

Small Group Discussion Guide: Marriage as a Gospel Drama

Based on Ephesians 5:15-33

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: What's one thing that requires "laser focus" or hypervigilance in your daily life? How do you maintain that focus?

Sermon Recap (5 minutes)

Paul calls us to pay careful attention to how we live—walking wisely, knowing the Lord's will, and being filled by the Spirit. His teaching on marriage (verses 22-33) isn't a separate topic but a concrete example of Spirit-filled living. Marriage is designed to be a living reenactment of the gospel—showing Christ's love for the church.

Key Takeaways

1. Marriage requires intentional focus - It won't happen by accident
2. We all read Scripture through lenses - Personal experiences and cultural assumptions shape how we interpret passages
3. Biblical marriage is counter-cultural - It differs from both modern Western and traditional cultural views
4. Marriage mirrors the gospel - Husbands reflect Christ's sacrificial love; wives reflect the church's trust and respect
5. The Spirit empowers biblical marriage - We cannot live this out in our own strength

Discussion Questions

Understanding Our Lenses (15 minutes)

1. Personal Reflection: What "lenses" do you bring to this passage about marriage? How has your family background, personal experiences, or cultural upbringing shaped your view of marriage?
2. Cultural Awareness: The pastor contrasted modern Western views (marriage for personal fulfillment) with traditional views (marriage for social stability). Which of these perspectives have you been most influenced by? How does Paul's view differ from both?

Wrestling with the Text (20 minutes)

3. Mutual Submission: Paul begins with "submitting to one another in reverence of Christ" (v. 21). How does this mutual submission framework change the way we read the specific instructions to husbands and wives?
4. Redefining Authority: How does Paul's description of the husband's headship differ from the Greco-Roman household codes of his day? What does it mean that husbands are called to use authority "not to please himself but to serve his wife"?
5. The Helper (Ezer): For many, "helper" sounds like a lesser role. How does understanding that "ezer" is primarily used to describe God himself change your perspective on the wife's role? What does it mean that a wife is a "strong helper"?

Practical Application (20 minutes)

6. For Married Individuals:
 - Husbands: In what specific ways can you sacrificially love your wife this week? Where are you tempted to use authority selfishly rather than to serve?
 - Wives: How can you use your full strength, wisdom, and resources to empower your husband? Are there areas where you're holding back your voice or gifts?
7. For Everyone: The pastor said, "Your marriage does not represent you. It represents Jesus." How does this shift in perspective change the stakes of how we approach marriage—or how we support the marriages around us?
8. Gospel Visibility: Paul calls marriage "a great mystery" that points to Christ and the church. How can Christian marriages in our community make the gospel more visible and viable to those who don't know Jesus?

The Spirit's Role (10 minutes)

9. Dependence on God: Paul makes it clear that we cannot live out biblical marriage without the Spirit's help. What would it look like practically to depend on the Holy Spirit in your marriage (or future marriage) this week?
10. For Singles: How can single people in the church live out the principles of mutual submission, sacrificial love, and empowering others in their current relationships and community?

Challenging Scenarios

Discuss one or both of these scenarios:

Scenario 1: A wife believes her husband is making a decision that could harm the family financially or spiritually. How should she navigate this situation while honoring both her role and God's authority?

Scenario 2: A husband realizes he's been using his "headship" to get his own way rather than to serve his wife. What steps should he take to repent and change this pattern?

Personal Reflection & Application (10 minutes)

Take a few minutes of silence for personal reflection:

- What is one specific way God is calling you to "pay careful attention" to how you're living in your relationships?
- What is one lens (personal or cultural) you need to surrender to God's design?
- If you're married: What is one concrete action you can take this week to better reflect the gospel in your marriage?
- If you're single: How can you support and encourage the marriages around you?

Closing Prayer Focus

- Pray for marriages in your group and church to reflect Christ's love
- Pray for healing from past wounds related to marriage and family
- Pray for dependence on the Holy Spirit to live out God's design
- Pray for single members to flourish in their current season
- Pray for protection from cultural distortions of marriage

Additional Resources

- Book Recommendation: *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim and Kathy Keller
- Bible Study: Read Genesis 1-3, Matthew 19, and Proverbs 31 to explore God's design for marriage
- Word Study: Look up all the uses of "ezer" (helper) in the Psalms to see how it describes God

Take-Home Challenge

This Week: Have an honest conversation with your spouse (or a trusted friend if single) about one area where you need to grow in reflecting the gospel through your relationships. Ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable.