

HOME • LIFE • RELATIONSHIPS

“ROMANCE & SEX”

LESSON 2

☰ Ephesians 5:21-33

POINT

Love is expressed through self-giving, not self-getting. With an understanding that God’s character is loving, compassionate, and caring at its core, we could conclude He gains pleasure by giving Himself for our benefit. When it comes to romance and sex, they both are very good when experienced within God’s design of selfless love. But the moment we slip into a self-centered, self-seeking mode, desiring to get something out of these acts for ourselves, that’s when we miss the God-designed joy contained within them. Refocusing on God’s purposes for marital intimacy will help us experience great joy!

NOTE: Throughout the study guide, the questions have been tailored around the three emphases of LifeBridge: Discover Grace (Acts 2:47), Grow in Grace (Col. 1:28), Live Gracefully (Eph. 2:10). Having questions from the text and also tailored to these three emphases is an attempt to help your group to both absorb the principles to each person’s life, and to also consider how to transfer them into another’s life.

TIP: As the leader you have latitude to mold this lesson to your group and the time you’ve budgeted to study together. For any question you ask, consider ways you might need to ask a follow-up question that fits your group. This is just a guide for you to adapt to the people in your group. Enjoy!

Notes:

OPEN

God designed each of us to experience joy in life, especially within the marital covenant. The union between man and woman allows us to give and receive true love and acceptance. One of the most beautiful love poems of all time is found in the Song of Songs (or, Song of Solomon). The love expressed throughout several episodes in this book celebrates the sexual love between a woman and a man. God gave us an unquenchable nature for pure love, and delights in our joy when our longing for intimacy is experienced in marriage.

Here's an idea! Read through portions of the Song of Songs with your marriage partner. It's beautiful! As you read, bear in mind how it foreshadows the union God had Israel and Christ has with his Church.

In light of the intimate union that followers of Christ have with Him, it would do us well to review how such intimacy relates to the marital covenant. What's helpful is that the apostle Paul already did that comparison for us in Ephesians 5. This may be the richest section in all of Scripture on how a person's "I do!" to Christ as Lord and Savior, impacts one's "I do!" with a partner 'til death. When Paul addresses this with the Christians in Ephesus, he wasn't trying to play the role of marriage counselor. He was more concerned with their relationship with Christ, because getting that squared up would indeed help their faithfulness in the marital relationships.

Notes:

DISCUSSION STARTERS (choose any or all of these):



DISCOVER

Name one way a husband's & wife's union (whether solid or shaky) models something to others (friends, children) who have not yet accepted God's grace in Christ.



GROW

Think of a recent point of irritation between you and your mate. Who was to blame? How would owning up to blame in your marriage more often help your union endure?



LIVE

Before you got married, what were your expectations of married life?

DIG

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 from your favorite version. Now, re-read it from The Message version. Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.

Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So, just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already "one" in marriage.

No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it (nourishes & cares for it). That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh." This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

The key to understanding this section is allowing 5:21 to play an overarching role. Mutual submission to Christ is the starting point for both husband (v. 25-33) and wife (v. 22-24) to understand their functions in marriage. It's also important to define what it means for all followers of Christ to "submit" to Him. In short, the term means to reorder oneself beneath another out of respect for priority and authority. So, when it comes to Christ, followers are to get beneath his authority because of His priority as Creator, Lord, and Savior. How the husband submits to Christ's authority is different than how the wife does that—but both responses to Him are equally important for a joyful union as a married couple.

Paul begins with addressing the function of the wife, not because he's a male chauvinist but because women in Ephesus were apparently not respecting the function of their husband. (The goddess Artemis was negatively influencing the attitude and behavior of women in Ephesus.) A Christian wife's disrespect for her man is not an act of reverence to Christ. As the church understands the role of Christ, so the wife is to follow suit with regards to her husband. But the husband is not to lord it over his bride. His act of reverence to Christ is to love his wife (5:25). "Love" is the single most important word in this entire section. Twice in these verses Paul adds special emphasis to the word "love" (v. 25, 28), making sure that the Christian husband understands the responsibility and significance of replicating Christ's love to his wife. The command to "love" was not issued in these verses to the wife, but to the husband. What does it mean to "love" as Christ loved the church? Simply, to care enough to die for the one you love! Husbands, your care for your wife becomes another way to represent the care of Christ. And that is honoring to our wives.

One of the deadliest earthquakes in the last ten years filled the nation of Iran with sadness. But in the midst of despair, one story gave people hope. Cradled in her dead mother's arms, surrounded by the crumbled remnant of a collapsed building, a baby girl was found alive. The mother shielded six-month-old Nassim from the falling debris and saved her life. Rescuers found the girl 37 hours after the earthquake. Hessemoddin Farrokhyar, Red Crescent public relations deputy director in Tehran, said: "She is alive because of her mother's embrace. The baby girl is in good condition considering the circumstances."

Christ was "crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5, NIV). Those who take refuge in Jesus' embrace are shielded from sin's devastating impact, saved through his sacrifice. God's nature is to protect us, as seen in Christ—and as seen in mom's—and to also be seen in the care given by husbands. Real men love like this.

The husband is the leader when it comes to the union within the marriage, and he leads by giving his life away for his wife. Such selflessness will naturally fuel his wife's submission to the degree in which he loves her. After all, what wife would not want to submit to a husband that loves like Christ loved? What a daunting duty for Christian husbands. Think of it: the church's gratitude for Christ comes second to the self-less sacrifice of Christ. In turn, the wife's respect and gratitude will grow as her husband leads her by his self-sacrificing love for her.



GROW

Consider Eph. 5:25-27...in what ways can the husband translate what Christ did/does for His church today into what he is to do for his own bride? In what ways does the husband make his wife holy, preparing her for the coming of Christ, preserving her purity?

APPLY

A.J. Conyers wrote, "We must answer the invitation to step outside of ourselves. Another human being is that invitation." At the core of this entire section is valuing another as more important than oneself—as Christ modeled. When Christ is allowed to be the Lord over each marriage partner, then the entire marital union will thrive with joy, satisfaction, purpose, and be an example for the world to see God through.

ACTION POINT

Spend some time discussing these things with your Lord and with your mate.



GROW

When it comes to sexual intimacy and Eph. 5:28, how would the temperature of romance heat up if the husband sought to bring pleasure to his wife without any ulterior motives to get something out of the experience himself?



LIVE

What is something you will do for your spouse this week that will demonstrate respect and love?
