

Healthy Habits in Marriage

Good morning. If you have your Bible, would you turn with me to Ephesians 5. It is on page 919 of the Bible under the chairs. As always, you can also follow along using our church app which has the sermon notes provided in there for you.

We are continuing our series, Intimate Connection, as we have been focusing on different aspects of the marriage relationship. And today, we are going to focus on healthy habits in marriage. So here you go. Are you ready? Here are 5 healthy habits for marriage:

1. Eat at least one meal together.
2. Say, "I love you" every day.
3. Share a bank account.
4. Go to bed together and in the same bed.
5. Laugh together.

Alright, there you have it. I think we are done here. Everybody good? I hope the answer is no. Are any of those things bad? I don't think so. In fact, I would hope you are already doing those things as a married couple. But I think we should all be after more than a few tips and tricks. I hope that none of you came this morning to hear Alex's top tips for marriage. That, I assure you, would help no one. No, we are all here to hear from God's eternal truth about how we can have healthy marriages. And that is why we turn our attention to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, a passage we are probably all very familiar with yet not quite sure what to do with it, especially in our cultural context.

Before we read the text, we first need to understand the context of this passage. We don't open Ephesians, and the first words Paul writes are, "Wives, submit to your own husbands." There has been a lot of ink spilled before this verse, right? In

the broadest overview of Ephesians, Paul spends the first three chapters of this letter **explaining** the gospel and the last three chapters **applying** the gospel. In chapters 1-3, he writes about how God chose us for himself for his glory (1), he made the dead in sin alive in Christ and the Jews and Gentiles united in faith (2), and this mystery of Jews and Gentiles being heirs to the kingdom is now revealed (3).

In chapters 4-6, Paul then applies the gospel to the church as a whole: to be united as one body, to put off the old self and put on the new, and to be filled by the Spirit (4-5:21). Then he applies the gospel to specific relationships that have been broken by the curse of sin: husbands/wives (5:22-33), children/fathers (6:1-4), and slaves/masters (6:5-9). He finishes the letter with the call to wear spiritual armor for this kind of heavenly warfare.

With that context of the book in mind, would you follow along as I read Ephesians 5:22-33?

READ Ephesians 5:22-33

Would you pray with me?...

INTRODUCTION

[ILLUSTRATION]

Hannah and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary last weekend **[Picture]**. Just a couple of young'ins there. We were able to get away for a few days and enjoy a cabin in the woods, our favorite thing. But before we left, we dug out our wedding videos to watch with our kids. Our daughter, Evelyn, is 5, and our son, Noah, is 2. They had never seen these videos before. We all sat on the couch to show them the videos.

It was such a special time to share that with them. Evelyn's face just lit up the whole time smiling at the pretty dress Mommy was wearing. Noah was a little more confused as to what was going on, but he was just excited to

see us on TV. But what really captured Noah's attention and stuck in his memory was a video from our reception.

My Mom and I did not do the typical Mother/Son dance. We don't always like to do things by the book. So, instead, we surprised everyone with a Lip Sync Battle. We both chose 2 songs to perform but did not tell each other what they were. I really hadn't planned anything for the performance beforehand. I knew the words of the song I chose and then just went with the flow. At one particular moment in the song, I had the bright idea to slide on my knees towards Hannah, reaching out to her. What could possibly go wrong, right?

Well, here's the thing. Our reception was in a barn with really rough tiled flooring. So, when I slid, I banged my knee on the floor, slightly tore a hole in my pants at the knee as the tile scrapped it. We kept rewinding the video to watch that moment, and that really stuck with Noah. He started saying, "I don't want to get married." And I said, "Aw, why not buddy?" He said, "I don't wanna hurt my knee." I was like, "No, that's not how that works. You don't bang up your knee just because you get married. Daddy just banged his knee because he's silly."

In his mind, he had made this whole connection. That marriage means banging up your knee. There is no other way around it. He saw it happen. And therefore, every marriage begins with scrapped knees. Because he misunderstood the context, his view of marriage was all wrong. And this happens to us all the time.

We can allow the mistakes of others to define our view of marriage, whether it be our own parents or other people we know. We can believe that their poor example must be true of all marriages. Especially when we see the Bible's example misused. Or when we see it distorted or abused. Rather than throw out the bad example, we throw out the whole system.

And I believe this passage in Ephesians is one of those texts that we either try to dismiss or maybe even apologize for. For many, we want to pretend like these

verses are not in the Bible. Maybe as soon as we started reading the text, you got a little uncomfortable. You started to feel tense.

If you were to ask our culture their views on this passage, they will tell you it belittles women, glorifies the patriarchy, and should be flat-out rejected. But this is not some invention of man. This is God's good design. And rightly lived out, it is the healthiest habit we could pursue.

That's our main idea this morning: **Living out God's design for marriage is the healthiest habit we can pursue.**

What is it that God has designed? What are the healthy habits he has set up for us? 1) Joyfully Submit to Your Husband, 2) Sacrificially Love Your Wife, and 3) Longingly Look to Christ.

JOYFULLY SUBMIT TO YOUR HUSBAND

Let's begin by looking at the healthy habit for wives: **Joyfully Submit to Your Husband.**

Look with me at verses 22 through 24 again:

Ephesians 5:22-24

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

As I said earlier, context is so important because in the Greek text, verse 22 does not contain the word submit. It says, "And wives to your own husbands as to the

Lord.” This is because Paul is applying what he said in the previous verse to the wives. What did he say in verse 21?

Ephesians 5:21

²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul spoke about Christians being filled with the Spirit, which should result in a mutual submission in the church. We are to submit (or another word there is to “be subject”) to one another. We are to give up our rights for other believers around us. We are to put the interest of others above our own. We see this mutual submission lived out even between pastors and their congregations. Pastors submit to their congregation for accountability and the congregation submits to the pastors in following their leadership. But even in this mutual submission, there are still distinct roles. Pastors have a unique responsibility than the congregation and the congregation different than the pastors. Mutual submission does not rule out or negate distinctions.

Though there is mutual submission among Christians in the church, Paul gives specifics for how this works in the unique relationship of wives and husbands. He says in verse 24 that **as the church submits to Christ**, wives are to submit to their husbands. What does this mean? Maybe we should start by addressing what this submission is NOT.

NOT Submission to All Men

Paul does not say that all women are to submit to all men. He specifically says wives are to submit to their own husbands. Not every man in the world, not all husbands, but your own husband. And Paul gives the grounds for why this is in verse 23. Because God has established your husband to be your head. He is the representative of the family. The primary responsibility for the family falls on his shoulders. If something goes wrong in the family, God will look to the husband as the head to give an answer. We see this in Genesis 3. When Eve eats the fruit

from the tree, she gives it to Adam and he also eats. When God shows up, he calls to Adam first.

NOT Replacing Christ

Secondly, this submission is not replacing Christ with your husband. Yes, Paul says to submit to your own husband **as to** the Lord, but this does not mean replacing your husband **as** Lord. Jesus is the ultimate head. He is the perfect Lord. What Paul is saying is that with the same heart and attitude you would submit to Christ, you are to submit to your husband.

NOT Blind Ignorance

This means that submission is also not blind ignorance. Paul is not saying that a wife should follow her husband blindly or that she has no say. You do not leave your brain at the altar of your wedding. We know this because Peter also writes about submission to authority. And he addresses wives and husbands in 1 Peter 3.

1 Peter 3:1-2

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, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Here, Peter says, “Yes, you are to submit to your husband, but even if they are not obeying the word (whether because they are an unbeliever or a believer walking in sin), they should see your respectful and pure conduct and be won over.” If your husband is asking you to sin, you say no.

So, what is this submission Paul speaks of then? Paul gives us a clue into that in verse 24. He says,

Ephesians 5:24

²⁴ Now **as the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

The model for wives on what submission looks like in marriage is the example of the church. How do we as the church submit to Christ? Joyfully. We joyfully submit to him. The Bible repeatedly talking about rejoicing in the Lord and about giving thanks to him.

Jesus is not after a begrudging, half-hearted submission of his people. He is not twisting our arms or coercing us into submission. He says in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." It is love for Christ that leads to submission. He wants the church, his bride, to see his love and willfully, joyfully submit to his leadership.

In studying this passage, I found **John Piper's definition** on submission to be helpful. He says,

"Submission is an inclination of the will to say yes to the husband's leadership and a disposition of the spirit to support his initiatives."¹

The reason he states it this way is because as we mentioned earlier, a wife is not to blindly follow a husband, nor is she to submit to the husband's every whim and desire, especially if it will lead her to sin. Instead, a wife is to have the inclination, or the desire, to want to say yes to her husband's leadership, but it doesn't mean always saying yes to every decision. And she should have a disposition, or a natural tendency, to want to support his initiatives, but it doesn't always mean every initiative he has will be right.

I think many times when we start to hear the word "submission," we can create all kinds of scenarios in our head about a husband and wife completely

¹ John Piper, Sermon "Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them," <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/husbands-who-love-like-christ-and-the-wives-who-submit-to-them>.

disagreeing and a husband just putting his foot down. But that is not what is going on here. In fact, if the husband is leading his wife the way he should (which we will see in a moment), then it will not look like that at all.

As I said earlier, Hannah and I celebrated 10 years last weekend. That might not be a long time compared to most of you in the room. But I can't think of a time when both of us wholeheartedly disagreed on something, and I just made a decision because "I'm the head." And we have had some difficult decisions to make: like moving up here from GA, buying a house, her quitting her job. But in all of those decisions, we were both seeking the Lord, and we were seeking the Lord together. We both wanted what would honor God and what would be best for the other.

Does that mean that Hannah had no say in any of those decisions? Of course not. God has given Hannah the gift of discernment, a creative and strategic mind, and to ignore her opinion and thoughts would be foolish. Her insights are invaluable and needed as well as her support in the decision. We both desire a good result, but we each have a different role in that decision.

[ILLUSTRATION]

Let me put it another way. There are usually two pilots that fly a plane: the captain and the co-pilot. Both are essential for a safe flight. Both have unique roles and responsibilities before, during, and after the flight. But only one is the captain. Only one bears the primary responsibility for the decisions that are made onboard. If the co-pilot tries to be the captain, there would be a lot of chaos. But if they submit to the leadership of the captain, and fulfill the role they have been given, things will go smoothly. And the captain needs their help to have a successful flight. In a similar way, wives are to submit to their husband and fulfill the role they have been given.

Do you find it hard to submit to your husband? As we saw from the context before our passage, submission is a result of being filled by the Spirit. Wives, you

should be praying daily for the Lord to fill you with his Spirit so that you can joyfully submit to your husband's leadership. Submission is not silence, so share your concerns and communicate clearly when making decisions as a couple. You can lovingly and submissively disagree with your husband. That might look like saying, "I really want to follow your leadership in this, but I don't have peace about this decision. I would really love to talk about this more with you." Once a decision has been reached, give him your full support (again, as long as that decision is not going against God's Word and leading you into sin).

Submitting to your husband is a real test of faith. It means you have to trust your husband. But even more than that, it means you have to trust in the Lord and his design for your marriage. Will you live out the calling he has placed on your life, or will you live contrary to his Word? The healthiest habit for a wife to pursue is to joyfully submit to her husband.

SACRIFICIALLY LOVE YOUR WIFE

God has also designed a healthy habit for husbands. Husbands, **Sacrificially Love Your Wife.**

Paul stated in verse 23 that a husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church. Yes, the husband is the head. But Paul makes it very clear what this headship is NOT.

NOT Domineering

This headship is not domineering. You are not called to lord your authority over your wife. This is not an abusive leadership or a dictatorship. This headship is modeled after Christ, and he is a servant-leader. And Jesus said in Luke 22:

Luke 22:25-26

²⁵ And he said to them [his disciples], "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are

called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and **the leader as one who serves.**

You do not give up your leadership to serve. You lead through serving. I heard one pastor say that when Jesus served the disciples by washing their feet in the upper room, there was not a single disciple who doubted in that moment who the leader was. Jesus is the model of leadership for the husband.

NOT Lazy or Passive

This headship is also not lazy or passive. Abdicating your responsibility as a leader is the opposite of leadership. This is where we saw Adam go wrong in the Garden. He was with Eve as she ate the fruit, but he did not step in and lead. Again, Christ is the model. We do not see Christ being passive, but actively loving, serving, and leading his church.

What is this headship then? Again, I think **John Piper's definition for headship** is helpful here. He says:

“Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christlike servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home.”²

This headship, or leadership, comes with significant responsibility. And this is what Paul spends the next 9 verses explaining.

Ephesians 5:25-27

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present

² John Piper, Sermon “Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/husbands-who-love-like-christ-and-the-wives-who-submit-to-them>.

the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

And right away, Paul sets a high bar for husbands. That not only are husbands to love their wives, but that love is defined. He bases this love on the highest and greatest display of love possible: Christ's sacrificial love for the church. He used this same phrase earlier in chapter 5 when he addressed the whole congregation. He said in verse 2:

Ephesians 5:2

² And walk in love, **as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...**

All Christians are called to love with the love that Christ has shown to us. Again, as there is a mutual submission to one another in the church, there is a mutual love for one another as believers. However, there is a unique role and responsibility that a husband has for his wife. That a husband is to particularly love his wife in this way.

And how are husbands to love like Christ? Paul says that Christ gave himself up. He gave up his life to purchase the redemption of his bride. This is a love full of grace. Jesus loved his bride even in her worst possible state. Not when the church got herself together and cleaned herself up. Or when the church was finally deemed loveable. No, he loved the church from the beginning. Paul says in Romans 5:8:

Romans 5:8

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Husbands, do you love your wife completely? Do you love her in her worst moments as well as her best? We've mentioned before, our world says that when it gets hard to love someone, just give up and move on to someone else. But that

is not sacrificial love, that's superficial love. That is not the love Christ has for the church. To be husbands who love the way Christ does, we must be sacrificial.

I've heard a popular phrase out there that says, "Many of you say you are willing to die for your wife, but are you willing to live for her?" I don't think Paul intends for those to be separate things. A love that is willing to die for someone is a love that is sacrificial and selfless. And this will show itself not only in giving up your life, but in the small selfless acts throughout your life.

Not only did Jesus love us while we were still sinners, but Paul says back in Ephesians 1 that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before him. He set his love on us. And here in our text, Paul says he did this so that he can present the church to himself in splendor. Jesus' love for us seeks our good for his glory. He loves us and sanctifies us (makes us holy) so that we are made more beautiful. And this brings about glory to himself.

Now, husbands, you cannot save your wife. You are not their Savior. Only Jesus is. But we can pursue their good. We can desire for them to be holy. We can and should lead them spiritually to that end. What does this look like? It looks like taking the initiative to pray together. Not waiting for her to bring it up but being the one to prioritize it. It looks like engaging in spiritual conversations with her: asking her how her walk with the Lord is or what has God been teaching her.

It looks like encouraging her with the gospel when she is stressed or discouraged or fearful. It looks like leading her to church every Sunday, making it a priority in your home. It looks like encouraging her and finding ways for her to be engaged in in community with others whether through Grow Groups or Women's Ministry Events. Do you desire your wife to be holy? Are you leading her spiritually to the One who brings about holiness in our lives?

That alone is a huge task. To love our wife sacrificially and lead her spiritually. But Paul doesn't stop there. He continues to define this sacrificial love in verses 28-31:

Ephesians 5:28-31

²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Paul says, "In the same way," meaning that this sacrificial love for your spouse is really love for yourself. You have become one flesh in marriage. Just as quickly as you are to care for your needs, you are to do so for your wife. Paul bases this on the fact that the church is Jesus' body, and Jesus nourishes and cares for us. What does it mean to nourish and cherish?

I'm not a gardener by any stretch of the imagination. I can barely keep these plants in my office alive. But I know that if I want them to grow and be healthy, I need to provide it with the necessary things: good soil, water, sunlight. I have to nourish it by giving it what it needs to grow and thrive. But that is different than cherishing. If I cherished them, I would give them a prominent place in my office, protecting them from harm, tell everyone about them when they come in my office. Nourish conveys this idea of supplying what is needed for growth and maturity, while cherish conveys the idea of affection and warmth and protection and care. Just as Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, husbands are called to lead, to care for, to nourish, to protect, and to provide for their wife.

Again, being the head of your wife does not mean that you have to do everything, that you can't have help, that you have to make all the decisions yourself. But it does mean you bear primary responsibility for these things. You are held accountable for the care and well-being of your wife. Are you ensuring that your wife is cared for, that her needs are provided for? Are you not only providing for her physical needs but her emotional needs?

I think it's important to note that these roles are not defined by the personality of the wife or husband. Husbands, you are not able to abdicate this responsibility because your wife is more organized or vocal or smarter than you. And wives, you are not able to be the head of the home because your husband is lazy or passive. These roles are placed on us by God regardless of personality types or enneagram numbers. We are either living out our calling well for his glory or we are living contrary to his Word. Husbands, you and I are held responsible for our families. Will we rise to the calling God has placed on our lives? Will we pursue the healthy habit of sacrificially loving our wife?

LONGINGLY LOOK TO CHRIST

Whew. That's just a whole lot, isn't it? I know I'm feeling the weight of all, how about you? You might be thinking, "How in the world could we ever possibly do this?" This is why we must all **Longingly Look to Christ.**

Verse 32 says:

Ephesians 5:32

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul says that when God created marriage, he had in his mind from the beginning the relationship of Christ and the church. He thought, "How can I best display the joyful submission of the church and the sacrificial love of Christ?" And he created marriage.

The problem is that sin has affected this relationship severely. It has distorted it and twisted what God intended to be a beautiful display of the gospel. We see this from the curse of the Fall in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:16

¹⁶To the woman he said,
...Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

Sin brought strife into the marriage. Where there was once joyful submission from the wife, now there is a desire to control. To manipulate. To usurp the husband's leadership. And where there was once sacrificial love and servant-leadership from the husband, now there is abuse and domineering or even passivity.

Let's face it. None of us are perfect. We are going to mess this up. I know this is shocking news, but husbands are not going to be a perfect head. We are not always going to see things clearly, make the best decisions, love sacrificially. We will not perfectly reflect Christ. Only Jesus is Jesus. But we look to him. Not only as our example, but as our Savior. The one who cleanses us from our sin. The one who sanctifies us and makes us holy. The one who strengthens and equips us by his Spirit to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

Likewise, wives, you are not perfect. I know this is hard to believe, but wives are not always right. You are going to mess this up. You will not always perfectly submit. At times, you will desire to take control, to manipulate or deceive. But we look to Jesus. Again, not only as a perfect example of submission to the Father, but as your Savior. The one who is seeking your good, making you holy and without blemishes so that he can present you in splendor before himself.

This only happens if we are filled with the Spirit. But you cannot be filled with the Spirit if you have never confessed your sins and trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior. If you have never done that, let me invite you to see the beauty of the gospel. That because of Jesus' love for the church, he lived among us, perfectly submitting to the Father. He died the death we deserved to die on the cross, bearing our sins, our rebellious acts against God, upon himself. And he rose again from the dead, offering eternal life for those who trust in his finished work. So,

turn away from your sins. Call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved. If you have questions about this, please find me or one of the pastors after service. We would love to talk with you about how you can know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Maybe you are here this morning, and you are not married yet, or you are no longer married. How can this message apply to you? As I mentioned earlier, all Christians are called to submit to the Lord and to one another. We are also all called to love each other as Christ loved the church. Ask the Lord to fill you with his Spirit so that you can joyfully submit and sacrificially love. For women yet to be married, practice joyfully submitting to one another in the church. Don't settle for less than someone who will sacrificially love you and point you to Jesus. For men, practice sacrificially loving others. Find a spouse who will joyfully submit and follow your leadership.

CONCLUSION

Even though we will all get it wrong, and we will not do it perfectly; Paul says the gospel brings restoration. That now, as a Spirit-filled believer, no longer enslaved to sin. That now, wives, you are able to and are called to joyfully submit to your husband. Husbands, you are able to and are called to sacrificially love your wife. This is why Paul doesn't end this section by saying marriage is picture of Christ and the church so none of it really matters. He ends by saying in verse 33:

Ephesians 5:33

³³ However [even though that's the case], let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The world might try to paint this as wrong. We may have seen this lived out poorly in our own lives. But lived out rightly, we get to display the beauty of the gospel, of Christ and his church. John MacArthur said it so well in his commentary on Ephesians:

“To follow God’s plan for the family not only is pleasing to Him but is the only way to godlier, happier, and more secure homes. His plan is neither for the exaltation of man and suppression of woman nor the exaltation of woman and the suppression of man, but for the perfection and fulfillment of both man and woman as He has ordained them to be. Such perfection and fulfillment is made possible by the filling of the Holy Spirit.”³

In summary: **Living out God’s design for marriage (of wives joyfully submitting and husbands sacrificially loving) are the healthiest habits we can pursue.**

Would you pray with me?...

COMMUNION

I’m going to invite the deacons and band to come up. Just as marriage is a living display of Christ’s relationship to the church, the Lord’s Supper is another visible picture of the gospel. Paul says that we are members of his body. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

As we take the Lord’s Supper together, we display our unity in Christ, as members of his body, we remember that he gave himself up for us, and we long for his return. If you are saved by the gospel as you have heard it explained this morning, then you are invited to join us in taking the elements. However, if you are not a believer, if you have not trusted in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins, then I ask that you heed the warning of Scripture and not partake of the

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary “Ephesians,”* 289.

elements. Instead, I would urge you to consider your own need for the forgiveness of your sins and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

In a moment, I'll pray, and the deacons will begin passing the plates. The bread is gluten free, and the juice is grape juice. Please hold on to those and wait until everyone has been served. We will sing together during this time. Once everyone has been served, I will lead us in taking the bread and the cup together.