

God Didn't Call You to be a Doormat!

Christians often suggest that God created women to be frail and quiet. But biblical submission is not about weakness or silence.

According to self-proclaimed relationship expert Laura Doyle, "something magical" happened when she decided to "surrender control" in her marriage. She stopped doing the family finances. She started cooing "Whatever you think" when her husband wanted her opinion.

She decided that the way to secure happiness in marriage was to become "a surrendered wife." Then she started organizing clubs all over the country to teach other women how to, as she says, "relinquish control."

And did I mention that her book, *The Surrendered Wife*, is climbing best-seller charts? Doyle's philosophy, a knee-jerk reaction to secular feminism, is controversial and disturbing:

****Doyle tells women not to worry if their husbands are looking at pornography. ("It's none of your business," she says.)**

****She advises wives not to offer opinions of any sort, since this is just nagging. ("By telling him what you think," Doyle writes, "you risk contradicting him.")**

****If your husband risks breaking his neck by standing on a shaky ladder, you shouldn't criticize him, Doyle says. She advises wives to just ignore their husbands' mistakes.**

****The more a wife relinquishes control to her husband, "the more powerful and masculine he will feel," Doyle says.**

When I first heard Doyle dishing out her views on a TV talk show, I wanted to demand equal time. I've been married for 17

years, and I'm not so insecure that I need my wife to lie on the floor and act like a doormat so I can feel "powerful and masculine."

Guys who need their wives to act subservient are dealing with emotional problems that can lead to domestic cruelty. They need professional help, and they aren't going to get it from Doyle—who, by the way, does not claim to be a Christian. She says her "higher power" is an inner voice that allows her to choose her own path.

DON'T BELIEVE THE LIES

The saddest thing about Doyle's advice is that it sounds so similar to what many well-meaning Christians typically teach about a woman's "biblical" role in marriage. I've heard these kinds of ridiculous ideas promoted from the pulpit for years:

****A wife shouldn't balance the checkbook each month because this might tempt her to become dominating.**

****A wife must learn to exert her influence only in "quiet" ways—without appearing to be authoritative.**

****A woman should view her husband as "priest of the home," allowing him to make all the important spiritual decisions—since she is not equipped by God to lead in any fashion.**

****True "submission" in marriage means never contradicting your husband when he feels his way is best. (In some extreme cases, Christian wives have been counseled to stay in physically abusive situations because God wants them to "learn to submit.")**

Perhaps this kind of teaching shaped your early years as a Christian. Perhaps you currently attend a church that promotes these views. You may even feel tempted to quote various Bible verses that defend these positions. For example, what about the verse in which Paul says, "The man is the head of a woman" (1 Cor. 11:3, NASB)? Or the passage that declares women are to

keep silent (see 1 Cor. 14:34)?

I've read those verses. But I have realized after in-depth study that we can't build a doctrine on one or two verses taken out of context. That's how you create a false doctrine. If we want to handle the Word of God accurately (see 1 Tim. 2:15), we must interpret all of Scripture in light of what the whole Bible says, not what we think one isolated verse means.

The Bible, in fact, contradicts the traditional religious view that requires women to be weak and demands that they keep their mouths shut in church and at home. From my study I've learned three liberating principles about God's plan for women:

1. God wants women to be strong. Traditionalists like to quote 1 Peter 3:4, which says that women are to operate in a "gentle and quiet spirit." Or they remind women that the Bible calls them "the weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7). But these verses cannot be used to promote the idea that women should act weak and spineless. Peter's words here simply affirm the fact that women are feminine—that they have a unique emotional nature and physical makeup that sets them apart from men.

It is ridiculous, however, to suggest that women cannot do anything daring or adventurous for God just because of their gender! The Bible gives us plenty of examples of women who stepped out of their own weakness to do bold things for God.

Deborah and Jael are perfect Old Testament examples of this. Their victory over Sisera's army (see Judges 4-5) was a foreshadowing of the way God would use another brave woman—the virgin, Mary—to deal a crushing blow to the devil's skull by giving birth to the Messiah.

God wants you to be a modern-day Jael. Wouldn't you like to be the woman who drives the spike through the head of the demonic strongholds that hold your generation in spiritual bondage? You can be that woman! If you have the power of the Holy

Spirit and the weapons of faith, then you should run to the front lines of the battle and find your position.

I'm thankful for all the brave women who have been used by God throughout church history—women who did not listen to the traditionalists' accusation that they had “stepped out of their biblical role.” Indeed, your role as the “weaker vessel” is to be a devil-chasing, fire-breathing, Holy Ghost-filled warrior who knows that because Christ dwells in you, you are strong even in your weakness!

2. God wants women to be vocal. I laugh when I hear religious people declaring that “God doesn't believe in women preachers.” He doesn't? What Bible are these people reading?

I like to open mine to Proverbs 8:1-11, in which the wisdom of God is personified as a righteous woman preaching in the streets. This woman is not just leading a ladies' Bible study—she's shouting her passionate sermon to men in the city square! If God doesn't call women to speak for Him, why did He portray wisdom as a woman preacher?

There are so many examples in the Old and New Testaments of women who spoke boldly for God. Miriam, Huldah and Anna were gifted prophets. Esther was a timid girl, yet her cousin Mordecai told her, “You cannot remain silent, or deliverance will arise from another place” (see Esth. 4:14). Like a female Moses, Esther knew she had to speak on behalf of her people or they would perish.

In the New Testament, we are told that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. Paul affirmed the ministry of female prophets in his letter to the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 11:5). Priscilla was a skilled Bible teacher who traveled with Paul's apostolic team—and she was used by God to instruct a man, Apollos, who later became an apostle himself.

What about you? Have you been deceived into thinking that since you are a woman, you should remain silent while evil

increases all around you? Are you waiting for your husband, your pastor or some other man to do the speaking for you? Are you one who believes that God uses women only in exceptional cases—as if they are second-string backups for men?

Don't believe that! Maybe God is waiting for you—not some man—to march into the ghetto and claim a cocaine den, start an orphanage or establish a drug rehab center. Maybe He is waiting for you to start a Bible study at work.

Perhaps He is calling you to assume a staff position at your church. Are you willing to obey God even if it means religious people will call you a “Jezebel” behind your back because they think you are trying to steal a man's role?

3. God wants husbands and wives to function as equal partners.

To understand God's original intent for the genders we must go back to the beginning—before sin tainted Adam and Eve's relationship. When God commissioned the first couple in the Garden of Eden, they were told to rule creation together. God did not say: “Adam, you run the place while Eve stays home and does the dishes.” The man and the woman were called to co-labor as partners.

This partnership became dysfunctional after Satan's ploy lured Adam and Eve into rebellion. They were banished from their perfect home, Adam was destined to grope in poverty, and Eve was cursed to live in a culture of male domination. God told her: “Your rule over you” (Gen. 3:16).

But God's perfect will is not for Christian women to live in this type of subservience. Genesis 3:16 was canceled by John 3:16! Jesus came to liberate us from the curse!

In a Christian marriage, man and woman are graced to reclaim that place of intimacy, partnership and equality that was destroyed by sin. Yes, wives are required to respect their husbands, but husbands are required to treat their wives with tenderness, viewing them as equals in every respect (see Eph.

5:28).

I recently met Dr. Julianna Slattery, a Christian psychologist who wrote a contradictory response to Laura Doyle's *The Surrendered Wife*. Slattery's book, *Finding the Hero in Your Husband*, makes it clear that Doyle missed the boat when she told women to relinquish their part of the marriage partnership.

"Dr. Doyle discusses a husband's need for respect and trust. I agree," Slattery says. "However, a husband has another imperative need. He needs the companionship of his wife. That includes her perspective, her opinion and her accountability."

I'll recommend Slattery's advice over Doyle's any day. I don't want my wife to be a doormat. I value her spiritual gifts, her natural talents and her opinions—and I don't think she is acting like my mother when she tells me what she thinks.

I also appreciate the many times she has stepped on my toes with a word of correction—spoken in a tender way that only she can because of the level of intimacy we share. I want my wife to be an equal partner—not a zombie who says, "Whatever you think," to avoid confrontation.

Are wives called to be submissive? Absolutely. And so are husbands (see Eph. 5:21). God does not endorse rebellion, domination or control—on the part of a wife or a husband. But remember that your first and most important act of submission is submitting to God's Word. And His Word has called women to be vessels of His love, strength, courage and supernatural power.

Women of God: Don't let religious people or secular "experts" like Laura Doyle talk you into becoming a doormat. I'll tell you what I tell my wife: Go for it. Preach it. You go, girl. I'm not standing in your way, and I'm not threatened by strong women who know they are called by God to nail the devil's skull to the ground.

Read a companion devotional.

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