

# Weapon-Words and Wisdom

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## **1 Peter 3:1-2**

*In the same way, your 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, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.*

### **Words**

I recently heard that men want only three things: food, sex, and silence. When I bounce this idea off guys (likable guys who know how to relate and interact) they enthusiastically agree, especially with the silence part.

I'm not surprised – my own husband reacts the same way. We have great conversations, but occasionally I notice his eyes rolling back in his head (just a little) if I delay getting to the point. It's easier for him to listen if I speak in what he calls “newspaper style.” I've heard that newspaper columnists put the important information in the first few lines of their article and follow with data that gradually decreases in importance. Newspaper style writing allows the editor to cut off the article to fit the space available and still not eliminate anything essential. Newspaper style speech works the same way: if the woman says the essential part first then the man can tune out after the first few words and still (in his view) not miss anything important.

Women enjoy anticipating and savoring the gradual approach of a punch line. We like tangents. Guys generally don't. If we want rapt attention, newspaper style speech has a higher success rate. God understands the situation. While He encourages men to talk, He warns women to be careful with their words. Wives must be particularly careful when their husband's actions or attitude let them know that he does not want to change. Peter tells us so explicitly: behavior (not speech) best impacts a resistant heart.

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**1 Peter 1:1-2 says it clearly:  
behavior (not speech) best impacts a resistant heart.**

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### **Weapons**

Most women have a well-honed verbal ability. Fine. Fine, that is, if we use our words to encourage and inform and bless. But not fine if we use our words as weapons. Not fine if we push words at our husbands until they give in. Not fine to use our words to force them to change.

Most any wife can verbally back their husband into a silent corner. Words become weapons. If we talk long enough, a man will almost always capitulate, “Okay, okay. Do whatever you want.” Their desire is for silence. And that's exactly what capitulating does not produce. When our husbands back off, we get mad and use even more words to make them to stay involved. But our efforts backfire: verbal pressure produces more resistance; more words create more distance. As Peter says, speech is not likely to impact a resistant heart. Words used as weapons are not only hurtful but also ineffective.

We need an alternative. Something possible and helpful. Insight into the interplay between words, weapons, and wisdom.

## **Wisdom**

When Peter says without a word he's not suggesting that wives be seen but never heard. He's not telling us never to speak. *Without a word* is specific advice about a specific situation. Look at the context: Peter refers to husbands who have dug in their heels to resist God. He wants to help wives be wise in the midst of this difficult situation. In thorny times, behavior has more impact than do words. There's no point in pushing at a husband who is already resisting God and having him resist us also.

I think Peter's focus on behavior has another advantage. A husband can observe his wife's behavior without having to admit that he's being influenced by it. Observing her doesn't trigger defensiveness. It helps him save face.

All well and good, but I have a small problem with following Peter's wisdom – it takes too long. I get a quicker response when I use my weapon-words. Though I get a negative response, at least it's quick. And at least I'm doing something instead of just waiting around for God to impact my husband. I hate waiting. And I hate not getting my own way. And I think I'm pretty smart about what my husband should change. And I get frightened that I'm not going to get what I think I need. Let's see ... impatience, selfishness, arrogance, and fear. (Perhaps God has to work on me. Perhaps He has to work on you.)

But God also has to work on husbands. Again and again wives tell me that their husbands are passive, that they initiate neither relationally nor in decision-making. Many men ignore the Lord's repeated commands for them to approach, understand, and talk with their spouses. Wives have a point – yet we also make an error. We want our husbands to initiate *our* way, so we proceed to tell them how to act. Isn't that us doing initiating? Why would our husbands step in to do a job that we've already taken over?

Instead of our taking the initiative with our weapon-words, Peter wants us to behave chastely and respectfully. "Chaste" means "without sin" while respectful implies taking the other person seriously – never dismissing them or treating them lightly. Think about how you respond when your husband takes you seriously and acts unselfishly. That's what you long for, isn't it? And he longs for the same thing. Such behavior softens hearts.

There's no problem (and sometimes a great deal of wisdom) in speaking with our husbands to help them. Sometimes we perceive things they've missed. The Lord intends us to be helpers to our husbands. But – and this is crucial – we're not helping if we are serving ourselves at cost to them. We not helping if our heart is against them and for ourselves. Our husbands will sense the difference.

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