

# Serving God Without a Husband

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M.W. Bassford  
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## Introduction.

- A. When we look into God's word, we see an idealized reflection of the world. That is, we see life as it ought to be, as it would be if everyone obeyed the teachings of the Bible. This is particularly true of the Bible's teachings about marriage. If both husbands and wives listened to the word of God, it would transform marriage. That's the point of the lessons we've been looking at lately on the role of men and the role of women. We want to see what the Bible has to say so we can learn to live marriage as God intended.
- B. However, sometimes God's plan for marriage is not fulfilled, even in the lives of Christians. In some cases, both husband and wife are responsible for this shortcoming, and in couples like that, both spouses need to rededicate themselves to God's teachings. But what about the times when both spouses DON'T share equally in the blame? What about the times when the wife is doing everything she can to obey God in her marriage, but the husband is completely uninterested in what God has to say to him? What does the wife do then?
- C. In some ways, the wife's actions don't change. She still owes her husband the respect that the Bible tells her to give him, regardless of whether he's living up to the Bible's standards. However, the husband's failure to be a spiritual leader still leaves a leadership vacuum. The wife isn't supposed to be the spiritual leader of her family. That's not God's plan. However, if her husband won't lead, she has to; otherwise, no one will.
- D. This problem, as sad as it is, is not a new one. The Bible gives us examples of a number of different women who had to lead spiritually. We find the story of the most famous of these reluctant leaders, however, in the book of Esther. Esther was a devoted servant of God who was married to the king Ahasuerus, who was not. He showed no interest in obeying; indeed, he was perfectly willing to see every Jew on the planet killed if it would make one of his advisers happy. On the 1-10 scale of spiritual leadership, Ahasuerus rated about a 0.
- E. Her husband's failure to lead, however, didn't keep Esther from acting as a woman of faith. She did what her husband wouldn't and saved her nation from harm. All women who don't have a husband who is a spiritual leader can learn from her example, whether they are married, divorced, widowed, never married in the first place. Let's look at Esther, then, to see what she has to teach us about serving God without a husband.

## I. Take Problems Seriously.

- A. The first thing that women in Esther's situation can learn from her is to take problems seriously. We see her doing this in Esther 3:13; 4:3-4. As we look at what's going on in this verse, it's important for us to remember what had happened to Esther. She didn't begin life as a person of any consequence; indeed, both of her parents died when she was young, and she was raised by her uncle Mordecai. However, when Ahasuerus became displeased with his current queen, Vashti, he deposed her and basically held a national beauty pageant for her replacement. Esther won the beauty contest and was appointed queen in Vashti's place.
- B. Esther, then, had gone from being a nobody to being the most important woman in the kingdom. She had left her old life behind. Nobody knew she was Jewish. She could easily have treated the anti-Jewish decree as a problem for someone else. However, that's not what she did. She saw that the problem was hers too.
- C. Women who have to take the lead today must follow Esther in this recognition, and this is true in both the sphere of the family and the sphere of the church. Nobody gets a free pass in the church. God wants all of us to work to accomplish His will, no matter what our situation may be, male or female, married or unmarried. This is the message of Philippians 2:13. All of us have jobs to do, and we need to do them, wherever we are.
- D. In the family setting, this means that women who are leading spiritually must face their husbands' lack of leadership. For those of you who are trying to raise godly children without a godly father, I don't have to tell you how daunting this challenge can be. I'm sure there are times when you feel like you're trying to bail out Lake Michigan with a teaspoon, and I know that's a powerful temptation to just give up, to turn a blind eye to the difficulties around you because they seem so insurmountable. We need to remember, though, that God expects us to do more than merely hide from our problems. He will help us every inch of the way if we're fighting, but not if we quit. We need to take ownership of our problems. We need to take them seriously.
- E. This also holds true in the church. Because God has invested spiritual authority in men, that means that the decision-makers in this church are male. This means that women who don't have a close relationship with one of the decision-makers can feel shut out. They can decide that the church is someone else's problem, show up three times a week, but never participate in its work. However, God expects more. He wants everyone in the church to be concerned about its problems and to work toward solutions, and that's true of women, too.

## II. Learn Before Acting.

- A. However, as concerned as Esther was about the problem her people was facing, she didn't go charging off to her husband's throne room and demand he do something about it. Instead, she learned before acting, and we

can learn to do the same. Look at what Esther did in Esther 4:5-7. She sent one of her servants to ask her uncle what's going on. She realized that she needed to know as much as possible before acting effectively.

- B. The same thing is true of women without a spiritually-minded husband today. Consider the words of Proverbs 21:5. This is true not just of wealth, but of every realm of human endeavor, and it's particularly true for women. Here's why: we all recognize that women are physically weaker than men, and very often, this is true of the amount of authority they can exert as well. A man who speaks in a very straightforward, aggressive way is generally perceived as being a strong leader, but a woman who says the same thing in the same tone of voice often comes across as pushy and obnoxious. This makes it critical for women to consider a problem from every angle, to learn and think before acting. Women can't just bull through something the way a man can, so they need to approach problems in a way that emphasizes their strengths, not their weaknesses.
- C. In the family context, this idea shapes the way that a woman deals with her husband when he is not serving God as he ought. She needs to remember that even though he is not fulfilling his role as spiritual leader, he is still the leader of the family in other areas. That means that she should approach him with reason and persuasion, not just determination. If a woman comes to her husband and tries to bend him to her will with sheer force of personality, even if she wins, she loses, because he will resent her for it forever. It's better far to learn about the situation and come to him with a reasonable plan so that he willingly consents.
- D. In the church realm, the same principle applies for a different reason. Oftentimes, when ordinary church members, like women without active husbands, see a problem and don't see an obvious solution underway, they assume that nothing is being done. This is often far from the case. When it comes to church problems, the iceberg principle applies. 90 percent of what's going on is hidden from sight. That's part of the work of the elders: to deal with the messy issues that the congregation is better off not knowing about. A woman with the best intentions in the world can do a lot of harm to a congregation by raising a stink about a problem the elders are trying to solve quietly. It's far better for women to investigate what's going on before they act.

### **III. Receive Wise Counsel.**

- A. In addition taking problems seriously and learning before acting, Esther can also teach women today to listen to wise counsel. After having heard all the facts, she recognized that she needed to talk to her husband about it. The problem was, anyone who approached the king of Persia uninvited would be killed unless the king pardoned his breach of etiquette on the spot. Esther explained the problem to Mordecai, and we see the resulting dialogue in Esther 4:13-16. Mordecai explained to Esther that it was God's will for her to save her people, and that she herself would perish if she did not. In response, Esther agreed to go.
- B. Today, women can similarly benefit from receiving wise counsel. Proverbs 15:22 highlights the importance of listening to others' wisdom, and this is important everywhere. One of the great blessings of being in the church is that we almost always worship with others who have more wisdom than we do, upon which we can rely. A woman with a difficulty can almost never go wrong in presenting her problem to at least one elder. Indeed, this is another big reason why God instructed His church to appoint elders in the first place.
- C. In domestic matters, women also do well to seek the advice of older, wiser women. Indeed, Titus 2:4 instructs older women to teach younger women. This is particularly important when the younger woman lacks a husband to provide leadership. It's a difficult situation, but there are many older women who have faced the challenge of bringing up godly children by themselves and succeeded. The experience that such women gain in the process is invaluable to other women who are facing the same problems they did 20 years ago. In any case, though, women are always better off forming a plan based on the wisdom of many rather than of one.

### **IV. Act Courageously.**

- A. Planning is all well and good, but there comes a time when a woman by herself must act courageously and do what she has decided on. We see Esther doing this in Esther 5:1-2. She knew what she had to do, and she did it. She risked death by appearing before the king to plead for her people. The king spared her despite her presumption, and through her bravery, the Jews were saved from their enemies.
- B. God wants His daughters to be as courageous today, and indeed, equips them for it. Look at the words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7. God doesn't want us to be frightened of the dangers that confront us; He wants us to challenge them and succeed. Bravery might not be a virtue to which women naturally aspire. My wife, for instance, refuses to watch horror movies with me because she will lie awake all night, worrying that the monsters are going to come eat her. However, women need to find in God the courage to do what's right. It's not the kind of bravery that lasts through a two-hour movie. It's the bravery that lasts through a lifetime.
- C. In the personal sphere, this is the courage that moves her to constantly defend her children from evil influences. It's the courage that makes her go to church every time the doors are open, even if her husband doesn't get it and even laughs at her. In the area of the church, this is the courage that makes her fight against the problems she sees and work to build up the Lord's kingdom, even when it takes a lot of effort. It's the courage that is never too busy to do one more thing for God. This is the courage that Esther had.

**Conclusion.** If you want to work for God, you have to start by making your life right with Him.