MY SO-CALLED LIFE AS A
SUBMISSIVE WIFE

SARA HORN
To Cliff:

I am so grateful for the story
God continues to write for us,
and the journey He's put us on together.
Acknowledgments

Writing a personal narrative or a memoir like this is not just personal; it can also be very challenging because more often than not, other people’s stories are included as well.

First, I want to say a big thank you to my husband, Cliff, for his willingness to take on another “experiment” with me and for the growth we’ve seen in our marriage and the impact God has made on our relationships with Him as well as each other.

I also thank my in-laws, Ray and Nancy Horn, my mom Gail, and the rest of our extended family and friends for their patience and agreement to let me include them in our story.

Special thanks must go to my editor, Rod Morris, for his enduring patience and encouragement as we went through the editing process. It has been wonderful working on this second project with you, and I’m looking forward to others in the future!

I also extend a grateful thank you to Larae Weikert, Barb Sherrill, and the entire Harvest House staff for all of your support. I truly feel like I am part of an exceptional, wonderful team, and I am so grateful.

A big thank you also to my agent, Andrea Heinecke, and Alive Communications. Thank you Andrea for accepting my panicked phone calls and always knowing what to say to help this crazy writer finally hit the send button!

To my incredible team of leaders and friends at Wives of Faith—thank you for your support!

To my readers, it is such a joy to walk this journey with you. I never take for granted the emails and contacts I receive from you, and when I hear that one of my books has encouraged you to grow in your relationship with God or to take steps to improve your marriage or your family, I immediately whisper a thankful prayer to God for giving me the opportunity. Thank you for letting me be real with you and thank you for being real with me.

Finally, I am so grateful to God for what he has done in my life. *Through the hardships, the challenges, the blessings and the joys, you have shown me that the only thing that matters is you. Please continue to help me grow closer to you and stay discerning to your will.*
Why I Don’t Want You to Read This Book

This book is not for everyone. Seriously.

No, please don’t think, Oh, she’s using reverse psychology on me, or She went to some author marketing class where the instructor and all of the wannabe writers sat around plotting and saying if we tell them not to buy, they’re gonna want to buy!

Um, no.

I truly and honestly don’t want you to read or buy this book if it’s not for you.

I can think of at least two types of people who do not need to read this book. These include women who already feel like they have a strong grasp on what it means to be submissive to their husbands (awesome, congrats, very happy for you), and women who are looking for a clear, concise guide or handbook with steps, charts, and footnotes on what it means to be submissive to their husbands (awesome, congrats, and good luck with that).

If you fit in the former group, you will probably be bored to yawns when you read what I have to say and not enjoy it very much or feel like you get anything out of it. You will probably call me immature or naive or believe I have a lot more living I need to do. If you are in the latter group, you will probably be frustrated and not enjoy it very much and want your money back. You will probably say I’m a terrible writer or teacher and I should never attempt to write anything else again. Noted.

So, either way, let me save you the time and the cash and give you permission to walk away now. Before you get upset with me and post a nasty review online saying you already know more about this topic than I do, or you were looking for a how-to guide and this was more of a story, maybe a nice story, maybe a slightly interesting story, but not what you were looking for, and not very helpful.
There. I’ve already said it for you. Please find a book that will be a better fit and save us both some frustration.

I hope you’re reading this online as a preview. But if you’re not, if you’re holding this book in your hands, just take it back, send it back, give it back. The only word of caution I offer is if someone else gave it to you as a gift—a friend, a sister, a mom—then maybe, just maybe, you might want to give it a chance. They could have a better idea than you do at this moment for why you should read it.

I stand by everything I just stated with one exception—if your husband is the gift-giver of this book. And you didn’t ask for it. You haven’t heard of it. This is the first time you’re seeing it. And just because of the title, if you know nothing else about this book, or about me, and you’re feeling a little annoyed at your spouse right now, maybe a little frustrated, quite likely wondering if you’ve just been insulted or told something you don’t want to hear, or aren’t ready to hear…If that’s the case, then you definitely have my permission to do one very important thing with this book before you give it back.

Hit him with it.

Sorry it’s not a hardcover. I recommend two hands.

If, however, you don’t fit in these two categories, then please, by all means, keep reading. Because I’d like to tell you why I wrote this in the first place.

I think how-to books are great. Books that fit the Christian living genre are also wonderful. They’re inspiring and offer refreshing guidance, hopefully based on what Scripture says. I have written a couple of books in that category. I’ve read many, many more that I’ve loved and that helped me gain new perspective in areas where I needed it.

But I also believe in the power of story. And I think sometimes, for some people, seeing your own story in someone else’s can be much more educational and inspirational and effective than reading someone else’s words telling you if you do A and B, you will definitely see X. Because sometimes, when you dutifully follow A and B and you don’t see X, or X shows up in a different way, at a different time or in blue instead of green, or with a lot more tears and frustration than what the original X-promoter said would happen, well you start feeling as confused as you probably do trying to read this last sentence.

I discovered some things about the power of story when I wrote my previous book, My So-Called Life as a Proverbs 31 Wife. This was a very
different book for me to write, and it required me to step out of my normal writing comfort zone. It’s my story of a year-long experiment I attempted while trying to figure out who I was as a wife and mom in the context of who the Proverbs 31 wife was. And the kind of wife and mom God wanted me to be.

It’s very personal. It’s extremely honest. I had no idea what women would think about it. I didn’t know what they’d think about me.

But after the book was released, gently tugged from my trembling fingers by the publisher to be received by tens of thousands, I heard from a lot of you. What blessed me so much was that in your emails and Facebook messages and Twitter mentions, there was often a common repeated theme. You appreciated the real, the honest, the little peek into my life amidst the raw, and you were challenged to look closer into your own lives. You told me you saw need of change for yourself, in your day-to-day interactions with your family, in the way you handled things in your marriage, things you needed to do differently, minor or major shifts you needed to make with certain mindsets, in various habits, in specific approaches. I loved hearing about those, especially when you told me how the changes you made impacted your family for the good.

And even better? I was never the one who told you to make them.

That’s what I love, and what I mean, about the power of story. God uses our stories to help others shape and change their own stories into what he wants them to be. Not what someone else thinks or says your story should be. And that’s honestly at the heart of what I hope and pray for this new story you hold in your hands.

We’ve increased the threat level on this one, haven’t we? The button’s bright red and glowing (or glaring, depending on your perspective) to be pushed. Submission is not a feel-good topic like how to cook better or ways to clean faster or how to not lock up your kids or kill your husband when you’re a wife and mom trying to follow Proverbs 31. At least there are many individuals and groups and even ministries of Christian women who love and embrace the Proverbs 31 wife.

Submission is a different story. There’s a lot more eye-rolling with this one. It’s different. More sensitive. More intrusive. The stakes just feel a whole lot higher, like your very right to breathe as a woman is on the line. You won’t find a lot of Pinterest pins with a cartoonish drawing of a smiling woman and the words “A submissive wife is a happy wife!”

The truth is, women in droves have passed by this book in the bookstore.
and just kept walking, insulted for even seeing this word in a Christian context. We’ll pick up steamy novels all about doing exactly what a man wants us to in the context of submission in sex, but refer to submission in the context of a spiritual perspective? That’s just old-fashioned and far behind our culture today. Right? Shades of grey? I would say so.

But you, my dear, didn’t keep walking. You did pick this up or download it or borrow it, as the case may be. For whatever reason. So here’s the deal. This word submission is in the Bible. Not once but several times. So as much as we sometimes want to ignore it, I don’t think we can. I don’t believe we should. Not if we’re following Christ. Not if we’re committed to living honorable and righteous lives that spill out in the highways and byways of our marriages and our families. Eventually we’ve got to address this ten-letter word that so often comes across as a four-letter one. At some point, we have to decide for ourselves how we feel about this topic that seems to make people cringe the same way they do when they accidentally take a swig of sour milk.

Let me make this even more personal. Eventually, in my marriage, in my walk with God, I have to face this whole submission idea. I have to say, am I for it? Or against it? Am I voting yay or nay? Whether I intentionally try to ignore it or not, whether I try to pretend it doesn’t exist…through my actions, I declare my intentions. I accept it or I don’t.

It’s time to stop ignoring this word we’ve all decided, or at least culture at large has decided, is so ugly, whether we know why we think that way or not. We need to understand what this whole concept of submission looks like and what it means in life and marriage and in relation to God’s plan for everything.

But it’s not up to me to decide what that looks like.

If I approach the Bible as my spiritual authority, as God’s Word, this Book that’s been around for so many thousands of years, that what it says truly goes, then don’t I need to understand it? And apply it?

Not as my interpretation based on what I feel at the time, but an interpretation based on what the Bible actually says? Taking it at full value, not twisting it to suit my needs and my temperament in the moment?

And so we go back to the power of the story. Story gives you insight and information and sometimes even knowledge, but often it also simultaneously forces questions to be asked. Questions that get raised when
you suddenly put yourself in someone else’s shoes and you start to wonder the more you read…

“Am I doing that?”

“Should I do that?”

“Why couldn’t I do that?”

I ask a lot of questions in my stories. Readers don’t always like that because it’s easier sometimes when you see only answers. At least it feels easier. Questions make you think. Thinking can be hard. Especially when it comes to the heart.

My prayer, though, is that as you read through this story, you’ll be willing to think. You’ll be open to visualizing yourself attempting an “experiment” in biblical submission. Experiments, by the way, feel a little less ominous. A little less permanent. You’re trying it out the way you might try out a new bottle of nail polish or a new bedspread. But what happens when you allow yourself to try is that you open yourself to see the possibilities of life-changing attitudes. You’re more open to applying principles from Proverbs 31 or being more intentional in showing honor and respect to your husband, whereas before, you might have held yourself back because of your already-formed perceptions. And often, like experiments do, you discover something you weren’t expecting.

Maybe you’ll sympathize with, maybe you’ll satirize, what I’ve written within these pages. But my hope is by the end of this book, by the end of this story, you’ll find yourself reflecting. Looking within your own marriage, your own family, and your own Bible, thinking about changes, if any, you need to make in your life and in your relationship with your husband. And most important, your relationship with God.

If none of this sounds good to you, then let me kindly say good-bye and thanks for the moment of your time. But if this has tapped something inside you, something that may feel like a deep cavity that needs to be filled, or at least examined, then please keep reading.

There’s a whole lot more ahead.
Submission in Abusive Marriages

I am sensitive to the fact that every marriage is different, and while there are many solid marriage relationships out there based on godly principles and a strong Christian foundation, where both the husband and the wife love each other and desire to serve God and each other, I also realize there are other relationships where that is sadly, and heartbreakingly, not the case. The husband defines himself as his wife’s lord and master and expects her to treat him as such, misusing the Bible and abusing the responsibility and role God has given him toward his wife emotionally, physically, or both.

While I’m not sure a woman faced with this situation would even be interested in reading a book like this, one that offers a little tongue-in-cheek humor at ourselves as wives attempting to follow God’s guidelines while also encouraging serious thought, if you are reading this and you are dealing with marital abuse of any kind, please find a way to get help. You may be stopping yourself from reaching out for help because you’ve either been convinced by your husband or other people or even by yourself that submission means to just take whatever is thrown at you—literally or figuratively. But hear this loud and clear…

*It does not.*

Being beaten, whether by words or fists, is not the submission God has in mind for women who are wives.*

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* For a more complete and biblical perspective on abuse in marriage in the context of submission, visit John Piper’s blog, *Desiring God* (www.desiringgod.com) and search for the article, “Clarifying Words on Wife Abuse,” posted December 19, 2012.
called my husband the other day while he was at work and told him I was thinking about taking a year to study what it means to be a submissive wife and write about it.

“Would you be OK with that?” I asked.

“No,” he said.

Well, that was uncharacteristically direct. (And yes, I can only assume that as you hold this book in your hands, you see the irony.)

“Why would you want to do that?” he asked me. “You and I, we work together as a team. We do things together. You’re not like that. I’m not like that. That’s not us.”

I wasn’t prepared for his reaction. I thought he’d welcome the opportunity to have me at his beck and call. I thought he’d jump at the chance to not just be the “head of household” but have my constant and immediate cooperation at all times (which is not always consistent or always immediate). I was waiting for some crack about bringing his slippers and fetching him a sweet tea—not an immediate dismissal of the entire idea.

Cliff’s question made sense, though. Why would I want to do something so many in our world today see as a very old-fashioned if not archaic idea for marriage?

I’ve come far in our fourteen years of marriage, but you’d never mistake me for June Cleaver or Martha Washington. Two years ago I spent a year attempting to be like the Proverbs 31 wife. Though nothing went the way I planned, the experience and what I learned from it brought good changes, major changes, both in our family and in me.

God taught me during that year how much more he cares about my attitude and my desire to seek his will in my life than how many things I
check off the to-do list each day. For the first time as a wife, I saw myself as the thermostat of my family and realized my actions have great influence—whether I want them to or not. The old saying, “If Mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy,” does apply. Because the opposite does too: If Mama is happy, the family also is a whole lot happier.

So, since “the Proverbs 31 experiment,” as I sometimes call it, I’ve learned some things. I’ve changed some things—OK, a lot of things—in what I do as a wife and mom. I cook more. Whine less. I put my family first, though I still sometimes feel like I struggle managing everything. But I want to learn more. I want to continue growing deeper in my relationship with God. And if as a wife, God wants me to learn submission…well, I need to at least look at it a little more closely. Even if it’s as painful as it sounds.

That’s what I told Cliff.

But he still wasn’t budging.

“OK,” I pressed, “then what’s your idea of a submissive wife? I mean, I’m not planning on dressing up in long jean skirts and wearing my hair down to my ankles and avoiding makeup, if that’s what you’re thinking.” (My apologies to the ladies who do this. You look beautiful. Really.)

Silence came over the line as he thought about it. I waited.

“I guess when I think about the word *submissive*…uh…you know *Star Wars*, right?”

“Oh, yes?” I had no idea where this was going.

“Well, you know that old movie poster, with Hans Solo and Princess Leia? The one where she’s like lying on the ground, all curled up around his legs? That’s what I think when I think of the word *submission*.”

“Seriously?” I asked, trying not to laugh. “I guess that’s one of the reasons why I want to take this on. I think a lot of us have so many different ideas about what submission is—what it looks like. Some people think it’s all about the man being in complete control and the little woman doing his bidding. Some think it’s equal—men and women complement and complete each other and they should work together.”

I paused, trying to think of the words that might go with how I was feeling at the moment.

“I guess I just want to study what the Bible says about it. And pursue that. You know what I mean?”
There was that silence again.
“Let me think about it,” Cliff said.

We hung up, and I had this eerie feeling of waiting for my husband to make a decision on something I wanted to do. Was this submission? Not sure I liked it. This might be even tougher than I thought.

An hour later, my inbox chimed and it was a note from Cliff. He’d sent a link to an article he found online about biblical submission, written by a woman. It was lengthy, but she broke down the usual verses mentioned when it comes to submission, and offered her analysis:

Submission to a husband does not mean a woman is to be a slave in bondage to that man, but rather it is to be a mutual submission in love. The above Scripture (Ephesians 5:21-33) says we are to submit unto each other. Submission means to yield or “to set yourself under.” From this definition we see we are to yield to one another instead of demanding our own way. Love should be the rule in our homes, and we should “prefer one another.”

My phone rang. It was Cliff, wanting to know if I’d seen the article he sent.
“I did. It’s good. What did you think?” I asked.
“I think I’ve never really thought about it much,” he said. “I think I agree with her point about mutual submission.”

“See…I’m not so sure.” I surprised myself a little, and probably Cliff too, because I’ve always seen our marriage as a 50/50 partnership. But as I’ve looked at the Scriptures lately, I’m not as confident. “I mean, it does say in Ephesians to submit to one another, but is that in the marriage context or in the church context? And if it’s in the marriage context, then why does it say that women should submit to their husbands, and husbands are heads of their wives?”

“OK, well, I think it’s interesting,” Cliff said. “And I’m OK if you want to do this.”

“Are you sure? It’s going to affect you too—maybe not in the way you’re expecting.”

“Yeah, I know, and I’m OK with it. But can I make a request?”
“Sure,” I said, happy we were both on the same page and excited, though nervous, to start this new experiment.

“Anytime you want to dress up as Princess Leia, you totally have my permission.”

Oh, brother.