

Purposes for Marriage, Part 5—Ephesians 5:22-33—8/24/2025
Copyright by Mark Vaughan 8/2025

Today we enter a 5th message in this summer's marriage refresher series that's been a break from our normal exposition.

We began with the thought that—as Dan Phillips said it—that *marriage is like being a Christian, only more so.*

Marriage is the closest context to apply the commands & promises & principles of the Christian life—so it's like being a Christian, only more so because it's so uniquely intimate & inescapably consistent.

And numerous other commands & promises & principles for husbands & wives add layers of responsibility to the marriage.

We receive all such truths with a desperate sense that we cannot measure up, that as good as God's ways are, we fail to fulfill them.

So we need God's grace to forgive our transgressions against His good law & our treason against His good character.

And we also need His grace to empower us to change & overcome sin.

So we study God's design humbly knowing our need & confessing our inability to ever be enough on our own.

And listen—that's why marriage is never the solution to our sin problems or longings or insecurities.

As I've said in premarital counseling for decades—ladies, your husband will make a bad savior.

And guys, your wife will make a bad savior.

If you think your emptiness will be filled by marriage or your battles with self-control will be conquered by marriage, you are sorely wrong.

Rather, what we all need is to repent of serving ourselves & seeking satisfaction in anything other than God Himself.

What we need is for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see ourselves & others rightly & to trust & treasure Christ faithfully.

We need the punishment that our sins deserve fully paid & we get that by faith in Jesus in His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

And we need His resurrecting power for newness of life now & the sure hope for a bodily resurrection to be with Him forever.

We need the assurance to seek God with the merits of Christ's life & death freely providing all we need for life & godliness.

In other words, in marriage & in all of life, we first & foremost need the biblical Gospel—so please come ask if we can help with that.

We ever need to return to that Gospel—day after day—no matter whether it seemed like a day of victory or defeat.

We rejoice with thanksgiving in God's grace in Christ & we renew our minds in His promised power to apply His Word.

We live by grace through faith in Christ in each area of life & God meets us with His blessings of growth & fruitfulness.

We learn increasingly what Jesus meant in promising abundant life in Him & freedom in His ways & holiness distinct from the world.

Just as we can experience that in all of life by repentance from sin & faith in Christ, we can do so in marriage, only more so.

We start with the truths of the Gospel about our sin & Christ's sufficiency & we ever return & grow in those realities.

We've seen that dependence on God's Word & Christ's work & God's Spirit as we've studied His design for marriage.

And as I've said, whether you are married, want to be married, used to be married, or are never married, these truths matter to you.

You must be equipped to speak truth to yourself & to others on these fundamental issues of human existence.

When society promotes individualistic happiness in living for yourself or other causes, we need to hold up God's basic goodness in marriage.

We need to know & value the vital & central role that marriage plays in providing the context for the closest relationships & for training the next generation & caring for aging generations.

God did not design government programs to replace the roles of husbands & wives & moms & dads & extended families & churches.

God designed marriage as the fundamental, reproducing unit of human flourishing & we need to restore that & defend it & model it & proclaim it as God's people who can enjoy it.

And if you yearn to experience God's design of marriage & do not, let me encourage you to make that known to leaders & others around you.

Share that as a prayer request that you want God to provide because He says it is good though He does not owe it to you.

Whether past relationships have failed you or you have failed in them or you have no experience in relationships & are not sure how to begin, we want to be sensitive to those situations.

God may be doing good work in you to desire something you have seen in His Word as good as we've studied it so far.

We've seen that God designed marriage for (1) companionship & (2) complementary roles & (3) co-laboring & (4) children & (5) consecration & (6) covenant commitment & (7) consummation.

I urge everyone to go back & listen to any of those you missed or any topics where you need further meditation or reminders.

Today we come to an 8th purpose of God for marriage that has unmistakable eternal significance.

To add another C-word to this C-series of God's purposes for marriage, note that God designed marriage for co-witnessing, or for a marriage couple to be co-witnesses.

A husband and wife come together to be co-witnesses to the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian marriage is God's designed drama of love displaying God's relationship with His people.

And sadly, rejection or redefining of marital roles can be a terrible hindrance to properly trusting God's love & following Christ.

For example, if you don't trust a Ruler who came to rescue you, you may have objections rooted in your life experiences.

You may hate the idea of bowing before anyone else & surrendering your will to trust & follow someone else.

Or you may not believe that love even exists or you may translate your pain into suppressing the knowledge of God.

You may assume that every person needs to find his or her own way & that we all use each other for what we can get out of the deal.

You may feel like relationships are not meant to last or matter.

Whatever wrong response to your Creator you may have, God designed marital roles with the potential of dispelling those myths.

So listen—the way you live as a man or a woman can proclaim profound truths about God's goodness.

You can uphold & adorn Gospel truth in compelling ways that lead others to God of Scripture as Titus 2 says.

Faithfulness in God's design can be a compelling testimony that God uses by His grace to lead others to life in Jesus.

And that's what we want to encourage & affirm & strengthen today as we turn now together to a familiar passage in Ephesians 5:22-33.

Marriage is used to depict God's relationship with His people in both OT & NT, but let's read Ephesians 5:22-33. [READ]

I most often reference this passage in weddings because I tell couples that I plan to do 2 things in each wedding.

I always plan to share some refreshers about marriage & gender roles & I also always plan to share the Gospel.

Ephesians 5 is a beautiful combination of those two areas of truth.

And you may recall that I typically remind a wedding couple that Ephesians 5 teaches that their marriage is not about them.

Marriage is not primarily about the personal enjoyment of all the other blessings we've described in God's design for marriage.

It is about those things, but all those are for the glory of God & they are also channeled toward a proper exaltation of Christ.

God designed marriage to be a cooperative testimony, a joint witness, a partnership in proclamation & presentation of the Gospel.

We want to display that design of God & today we'll outline how we can do so in 2 truths that Christian marriage shows.

We'll start with husbands because most these verses focus on his role & then the wife's role is in response to the husband's.

Here's point #1 of Gospel connection to Christian marriage—God's words to husbands show that gracious love does exist.

God designed marriage for co-witnessing & we see that 1st in how God's words to husbands show that gracious love does exist.

The more that families crumble & kids grow up today in one-parent homes or with divorced parents or divided households, the more people today question if real love exists.

When immorality is sold with the love as the label & many parents live for themselves, kids often struggle to believe that anyone cares.

Selfishness sees life as a war to get what you want from others.

So when people with such backgrounds are told that God loves them, they find it hard to believe that or to process in proper ways.

They've never seen anyone living to love others selflessly.

Often the kindnesses they've seen or gifts they've received have been done to manipulate or get what's wanted or to keep up an appearance.

And they certainly can't relate to someone DYING for others because they've never seen authentic sacrifice to serve others.

They may think that's nice to hear about, but such love can't be real.

Only God can rescue from such hopelessness, but one of His rescue tools throughout history has been biblical manhood.

One way God designed to show that gracious love does exist is by Christian men showing it first in marriage & generally with others.

So if you want to prevent or refute cynicism that denies love is real, Christian men please consider what your life is displaying.

So read Ephesians 5:25 again to see husbands are told to LOVE your wives, just as Christ also loved the church & gave Himself up for her.

As we think of Christ's love for His people, let's recall that Jesus came to earth for us before we existed, right?

In fact, Jesus chose those whom He would save before He even created the earth and made the first humans, didn't He?

Then when we came alive physically, we were still dead spiritually in our trespasses and sins, as Ephesians 2 says.

So as we step back to evaluate Christ's love for the church, we need to first understand that He was the initiator in the relationship.

That's implicit in this text that comes after Ephesians 1-2 where it is explicit that God's love in Christ came first.

As 1st John 4:19 says, we love—why?—because He first loved us.

The whole basis and beginning of the relationship between Christ and His church is because Jesus started it all.

His love can be termed a Starting Love—a leading or initiating love.

That's the 1st of 5 alliterated descriptions of this love that start with an S that you may recall I've outlined before.

For a husband to love his wife like Christ loved the church, he must take initiative in the relationship & move toward his wife to know her & serve her & not be passive or lazy or react.

And for you single men who want to be married, that means you need to be leading yourself first & then be willing to take the initiative to get to know others & be accountable to others.

God's design from the beginning, even before sin, was for man to be the starter, the leader, the one responsible to initiate.

So guys, in your marriage & more broadly as well—get over your self-absorbed pride that you may excuse as shyness or whatever else & step out in faith to serve others & meet needs.

To do so is loving like Christ & it should be a way of serving others.

Jesus saw the need of His people & came from heaven to serve.

Verse 25 says Jesus gave Himself up—He offered Himself in sacrifice.

That word 'gave up' is used for delivering someone over to another's care or authority like Judas did in betraying Jesus.

But Jesus is the one who gave Himself—He voluntarily sacrificed Himself to be mistreated, mocked & killed.

As 2nd Corinthians 8:9 says, though Jesus was rich, He became poor so that we who were poor might become rich in Him.

This sacrificial love was first a choice & commitment, not a feeling.

And He did it for us—that is, for the church, for His people.

Jesus willingly chose to die to pay sin's penalty for all who trust Him.

So God commands a husband's love for his wife to be sacrificial like Christ's love for His bride.

Of course, that's not to say that feminine love is not sacrificial.

Wives & mothers & single women show sacrificial love also.

But for some reason, God singled out husbands here as needing this special definition of what a man's love should look like.

Maybe it's because men are more selfish by nature or it's because leaders tend to be more selfish because of sin's curse.

But Colossians 3:19 tells us that this love is to be done without proud harshness or bitter whining about it.

Colossians 3:19 says, “*Husbands, love your wives and do not be [harsh or] embittered against them.*”

Husbands, that means we don’t boast about how great we are & we don’t grow bitter if we are not appreciated as we may wish.

Thankfulness from others is good & yet we men should not have selfish expectations of others to honor or thank us.

We must simply trust God that men are called to lead with sacrificial love & then prayerfully allow God to work as He wishes.

We take the risk of being unappreciated or criticized or misunderstood or maligned.

And then we must resist the temptation to feel self-pity & lose motivation to serve if our initiatives & sacrifices go unnoticed.

Such responses wrongly focus on ourselves, not on Christ.

Yet when Jesus loved the church, it was not because the church deserved it or would always respond rightly.

Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love for us while we were still sinners, right?

We were hostile enemies of God & He loved us & initiated & reached out & Jesus left heaven to come rescue us.

And He perseveres in loving us all the way to glory.

So men, we dare not harp on our wives for little things she fails at or things she does that we don’t like as if she needs to earn our love.

We must be gracious & intentional in both speaking of our love & serving with love.

We must say it—tell your wife that you love her just as God repeatedly tells His people in Scripture of His love for us.

And then show it—as 1st John 3:18 says, “*let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed & truth.*”

Turn from whatever wastes your time & energies & pray for & think of & demonstrate love in specific ways.

We can all do that whether we are husbands or wives or singles or boys or girls—we can all seek ways to love & serve others.

But remember men, it starts with you—so embrace the privilege.

Do not passively sit back and let days pass by doing nothing.

And do not try to force your family or others to order their lives around sacrificing for you.

We must take up our cross & die to self & invest the time & energy needed to lovingly lead with thoughtful initiative.

If you never had a good model of this, don’t assume it cannot exist.

Don’t give into temptations to distance yourself from relationships if you have yet to experience God’s loving plan.

Pray for God’s healing help in your heart & for hope for your future & for the future of the church in living these truths to the fullest.

And read verses 26-27 to take this love a bit deeper. [READ]

We see here that Jesus sacrificed primarily for spiritual needs so we might call this starting & sacrificial love also a sanctifying love.

This Christlike love has the supreme desire to lead others to sanctification or holiness for their own spiritual good.

To sanctify someone is to set them apart as holy in pure devotion and intimacy with Christ & all Christians should want that for others.

Men, this means you need to be interested in your wife's & others' spiritual health & how their walk with God is going.

Lead & encourage them in prayer & discussion & application of truth so that they see the desirability & wisdom of God's ways.

The goal is for others to display the glorious beauty of purity in devoted love for Jesus as verse 27 says.

And since verse 26 is clear that the primary tool is God's Word, we must all prioritize God's Word & encourage others to do the same.

Sanctifying love ensures that God's Word is the fuel of our soul & also that the world's fuels are not what we're living on.

This kind of love is starting, sacrificing, & sanctifying & then it's also supplying—read verses 28-31 about this supplying love. [READ]

This is the one of the texts honoring the traditional idea of the man as the primary protector and provider for his family.

A Christlike husband's love is supplying—it supplies what is needed.

We typically love our own bodies by caring for them with food & clothing & rest & meeting other needs.

Even those who claim to hate their bodies abound in self-love for their own physical appearance or health or body somehow.

So verse 29 is right to say that no one ever hated his own flesh, but rather nourishes and cherishes it toward some goal for it.

That word for nourish can mean feed or it can refer to bringing up children, providing for their needs in order to raise them.

That's the biblical idea of the husband as the provider.

And then secondly, that word "cherish" speaks of the protection that is historically associated with a man's role.

The word is used for a mother hen warming her eggs or warming her baby chicks to protect them from the cold.

That sense of providing warmth carries the idea of both protecting and providing just as we all do for our own bodies.

It's like 1st Timothy 5:8 pinpoints the man's responsibility to care for his own, for those family members within his own household including at least his wife and children and parents.

1st Timothy 5:8 even says that "*if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*"

That strong statement makes clear that God takes this seriously.

Of course, these verses do not say that women cannot provide physical or spiritual care or that women can never work outside the home.

But men need to see it as our responsibility before God to show supplying love that others can depend on.

And we could discuss exceptions based on health problems & we could walk through loads of scenarios case by case.

But just get the point that the one flesh relationship means men are hurting themselves if they hurt or neglect their wives.

And on the other hand, you are totally helping yourself when you love your wife and foster her spiritual health and provide for her physically.

God's design for giving of ourselves what is best for us.

The weighty, laborious, self-denying responsibilities of a husband are the path to genuine joy and satisfaction.

Giving and living this kind of love is the most fulfilling and rewarding way to have a relationship.

That is not what the world or our sinful flesh will tell us, but God's path of meeting others' needs is the path of true happiness.

We follow that model because it's what Jesus has proven.

And when husbands particularly love like Christ, we display His love to a world that needs Him in a way that makes this love symbolic.

Read that point restated in verses 32-33. [READ]

The mystery that is displayed in a biblically Christian marriage is that of Christ and the church.

The love of a man for his wife is a message to the world about the love of the Lord for His church.

That symbolic love is shown to children and relatives and coworkers and neighbors and everyone in your world.

They are all learning about your God by how you love.

The way we love teaches people about the God we serve.

So men, never underestimate the power of your love.

Embrace the tremendous opportunity that comes with this.

As husbands die to our own selfish agendas to serve others, we can show that gracious love does exist.

We show that someone can lead in a selfless way.

When Christian husbands serve to treat their wives as holy, to sanctify them, then it shows real love.

Real love is different from the world where people are only wanted as valuable if they produce what's desired.

That's works-based, self-trust that competes against real love.

But in contrast, living out God's words for Christian husbands can show that gracious love does exist.

That's the first side of God's design for marriage partners to be co-witnesses—that's the testimony the husband is to display.

When you understand that, you feel the need for the Gospel, right?

We feel the impossibility of that standard & we run to Christ for forgiveness & power to walk by grace through faith.

We sense our need to respond to Christ like God has said for wives to respond to their husbands as we see in the other side of this testimony.

Note the other side of the co-witnessing—point #2—God's words to wives show that intelligent submission can flourish.

2-God's words to wives show that intelligent submission can flourish.

The wife's role is to model the true church's response to Jesus.

She is to trust & follow her husband as the church does Christ.

She is to be subject, or to line up under the leadership & authority of her husband just as the church should under Jesus.

Many people in our day reject that idea without a thought.

But such reactions fail to realize that we all are followers.

Every one of us is a follower of someone else.

You follow the examples set for you or you react against those examples & follow others who seem opposite.

You follow the information fed to you by your upbringing or your education or the internet or media or entertainment or friends.

Since we are not born as all-knowing, we grow up absorbing & evaluating what we experience & learn.

Then we follow one or another path in response to what's forced upon us or what seems best to us at a given time.

We are finite creatures—we are not the all-knowing, all-wise, Creator—and that makes us dependent on God & others.

The question is whom we depend on, whom we follow, & why.

The question is whether our submission is intelligently evaluated & directed in the way that is wise & right.

A Christian wife can display that a carefully-reasoned, well-evaluated, path of submission can flourish.

Read Ephesians 5:22-24 again. [READ]

This is a choice of faith in the Lord & His command to line up under God's given arrangement of authority.

The Greek word *hupotasso* literally means to place oneself under from *tasso* meaning to place & *hupo* meaning under.

And it is the Greek middle voice which implies that the wife is acting on herself, choosing to place herself willingly under her husband.

Yet it is done in faith in the Lord because Ephesians 5:22 says to do so 'as unto the Lord, with a motive of obeying the Lord.

The submission of a Christian wife is not mindless doormat duty for an oppressed, uninformed population of lesser vessels.

Rather, a Christian wife submits as to the Lord, meaning it is by faith in the Lord & in agreement with all the Lord says.

So a Christian wife should NOT submit to a husband's desire for her to violate Scripture in some other way.

She should not follow his lead if he wants to lead her into sin.

To protect against that, she must be a careful thinker, a wise student of Scripture, & a faithful follower of Jesus.

Then she submits out of true trust in Christ & what He said.

And as she does so, she displays the flourishing design of God for woman to be man's helper as God blessed before the 1st sin.

When a Christian wife does that, she displays the wisdom & attractiveness of intelligent submission to God's good ways.

She shows that it can be GOOD to give up self-trust & self-governance & follow the good God who made us.

A Christian wife can show that trust & submission & support can be wonderfully flourishing when done in response to God.

And this is unto the Lord in everything according to Ephesians 5:24.

So it is comprehensive in scope, not just one little area.

And it is to be done with openness & honesty, not hiding or manipulating to merely appear submissive on the outside.

Ephesians 5:33 sums it up as respecting her husband.

That heart attitude will flow out into trust in the Lord leading through her husband & eagerness to support & encourage him.

It will yield gratefulness & growing appreciation.

It is done with dedication to him and his good as his teammate using her gifts to serve & help & joyfully support.

And submission is not unique to the wife's role.

We are all called to submit to government according to 1st Peter & Romans 13 & we also submit to employers or other authorities.

And in the church, we are called to submit to leaders even as elders submit to one another in the plurality of eldership.

So submission is part of life that has particular power & purpose in the role of a wife in Christian marriage.

The wife can model what it means to trust & follow Jesus.

In a world awash in easy-believism where people claim to trust Jesus but do not follow Him or live like He matters, we desperately need Christian wives who will embrace their role.

We need wives who will see their vital & privileged position of displaying what a genuine relationship of faith looks like.

What an honor & an incredible purpose!

Just think, ladies, you can lead your children & others to Christ by the way you live in submission to your husband.

If you don't want them to give lip service to Jesus with no changed lives, then don't do that in your marriage.

Live as wives like the true church & pray that God will use you to powerfully affect your children & many others.

Don't underestimate the vital value & eternal significance of being a wife who is living like the church should in response to Christ.

God designed marriage for co-witnessing, for joint testimony of Christ' gracious love & the church's trusting following.

Husbands can show that gracious love does exist & wives can show that intelligent submission can flourish.

So together, a Christian couple's marriage can show the beauty of God's relationship with His people.

Realize the significance of this transcendent purpose in God's design.

Let that design first drive you to Christ personally in submissive faith as His follower who receive His gracious love.

And then let His love move you model His goodness in marriage & in every other relationship in whatever measure He commands.

Our God is supremely good & His ways are wise & desirable & we want people to see that in our lives & come to Him.

That happens through Gospel proclamation & faithful living in many ways, but it is particularly powerful in our homes.

Let's pray for God to lead many to Christ by this good design.

I know this may be familiar of you, but I pray it's a timely refresher.

I pray that God will renew us with its eternal significance.

Let's pray that God will use these reminders for His glory & our good.