

1 Peter 3:7

1Pe 3:7 (NKJV) **Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.**

In this study we begin the actual exegesis and exposition of [1 Peter 3:7](#). Over the next several weeks, there will be a large portion devoted to the practical application of the words or phrases that we are addressing. We have already dealt with the term “**likewise**”, as well as the importance of our taking a verse like this very seriously. With just a cursory reading of the verse, there are five major areas that Peter will address that should be readily apparent.

- (1) The husband is to dwell with his wife with “**understanding**”.
- (2) The husband is to give “**honor**” to his wife.
- (3) The wife is described as a “**weaker vessel**”.
- (4) Both husband and wife are “**heirs together of the grace of life**”.
- (5) If a husband does not get these first four areas right, his prayers will be “**hindered**”.

So, initially summarizing all of this, the husband’s role is that he is to be incredibly considerate of his wife. God has designed her differently than he is. She is very different physically and emotionally, and because of that there will be many things that impact her differently than they impact her husband. What may be of little importance to the husband may have a much greater value to the wife. So, part of the husband’s role is to figure some of that out. When Peter says to give the wife “**honor**”, that word means that he is to highly esteem his wife, to dignify his wife as being incredibly precious. However, he is to honor her because just like him, she is a recipient of God’s grace just as much as he is. I.e., God is working just as much in the wife as He is in the husband. She is a co-heir of God’s grace as much as the husband is. Obviously, she is physically weaker than the husband and the husband must be aware of that and not be placing more on her than she can bear. This requires a very keen sensitivity on the husband’s part. Unfortunately, for the husband who has little concern for these areas of his relationship with his wife, both his life and his prayers will have little impact. The word for “**hindered**” in reference to the husband’s prayers literally means in the Greek that they will be cut into, that they will be impeded.

It is my personal opinion only that God will not really use a husband who does not genuinely address this verse and how it applies to his marriage. A husband does not have the privilege of ignoring his wife or her special needs. His attention to her life and to her needs has to become one of the most important areas of his life. I think what we will clearly see as we progress through this study, and this is a very important point, is that **how a husband relates to his wife is actually a reflection of his relationship with God**. The less he is honoring his wife, the less he is honoring God. The Word of God is not going to allow us as husbands to just carelessly address the needs of our wives. To the contrary, our wives have to become an ongoing priority of every husband’s life. The very best way for a husband to demonstrate his love for God is to have a deep and abiding love for his wife and children.

So, what does it mean to “**dwell**” with our wives with “**understanding**”? The word “**dwell**” is the Greek word “*sunoikeyo*” and it simply means to live with someone, to live together domestically.¹ In fact, this is the only place in the New Testament that this particular Greek word is used. The word for “**understanding**” is actually two words in the Greek – “*kata*” for with, and “*gnosis*” for knowledge. That is why in the KJV, ASV, and YLT it is properly translated as “**according to knowledge**”. Most of the translations use a phrase like “**in an understanding way**” or “**be considerate**”. It is a word that speaks of a kind of practical knowledge that has discernment. It is the kind of knowledge that creates a high level of discretion, carefulness, caution, maturity, and prudence in a relationship.² The most important word in the New Testament for knowledge is in fact this word “*gnosis*”. It is a word that has a kind of broad meaning to it and includes not only knowledge, but also includes growing in one’s insight, always learning, a kind of very cognizant recognition of things, and it breeds an ongoing familiarity with certain factors in the marriage.³ This is not a word in this context that just means being understanding of someone else, even though it certainly drives us to that place. It is much more than just a casual knowledge of something or someone. So, this is not a word that refers to someone just acquiring knowledge, but it is a kind of knowledge that governs and controls how we act towards and treat someone. Marriage with all of its pressures and stress, especially with children, can become very complicated, very problematic and incredibly difficult at times. I think the old adage that opposites attract is very accurate and actually creates much of the tension initially that often occurs in a young marriage. For that very reason, the husband has to have a different level of understanding for his wife and for the issues that are created within a marriage relationship. I find it interesting that the Scriptures place the need for this kind of understanding squarely on the shoulders of the husband.

I have known plenty of people who were passionately in love with one another initially, only to not have an understanding of what was actually needed to make a marriage work, and they eventually got a divorce or simply abandoned the marriage. What seemed obvious and simple at first became a very complicated nightmare later. The way it seems to work is that people initially fall “in love” and then eventually fall “out of love” once the honeymoon period kind of wears off. Once the initial period of marriage has progressed for a couple of years, then the partners begin to reassert themselves into the marriage. They become more expressive of what they do not like, of what is not working, and why their initial intimacy seems to be fading some. This is where the real work begins, yet for some this is where it seems to end too quickly. You may have been here in your marriage and thought that you only had two options – either get out of the marriage, or just resign yourself to a life of frustration and misery. However, this is when our real love for our mate really should begin to grow. Regarding your part as a husband, it requires a great deal of discipline and personal growth. None of us can have a meaningful marriage apart from a great effort on our part. It is making the effort to enrich your partner’s life in every way possible, and that will not happen apart from personal sacrifice on your part. The more you try to enrich and enhance your wife’s life, the more she will love you.

So, what the husband has to do is to gain some insight into his wife’s ongoing needs. Every wife is different, but there are still very basic needs that should be understood and addressed. For me personally,

¹ Zodhiates, 1345.

² Zodhiates, 378.

³ Harris, #1102, *gnosis*, ep.

I have always felt that the greatest thing that I had to do for my wife was to **be a strong spiritual leader in my home**. I am not just talking about doing Bible studies or attending church. Obviously, those kind of things are important and vital to a healthy marriage, but what I am talking about is making wise decisions, having deep spiritual convictions, and constantly deepening my personal walk with God. There is no way to measure the impact that a husband pursuing and leading a life of godliness has on his wife. What you strive to do in your personal relationship with God will motivate your wife to develop the same values for her own life. As a husband, there will always be certain activities, certain attitudes, and certain pursuits that you must avoid, or they will cause both your wife and children to stumble. It could be things like not controlling your anger, becoming overly frustrated, making foolish decisions, being enslaved to bad habits, having the wrong kind of friends, being overly absorbed in recreational activities, hiding in your man cave - the list is endless. If any of these kinds of areas are areas that you struggle in, then you must determine what you have to do in order to overcome these kinds of marital and spiritual obstacles. Everyone will notice your efforts or your lack of effort to be an overcomer in the areas that hinder your walk with God and your relationship with your family. Whenever a husband says that he has godly convictions, then he has to live by those convictions. He has to become the model in the family of what it means to be faithful to God and obedient to the Scriptures. I love the way that Paul addressed some of these things in **Philippians 1:9-11**. I know this is not a passage on the husband or the family, but the principles that are given here certainly highlight everything about which we are talking.

Php 1:9 (NKJV) **And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge (*epignosis* – deeper knowledge) **and all discernment,** ¹⁰ **that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,** ¹¹ **being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.****

Another area that is important for a husband to embrace is his **communicating to his wife how she is specifically meeting his vital needs as a husband**. My wife is able to meet needs in my life that no other woman on the planet can meet. Husbands, listen very carefully. Your wife wants to both know and hear that she is meeting those vital needs in your life. She finds a great deal of security and purpose and contentment in her life when you sincerely communicate these kinds of things to her. Here is what you should do – **continuously praise your wife for all of the good things that she is doing for you** and for all of the ways that she is meeting your personal needs. For instance, most wives serve as a protection and safety net against their husband making unwise and quick decisions. You should always be thanking her for that. She understands the needs of your children better than you do, and you should be thanking her for reminding you of their needs. The more that you praise your wife for steadying you, for balancing you, even for countering and refuting you when that is needed, the more you will win her love and affection. If you and your wife are not physically affectionate, one major reason may be because you never complement her for all of the things that she does for you in your life.

All of this is a part of living with your wife with “**understanding**” or “**according to knowledge**”. As a husband, you have to take the time to discern what your wife’s specific needs are and then find creative ways to meet those needs. When we study the Greek word for “**love**” in **Ephesians 5:25**, it is the word

“*agapao*” and it means to esteem someone and to find one’s joy in someone.⁴ It has the idea of cherishing that person which means to protect them and to care for them tenderly, to nurture them and to care for them. Protecting your wife does not just mean to protect her physically, but to help identify areas of her life where you can help her if those areas are actually hurting her in some way. For instance, she may need more sleep than you do. She may have poor eating habits that are hurting her health. She may be neglecting her personal appearance. It could be anything. Simply stated, your wife has this incredible need to know and to be reassured that you love her and cherish her and value her above everything else in your life outside of Christ. As a husband, you can be assured that when your wife does not feel cherished that she will become very insecure, and that that insecurity will create tension in your marriage. It will often become the reason why she is always willing to contend with you about everything. It is because she really does not feel that loved. She believes that you are content with just ignoring her, with ignoring all of the chores that the children and the home require.

Every marriage has what are often called “core needs”, and it is critical for each partner in the marriage to recognize the needs that their mate has. Why is that? Well, it is because if we are not willing to meet our partner’s needs then the relationship is simply doomed to failure. Husbands, your wife needs to feel deeply loved and deeply secure, and you are the one that has to communicate and demonstrate that to her. Your wife needs to know beyond any shadow of a doubt that you deeply value her and that she is more important to you than any other thing in your life – more important than your job, your family, your friends, your career, your hobbies, and even your children. If you want your marriage to thrive, if you want to have intimacy and oneness in your marriage, then you must provide these things to her.

I want to give you a list of three essential needs your wife has above what we have just discussed. I could easily give ten or twenty, but for the time being, three will be plenty. If you will get these three things down pat, I am convinced that you can have a successful marriage. The list can vary and certainly enlarge depending on where you already are in your marriage, but these areas are critical to every healthy marriage and not difficult to understand.

First of all, **your wife needs your continual physical intimacy and affection.** I am not just talking here about sexual intimacy, even though that is critical as well. It seems that after several years and several children, that affection in the marriage often fades dramatically. It is almost like being married just becomes a rut. My wife showed me this article that she had read the other day on Facebook or something and it said that an average hug lasted 2-3 seconds, but that the hugs that really were impactful lasted at least 20 seconds. Now, why would my wife show me that? It is because she really believes that is true to some degree. My wife and I still hold hands in public and place our arms around each other. We remain physically affectionate with each other at home. If you need a jumpstart in this area, then just meditate on the Song of Solomon for a week or so. Partners need to be touching, caressing, holding, hugging, kissing, embracing – you name it, it should be there every day from both directions. We are not just talking about a peck on the cheek, but an intimate oneness that is always being manifested to one another. It can be verbal or physical. There has to be this physical intimacy and affection that is a constant and meaningful habit in the marriage. Obviously, it is not practical to have sexual activity

⁴ Zodhiates, 64.

every night, but it is very important to have physical intimacy every day. Once this area of the marriage begins to get overlooked, it is only a short step away for the spirit of the marriage to begin to fade away.

Secondly, **your wife wants to have intimate conversation with you**. I know this may sound a little over the top, but I have met some husbands for which having a meaningful conversation with their wife was very painful. You may feel that you are too busy or too tired, or have too many responsibilities to take care of, but that does not remove this particular need that she has. If you genuinely want your wife to be your best friend, then you must have some genuine and meaningful conversation with her. I am convinced that women with children need what we have all heard described as “adult conversation”. If you as a husband ignore this need when your wife wants to talk to you and you kind of casually just tune her out, the one thing that will do is to give her the impression that you simply do not care about her and that you do not really love her. If you do not talk to your wife, you do not really love her. Just listening to what she has to say is important in convincing her that you actually do love her. You do not appreciate it when people do not listen to you, so it should not come as any surprise that she feels the same way. No marriage can have intimacy apart from intimate conversation. Your wife wants to know that her opinion counts and that it has value and meaning to you.

Thirdly, **your wife must know that you are always totally honest with her**. There is no replacement for truth and honesty in a marriage. I started doing some study on the word “honesty” in the Scriptures and found that it is never used in the NKJV. At first I found that to be a little strange, but quickly came to realize that the primary word that God chose to use is the word “**truth**”. In a marriage, there is nothing, not one single thing that we should be hiding from our marriage partner – not one single thing. Hiding things from each other will destroy the intimacy that is required for a great marriage, but being totally honest will open the door for intimacy. Stated another way, you have to be a man of integrity and character. I have heard it said often that your wife needs for you to be the kind of man that your sons want to be and that your daughters would want to marry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harris, Ralph. W., ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek English Dictionary*. Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press Inc., n.d.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.