

Christian Marriage

A Small Group Study based on Ephesians 5:18-33 and related passages.

Prepared by the Small Group Ministry of



Grace Life Church
of Brookhaven

GraceLifeBrookhaven.com

Leader's Guide

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Preface

Marriage, as an institution, seems to be in trouble these days, even among professing Christians. Why is that?

Perhaps it's because many simply do not have a biblical understanding of what "marriage" is, or how it should look. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "It is only the Christian who truly understands and appreciates marriage," and he also said, "You cannot understand marriage unless you are a Christian."

Sadly, it seems that even many Christians do not understand marriage anymore. Perhaps that is partly due to the abundance of secular resources available for those looking to study the concept of marriage, much of which consists of psychological, man-centered advice or worldly philosophies rather than Biblical, Christ-centered doctrine.

It is our belief at Grace Life Church of Brookhaven, that the Apostle Peter was right when he said,

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." ~ 2 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV)

Therefore, we believe that if we subject ourselves to the Biblical teaching found in the fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, as well as related passages throughout Scripture, the Lord can help us to:

1. Better understand His purposes for marriage
2. Better understand the roles of husbands and wives in marriage
3. Conform our lives and marriages to the Biblical standards

John MacArthur said, "The most important place to live out Christianity is in the home," and that "marriage is the truest test of your spiritual life."

May the Lord help us to show the world what marriage was meant to be, thereby pointing a lost world to Christ.

For those who are unmarried and looking for a spouse, use this study to prepare you for marriage. For those who will remain unmarried, use this study to help you in other realms of relationship.

We pray that your participation in this study will help you to know Christ better and drive you to worship and obedience. ***Finally, we hereby grant permission for this study to be shared with anyone who might benefit.***

Notes to Group Leaders

The Grace Life Church of Brookhaven Small Group Strategy Statement asserts that “The Church organized into Bible Study Small Groups provides an avenue for the ministry of the Word, the meeting of individual needs, the equipping of believers, the fellowship of the body, and the evangelization of the lost.” These five vital functions can be grouped into two categories: edification of believers and evangelization of the lost.

Edification is centered on the Word of God, through which “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...” (2 Peter 1:3a); therefore, small group ministry should also be centered on the Word of God.

Edification also takes place by encouraging one another, building each other up, and learning from one another:

*Therefore **encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.**
~ 1 Thessalonians 5:11, emphasis added*

*...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**
~ Hebrews 10:25, emphasis added*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**
~ Colossians 3:16, emphasis added*

Remember the word “balance” when it comes to leading your small group: within the allotted time, usually 1 hour, be careful to balance the study of the Word with the “building each other up” and “encouraging each other” aspects of edification.

Here are some practical tips to help guide you:

- Remember that the study guide is merely a “guide.” Don’t feel like you must cover every jot and tittle in every lesson. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and the spiritual needs of those in your small group. **Don’t feel rushed to cover it all!**
- Remember to spend time praying for each other, for the group, and for the local church body. Sometimes you might spend the first few minutes, or even the first half hour, praying for one another. Sometimes you might save the prayer time for the end of the session. **Be flexible: allow time for building relationships!**
- Remember that the questions are designed to draw people out of themselves but be sensitive to the comfort level of group members: Some will readily participate, whereas others will be more reluctant to do so, **and that’s okay!**

Evangelization should involve inviting our friends, loved ones, and acquaintances to join our small group and regularly attend our small group meetings. **Consider inviting people to participate in this study!**

Important Note: Sensitive issues are raised in this study, particularly in lessons 9 & 10. Leaders should exercise discretion in teaching, ensuring that conversations remain respectful of others and do not glorify sin.

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

Lesson One:

Being Filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ~ Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

“The most important thing in our marriage is not the behavior of our spouse, but our relationship to Christ.” ~ John MacArthur

- 1) Icebreaker Question:** What is the best way to get all the air out of an empty glass? **[Answer: fill it with water]**

“You can remove the stale air out of marriage, but not with human psychology...only when you fill yourself with the living water of the Holy Spirit and Divine Truth.” ~ John MacArthur

- 2) Discussion Questions:** Why is it a good idea to begin a study on marriage with verse 18, above? Why do you think Paul commands us to be filled with the Spirit here?

[Note to Leaders: Paul understands that for wives and husbands to do *anything* he’s about to command requires that they be born again! The things he’s about to command are *impossible* for those who remain in the flesh.]

Historical Context: *Pagans in Paul’s day would often get drunk in religious festivals in an attempt to be closer to pagan gods. Paul tells the Ephesian believers that the way to be closer to the One True God is not by drunkenness, which is a work of the flesh, but by being filled with His Holy Spirit!*

- 3) Exercise:** Read Galatians 5:16-21 and list the “works of the flesh” below:

4) **Discussion Questions:** How would you describe a marriage in which one spouse or both spouses were characterized by the works or deeds of the flesh? How would the lives of the children of such a marriage be?

5) Below are some examples of marriage difficulties caused by the works of the flesh:

a. **Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality:** pornography, causing issues with marriage intimacy and/or creating unrealistic expectations.

[Exercise discretion here, ensuring that conversations remain respectful and do not glorify sin.]

b. **Enmity and strife:** causing combativeness and argumentativeness destroying peace in the home

“Don’t blame the sandpaper.” ~ Tommy Alderman

If you think your spouse is causing you strife...if your spouse irritates you, consider that Christ might be using them to rub something off **YOU!**

c. **Jealousy:** creating an atmosphere where there is no trust in the home

d. **Fits of anger:** angry outbursts causing those in the home to live in fear and trauma

e. **Divisions:** creating separation between husband and wife and children, rather than “oneness” as described in Ephesians 5:31

f. **Drunkennes:** could lead to the others listed above, trouble with money, physical and/or verbal abuse

g. What are some other examples?

6) **Self-Examination:** Do you struggle with any of the works of the flesh? Which give you the most trouble? Why do you think you struggle there?

*[Note to Leaders: evangelistic opportunity here – point out that one possible explanation for those struggling with the works of the flesh **MIGHT** be that the Spirit isn’t in them...that they might need to be born again.]*

7) **Exercise:** Read Galatians 5:22-23 and list the “fruit of the Spirit” below:

8) **Discussion Questions:** How would you describe a marriage in which one spouse or both spouses were characterized by the fruit of the Spirit? How would the lives of the children of such a marriage be?

- 9) **Self-Examination:** Which of the fruit would you like to see more of in your life? Do you have trouble displaying any in particular? If so, which ones? Why do you think you struggle there?

[**Note to Leaders:** evangelistic opportunity here – point out that one possible explanation for those struggling with manifesting the fruit of the Spirit *MIGHT* be that the Spirit isn't in them...that they might need to be born again.]

- 10) **Discussion Question:** What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit?”

- 11) **Discussion Question:** What do the following verses tell us about being filled with the Spirit? Write your answers on the next page, below the verses:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

~ Romans 8:9

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ~ Romans 8:14

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ~ Galatians 5:16

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

~ Galatians 5:24-25

...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light... ~ Ephesians 5:8

Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. ~ 1 John 2:4-6

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;
~ Colossians 1:9-10*

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ~ Colossians 3:16

Answer:

12) Discussion Question: How do the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, study, and prayer help us to be filled with the Spirit?

13) Homework: This week, memorize the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23

[Close in prayer, asking the Lord to reveal Himself during this study, to help us understand better who we are and what we need, and to equip us to have marriages that honor Him.]

Notes:

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Lesson Two:

Living with Joy and Gratitude (Ephesians 5:19-20)

*...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
~ Ephesians 5:19-20*

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

“Being filled with the spirit makes one joyful and thankful and wonderful to live with. It should be almost impossible to start a fight with such a person because he or she is so blessed! It’s very hard to argue with someone who is thankful for everything.” ~ John MacArthur, paraphrased

1) Ice Breaker Question: What is the difference between eternal “joy” and temporary “happiness”?

2) Question: According to the following verses, what is the source of a believer’s joy? Write your answers on the next page, below the verses:

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. ~ Luke 10:20

*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,
~ 1 Peter 1:8*

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ~ John 15:11

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. ~ Romans 15:13

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ~ Philippians 4:4

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
~ Galatians 5:22-23*

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ~ Isaiah 61:10

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ~ Habakkuk 3:17-18

Answer:

[Note to Leaders: guide participants to an understanding that the grace and mercy we have received as believers produces a joy that cannot be quenched by circumstances, including marital difficulties. May be an evangelistic opportunity here.]

- 3) **Discussion Point:** Even though we understand the source of our joy, because we still battle the flesh, sometimes we struggle with maintaining joy. Below are some things within a marriage that can hinder our joyfulness:
- a. Unforgiveness
 - b. Bitterness
 - c. Coldness
 - d. Tragedies
 - e. Sickness/Disease
 - f. What are some other “joy killers”?

- 4) **Discussion Question:** What is the remedy when joy has faded?

[Note to Leaders: return to the source! Repent and remind yourself of the grace and mercy of Christ!]

- 5) **Discussion question:** according to the following verses, what should we be thankful for as believers?

...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ~ Ephesians 5:20

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ~ Colossians 3:17

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ~ Philipians 4:6

Answer:

[Note to Leaders: guide participants to an understanding that believers can and should be thankful both in and for everything! Romans 8:28 tells us that God is working everything for the good of those that love Him...even hard things...even painful things. Even in the hardest of things, we can be thankful that without the controlling Hand of God, the situation would be much worse. May be an evangelistic opportunity here.]

- 6) According to the following verses, what is the danger of being ungrateful? What does God think about ingratitude? Write your answers on the following page, below the verses:

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.
~ 2 Timothy 3:1-5*

*They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And **the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron** in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ~ Exodus 16:1-3*

*For although they knew God, **they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ~ Romans 1:21-23*

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed,

turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ~ Luke 17-11-18

Answer:

[Note to Leaders: guide participants to an understanding that habitual ingratitude can harden a person...the more ungrateful a person is, the more ungrateful they become. God expects us to be grateful in all things, and ingratitude is a sin.]

- 7) **Self-Examination:** *Considering the passage from Exodus 16, above, in which the Israelites grumbled against Moses even though they'd just been delivered from 430 years of slavery, are you more focused on what your spouse **HASN'T** done for you, and thereby overlooking things for which you should be thankful? Write down three such things for which you should be thankful. **You do not have to share your answers:***

*"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. **But he who is forgiven little, loves little.**" ~ Luke 7:41-47*

- 8) **Discussion Question:** *What does the passage above teach us about gratitude? How does a thankful person behave toward others? How does a thankful spouse behave toward his or her marriage partner?*

- 9) **Homework:** *Pray that the Lord would help you be more joyful and thankful this week. Work on cultivating gratitude by thanking your spouse for the things that he or she does for you and your family, no matter how small. If you are unmarried, practice by thanking those in your life whether parents, friends, coworkers, employers, teachers, or whomever does things for which you should be thankful.*

[Close in prayer, asking the Lord to remind us where our joy comes from, and to remind us constantly of all the reasons we have to be thankful.]

Notes:

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Lesson Three:

The Foundation: Mutual Submission (Ephesians 5:21)

...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ~ Ephesians 5:21

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

- 1) Discussion Question:** When the idea of “submission,” especially in marriage, is discussed, why is it that Ephesians 5:21 is rarely mentioned? What, instead, is usually thought of when it comes to “submission?”

Paul here lays down a foundational principle: mutual submission. Certainly, in the very next verse, he will turn his attention to wives, but it is vitally important to understand the general principle of mutual submission before turning our attention to specific applications of the general principle.

- 2) Exercise:** It is helpful to note that the principle of mutual submission is found throughout the New Testament. Read the following verses and underline the words or phrases that deal with mutual submission in each verse:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ~ Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

Let love be without hypocrisy—by abhorring what is evil, clinging to what is good, being devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor, ... ~ Romans 12:9-10 (LSB)

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ~ 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

~ Galatians 5:13-14 (ESV)

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." ~ Mark 10:42-45 (ESV)

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ~ John 13:14 (ESV)

*Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.
~ 1 Corinthians 10:34 (ESV)*

By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ~ 1 John 3:16 (ESV)

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. ~ Matthew 7:12 (ESV)

- 3) Discussion Question:** There are other verses in the New Testament calling believers to submit in particular ways and to particular "others," such as submission to our spiritual authorities (Hebrews 13:17), and submission to earthly/governmental authorities (1 Peter 2:13-14, Romans 13:1-7, & Titus 3:1), but how are the verses above different than such "particular" calls to submission?
- 4) Discussion Question:** In your own words, describe how the longer list of verses above instruct us to behave toward other believers, in general, and toward our spouse particularly?

- 5) **Discussion Question:** In the passages from Mark 10, John 13, and 1 John 3, printed above, Christ sets the standard for the general principle of submission to others. Considering that Christ is God in the flesh, what does His voluntary submission teach us about submitting to those who might be of a lower rank or position of authority or power than we are?
- 6) **Discussion Question:** What is the connection between the command to submit to one another in v 21 and the command to be filled with the Spirit in v 18?

“In other words, submission is the single principle that sums up the character of a truly Spirit-filled person. It is the key and the capstone of the Spirit’s work in our hearts.” ~ John MacArthur

“Scripture frequently calls Christians to be humble and submissive people. Here Paul suggested that the Spirit-filled life is not a fight for the top; it’s a fight for the bottom. That’s exactly what Jesus taught, too: ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all’ (Mark 9:35).” ~ John MacArthur

*“In a community of believers, then, the principle of submission governs **all** relationships. **Every** individual submits to **all others**. That is the very situation Paul described in Ephesians 5:21, ‘submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.’” ~ John MacArthur*

- 7) **Discussion Question:** What are some everyday situations in which you are faced with opportunities to be submissive to another believer or other believers?

It is significant that before the apostle Paul instructs husbands and wives how to love each other that he calls for mutual submission. ...That’s a general command to all Christians in all contexts. Husbands are no exception to this rule. The love you are to show your wife involves submission. It is colored and characterized by meekness, tenderness, and service. It is a humble, servant’s love, like that of Christ. ~ John MacArthur

- 8) **Discussion Question:** Paul’s command to be mutually submissive to one another includes husbands and wives. Though wives are commanded to be submissive to their own husbands in a particular way in verse 22, here Paul says

that husbands are to also be submissive to their wives in general ways not related to headship or authority. What are some everyday situations in which a husband and wife are faced with opportunities to be submissive to one another, not related to headship or authority?

*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
~ John 15:13 (ESV)*

*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
~ John 13:35 (ESV)*

- 9) **Discussion Question:** Considering the two statements of Christ above, what is the connection between “love” and “submission?”

*Love is **patient and kind**; love does not envy or boast; it is **not arrogant or rude**. It **does not insist on its own way**; it is **not irritable or resentful**; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love **bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things**.
~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)*

- 10) **Discussion Question:** Why is it that, even as Christians, we seem to have such a hard time with mutual submission? What is the main sin that hinders a submissive spirit in us?

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.
~ Proverbs 18:18 (ESV)*

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.
~ Proverbs 11:2 (ESV)*

*Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
~ James 4:6b (ESV)*

We live in an egotistical, narcissistic generation. Our culture is obsessed with self-esteem, self-love, self-fulfillment, and every conceivable kind of selfish pursuit. People relentlessly promote themselves, praise themselves, and put themselves first. ... This preoccupation with self and self-promotion is unspeakably destructive. When people are committed first of all to self, relationships disintegrate. Human society cannot survive long without healthy, lasting relationships. Indeed, right now we are watching the crumbling of the very foundations upon which society is built, as friendships, marriages, and families fall apart. Human pride is the evil root that underlies so many failed relationships. And yet our culture stubbornly and deliberately fosters pride as though it were something noble. ~ John MacArthur

O believer, learn to reject pride, seeing that you have no ground for it. Whatever you are, you have nothing to make you proud. The more you have, the more you are in debt to God; and you should not be proud of that which renders you a debtor. ~ Spurgeon

*The man who is meek is not even sensitive about himself. He is not always watching himself and his own interests. He is not always on the defensive... To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending... The man who is truly meek never pities himself, he is never sorry for himself. He never talks to himself and says, "You are having a hard time, how unkind these people are not to understand you."
~ Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

11) Discussion Question: Looking again at our main verse for this lesson, Ephesians 5:21, which says, "...submitting to one another **out of reverence for Christ**," what is our primary motivation for submitting to one another?

It is this submissive attitude that makes a marriage work. I don't have any question about the fact that I'm supposed to be the head of Patricia, my wife, and she doesn't have any restraints placed upon her by that, that in and of themselves are abusive or harsh, because I understand that while I have authority over her, given to me from God, I am also commanded to be submissive to her in every area of her needs. ~ John MacArthur

12) Homework: This week, pray with the Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24, ESV) Specifically ask Him to show you if pride is preventing you from submitting one to another, in the fear of Christ, as Paul commands us here. If the answer is “yes,” repent immediately and Christ will help you become submissive. Also, spend time reflecting on how and why you should have “reverence for Christ.”

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

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Lesson Four:

Submissive Wives (Ephesians 5:22)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ~ Ephesians 5:22 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

In our last lesson, we learned that a foundational principle for Christian living is “mutual submission,” meaning that believers should be submissive to one another as a general principle...every believer should consider the needs of every *other* believer as more important than their own. In verse 22, Paul now turns his attention to specific applications of the general principle, and his first specific application of the general principle is directed toward wives.

Textual observation: *As evidence that Paul is continuing his discussion of submission that he began in verse 21, the word “submit” doesn’t appear in the original text, so that verses 21 and 22 read together like this: “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”*

- 1) Discussion Questions:** Why, after presenting the principle of “mutual submission” did Paul **FIRST** specify that wives should submit to their husbands? Why is the command in verse 22 so difficult to obey? What is the reason that the doctrine found in this verse is so hated by women outside the church (and by some inside the church!)?

[Note to Leaders: 1) because, for reasons revealed in the Genesis passages below, submission to husbands will be the most difficult submission in the life of women. 2) & 3) because of the curse, as revealed in the Genesis passages below.]

In the book of Genesis, after the Serpent tempted Eve and she ate and gave some to Adam, which he ate, the Lord pronounced judgment on all of them. He first cursed the Serpent, then He cursed Eve in the following way:

*To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. **Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.**” ~ Genesis 3:16 (ESV)*

A little later in Genesis, in chapter 4, after Cain brought an unacceptable offering to the Lord, the Lord said this to Cain:

*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. **Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.***
~ Genesis 4:7 (ESV)

- 2) **Discussion Question:** What are the similarities and differences between what the Lord said to Eve in Genesis 3:16 and what He said to Cain in Genesis 4:7?

[Note to Leaders: In 4:7, the Lord warned Cain that sin's desire was "contrary to him," meaning that sin was always looking to dominate him, control him, make him submit to it, and that Cain should not relent...should not give in, but "rule over it." Similarly, in 3:16, the Lord cursed the woman, and all women by extension, by telling her that her desire would be contrary to her husband, meaning that she would always battle the desire to dominate her husband, and therefore the desire to resist submission. Interestingly, though the Lord told Cain to rule over the desire of sin, He told Eve something different: that her husband would rule over her, further frustrating her desire to rule over him! PS – the last part of the curse on the woman, "he shall rule over you," is also part of what makes it difficult, without the Lord's help, for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church!]

- 3) **Discussion Question:** What is the significance of Pauls' including the word "own" in Ephesians 5:22?

*[Note to Leaders: Paul is not telling wives that they are to submit to **all** men...not to **all** husbands, but to their **own** husbands. Certainly, the principle of "mutual submission" still applies, but the specific way wives are to submit to their own husbands is unique. Further, MacArthur points out the beauty of the word "own," which speaks of "possession" or "ownership:" wives are to submit to the husbands they possess...the husbands they "own."]*

Peter also commanded wives to be submissive to their "own husbands," and offered a bit more detail:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. ~ 1 Peter 3:1-6 (ESV)

- 4) **Discussion Question:** What do you think Peter means when he suggests that a wife's conduct can influence her husband's response to the Gospel? How can our behavior and attitude toward submission be a powerful testimony to others?

*And by the way, the word submissive is the same word [as in Ephesians 5:22] – hupotassō, to rank yourself under - and in this case, you do it even with an unbelieving husband because this is the divine plan, “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 pure and respectful behavior.” You want to evangelize your unconverted husband? Be submissive; be submissive.
~ John MacArthur*

- 5) **Discussion Question:** Peter mentions the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. How can cultivating such a spirit positively impact our relationships and interactions with others, especially our spouse?

*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. **When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**
~ 1 Peter 2:21-23(ESV)*

- 6) **Discussion Question:** How can Christ’s example of patient endurance and submission to unjust suffering be an encouragement to wives who live with husbands who aren’t measuring up to the standard Christ set for husbands?

*Your adornment? It’s not about external things, braiding, or plaiting the hair - which was some kind of weaving with gold in it, a very fancy thing - wearing gold jewelry, putting on dresses. Look, that’s not wrong to do that. ... But your adornment must not be **merely** external; in fact, that’s not going to do it with your husband. You’re going to win your husband another way. ... You don’t want to adorn yourself with perishable things; you want to adorn yourself with imperishable things. You don’t want to adorn yourself **only** on the outside – yes, on the outside, but not **only** on the outside - but on the inside. You want your beauty not just to be seen by your husband, but you want your beauty to be seen by God. This is the true beauty, and it has great value. ... Holy women - women who hoped in God, this means redeemed women - this is how they’ve always adorned themselves, by being submissive to their husband. ... And by this quiet, gentle spirit, you can win an unconverted husband. This is God’s design.
~ John MacArthur*

MacArthur, in discussing 1 Corinthians 11:4-16, explains that behind the specifics of the passage is the matter of submissiveness of wives toward their husbands. He points out that in Corinth at that time there was a “feminist” movement, of sorts, that had rebelled against the custom of women’s head coverings, some to the extreme point of shaving their heads, which, by the way, prostitutes also did. MacArthur indicates that Paul was

basically telling such Corinthian women that if they were disregarding the God-ordained signs of femininity (such as submissiveness with a quiet, gentle spirit mentioned in 1 Peter) by uncovering their heads, why not go all the way and shave their heads like the radical feminists and prostitutes!

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. ~ 1 Corinthians 11:4-16 (ESV)

- 7) Discussion Question:** MacArthur says that the timeless message of the above passage is, “whatever culture you live in, maintain the symbols of femininity and submission; whatever they are.” What are some symbols of femininity in our culture...in the area and the time in which we live?

[Note to Leaders: it’s probably impossible to come up with a definitive list of such symbols, but it might be helpful to lead participants to an understanding that we, for the most part, “know it when we see it.”]

- 8) Discussion Question:** When women who profess Christianity refuse to be submissive, or otherwise reject the normal symbols of femininity, what does that communicate to the world (and even to the church!) about Scripture?

A generation of so-called Christian women who take a feminist approach and reject the calling of God to be subject to their own husbands, and to love their children, and be keepers at home, undermine the Word of God; they undermine the Scripture. They say to the world, “Not all of it matters.” And if not all of it matters, then you can pick and choose what to reject, and the Word of God is undermined. ~ John MacArthur

Let's look again at Ephesians 5:22:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, **as to the Lord.** ~ Ephesians 5:22 (ESV)*

- 9) **Discussion Question:** What does it mean that wives should submit to their husbands "as to the Lord"?

***Wives** is not qualified, and therefore applies to every Christian wife, regardless of her social standing, education, intelligence, spiritual maturity or giftedness, age, experience, or any other consideration. **Nor is it qualified by her husband's intelligence, character, attitude, spiritual condition, or any other consideration.** Paul says categorically to all believing wives: be subject to your own husbands. ~ John MacArthur*

Christian wives are NOT to be some sort of servant or slave ... And those who take this verse and use it as some so called "godly" reason to treat their wife as some subservient, second class Christian servant are violently abusing this teaching ... such as a man forcing his wife to call him "lord," or those men who demand that the house always be clean, or those who talk down to their wives or do not let their wives have an opinion...Christian wives are in NO way second class or inferior Christians compared to their husbands. ~ Pastor Chris Sheppard

- 10) **Discussion Question:** How does the phrase "as to the Lord" help women whose husbands might be, at best, not very Christlike, or at worst, terribly ungodly?

- 11) **Discussion Question:** Is there a message for men in that phrase, "as to the Lord"? If so, what is it?

[Note to Leaders: if wives are to submit to their husbands as if they are submitting to Christ...in the same manner as they submit to Christ, Himself...it is incumbent upon husbands to be LIKE Him, rather than some ungodly dictator!]

12) Discussion Question: How does Paul's earlier admonition to "be filled with the spirit" (Ephesians 5:18, from Lesson One) relate to both wives and husbands in the matter of the submission of wives to husbands?

*[Note to Leaders: Wives: only born-again women can **desire to willingly** submit to their husbands. Husbands: only born-again men, through whom and in whom the fruit of the Spirit are evident, can be the sort of man to whom a wife will desire to willingly submit.]*

13) Self-Examination: Ladies, are you more concerned with how you look...your outward adornment (makeup, pretty clothes, hair just right, jewelry and accessories...all of which are perfectly acceptable!) than you are about cultivating the inward beauty of a gentle, quiet, and submissive spirit? Men, do you compliment your wife about her outward beauty (as you should!), but not about their inward beauty?

14) Homework:

Ladies, this week focus on cultivating your inward beauty. Pray and ask the Lord to help you develop a gentle, quiet, and submissive spirit.

Men, ask the Lord to help you find ways to encourage your wife and ways you can make it easy for her to be submissive to you...ask the Lord to show you how you might be making submission more difficult for your wife.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

Lesson Five:

Headship in the Church and in the Home (Ephesians 5:23-24)

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ~ Ephesians 5:23-24 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

Last week we looked at Paul’s command to wives found in verse 22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” The verse contains the “how” of a wife’s submission in the phrase “as to the Lord,” and this week we’ll look more fully at “why” wives should submit to their own husbands, and one more “how.”

In short, the “why” can be summed up in one word: headship.

The concept of "headship" in the scriptures refers to a leadership or authority role within specific contexts, particularly in family and church relationships. It is a biblical principle that outlines the God-given roles and responsibilities of certain individuals within these spheres.

In the context of marriage, headship refers to the husband's role as the leader and head of the family. The husband's headship is not about dominance or superiority, but rather about loving leadership and selfless service. It mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church, where Christ is the head, and the Church submits to Him out of love and reverence.

1 Corinthians 11:3 is most helpful in understanding this dynamic:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. 1 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV)

- 1) Discussion Question:** Explain what Paul meant when he said “the head of Christ is God [the Father]? Did he mean that the Father was superior to Christ in any way, or that Christ is in any way inferior to the Father?

- 2) What is the implication, therefore, for how we are to understand the phrase, “the head of a wife is her husband” in 1 Corinthians 11:3, or “the husband is the head of the wife” in Ephesians 5:23?

*[Note to Leaders: just as Christ is in no way inferior to the Father, the wife is in no way inferior to the husband, nor is the husband, as the head, superior to his wife – **it's not about value, it's about roles and responsibilities.**]*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
~ Colossians 1:15-20 (ESV)

- 3) **Discussion Question:** What does the above passage say about Christ's equality with the Father?

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, **though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***
~ Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

- 4) **Discussion Question:** How can the above passage help wives in their struggle to be submissive? How can it help husbands be the sort of man to whom their wives will willingly submit?

This verse might seem out of place for today's lesson, but hang in there:

*For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the **Savior of all people**, especially of those who believe.
~ 1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)*

- 5) Discussion Question:** In what sense is God the "Savior of all people," understanding that a lot of people die in their sins and end up in hell?

[Note to Leaders: the word translated "savior" in the New Testament can also mean "deliverer, preserver," and carries the idea of providing for, sustaining, protecting. That God provides for, sustains, and even protects ALL people, including unbelievers, is self-evident. Perhaps discuss Matthew 5:45, Acts 14:16-17, Psalm 145:9, Psalm 36:6, and Acts 17:25.]

Look again now at Ephesians 5:23-24:

*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, **and is himself its Savior**. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.
~ Ephesians 5:23-24 (ESV)*

- 6) Discussion Question:** Paul says that husbands are the heads of their wives "even as," meaning, "in the same way," that Christ is head of the church, which is His body. Then he adds that husbands are to be the "savior" of their wives. Obviously, husbands have no power to "save" their wives in an eternal sense – only Christ can do that – but in what ways can and should a husband be a "savior" to his wife in the sense that God is the "Savior of all people" in 1 Timothy 4:10?

The Apostle Peter, and John MacArthur, help us better understand the concept Paul is driving at regarding men being the “savior” of their wives:

*Likewise, husbands, **live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel**, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. ~ 1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)*

*The wife is "the weaker vessel," according to Peter. In what sense are women "weaker?" This has reference primarily to the physical realm. Women are, as a class, physically weaker than men. Now, it is undoubtedly true that there are some men whose wives are physically more powerful than them. But that is unusual, and I believe that even in those exceptional cases, the principle still applies. **You are to treat your wife with a gentle chivalry.** You can do this in a thousand ways, from opening doors for her to moving furniture and doing the heavy work around the house. A loving husband would not say to his wife, "After you've changed the tire, I'll be glad to take you to the store." **We serve them with our strength.** We treat them as the weaker vessel, **showing them a particular deference in matters where their physical weakness places them at a disadvantage.** First Peter 3:7 actually suggests that **God designed women to be under the protection of a man, benefiting from his strength. And serving our wives by lending them that strength is one of the main ways we show them a Christlike, sacrificial love.** ~ John MacArthur*

- 7) **Discussion Questions:** Ladies, are you offended by being described as the “weaker vessel”? Do you allow your husband the opportunity to be chivalrous (open the door for you, unload the groceries)? Men, do you look for every opportunity to behave like a “knight in shining armor” for your wife? Do you open her car door for her, or unload the dishwasher?

Look back at Ephesians 5:23-24:

*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.***
~ Ephesians 5:23-24 (ESV)

- 8) **Discussion Questions:** Last week, we saw “how” wives should submit to their husbands in the phrase “as to the Lord.” Here in verse 24, we see another “how.” Describe it in your own words:

- 9) **Discussion Question:** Verse 24 also says that wives are to “submit in everything to their husbands.” What does “everything” **exclude**? How does Acts 5:27-29 (below) help us understand the Biblical limits on the word “everything” here?

*And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “**We must obey God rather than men.**”*

~ Acts 5:27-19 (ESV)

[Note to Leaders: as mentioned in the “Important Note,” below, wives are NOT commanded, nor expected, to submit to husbands in matters of sinfulness, criminality, or abuse. Wives should not be expected to submit to directions that violate their conscience, but it’s also important to note that wives shouldn’t dishonestly use “matters of conscience” as excuses to be unsubmitive when submissiveness is in order.]

Important Note: While the bible commands submission in marriage, it also prioritizes obedience to God above all else. Further, if a husband is leading his wife into sin or actions contrary to God’s Word, or even in actions or directions that can cause physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual harm to her or their children, the wife should seek wise counsel from trusted Christian leaders and mentors, like your pastor or small group leader.

- 10) **Homework:** Ladies, spend time this week studying Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22-23, and Hebrews 12:2 to get a better understanding of Christ’s headship over the church. Then consider how you, as a wife, can better submit to your husband, looking to the church’s submission to Christ as your model.

Men, spend time this week studying Colossians 3:19, 1 Peter 3:7, Philippians 2:3-4, and Ephesians 5:21 to get a better understanding of how you are to relate to and treat your wife, looking to Christ’s relationship to the church as your model.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

Lesson Six:

Loving Husbands (Ephesians 5:25)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ~ Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

- 1) Discussion Questions:** Why is it necessary to command husbands to love their wives? Don't men naturally love their wives?

[Note to Leaders: refer to Genesis 3:16 (Lesson Four), in which God cursed women, but also men by telling Eve that her husband would “rule over her.” Part of the curse on women includes that men’s natural bent will be to dominate them rather than to nurture them, which frustrates a wife’s desire to submit, but also makes it difficult for men, without the Holy Spirit, to love their wives as they should.]

*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.
~ Colossians 3:19 (ESV)*

*Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.
~ Colossians 3:19 (LSB)*

Husbands, love your wives [with an affectionate, sympathetic, selfless love that always seeks the best for them] and do not be embittered or resentful toward them [because of the responsibilities of marriage]. ~ Colossians 3:19 (Amplified)

- 2) Discussion Question:** Why is it necessary to command husbands **NOT** to be harsh toward, embittered against, or resentful of their wives?

The husband’s command is very clear - it’s a single command: “Husbands, love your wives”; ... That is the command. There is no command to take authority over your wife. That’s not the command; ... Is the husband the head? Absolutely, he’s the head; ... The husband is the head of the wife, Christ is the head of the man, God is the head of Christ. But the command is not to take authority. It doesn’t say a word about that. It doesn’t say take authority, it doesn’t say rule over your wife, it doesn’t say order her around, it doesn’t say command her, it doesn’t say subjugate her, subject her, it doesn’t say dominate her. It says love your wives; ...

And the word for love is from the verb agapaō, which is the most intense, most divine, most magnanimous, most sacrificial, most humble kind of love; it's the love of the will. ~ John MacArthur

- 3) **Exercise:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a is printed below in the ESV and the Amplified version. Underline the characteristics of Holy Spirit-empowered “love” that, if found in a husband’s relationship with his wife, will prevent him from being harsh, resentful of them, or embittered against them, and discuss how those characteristics counteract a man’s natural bent toward hardness:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (ESV)

Love endures with patience and serenity, love is kind and thoughtful, and is not jealous or envious; love does not brag and is not proud or arrogant. It is not rude; it is not self-seeking, it is not provoked [nor overly sensitive and easily angered]; it does not take into account a wrong endured. It does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices with the truth [when right and truth prevail]. Love never fails [it never fades nor ends]. ~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (Amplified)

- 4) **Exercise:** Look up Galatians 5:22-23 again and write the fruit of the spirit below:
- 5) **Discussion Question:** How can the fruit of the Spirit enable a born-again man to love his wife as Christ loves the Church? Be specific, using several of the fruit to make your case:

Look again at Ephesians 5:25:

*Husbands, love your wives, **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**, ~ Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)*

- 6) **Discussion Question:** How did Christ love the church? How does He still manifest His love for the church?

Christ's love for His Bride, the Church, is multi-faceted, demonstrated through various actions and ongoing manifestations. Here are some ways in which Christ loves the Church (**Husband, THIS is how you are commanded to love your wife!**):

- **Sacrificial Love:** The ultimate expression of Christ's love for the Church, His Bride, is seen in His sacrificial death on the cross. He willingly gave up His life to redeem and reconcile His Bride to God.
 - *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*
~ Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)
 - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* ~ Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

7) Men – are you loving your wife sacrificially? Do you sacrifice your wants and desires in order to please her? Or do you expect her to sacrifice her wants and needs in order to please you? Is your reputation more important than your wife's well-being?

Ladies – remembering the command in Ephesians 5:21 to be mutually submissive, is it your desire to likewise support your husbands dreams, goals, and desires?

- **Nurturing and Caring:** Just as a loving shepherd cares for his sheep, Christ nurtures and cares for His Bride, the Church. He guides, protects, and provides for her, ensuring her spiritual growth and well-being.
 - *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
~ John 10:11 (ESV)
 - *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* ~ Psalm 23:1-3 (ESV)

- 8) Men – do you encourage your wife’s spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth? Do you provide for her? Can she count on your work ethic to consistently provide for your family? Do you make your wife feel safe physically and emotionally?

Ladies – do you likewise encourage your husbands growth? Do you express gratitude for your husbands efforts to provide for the home? Do you have expensive appetites that force your husband to work more than he should have to?

- **Forgiveness and Grace:** Christ's love is characterized by His willingness to forgive sins and heap grace upon all who come to Him in repentance and faith. He offers reconciliation with God and ongoing, preserving grace for His Bride.
 - *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight... ~ Ephesians 1:7-8 (ESV)*
 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ~ 1 John 1:9 (ESV)*

- 9) Men – are you *QUICK* to forgive your wife? Do you freely offer her grace as Christ gives grace so freely to you?

Ladies – how about you? Are you likewise quick to forgive, or do you harbor bitterness and keep a record of wrongs in your marriage?

- **Intercession:** Christ continues to intercede for His Bride before the Father, praying on her behalf. He pleads for her needs and well-being, ensuring she receives the support she requires.
 - *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ~ Romans 8:34 (ESV)*
 - *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. ~ Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)*

- 10) Men – do you pray for your wife...every day?

Ladies – do you pray for your husband...every day?

- **Indwelling Presence:** Through the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells within His Bride, providing comfort, guidance, security, and empowerment for living a godly life.
 - *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ~ John 14:16-17 (ESV)*
 - *“...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
~ Matthew 28:20b (ESV)*

11) Men – do you ensure that your wife *knows* that you are “in it for the long haul”? Does your wife feel secure *knowing* that you will never abandon her? Or does she live in fear that you might disappear at any moment, leaving her to fend for herself?

Ladies – same for you: do you work to ensure stability in your marriage? Do you give your husband reason to fear that *you* might disappear, or does he know for certain that you are committed for life?

- **Unconditional Love:** Christ's love for His Bride is unconditional and unchanging. It is not based on her performance or merits but on His grace and desire for a loving relationship with her.
 - *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
~ Romans 5:6-8 (ESV)*
 - *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ~ Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)*

12) Men – do you ensure that your wife *knows* that your love for her is *not* based on her performance? Does she *know* that there is nothing she can do to lose your love for her?

Ladies – do you force your husband to “work” for your love and acceptance, or do you make sure he knows that you love him no matter what?

- **Future Glory:** Christ's love for His Bride extends to the promise of a future glorious union. He has prepared a place for her in heaven, where she will be with Him forever.
 - *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*
~ John 14:1-3 (ESV)
 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*
~ Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

13) Men & Ladies – do you discuss future plans with each other? Do you allow one another to openly share your dreams for the future? Do you *both* make it your priority to secure the other’s future and your future together?

14) Homework: Men & Ladies pray through questions 7-13 together this week and meditate on the scriptures associated with each. Talk about the questions with each other.

Men, pray for your wives and ask the Lord to help you love her in such ways as Christ loves His Bride.

Ladies, pray for your husbands, and ask the Lord to help you make it as easy as possible for your husbands to love you in the ways Christ loves His Bride, and to help you be grateful for the ways in which he loves you now.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

Lesson Seven:

Sanctifying Husbands (Ephesians 5:26-27)

*...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
~ Ephesians 5:26-27 (ESV)*

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

Last week, we looked at Ephesians 5:25, which says,

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ~ Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

Paul commands husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church,” which means “in the same way in which Christ loved the church.” Obviously, men are not Christ and have no power to pay for the sins of their wives, and husbands have no inherent righteousness to transfer to their wives...so husbands cannot love their wives in *that* particular way that Christ loved the church.

But we did look at a number of ways that Christ loved, and still loves, His bride that do apply to husbands: ways in which husbands can, and should, and must love their wives.

We talked about what it means for husbands to give themselves up for their wives, short of the ultimate way in which Christ gave Himself up for His Bride, the Church.

This week, we examine additional ways in which Christ interacts with His Bride...ways in which He loves her...and talk about how they apply to earthly husbands and wives.

Here again are verses 26-27:

*...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
~ Ephesians 5:26-27 (ESV)*

- 1) Discussion Question:** What does it mean that Christ cleanses His Bride with the Word? What does the “washing of water with the word” do for the Church?

When you read Ephesians 5:26-27, did you think of John 17, often called Christ's "High Priestly Prayer?" Read it aloud below, paying special attention to the portions in bold text:

*"I have manifested your name to **the people whom you gave me out of the world**. Yours they were, and **you gave them to me**, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. **I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me**, for they are yours. **All mine are yours, and yours are mine**, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth**. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth**.
~ John 17:6-19 (ESV)*

- 2) **Exercise:** In the space below, rewrite the portions of the passage above that are in bold text from your personal perspective, as either a husband or a wife, rather than from Christ's perspective. *For example, a husband could change "the **people** whom you gave me out of the world" to "the **wife** whom you gave me out of the world."*

Christ isn't praying for everyone in John 17! He's praying for His Bride, which includes all believers from times past, in the time Christ was on the earth, and into the future...including those believers reading this lesson today! That doesn't mean Christ had no concern for those outside the church – we *know* He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust – but His particular care is for His people, the Church...His Bride. In the same way, although Husbands are called to be kind to everyone, to be mutually submissive to all other believers, men are called to *especially* love their own wives, who belong to them, just as they belong to their wives, and wives should find comfort and security in knowing that just like the Church is Christ's particular treasure, wives should be the particular treasure of their husbands.

If your spouse is your “particular treasure,” he or she will know and feel like they are the most important person in the world to you...like he or she is valued above all other people. The late Pastor Bendon Ginn was fond of the saying, “If you want to see what a man values, look at his calendar and his checkbook register.” Someone else put it like this: “You communicate what's most valuable to you by how you spend your free time and how you spend your extra money.”

Whatever it is that you sacrifice for is your “particular treasure.” If you will set your clock to get up early in order to do something fun for yourself, or even to go help someone other than your spouse, but won't set your clock early to spend time with your spouse or to help your spouse with something, you are not communicating to your spouse that he or she is your “particular treasure.”

3) Discussion Questions: Husbands, does your wife feel like she is your “particular treasure?” Does she feel like she is more important to you than your hobbies or interests like fishing or hunting or sports, or your work, or other people who ask for your attention?

Wives, does your husband feel like he is the most important person in *your* life? Does he feel like he is more important than a clean house, your job, your hobbies, or friends, or even the kids?

Are each of you making a concerted effort to ensure that your spouse feels like the most important person in the world to you? Perhaps this should be a topic of discussion between you this week?

We talked last time about Christ interceding for His Bride, and we see that again here in John 17. It's a terrific reminder that husbands should be praying for their wives...interceding for them...pleading on their behalf.

4) Questions: Husbands, are you faithfully interceding for your wife? Wives, are you faithfully praying for your husband?

Christ's prayer was that the Father would sanctify His bride by the Word of God...but notice something in the last sentence of the quoted passage – Christ sanctifies *HIMSELF* so that His Bride would be sanctified!

- 5) Questions:** Men, Christ had no need to be sanctified – but YOU DO! You need to be washing your wife with the word, but you can only do that if you, yourself, are being sanctified by it. Will you commit to reading your Bible *every day*?

Ladies, will you commit to helping your husband develop or maintain the habit of regular Bible reading and study?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. ~ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (ESV)

- 6) Discussion Questions:** The above passage from the Old Testament was directed at the adults among the Israelites. Considering Ephesians 5:26-27, what can husbands take from the Deuteronomy passage in terms of “washing” their wives (and children) with the word of God? Wives/moms – what encouragement is there for you in the Deuteronomy passage?

... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” ~ Joshua 24:15b (ESV)

- 7) Discussion Questions:** Men, what advantages can you see from declaring, like Joshua, that your family will be marked by obedience to Christ? Ladies, what would it mean for you for your husband to take such a stand, and how can you support him in setting and maintaining such a standard in the family?

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.
~ Psalm 78:1-4 (ESV)*

- 8) Discussion Questions:** Men & Ladies, did your parents tell you of the “glorious deeds of the Lord”? Did you have parents that taught you the word and lived it in front of you? How can your decision to do that for your children affect them and your children’s children, and future generations of your family?

Let’s look back at our primary verses from today’s lesson:

*...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
~ Ephesians 5:26-27 (ESV)*

- 9) Discussion Questions:**

Husbands: How does the concept of "sanctifying your wife" challenge your understanding of your role as a husband and spiritual leader in the family? In what ways can you actively contribute to your wife's spiritual growth and holiness??

Wives: How does the idea of being "sanctified" by your husband challenge your understanding of submission in marriage? How can you actively support and encourage your husband's leadership in spiritual matters?

10) Discussion Questions:

Husbands: The passage mentions "cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." How can you take the initiative to lead your family in studying God's Word and fostering an environment of spiritual growth and transformation?

Wives: In what ways can you demonstrate respect and support for your husband's role as the spiritual leader in your home? How can you show appreciation for his efforts to nurture and guide your family's faith journey?

11) Discussion Questions:

Husbands: What specific steps can you take to cultivate a deeper spiritual intimacy with your wife, encouraging open communication about faith, prayer, and spiritual matters?

Wives: What steps can you take to strengthen your prayer life, seeking God's guidance and wisdom in your role as a wife and mother? How can you cultivate a heart of gratitude and contentment in your marriage?

12) Homework: Husbands and wives, commit to do two things **every day** this coming week:

1 – pray together. It doesn't have to be an hour! Just begin to form the habit of praying with each other and for each other. Pray for your family together. Pray for your pastors together. Pray for your church family together. Pray for your lost friends and family together...and do it *every day* this week.

2 – study the Bible together. Again, this doesn't have to be an hour or more. Just pick something in scripture, perhaps a section of Proverbs, and read it aloud together and discuss its spiritual implications. Maybe read through and discuss Ephesians 5:18-33? But do it *every day*. Make it a point to set the time aside and don't let anything rob you of this time in the word together.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

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Lesson Eight:

Husbands Who Nourish & Cherish Their Wives (Eph 5:28-30)

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ~ Ephesians 5:28–30 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

- 1) Discussion Question:** What are some practical ways we protect, nourish, and cherish our own bodies?

Obviously, the phrase “For no one ever hated his own flesh” refers to “no one in his right mind,” as the evening news is filled with stories of people who do seem to hate their own flesh. Folks in their right minds don’t hate their own flesh, but rather have God-given instincts to protect it, to nourish it, and to cherish it...since it’s the only one we have!

The Greek translated as “nourish” includes our common understanding of the word, and “cherish” means “to foster with tender care.”

When we think of “nourishing” our bodies, we can think in terms of giving them what they need to survive and thrive: rest, food, water, medicine, exercise, etc.

Christ nourishes His bride by providing her rest:

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
~ Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV)*

*Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
~ Psalm 116:7 (ESV)*

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.
~ Hebrews 4:9–10 (ESV)*

- 2) Discussion Questions:** Christ provides believers rest from working for righteousness, from working for His approval and love.

Husbands, do you provide for your wife rest from working for your approval and love? Can she rest knowing that your love for her is unconditional?

Wives, do you make an effort to live a life of contentment with your husband...a life of gratitude and peace?

Christ nourishes His bride by providing her food & water:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ~ John 6:35 (ESV)

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ~ John 4:13–14 (ESV)

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ~ Luke 22:19–20 (ESV)

- 3) Discussion Questions:** Of course, the Lord provides physical food and water for us all. All good things come from His kind Provision. But Christ also provides His Bride with spiritual food and living water.

Husbands, do you provide for your wife spiritual and emotional food by providing what she needs to thrive in those areas? Does she thirst for things that you are *not* providing for her, or is her thirst quenched by what you provide?

Wives, do you communicate clearly, openly, and gently with your husband about your needs for nourishment? Are you patient with him as he works to be a better provider of nourishment?

Christ nourishes His bride by providing her medicine/healing:

*He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.
~ Psalm 107:20 (ESV)*

*This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.
~ Psalm 119:50 (ESV)*

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. ~ Proverbs 4:20–22 (ESV)

4) Discussion Questions: Christ's words bring healing.

Husbands, do your words bring healing to your wife, or do they bring injury and pain?

Wives, do you use your tongue as a sword to cut down your husband, or are your words to him sweet like honey?

Sometimes the absence of words can cause grief and pain, too. Husbands and wives, does your absence of words cause unintentional pain in your marriage?

Christ nourishes His bride by providing her exercise:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ~ Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ~ Romans 6:4 (ESV)

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
~ Galatians 5:16 (ESV)*

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ~ 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

5) Discussion Questions: Life in Christ is often described as a walk – growth requires exercise.

Husbands, do you encourage your wife to exercise the gifts the Lord has given her? Do you honor her giftedness by telling her how much you appreciate her? Do you honor her in front of others, as well as in private (you should do *BOTH*)?

Wives, do you willingly come along side your husband in his walk? Do you encourage him to pursue his calling as a leader in the home?

When we think of “cherishing” our bodies, we can think in terms of fostering its growth with tenderness, allowing for restoration and renewal, and providing it comfort.

Christ cherishes His bride by being tender to her:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
~ Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV)

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
~ Isaiah 40:11 (ESV)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ~ Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, ...
~ Matthew 12:20 (ESV)

6) Discussion Questions: Christ is tender toward us, He does not place heavy burdens upon us, He carries us, and He is sympathetic to our weaknesses.

Husbands, are you tender with your wife, understanding that she is, as the scripture says, “the weaker vessel”? Do you expect your wife to “carry her load” or “pull her own weight,”... or even expect her to carry *YOUR* load... or do you look for every opportunity to lighten her load? Are you impatient with her weaknesses, or are you sympathetic and gentle, knowing that you, too, are imperfect and fallen?

Wives, are you the “quarrelsome (contentious) and fretful wife” of Proverbs 21:9 and Proverbs 21:19? Or is there peace in your presence that encourages tenderness from your husband?

In Christ, His bride finds restoration and renewal:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ~ Titus 3:4–7 (ESV)

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 (ESV)

- 7) Discussion Questions:** Christ makes all things new, He does not hold former sins against us, and He takes the initiative to reconcile us to Himself.

Husbands, are you quick to forgive *AND* forget the ways in which your wife might've sinned against you? Do you *EAGERLY* work toward reconciliation, always taking the first step? Or do you hold grudges and withhold forgiveness from your wife?

Wives, do you withhold forgiveness from your husband? Do you make reconciliation and restoration difficult in your home? Or are you a peacemaker?

Christ cherishes His bride by comforting her:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ~ John 14:27 (ESV)

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." ~ John 16:33 (ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ~ 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (ESV)

8) Discussion Questions: Christ comforts His Bride and offers supernatural abiding peace to her.

Husbands, does your presence in the home bring peace and comfort, or chaos, confusion, anxiety, or fear?

Wives, does your presence in the home bring quiet, which Proverbs 17:1 says is better even with only “a dry morsel” of food? Or does your presence produce nothing but strife, which the same verse says makes a house full of feasting not worth it?

9) Homework: Review Discussion Questions 2-8. For each question, write down at least *one* thing you can do to bring yourself more in line with scripture. Pray over your list during the week, asking the Lord to help and equip you.

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[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

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Lesson Nine:

One Flesh (Ephesians 5:31)

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ~ Ephesians 5:31 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

- 1) Discussion Question:** Commonly referred to as the principle of “leaving and cleaving,” what does it mean that “a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife”?

As unmarried children, whether young or old, our identities are tied to our parents. “That’s so-and-so’s son,” or “She’s *their* daughter.” But when we become married, we begin forging a new identity, together with our spouse. The same is true when we become Christians:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ~ Ephesians 4:22–24 (ESV)

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ~ Colossians 3:9–10 (ESV)

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ~ Romans 6:4 (ESV)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ~ Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

Just like when we are born again, when we are married, we become something new. And just like we, as Christians, are admonished to leave behind our old selves, we should also leave behind the old identities we had before we became husband and wife.

2) **Discussion Question:** Perhaps our “father and mother” are not the only parts of our pre-marriage identities that we need to leave behind. Why might the following parts of our pre-marriage identities need to be forsaken or at least curtailed or modified?

a. **Friendships**

b. **Hobbies**

c. **“Single” Lifestyle**

d. **Spending Habits**

e. **What others?**

3) **Discussion Question:** Married couples often enter marriage with little understanding of what to expect. Roadblocks are common, as they are faced with situations they’ve never faced before. Wisdom dictates that they should seek counsel (Proverbs 1:5; 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:5; 24:6; 27:9, and others). Does the principle of “leaving & cleaving” mean that married couples should not seek godly, biblical counsel from their parents? Why or why not?

Note: *Sometimes, the difficulty with leaving and cleaving is not on the part of the newlyweds, but on the part of parents who don’t want to let go, and who can even become intrusive. Husbands, it is your job to set boundaries – in a kind and respectful manner, of course...but firmly and resolutely. Seek counsel from your pastor or small group leader if necessary.*

Paul, here in Ephesians 5:21, points back to Genesis 2, Matthew 19, and Mark 10:

*So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, **“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.** ~ Genesis 2:21-24 (ESV)*

*And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, **‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ~ Matthew 19:3–8 (ESV)*

*“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. **Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ~ Mark 10:6–9 (ESV)*

- 4) **Discussion Question:** The concept of two human beings becoming “one flesh” is mysterious, for sure! But there are practical ways in which such concept can be manifested in a marriage union. Describe how the concept should affect the following areas in a marriage:

a. Communication:

“Regarding secrets: let yours be hers and hers be yours and let there be none between you.” ~ Tommy Alderman

b. Finances:

“In a marriage, it’s not ‘yours’ or ‘mine,’ but ‘ours.’” ~ Tommy Alderman

c. Decision making:

...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ~ Ephesians 5:21–22 (ESV)

d. Sexual intimacy:

[Exercise discretion here. Ensure conversations remain respectful & do not glorify sin.]

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ~ 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (ESV)

e. Conflict Resolution:

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ~ James 1:19–20 (ESV)

f. Parenting:

And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. ~ Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV)

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. ~ Proverbs 1:8–9 (ESV)

- 5) Homework:** Talk with your spouse about portions of your old identities that you haven't sufficiently left behind and commit to help each other do so. Think of practical ways you can order your lives to better be "one flesh" as God intended.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

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Lesson Ten:

The Mystery Revealed (Ephesians 5:32)

*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.
~ Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)*

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

After Paul spends several verses discussing some practical considerations for marriage, he suddenly pulls back the curtain, so to speak, and drops a bombshell: marriage is a picture of Christ and the church.

This is a *profound* statement of doctrine, following the practical matters, that gives weight to those matters and should cause us to continually pause and reflect on the *magnitude* of what our marriage says to the world.

- 1) **Discussion Question:** Christian marriage is designed by God to reflect Christ to the world. What does the current state of your marriage say to the world? Perhaps more importantly, what does it say to your spouse?

Upon closer examination of the scriptures, the connection between the marriage union and the union of believers with Christ becomes a bit more obvious:

*For if we have been **united with him** in a death like his, we shall certainly be **united with him** in a resurrection like his. ~ Romans 6:5 (ESV)*

*Do you not know that **your bodies are members of Christ**?
~ 1 Corinthians 6:15a (ESV)*

*But **he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him**.
~ 1 Corinthians 6:17 (ESV)*

*...because **we are members of his body**. ~ Ephesians 5:30 (ESV)*

*For you have died, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God**.
~ Colossians 3:3 (ESV)*

*...for **in Christ Jesus** you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized **into Christ** have **put on Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all **one in Christ Jesus**. ~ Galatians 3:26–28 (ESV)*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.... ~ Ephesians 1:3–4 (ESV)*

*For we are his workmanship, created **in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ~ Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)*

*But now **in Christ Jesus** you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ~ Ephesians 2:13 (ESV)*

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in him**, rooted and built up **in him** and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ~ Colossians 2:6–7 (ESV)*

- 2) **Self-Examination:** What are some things that you often do or say that you would never do or say if Christ were standing right next to you (by the way, He is always standing right next to you)? **You do not have to share your answers.**

“Nothing can be concealed from Christ. What do we think of in private when no man sees us? What do we think of in church when we seem so grave & serious? What are we thinking of at this moment while these words pass our eyes? Jesus knows. Jesus sees. Jesus records.” ~ J.C. Ryle

“Never do or say anything outside the presence of your spouse that you would not readily do or say right in front of his or her face.” ~ Tommy Alderman

- 3) **Discussion Question:** Understanding that your marriage union is supposed to mirror the union of Christ and His church, how does that affect your view of your marriage, both as it is today *and* as it should be going forward?

- 4) **Discussion Question:** Here's another way to look at it: how should the knowledge that you, as a believer, are united with Christ affect your relationship with your spouse? How should it affect the way you speak with one another? The things you do, whether together or apart?

Consider these verses: **[Exercise discretion here. Ensure conversations remain respectful & do not glorify sin.]**

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ~ 1 Corinthians 6:15–18 (ESV)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ~ 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 (ESV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ~ Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

- 5) **Discussion Question:** Bluntly stated: according to Christ, lust is equivalent to adultery. Therefore, since pornography feeds lust, do you think pornography is equivalent to adultery? Why or why not?

[Exercise discretion here. Ensure conversations remain respectful & do not glorify sin.]

"Contrary to popular culture, fellas, it's not 'okay to look.' Don't believe me? Ask your wife." ~ Tommy Alderman

*"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?
~ Job 31:1 (ESV).*

- 6) **Discussion Question:** Pornography is awful, but so is a wandering eye. Men are, by God's design, visually stimulated creatures, whether we're talking about a bowl of seafood gumbo, a piece of chocolate cake, or an attractive female.

[Exercise discretion here. Ensure conversations remain respectful & do not glorify sin.]

Men, we cannot control the chemical/hormonal reactions that take place when our eyes lay long on something attractive to us. But according to Job, what can we control? What are some practical ways we can do that?

Ladies, what are you watching on television? Soap operas and romantic dramas, while perhaps not “pornography” in the commonly understood sense, are designed to ignite the sensual imagination. How about romantic novels? Or when a “buff” man enters the room, do your eyes linger longer than they should?

Men & Ladies – do your comments about people of the opposite sex reflect respect for your spouse? Or do they communicate a lustful heart, understanding that “out of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34)?

*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy **and all slander.**
~ 1 Peter 2:1 (ESV)*

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. ~ James 1:26 (ESV)

*...to **speak evil of no one**, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ~ Titus 3:2 (ESV)*

*“Never, **ever** speak ill of your spouse to another human being.”
~ Tommy Alderman*

7) Discussion Questions:

Men, do you joke to other men about your wife, or make disrespectful comments about her to other people? Do you reveal intimate details to others that should remain between you and your wife?

Ladies, when you are with a group of women and conversation turns to speaking ill of their husbands, do you chime in bringing attention to the faults of your own husband? Do you reveal intimate details to others that should remain between you and your husband?

- 8) Homework:** Look back over the discussion questions from this lesson. If you have been guilty in any of the areas mentioned, repent to the Lord, *and* to your spouse. Take time to *seriously* examine what each of you thinks the current state of your marriage communicates to the world about Christ and the church.

Note: Your pastors and small group leaders are available for counsel if you need help.

[Close in prayer.]

Notes:

Lesson Eleven:

Love and Respect (Ephesians 5:33)

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. ~ Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)

[Open in prayer, asking the Lord to open hearts and minds to comprehend the lesson.]

In verse 33, Paul, in a sense, sums up all of what he's said in verses 22-32: "Bottom line: Men, love your wives. Women, respect your husbands."

- 1) **Discussion Questions:** Why do you think Paul chose to sum everything up in this way? Why is "love your wives as yourself" the bottom line for men? Why is "respect your husbands" the bottom line for women?

Remember the following from Lesson Four?

In the book of Genesis, after the Serpent tempted Eve and she ate and gave some to Adam, which he ate, the Lord pronounced judgment on all of them. He first cursed the Serpent, then He cursed Eve in the following way:

*To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. **Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.**" ~ Genesis 3:16 (ESV)*

A little later in Genesis, in chapter 4, after Cain brought an unacceptable offering to the Lord, the Lord said this to Cain:

*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. **Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.**" ~ Genesis 4:7 (ESV)*

Also, do you remember discussing the “works of the flesh” in Lesson One?

- 2) Exercise:** Turn to Galatians 5:19-21, or flip back to Lesson One, and write again the “works of the flesh” below:

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, and the curse that resulted from it, men’s natural bent is not toward loving their wives, but toward dominating them. On top of that, look at that list of works of the flesh!

- 3) Exercise:** Which of the works of the flesh make “love” almost impossible, if not completely impossible outside of Christ?

Women are likewise cursed, in that their natural bent is to resist submission to their husbands, which resistance is heightened by the man’s natural bent toward domination. Further, women battle the same works of the flesh as do men!

- 4) Exercise:** Which of the works of the flesh make “submission” almost impossible, or at least *very* difficult?

So, what are we to do? How can we possibly overcome both the results of the curse, and the nagging works of the flesh with which we constantly battle?

The answer, at least in part, is again in Lesson One of this study.

- 5) Exercise:** write Ephesians 5:18 in the space below:

- 6) Exercise:** Turn to Galatians 5:22-23, or flip back to Lesson One, and write again the “fruit of the Spirit” below:

Of course, verse 18 is the key to the whole thing, which is why it comes before everything else! Unless a man or woman is born again, they *cannot* display the fruit of the Spirit and are doomed to live in the flesh, from which nothing good can come:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ~ Romans 7:18 (ESV)

... among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ~ Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ~ Romans 8:5–6 (ESV)

Battling the flesh, the great tug-of-war, is a full-time endeavor for Christians, though the eternal battle was won at the cross:

*And those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified** the flesh with its passions and desires. ~ Galatians 5:24 (ESV)*

Although “have crucified” indicates a past, completed action, we know from Christ, Himself, that the “old man” refuses to die for good:

*And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me.” ~ Luke 9:23 (ESV)*

According to Christ, we must die to ourselves **every single day**. And if you are honest with yourself...honest about how often *your* flesh rears its ugly head...you know that’s true. Bottom line: to be filled with the Spirit...to manifest the fruit of the Spirit and have victory over the works of the flesh...we *must* die to ourselves **every single day**.

What does that look like, in some practical terms? Dr. John MacArthur explains:

Death to self is critical. And that’s a spiritual reality, right? “Take up your cross and follow Me. Die daily. Be crucified with Christ. Look not on your own things.” This is really the starting point of this kind of love. You’ve got to do away with yourself. You might think about it this way; here’s how you could describe dying to self:

“When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set aside, and you sting and hurt with the insult of the oversight but your heart is happy being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself but take it all in patient, loving silence, that is dying to self. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face-to-face with folly and extravagance and insensibility and endure it as Jesus did, that is

dying to self. When you are content with any food, any offering, any clothing, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in a conversation or record your own good works or itch after commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you see another prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor question God why your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less importance than yourself and humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion and no resentment rising in your heart, that is dying to self.”

7) Self-Reflection: As you read through that, do you see yourself in there, responding in the flesh rather than dying to self? If so, do you recognize anything in there that resembles your marriage now, or maybe, hopefully, as it used to be? Write your answers below or write out a brief prayer to God thanking Him for what He’s done in you and in your marriage during the course of this study.

8) Homework: Spend time with your spouse this week talking about what the Lord has done in your marriage over the weeks we’ve been meeting together. Vocalize to one another what you’d each like for Him to do, or continue to do, in the weeks, months, and years to come. Commit to working toward those goals and commit to praying and asking the Lord to help you. Pray for one another.

[Close in Prayer]

Notes:

Lesson Twelve:

Recap and Conclusion (Ephesians 5:18-33)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. ~ Ephesians 5:18–33 (ESV)

[Open in prayer.]

Over the course of the last eleven weeks, twelve weeks counting today, we've looked at the biblical foundations of marriage. Below is a brief summation or recap of what we've learned. Review the previous lessons. Jot down a few thoughts about how each of the lessons impacted you or your marriage, or write one or more things you learned about yourself or your spouse, or one or more things you committed to do because of that lesson:

- 1) **Lesson One:** To have the sort of marriage described in Ephesians 18-33, husbands and wives **must** be born again, **must** constantly battle the works of the flesh, **must** manifest the fruit of the spirit. **There is no other way.** (verse 18)

- 2) **Lesson Two:** husbands and wives, because of being born again and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, **must** be joyful and thankful people. (verses 19-20)

- 3) **Lesson Three:** husbands and wives **must** live lives of mutual submission to one another and toward all other believers. (verse 21)

- 4) **Lesson Four:** wives **must** be submissive to their husbands *in the same way* they are to be submissive to Christ, *in the same way* that the church is to be submissive to Christ, *in the same way* that Christ is submissive to the Father. (verse 22)

- 5) **Lesson Five:** husbands and wives **must** understand biblical headship, understanding that it has *nothing* to do with value, but *everything* to do with roles and responsibilities. (verses 23-24)

- 6) **Lesson Six:** husbands **must** love their wives *in the same ways* that Christ loves His Bride. (verse 25)

- 7) **Lesson Seven:** husbands **must** sanctify their wives *in the same ways* that Christ sanctifies His Bride, and husbands **must** sanctify themselves to be able to do that. (verses 26-27)

- 8) **Lesson Eight:** husbands **must** nourish and cherish their wives *in the same ways* that they nourish and cherish their own bodies, and *in the same ways* that Christ nourishes and cherishes His Bride. (verses 28-30)

9) **Lesson Nine:** husbands and wives **must** live their lives as “one flesh,” rather than as two individuals who happen to live in the same house. (verse 31)

10) **Lesson Ten:** husbands and wives **must** understand the gravity and magnitude of the *fact* that their marriage represents to the world the relationship of Christ and His church. (verse 32)

11) **Lesson 11:** husbands and wives **must** understand that because of our fallen natures and our flesh, husbands are called to do *the most difficult thing* for men to do, and wives are called to do *the most difficult thing* for women to do, and therefore each **must** die to self *every single day*. (verse 33)

[Note to Leaders: ask people to share testimonies about how the Lord has worked in their marriages through this study. If so inclined, ask people how they and their spouses plan to work toward developing and nurturing more Biblical marriages in the coming weeks, months, and years.]

[Close in prayer.]

Notes: