

How to Handle a Woman

*1 Peter 3:7c, The Weaker Vessel
A Sermon by Chris Mueller*

How do you act around women? One movie said it in terms of the Code of the West, which is: "Respect the land, defend the defenseless and don't never spit in front of women and children."

How do you handle a woman? From the play *Camelot*, King Arthur sings,
"How to handle a woman? 'There's a way,'" said the wise old man,
'A way known by ev'ry woman since the whole rigmarole began.'
'Do I flatter her?' I begged him answer. 'Do I threaten or cajole or plead?
Do I brood or play the gay romancer?' Said he, smiling: 'No indeed.'

How to handle a woman? 'Mark me well, I will tell you, sir:
The way to handle a woman is to love her...simply love her...
Merely love her...simply love her...love her... love her."

Is that it? Go around with a microphone this morning and ask every man, both single and married, how to handle a woman and you'll get very different and unique answers. I did ask some of the leaders of our church and here is some of what they said--how to handle a woman?

Treat a woman like I would desire someone to treat my sister or mother, with the utmost care, respect, patience, and understanding.

As Christ handles/treats you, with a pure, grace-filled, self-sacrificing, love--always in awe of how beautiful and yet sin-ridden they can be all at once.

Treat her like she's right, if you know what's good for you.

I handle a woman with gentleness and listening ears, since they often come with a mixed bag of emotions that I must understand before I speak.

Don't try to make her think the way that you do. Do study her to find out what are her fears, joys, regrets, and hopes. Show her that you know what she needs, and you know what she wants by giving them to her in proper proportion, without her having to ask. The way you want another man to treat your daughter.

You treat her with strong, upright, understanding love and care.

A woman is God's greatest creation, and is to be treated with the utmost respect and dignity. They are God's child first and foremost, and we are to handle with the utmost care.

I handle a woman with gentleness, being sensitive to her needs and being a great listener and communicator. Treat her with gentleness and a Christ-like humility, always modeling your hope in Christ and confidence in God's sovereign hand, guarding her heart by your careful conduct and words.

With respect, gentleness and a strong sense of commitment to my wife. I always find a way to bring her into the conversation with admiration.

I try to handle women with understanding, acknowledging that they are emotional creatures that can't be dealt with harshly. As a gentlemen, regarding them as the weaker vessel, holding open doors, protecting them, trying to help them with whatever.

With care, as someone who has great value--with love, as someone precious.

I handle all women like sisters, remembering that they were created in the image of God and that they are the weaker vessel. I make attempts to serve them as I would my biological sister. At the same time I am cautious because of our propensity for relationships and intimacy. I do not allow myself to be alone with other women, or counsel other women alone.

Kind of like you handle and treat a gun--with love, respect, a healthy fear and calm control.

Like a gentle flower to be nurtured into a beautiful blossom, as opposed to neglecting her and causing her to wither.

Those are all nice, but they all fall short of what God says. Personally, I make a practice of reading the manufacturer warnings given on the products I purchase--don't drop this camera in water, don't lick this device while it is plugged in, don't use this machine without the safety shield down. It makes sense to listen to those who made the device. And it makes sense to listen to the God who made woman.

If we're going to enjoy the opposite sex, if we're going to have marriages that bring God glory and bring us joy, if we are going to date, court, get to know ladies in a manner that will please God and bring you untold blessing, then we had better follow the manufacturer's label stuck on every woman. Where is it? Open your Bibles to 1 Peter 3:7 and following along in your outline as we continue to draw out every truth here.

Peter is teaching a group of Christians who have been displaced because they are Christians. There is a growing concern in the Roman Empire that Christians are anti-government and dangerous. So Peter writes to help them stand firm in their faith by (chapters 1 and 2) saturating every day with a thankfulness for the Gospel. They're to not merely look back at when they were saved, but they are to have their salvation permeate all they do and say.

Then in chapters 2 and 3 Peter says to stand firm--they are to submit to their authorities. Just like Christ submitted to unfair, unjust treatment, His children are to submit to unfair government. Slaves are to submit to unjust masters, and now in chapter 3 wives are even to submit to unsaved husbands. Wives demonstrate they are genuine Christians by following their husband's position of leadership, making sure they demonstrate their submission to Christ through their behavior towards their husbands, a focus on internal character over external appearance and following the models of submission given to us in the Scripture even if their husband is unsaved.

And now Peter shocks us by addressing the saved husband. The reason verse 7 is shocking is Peter has not addressed the authority role with government over citizens or masters over slaves, but He does address husbands and tells them how to handle their wives--here is the manufacturers label on how to treat wives, even if those wives are unsaved. What are husbands to do?

1 To FOLLOW Christ as your model for marriage.

To be CHRIST-LIKE--from you husbands in the same way

2a To BUILD A HOME with your wife according to intimate knowledge

To COMMUNE with her--from live with your wives in an understanding way, and now

3 To PROTECT your wife

To be CHIVALROUS--from as with someone weaker, since she is a woman

So how do you handle a woman? Be chivalrous--what does that mean? To be chivalrous describes a man's behavior characterized by consideration and courtesy, especially toward women. Are you considerate to all women? Do you express courtesy to all women? Are you a man who has decided already to protect, defend, help, be kind to, serve, be courteous to, and sacrifice for your wife, Christian women and all women in general?

Peter says you had better be because God made them to be cared for in a very unique way. Look at verse 7 and pay close attention to the underlined phrase that we will focus on today. *"You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."*

Notice *"as with someone weaker, since she is a woman."* This speaks of how to handle a woman, true femininity, and the delicate duty of husbands in caring for their wives. But let me clarify the translation for you. The NAS and ESV translate this phrase differently. The NAS says the phrase, *"as with someone weaker, since she is a woman"* belongs to the previous statement of *"living with your wife in an understanding way."* The ESV says the phrase *"as with someone weaker, since she is a woman"* belongs to the next statement in the verse *"showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel."*

Well the NAS has it right--Peter is saying to live with your wife in an understanding way or as we discovered last week, dwell with your wife by deep personal knowledge as with someone weaker, since she is a woman. The verse breaks down this way:

1 You husbands in the same way,

2 live with your wives in an understanding way,

3 as with someone weaker, since she is a woman;

4 and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life,

5 so that your prayers will not be hindered

So get this men, own it, make this personal. This is for you, not other men, but for you specifically. Treat your wife, and all women in general, with a special care--God puts a label on every wife **"HANDLE WITH CARE"**. Are you?

But there's more. Sounds like an infomercial, but wait--there's more to women than you can imagine, men. The NAS translation leaves out the word vessel or pot. But vessel is in the Greek text, so the English should read, *"as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman."* Plus

the word translated woman in this phrase is actually the word feminine, so it gives the phrase this sweet meaning--as with a weaker vessel since she is the feminine one.

And with that Peter is actually telling men in general, and husbands specifically, three crucial steps to handling women. God is asking for three commitments from you men. The Creator has stamped three instructional labels on every woman He's made—are you ready?

#1 Treat your wife (all women) with tenderness--from weaker

#2 Treat your wife (all women) as breakable--from a vessel

#3 Treat your wife (all women) as feminine--from a woman

#1 Treat your wife and all women with tenderness

Peter says as with a weaker vessel--weaker is sometimes translated sick, without strength, powerless, or being in a position of weakness. Husbands treat your wives as weaker. Now don't be insulted. God loves those who are weaker, would you agree? God is pleased to bless those who are weaker and those who are less honored in the eyes of the world. Remember what God said of you.

First Corinthians 1:26 to 27, *"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong."* That's me and that's you--not wise, mighty, noble, but foolish and weak.

First Corinthians 12:22, *"On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary."* That's us, weaker.

James 2:5, *"Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"* That's us, poor.

Second Corinthians 12:10, *"Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*

God is pleased to bless those who are weaker and to care for those who are less honored in the eyes of the world. Godly husbands will do the same for your wives--to tenderly care for them and treat them as your highest priority. Do you? Is there anything apart from your walk and service to Christ, and your provisional career that gets more of your time and money than your bride? Should there be?

Now just as submission doesn't imply the inferiority of the one who submits, so the word weaker does not mean a wife is weaker in character or intellect to her husband. I know Jean is smarter than I am--I know it. We went to Israel, and as a seminary student, I took a class there and got a B. Jean didn't study much and got an A. We go to museums and she reads every plate of information and remembers everything she reads. I go to museums and look at the shiny blue objects and don't remember where the snack shop is. Weaker doesn't mean women are spiritually or intellectually inferior—not at all.

Peter is not specific in describing what he means by weaker. He doesn't tell us in what way God made women weaker. Why? I believe he purposefully does not describe how he believes a woman is weaker because the context already tells us. The context tells us what the word weaker implies for men.

In 2:13 citizens were to submit to the government as their authority

In 2:18 slaves were to submit to their masters as their authority

In 3:1 wives were to submit to their husbands as their authority

So now in verse 7, husbands are given God's direction as to how to use their authority, and Peter's words here tell husbands to be very careful in the use of their authority. He gives three ways:

First Husbands don't take advantage of submissive wives

Christian husbands are the authority over their own wives, but because wives are placed in submission under their husbands God does not want husbands to lord it over their wives in any way, even though their wives are in the weaker submissive position. You husbands are the head of your wives, but you are never to use that position of strength to control, dictate, or order your wife around, even though your wife is in the weaker submissive role.

Husbands, instead of pursuing authority for selfish ends, you must use your headship to tenderly care for, provide, bless, protect, love, serve, adore and graciously lead your wives. The goal of an elected official is to serve his constituency, though sadly the goal of some elected officials is personal gain. God says, in your role as husband you are placed in authority to serve your wife and children, not to be served just like Christ (Mark 10:45).

Second Husbands don't take advantage by physical strength

The headship of a husband over his wife also implies the idea that by-and-large, women are physically weaker than men. I know we have some amazingly strong, fast, enduring workout mamas in our congregation--but for the most part if men tried, they can usually overpower their wives physically. Men are to be chivalrous. Husbands are to be protective and courteous to their wives and to all women in general.

The battle of the sexes, the women's movement and the feminization of men has almost completely swept away the role of provider, protector and politer from our society, unless . . .

UNLESS--unless you are a genuine born again man. Christian husbands and believing men are to be chivalrous. Prior to Christ and all around the world today you'll still find men riding on donkeys while women walk beside them. It was Christianity that introduced the responsibility of men to care for, protect, provide and be polite to women, particularly wives.

Let me make a plea, men--let's not go back to the ruder, cruder abusive days while we have breath. Would Jesus get a door for a woman, or walk ahead of her and let the door shut behind Him? Would Jesus open a car door for Mary, or let her get out herself? Would Jesus jump in the lifeboat, or would He call for women and children first? Let's use our physical strength to specifically care for our wives and generally care for all women. Let's act like men.

Third Husbands don't take advantage of emotional sensitivity

A third possible meaning for weakness which would fit the context of verses 1 to 7 since it's a trait a husband should not take advantage of is the weakness of greater emotional sensitivity. Now thank God for our wives' greater emotional sensitivity since without it most of us men would walk through life as crude cavemen or uncaring robots--true? Will you admit that we men often overlook the obvious, and our wives pick up on emotional clues with our kids, relationships and situations all around us?

A wife's emotional sensitivity is also a weakness because of the likelihood of a wife being deeply hurt by conflict within a marriage, or by inconsiderate behavior on the part of their husbands. You wives are vulnerable in your submissive role. Therefore husbands are not to take advantage of you, or exploit you, because you must follow and obey your husband.

So you husbands are to treat your wife with consideration and thoughtfulness--to serve and love, to lead and sacrifice, to study and protect, and not take advantage of her, especially because she has greater emotional sensitivity. This makes a wife especially vulnerable. This is why God demands that Christian husbands not be harsh. Colossians 3:19 says, "*Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.*" Think about that word bitter.

When my family was at a popular amusement park, the park was giving away free Coke products from around the world. One of them was from Italy and it was bitter. It was so bad you could stand in the room and automatically know when someone had a little taste of it. You'd hear, "Oh that's terrible," and other descriptive terms—"Yuk, ooowie, ugg, gag..."

Husbands are never to have that kind of heart toward their wives. The word bitter is used four times in the New Testament, and the three other places are all used in the book of Revelation referring to something distasteful and un-enjoyable. Husbands are not to have a heart that considers their wives distasteful or un-enjoyable.

Practically, you husbands are not to let a harshness of temper or cross attitude dominate your marriage. Don't call your wife "Honey", then act like vinegar. Don't irritate, exasperate or be cross with your mate. Even if she's not submissive, don't be bitter. How do you know you're bitter?

1 You keep lists--anytime a husband says, "You did this last time, you said this or didn't do that," you are allowing a bitter strand to take root in your heart

2 You are demeaning—"What's the matter with you, you can't even boil water?" "Hey, grumpy!"

3 You give orders—"Submit woman, I'm the leader!" It is true, Christian husbands, that your Christian wife is to submit to you like a soldier, but you are to lead her as if you are her slave.

Wives typically have a greater emotional sensitivity, and husbands must never abuse or take advantage of that trait, but protect, treasure and be thankful for that sensitivity. Women are in a weaker position. Peter doesn't define in what way women are weaker, but the context seems to imply weaker as one who must be in the submissive role. The word weaker itself seems to imply Peter means women are physically weaker than men and generally women have greater emotional sensitivity than men. So husbands must treat their wives with that knowledge. Let's understand them and treat them as the treasures they are.

#1 Treat your wife (all women) with tenderness--from weaker

#2 Treat your wife (all women) as breakable--from a vessel

The Greek word vessel is used in the New Testament as a hollow object used to contain things--a pot, jar, container, typically a clay pot or a clay container used to store, to cook or keep valuables. But as a hollow container, vessel is also used by New Testament writers to describe our body. Our physical body is the container of our spirit, our immaterial part, who we really are.

Paul used the word vessel to describe a physical body in 1 Thessalonians 4:4, *"that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor."* So now Peter uses this image to help husbands know how to handle a woman. Don't be confused--vessel is translated in the ESV but overlooked in the NASB. But this Word vessel is painting a crucial picture about women--your wife is a vessel created by God for His specific use.

Just like Paul was in Acts 9:15, *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.'"* Or as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."* Or as Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:21, *"If anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."*

So when Peter calls women a vessel here in 1 Peter 3 it is not derogatory, since men are also called vessels in the New Testament. But here a wife is referred to as the weaker or more fragile of the two different types of vessels. And by using the term vessel Peter is pointing out how to handle a woman, for singles and marrieds. What's the secret?

First We are created beings

Because of manufacturing and mass production of everything today we miss the obvious and immediate reference to a potter when Peter uses the word vessel. Just like Romans 9:21, *"Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"* When the first century believer read the word vessel, they immediately thought of a piece of pottery made by a potter. Even today if you notice a piece of pottery or some lovely vase you ask, "Who made it?"

The image of a vessel is of a Creator who made us. As vessels, we were clay molded into a pot by the Creator God. Some were made men, but it seems His best works were women. God is telling you husbands never to forget that your wife, that precious and expensive gift God gave you, was especially made by God for you. Should that change the way you treat her?

Second We are accountable beings

As pots created by the master potter, you were made for Him. You were made to make people think what an amazing potter our God truly is. He made you so when people see you they will glory in the potter. He made you for this purpose, and for you to live outside of His created purpose is foolish. Your wife was made for God's glory, to worship Him, serve Him, obey Him

and honor Him above all. That means she has turned to Christ in repentance and faith--she submits to her Creator first above all. Have you?

It also means she functions in the way God designed her in her daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit to please God in her role as a Godly woman from these verses, with her spiritual gift in service to the body of Christ, and with her passion to live and share the Gospel in the world today. Is that you? "Vessel" shows husbands/wives are created, accountable and . . .

Third We are frail beings

Clay pots and pottery vessels are easily broken. Go by any road that has cut into the landscape in modern day Jerusalem and it is filled with pottery shards, pieces of ancient clay pots now broken. In some places it's $\frac{3}{4}$ dirt and $\frac{1}{4}$ pottery--I used to stop and lift out pieces without digging. The point is vessels are easily broken--they are dropped, tripped over, hit with a rock, grow brittle with age and break. We often forget just how fragile we really are.

Husbands, think about it in this manner. Every time you complain, yell, are harsh, say mean things, it's as if you are throwing a rock and hitting, cracking and even breaking your wife/vessel. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is a lie. Words can break you. The grace of God and God's forgiveness is the glue that heals, but some of our wives have so much glue, they're more glue than pot.

Husbands, the term vessel points to the fragileness of our wives' hearts--they can be broken easily and must be cared for tenderly. I rarely regret what I don't say, but often regret what I have said. Husbands, it's accurate to consider your bride a fragile vase, one that is beautiful, useful, valuable, but also breakable. She is not to be kept up on the shelf or locked away in a cabinet, she is a working vessel, a helpful vessel, but a gorgeous, rare and extremely valuable vase that must be protected at all times. She is not a common cooking pot, or the waste pot, or the garbage pot, or the water pot. Your bride is the most beautiful of all the vessels in your home and must be treated with TLC, tender loving care, since she is a frail being.

Wives are to be treated with care because women are in the more vulnerable position. They are more at risk to physical or emotional abuse, unjust treatment and abandonment. This is why most cities have shelters to protect women from domestic violence. On the other hand, a husband is typically stronger, more aggressive and emotionally less sensitive, therefore must protect his wife and not take unfair advantage of her except when tickling, so . . .

#1 Treat your wife (all women) with tenderness--from weaker

#2 Treat your wife (all women) as breakable--from a vessel

#3 Treat your wife (all women) as feminine--from a woman

Look again at verse 7, "*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*" The phrase, "Since she is a woman" actually means "the feminine one." It is a rare word that points to the femininity of women.

God is saying, as you appreciate your wife's femininity it should elicit a gracious, intimate understanding causing you to treat her in a special way. The Greek word doesn't mean woman, it means womanly, feminine. Peter is saying your wife is not a man--she is not a little girl. She is a woman--hear me roar! She is feminine.

God doesn't want men to look or act or speak like women and He doesn't want women to look or act or speak like men. Though we are not under the law, you can see God's heart in

Deuteronomy 22:5, "*A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.*" So then what is femininity? Have you been paying attention? Peter has been telling us what femininity is in verses 1 to 6.

Take a look at verses 1 to 2, "*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.*" A woman is feminine when she follows Christ's example by living submissive to her husband. Her heart is given to only one man--her own husband or her future husband to be, never another man or another woman. And now that she's come to Christ, she'll be physically intimate with only her husband or as a single, waiting until she marries. She is dedicated to demonstrate a life of physical purity and continual respect to her Lord by respecting her husband as head.

Look at verses 3 to 4, "*Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*" A feminine woman wears distinctly attractive womanly attire, honoring both the Scripture and the culture of her day, yet without violating sound principles of modesty. She doesn't desire to look like a man, nor a prostitute who is selling her body. A feminine wife is one who prioritizes the inner character over her outward clothing and seeks to develop the kind of heart that is gracious to all others and is content in her heart.

Look at verses 5 to 6, "*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; 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.*" A feminine woman models after all the other Godly women of the Scripture, seeking to trust, obey, have faith, not fear, and hope in God as they did, in order to bring glory to God and blessing to her husband. A feminine woman loves Christ above all others and lives moment-by-moment dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Are you feminine? So men, do you . . .

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7 "*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman.*" But don't women experience joy and blessing, and don't they have a privileged role before Christ? For the answer to that, you have to come back next week.

So what . . .

One As a man, safeguard all women--act like men

Though you must limit what you do when you're alone, today decide as a man you'll stop to help a woman in trouble by the side of the road, or help her carry heavy boxes or objects. Decide to help place their bags in the overhead bins and get doors. Yes, a few will tell you off, but I have only been insulted three times thus far, and that was by the extremely rare flaming feminist, and who cares what they think. The vast majority will say thank you and express appreciation. Choose to help all women--let's act like men.

Two As a husband, learn to cherish your wife

Remember courtship--stir it back up. Write the note, sing the song, bring the gift, buy the flowers. But more than all that, think about her, pray for her, protect her, thank God for her and make certain she knows exactly how committed you are to only her.

Three As a woman don't resent or resist femininity

God made you unique in your shape, your strength, your emotions, your heart for God. Don't fight it, don't run away from it, don't allow the world to distort it. God made you a woman--don't try to be a man, don't remain a little girl, be a feminine, Godly woman of 1 Peter.

Four As a Christian, remember how Christ treated you

You were God's enemy and He decided to love you/save you, and to this day you are weak, yet Christ protects you. Husbands who understand who they are in Christ know how to treat their wives. But if you are not in Christ, you will not know how to treat those who sometimes despise you, are rude to you and hurt you. Remember how Christ treated you. Let's remember Him right now.