

Finding Security and Significance

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Ephesians 5:21-33

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If you're married, are you in the crazy cycle right now? Actually, this can be more like a selfishness spiral where unmet needs turn into unbridled nastiness.

Many can relate to comedian George Burns who said, *"I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury."*

Rodney Dangerfield, who died in 2004, was known as the man who "gets no respect." This is what he said about his own marriage, *"My wife and I were happy for twenty years. Then we met."*

And Henny Youngman was the master of the one-liner. His most popular put-down was, *"Take my wife...please, take her."* He also said, *"The secret of a happy marriage remains a secret."*

That reminds me of a golden anniversary party for a married couple. The husband was very moved by the occasion and wanted to tell his wife what he thought of her. She was very hard of hearing, however, and often misunderstood what he said. With many family members and friends gathered around, he toasted her and said, *"My dear wife, after 50 years I've found you tried and true!"* Everyone clapped for them, but his wife was a little irritated and asked, *"What did you say?"* So he repeated it again: *"AFTER 50 YEARS, I'VE FOUND YOU TRIED AND TRUE!"* The wife, now visibly upset, shouted back, *"Well, let me tell you something – after 50 years I'm tired of you, too!"*

It's easy for married couples to get tired of each other by settling into predictable routines where both spouses stop listening and loving.

How do you get off this marital merry-go-round of shaming and blaming, of put-downs and one-upping each other? Is there a secret to a happy marriage, where both spouses find security and significance in a tried and true relationship? Is it really possible to have less friction and fighting and actually have a fulfilling marriage?

Last weekend, we learned about marriage as it's meant to be from Genesis 2 and established this truth: *Because marriage matters to God, we must do marriage His*

way. You achieve this by seeing your spouse as your companion, as one who completes you, and as one you are to live in communion with. It's essential to *leave* and *cleave* so the Holy Spirit can *weave* your lives into one. This will prevent you from *grieving* God by breaking your vows. If you want to watch the sermon or read the full-text manuscript simply go to edgewoodbaptist.net.

Today, we'll discover the secret to marriage is to learn and live out the unique roles and responsibilities God gives to husbands and wives. We could summarize the sermon in a sentence: *A ministry mindset in marriage means serving your spouse.*

Preliminary Points

- A good marriage is more than being with the right person; it's *being* the right person.
- If you are single, divorced or widowed, you may feel a message on marriage doesn't apply to you. Actually, whether married or not, we must reclaim marriage as a gift from God because it has been demeaned, denounced, discouraged and redefined by many in our culture. Hebrews 13:4 says, "***Let marriage be held in honor among all.***" Our topic next weekend will be, "Single and Satisfied?"
- If you are in an abusive and dangerous relationship, please find a safe place and get some help.

Submit to One Another

If you have a Bible nearby, please turn to Ephesians 5. Verse 21 begins by addressing both spouses: "***Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.***" It is unacceptable for anyone to exalt themselves as better than anyone else. This is similar to Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:3: "***Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.***" We are called to humbly submit to our spouses by focusing on their interests, concerns, and needs. This requires a servant attitude where we lay our rights and ambition aside.

Before we dive in, I'm going to borrow a metaphor of marriage from Tim and Kathy Keller. From now on, when you think of marriage, think of the image of cultivating a garden. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, the Apostle Paul said, "***I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth...he who plants and he who waters***

are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building."

A good gardener breaks up the ground and plants the seed. The gardener proactively cares for what he has planted by watering, fertilizing, weeding, and pruning in order to enjoy the harvest to come. If you want a good garden, it will take an enormous amount of work and constant attention. Generally, good gardeners don't go a day without getting out in their garden so it doesn't get away from them. They're especially focused on pulling weeds so they don't choke their precious plants. One author says, *"A master gardener is someone who carefully monitors the condition of a garden and judiciously acts to ensure it's well being."* Good gardens, like good marriages, don't happen by accident. They take work.

"Marriage is not like sod you buy and bring home and roll out and it's ready to go. A lot of people enter marriage thinking since they found the right person everything's going to be right. When couples start having conflict, it's easy to think the problem is the particular person you're married to." Actually, the problem is there are two sinners who are striving to become one. Like a garden, your marriage will take an enormous amount of time, skill and attention to cultivate. Here's how they say it, *"You've got to be in it all the time...you can't just plant it and come back in three months and expect it to be there...gardens take work. No matter the weather."*

Our culture teaches people to marry for happiness while the Bible says marriage is a reenactment of the gospel. Tim Keller puts it like this: *"The purpose of marriage is to help your spouse become his or her future glory self through sacrificial service."*

This is counter cultural because most enter marriage with this mindset: *"I'll be the spouse I ought to be if and to the degree you're the spouse you ought to be."* But if you're in a gospel reenactment by helping your spouse become his or her future glory self through sacrificial service, you will say, *"I will be the spouse I ought to be whether you are being the spouse you ought to be or not because Jesus gave me spousal love like that. He loved me not because I was lovely, but in order to make me lovely...and I'm going to do that for you."*

A ministry mindset in marriage means serving your spouse.

In the marriage relationship, it is the husband's privilege to portray the headship of Christ over the church by his loving and sacrificial leadership. The wife's

privilege is to symbolically represent the church in its submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head. These divinely appointed marital roles serve as symbols of the mysterious and beautiful relationship between Christ and His church.

Gardening roles differ for husbands and wives, but the principle of submissive humility is the same for both. We see how these different responsibilities are fleshed out in Ephesians 5:22-33.

“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.”

Responsibilities of the Wife

Only 3 ½ verses are addressed to wives, while 8 ½ are written to husbands. This passage teaches that the wife has one primary responsibility and is found in verses 22-24: wives are to *submit* to their husbands, as to the Lord. Let me be quick to say children are to obey as seen in Ephesians 6:1, while wives are to lovingly and voluntarily submit. Some of you may be tempted to tune out or turn off the sermon because it might sound like the ranting of an ancient male chauvinist. Let me remind you this is how God set it up.

However, it does help to realize the emphasis is upon submitting to Christ.

- ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”*** (verse 22)
- ***“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*** (verse 24)

The central and common element in these verses is Jesus. The idea is this: *Being devoted to Christ, in a like manner, submit to your husbands.* The wife is to be subject to her husband not because he is such a wonderful creature, but because she has a previous and primary relationship with her Lord. What the Lord asks of her is to yield to her husband. Submission to your husband is to be a reflection and outworking of your submission to Christ. Or to say it another way – a wife is to submit because of the Lordship of Christ and the headship of her husband. 1 Corinthians 11:3: ***“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.”***

Kathy Keller works it out this way: *“Gospel reenactment sounds good, but that means, as in any play, the players have to take on roles. In marriage, the husband and wife both take on the role of Jesus. The husband takes on the role of Jesus as He is the head of the church. The wife takes on the role of Jesus as the Son submissive to the Father for the sake of our salvation.”*

This is really the fulfillment of Genesis 2:20, where we read the first wife was created to be a **“helper”** for her husband. She is not to be in charge, but neither is she to be bossed around. Instead, she is to be a loyal helper who willingly submits to her husband out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, how are you doing on this? Are you striving to submit, or striving towards strife?

1 Peter 3:1 adds: ***“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands...”*** To submit comes from an old military word meaning to voluntarily line up under for the sake of order. The primary idea is to give up one’s own rights. Here’s a helpful definition: *“To rank yourself under someone else in order to lift them up and build them up.”* Some time ago Pastor Tim helped me when he added that it’s an attitude of cooperation because marriage moves into chaos so quickly. It’s not so much subservience as it is willingly lining up under the husband’s leadership. It’s also a command in the present tense, meaning it’s something that must become a continual practice.

Notice, wives are not called to submit to someone else’s husband. Let’s be clear this does not mean husbands are better than wives. It’s a matter of roles in the relationship. Husbands and wives are equal before God but they are not identical.

The key to developing a spirit of submission is to first be surrendered and submitted to the Lord. To say it another way: You will not be able to submit to anyone unless you have first surrendered to the Savior as Colossians 3:18 says: ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”***

Submission will always be a struggle because the tension goes back to Genesis 3:16 where we read in the New Living Translation: ***“And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”***

Since it’s no doubt tough for a woman to listen to a man speak about submission, I thought it would be helpful to hear how my wife Beth fleshes this out in our relationship.

Sometimes we Christian wives believe the worldview that submission is a curse. It is not a curse. Actually, submitting to our husbands is designed to be a blessing.

According to Ephesians 5:22-24, marriage is intended to reflect Christ and the church. The Bible clearly teaches that as the Church submits to Christ, wives are to submit to our husbands. It is a picture of His love relationship with the Church, not a curse on the Church.

That sounds great, but what does that mean for us as wives? Do we have a say in marriage? Do our thoughts and points of view matter? Does it mean that our husbands control us and treat us without dignity?

Wives have a lot to offer. Women and men are both created in the image of God. He has given women gifts, abilities, intelligence, insights and ideas. Some women have a lot of education, are well-read, informed and pretty sharp. As helpers to our husbands, we bring all of this to our marriage relationship. Discussions that include both husband and wife sharing their points of view is healthy.

The trouble is when we come to a point of not being able to agree...which happens every now and then 😊. [I’m not sure what she’s talking about]

Author Betsy Corning writes, “If you come to a point where you just cannot agree, and your husband is not asking you to sin, then you are to yield your will to his...this is God’s perfect design.”

Brian and I don't always see things eye to eye, we have to talk it out. I have some very strong opinions and thoughts. Honestly, I usually think that I'm right and need to persuade him to think my way. But ultimately, it comes down to intentionally trusting God. After sharing all I have to say, and we cannot agree, then I must choose to trust God and yield my will to Brian's...it is God's design. We made a vow at our wedding that we would hold fast to God's way of doing marriage, so that settles it.

Please hear me on this. Submitting to Brian is not something that comes naturally to me. It is a process of intentionally trusting God. It is sometimes work. It is always a choice. It is following God's way of moving forward, as one, in marriage. It is my way of obeying Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3...of respecting Brian and honoring God.

A ministry mindset in marriage means serving your spouse.

The Husband's Responsibility

Now, it's the husband's turn. If wives are to reflect the submission of the church to Christ, what would you expect Paul to command the husbands to do? I would have thought he'd say something like this: Husbands are to manifest the headship of Jesus Christ over His church, and thus they are to be the spiritual leaders of their wives. If wives are commanded to submit, then the husbands surely must be instructed to lead. But they are not. Instead of commanding husbands to *lead* their wives, Paul instructs us to *love* our wives. Only as you love your wife, can you provide servant leadership for her.

Paul's main point is obvious – he repeats the command for husbands to love their wives three times in this passage. He knows husbands are not the best listeners so he wants to make sure we get the message! Here's the best definition I've found on what this kind of love is: "*Love that acts for the best good and promotes the well-being of the other person, demanding nothing in return.*" This kind of love gives freely, sacrificially and unconditionally...regardless of the response.

I like how John Piper puts it: "*Christ-like, humble, loving, sacrificial men are to take primary responsibility for leadership, provision and protection. And women are called to come alongside these men, support that leadership, and advance the kingdom of Christ with the full range of her gifts in the paths laid out in Scripture.*"

I see four ways a husband is to love his wife from this passage.

1. With sacrificial love. Listen to Ephesians 5:25: ***“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*** The word “*as*” reveals my marriage model is the sacrificial love of Christ which was demonstrated in how He “*gave Himself up*” on the cross “*for*” us. Jesus died as the final sacrifice as our substitute. A husband must take his cue from Christ – it’s not about rights and power, but about relationship and sacrifice.

Two other passages come to mind which help husbands see what sacrificial love is *not* like.

- **Husbands are not to be harsh.** Colossians 3:19: ***“Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”***
- **Husbands are not to be haughty.** 1 Peter 3:7: ***“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...”***

Husbands, when is the last time you sacrificed something for your wife? When did you give up or give in? Are you willing to die for her? Better yet, in what ways are you living for her right now?

2. With sanctifying love. 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.”*** The word “*sanctify*” means, “*to set apart and be holy.*” The word “*cleansed*” is the idea of “*freeing from filth.*” Here’s a literal translation of verse 27: ***“That He might Himself present unto Himself the church glorious.”***

Just as Jesus will present us in splendor, without spot or stain, so husbands are to help make their wives holy. Fellow husbands, God calls us to love and to lay down our lives so that our wives grow in godliness.

One of our key roles is to help our wives reach maturity in Christ, building them up every chance we get. It involves relating to your wife as a sister in Christ, not just as your mate. Husbands, how are you doing in this regard?

3. With satisfying love. 5:28-31: ***“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.'" Just as we feed and care for our own bodies – well, most of the time – we are called not only to provide a positive spiritual environment but also to care for our wives physically and emotionally as well.

The word "*nourishes*" focuses on internal provision and means, "*to bring to maturity.*" A godly husband helps his wife reach her full potential in Christ. The word "*cherishes*" means, "*to soften with heat and has the idea of external protection through tender care, concern and comfort.*" I'm called to feed Beth's soul enabling her to grow in godliness and I'm to fertilize the soil of her garden to produce a good harvest.

I used to have a fertilizer spreader but it broke a couple years ago. Last spring I decided to fertilize our lawn by hand walking back and forth simply throwing fertilizer on the grass. This was a terrible idea because I ended up killing the grass in many spots because I inadvertently used too much.

This year I was thrilled my son-in-law Brad gave me a spreader to use. I bought some fertilizer, figured out what setting to use, and sailed through the lawn with this top-notch spreader. In my haste to finish the task, I neglected to read the instructions and ended up with lush green stripes right next to sections that are dull and lifeless. I found out I didn't put enough fertilizer on and didn't apply it like I should have. Even with the right equipment, because I didn't read the directions, I have another loser lawn.

Earlier this week I decided to watch a YouTube video about how to correctly feed and fertilize a lawn. The guy gave two distinct cautions – never apply it by hand and make sure to overlap when you're spreading fertilizer. To further my shame about not having lawn game, this landscape expert ended the video with these words: "*Whatever you do, don't do it by hand! You'll burn out your lawn.*"

Listen. You'll burn out your marriage if you try to do it all in your own strength without the tools and tasks God has given you. Unless you follow God's directions, your marriage will be uneven and unattractive.

The word "*husband*" comes from "*husbandman*," which meant, "*one who tills the soil.*" Later it came to mean one who holds the house together, like a manager who spends his time and resources wisely. Another image is that of a gardener who cultivates the soil and keeps the weeds out. We need to be planting seeds of

security, using the fertilizer of faithfulness and watching to make sure weeds are not allowed to choke out what is growing. As husbands, our responsibility is to love our wives by holding things together in the home and providing an environment for growth and fruitfulness. One pastor put it like this: *“If your garden is full of weeds, don’t curse the soil. Take a look at your own soul and get back to work pulling weeds.”*

A husband is not inherently better or more special than his spouse. We see this in Ephesians 5:31, which is actually a quote from Genesis 2:24 and repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5: ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*** We’re equal in spiritual footing and eternal importance because we are partners who become one flesh. Whatever each does to the other, he does to himself or herself.

Christian husbands and wives are ***“heirs together of the grace of life.”*** We are sharers together in salvation. Romans 8:17 calls us ***“joint heirs with Christ.”*** Malachi 2:14 says, ***“...yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”***

Some time ago I listened to a sermon about husbands by Kenny Anderson called, *“Bullies and Bums.”* He calls these extremes distortions of God’s order. Here are ten I wrote down. Guys, which column most describes you?

Bully

Tyrannical
Abusive
Rabid Dog
Hurts
Heartless
Attacks
Hovers Over
Brute
Scary
Indignant

Bum

Timid
Passive
Scared Puppy
Hides
Spineless
Abandons
Hides Under
Baby
Scared
Indifferent

Instead of being bullies or bums, husbands are called to be loving leaders. I’m to be bold and yet broken, caring but not a coward. In short, Beth needs me to be a tender warrior as I lovingly lead her and our family.

I like how John Piper defines headship: *“The divine calling of a husband to take the primary responsibility for Christ-like servant leadership, protection and provision in the home.”*

Often I tell guys when they ask for dating advice to remember their girlfriend is first and foremost their sister in Christ. The same applies to marriage. Fellow husbands, because your wife is your sister in Christ, pray for her, love her, encourage her, and serve with her.

4. With symbolic love. When God brings a man and woman together in marriage, they are to be a reflection of the mysterious relationship between Jesus as groom and the church as His bride. We see this in verse 32: ***“This mystery is profound, and I am saying it refers to Christ and the church.”*** The word ***“mystery”*** refers to a symbolic secret and ***“profound”*** means *“great in size and stature.”* One commentator translates it like this: *“This mystery is a great one.”* When both husbands and wives fulfill their roles and responsibilities in marriage, their relationship symbolizes the sweet love of Christ and the submission of His church to His leadership.

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Love and Respect

Verse 33 gives us a concise summary of the entire passage in a very personalized way. There’s not a more definitive statement of God’s ideal for marriage than this: ***“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”*** J.B. Philips paraphrases it this way: *“In practice what I have said amounts to this...”* The word ***“however”*** can be translated as, *“nevertheless, over and above.”* If you don’t remember anything else, remember this. J. Vernon McGee says this brings the *“romantic into the realm of reality.”*

The word ***“let”*** indicates this is a command and ***“each one of you”*** shows it applies to everyone who is married. The tense indicates these are present imperatives, meaning these commands are to be continuously followed.

I’m thankful Paul gives us such a concise summary. If you’re a husband, you must love your wife. If you’re a wife, you must respect your husband.

1. Husbands are to love their wives. Husbands are to love unconditionally and sacrificially, putting his wife’s needs before his own. He is to never leave, cheat,

beat or belittle his bride. He is to be attentive and affectionate and meet her need for security.

2. Wives are to respect their husbands. Wives are to reinforce and meet a husband's need for significance by noticing him, valuing him, and esteeming him. Make sure you are celebrating what he does well by speaking well of him.

I like how Eggerichs frames the question when a couple is having conflict: "*What's the issue when the issue isn't the issue?*" The real issue is often the wife is not being loved and the husband is not being respected.

Here are some quotes from his very helpful book, *Love and Respect*.

- *Wives are made to love, want to love, and expect love. Husbands are made to be respected, want respect, and expect respect.*
- *When a husband feels disrespected, it is especially hard to love his wife. When a wife feels unloved, it is especially hard to respect her husband.*
- *Without love from him, she reacts without respect toward him; without respect from her, he reacts without love toward her.*

And this leads to the "crazy cycle," which we started the sermon with. But we don't want to end with this. Notice both husbands and wives are to work at fulfilling their responsibilities regardless of how their spouse responds. We can't say, "*When he starts loving me, then I'll respect him.*" Nor can we say, "*When she starts respecting me, I'll begin loving her.*" Somebody told me this a long time ago, and it fits here: *my response is my responsibility*. I must focus on what I must do, regardless of how my spouse is fulfilling his or her role.

The way to stop the crazy cycle is for one spouse to make the first move and begin living out your responsibility. Eggerichs refers to this as the "Energizing Cycle."

Action Steps

1. Get some help. Here's a list of ten resources that can help prepare you for marriage and live out your roles if you are already married.

- *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs
- *A Christ-centered Wedding: Rejoicing in the Gospel on Your Big Day* by Katherine Parks and Linda Strode

- *5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman
- *Sacred Marriage* by Gary Thomas
- *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: 7 Questions to Ask Before You Get Married* by Les and Leslie Parrot
- *Cultivating a Healthy Marriage* by Tim and Kathy Keller (podcast)
- *The Crazy Cycle* by Emerson Eggerichs (Right Now Media)
- *Love Talk* by Les and Leslie Parrot (Right Now Media)
- *His Needs, Her Needs* by Bill and Joyce Harley (Right Now Media)
- *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim and Kathy Keller (Right Now Media)

2. Obey with actions even if you don't feel like it. Here's a paraphrase of one of C.S. Lewis' quotes: *"Do not waste time bothering whether you feel love for your spouse; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."*

3. Husbands, get in the habit of saying, "I love you" to your wife and show that you do every day.

4. Wives, get in the habit of saying, "I respect you" and show that you do every day.

5. Practice saying "Please forgive me" because you're going to need it.

The Ultimate Marriage Builder

This section of Scripture, with its high standards, follows immediately after Paul's teaching about being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18: ***"Instead, be filled with the Spirit."*** Only as the Holy Spirit controls our life, can we have the will and the ability to obey His commands. The filling of the Holy Spirit leads to a garden filled with the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."***

It's not surprising the titles "Lord," "Christ," and "Savior" are mentioned in some fashion 14 times in this passage! Psalm 127:1 says, ***"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."***

Adam had to give part of himself in order to get a bride, but Christ gave all of Himself to purchase His bride at the cross. God opened Adam's side, but sinful people pierced the second Adam's side.

If you don't know Christ through the new birth, you need to get saved today. There's no way you can have a marriage of oneness without knowing the One who died in your place, as your sin substitute.

If you have never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, it's time to do that right now.

You could pray this prayer with me.

Jesus, I realize I'm a selfish sinner. I repent of how I've been living and want to go in Your direction. Thank You for dying in my place on the cross as my substitute and for rising from the dead on the third day. I believe and now I receive You into my life. As my Lord, enable me to follow Your ways in my marriage or in my singleness. If there's anything that needs to change in my life, please change it so I can reflect You to the world around me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

If you trusted Christ today, tell someone about it and then send us an email at info@edgewoodbaptist.net.

May God be with you until we meet again.