

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

Table of Contents

Preface _____ **2**
Notes to Group Leaders _____ **3**
Lesson One: Being Filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) _____ **4**
Lesson Two: Living with Joy and Gratitude (Ephesians 5:19-20) _____ **9**
Lesson Three: The Foundation: Mutual Submission (Ephesians 5:21) _____ **14**
Lesson Four: Submissive Wives (Ephesians 5:22) _____ **21**
Lesson Five: Headship in the Church and in the Home (Ephesians 5:23-24) _____ **28**
Lesson Six: Loving Husbands (Ephesians 5:25) _____ **34**
Lesson Seven: Sanctifying Husbands (Ephesians 5:26-27) _____ **41**
Lesson Eight: Husbands Who Nourish & Cherish Their Wives (Eph 5:28-30) _____ **44**
Lesson Nine: One Flesh (Ephesians 5:31) _____ **49**
Lesson Ten: The Mystery Revealed (Ephesians 5:32) _____ **55**
Lesson Eleven: Love and Respect (Ephesians 5:33) _____ **63**
Lesson Twelve: Recap and Conclusion (Ephesians 5:18-33) _____ **64**

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!**

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?

[Answers: 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.
- b. **Enmity and strife:** causing combativeness and argumentativeness destroying peace in the home
- 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. **Drunkness:** 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:

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:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

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 “joy” and “happiness”?

- 2) According to the following verses, what is the source of a believer’s joy?

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?

[Answer: 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?

*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 out loud):*

*“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:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

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 that deal with 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 verse 21 and the command to be filled with the Spirit in verse 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?

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:

Christian Marriage – Leader’s Guide

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 verse 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 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. 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 back 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 key 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.]