the fulfillment of life's needs and for the continuity of humanity upon the earth.

Two rivers, neither very impressive, join and, flowing together, become a mighty and magnificent waterway, sometimes smooth as silver, sometimes raging and terrible. And individual lives, at the marvelous, meaningful moment of matrimony, abandon their aloneness and enter an era of unlimited possibilities for growth and achievement. The family team, living with and for God, grows richer and happier as the decades roll by.

And the key is abiding in God. With Him, there is nothing stronger than marriage. Without Him, there is nothing more fragile. The culmination of advice to any couple is, "Stay close to God." He is the third member of the marriage team.

Uphold your husband. Love him. Nudge him ever closer to God, for he will never be more wholly yours than when he is wholly God's!