

Win. Look. Learn. Pray.

That's the four part application of 1 Peter 3:1-7, our passage for today.

Here is my 10 word summary of the message, allowing for a hyphen.

Live a God-honouring marriage for the good of your spouse

If there are four points of **application** to this message then I want to share with your four points of **preparation** as we approach these verses:

1. **Firstly, God's number one priority is to bring you into eternal relationship with him.** V 7 of the passage speaks of the gracious gift of life that God desires for all people. *Inheritance* is the word used.

Later in this same chapter the writer will say:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Are you sure of your eternal inheritance? Have you been brought you God? **That question is more important than any question this somewhat contentious passage raises for us.**

2. **Secondly, God made us all equal in status before him.** In the first book of the bible it is explained that God made the women and the man in his image. In doing so they both had equal standing before him. Not equal with God. Equal with one another.
3. **Thirdly, we are equal but different.** God gives different responsibilities in relationships. This has to be for society to work. Governments need to have authority. Teachers in schools exercise leadership. The surgeon needs to be in charge on the operating table. And in marriage the bible also speaks of how the wife and the husband's roles equal but different. Marriage is between one man and one woman. With a leadership for the husband that is loving and servant-hearted like Christ that does not compromise the equality they share before God.

4. **Fourthly, we all bring our sinfulness to all our relationships.** We'll come to this passage as those who've been in marriages that are no longer so. Where the hurts have been deep and lasting.

Some may be in marriages that are vulnerable at the moment. Hard to see the way forward.

And some will not have ever been married. Maybe disappointed about that. Maybe not.

We need a strong dose of humility when we come to God's Word rather than a dismissiveness about the things we don't like to hear.

The measure of the effectiveness of God's word is whether our relationship with Jesus has been changed by it.

The four preparations. Here then, the four applications. **Win. Look. Learn. Pray.**

The first three speak to godly wives. The last to godly husbands. Those who desire to work for the good of their spouse.

Win

Win. V 1:

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Understanding the world of the original readers helps us. A society where the husband was the patriarch of the house. The faith he practised was the faith everyone in the house practised.

The experience of marriage seems quite compromised in our eyes. Polygamy was practised. The meeting of sexual pleasures through concubines part and parcel of married life. All under the same roof.

Enter the saving news of the gospel. In this passage, the wife has been won for Christ. And here is a truth which applies then and now. Coming to Christ

changes your relationship with God, and with others. It is a mistake to think your relationship with God is just a private matter.

Submit yourself to your husband in order that your behaviour might win him for Christ. It happened to you. Why can't it happen to him?

The word submit raises the hairs in the back of our neck. The knee jerk reaction is that submission must be a sin and is to be avoided at all costs.

This week a representative from NSW Health visited our church for a COVID inspection. At the same time an outbreak occurs in SA returning the state to lockdown for around a week and sparking a reaction all around the country.

The whole country is relying on submission to the authorities for our well being. Respecting the rule of law. You can choose to go your own way if you like, but there are consequences.

In this passage respect is the word that captures the call to submit. In this instance to the husband, so that he too might be won over without words.

It's not to say that someone becomes a believer without words. But here to say that actions speak louder than them. The loving spouse, confident in their relationship with God, brings a fresh blessing to the marriage by her manner of life, encouraging the husband to see the opportunity to come under the same grace.

He is not to be manipulated or cajoled or guilted into the Kingdom. Nobody enters the Kingdom that way. Only by grace.

And I say this to all listening today who have been won for Christ. Working out how your relationship with Christ can be a blessing to your household should be the prayer of every believer.

If you've been won for Christ, how will that grace be shared?

Look

It appears, secondly, by how you look. V 3:

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine

clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

We might sum up these two verses in two sentences. Beauty is measured inwardly and not outwardly. What matters most is how you look before God.

God doesn't look at the external. He looks at the eternal. What makes you fit for relationship with him. He sees someone whose heart has been changed irreversibly through the love, mercy, forgiveness and renewal that comes through being won for Christ.

Respect for your husband isn't about winning his approval. You already have that from God. That's why outward adornment can't be the measure of the manner of life called for in verse 2.

I can't help thinking most of us know this. We realise all the shiny cars and age-preserving creams - very Western illustrations I know – can't really stave off the reality the Job speaks of in his book:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

It is a mistake to read the words of a gentle and quiet spirit as somehow passive and silent. What matters is what finds worth in God's sight.

A healthy marriage is where the gifts and abilities of the husband and wife are recognised and valued and exercised, and this will vary for every marriage.

The inner quality spoken of here is that which Christ brings. He spoke of himself as gentle and lowly in heart, yet was able to achieve the most life-changing act of service by his submitting to the will of his Heavenly Father.

Peter says cultivate unfading beauty. Imperishable. Like the promised inheritance. What's of value in God's sight is usually understood by what counts beyond the externals of this world. The Lord gives and will never take those away.

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Learn

In verse 5 the writer Peter speaks of godly models of this adornment. We are to learn from their example of those who have worked this out in their marriages. Sarah's respect for Abraham becomes the illustration.

This might surprise, because we don't find anywhere where Sarah actually calls Abraham 'Lord', though she does speak of him as 'lord'. I would stress as 'lord' with a little 'l' and not capital 'L' so we don't confuse Peter's reference to the Lord Jesus in the rest of his letter.

If we learn anything from the example of Abraham and Sarah, who of course were both believers, we learn they were able to return to the word of God to work out what their marriage should look like before God, even as it took many messy and unexpected turns, often by their own making.

Learning from godly models is the pattern of the believer's life. And married life can be no exclusion. Some of us will have learnt those lessons the hard way. Others in better times.

All of us, whether in marriage or not, whether believer or not, ought to be committed to health in marriage. It is a gift God has given to society and society ought to be committed to honouring it according to his purposes.

The first three speak to godly wives. The last to godly husbands. Those who desire to work for the good of their spouse.

These first three applications are directed to wives. Showing respect to their husbands is their choice, not the husband's imposition.

If you are a husband who does not understand this and is practising abuse in your marriage or even within your household, then your instruction comes in v 13 of chapter 2.

Submit yourself to every human authority. Domestic Violence is against the law. If you are making the marriage or the family unsafe then you should stop and seek help. Immediately.

If any listening are feeling unsafe in their marriage or household then likewise you must take action for your well being.

It would be a complete distortion of this teaching to suggest it permits sinful behaviour, in this instance by the husband, that brings harm to their spouse, or any other member of the family.

Pray

Which leads to Peter's final instruction of v 7.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Peter turns his focus on believing husbands. He is clearly expecting change. Likely change from the polygamous and promiscuous households of his day.

The message for husbands is **pray your way to understanding your fellow inheritor.**

Be considerate as you live with your wives. Peter here is literally saying know and understand your spouse who is equal with you in God's sight. A co-heir. A fellow inheritor of the eternal life God has granted all who have been won for Christ.

Peter uses a phrase we baulk at when he references the weaker partner. The sense of the word is physical vulnerability. Perhaps he observes the abuse and disdain husbands exercised towards their wives in his day.

It's not a comment about character. Or capability. It is not a reference meant to diminish or discriminate. If anything it is a testimony to the sinfulness of the husband who takes advantage of the marriage in an abuse of power.

Sadly we still see this too often. And the test in a marriage of co-heirs is the quality of your prayer life.

It's true of all relationships in Christ. The presence of prayer is the absence of presumption. Peter assumes that the outcome of the considerate and respectful husband is a deepening prayer life.

If you're the husband of v 7, that would a great outcome from this passage.

Win. Look. Learn. Pray.

It struck me that no matter where you find yourself today. Married. Unmarried. Previously married. Looking to be married. Can't wait for the heavenly marriage to come where the people of God are the bride of Christ.

Win. Look. Learn. Pray, matters to all of us.

Just as you've been won for Christ. Be as Christ before others.

Look beautiful before God. It's what he sees as lovely that matters most.

Learn from godly models. So that you might be one yourself.

Pray your way to the return of Christ and the inheritance he promises.

All this comes to us because Jesus submitted himself to the will of his father that together we might live the good life in God's sight until his Son returns.