

Submission: The Yielded Spirit

In the interviews that I often do about my book, The Woman God Designed, I am inevitably asked about submission. Because I have written several chapters in the book about the true power and purpose of submission and have offered a unique perspective on it, I am always asked to explain that in the briefest possible way. This is very difficult to do.

I always express how the Lord has taken what was a difficult command for myself and every woman I know and made it something of strength and beauty in my life. I always say that submission was never meant to be a law enforced by another, but that it is meant to be an act of love, of honor, and respect. Ideally, it should take place between two people where mutual trust and respect has been established, but often this is not case.

Because the command of biblical submission for women has been too often abused, it is hard for women in difficult marriages to embrace and put hope in something that God meant for beauty in a relationship.

Every time I speak about submission I feel the resistance out there, a disbelief, a dread. It is difficult to express to women in a very brief space why they should not be afraid to honor this command of God even while married to a very imperfect men, or unsaved men.

My own journey through the undiscovered land of submission was typical: it began with a certain reluctance, and carried out with the fear and a hint of resentment that I would lose myself, that I would somehow yield myself up for being used or abused in some way. A close friend informed me one day when I bragged about my efforts to submit that I was “about as submissive as a rattlesnake.” Like many women I made myself do it to honor God, before I fully trusted him in that process or understood its real purpose, before I learned that submission is actually about having a yielded heart that supports and honors leadership, not a strict, unquestioned obedience to authority that presumes I have no right to speak or share decision-making.

The first major lesson I learned was that the real issue was not about trusting my husband as much as trusting the God who gave me the command. Would HE allow me to be put in a position to be hurt? Was he willing for me to suffer for the sake of having his way in our marriage? Could HE be trusted? My personal history told me he could.

I had been a Christian several years when I came to this moment. God had shown himself to be absolutely trustworthy, he had loved me faithfully, he had demonstrated his mercy and grace and goodness to me in every possible way, in the midst of my being flawed, when I sin, giving me grace when I had not done things his way and needed help facing the consequences. This made me willing to embrace submission with a truly yielded heart.

I was further compelled to willingly embrace submission for this reason: in John Chapters 14 and 15 Jesus had said these things: (1) the only way we could really prove our love for him was to obey his commands, (2) that he longed with all of his heart for us to remain in his love, live or abide in that love every day; and (3) the only way to do that was to obey his commands. Thus the question of submission became framed for me in the larger picture of how to love God and how to enjoy the best of his love every day.

Yet this is my personal journey, and having counseled many women over the years and witnessed many difficult marriage situations, I acknowledge how difficult this can be for other women to accept. So I tell my story.

My story is that mysteries took place, beautiful moments between my husband and I as the Lord helped me lay down all resistance to the concept of submission. I walked past my fear and purposed in my heart to learn how to yield my desires, my need to be right, my need to have things a certain way, for the purpose of honoring my Lord and my husband. The motivation to honor changed the tenor of my submission from the category of “rattlesnake” to sweet yieldedness.

The greatest mystery I discovered is that adopting a yielded spirit to God produces a yielded spirit to others, especially a husband; and that adopting a yielded spirit towards the flesh and blood people in my life taught me how to have a more yielded spirit towards my Lord.

There's something wonderfully restful about yielding to another, about laying down the need to have your way. It becomes an offering of love, the kind of gift that begs one in return. In truth it does require a certain death to self and there is no denying that on occasion I felt the cost of that so deeply that I wept tears of grief. But when I would seek the Lord for help, when I would cry out to the Holy Spirit for confirmation that this was the

right thing to do at this particular moment, I was often given (and became completely familiar with) the word of God that says,

“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” (Psalm 126:5-6)

I put my hope in this truth, and my hope was never wasted, never in vain; for I did reap joyful things, surprising things, unexpected joys and treasures of relationship. After the first two or three times of experiencing this, submission becomes easier as one begins to see the cause and effect, the seed and the fruit of yielding oneself to another and to God.

I began to see new meaning in Jesus words, “a friend lays down his life for another,” written in John chapter 15. Originally thought to be a reference to sacrificing one’s physical life to save another, I learned that the word “life” was the word “*suche*,” which refers to the soul, or one’s mind, will, and emotions. To phrase it a more familiar way, it refers to one’s thoughts, opinions, desires, and feelings. I saw that the act of a friend laying down his life for another had a more common meaning, a more every day life application: to yield oneself to another for the sake of loving them well.

(Remember, we are not writing here of an abusive relationship in any way, but rather the average relationship between two flawed human beings, whether saved or unsaved.)

My journey to understand and walk in true godly submission brought me into a fellowship with Jesus Christ that I had never known before. By that I mean that I began to understand both what it cost him to yield to people who were very imperfect, who did not understand him, even to those who abused him -- and what an act of love that was for his Father and for us. As I saw the transformation that began to take place in my own character, the wisdom and beauty of this command began to be established in my heart.

One day, I noticed that submission was not listed in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. That was a curiosity to me until I pondered with the Lord awhile, and realized that submission would be better likened to the soil in which the fruit of the Spirit are grown, that humble place where one buries the seeds of self -- self-assertion, selfishness, self righteousness, self-determination -- and allows that soil to do its mysterious work, hidden in

darkness for a short season, then suddenly bursting through into the light one day, revealing something totally new and lovely and full of life, a flower that is way much better in every way than the seed that went into the ground. I could recognize the process because it had been happening to me. The more I embraced a yielded spirit to both God and my husband, the more the other fruit of the Spirit began to grow in my life, and much more powerfully and organically than when I tried to work at BEING those things.

I saw that the fruit of the Spirit, that familiar list of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, long-suffering, goodness and kindness-- were more genuinely produced by the process of yielding to God and to others, than by trying to force oneself to act in those ways.

I also begin to see that this submission or yieldedness was something required of every Christian: first towards God, then towards other authorities in their life; that even Jesus Christ himself had a yielded and submissive spirit. In fact I've come to prefer the word "yieldedness" to submission for the very reason that submission has become practically a dirty word, certainly a dreaded word, and an overused word.

I began to notice how often the Scriptures spoke of Jesus in his submissiveness and yieldedness: how Hebrews 5:7 says that it was because of his "reverent submission" that his prayers were heard by the Father -- not just because he was the son of God; how Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians that we should adopt the same attitude of Jesus, an attitude of treating others as better than oneself, of humbling oneself to others, how Jesus yielded himself even to those who were not as good as he, even unto death.

I began to see that in God's kingdom, everyone is required to yield to someone, and that even the Trinity, the Godhead is submissive to one another. It is the way of God's kingdom and a significant part of his character.

I even begin to see that in his grace, or should I say his graciousness -- there were times that God even yielded to me or to another human being. I know that seems incomprehensible to some but I have witnessed in my life, in my knowing God, and that when he chooses to do this, nothing of his sovereignty is violated. David Shepherd King, the one who became established

in God's love on the backside of nowhere while out tending the sheep, expressed it like this: "You stoop down to make me great."

I cannot walk away from this subject without admonishing the reader: one must be filled with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead you in order to walk submission out wisely in your own unique life. Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned was that this and every other command given by God is easily reduced to a legalistic life-robbing exercise when done apart from the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit, the personal Counselor who intimately knows you, your spouse, your parents, your children, your boss, your pastor, your situation -- all things which change continually, as living hearts and situations do -- and alone is the one who can guide you in the right way to yield, the right time to yield (and the time not to yield, for there are such).

In order for this to be the life-giving command that God intended it must be worked out through walking with the Holy Spirit as we are advised to do in Galatians chapter 5. Apart from the Spirit submission is just a burdensome law, easily abused as the Pharisees abused many other laws that, as originally given by God, were good.

Just as submission, a yielded spirit, was the means for Jesus to come into his glory, into the true character of his father, so it is with us.

Tonia Woolever
Shammah Ministries
www.shammah.org
Tonia Woolever © 2010 All Rights Reserved