

Chapter One

A HUSBAND'S UNDERSTANDING OF HIS PRESENT CONDITION

A Personal Testimony

I remember a time early in our marriage that was a turning point for my wife Zondra and me. It all started with one little statement that she made to me one evening after an especially hard week as a mother of two young children.

"You are being very selfish," she said. I'd *never* heard Zondra speak so pointedly to me before. At first I was speechless. "She should *not* be saying this to me," I thought. I tried desperately to figure out what I had done that was so terrible. "Where did *that* come from?" I asked after the momentary shock wore off. "How can you say that?"

I was a young pastor at the time. I had been through both Bible college and seminary. In fact, I was studying through the husband's role in marriage when this occurred. "She must be having a bad day," I rationalized. Before I could think of something else to say, she continued, only now she was in tears.

"You seem to care almost exclusively about your own desires, circumstances and interests. Now that we have children, I can't focus

totally on you anymore. The truth is, you act as if you couldn't care less about *my* circumstances. Do you realize that we never seem to talk about what concerns *me*? For the most part, you aren't willing to sacrifice even in the smallest ways for others, unless it costs you nothing or it serves your interests. And on top of that, do you realize that if I have to ask for your help with anything lately, your reaction shows your impatience. I really think that the concern and interest should go both ways."

So that's what this was about. "You're just upset because I was tired and didn't really want to wash the baby bottles, aren't you? You know how difficult things have been for me this week at the church. Besides, even though I didn't want to, I did wash the bottles, didn't I?" Thinking further about Zondra's statements, I became defensive. I thought, "Surely you have the wrong person. Are you talking to me? Your provider and protector? How can you so misjudge me when I am such a good husband to you?"

Blinded by my own pride, I set out to inform Zondra of the ways that I loved her sacrificially, the way Christ loves the Church. As my mind sought examples, however, I was thoroughly stumped. I mentioned a few things I had done for her. But the truth was, I did just enough to get by and there was often a kickback for me. The more I evaluated my "love" for her, the more I realized that convenience or putting on a show for others to see was almost always involved. As much as I hated to admit it, she was right. I *was* consumed with myself and my own interests.

I remember the moment of those realizations as if it were yesterday. I was like King David when he was rebuked by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12:1-13). My mouth had been silenced by Zondra's words. I had never really loved my wife the way I thought I had. I came to realize that although I believed that "two shall become one," I, of course, was the one.

There followed a week of unforgettable grief and remorse. It was as if my pious world had come crashing in on me. The realities about my lack of biblical love were earth-shaking ones that I continued to recognize in all areas of my daily living. I began to see what others must have long since observed in my life. Thanks to my dear wife, who loved me enough to tell me the truth, God began a much needed work

in my heart.

Since then, I have been much more aware of my pride and selfishness. Repentance began through that incident and is a continuing process. I would like to be able to tell you that I have fully arrived and become Zondra's knight in shining armor. Instead, I could be likened to a simple frog slowly being transformed into the form of her prince, not yet rid of all his warts.

The intent of this account is to illustrate my need for understanding concerning my love for Zondra. Like a builder preparing to build a home, I had to do some personal surveying before I could establish where I needed to begin building. I was lacking in true concern for her interests. My selfishness was a lack of mature Christian character.

I have entitled this book, *The Exemplary Husband*, because of its emphasis on a man's walk and character. The word *exemplary* sums up the husband's responsibility in marriage to live what God instructs. Only one other word could describe it better. That word is *Christlikeness*.

More as a goal than a full reality, Christian husbands must answer the call of God *to lead the way* in pursuing Christ's likeness. In doing this a husband will participate in the building of God's kind of marriage, and more specifically, God's kind of husband.

God's Will for Christian Husbands

God's will for every Christian husband is to shepherd and love his wife the way Christ shepherds and loves the Church (Ephesians 5:23-33). In fact, Christian men are called to follow Christ in all their ways.

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

1 John 2:6

Christ is our perfect example in all things. We have been given many other examples in the Scriptures as well. Some are good examples and some are bad ones. We are given good examples that we

might clearly see God's pattern. Bad examples show us wrong patterns. By these poor examples God is seeking to reveal what is often difficult for us to recognize in the middle of our *own* circumstances. God uses both good and bad examples to move us toward His own likeness.

God not only wants us to look to the right examples, but He also wants each one of us to *be* the right kind of example for others. We need to remember that we already *are* some sort of example to others. The question is, what kind? The following are charts of Scriptures about Christ, (our perfect example), and our need to *be* exemplary. As you read them you will see that God has spoken clearly and powerfully to us about exemplifying Christ.

The Ultimate Pattern: Jesus Christ

Servanthood

"For I gave you an example that you should always do as I did to you."— John 13:15

Suffering

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps... while suffering. He... kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...— 1 Peter 2:21-23

Mindset

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who... emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...— Philippians 2:5-7

Self-Denial

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."
— Luke 9:23

Obedience to the Word

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked...
— I John 2:6

Hated by the World

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you; if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."— John 15:18-20

Other Good Examples

God-honoring Spiritual Care

I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children... I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.

— 1 Corinthians 4:14,16

God-honoring Evangelism

Just as I... not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

— 1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1

God-honoring Pursuits

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

— Philippians 3:17

God-honoring Life Patterns

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things...

— Philippians 4:9

God-honoring Faith in Difficult Times

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation... so that you became an example to all the believers...

— I Thessalonians 1:6-7

We desire that each one of you show the same diligence... imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.— Hebrews 6:11-12

God-honoring Reception of His Word

When you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it... for what it really is... For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Jesus Christ...

— 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14

God-honoring Motives and Walk

You... know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner... in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.— 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

God-honoring Leaders

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.— Hebrews 13:7

God-honoring Suffering

As an example... of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

— James 5:10

Commands To Be An Example

All Believers

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us...— Ephesians 5:1-2

Young Men

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith

and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe... — 1 Timothy 4:12

Elders

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock of God among you... proving to be examples to the flock...— 1 Peter 5:1-3

Poor Examples

Israel —

Example of Sinful Lusts

Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved... Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

— 1 Corinthians 10:6,11

Israel —

Example of Disobedience

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience...

— Hebrews 4:11

Sodom & Gomorrah —

Examples of Immorality

Just as Sodom & Gomorrah... are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

— Jude 7

Evil Doers —

Examples of Ungodliness

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.— 3 John 11

Following the Perfect Pattern

You may be amazed to learn how much the Scriptures have to say about examples. You may also feel that a biblical example is a shoe you could never fill. In the Scriptures, the Greek terms for example (*typos*), pattern or model (*hypodeigma*), and imitator (*mimetes*) are key words. *Typos* in particular, can shed much light on our endeavor to be exemplary. This word carries with it the assumption of an accompanying guide. It was used to refer to the tracing or practicing of one's letters. A clear example of this definition is seen in elementary schools across our country. Our children learn to write the alphabet by first seeing the letters (which serves as their guide), then by tracing the letters, and finally by attempting to form the letters freehand.

The emphasis of this word is not necessarily on the perfection of the resulting copy, but rather on the careful attention given to the *perfect example and on the determined purpose* of following it. Likewise, we as husbands must be focused on our perfect example, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must carefully and purposefully strive to copy Him, no matter how inadequate our attempt may be at first. As we continue to grow in this endeavor we *will* be **exemplary**. There *will* be more and more of a resemblance to Christ that others can follow. As the Apostle Paul said,

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

So what does it really mean to be exemplary? From our study so far, we can put together a working definition. To be "exemplary" is:

To serve as an improving copy of our perfect pattern, Jesus Christ, by deliberately focusing on and practicing His likeness.

The Fruit (Traits) of the Exemplary Husband

It is God who produces real fruit within the heart (Matthew 7:17-18; Galatians 5:22,23). Only the heart that truly knows and walks with

God can even begin to look like the heart of God. *A husband will bear good fruit in his character and work only when the thoughts and intentions of his heart seek God, love God, and desire to glorify God.* Such a man will leave behind a legacy that will continue to be an example long after he is gone.

Who Can Be the Exemplary Husband?

Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

Whatever condition you believe your heart and life fruit to be, you need not and must not remain in this condition. To be an exemplary husband you must first be in a right relationship with God; then, you must recognize that growth is needed and purpose to begin following your perfect example. Next you must realize that sin is the only thing that can stand in your way. You should take great hope in this truth because sin *can* be confessed and turned away from with God's help. No Christian husband is destined to be a slave of his flesh, helplessly bound by his past or "personality type," nor helplessly affected by poor examples lived before him. Once one accepts responsibility for his own sin, he *can* change through God's provisions (Romans 12:2). (See the "God's Provision of Sanctification" section of chapter 3). So who can be the exemplary husband? *Any* Christian man can.

Are You Ready?

Becoming the exemplary husband will be a growing process. In the end we want to look like Christ. Each husband must do his own honest survey of his heart's condition before he can begin to build an exemplary life. Next, he must acknowledge God's perfect standard and determine his commitment to pursue it. You must count the cost of following Christ. It will most certainly cost you your own will and always getting your own way, because we cannot have both God's way and our way. This fact must be recognized at the outset of the commitment to build an exemplary life and marriage.

There is only one thing that will truly motivate men to follow Christ's example. That one thing is knowing Christ Himself. In other words, it is a right relationship with God that produces the desire for Christlikeness. You must truly be one of His disciples, or you will not be able to be an exemplary husband. Of course, a right relationship with God is based on an accurate knowledge of Him as He is revealed in the Bible.