

## Section 2: God's Good Pattern For Marriage (Part Three)

### Lesson 3: The Husband's Calling: Self-Sacrificing Leadership

#### Introduction

Some years ago two brothers asked their mother if they could go play together. Looking at the older brother, the mother said, *"You can go play, but you are in charge, and that means that you must take care of your brother."* The older son agreed and off the two went. A short bike ride from their home was a bank of sand dunes that had been formed by local dredging operations. The sandy bottom of the river was scooped up and dumped out on the shoreline so that larger commercial vessels could safely navigate the river. The peaks and valleys of the dunes formed by these operations are an almost irresistible sight to adventurous young men. So it wasn't long before the sounds of the boys' laughter began to echo as they played.

The problem is, when wet sand is dredged out onto the shore, it can sometimes form a hard crust on the surface that conceals unstable caverns beneath; voids that are formed by the water as it drains out of the sand. If that thin layer of sand on the surface collapses, it is like a dam breaking, and the surrounding mounds come quickly rushing into the void.

Hours passed, dusk fell, and the mother began to worry. Her boys were supposed to be home by dinner, but that was over an hour ago. She called on her neighbors to help her begin searching for the children. Soon, they found the younger brother. Only his head and the tops of his shoulders were visible. He had been rendered unconscious by the pressure of the sand surrounding his body. Everyone worked as quickly as possible to begin digging him out. When the pressure was released down to his waist the boy awoke.

Still in search of the other son, they asked him urgently: *"Where is your brother?"*

With tears beginning to stream down his face he replied, *"I am standing on his shoulders."*

At the sacrifice of himself, the older brother used all his strength to lift up the one whom his mother had left in his charge.

The story of these two brothers is a powerful picture of sacrifice from which we can learn much. The older brother in the story was presumably bigger, stronger, and perhaps even a bit smarter (developmentally) than his younger brother. Taking these things into consideration, the older brother probably had the best chance of getting out of the hole and saving his own life. If he were thinking of himself it is likely that he could have climbed to safety and left his younger brother behind. In other words, he could have chosen to use his size and strength in the service of self at the cost of another. But that is *not* what the older brother did. ***Instead, he deployed the full strength of all those God-given qualities in the sacrificial service of his brother. He did not use his "superiority" as a means to self-advancement or self-preservation, but rather as a means to sacrificially advance another.***

This picture of sacrificial love is an illustration of how husbands and wives are to think about their calling from God in the marriage. Just like this brother, every husband has gifts, strengths, and abilities that his wife does not have, and every wife has gifts, strengths, and abilities that her husband does not have. The question before all of us is this: ***How will we use them?***

***Will you love your spouse at the cost of yourself? Or will you love yourself at the cost of your spouse?  
It will be one or the other.***

The ultimate example of sacrificial love is Jesus Christ, (Eph. 5:25). The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our older "brother", (Heb. 2:11). And we know beyond all question that he is superior to us in *every* way: *stronger, wiser, etc.* Yet when the mounding heaps of judgment were crushing down upon us because of our sins, he too stooped low to lift us up on his own shoulders by willingly laying down his life for us upon the cross, (Phil. 2:6-7).

**Instead of using his position, his authority, his power, and privileges for himself, Jesus sacrificially deployed the full balance of his strength for the benefit of his Church. This gospel of our salvation is the model God calls us to follow in our own endeavors to be faithful in marriage, (Eph. 5:32).**

*Q: How is the example of the older brother a picture not only of true love but also of true leadership?*

## Overview

This week we want to continue to consider what the Bible teaches us about *the husband's calling in marriage*. To do this, we will focus in on the key text of the Scripture related to this subject: **Ephesians 5:24-33**. As we consider these verses together we will see:

- I. The Husband's Call To Lead: *Clear & Comprehensive (v24)*
- II. The Manner of the Husband's Leadership: *Loving & Self-Sacrificing (v25)*
- III. The Purpose of the Husband's Leadership: *Sanctification (v26-27)*
- IV. The Extent of the Husband's Leadership: *As His Own Flesh (v28-31)*

### I. The Husband's Call To Lead: *Clear & Comprehensive (v24)*

*"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands," (Eph. 5:24).*

Trying to deny the fact that God's Word *clearly* calls the husband to be the leader in the marriage is a very dangerous practice. *If we are willing to pretend as though Ephesians 5:24 is unclear, then how could we say we have clarity about anything in the Bible?* Undermining the clarity of God's Word in order to avoid submission to its teaching is not only intellectually dishonest, but dangerous to our souls. Instead, we should wholly embrace God's will for us everywhere that he has spoken, knowing that God's designs are always holy, wise, and best.

If the wife is called to "submit," it is *clear* that this means *the husband is called to lead*. But what is the extent of that leadership? The subsequent words "in everything" reveal that *the husband's leadership is meant to be comprehensive*. This probably starts to make us all squirm a bit. But that is because we tend to think about God's call to leadership in the wrong way. If you think this verse is teaching that husbands have been given a blank check of unregulated authority from God, you are deeply wrong. ***The calling of the husband to exercise comprehensive leadership is by no means biblical permission for him lead the family according to his own will, but rather a declaration of his solemn responsibility to lead the family according to God's will.***

The husband's comprehensive leadership means that the ultimate responsibility for the nurture of his wife (and the family) falls upon the his shoulders. He is the one who is most accountable in the sight of God for the pattern of life maintained by the family—from the way they speak to one another, to how they spend their time, to what is watched on the television, or what is pursued as family priorities, etc. ***There is no area of the life of the family over which the husband does not have a God-given responsibility to use the influence and authority entrusted to him for the glory of God and the good of his family.*** To say it still one more way: There is no part of the marriage or the family over which the husband can say, "That's not my responsibility; that's not my department."

*Q: What is the difference between understanding authority as permission to do our own will versus a responsibility to do God's will?*

*Q: What does it look like to faithfully exercise "comprehensive authority" as a husband without being a micromanager (or controlling)?*

While the husband's authority and responsibility are both *clear* and *comprehensive*, the text also tells us (in more ways than one) that his authority is *confined* or *regulated*. **That is to say, the husband is not only a man in authority, but a man under authority who is accountable to the Almighty God for how he leads.** This is why the very next breath of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture carefully defines *the manner of the husband's use of his God-given position of leadership*.

## II. The Manner of the Husband's Leadership: *Loving & Self-Sacrificing (v25)*

*"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," (Eph. 5:25).*

**S**ometimes the smallest of things can have the biggest of impacts. Such is the case here. That little two letter word "as" is deeply important to our understanding of the husband's calling. The husband is not free to lead his family however he desires, or however he saw his father lead, or however he is most inclined according to his temperament. **His marching orders from the Lord Most High are clear: Every area of his leadership is to be undertaken in a manner of love that resembles the love of Christ for his church.**

There are many characteristics which fill up the meaning of this call: He should be caring and gentle in his speech and conduct, patient and forgiving when others fall short, tender and understanding when instruction is needed, firm and immovable when boundaries need maintained, wise and discerning in the decisions he makes, and much more. But above all other things, what we behold in the love of Christ for his church can be captured in one word: *Sacrificial*.

**Jesus did not give up his bride to serve himself, he "gave himself up for her." That is not a cute little slogan to put on a coffee mug, it is the biblical paradigm by which men are called to view their responsibility before God in marriage. Leadership does not primarily mean being served, but serving; not bending everyone else toward the accomplishment of our desires, but rather sacrificially spending ourselves toward the achievement of what is best for those whom God has entrusted to our care.**

**Q:** *What does it really look like in practice for a husband to "give himself up for her"? Give some examples.*

There is a strange phenomenon that I have noticed. I wonder if you have noticed it too? I have no doubt that each of you husbands would die for your wife (and children). If an intruder came through the door of your home there would be no hesitation for you to do all that you could to protect them—even at the cost of your life. **But have you ever stopped to think about the glaring contradiction between how we WOULD act in moment like that compared to how we ACTUALLY treat our spouse (and children) on an average day?** *You would die for your family, but will you live for them? You would willingly be wounded to save them, but are you willing to be patient with them in the home? You would lay down your life to protect them, but will you lay down your career ambitions so that you can be present with them? You would fight an army to keep them safe, but will you fight your own pride and selfishness in the daily battles of life? You would open fire on anyone trying to harm their bodies, but will you open the Word of God to them each day and strive to teach them the truths that will safeguard their souls and order your home to the glory of Christ?*

The defining manner of biblical leadership as a husband is to lovingly 'give ourselves up for the good of our family', just "as Christ loved the Church." This is the measuring line under which the exercise of our authority and influence must always pass. Whatever does not meet that test, must not persist in our practice. The plain truth is, if the way you are using the authority entrusted to you by God cannot be described as loving and self-sacrificing, then you are misusing your authority. This, of course, does not mean that everyone in the family (including your wife) will always like the decisions you make. But it does mean that even when they dislike your decisions they will still see your love and care demonstrated in them.

But there is still much more to the husband's calling. A good leader not only demonstrates godly character in the use of his authority, but also godly vision. **Husbands are not only called to love their wives as Christ loved the church, but also to lead their wives (and families) toward the same end that Christ is leading his church: Sanctification.**

### III. The Purpose of the Husband's Leadership: Sanctification (v26-28a)

*"...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 own wives..."*  
(Eph. 5:26-28a).

**L**et us make no mistake, this passage teaches us that the chief end of the husband's leadership is the **spiritual flourishing of his bride (and family)**. That is the highest aim of his calling and the desired end of all the exercise of his authority. Moreover, this is not merely the calling of *some* Christian husbands, but of *all* Christian husbands. Perhaps no one ever told you this when you were growing up or gave you a vision for this task. Nevertheless, God has called every Christian man to be a spiritual leader in the home. Moreover, this is not a small part of what it means to be a faithful husband, it is at the very core. However, before we consider what this might look like in terms of practical activities, we need to endeavor to cultivate a vision for what this calling means for the shape and focus of *ALL* the ways we serve our families as self-sacrificing leaders.

When you have a clear goal in mind for your life it has a shaping effect on everything else you do. When you know your goal, you are able to trace backward from its attainment and determine what behaviors, practices, habits, etc. will be essential to reaching that end (*as well as what sorts of things would actually be counterproductive*). Your goal clarifies the "what" and "why" for all the other activities of life.

For example, if someone's goal is to be a straight A student, would that mean that they stop eating and exercising since those things are not directly connected to studying? Of course not. Instead, the desire to be a straight A student would inform **how** they went about those activities and **why** they made the choices related to them that they made. They may learn that staying up late eating junk food has a big impact on their ability to wake up refreshed and focused the next day. Additionally, they may recognize that while they used to spend two hours a day exercising when their goal was to be a top athlete, that same time commitment is no longer wise because it does not serve the goal they are after. The point I am making is that having a goal does not make us neglect the other important things in life, instead, it sharpens our focus on those other things and helps us undertake them only inasmuch as they serve the greater end in mind.

The same is true for husbands and fathers. **When we begin to understand from Scripture that the highest priority and task in our role as husbands (and fathers) is to lead our families into spiritual flourishing, that does not mean that we will stop going to work, or that we pull our kids out of school. But it does mean that the way we think about our work life, and the way we think about our children's education, (as well as many other things), will no longer be controlled by the patterns of this world and its goals, but rather by the God-given goal of ordering all things in such a way as to promote the spiritual vitality of our families.** In other words, when you truly begin to understand your spiritual calling as a husband, it will shape (and reshape) everything about the way you lead your home. You will start to cut out of your life/your family's life many things which are hinderances to that end, and you will also begin to take up new habits and patterns of life that support that end. Knowing your God-given goal will shape both the "what" and the "why" of every aspect of life together in the marriage and family.

**Q:** *What do the pressures of the world all around you say your highest goals should be?*

**Q:** *What do the current rhythms of your life say your highest goal is? (Rhetorical)*

Here are two practical examples which are meant to help us to begin thinking about all of life according to our true goal:

- *Our Saturday night activities will no longer be controlled by the idea that “this is my weekend”. Instead, they will be controlled by the truth that the following day is the Lord’s Day, and how we spend our Saturday night will most certainly have a significant impact on how prepared we are to feast upon the Lord and to engage with his people in worship the following day.*
- *Our consideration of a new position or a promotion will no longer be controlled by the idea: “I will make more money.” Instead, the controlling consideration will be, “Would this new role help me or hinder me in fulfilling my primary calling to be the spiritual leader of my family?”*

Thus far, I have sought to present *a vision* for this calling rather than to focus on specific practical habits. The reason for that is because without the overarching vision, the habits will soon fade. They will either be like the seed scattered among the rocks which sprung up quickly but had no root, or like the seed that fell among the thorns and was choked from bearing fruit by all the other cares of life. The fact is, the world, as well as our own hearts, are loudly clamoring for us to make 10,000 other things our priority and goal—that is, let them decide our schedule and rhythms as a family. Without having a clear vision for this calling from God, the busyness of trying to keeping up with all the *world’s* desires and goals will simply be too cumbersome for us to actually keep up with consistent spiritual practices in the home.

Many of you may be living out the very reality I just described right now—*feeling pulled in 1,000 directions and not centered on Christ*. Too often we end up trying to ‘*fit a little Jesus into our other plans and goals*’, rather than making Christ himself our ultimate aim and end. But having Christ as our ultimate aim and end is exactly what it means for us to exercise godly leadership in the home, brothers. ***Once we have a clear vision that God is calling us to make knowing, loving, and serving Christ the central priority of our marriages and families, the practical habits will be much easier to cultivate and maintain because we will have said “no” to other things in order to make room for that which is most important in God’s sight. Moreover, they will be easier to maintain because we will have a solid, biblically-based reason “why” we are choosing to give ourselves to these specific practices, rather than to other things.***

We will touch more deeply on some of the practical habits of spiritual leadership in the home during a later portion of our study. But for now, let me succinctly encourage you to make these habits of grace your uncompromising commitment:

- (1) *Be united as members of a faithful local church.*
- (2) *Do not forsake the Lord’s Day.*
- (3) *Lead your family in worship each day by guiding them through (1) a hymn of praise, (2) a passage of Scripture, and (3) a time of prayer.*
- (4) *Pray with and for your family regularly so that it becomes the natural instinct of your household to bow before God in humble dependence.*

## **I. The Extent of the Husband’s Leadership: As His Own Flesh (v28-31)**

*“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.” (Eph. 5:28-31).*

**W**hen your hand gets hurt, how do you respond? Do you scold it and tell it to get its act together? Do you wound it further in order to teach it a lesson? Do you threaten to cut it off and throw it away if it does not start performing up to standard? Of course not. When a part of our body is hurting we don’t give it less attention, we give it more. We don’t give it less care, but rather we take special care with how we seek to mend what is ailing. The reason we do this is because we know that our hand is part of our body, and therefore, what happens to our hand is inseparable from what happens to us—either for better or worse.

This is the very picture that God has given to us concerning marriage: “...husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.” When two people are united in marriage, the Scriptures tell us in more than one place that: “the two shall become one flesh”. Inasmuch as your eyes are one flesh with your body, or your legs are one flesh with your body, so your spouse is one flesh with you. Never again shall what happens to the one be irrelevant to or unfelt by the other. Rather, from that point forward the well-being of both the husband and the wife are inextricably bound up together—either for better or worse.

This means that for a spouse—*particularly a husband*—to take advantage of, neglect, abuse, or demean the other is as foolish as a man smashing his own hand with a hammer or cutting off his own arm with a saw. We may naively think that we can neglect or mistreat our spouse without consequence, but that is false. The way you treat your spouse is the way you are treating your own flesh because God has knit you together as one. To wound the other is to wound yourself, and to bless the other is to bless yourself. In closing, let us consider the application of these truths in one final way:

### **The Degree of Our Devotion**

**M**en, I want you to ask yourself: *Where has God set the extent of my calling to be devoted to the well-being of my wife? How far would God have me go in seeking to fulfill my responsibility to be a sacrificial servant by laying down my life for her everlasting good?*

The answer of Scripture, gentlemen, is that you are to be as devoted to your wife as you are to your own flesh. Think about this metaphor for a moment. ***Just as you take pains to protect, nurture, and nourish your body each an every day—regardless of how you feel—so you are called to protect, nurture, and nourish your bride in the same respect.*** Moreover, our nervous systems provide a perfect illustration of what the Scriptures are teaching us here. If all of a sudden something came flying at your face right now, what would the rest of your body do? Would the rest of your body just sit still and say, “Well, the face will just have to figure out how to take care of itself. I am tired of coming to it’s rescue all the time.” No. Your whole body would immediately spring into action in order protect itself from the potential harm because it knows and understands that the face is one flesh with the rest of your body. The husband’s devotion to the care and protection of his wife and family is meant to be the same. And how long will our nervous system work like this? Essentially until our dying day.

**Thus, when we are told that “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies,” we are not only being given a picture of the degree of our devotion, but also of the duration: *The husband is to love his wife with all his heart for all her days.***