

“UNDERSTANDING HUSBANDS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 3:7

Prayer: Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the responses of all our hearts glorify you, exalt Jesus, honor your Word and edify your people. Come, Holy Spirit, help us I pray.

Introduction.

I heard there was some concern that I was letting the men off easy with only one sermon while the women got two. You will be happy to know that there will be a second one for men.

Back in the 70's a Christian businessman wrote a book on authority and submission called *The Velvet Covered Brick*. I remember seeing it on my dad's bookshelf.

Some men are all velvet, soft but no backbone like those Jesus described,

Matthew 11:7-8 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Other men are all brick, like Abigail's husband Nabal:

I Samuel 25:3 Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved.

And some men bounce from one extreme to the other, harsh tyrants when they are angry or selfish, and the soft, lazy bums when abdicating their responsibilities in the home.

For every marriage that is hurt by abusive or demanding husbands, there are just as many hurt by passive husbands who don't take responsibility and don't exercise godly leadership. In fact there may be more absentee husbands than domineering ones.

The Bible teaches husbands to not be like any of those men but to be velvet covered bricks, strong and soft in the right measures and at the right times. A man strong enough to be tender.

Husbands are to be the head of their wives and homes, they are to take responsibility and to exercise authority, but it's not a blanket authority. It is not absolute and it is not undefined. It is to be exercised in a certain way, with certain considerations.

That's the message of I Peter 3:7.

Live with your wife, physically present.

Live together. Share the same house and the same bed. When that's absent, relational intimacy diminishes and if sustained will lead to independence and isolation. A husband is to share his life and sacrifice his life, to live with his wife in every way.

Another form of drifting apart takes place when one spouse goes to bed early and gets up early and the other one goes to bed late and gets up late. I know this can be sort of a chicken and egg discussion. Which came first the emotional and physical withdrawal and then the sleep pattern or did the sleep pattern lead to the drifting apart?

Either way it should be a serious warning signal to a couple to seek to reconnect. Intimacy is meant to seal and strengthen marriage. Separation and avoidance weakens affection.

One of the big causes of divorce is neglect, inattentiveness, not paying attention and drifting. More relationships die from ice than from fire. Stay connected.

Live together, dwell together, be together. Don't be ships passing in the night.

And to this I would add, forsake all others and live only with your wife. Your marriage relationship is an exclusive relationship according to your vows when you said you would forsake all others, whether real women or virtual women.

In an understanding way, mentally present.

Live in an understanding way or *according to knowledge*. Understanding, with knowledge.

I know what you guys are thinking, it's impossible. Who can understand the complexities of women? I remember years ago seeing that picture being passed around the internet of two instruments, one marked male and the other mark female. The male one had one switch, on/off. The female one was covered in dials and switches and lights and levers and not one said on/off.

So what are we saying? Is it hopeless? Does God issue an impossible command? Never, it is His grace always to enable us to love Him by obeying His commands.

So how do we live according to knowledge? Knowledge of what? Any knowledge beneficial to your marriage relationship and the building of a home together. What might that be?

Knowledge of God's purposes for marriage. Knowledge of the world and its pressures and intrusions into our lives and homes and marriages. Knowledge of your wife in all her facets and depths.

Study her, think about her, study your responses to her. Do some comparing and contrasting. Men and women are totally different. Women think differently, reason differently, do emotions differently, nurture differently. She looks at life completely differently.

The typical approach of husbands in the face of all these differences is like Professor Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, “Why can’t a woman be more like a man?”

I understand the sentiment, but I also know it would be a most undesirable reality. God made women different and as the French say, “vive la difference.”

Because wives are completely different it means you won’t be able to live with your wife in an understanding way without a lot of work and effort. Being casual or lazy on this won’t work.

You have to work at it, you have to figure it out. You can’t plead ignorance, or say, “I don’t understand women, their impossible.”

Now I have some good news for you guys. I have come across in incredible resource that will help you immensely, a treasure of information and wisdom. Are you ready for this, you might want to write it down. The best resource for understanding your wife is ... your wife.

Start asking questions and start listening. Get in her head and heart.

Ask what she thinks, ask her how she feels about things, get her views and perspective.

Ask her about the kids, what she sees, what she notices, what’s in her heart about them.

Being understanding requires a lot of patience. This means you will have to spend more than the 37 minutes a week some surveys say husbands and wives spend in actual communication.

It means you need to make time for regular, unhurried, stress free private conversation about things that matter most. Date your wife and ask questions.

Do you know her fears, her frustrations, her desires, her goals, her deepest hurts?

Do you know her preferences, her moods, her needs, her thoughts?

Do you know her strengths and weaknesses?

Do you know where she needs the most affirmation and encouragement?

Do you know her love language?

That’s all leadership. Your leadership will be better if it is informed by her insights. I have three questions I regularly ask, how am I doing? how are you doing? and how are we doing?

Learn to read her eyes, notice her countenance and body language.

When you walk in the door learn to read how her day went.

Don’t be like the husband who walked in, sensed something was wrong and asked if anything was the matter. She said “nothing” and he said, “Oh good, for a minute there I thought

something was wrong” and then went to watch TV. He didn’t understand nothing means everything.

Living with your wife in an understanding way means understand who she is and who God has created her to be and what God has created her to do.

Living with your wife in an understanding way means affirming her worth and value in your home, to you and to the children, and complimenting her beauty, both inside and out.

Living with your wife in an understanding way doesn’t mean saying yes to everything she asks or giving in on every point.

She has weaknesses that lead to sin and for this you need wisdom and discernment to say no or stand firm, but learn how to say no in a way that honors and remembers she is like you. You have weaknesses that lead to sin as well, remember that.

Living with you wife in an understanding way means understanding and caring about her children, being actively involved in their lives and interests. It means asking, “What can I do to help?”

Living with your wife in an understanding way means working hard to provide a home, a car, clothes and necessities. Dutch men have been especially good at this. This is part of the security she needs.

An understanding husband doesn’t ask her to fix the car or lawn mower or move the refrigerator. You take out the trash when she asks, you unclog the toilets, you kill the scary critters, you are the fixer of broken things and the doer of the Honey Do’s.

There is another aspect of living with your wife in an understanding way that means being hard on yourself, disciplining yourself for the sake of your family.

Living with your wife in an understanding way means being hard with your own sins and habits, your TV and movie watching, your drinking, your video games, your lusts and pleasures, your spending.

No woman will respect a man who doesn’t take responsibility for himself and for others, especially those God has given to him to be most responsible for.

A wife needs the security of knowing that she is the only one and the most important person in your life, that she is number one. Adultery and pornography destroy that security and tear the fabric of marriage. They threaten her, her marriage, her children.

Live with your wife in an understanding way. And two other sources, God’s Word and prayer. For more help, check out James Dobson’s books on this subject, very practical and helpful.

Showing honor as the weaker vessel, emotionally present.

Part of understanding is showing honor and esteem. As I said last week, few things can destroy the marital relationship as quickly as contempt. Showing and speaking honor is a good way to guard your heart and your relationship from anything even approaching disdain or disrespect.

Fathers should tolerate no disrespect toward mom from their children and they must set the example in their own words and actions toward their wives.

Peter says show honor because she is the weaker vessel. What does he mean by that? Is he being patronizing? Is he belittling wives or suggesting they are inferior?

Are women the weaker sex? Well it depends on what you are talking about. If we are talking morally or mentally or spiritually then no, they are not weaker.

Generally speaking women are weaker physically. Sure there are exceptions, but men are generally bigger and stronger than women. There are almost no sports where men compete directly against women. Most husbands can over power their wives physically.

The danger wherever there is a weakness is that someone will see it as something to be exploited or taken advantage of. Physical weakness does make her more vulnerable. Husbands must guard against being the aggressor, being abusive or rough.

Wives need to be protected. The default action of the man is to defend and protect, to lay down the life. Men are the warriors.

I remember about the first month of our marriage Phama was finishing up her duties as the Assistant Dean of Student at Sterling College in Kansas before we moved to Boston for seminary. One day she came home for lunch in tears because some men had been making her job miserable and weren't respecting her authority.

Now I just had knee surgery and was in a leg brace and on crutches, not exactly a picture of great power. But I got on my crutches and hobbled across campus and confronted the man. I told him if he was going to do battle with my wife, he was first going to have to do battle with me. Fortunately he didn't laugh or say "Oh yeah, you and who's army." He backed off and later came to Phama to apologize and everything worked out.

Palm Sunday is Jesus riding into Jerusalem to take responsibility, to do battle for His bride, to rescue and defend her, to lay down His life for her.

Scripture teaches that God has made men physically stronger to protect women and children. If there is an intruder in your house at night, the husband doesn't say to his wife, "I think it's your turn to go this time."

That's why women in combat turns things upside down and puts the natural order of the sexes out of order. The duty of men is to take responsibility. Men are to provide and protect, to defend and care for. Men, husbands, fathers step up and take responsibility.

Honor means protecting, not just physically, but emotionally, protecting her from shame, from condescension. Their God given weaknesses are never used against them. Women have certain fears that are easy for us men to mock, because well we would never be afraid of that.

Understanding her strengths and weaknesses means you don't make her feel like a failure or inadequate. You don't be demeaning of what she can't do as well or as fast as you.

Women are said to be weaker by having a greater emotional sensitivity. That is also a strength, but this means she can be more easily hurt deeply with harsh words, angry outbursts or ugly behavior.

Husbands, take responsibility for your mouth and your actions, control your tongue and control the conflict in your relationship.

God intends greater honor be given to weaker or less honored vessels.

I Corinthians 12:22-24 The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor ... God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.

Honor her publicly, in the city gates as the Proverbs 31 wife's husband does.

I love the story of Winston Churchill being asked at a formal state dinner if he died and could come back as anyone, who would he most like to come back as, and without missing a beat he answered, "Mrs. Churchill's second husband."

I will push pause for now and return to this in three weeks. Until then I commend to you again as I have in the past the threefold antidote against letting the flame go out. Every day, a hug, a kiss and an "I love you." And maybe a couple of times a month, those other three words every wife wants to hear: Let's eat out. Can I get an amen on that note.