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WHEN BARBIE MEETS TRASH TRUCK

1 Peter 3:1-7

There are some topics that will always generate interest when pastors and other speakers address them. Anything having to do with prophecy and the end times seems to grab attention. Announce that you will be revealing the 5 signs that Jesus is going to come back on Easter Sunday, April 17 next year, and you will get an audience. Sex is always a big winner. Another topic that usually piques interest is marriage. Most people want marriage to work because it holds the potential for touching some of the deepest places in the human heart and answering some of our most ardent desires. Nevertheless, marriage also presents a challenge. Too often it doesn’t come close to its potential, and even can produce the total opposite. Instead of happiness it produces frustration and anger. Some today have given up on marriage. The difficulty of making marriage work has resulted in many claiming it is no longer a viable model. In March of 2019 Heather Havrilesky had an article in *New York* magazine titled, “Is Marriage Obsolete?” In it she described marriage as “a torturous state of affairs.” The late comedian, Henny Youngman, said, “The secret to a happy marriage remains a secret.”

1 Peter 3:1-7 addresses the issue of marriage but it is not a manual on how to have a happy marriage. It is about something larger than that. Having said that, some things that this passage says are important for a marriage to be the best it can be. In light of that, at the end today I will give you a few helpful hints for a happy marriage. But realize even if you’re not married, there is something you can learn here, for there is a larger issue at stake.

THERE IS A POINT IN THIS PASSAGE BIGGER THAN MARRIAGE

Peter’s opening statement sets off an explosion in our culture. “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husband.” That instantly sparks howls of protest. This, many say, is a bunch of knuckle-dragging, male chauvinist, patriarchal garbage that belongs on the trash heap of history, not in a 21st century enlightened society. But it gets worse. Peter failed to heed the reasonable advice that when you’re in a hole, stop digging. He added accelerant to the flames by telling women in verse 4 they should be gentle and quiet, telling them in verse 6 they should be like Sarah who obeyed her husband, and finally by describing a woman in verse 7 as the “weaker partner.” Well, that should drive the final nail in the coffin of this passage, don’t you think? That’s when some women stand up and start singing, *This Is My Fight Song.*

Before we go ballistic on Peter for these words, let’s put our offended sensibilities on hold for a few moments, and try to think coolly and analytically about this passage. It is easy to seize on one potentially incendiary word or idea and be so blinded by it that you miss the bigger picture. In so doing one would miss what Peter was actually writing about.

There is a Greek word that appears twice in these verses that is easy to overlook. It is the Greek word *homoios*. It is translated “in the same way” in verse 1 and again in verse 7. It is easy to miss because it is a mere transitional word. But this transition is important. This word tells us two crucial things. First, this passage is directly connected to its context. When you read “in the same way,” the logical question is, the same way as what? The same as Peter was just discussing. In chapter 2 Peter had described a way of thinking and living that was radically different than people typically have. This transition ties this passage directly into what Peter has just said. It is common to look at this passage as though Peter is starting a new topic, the question of marriage. But Peter was continuing the topic he had been addressing. He’s making the same point. I repeat, he is making the same point. He had a principle in mind that he had applied to politics, to relations with other people, to slaves and masters and now he’s applying the same principle in marriage. These are all examples of applying one idea in different contexts. The point is not the contexts, it’s that one idea that he wants us to get.

There is a second thing Peter’s use of this word tells us. By using this word to introduce his discussion of both wives and husbands, *he is saying essentially the same thing to women and to men*. Men are to do something just as women are! Men are to act *in the same way* as women.

Well, it doesn’t sound the same. He doesn’t use the word “submit” when addressing men. Perhaps not, but Peter’s wording indicates that men and women are to act “in the same way.” If we don’t see that then we aren’t quite getting his big point. The problem is our prejudices and emotional responses confuse the issue and keep us from seeing the real point.

Someone might object, “If what you say is true, then why didn’t he just say one thing and tell wives and husbands to both do it?” That’s an excellent question, and I’m glad you asked it, because answering it helps us understand the passage a little bit better. One simple fact explains why Peter’s wording might be different even though he was teaching the same thing to women and men. But I warn you, it is a fact that some in our society are trying fervently to deny. Their energy, their fervor and their persistence does not change the reality of this fact. Here is this controversial but true fact. *Men and women are different*.

This is a truth that was recognized for thousands of years by all humans until our culture began insisting that this is not so. Today the drumbeat of our society is that men and women are basically the same. I take issue with that premise, as did Peter. Just a couple of weeks ago we had all four of our grandkids at our house. Three girls and one boy all aged 5 and younger. If you had been there, first, you’d be tired, but second, you would come away thinking that boys and girls are different.

They are not totally different. Both need and enjoy many of the same things, but there are some definite differences. The girls love My Little Pony, Barbie, tea parties and princesses. They love to dress up as princesses. At times they will sit for extended periods playing with those toys. In contrast, our grandson, Wesley, rarely sits still. He is constantly on the move. He loves trucks, cars, airplanes, trains and helicopters. Especially trucks. And Buzz Lightyear. Ella and Cara love the animated Barbie show on TV. Wesley’s favorite show is *Trash Truck*, which is an animated show about a little boy whose best friend is a trash truck. Boys and girls are different! Those differences don’t disappear when they grow up.

Recently one evening after she had overdone drinking both water and coffee, Laurie said she was annoyed because she was constantly going to the bathroom. I said, “Maybe it’s your prostate,” because I’ve had personal experience with that problem. We know for sure it’s not her prostate, because she doesn’t have one. Men and women are physiologically different. I never had to deal with fibroids in a balky uterus like Laurie did, because I don’t have a uterus.

Well, sure, our physiology is different and everyone knows that, but so what? Well, wouldn’t you suspect that different physiologies might result in different psychologies? In fact, we know that women’s and men’s brains are different and that they work differently. That means they actually think differently. In addition, let’s consider hormones. Men’s and women’s hormones are also different. Do the letters PMS mean anything to you? Hormones have a huge effect on how we think and feel. Our hormones are different and our brains work differently, and that means how men and women think and feel is different. And that brings us to why Peter might say the same thing to women and men in different ways. Because we think and feel differently we see things and react to things differently. We even value things differently. Doesn’t it make sense that we might need to apply the same principle in somewhat different ways?

Marriage is a challenge because it involves two difficulties. First, it involves bringing together two fallen, self-oriented human beings. Even if they are much alike, just the fact that they are fallen and thus self-oriented people, as we all are, means having peace and harmony between them is going to be a challenge. The second problem adds to the degree of difficulty. It is that marriage is where, more than any place else in life, Barbie meets Trash Truck. You are putting together two people who have different physiologies and psychologies, and who can’t fully comprehend the differences because they have never lived in each other’s body. They can’t really feel fully what the other person feels, and don’t fully understand how the other person thinks.

At this point it is important that I remind you what the “in the same way” refers to. What is the important principle Peter is teaching in this long section of his letter? We saw in chapter 2 that it is embodied by Jesus Christ. It is the principle that the most important thing in life is living for God’s kingdom. It is doing his will, it is preparing for eternity in his kingdom, it is working to further his kingdom on this earth rather than being controlled by what we want right now in this world or by our circumstances in this world. This is what Jesus lived for, so he sacrificed beyond measure in order to do the Father’s will and bring about his kingdom, to accomplish what would last for eternity. We saw in chapter 2 that this is what we are called to do as well, even when it means suffering. This is what we are to care about and act upon. This is Peter’s point. It was this radical thinking, what Harry Blamires called the Christian mind, that he wants us to have and apply in life. It is why, he said, in chapter 2, we should obey authorities, give honor to all people, including a person as dishonorable as Nero, why slaves should obey their masters.

It is difficult for us to grasp how thoroughgoing and radical this way of thinking is. It is breathtaking. It is violently contrary to the natural human mindset. It transforms us into completely different people. It touches every single part of our being and our lives. It is so completely comprehensive and counter to human nature that Peter has been describing its application since 2:11, and he’s not done with it yet. In this passage Peter is discussing that same mindset and showing what it will mean in marriage. In order to do that he picks on ideas that are particularly difficult for women and on ideas that are difficult for men to apply in their lives. If you don’t have this mindset, if your thinking hasn’t been transformed by this radical idea, this passage won’t make any sense to you. And it certainly won’t work for you.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO WOMEN

What should a woman think is most important in her marriage? It is that she live for God’s will, that she seek to build God’s kingdom in her marriage, that his rule over her life would be deepened and expanded, and that she would focus on what will matter for eternity. But what about this business of “submit to your husband”? Why should she have to submit to him? Why doesn’t he have to submit to her? If a wife really grasps this radical mindset that Peter is teaching, her answer to that question will be, “I don’t care. That doesn’t matter to me. What matters to me is to do God’s will, to live for eternity and to build God’s kingdom on this earth. If submitting to a husband will do that, then I will gladly and eagerly do it.”

You can see this thinking in this passage in verse 1 where Peter brings up the possibility of a woman having a husband who does not obey the Word. That was mostly about a husband who didn’t believe in Jesus, but it could apply to one who may believe but isn’t following him as well. What is her goal in dealing with that guy? It is to further the kingdom of God. How? By winning him over! If you can, the kingdom is expanded. But how do you win him? It’s not by controlling him, by preaching to him, trying to get him to change, by nagging him, by criticizing him. You do it without a word with your holy life. Remember that a holy life is a beautiful life. That’s what will win him. That has been Peter’s message for some time now. Win over people with your holy life, with a life so good and beautiful it wins their hearts. So wives, do that with your men. You win them by loving them!

Laurie and I were recently doing a crossword puzzle and we came across a clue for a 4 letter word. It was a 1990’s fad that involved disks. I knew immediately what that was. It was pogs. Do you remember pogs, those little round cardboard disks? For a period of time our kids were obsessed with pogs. What do you suppose they would say if you tried to interest them in some pogs today? They would be utterly uninterested. Those disks mean nothing to them today. They are worthless. They just don’t matter, though they were once obsessed with them. For a person who has had her thinking transformed into the true Christian mind if someone starts talking to her about submission, about her being equal if not better than her husband, and all that is involved in that discussion, she’s going to say, “That just doesn’t matter to me. It is not important one way or the other. It’s like pogs to me, so I don’t care. I care about God’s kingdom.”

This is how radical this mindset that Christ exemplified and Peter calls us to is. It is one the world doesn’t understand. But why does Peter pick on that specific idea for women? He doesn’t tell us. I think, for whatever reason, it is a particularly difficult thing for women today, thus it’s a potential point of testing of this radical mindset Jesus followers have. However, since Peter didn’t specify why he identified submitting as important, our best answer is we don’t need to know why in order to follow his instruction. But I am going to share a couple of thoughts anyway. Put this in the category of my guesses. If you think they don’t hold water, just toss them in the recycling bin.

There are a couple of things you ladies should know about guys. I was reminded of one of them when my son was in high school. He was talking to a girl that was a part of the group he hung out with. She said the group was going to get together to see a movie and said he should join them. He asked what they were going to see. She told him it was *Sweet Home Alabama*. He said, “That’s a chick movie.” She said it was not. He said, “There are no airplanes, no ships, no spacecraft, no guns, nothing gets blown up, no one gets killed and there are no sports involved. How is that not a chick movie?” She paused, obviously trying to come up with an answer, then she said, “Well, it takes place in the country.” Ah, I see. I take it back, I don’t see. Neither did Toby.

That discussion says something about guys. Why are guys often drawn to movies with danger and conflict and action? This is a generalization, so not true in every case. But the reason is, guys were made for an adventure, to go into the world and make a difference. In a way, to kind of be heroic. It’s built into us. It’s part of who guys are, maybe in part driven by testosterone. The modern world mostly distances men from that role, which is why they are drawn to movies about that. But they still have that sense. But there is something else true of most men. It is that they don’t feel heroic, and don’t know if they have what it takes to play that role. In his book, *Wild At Heart*, John Eldredge wrote, “Every man feels that the world is asking him to be something he doubts very much he has it in him to be. This is universal. I have yet to meet an honest man who won’t admit it… ‘Any day now I’ll be found out’ is a pretty common theme among us guys. Truth be told, most of us are faking our way through life.”

We hear at times about the fragile male ego. This is why that’s a stereotype. It is because guys fear they don’t have what it takes, and when something tears away the façade we build to make it look like we do have what it takes, we feel badly exposed. Everyone will know we don’t have what it takes.

What does this have to do with wives? As you think about your marriage and your family, about leadership in it, what are your options? You can see your husband as undeserving of following and seek to take control of him and the family. You can wrestle him for leadership. Or you can choose to let him lead. When you fight him you confirm what he fears, that he doesn’t have what it takes.

That, I believe, is why Peter tells you to submit to him. Not be a doormat, not be a mouse, but don’t fight him, tell him you respect him by your words and your actions and let him lead. Encourage him to not be passive but to engage in life and take leadership. It is a way to love your husband and serve him, that has huge effect.

I know, you think, “But what if he messes up? He could really foul up my life and my family!” It’s true. That’s why Peter brought up Sarah. Her husband, Abraham, that paragon of faith, that hero of God’s people, the example for us to follow, failed spectacularly on a couple of occasions due to cowardice and compromise and put Sarah in bad situations. But God rescued them. That’s the point. You are in God’s hands, not just your husband’s. This is about trusting God.

My point here is not to pound the idea of submission. It is to pound the idea of making building God’s kingdom, doing his will, your heartbeat and your passion. Don’t make life about yourself, your position, your worth. Those are all settled in Christ. Make it about God’s kingdom, not yours, and about winning your man without a single word.

Before I move on there are a couple of things I need to clarify. Peter speaks in verse 4 of women having a gentle and quiet spirit. Some interpret that, incorrectly, to mean a woman should never speak up, never say anything, be a doormat. That is not what Peter meant. The word “gentle” was one Jesus used of himself in Matthew 11:27-28. He said he was gentle and we could come to him and find rest. Was Jesus weak? Was he a doormat? No, he was stronger than anyone who has ever lived. His gentleness consisted in harnessing his strength and using it to serve, protect, encourage, love and strengthen others. So being gentle means being so strong others can find rest in your presence.

What about being “quiet?” That doesn’t mean never talking. Think of Psalm 23 where David wrote of the shepherd leading him beside quiet waters. He didn’t mean the water never makes any noise. He meant the water is calm. That’s what Peter meant. Have a calm spirit, one that is peaceful because it is in God’s hands. This is a beautiful, life giving thing. It is about strength.

Verse 3 has caused some confusion among Christians when Peter said a woman’s beauty shouldn’t come from elaborate hairstyles, wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes. This has led some to say women should make themselves plain, not draw attention to themselves with their hairstyles, jewelry and fancy clothes. However, that’s not the point. Peter literally said, “Let your adornment not be braiding the hair, wearing gold or putting on clothes.” If this meant, “Don’t braid your hair or wear jewelry,” then it also was saying, “Don’t put on clothes.” I don’t think Peter was encouraging women to be nudists, so I’m quite confident that is not the point.

Have you ever noticed the English words “cosmetology” and “cosmetics”? The root of those words is the Greek word *kosmos*. We get cosmos from it. What do cosmetics have to do with the cosmos? The heart of the Greek word means “how things are ordered or arranged.” So the cosmos is how the universe is arranged. The word translated “adornment” in verse 3 is *kosmos*. What this means is Peter is not saying, “Never have a nice hairstyle, never wear anything gold, and never wear clothes.” He is saying “Don’t let those things be what orders your life.” In other words, don’t let them be your cosmos, your world. It’s fine to take care of yourself and to look nice, but don’t let that be what runs your life. Let the kingdom of God and your inner spiritual life be the arranging, controlling force in your world. Laurie has often said her goal is to look cute and have fun. I assure you she does both. If that really was her goal she’d be letting her kosmos be cuteness and fun. But I can absolutely tell you that is not her kosmos. It is not what orders her life.

The Nordstrom store down at UTC is a big store, containing 3 floors. Half of the first floor is men’s clothing and shoes. The rest of the store is women’s clothing, shoes and cosmetics. Does that suggest anything to you? It suggests to me that fashion, clothing, beauty, can easily become a woman’s world. Peter was just saying “don’t let that happen.” It is fine for a woman to care about her appearance and make the most of it that she can. Most men would appreciate the effort. But he’s saying don’t let it run your life. Make your life about God’s kingdom, starting with your own heart.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO MEN

Peter addresses men saying “in the same way.” The same thing that is to be true for women applies to you men. You must have that same transforming, radical mindset. What matters to you most of all is doing God’s will, it is his kingdom, it is living for eternity. Peter is going to key on some spots where men often drop the ball in marriage. Men are to win their wives over, to draw them to God’s kingdom so that he rules in their lives more and more. They don’t do that by preaching to them, hounding them or dominating them. They do that by doing what is often difficult for men. That involves serving and loving your wife.

In Ephesians 5:25 Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” So men, here’s what serving the kingdom of God means for you. Give yourself up. Don’t make your life be about you. Make your life be about serving your wife and loving her with everything that is in you. Your life is not about a successful career. It is not about amassing huge sums of money. It is not about impressing other people. It is not about being the big man in your family. It is not about proving anything about yourself. It is not about male ego or your position or power. You are to have that radical mindset that Peter has been discussing, the Christian mind. It says what matters is God’s kingdom, and it matters more than anything. That has implications for how a man relates to his wife. It means you are in the marriage to do one thing, to be your wife’s slave. Serve her. It is common for women to react to the idea of submitting to a husband these days. Well, ladies, how would you like it if The New Testament said you should be your husband’s slave? **Well it tells your husband to be your slave**. In the same way indeed.

The NIV translation of verse 7 is not great. It is good to be considerate and treat wives with respect, but what Peter actually wrote in Greek is both more insightful and considerably stronger than that. First let’s get the “weaker partner” thing out of the way. Peter does not say treat her with respect because she is weak. That wouldn’t make sense. You wouldn’t respect because someone they are weak. What Peter actually wrote was close to what the New American Standard version has, “Live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel.” He’s saying be understanding as though she is weaker. Yes, women typically are not as physically strong as men, but that’s not really the point here. It’s not that she’s weak, it is that she has put herself in a vulnerable and insecure position because she’s trusting you and letting you lead. Regardless of how strong she is, she has put herself in a weaker position for you, and you must never forget that.

I have on a number of occasions had a conversation with Laurie in which I have told her the responsibility God has given me scares me. It weighs on me that she trusts me. I’ve told her that it feels to me like I might be leading us off a cliff. In my head I know that God will always take care of us. But here’s that inadequacy thing. I’m going to tell you a secret. I don’t know what I’m doing. It often *feels* to me like I’m leading us full speed ahead to a train wreck. It would be all right if I ran myself off a cliff, but how terrible it would be to take her with me because she’s been trusting me. She’s vulnerable, because she is trusting me. She’s in that weaker position.

Peter says men should live with their wives in an understanding way. That means that we need to know our wives, and understand what’s happening in their hearts. We need to nurture their hearts and be careful with them. Yeah, uh, that’s the problem. We already saw that we don’t understand them because we are different. In Laurie’s and my first argument as a married couple I failed on this specific point. I’ve told the story before. It happened on our honeymoon. Like so many marital spats, it was over something rather trivial. It was about a restaurant. We were at this restaurant because she wanted to be there. But the service was so bad that after we had ordered she wanted to leave, and the battle was joined. I strongly made clear we were there because of her insistence, and to leave would just make things worse. I made such a powerful argument that she had to admit that I was right. In so doing, I sort of won the battle and lost the war. What I really did was bully her. Whether I was right or wrong was beside the point, because I hurt her. I communicated to her that she was not safe with me. I failed to understand her.

What do men need to understand about their wives? There are many things, but two of them are crucial. First, she needs to be able to trust you. She needs to know that she is absolutely safe with you. You would never do or say anything that would harm her physically, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually. She needs to know there’s nothing hidden from her, that there is nothing you are keeping from her. She needs to know that you communicate with her about everything and hide nothing. Well, nothing except, maybe a surprise present on your anniversary or at Christmas. Your life should be an open book.

Laurie and I are a bit unusual in that we share an email address. This actually presents a problem occasionally. When we applied to refinance our mortgage, the lenders couldn’t handle it. But I have a reason for that. I want Laurie to know that she will see everyone that I am emailing with and can look at what is said. There are no secrets. Trust is essential to every human being. We cannot love if we cannot trust. But this is critical for women, because they have committed to trust a man and their heart is in his hands. So she needs to know that she is totally safe there.

I have known several marriages that have blown up because husbands made decisions and took actions without discussing them with their wives, and those decisions did damage to the family. The wives didn’t feel safe after that because they did not feel like they could trust their husbands. In every instance, had the husband said to his wife, “I’m thinking about doing this, what do you think?” and then listened to her wisdom, they likely would have been saved from some really bad decisions. But even if the wife had said, “Sounds good to me” and they made decisions that turned out terribly, the marriage would have been fine because the wife would have known what was going on. Trust would not have been broken. She would have felt like they made a bad choice together. And that would have made it all right.

Second, she needs to know that next to God’s kingdom, she is absolutely the most important thing in your heart and life. She needs to feel cherished and adored. She needs to know that she is your passion, that nothing comes before her in your heart, other than the Lord. In his commentary on 1 Peter Scot McKnight wrote, “A wife responds to a husband who showers all of his attention on her all the time, not just when he wants something…In other words, a woman wants to be ‘number one’ to her husband.”

I recently was surprised when I mentioned to Laurie that I feel like my calling in life, more important than anything other than serving God, is to love her. What surprised me is that she has told me on multiple occasions since then how much that touched her. I love my kids and grandkids. I love serving God in the job he has given me. I love sports. I love doughnuts. But I love Laurie most of all, and I want there never to be a moment of doubt about that in her heart.

The late President Lyndon Johnson said, “I have learned that only two things are necessary to keep one’s wife happy. First, let her think she’s having her own way. Second, let her have it.” That was kind of funny, but at the heart of that there’s a truth, and that truth is, do everything you can to serve your wife. She’s worth it. Writer Robert Brault said, “The older I get the less time I want to spend with the part of the human race that didn’t marry me.” I say amen to that.

Pastor and author, Andy Stanley, relates the story of being a groomsman in a friend’s wedding. After the wedding the wedding party, about a dozen people, went out together. At one point a couple of the girls raised a question about this passage. One said to him, “I heard a preacher say the man has to be the head of the home. Is that what you believe?” He said to the two girls, “Before I answer your question, imagine you’re married to a man who genuinely believes you are the most fantastic person on the planet. He’s crazy about you. You have no doubt that your happiness is his top priority. He listens when you talk. He honors you in public. To use an old fashioned term, he ‘cherishes’ you. He’s not afraid to make a decision. He values your opinions. He leads, but he listens. He’s responsible. He’s not argumentative. You have no doubt that he would give his life for you if the need arose. You never worry about him being unfaithful. To quote an old song, he only has eyes for you.” As he was saying this conversation at the rest of the table died down as they all tuned in to what he was saying. He paused, then said to the girls, “Would you have trouble following a man like that?” Another girl blurted out, “Are you kidding? I want to meet that guy.” Everyone laughed. Stanley says, “It’s easy, perhaps natural, to submit to someone who genuinely has your best interest in mind. There’s no fear, no reason to resist. Anyone who has your best interest in mind has, in effect, submitted to you. He is saying essentially, ‘You first.’”

This is the man God wants us husbands to be. Do you know how big of a deal it is to him? Verse 7 ends with telling husbands to do this, “So that nothing will hinder your prayers.” That statement doesn’t fit easily with my theology. But it tells us men that our very relationship with God is at stake when it comes to how we treat our wives. I actually was once accused of loving my wife too much. My answer to that is simple, God says if I don’t love her that much it will interrupt my relationship with him, so I think this is a big deal.

CONCLUSION

I said at that beginning this passage is not a manual on how to have a happy marriage. It is about women and men having a radically transformed mind that says what matters above all else is God’s eternal kingdom. This passage calls us to not live for our kingdom, not try to manage life to suit ourselves, but to do whatever most furthers the kingdom of God in our lives, the lives of those around us and in the world.

This passage is about displaying the glory of God in marriage and life, about depicting for the world his unconditional, unlimited love for his people. God desires that people will see that love lived out between husbands and wives who love Jesus. This is what this passage challenges us to do in the context of marriage. Having said all that, I would like to give you a few brief tips for making your marriage just a bit happier according to some of the latest research on marriage. It can be done. CEO and best selling author Fawn Weaver says, "Happily ever after is not a fairy tale. It’s a choice.”

Church attendance matters. An Emory University study found that those who attend church regularly are 46% less likely to get divorced than those who don’t, so go to church.

Men, wash the dishes. Studies have revealed that women who wash the majority of the dishes report more conflict in their marriages, less relationship satisfaction and worse sex than women whose husbands help with the dishes.

A recent study out of the University of Georgia revealed that the most consistent predictor of how happy marriages are is how much gratitude spouses express to each other. This is consistent with the conclusions of John Gottman, who studies what makes marriages happy. He says the consistent factor in the happiest marriages is constant affirmation of each other and an absence of contempt. One person said, “A great marriage is one where each partner suspects that they got the better deal.” One last tip. Scott Stanley, a psychologist at the University of Denver, says one helpful tip is, “Never build IKEA furniture together.”

In her article that I mentioned in the introduction, Heather Havrilesky asked if marriage is obsolete and spoke of it as a torturous state of affairs. But she said, “Why do I love this torturous state of affairs so much? There is nothing more divine than being able to say, ‘Today, I am really, truly at my worst,’ knowing it won’t make your spouse run for the hills.”