

The Christian Home, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: The Wife's Calling: Respect and Godly Submission

Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Peter 3:1–6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Like Lesson 3, this lesson runs against the grain of the surrounding culture, and the teacher should present it clearly, lovingly, and without apology or harshness. What is doctrinally at stake is the New Testament's genuine teaching that a wife is called to respect and godly submission to her own husband, a teaching that must be neither denied (as though there were no distinct callings) nor distorted into servility, fear, or the toleration of sin. Three guardrails should frame everything. First, submission is to a wife's own husband, not to men in general, and it images the church's glad trust in Christ, not the cowering of a slave. Second, it is offered freely to the Lord ("as to the Lord"), an act of faith and strength, not something coerced. Third, it is bounded by a wife's higher allegiance to God: it never requires her to sin, and it never asks her to endure abuse. Establish these guardrails early and the lesson will be heard as the honoring of women it actually is.

Be ready to correct the caricature directly, because many in the room carry it. Submission is not the erasing of a woman's mind, voice, gifts, or judgment; Abigail acted boldly and wisely against her husband's folly and is praised for it, and Sarah was a woman of strength who is nonetheless held up as a model of hope in God. Nor is the wife's calling a statement that she is inferior; she is a fellow heir of the grace of life (Lesson 3), equal in worth and dignity, with a distinct and complementary role. The teacher should also be alert and tender: in any group there may be women in painful or even dangerous marriages. Make explicit, more than once, that God never asks a wife to follow her husband into sin or to submit to mistreatment, and be ready to point quietly toward the elders and other help. Teaching this clearly protects women; teaching it carelessly endangers them.

The lesson is aimed at the heart as much as the head. The deepest issue beneath submission is trust, whether a woman will entrust herself and her outcomes to God rather than seizing control through fear, manipulation, or contempt. That is why Peter ends with 'do not fear.' The gentle and quiet spirit he praises is not timidity but the settled, unanxious strength of a woman anchored in God. The disciple being formed here is a woman growing in that holy confidence, free enough in Christ to honor and support her husband without losing herself. Send wives home not diminished but dignified, seeing their calling as a high and honored way of picturing the faith of God's own people.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... as the church submits to Christ” (Ephesians 5:22–24). Notice that he says “your own husbands,” not all men, and grounds it in the church’s relationship to Christ. What does godly submission actually mean here, and how does grounding it in the church’s trust in Christ keep it from becoming something demeaning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by defining submission from the text rather than from its misuse. The Greek word (hupotasso) is a term of voluntary ordering, of placing oneself under in support, the same word used of Christ’s own submission to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28) and of the church’s response to Christ. It carries no hint of inferiority; the Son who submits to the Father is fully equal to the Father. So submission, in Scripture’s vocabulary, is something the strong and the equal freely render. It is the wife’s glad, voluntary support of her husband’s leadership, not the cringing of a lesser before a greater.

Two phrases keep it from ever becoming demeaning. First, “to your own husbands.” Paul does not teach that women submit to men generally; he speaks of a particular relationship, a wife and the one man she has covenanted with. A Christian woman owes no man on earth this kind of submission except her own husband. Second, “as to the Lord” and “as the church submits to Christ.” The model is the church’s relationship to a Savior who loves her and gave Himself for her. The church does not fear Christ as a tyrant; she trusts Him as her Redeemer. A wife’s submission is meant to picture that glad trust, which means it can never rightly be coerced or fearful.

Notice the order again. Paul addresses wives first and briefly, then spends three times as many words charging husbands to love sacrificially. The wife’s calling is never given in isolation, as though she alone bore the weight of a good marriage. It is half of a mutual picture, offered within the safety of a husband who is laying himself down for her. The teacher should always teach Lessons 3 and 4 as a pair.

Finally, ground submission in faith. Because it is rendered “as to the Lord,” the wife’s deepest relationship is not with her husband but with God. She supports her husband as an act of trust in the Lord who stands over them both. This is why a godly wife can support an imperfect husband without despair: her security rests in God, not in her husband’s performance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Submission (hupotasso) as voluntary ordering, used even of Christ to the Father
- “Your own husbands,” not men in general
- “As to the Lord” and the church-and-Christ model ruling out fear and coercion
- The wife’s calling as half of a mutual picture, never given in isolation
- Submission grounded in trust toward God, not in a husband’s performance

Discussion Prompts

- How does the word being used of Christ submitting to the Father reshape its meaning?
- Why does it matter that submission is to “your own husband,” not all men?
- How does picturing the church’s trust in Christ guard submission from abuse?

Question 2

Student Question:

Submission “as to the Lord” is offered freely to God, not extracted by force. Wives, is there an area where you find it genuinely hard to trust God by supporting your husband, perhaps because you fear the outcome or believe you know better? What would it look like to bring that area to the Lord this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question gets beneath behavior to the real issue: trust. Submission ‘as to the Lord’ means the deepest question is not ‘Is my husband right?’ but ‘Will I trust God here?’ The places a wife finds submission hardest are usually the places where she fears the outcome or is convinced she knows better, and both of those are finally matters of faith.

Help wives name the specific area without shame. For one it may be finances, for another a parenting decision, for another a move or a major risk. The aim is not to pretend the husband is always right (he is not, any more than she is), nor to silence her wisdom (she should bring it freely, as Abigail did), but to identify where she struggles to entrust an outcome to God.

Be careful to distinguish godly support from passive enabling. A wife’s trusting God does not mean staying silent about sin or danger; it means she speaks the truth in love and then rests the outcome with the Lord rather than seizing control through manipulation, nagging, or contempt. The step this week is to bring one such area honestly to God in prayer before bringing it, respectfully, to her husband.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trust in God as the real issue beneath submission
- Fear of outcomes and ‘I know better’ as matters of faith
- Bringing wisdom freely while entrusting outcomes to God
- Godly support distinguished from passive enabling of sin or danger

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you find it hardest to trust God by supporting your husband?
- Is your struggle there really about him, or about trusting God with the outcome?
- What would it look like to bring that area to the Lord this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul closes the passage by telling the wife to “see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Just as the husband is especially commanded to love, the wife is especially commanded to respect. Why do you think Scripture singles out respect as the wife’s particular calling, and what does genuine respect look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ephesians 5:33 gives a striking summary: the husband is told to love, and the wife is told to respect. Many have observed that this matches a deep difference in how men and women often experience love. While both need love and both need respect, Scripture singles out respect as the wife’s particular calling toward her husband, just as it singles out sacrificial love as his toward her. The two callings fit together like a key and a lock.

Define respect carefully. It does not mean pretending a husband is perfect or approving of his sins. It means honoring his God-given place, valuing him, speaking well of him, assuming the best where possible, and refusing the corrosive habits of contempt and belittling. A husband can endure many hardships if he knows his wife is for him; contempt from the one closest to him wounds like little else.

The teacher can note how counter-cultural this is. Popular entertainment often portrays husbands as bumbling fools to be managed and mocked by competent wives, and that script can seep into a marriage without anyone deciding it. Scripture calls the wife to the opposite: to be her husband’s chief encourager, the voice that builds him up rather than tears him down.

As always, balance this with the truth that respect is not flattery or dishonesty. Abigail respected the structure of her home and still spoke and acted wisely against real folly. Genuine respect can include honest, courageous truth-telling; what it excludes is contempt, scorn, and the public or private diminishing of one’s husband.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Respect as the wife’s particular calling, paired with the husband’s love
- Respect defined as honoring, valuing, and speaking well, not approving sin
- The corrosive power of contempt from the closest person
- Respect compatible with honest, courageous truth-telling

Discussion Prompts

- Why might Scripture single out respect as the wife’s particular calling?
- What is the difference between respect and mere flattery?
- How does our culture’s mockery of husbands seep into real marriages?

Question 4

Student Question:

Respect shows up in tone, in words, and in the thousand small ways we honor or diminish someone. Wives, how do you speak to your husband, and about him to others? Where might criticism, contempt, or comparison have crept in, and what would it look like to rebuild a habit of honoring him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application makes respect concrete, because respect lives or dies in tone and words. The question asks wives to consider both how they speak to their husbands and how they speak about them to others, friends, family, even the children. Words spoken about a husband behind his back shape a wife's own heart toward him and shape how others see him.

Help wives notice the subtle erosions: the sarcastic aside, the eye-roll, the comparison to another woman's husband, the running commentary on his faults, the public correction. None of these may feel dramatic, but together they create a climate of contempt that suffocates a marriage. Naming the specific habit is the first step to laying it down.

Then turn toward rebuilding. Respect can be cultivated deliberately: speaking a genuine word of appreciation, defending him rather than joining the chorus of complaint, choosing to dwell on his strengths rather than cataloging his weaknesses. Invite each wife to name one habit of honoring she could begin this week, and one habit of contempt she will lay down.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Respect expressed in tone and words, to and about a husband
- The cumulative damage of small contempts and comparisons
- Cultivating respect deliberately through appreciation and defense
- Naming one habit to build and one to lay down

Discussion Prompts

- How do you speak about your husband when he is not present?
- Where might contempt or comparison have quietly crept in?
- What is one habit of honoring you could rebuild this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter writes that wives may win even a husband who does not obey the word "without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct" (1 Peter 3:1–2).

What does this teach about the quiet power of a godly life, and why would conduct sometimes accomplish what arguments and lectures cannot?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter addresses one of the hardest situations imaginable: a wife married to a husband who 'does not obey the word,' that is, an unbeliever or a disobedient believer. His counsel is remarkable. Such a husband may be won 'without a word' by the conduct of his wife, by her 'respectful and pure conduct.' The quiet sermon of a transformed life can reach a man that arguments never will.

This teaches the immense power of godly character. A husband can dismiss a lecture, win a debate, and harden himself against pressure, but it is very hard to argue with the steady witness of a wife whose patience, purity, and peace are plainly real and plainly supernatural. Her life raises a question her words could not: where does this come from? Conduct preaches when words have stopped being heard.

Be careful to teach this rightly. 'Without a word' does not mean a wife may never speak of her faith or must endure sin in silence; it means she does not rely on nagging, manipulation, or relentless argument to change her husband. Nor does it promise that godly conduct will always convert a husband; Peter offers a hopeful possibility, not a guarantee. The wife's task is faithfulness; the outcome belongs to God.

This passage will be developed further in Lesson 10 for those in spiritually divided homes. Here, the central lesson is the quiet authority of a holy life and the call to trust that witness rather than to seize control through words.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Winning a husband 'without a word' by respectful, pure conduct
- The supernatural witness of godly character that argument cannot match
- 'Without a word' as not relying on nagging, not as enforced silence
- Faithfulness as the wife's task, the outcome left to God

Discussion Prompts

- Why can conduct reach a person that words and arguments cannot?
- What does 'without a word' mean, and what does it not mean?
- How does this free a wife from the burden of changing her husband?

Question 6

Student Question:

Most of us are tempted to try to change the people we love by words, pressure, or nagging. Wives, where have you been relying on words to change your husband, when God may be calling you to a more powerful witness of steady, godly conduct? What would change if you trusted your example to do what your arguments have not?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application turns Peter's counsel inward. Almost all of us, when we want someone to change, reach first for words: persuasion, reminders, pressure, and when those fail, nagging and contempt. Peter points to a more powerful and more difficult path, the witness of a steady, godly life.

Help wives examine where they have been relying on words to do what only God can do through a changed life and the Spirit's work. Often the harder a wife pushes with words, the more a husband digs in. The shift Peter calls for is not passivity but a redirection of energy, from trying to control through speech to trusting God through faithful conduct.

Make clear, again, that this is not a call to suffer sin silently or to stop speaking truth; serious matters must be addressed, and dangerous ones must be brought to help. The point is the everyday temptation to change a spouse by verbal pressure. Invite wives to name one area where they will lay down the nagging and trust the witness of their lives, leaving the outcome with God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal temptation to change others by words and pressure
- Pushing harder with words often hardening the other person
- Redirecting energy from control to faithful witness
- Not a call to silence about sin or danger

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been relying on words to change your husband?
- What might change if you trusted your example over your arguments?
- How do you tell the difference between speaking truth and nagging?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter directs wives away from merely external adorning and toward "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:3–4). What is the "gentle and quiet spirit," and why does God call it precious and imperishable when the culture prizes the opposite?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter contrasts two kinds of beauty. One is external and perishable, 'braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear.' Peter is not forbidding ordinary care of appearance; he is warning against making the external the seat of one's identity and worth. The other beauty is internal and imperishable, 'the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.'

Define the 'gentle and quiet spirit' carefully, because it is easily caricatured. It does not mean a timid, silent, personality-less woman; recall that Peter immediately points to Sarah, a woman of considerable force. The words describe not a temperament but a settled inner disposition: 'gentle' (the same word Jesus uses of Himself, 'gentle and lowly in heart') speaks of strength under control, and 'quiet' speaks of a tranquil, unanxious spirit at rest in God. An extroverted, outspoken woman can possess a gentle and quiet spirit; a shy woman can lack it entirely if her heart is full of fear or resentment.

The astonishing claim is that this beauty is 'in God's sight very precious.' The God of the universe treasures it. Where the culture assigns a woman's worth to her appearance, and assigns it a short shelf life, God assigns enduring worth to the condition of her heart. This is wonderfully freeing, especially for women weary of an impossible cultural standard of beauty.

Connect this to the whole lesson. The gentle and quiet spirit is precisely the kind of heart that can render glad submission and genuine respect, because it is anchored in God rather than driven by fear or the need to control. Inner beauty and a wife's calling are of one piece.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- External, perishable beauty versus internal, imperishable beauty
- The 'gentle and quiet spirit' as a disposition, not a timid temperament
- 'Gentle' as strength under control (used of Jesus), 'quiet' as unanxious rest
- God treasuring the heart where culture prizes appearance
- Inner beauty as the soil from which respect and trust grow

Discussion Prompts

- What is a 'gentle and quiet spirit,' and what is it not?
- Why does God call this beauty precious and imperishable?
- How is this freeing for women weary of cultural standards of beauty?

Question 8

Student Question:

We all pour our energy into what we believe makes us beautiful or valuable. Wives, be honest about where your energy actually goes, into the external and visible, or into the hidden person of

the heart that God treasures? What is one way you could invest more in the beauty God says lasts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question follows the money, so to speak: it asks where a woman's energy and attention actually go. We all invest heavily in whatever we believe makes us beautiful or valuable. Peter does not condemn caring for the external, but he asks whether the hidden person of the heart receives the same devotion we lavish on the visible.

Help wives take an honest inventory without sliding into shame about appearance (the goal is not to neglect the body but to prize the heart). The question is one of proportion and priority. How much energy goes into the imperishable, into prayer, into cultivating peace, gentleness, and trust in God, compared with what goes into the perishable?

Point toward one concrete investment in lasting beauty: a renewed practice of prayer, a deliberate turning from anxiety to trust, the cultivation of gentleness in a relationship marked by tension. The aim is to begin tending the garden God most treasures, the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Following one's energy to see what one truly values
- Proportion and priority between the perishable and the imperishable
- Honest inventory without shame about ordinary care of appearance
- One concrete investment in the lasting beauty God prizes

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your energy actually go, the external or the heart?
- What would it look like to invest more in the imperishable?
- What is one way to tend the inner beauty God treasures this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter points to Sarah and the holy women of old, and then says wives are her children "if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening" (1 Peter 3:5–6). Godly submission is offered to the Lord, flows from faith rather than fear, and never requires a wife to follow her husband into sin or to endure abuse. How do these verses show that a wife's ultimate trust is in God, and why is it essential to understand that submission is never a command to tolerate sin, fear, or mistreatment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it is also the most pastorally important, because it sets the limits and the foundation of the wife's calling. Peter grounds godly submission in the example of Sarah and 'the holy women who hoped in God,' and then defines a true daughter of Sarah as one who does 'good' and does 'not fear anything that is frightening.' Two truths stand out, and the teacher must hold both.

First, a wife's ultimate trust is in God, not in her husband. The holy women 'hoped in God'; that is the wellspring of everything Peter commends. Submission is an act of faith, the overflow of a woman who has entrusted her life and her outcomes to the Lord. This means a wife's security never rests on her husband's worthiness. She can support an imperfect husband because her hope is anchored in a perfect God. 'Do not fear' is the key: the godly wife is freed from the anxious need to control because she trusts the One who holds all things.

Second, and this must be stated plainly and more than once, submission is never a command to tolerate sin, fear, or mistreatment. Because a wife's first allegiance is to the Lord, she is never obligated to follow her husband into sin; 'we must obey God rather than men' governs every relationship, including marriage. And because God treasures her and watches over her (Lesson 3 showed He will hinder the prayers of a husband who mistreats her), no passage in Scripture asks a wife to submit to abuse. The very phrase 'do not fear anything that is frightening' assumes a context of safety and trust, not of terror. Where a marriage has become abusive or dangerous, submission language must never be used to keep a woman in harm's way. The teacher should say this clearly and be ready to point toward the elders and other protective help.

Hold these two truths together and the caricature collapses. Godly submission is not servile fear; it is the brave, faith-filled support a secure woman freely offers within a safe marriage, grounded in her hope in God. It is strength, not weakness. Sarah followed Abraham across the world on the strength of a promise, and she did so as a woman who feared God more than she feared circumstances. That is the picture Peter holds up: not a frightened woman shrinking before a man, but a fearless woman resting in God.

The teacher should also reassure wives in hard marriages that their faithful endurance is seen and honored by God, while never implying that endurance means accepting abuse. There is a world of difference between bearing with an imperfect spouse in an ordinary, safe marriage and being told to absorb sin or danger. Lesson 10 will return to the hard and divided home with further care.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A wife's ultimate trust placed in God, not in her husband
- Submission as an overflow of hope in God ('the holy women who hoped in God')
- 'Do not fear': freedom from the anxious need to control
- Submission never a command to follow a husband into sin
- Submission never a command to endure abuse or mistreatment

- Godly submission as strength and faith, not servile fear
- Readiness to direct those in danger toward elders and protective help

Discussion Prompts

- How does 'hoped in God' show where a wife's real trust must rest?
- Why is it essential to say that submission never means tolerating sin or abuse?
- How is 'do not fear' a picture of strength rather than weakness?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, from submission "as to the Lord," to honoring respect, to the winsome power of godly conduct, to the imperishable beauty God treasures. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the wife's calling that you most need to carry into your marriage or your future this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the wife's calling: submission 'as to the Lord,' honoring respect, the winsome power of godly conduct, and the imperishable beauty of a heart that hopes in God. Ask each woman to name one specific way Jesus is forming her through these verses, resisting vague generalities.

Different truths will land differently. One woman needs to repent of contempt and rebuild respect. Another needs to lay down the nagging and trust the witness of her life. Another needs to stop anchoring her worth in the mirror and tend the heart God treasures. Another, in a hard marriage, needs to hear that her hope rests in God and that He never asks her to endure sin or harm. The single woman can begin cultivating these patterns now. Let the Spirit choose the door.

Close on freedom and dignity, not pressure. The wife's calling, rightly seen, is not a cage but a high and honored place: to picture, in her own home, the glad trust of God's people in their faithful Lord. Send wives home not diminished but lifted, secure in Christ, unafraid, and free to love and honor their husbands out of strength rather than fear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of submission, respect, godly conduct, and imperishable beauty
- Formation as specific repentance and growth, not vague resolve
- Hope in God as the foundation, especially in hard marriages
- The wife's calling as dignity and freedom, not a cage

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth about the wife's calling do you most need this week?
- Where is Jesus forming you in respect, trust, or the beauty of the heart?
- How does hoping in God free you to live this calling without fear?