



FOR BETTER OR WORSE:

The Ups

Ephesians 5:21-33

FOR BETTER OR WORSE – SERIES OVERVIEW: Marriage at its BEST; Marriage at its WORST; and Marriage in the MIDDLE . . . why you cannot COAST!

How do you view marriage? I know that people’s perspectives about marriage vary wildly according to their experience. Some people see it as a ROMANTIC and JOYFUL. Some see it – SADLY - as a kind of IMPRISONMENT. For many people, their CURRENT view of marriage is FAR LESS than their EXPECTATIONS were for it before they were married. [My life as a FOLLOWER of JESUS, a CHILD, a HUSBAND, a FATHER, and a PASTOR all blend together to color my view.](#) I often GRIEVE about people’s perspective of marriage because I have seen what it CAN be in my own life, rather than what it most often IS in so many people’s lives. I say this knowing full well the many difficulties of marriage as well. I am not ignoring the struggles!

*Relationship IS risk! [Quote: John Ortberg – [Everybody’s Normal](#), P. 13-14]

-Pain WILL HAPPEN in EVERY human relationship.

*You never marry the “right” person [Quote: [Meaning](#), Keller, P. 37-38]

*Yet, you must CHOOSE WISELY the one that you do marry!

-Do not be UNEQUALLY YOKED! [[Don’t start in a DITCH!](#)]

-Don’t ABANDON your marriage if it is currently broken. God still works!

What I want to do today is encourage all of us to gain a GOD-GIVEN VISION of what marriage can be. **Marriage at its best is – I believe – a marriage that is functioning according God’s DIVINE DESIGN.** [[One man and one woman under God for life!](#)] There are several key elements of God’s design for marriage that we will talk about today, but I want to focus on ONE CENTRAL TRUTH that plays into every aspect of marriage at its best. This truth is imbedded in our key passage for today. **Ephesians 5:29-32 NIV**

29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church-- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."** 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.

There is so much great truth in this passage, but I want us to see this one primary truth that will help you to experience marriage at its best!

MARRIAGE AT ITS BEST IS TWO PEOPLE BECOMING ONE.

The passage we just read comes from the CONTEXT of what it takes to have HEALTHY relationships. It is SPIRITUAL, and yet very PRACTICAL. Paul is talking about the necessity of humility and unity and forgiveness that ought to be present in our relationships because of what Christ has done in and for us. Out of that context, he then goes into the ways that we should relate to one another in a healthy, loving marriage. This is done, he says, by taking to heart the truth that we must care for one another the way that we care for ourselves. He then states that marriage is a UNION in which two married people can ACTUALLY become one. This is much more than just the SEXUAL intimacy that married couples experience. It is also a PICTURE of the oneness that Christ has with HIS BRIDE, the CHURCH!

Oneness means that your IDENTITY is permanently LINKED to this person that you marry. When I gave my heart to Christ, I could no longer IDENTIFY myself APART from Jesus. I LEFT my OLD LIFE to experience NEW LIFE in Christ! [\[Leave and Cleave\]](#) In a similar way, once I entered into a COVENANT marriage with Lisa, I no longer IDENTIFY myself apart from her. I am now ONE with her, and everything I do affects her. Marriage is the chosen sacrifice of my INDEPENDENCE! **I am no longer ME; I am WE!**

***Your EVERY action now INTIMATELY INVOLVES ANOTHER PERSON.**

Oneness implies that whatever you do to your spouse, you do to yourself! This principle alone should rock your marriage! I am always amazed when I see a married person treat their spouse with disrespect or dishonor. When a husband MAKES FUN of his wife, he is MOCKING HIMSELF! When a wife lashes out in anger and bitterness at her husband, she is STRIKING HERSELF! The most beautiful marriages are those that express MUTUAL love and respect. **How do you want to be treated? Treat your spouse this way!**

This passage on God's design for marriage reveals the WAY that two people become one.

ONENESS EMBRACES THE MISSION OF MARRIAGE. Ephesians 5:21-28; 32 NIV

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself . . . 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Did you know that God gave every marriage a MISSION? That mission is to strengthen one another's faith and to help make each other more like Christ! This is why Paul began this part of his letter with an admonition to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Paul teaches us here that the best marriages are built on a FOUNDATION of mutual submission to the authority of Christ. **SUB-MISSION = To arrange under (military rank). *Placing yourself under the mission.**”

ONENESS is a key reason why a believer must only marry another believer. When you are unequally yoked, your oneness is constantly undermined and disrupted by your irreconcilable worldviews and destinies. Instead, we are BOTH to be submitted to Christ Jesus's PURPOSE for our lives because of our reverential love and fear of God. [If you are not married to a believer, do not despair! God is still accomplishing his work in you, and he can use you to perhaps bring your spouse to faith by your continued obedience to God.] However, “marriage at its best” requires that each of us must learn to see submission as an act of obedience FOR and TO God.

Lisa and I are tasting this in our marriage, and it relates to how we serve one another in our ROLES as husband and wife. **Our roles as husband and wife are not just mundane guidelines for everyday living on this earth. They are an EARTHLY MISSION that helps us to become better people as we become one.** These roles are designed to help SANCTIFY us and make us HOLY. Each partner has a unique ROLE to fulfill in this mission.

The wife is commanded to SUBMIT to her husband.

To some, the idea of submission is DEMEANING. But it is never viewed that way in Scripture. Submission is how CHRIST accomplished his work of redemption for us, and it is how a wife can fulfill God's mission for her marriage. It is the noble and necessary way that a wife accomplishes her work as a HELPER to her husband. When God speaks of Adam being alone, he says that “**there was**

not a helper suitable for the man.” So, God chose to MAKE one. This word HELPER means, **“one who supports, aids.”** And when God brings Eve to the man, he affirms that they are to LEAVE their father and mother and CLEAVE to one another. Remember, the word CLEAVE means to **“STICK TO like glue, to CHASE AFTER.”** Together, the words cleave and helper speak of a CLOSE COMPANION, a TRUSTED FRIEND and SUPPORTER that sticks close beside you through all difficulties and in all seasons. God is the most FAITHFUL of friends! **Amazingly, the word used to describe Eve in Genesis [Helper – “Azer.”] is the same word used to describe God in a host of scriptures** like DEUTERONOMY 32:9 – “The Lord is your Shield and your Helper;” and PSALM 10:14 – “You God . . . are the Helper of the fatherless;” and HEBREWS 13:6 – “The Lord is my Helper. I will not be afraid.” **Even the name describing the Holy Spirit in the New Testament – “The Advocate” – is the Greek equivalent of the word helper or close companion!**

***Submission is a VOLUNTARY ACTION that will not come naturally!**

- The curse of the curse - **Genesis 3:16-19 NAS**
- The problem with this desire - **Genesis 4:7 NAS**

***Learn what submission is NOT! (John Piper)**

- It does not imply submission to all men. (“Wives ... your own husbands”)
- It does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says.
- It does not mean losing your identity or abilities. [*Marrying a DOORMAT?]
- It does not mean avoiding the effort to change your husband.
 - How Lisa has effected change in me. *Her grief & respect last month.
- It does not imply putting the will of your husband ahead of the will of God.
- It does not imply placing all your hope in your husband. (1 Peter 3:5)

Every godly wife should ask herself the question: “How am I encouraging my husband to lead me?”

- *The greatest evidence of RESPECT (5:33) = Letting me lead!
- *Are you using your strengths for the sake of the home? **Proverbs 31**
 - DANGERS IN THE WORKPLACE: Dual allegiances/bosses.
- *Are you seeking your husband’s spiritual leadership? [[Wives who come to me.](#)]

The husband is commanded to be a SERVANT-LEADER to his wife.

While the wife is to submit to the husband’s leadership, the husband is to submit to meeting his wife’s needs! This is a picture of how Christ loves the church. **In fact, just as Christ is the prime example of submission for a wife, so he is the prime example of loving, servant-leadership for a husband!**

*Christ is consistently acting FOR THE SAKE OF his bride (the Church). [Vs. 25-27]

-Therefore, my responsibility to care for and protect my wife (not yours!)

*Jesus was the ultimate SERVANT. [Washing disciple's feet - John 13:13-15]

*He has made himself a yokefellow, not a taskmaster! Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

*Husbands, how does your leadership FEEL to your wife?

-Does she feel belittled, unacknowledged, coerced, or unconsulted?

Husbands and wives are to fulfill their role toward one another with a view to their relationship with the Lord Jesus. I am to pursue my wife for the sake of her spiritual growth and health. She is to do the same for me. We are called to SHARPEN and SANCTIFY one another in the way we submit to one another. As a wife, she is to submit to my leadership even as I lead imperfectly. As a husband, I am to love her by serving her needs even as she submits imperfectly. All of this will serve to help grow us SPIRITUALLY even as it helps us to grow closer RELATIONALLY. What a double blessing. This is why Tim Keller wrote this: "You want to help your spouse become the person God wants them to be. You hope to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servants. Over the years, you have lifted one another up to me. You sacrificed for one another. You held one another up with prayer and with thanksgiving. You confronted each other. You rebuked each other. You hugged and you loved each other and continually pushed each other toward me. And now look at you. You're radiant!" Romance, sex, laughter, and plain fun are the by-products of this process of sanctification, refinement, glorification. Those things are important, but they can't keep the marriage going through years and years of ordinary life. What keeps the marriage going is your commitment to your spouse's holiness . . . to his or her beauty . . . your commitment to their honesty and passion for the things of God. That's your job as a spouse. Any lesser goal than that, any smaller purpose, and you're just playing at being married!" [The Meaning of Marriage – P. 123]

Ultimately, "marriage at its BEST" is a marriage that PORTRAYS the wonder of JESUS CHRIST'S relationship with his bride, the Church. **Marriage is meant to be God's earthly picture of the heavenly glory of redemption. (Vs. 32)** Wouldn't you love for your marriage to be a powerful DISPLAY of the GRACE of God? I am always astounded when I see two people truly seeking to SERVE one another and LOVE one another with all of their heart in the very midst of their

brokenness. **In his wisdom, God has designed marriage to be a place where our BROKENNESS is not a cause for REJECTION, but a place for GRACE and REDEMPTION.** This is what it means for marriage to be a place where TRANSFORMATION is possible every new day. Would you like for this to be the reality in your marriage? It can be. We will learn more about this next week.

Let's pray.