
Chapter One

The Excellent Wife *Who Can Find?*



The Wife That I Was

"Submissive!? Me, be a submissive wife?" With an angry yell, I picked up the Bible and threw it directly at my long-time friend. Ed and his wife Jackie had been witnessing to my husband Sanford and me for weeks. Ed had just shown me 1 Peter 3:5 which says, "**For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.**" He didn't have to wait long for my response. Of all the things I wanted to be in my life, submissive was not one of them.

Thankfully, though the memory is still vivid, the above incident occurred over fifteen years ago. It is an accurate portrayal of my early views on submission. Soon afterwards, however, I did become a Christian and submitted my life to the Lord Jesus Christ and to my husband. Alma, another good friend, once remarked after hearing my testimony that my conversion was like *The Taming of the Shrew*! How right she was! But, let me start at the beginning.

My parents loved and indulged me as an only child. I was spoiled rotten! Imagine my shock at age 19 when my high school sweetheart and I married and I discovered that the world did not revolve around me after all! I was selfish, willful, and easily angered. In hindsight, I know that if Sanford had not loved me enough to "put up" with me, our marriage would have failed in the early stages.

I wrongly thought that getting married and having children would make me happy. It did pacify me for a while, but soon I was looking for something more. So I sought happiness in community organizations, education, jobs, and partying. Each of these entertained me for a while, but I was always

yearning for something more. I could not be satisfied. As time went on, I decided to commit myself to a career. I felt sure that a career would solve my problem. So I pursued an advanced degree in the field of nursing and eventually taught nursing at a local college.

I really did enjoy teaching nursing, but all my efforts were centered on pleasing myself and pursuing my career. Soon, my marriage began to break down. I had become a full blown feminist who was going to make my mark on the world — my way. About the time that I began teaching, we began to build our dream home, a two story yellow Victorian with a large porch on three sides. As time went by, we found out that our builder was stealing large sums of money from us. We were left with an unfinished house that had over \$15,000 in liens against the property. I tried to escape all of the mounting pressure by drinking and partying. Finally, I decided that what I really needed was freedom. I secretly began to make plans to leave my family. Because Sanford was much more stable than I was, I justified in my mind leaving the children with him. Fortunately for me, God had another plan.

God intervened by sending three people into my life. One was my now dear Christian friend Katrina with whom I shared an office at the college. I felt like I was chained to the Apostle Paul! I made fun of her Christian faith and yelled at her when she tried to talk to me about the Lord. She went home in tears on more than one occasion because of me. It was while I shared an office with Katrina that the Lord sent Ed and Jackie back to Atlanta. We renewed our friendship which had begun in college many years earlier. But, I will admit that I wondered about them because I had heard through the grapevine that they had “gotten religion.” Boy had they! Between the two of them and Katrina, there was no getting away from talk about God or His Word.

Coming Under Conviction

As my plans to leave my family developed, I became more and more uneasy. I soon began to have full blown anxiety and what the world calls “panic attacks.” Drowning my emotional pain with alcohol only left me more depressed and anxious. Ed kept telling me to pray and read the Gospel of John. Finally, out of desperation, I took his advice. I was “cracking up” and thought I needed psychiatric help. I wouldn’t make an appointment, though, because I knew the medications a psychiatrist would prescribe for me would keep me from doing my nursing instructor job. Sanford insisted. Thinking that I was about to be hauled out of the house in a straight jacket, I finally agreed to go on one condition: Sanford must first let me talk with a pastor of a local church. He was reluctant, but agreed.

Soon we were attending a local church with our friends, Jackie and Ed. During this time, I continued to read the Gospel of John over and over again. Most of what I read I already knew and believed — Jesus was God, the only Savior, and He had died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I had been taught these facts as a child, but I didn’t really know God personally. Although I wanted to, I didn’t know how. One night, however, while Sanford was at work and our children, Anna and David, were asleep, I was in bed reading John as I had done on many nights. That night it was to be different.

When I came to John 14, I read what had become the very familiar words of Jesus: **“And whatever you ask in my name, that will I do...”** (John 14:12). Aloud I said, “That’s not true. I’ve been asking and asking for Him to take my anxiety away, to give us our money back that the builder has stolen, and put our marriage back together.” He had done none of those things! But I recalled Ed saying, “Keep reading, Martha.” So, I read the verse again. This time I read the *entire* verse. **“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”** (John 14:13). Suddenly, I understood. All of my prayers had been self-centered. Nothing I wanted had been for the glory of God. I bowed my head in submission and received Christ as my Savior and Lord. Confessing my sins took a long time. Then I prayed, “Lord, now I know that You have the power to take my anxiety away, but whether You do or whether You don’t, You decide. I want my life to glorify You!” I turned out the lights and went to sleep.

The next morning, instead of the anxiety which for months had been flooding over me, I awoke to an incredible sense of God’s peace. I got up and walked across the room, paused to flip on the light switch and thought, “My life will never be the same.” I had finally found what I had been looking for. Jesus Christ, not I, was now the Lord of my life.

How My Life Changed

My life has changed dramatically because of what I have learned over the years about being a godly wife. I wish I could tell you that I am now the perfect wife. Of course I’m not, but God has given me a deep desire to be the wife that He wants me to be. Even though I fail miserably sometimes, He is in the process of molding me in that direction. God has not only given me a deep love for my husband, but also a passion for His Word and for teaching younger women to be the excellent wife described in Scripture. By God’s grace, this book is my “labor of love” for you. My prayer is that God will give you the same love for Christ and His Word and the same desire to do His will that He has given me.

The Will of God for Every Wife

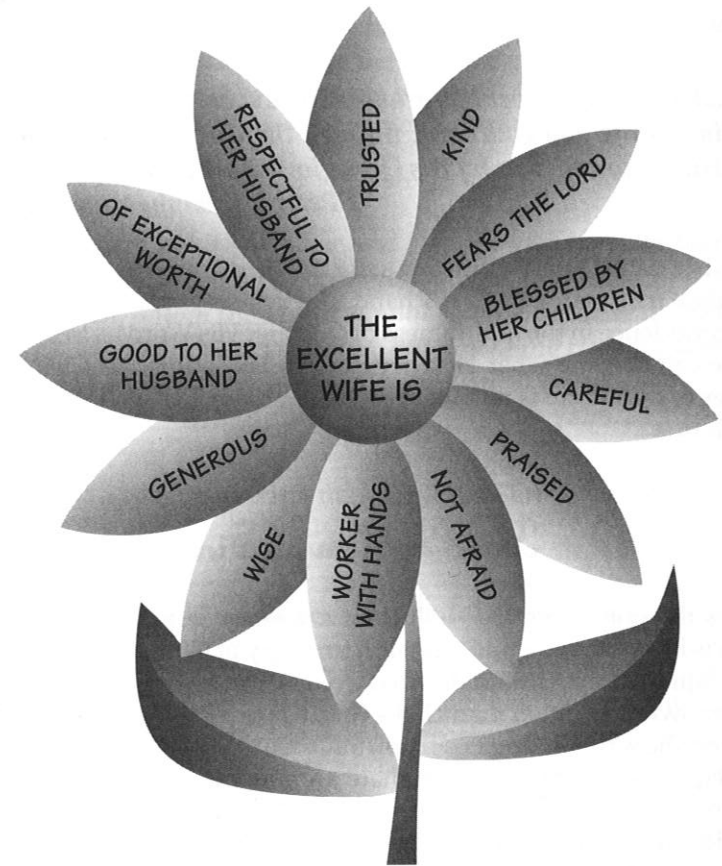
God's will for every Christian wife is that her most important ministry be to her husband (Genesis 2:18). After a wife's own personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing else should have greater priority. Her husband should be the primary benefactor of his wife's time and energy, not the recipient of what may be left over at the end of the day. Whether her husband is a faithful Christian man or an unbeliever, God wants every Christian woman to be a godly wife — an excellent wife. This truth is so important to God that He has clearly and completely revealed it in His Word, the Bible. Indeed, the Scriptures alone are sufficient to provide the wisdom wives need for living the Christian life. One of the most important Scripture passages concerning God's will for the Christian wife is Proverbs 31. Notice that in this chapter of Proverbs are the words of King Lemuel "**which his mother taught him**" Proverbs 31:1 (emphasis added). In verse 10, King Lemuel asks the question:

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

Who can find an excellent wife? What is an excellent wife? How is she recognized? What is she like? What does she do? These questions and more are answered in Proverbs 31:10-31. My life was radically changed by the application of these and other Scriptures. Because God gave me a heart to obey God's Word and will for my life, I am becoming the godly wife that He wants me to be. He can do this in your life, too, if you are a Christian. You can, with God's help, become a godly wife, an excellent wife! That's the purpose of this book — that you might first consider what it means to be an excellent wife and then faithfully commit yourself to that end, so that you will become the wife God wants you to be! The purpose of this chapter is to give you a glimpse of what an excellent wife is in the hope that you, too, may become one. Let's start by looking at ...

The Traits of the Excellent Wife

In Proverbs 31 verses 10-31, God describes twenty traits of an excellent wife. As these traits, or excellencies, are developed in a woman, her life will begin to glorify God. As a beautiful flower in the light of the morning sun reflects the glory of God's creation, an excellent wife reflects God's glory by her attitudes and actions. She might look something like this:



What a glorious reflection of God a woman becomes as she develops her ministry as a godly wife! You should ask yourself, "Are these the qualities I want in my life?" If the answer is, "Yes!" you may be thinking...

But Who Can Be That Excellent?

Many women have a desire to be the excellent wife of Proverbs 31. They just don't think it is possible, at least not for them. These twenty traits, however, can characterize any Christian woman's life. These traits are given in Proverbs as general truths. Any Christian woman who knows and obeys

them can become a godly woman, an excellent wife! Her ministry can grow under the nurturing hand of a faithful and loving God because:

...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His Own glory and EXCELLENCE.

2 Peter 1:3, emphasis added

God has called every Christian wife to His excellence! Any flower can bloom when it is tended by God's hand. A wife's responsibility is to learn to put her confidence in the faithfulness of God and His Word — to do what He says. She can become what He wants her to become if she does what He wants her to do. There is no other way! But, there is one major problem to deal with first...

The Problem of Sin

Sin is the only thing that will keep a woman from becoming a godly wife. Sin is lawlessness, a transgression from any of God's standards (1 John 3:4). It is failing to trust in and do what God's Word says. Sin is wanting to do things her own way rather than God's way. It is presuming God will help her even when she is neglecting His truth. Sin is thinking she can get by without God's help. The bad news is that there are a number of ways to sin. The good news is that God Himself has provided a remedy for sin. **"He (God) made Him (Jesus Christ) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). When a wife trusts in Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord, He saves her from sin. He frees her from the death grip of sin. She is no longer a slave to sin, **"...knowing this that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with (rendered powerless), that we should no longer be slaves to sin..."** (Romans 6:6). The Lord Jesus put it this way, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin... If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed"** (John 8:34,36). There is help available for every wife's struggle against sin.

The Help Wives Need

If a wife truly is a Christian, God has provided everything she needs **"pertaining to life and godliness."** God has broken the grip of sin in her life,

and He has given her the supernatural power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable her to obey His Word and submit to His way and His will. In the following chapters we will examine the details (specifics) of what God tells us in His Word, and how to apply what we learn to our lives and marriages. Further, Jesus told His disciples not to worry, because God the Father would send us help:

And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because he abides with you, and will be in you.

John 14:16-17

If this is true (and of course it is if the Lord Jesus Christ is her Savior,) then ...

Wives Are Without Excuse

Because God has so richly provided for a Christian wife in her battle against sin, she is without excuse. Her loving, merciful, and holy God has truly provided everything she needs to become a godly wife — to become the excellent wife that God wants her to be. And even when she falls short, she can be forgiven. **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9). The only question which remains is...

Are You Ready to Begin?

If you are, you may bow your head right now and confess to God that you have not been the wife God wants you to be. Ask God to help you by His grace to become the excellent wife He wants you to be. You might want to pray a prayer similar to the following one:

"Dear Lord, I confess that I have not been the wife that You want me to be. I need your help to become that wife. I now commit myself to make my ministry to my husband the primary ministry of my life. Teach me what I need to know. I want my life and my relationship with my husband to glorify You. In Jesus' Name, Amen"

If you just prayed that prayer and meant it, you can know that God has heard you and will answer your prayer because 1 John 5:14 says, **“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”**