

There's a lot of talk about power these days. It's often used in the context of abused authority. Russia/Ukraine, high-profile politicians and news people acting badly, governmental oppression. But is authority inherently bad? Doesn't God's providential ordering of creation require it, even our most intimate relationships? I have been reflecting on that over the last few months as I consider my roles as husband, dad, and pastor/boss, how I use the incredible influence I have, and what I can do to improve them. What about you? How are your closest relationships and how are you doing in them? Are you considering how they can improve?

We would all say we want improved relationships but most of us would like the other people to change. No one easily yields to another, and we all struggle with wielding and responding to authority properly. But what would Jesus ask of us? What if we were to bring the sufficient and supreme Christ to bear in our most important relationships? If we believe Jesus is enough to cause our relationship with God to flourish, him being the ultimate authority, do we believe he's enough to cause our relationships with one another flourish as well?

This morning we look at some of the most intimate relationships in our lives and wrestle with what God asks of us in each of them. We looked at the church last week. This morning we look at home and work. To begin, I want to consider the common ingredients that cause us to thrive.

Devotion to the Lord. Before we ask the question "What does this person need of me?" we have to ask the question "What does God ask of me?" The answer to the second question is the right answer to the first. Throughout this passage, we will see how we treat the other person is ultimately how we obey God. Even when the other person doesn't deserve it, God still demands it. Even in the days where we struggle to be all in with the imperfect person across from us, we can ultimately stay the course knowing we are doing it for him.

Humility towards the other. Humility is not thinking less of our selves but thinking of ourselves less. It is self-forgetfulness, and it's essential if we are to be faithful to what God asks of us. Humility remembers our supreme and sufficient Savior laid down his rights for us because he loves us and wants a thriving relationship with us, and it inspires us to lay down our rights for the other because Jesus loves them too. Pride, entitlement, and resentment are certain to derail us. Humility allows us to move towards, and want the best for, each other.

Complementary, not conditional, roles. Both sides have a part to play for relationships to flourish. Both have rights and responsibilities. Think of gears in a machine. They make each other go. But we want to wait for the other person to do their part before we do ours. We do ours because God asks it of us, not because the other person has fulfilled their part of the deal. Commit to go first and it will go well.

**[Colossians 3:18-19] ¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.**

Paul begins with marriage relationship and uses the unpopular word "submit". It is a non-starter for many. It has been abused to devalue and marginalize women, so our antennae go up when we hear it, and the church too often tries to avoid it or explain it away. But if Jesus is enough, this word is enough, and my prayer is that God would redeem it for all of us this morning.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were created as equals and co-rulers with different roles to play. Both were made in the image of God and valued and loved equally by him. That has never changed. But in Paul's day, there was an imbalance. The man ruled and the wife had little to no rights. Paul's instruction here, while maintaining male leadership, is revolutionary in that it recognizes a woman's worth and agency.

That means submit is not a word that calls a wife to be a doormat or to be seen but not heard. It's a humble posture of respect, encouragement, and deference to her husband and his God-given role as leader of the home. It's the wife saying to her husband "I got your back." But it's not a default position. Go back to the beginning again. What was originally intimate, peaceful, and complementary relationship between Adam and Eve suddenly became a power struggle in the fall that has perpetuated since. If you've been married for more than 10 seconds, you've likely experienced it. As God pronounces the curse of sin, he says this to Eve: **[Genesis 3:16] "Your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you."**

When sin is in control, a wife will pursue the position of headship and he will, in turn, dominate her. If we see our marriage as a power struggle, "submit" sounds like bowing down under a husband's dominion rather than lifting our husband up in his God-given role.

We will never appreciate the call to wives if we don't appreciate the call to husbands to lead. Leadership is not a rank, it's a responsibility. **It doesn't make him more important. It makes him more accountable.** God asks husbands to care for, protect, provide, and lead his marriage and family in the Lord, and each will be asked to give an account. Wives, you can support him in this role, or you can attempt to control, nag, or be so self-sufficient that you communicate to him that he doesn't have what it takes and is not needed. You do that long enough and he'll either push back or check out (I see this more in marriages these days). He'll go crush it at work where he feels valued or be susceptible to looking for affirmation elsewhere.

Does that mean God asks wives to be silent? NO! Have you ever met my wife? She is not a shrinking violet. AT ALL! She is my best friend, partner, greatest counsel, and capable woman who makes a ton of decisions and runs a lot of our lives. You are vital to the success of your marriage and the flourishing of your husband because God gave you that role. In all my weddings I tell the bride "There is no one who will have a greater influence over your husband's heart than you." It's true. You want to talk power? You have the power to crush your husband or the power to build him up. I would not be the man I am today without Martha, and that includes her following my lead and building me up by saying "I've got your back. I believe in you." God has given you that opportunity. Take him up on it and see how your husband responds.

But men, we can make it easy or hard for our wives to submit by how we steward the authority God has given us. **The substance of our leadership is not command and control, it's love.** Paul uses that Greek word *agape* that Jesus used to describe his love for us, when he said "Greater love knows no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friend", and the word Paul uses in Ephesians when he says we love our wives like Christ loved the church and laid his life down for her. **It's the selfless love that seeks the best of the other without condition or expectation.** We obey this command when we cherish, nourish, encourage her to

become who God made her to be, and lead with tenderness. When we make it about us, pull rank, or check out, we leave our wives exposed and encourage them to take control.

Men, if you want to be a great leader in your home, be a great follower of Jesus. When you rest in the love of Christ you can lead with the love of Christ. When you sit at the feet of our Servant King, you will be enabled to exercise your leadership by serving. You want to see your wife secure in your marriage? Run hard after Jesus. The more submitted I am to Christ, the more at peace Martha is in submitting to me. Why? Because she trusts him, and if I'm pursuing him, he'll lead me in the right way. Cover your wife in love and see her flourish.

[Colossians 3:20-21] ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Paul now moves on to parents and children. Students, you have a ton of power and influence over how your home and family operate. God asks that you contribute positively by obeying. That word may sound harsh but consider a couple of things. The day you were born you were not immediately on your own. God gave you built-in caretakers, protectors, and people who love you, want the best for you, and were willing and eager to reorient their entire lives to have you in it. They do not want to make your life miserable. They want to see you thrive. When I tell my boys something and they ask "WHY?!?!?", my answer is almost always "Because I love you." And very often, we know better! Shocking, I know. Some of the sweetest words I hear from my boys is when they say "Yeah, I get it. You're right." It's usually said barely audible, and somewhat begrudgingly, but it gets said because they get it's true and for their best.

God is asking you to trust him by obeying them. It pleases him when you do because you are accepting the gift he's given you, and it pleases him because obeying parents is good practice for obeying him when you are on your own. This week, give your parents the benefit of the doubt, do what they say, and see what the results are? You may find it results in what is best for you.

Parents, dads in particular, we can make this easy or we can make this hard. My most common prayer as a dad is "Lord, help me lift up, not tear down." Because I can do either with the same end in mind, and I've excelled at both over my 19 years of parenting.

The command here is not to provoke and discourage your kids. I'd love to say I've never done that but it wouldn't be true. I expect a lot of my boys, I set the bar high, and I call them to it. But when my parenting becomes about me, my rules, my way, and I get after them, all I communicate is that they are disappointing their dad, and I steal their joy and crush their hearts. Why would I do that? I have amazing sons. I love them. I want them to thrive. Dads, if we do that enough they are going to head into adulthood unsure of themselves, trying to prove something, or so deflated they are not going to even try. That's not what God wants for you or them.

Our job is to build them up by speaking life and identity into them, that they are adored by their earthly father and by their Heavenly Father and teach them how to live in light of that. How? The same nine words we saw a few weeks ago: Walk in Christ. Grow in Christ. Learn in Christ. Yes, that will involve discipline and correction, but it's to be formative, not punitive. And if you

aren't sure of the difference, think of it this way. Discouragement is "Because I said so." Encouragement is "Because I love you."

I'm about to go away for a few days with my youngest, Joe, for some father/son time. I've done this with my other two when they turned 13. We head out for a couple days of adventure and to talk about [1 Corinthians 16:13-14] ¹³ **Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.** ¹⁴ **Let all that you do be done in love.** We'll discuss what it means to live as a man of God? And for a couple days my son will hear and experience the love of his father through my undivided attention and adoration.

Men, I know many of you did not have a good example. I was sure I'd be the perfect father, and that lasted about four minutes. My dad was a hard and harsh man, but I know he loved me, did his best, and did it better than his dad. 20 years into this deal, I just want to do it better than my dad and help my boys do better than me. That's how you change the trajectory of a family tree. You don't have to be perfect. Just do it better than your dad did it and find other men in this church who can help you get there.

[Colossians 3:22-4:1] ²² **Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.** ²³ **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,** ²⁴ **knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.** ²⁵ **For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.** ¹ **Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.**

The last relationship is work. Some translations have bondservants, other slaves. This is not the African slave trade that is part of our country's history. In biblical times, a vast number of people were indentured servants who paid off debt through labor. While they entered into it willingly, they still gave away their rights, and that created the potential for abuse and exploitation.

Paul here does not want to redeem slavery, he wants to redeem work. Most, if not all of us, have worked a job and gotten paid for that work. We can look at that is simple and transactional, but God sees it as something more. Work is sacred, existing in the Garden before the fall, and part of the purpose of our lives, and it has the potential to be a form of worship by giving our all and committing it to the Lord.

It's very easy to work hard only when you're being watched when you hate your job or don't like your boss. **But God sees you all the time and asks you to give your all, all the time.** How would your attitude, productivity, and satisfaction change if you did? Many of you know I started my career as an accountant and, frankly, wanted to punch myself in the face most days because I couldn't stand it (no offense, accountants!). But how different would my experience have been if I saw my work as worship. I bet it would be joy.

We are in the midst of the Great Resignation. Many are questioning their relationship with work and opting out or running to another job in the hopes of being fulfilled. Stats say 6/10 of you are thinking about a job change, and that's ok. But until you do, how are you going to finish? How

would you be different if you busted your tail this week for the Lord? Would it be enough that it pleases him? You can change your own experience, the experience of your co-workers and bosses, and provide a powerful witness for Christ if you give your all at work.

But bosses, like we've seen on the other two, we can make this easy or hard for our teams. Everyone reports to someone, and you are under the authority of our Heavenly Master who treats you fairly and justly and asks you to do the same for those who work for you. When I'm doing this right, our staff knows they are valued, is clear on what is being asked of them, and has been given what they need to be successful. Are you using your authority to allow your workers to flourish? You have the authority to steward the purpose of God in work.

Review and repent. Ask God to show you how you are living in these most intimate relationships and if something needs to change. Then acknowledge it to the other person. I've said sorry more than I ever planned as a husband, dad, and boss, but I know it's vital to flourish. Acknowledge where you've fallen short, ask for forgiveness, and commit to make the necessary changes. Oh, and go first. Always go first.

Dream, decide, and design. Dream with your spouse, parents, kids, staff, boss about how your relationship can be different, decide on a course of action, and make plans to pursue it. Martha and I were away for a much needed few days together and, while we had a lot of fun, we also spent time just assessing where we are as a couple and family. We realized we had been operating someone independently from one another and that needed to change. I had to own some things, she owned some things, and we came away from that time hopeful and encouraged. Your relationships are not stuck, but they are going to require your attention and commitment to change.

Pray and practice. Then ask for God's help, because you can't do it without him, and go try something new. It's ok if it doesn't work at first. Keep praying, keep going, ask for help here. God wants this for you. He will provide all you need to make it happen.

Authority is essential, but it doesn't have to be a barrier in our relationships. Jesus used his power and authority for our relationship with him to flourish, and when we follow him, he will do the same for our relationships with one another.