

STORM-PROOF YOUR MARRIAGE**1 PETER 3:1-7**

Weather has gotten to be a big deal in our country. We even have the Weather Channel now, which my wife, Cheryl, loves to watch during hurricanes. We're used to seeing incredible weather stuff on TV now: howling winds, buckets of rain, devastating floods, scary tornadoes, and raging wildfires. There's not much you can do to protect your home if you take a direct hit from a category five hurricane. Oh, you can board up windows and take other protective measures. That may minimize a great deal of damage, but it won't prevent all the damage. As many of you know, we've been thinking about how to stand strong in the storms of life. Is it possible to stormproof your life? No, you can't evade or avoid every storm. But you can reduce or minimize potential damage by storm proofing certain areas of your life. One area of your life where you can actually reduce or minimize potential damage from all the storms of life is your marriage. No, you can't guarantee your marriage will never get rocked by some storm in life, but you can do some things to protect it and prevent its collapse.

We've been taking a journey through 1 Peter, a letter written by Simon Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, to new Christians who were facing some big storms in their lives. The biggest storm they faced back then midway through the first century was the beginning of persecution. Their neighbors were becoming increasingly suspicious, hostile and ugly towards them because they followed Jesus. Peter wanted them to stand strong even in the storm of persecution. We aren't facing the storm of blatant persecution today, but what Peter said then has significance for us here and now.

A solid, stable, and loving marriage can and should be a tremendous blessing to you when you face various storms in life. Did you know that's one reason God created marriage? But, you know as well as I do, that a strained marriage relationship can become one of the biggest storms in life. I wish I could say today that followers of Jesus experience less marital storms than those who don't follow Jesus, but it's just not true. A storm in your marriage is one of the most difficult, painful storms you can ever endure in this life precisely because it's not a place God ever wants you to have a storm. God designed marriage to provide a place of great comfort and wonderful refuge when all the other storms of life blow hard upon you. He wants your marriage to be one of the great resources that enable you to stand strong when those winds of adversity howl around you. Through His servant, Peter, God provides some timeless ways to stormproof your marriage. Let's read what God wrote through Peter and then marinate in it for a few minutes. First, there is a message for wives.

WIVES: LET YOUR HUSBAND LEAD.

Now, let me ask you something. Does it seem unfair to go on and on about what wives should do for six verses and then describe what husbands should do in only one verse? There's actually a good reason for that. Many of the people who started following Jesus in the first century were on the bottom of the social and economic ladder of society. Last week, we learned that so many slaves were committing their lives to Jesus that Peter had to give them advice on how to mesh their new faith with the fact that they

were still slaves. Many women were committing their lives to Jesus, too. Like slaves, women were at the bottom of the ladder in the first century. In Jewish culture, a woman was a thing who was owned by her husband like he might own a sheep or a goat. She could never leave him, but he could dismiss her as his wife for the smallest offense either real or imagined. In Greek culture, a wife was thought to have no independent existence or mind of her own. She was to be seen and heard as little as possible. In Roman culture, a woman had no legal rights. Husbands and fathers could kill their wives or daughters for some personal offense without any legal penalty.

The whole attitude of ancient civilization and culture was that a woman couldn't make major decisions by herself. For a wife to change her religion from something other than her husband's religion was unthinkable. And yet this was exactly what was happening! When a husband and father became a follower of Jesus, it was quite natural that his wife and children followed his lead and became Christians, too. That created few potential problems, so I conclude that Peter felt one verse here was enough for Christian husbands. But, in many cases, women were committing their lives to Jesus before their husbands, and some of those husbands were not embracing the Christian faith. Peter knew that created the potential for some major problems. That's why, I believe, he devotes six verses to help Christian wives understand how to mesh their new relationship to Jesus with their old relationship with their husband.

What's Peter's counsel and advice here? Wives, he says, let your husband lead. Now, remember, this was written primarily to Christian wives with still non-Christian husbands. But there is a timeless principle here that I believe applies to all marriages that, if it's followed, will help stormproof your marriage. Peter says that wives can let their husbands lead by being, first of all, submissive. Oh, I know that's a dirty word to some – an inappropriate, politically incorrect word – but it's because we often misunderstand what the word means in the Bible. People automatically equate submission with weakness, with inferiority, and with being a kind of doormat. But the basic meaning of submission here is really about order and organization in a home or a family – never, ever about a woman's personal worth or her intelligence. When decisions need to be made, when a course of action needs to be undertaken, when a direction needs to be set, someone must be given the responsibility of leadership.

Consider what it's like to be in the Army. A private might very well be more intelligent and have a better character than a five star general, but the general outranks the private, nonetheless. As a result, he leads. Isn't that a position of greater privilege? Yes, but it's also a position of greater responsibility and accountability, too. When a big mistake is made, they don't come looking for the private. They come for the general! If your husband makes a leadership mistake in your home, God isn't going to hold you accountable for it, Christian wife. Yes, I do believe the Bible teaches that husbands should be the leader in the home and wives should willingly yield to that leadership. I'm not suggesting any kind of harsh, forced submission. This can't be submission by coercion or manipulation. Instead, it's a voluntary, free will brand of submission that can say willingly and freely, "OK, let's do it your way this time!"

Ruth Bell Graham, Billy Graham's wife, passed away in 2007. She was an amazing person in her own right – an accomplished author and Christian leader. She admitted that she struggled with this whole concept of submission in her own marriage to Billy. She said, "When we dated, we had our ups and downs. I had always thought I should go to Tibet as a missionary, and one day Bill said to me, 'Ruth, do you think God led us together?' I had to admit that I was convinced He had. Then Bill said, 'Well, then, I'll do the leading, and you do the following.' I've been doing the following ever since." She also said that it was a great day in her life when she realized it wasn't her job to change her husband. She said, "It was my job to love Billy and God's job to change him." A strong, confident person can also be submissive.

But aren't there exceptions? Of course! Peter never suggests that a wife should do something immoral in the name of being submissive. Nor is your husband always right in his decisions, any more than the government or your employer is right when it asks you to submit to its authority. But note the principle that transcends. Submission is the courage to allow a decision to go someone else's way graciously instead of insisting on my way. It means to defer to someone else - to yield one's rights, agenda and ego willingly for the sake of the relationship. Peter implies here that there's a potentially big payoff when the wife is a believer, but the husband is not. After all, your faith in Jesus needs to be more visible than verbal. When a non-Christian husband sees in his Christian wife a willingness to respond patiently and sincerely to his leadership in the home, it actually can help to create an openness to Jesus within him. In every marriage? No. In many marriages? Yes.

There's a second piece of godly advice offered here to wives and women. Be submissive – that's the first one. The second one might seem a little odd, but it's important. Be beautiful – but be truly beautiful. I think that's how we're to understand what Peter says here about hairstyles, jewelry and clothes. I don't really think he was against women looking attractive or wearing make-up. He wasn't against wearing jewelry any more than he was against women wearing clothes. So, then, what is Peter's point here? Basically, he reminds all of us – and particularly women – that real beauty isn't skin deep! God's definition of real beauty, ladies, goes far beyond the bone structure of your face, or your figure, or your accessories. God says real beauty is seen in your morality, in your purity and in the godliness of your inner character.

Remember the context of these verses! Most women, in Peter's day, had concluded that their ultimate value was all wrapped up in their sexuality. If you were taught that you didn't have a mind worth developing, then what purpose was there in learning how to use it? Your value and worth was based on how physically attractive you could make yourself to a man. Many women in that day and time got fixated on their physical appearance. Come to think of it, there is much in our current culture that sends the same message twenty centuries later! I want you to notice how the Christian faith challenged that whole way of thinking. Women are made in God's image just as much as men. Women are made for an eternal relationship with God just as much as men. Jesus died and rose again from women just as much as He did for men. That's why I have to shake my head in dismay when people today want to portray the Christian faith

as some great enemy of women's equal rights. Bless their pointy little heads! It is precisely the Christian faith that has elevated the entire world's thinking on the intrinsic value and eternal worth of every woman on the planet!

Peter mentions here that women who have truly known and loved God down through the ages have known this deeper meaning of true and real beauty. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was apparently one of the most physically beautiful women of her day and time. The Bible tells us that lots of men wanted to take her to bed the moment they laid eyes on her! Now, Sarah certainly had her own character flaws. You may remember how she treated her servant, Hagar, in that whole sordid mess involving Hagar's and Abraham's son, Ishmael. But along her life journey, God worked genuine beauty into Sarah's soul – the beauty of a gentle, quiet, submissive spirit that could say in the end, "Let's do it your way this time." God prizes that kind of attitude. Godly husbands prize that kind of attitude. And, wives, if you make that a part of your marriage, you can help stormproof if from many potential storms. Well, let's consider the one verse that Peter directs to husbands. Don't think that because it's shorter that it's somehow unimportant!

HUSBANDS: PUT YOUR WIFE FIRST.

Does that sound like a contradiction? What does Peter say again? "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered." (1 Pt 3:7 NLT) If wives are supposed to let their husbands lead and husbands are supposed to put their wives first then it sounds like both of them are finding ways to submit to the other one. Bingo! That's exactly right! As ironic as it may sound, that's exactly how a good marriage is supposed to work. Husbands put their wives first by being, first of all, considerate of them. Submission can and should work both ways. After all, the Bible also says, in the context of a marriage relationship, "...submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:21 NLT) If a wife can say, "Fine, let's do it your way this time," then a godly husband exerting his leadership in a godly way can certainly say on occasion, "You know, let's do it your way this time." Frankly, it's an ungodly husband who is so insecure as not to take the sound advice and counsel of his wife in making decisions. That's one big reason God put her in your life, dummy! There may be times when you have to make a tough call alone, but those will be few and far between. When you put your wife first and she's letting you lead, most decisions will end up being unanimous. When that kind of attitude prevails in your marriage, you will do a lot to stormproof it. Your marriage will be the place of refuge and comfort from all the other storms of life that God created and intended it to be.

Husbands, be considerate. What are your wife's feelings, wants and desires? A considerate husband doesn't demand that it be his way or the highway! Instead, he longs to be deeply considerate of his wife's needs, wants, hopes, and dreams. I like how Peter phrases it there – "... be considerate as you live with your wives..." (1 Pt 3:7 NIV) That means a whole lot more than sharing a house or a bed with her. Living considerately with your wife means knowing her, listening to her, talking with her,

laughing with her, and investing significant amounts of time into that relationship. Someone put it like this: more marriages erode than explode. A marriage can lose energy and one reason is lack of consideration. Can it be a challenge at times to be considerate, husbands? Sure. For example, have you noticed that men and women are just different in many ways? We don't necessarily look at life the same way!

Perhaps you've heard of the man who was walking the beach in California deep in prayer. He said out loud, "O Lord, grant me one wish." Suddenly, he heard a booming voice coming right out of the sky, "Because you've tried to be faithful to me in all things, I will grant you one wish." The man said, "Build a bridge to Hawaii so I can drive over there anytime I want to." The Lord was disappointed, "That's a very shallow request. Yes, I can do it, but the logistics are difficult. All that concrete and steel. I want you to think of another wish – one that would better honor and glorify Me." The man thought for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Lord, I wish that could understand women. I want to know what they feel inside, what they're thinking when they give me the silent treatment, why they cry, what they mean when they say, 'Nothing's wrong,' and how I can make a woman truly happy." There was a very lengthy pause in Heaven. Finally, the Lord, "Do you want two lanes or four lanes on that bridge?"

Now, guys, you aren't always easy to live with either. An overwhelmed-by-life-young mother signed up for a class on how to organize her life. After hearing many organizing tips, she asked, "But how do you get your kids to help clean up? I have two young children, and it's usually just easier to clean up myself. That way, I know where their things are and they get put away right. But I feel frustrated about that." Another woman in the class offered a solution, "In our house, we use a special box. Whenever something is left lying around the house where it doesn't belong – even if it's car keys or a wallet – it gets put into a large, wooden container that we call The Box. Then, if anyone is looking for something lost and finds it in The Box, he or she just can't grab it out of there. He or she has to do five minutes of chores around the home to get the lost object back again." The young mother said, "That's an awesome idea! How old were your children when you started that?" "Children?" answered the second woman, "We don't have children. The Box is for my husband!"

Husbands, be considerate. Peter also says that husbands can put their wives first by being respectful. What is this about women being weaker in this verse? The Bible never suggests women are spiritually weaker than men. If you've been to school, you already know women are not intellectually weaker. Women are not morally weaker. In fact, when it comes to moral issues, my experience has been that women can have a keener sense of what's right than men. No, I believe Peter had physical strength and limitations in mind here. Now, I know there are many women out there who could leave me in the dust in a race or a workout at the health club; nevertheless, Peter is simply observing a general reality that men are stronger than women physically. In effect, Peter says, "Men, take into account that your wife might get tired and worn out before you. Be aware that her emotions might affect her physical energy more than you." Isn't there some truth to the observation that some marriages have serious internal storms because the wife is expected to run the home, and raise the kids, and clean the house,

and hold down a job, and be the chief cook and bottle washer, and look like a fashion model? Husbands, this is just some very practical advice on how to live considerately and respectfully with your wife.

Here's yet another way to respect or honor your wife, men. Constantly remember her equal status before God. Now we accept the truth of that statement today as an obvious matter of fact. In doing so, we fail to grasp how radical the Christian faith was in Peter's day and time. Women weren't considered equal to men in anything back then! To suggest that women were equal to men before God must have sounded absurd to both men and women in the first century. But, there it is just as plain as day, "...She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life..." (1 Pt 3:7 NLT) And as if to drive his point home, notice the warning that Peter issues to husbands right after that statement, "...Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered." (1 Pt 3:7 NLT) Men, if you fail to put your wife first – to show her godly consideration and respect – you're going to have a much bigger problem than your wife. You're going to have a problem with God Himself!

Husbands and wives who follow Jesus share an exalted position. You are equal participants in and recipients of God's grace and God's gifts. Men, remember the example of Jesus. Did He ever put Himself first? Instead, didn't He set aside what was best for Himself in order to serve your needs and mine? God prizes that kind of attitude in you, men. Godly wives prize that kind of attitude. Husbands, if you treat your wife like Jesus treats you, you will stormproof your marriage. When those storm winds of life start to blow in on you – and they will – you'll find in your marriage, just as God intended, a place of shelter, refuge, and strength.

Every now and then, you get to see a picture of the refuge and shelter God designed marriage to be. Back in October 2011, Gordon Yeager, 94, and his wife Norma, 90, died exactly one hour apart after 72 years of marriage. They were holding hands when they died. The couple left their home in Marshalltown, Iowa, to run some errands in town, but they never made it. A car accident sent the couple to the emergency room with broken bones and other injuries. When they were transferred to intensive care the nurses knew not to separate them. Even in the hospital, they were more concerned about each other than themselves. Gordon and Norma's son, Dennis Yeager, said, "Mom was saying her chest hurt and what's wrong with Dad? Even laying there like that, she was worried about Dad. Dad's back was hurting and he was asking about Mom." When it became clear, sadly, that their conditions were not improving, the nurses moved them into a room together in beds side-by-side so they could hold hands.

Gordon died at 3:38 p.m. holding hands with his wife, Norma, as the family they built surrounded them. Their son, Dennis, said, "It was really strange. They were holding hands and Dad stopped breathing, but I couldn't figure out what was going on because the heart monitor was still going. We were like, but he isn't breathing. How can he still have a heart beat? The nurse checked and said it was because Mom and Dad were holding hands. Mom's heart beat was beating through him and the monitor was picking it up." At 4:38 p.m., exactly one hour after Gordon died, Norma passed away, too.

Dennis said, "They just loved being together They were old-fashioned. They believed in marriage till death do us part. They were committed."

You can't stormproof every part of your life. But you can do a whole lot to stormproof your marriage and allow God to make it and keep it a place of shelter and refuge from life's storms. Wives, let your husband lead. Husbands, put your wife first.