



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 5:21-33 :: “Reflecting Jesus in Marriage” [6.23.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: A Spirit-filled Christ-honoring marriage reflects Jesus’ relationship with His Church, glorifies God, and provides true contentment to a couple. Today, we discover how.

The largest problems impacting marriage include: unreasonable expectations, inadequate spiritual and emotional preparation pre-marriage, and lack of meaningful spiritual and emotional support once married. God has made abundant resources available so that we can enjoy thriving marriages. These include the Bible, prayer, pastors, counselors, and godly examples (mentors). Yet, the most important resource is the Holy Spirit.

Subject: A Spirit-filled marriage

Object: Reflect Jesus in marriage

Context: Jesus followers are to be empowered and controlled by God’s Spirit (5:18). In this section, we discover what a Spirit-filled marriage looks like, and in the sections that follow we will contemplate a Spirit-filled family and work experience. Paul previously addressed Spirit-filled life and singleness (4:1-5:21), and we don’t want to disregard the importance of Christ-honoring singleness. Furthermore, since a Christ-honoring marriage reflects the relationship between Jesus and His Church; this section applies to every follower of Jesus.

A. Unity + intimacy (31-32)

³¹ “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

1. God’s ideal is unity or oneness (31, Gen. 2:24)

Marriage is to reflect the unity and intimacy between Jesus and His Church. God’s plan was revealed early in the Creation account. God ordained a husband and wife, a man and a woman, to become one (31, Gen. 2:24). The ideal is spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy. God’s ideal is more than partnership or team, but oneness or unity. Marriage is unlike any other human relationship in the goal of oneness (Cf. partnership, friendship, parent-child re).

2. Sin + rebellion are obstacles to unity (Gen. 3)

Sin and its consequences are obstacles to unity with God, and unity between husband and wife. In the Garden of Eden there was intimacy, vulnerability, and innocence regarding evil. Immediately following Adam and Eve’s sin there is a loss of intimacy, vulnerability, and innocence. Sin causes separation from God, and between husband and wife. In the Garden, there was blame-shifting rather than confession and repentance (Gen. 3). Ever since there are broken-hearted and simply broken people. And our continued rebellion against God compounds the calamity. Furthermore, as part of God’s judgement of Adam and Eve’s sin He declared that husbands and wives will have conflict over authority in their relationship (Gen. 3:16). A desire for control, or authority and the abuses of power, control or authority create obstacles to unity and intimacy. Where can people find hope to experience unity and intimacy?

3. The mystery of unity

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (32). A mystery is a truth that is veiled in the Old Testament, but revealed or manifest in the new. As the Church relates to Jesus, and Jesus relates to His Church so shall a

husband and wife relate to one another. As Church and Jesus glorify Father so does a Spirit-filled Christ-honoring marriage.

For you to unite with Christ, you need to die to self. Similarly, to unite with your spouse you need to die to self. Jesus has given the Holy Spirit to His followers to empower you to live a Spirit-filled life and marriage, and to preserve unity (Eph. 4:3). To be Spirit-filled means that you are controlled by God's Spirit or yielded your will to His. You have all the Holy Spirit you need, the issue is how much of *you* the Holy Spirit has.

B. Mutual submission (21): *Submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

1. Put the needs of others before our own

We are to *submit to one another* because of *fear of God* or reverence. What does submit mean? The Greek *hupotasso* means to be ranked under, and had primary application to a military chain of command. Jesus exemplifies submission when He denies Himself of the rights and privileges of deity in connection with His Incarnation, life, ministry, and death on the cross (Phil. 2:3-8). His life is characterized by putting the needs of others before His own.

The Holy Spirit produces a selfless love, and mutual respect (33) that allows us to put the needs of others before our own. This is a foundation for healthy relationships and community generally, and marriage specifically. Yielding authority, or the need to be right can be related to respect, but is fundamentally a work of God's Spirit.

C. Wives encourage your husband to be your spiritual leader (22-24)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

1. How to yield to your husband's leadership

a. Motive: honor Jesus (22)

A wife is to *submit to* or *honor her husband* because she is seeking to *honor Jesus* (22). The desire and willingness to yield is a work of the Holy Spirit in a wife's life. A wife is to submit to her husband not to men in general. The issue is not superiority since men and women are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28). A woman is to be a helpmate comparable to a man (Gen. 2:18). There are four Hebrew words translated "helper" and the one used in Genesis 2 is usually used to describe God delivering Israel. Thus, God does not see women as inferior. Jesus exalts women. In contrast, the Greco-Roman world viewed women simply as property.

b. Motivate Him to lead (23-24)

A husband is head of his wife, and is called to be a spiritual leader to his wife (and family). As an ideal this would resemble the church being led by and submitted to Jesus (23-24). Encouraging your husband to be your spiritual leader is one of the best things for Him, for you and your marriage. How does the church honor Jesus? By praise, adoration, and yielding. A wife's affirmation for her husband may carry more weight than any other human being's words in his life. Consider how you as a wife affirm or encourage rather than discourage or criticize. Many men struggle at the role of being a spiritual leader. Guys often don't like to do what we find difficult or we don't feel good at. Most husbands want to be their wife's hero. Motivate him by letting him know *your* need for his spiritual leadership. He may be the head, but you can be the neck that turns the head.

D. Husbands love your wife like Christ loves His Church (25-33)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

1. How to love your wife as Christ loves His Church:

In the Greco-Roman world, a husband had no duty to a wife. In Christ, a husband has the highest duty imaginable. A husband can make it significantly easier for his wife to submit to his leadership by fulfilling his role. A husband is to love His wife as Jesus loves the church (25). The Greek term *agape* is the highest form of love. It is pure, unconditional, unmerited, and committed. Your choice to love is key (Gen. 24:67). What does this Christ-like Spirit-filled love look like?

a. Sacrifice: first, it is sacrificial in that *Christ gave Himself* (25). Jesus regularly gave Himself for others, and made the ultimate sacrifice of giving His life on the cross for us (Jn. 15:13).

b. Sanctified or set-apart (26) *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.*

The marriage relationship is to be set-apart as a special relationship. Husbands *sanctify their marriage by the washing and cleansing of water by the words of Jesus* (Cf. Jn. 15:3). In contrast, Greeks and Romans would take a bride to a lake, river, or ocean as a ceremony to cleanse all pre-marital defilement. The Greco-Roman ceremony could do nothing to change the thinking about God, and one's identity in Christ. Thus, it was powerless to change the relationship with God and between husband and wife. On the other hand, learning the word together, talking about the things of God, worshiping, praying together being in a group together, empowered by the Holy Spirit help to set the relationship apart. Husbands also set the relationship apart by dwelling with their wife with understanding, honoring her, and treating her as precious (1 Pet.3:7).

c. Spotless (27) *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

As a follower of Jesus, you are seen by Him as *spotless, holy, and perfect* in your position before God (Song of Sol. 4:7). As a groom gazes upon his bride on their wedding day, he sees her as perfect, no spots or blemishes. Husbands have a choice to focus on the spotless nature of his bride or the perceived spots.

d. Self (28, 29,33)

A husband is to *love his wife like he loves himself* (28, 29, 33). Since a husband and wife are to be one, a husband is called to *love His wife as he loves himself* (28). Thus, a husband is called to *nurture and cherish his wife as Jesus does the church, and avoid hurting her as he avoids hurting himself* (29-30).

This type of love is supernatural and thus you need the Holy Spirit. And when you experience this type of Spirit-filled marriage you will be content, and you will bring glory to God. God is waiting for you to ask (Lu. 11:9-13)

Study Guide Qs

1. What are some of the obstacles to unity and intimacy in marriage?

2. Why is submission in general, and in marriage, difficult?

3. What are some of the challenges of being single that married people should know? And what are some challenges of being married that singles should know?

4. How would you like to apply this lesson in your life?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a helpful free book on marriage: <https://calvarynexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Marriage-Bruce-Zachary.pdf>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Sample: Pray for God to open doors for you to talk about Jesus with neighbors where you live, work, school, play and worship.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 6:1-4 :: "Reflecting Jesus in Family"