



How to Live the Life – Honourable Marriage – Eph.5:15-33. Julie & John Lanham Sunday 5th November 2017



This week honouring God through marriage – what does the bible teach us on this issue – the passage is familiar to many, but possibly misunderstood and misused.

We want to focus on three key points – Submission, Sacrifice & Teamwork

Recent talks have discussed how we need

to be like clay on the potters wheel & being remade(Tom),

to put in new clothes (April)

and last week Jacqui spoke on how we need to imitate God and seek, as Christ did, to put the needs of others before ourselves.

This week we are looking at Marriage – as God designed it. We acknowledge not all of us are in a marriage/married – many may be single/divorced/widow etc – but there are aspects of this passage that we feel have meaning/ relevance for all of us.



What is the point of marriage???? / Why marry in the first place ?

John Mark Comer – Loveolgy – “Happiness is not the reason for marriage, but the product of it, it is dangerous to think you can make the other person happy – God is the source of contentment.” (don’t expect your spouse to make you happy / meet all your needs, we need to look to God for this).

The bible gives us the template - the family of God is the foundation for the community – and research shows that marriage can be the better foundation for the family. Harry Benson research director for the Marriage Foundation published a report in July 2017 which highlighted Family instability as an epidemic issue.

Whilst cohabiting parents account for only 21% of all couples, the separation of cohabiting parents accounts for 51% of family breakdown. Feedback collected from couples through this research indicated that couples tend to *slide* into a cohabiting relationship whereas the decision to marry requires a conscious / intentional step - decision often after weeks and months of wrestling with the life long implications of “getting married”.

Why Marry ? JMC – Loveolgy Series states five reasons why God designed marriage – a blueprint/template we find right back at the start of the bible in Genesis 2:24 -

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

This was not only the first marriage – but it was the model / template for all marriage.

Other defences – for example - Ecclesiastes 4:9:

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

JMC's cites five reasons –

Friendship ~ Genesis 2: 18 ~ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.

Partnership ~ Genesis 2 : 18 continued ~ “I will make a helper suitable for him.” Equal parties: work shoulder to shoulder, one no good without the other ~ but will have different roles, these need to be mutually agreed, due to circumstance roles may change. (But man is the head)

Sexuality ~ Genesis 2:25 ~ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Marriage provides the context to explore sexuality / glue for the marriage to stay close to each other. Genesis 2:24 ~ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Family ~ Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth. 1st command ~ go and have sex, multiply / building block of society / family more than just family- I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Re-creation – the hyphen is important – not recreation ! – Through a marriage we are re-created – remade, refined, shaped and prepared for eternity.

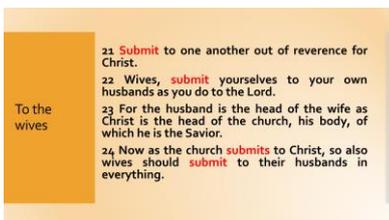
Thus an intentional partnership – with mutually supportive roles is the template God gave us. Synergy – 2+2 = 5 – I think we can all see/agree that any successful friendship, partnership can produce outcomes that are more than simply the sum of the two parts – 2+2=5. But - we also know that close partnership working – at any level – family, work, Church ! – can also highlight wrinkles and cracks ! - this is JMC's fifth point – he see's this as being part of God's model of marriage as its through acknowledging and addressing the cracks/wrinkles and differences in a marriage that we work to become more like Christ.

Reading : Ephesians - 5: 15-33

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Instructions for Christian Households

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[b] 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. 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.”[c] 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.



Four times in three verses Paul tells us to submit (submit to each other, wives to husbands - which he says twice just in case we didn't get it the first time and to Christ). For who, is this a red flag????

The Oxford Dictionary definition of submit is: Accept or yield to a superior force or the authority or will of another. I don't know about you but to me this speaks of giving up my rights / choices etc. to people in a higher position than me.

If we read V21 as a whole, not just focus on the word submit we get clearer understanding of the point Paul was making. 'He calls us *all to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ*'. To live with an attitude of submission to everyone and this is out of our love for Jesus.

In Matthew 20 we read that Jesus came to serve and not be served it is in the same way that we are called to submit. Paul is telling us to respect each other equally, whether in a position of authority and leadership or not. This is much easier to do when we feel valued and respected, not so easy if we don't. But as followers of Christ we should be called to submit to each other & in so doing will be modelling a life of serving each other as Jesus did. This doesn't mean we become a door mat and 'yes' people - at times we may need to stand firm to live by Jesus' standards and respectfully say 'no' to things when we don't feel they are right or we are being taken advantage of.

Paul, in verse 22, then goes onto speak directly to the wives. Note here, Paul isn't talking to the husbands, he has a different message for them that John will unpack in a few minutes. Additionally Paul is not saying that wives should submit to all husbands, or all men, but to your husband. If we read this passage in the message version it says ~ *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.*

When we read the bible in depth we start to see that God has designed a very ordered kingdom, everything has its place, and for a reason. As part of this order God calls women to submit to their husbands, understanding and supporting them - and for the husbands to lead their wives and family. Out of respect for Christ we need to honour the differing roles God has given wives and husbands.

To unpack what Paul means when he instructs wives to submit to their husbands, it is helpful to look back at God's original design. In the book of Genesis we read in chapter 2: verse 15: 'The Lord God took the man and put him to work in the garden'. We then read in verse 18: The Lord God said "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper fit or suitable for him". Verses 21-22 then tell us of the creation of woman ~ Man's 'helper'.

In Hebrew, the word for "helper" used in this verse and verse 21 is ezer, it is always and only used in the Old Testament in the context of vitally important and powerful acts of rescue and support. The word ezer is used 21 times in the Old Testament and TWICE it is used in the context of the first woman. *Without exception, these biblical texts are talking about a vital, powerful kind of help.* Yet when ezer is applied to the first woman, its meaning is usually changed to fit with traditional and cultural views of women's roles.

My understanding therefore is that God actually created us as husband and wife, to complement each other to accomplish the plans He has for us. Working together in partnership, shoulder to shoulder seeking and working out the vision God has for our life. Our roles maybe different but they are equally important, our husbands are given the responsibility to lead the way but we are responsible to help and support them. When we work together we are not only honouring God but helping build his Kingdom here on earth.



I want to bring us back now to the film clip – sailing, canoeing or cycling together takes team work, trust and understanding. In a team there is always a captain or leader, one who carries the responsibility.- I often think of sailing as a great metaphor for life and leading an Honourable Christian Marriage.

To sail a dinghy such as we used to do we needed to understand the differing roles ~ you could say there are a number of different elements ~ obviously the boat and the water, then the helm, the crew and the wind (I want you to think of the wind as the Holy Spirit) ~ When we sailed, John was at the helm, he was responsible for the main sail and the tiller, he controlled the direction and speed of the dinghy. I was the crew, my responsibility was to help keep the boat stable and manage the jib (small sail). To get the best sail we could we needed to work together and understand where the wind was coming from. Because you can't see the wind we needed to know how to read the water, if we got this wrong we either got nowhere quickly or as happened on a regular basis would find ourselves upside down. Reading the wind (Holy Spirit) primarily was the responsibility of the helm (John) so he could set the main sail and steer the boat to enable us to sail as close up wind as possible to get the best run.

To sail as in a marriage it takes team work, the roles are equally important. John ultimately is in control as the helm. I had to respect and trust his judgement and rely on him to keep us upright. Particularly if I was out on the trapeze (it was a very vulnerable position), great fun with a constant wind but on squally days I would find myself totally out of my comfort zone, having no control. Sometimes as in marriage our roles reversed, John was still leading but I would need to feed back to him what was going on in front because his vision was restricted by the sail – It would then be my role to read the water and warn of any strong squalls coming at us that we needed to prepare for or watch out for other dinghy's that we needed to avoid.

Remember the Hebrew word here for helper is Ezer ~ One who supplies strength in the area that is lacking. The term does not imply that the helper is weaker or stronger than the one helped. "Fit for him" or "matching him", as a wife this doesn't mean I am a servant of John but instead I compliment him. Submission then to our husbands isn't to be seen as a negative, a power over us. We are called to submit as a helper, it is something we do out of love and respect as Christ called us to.

To the husbands

25-28: 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.

To the Husbands - Lets focus on some of the words in these verses – and look to the model of Christ – he wasn't married – but he lived a life that was a template for us to use in our marriages.

...go all out...– not half hearted, not ... well maybe...., guys - we are called to put all our great strength and effort into our relationship – put it first

...a love marked by giving, not getting.... – we need look first to the needs of our wife – not ourselves. JMC in the Loveology talk referred to earlier said it wasn't until he got married he really understood how selfish he was !

Giving is not just about remembering her birthday/ wedding anniversary – its about dropping out of Saturday football, its about leaving work early so you can do the school run every once in a while, its serenity prayer / St Francis – “seek first to understand” – we will provide some tools later !

We need to read the signs of when to drop out, put her first, it might be as a one off or it might be for a season!!!!!!

..His words....her beauty.. – not just agreeing with the “do I look good in ... “ – seeing the beauty in what she does, who she is, the blessings she brings to the family – to your relationship –

.. Everything he does ..designed... best out of her.. – Husbands we need to be – intentional, proactive – not domineering – but we need to intentionally put aside our desires, wants etc. and focus on how we can help our wife become the woman God destined her to be – we are an important partner in that process

..dressing her...radiant with holiness – how do we help our wife – what practical things can we do to give her the time, space, energy, capacity to grow ??

So as husbands we are called to love our wives sacrificially – the way Christ did for us.

1 Peter 3:7: “In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.”

Man in the Mirror – Patrick Morely

“Your wife's submission to you is to be in the same manner, or equal to, the way she submits to Christ. Don't you think that puts a pretty large responsibility on you as the husband? If she submits to you as if you were Christ Himself, then can you treat her any less than the way Christ would treat her?”

That seems to me to be a pretty tough standard to live up to guys – and I for one know I don't achieve this as I should. Despite my best efforts, plans and intentions – I slip back to thinking first about me and my feelings, desires, wants etc. – but we are all on a journey, and as husbands we are called to die to ourselves and submit to God by the way we live our lives as husbands and serve our wives.

Morley makes a further point about how we are to love our wife –

“The heart, the inner self, is comprised of three parts - the intellect is the rational man; the will is the volitional man; and the feelings are the emotional man. We are to love our wives volitionally, as an act of the will by choice. Fortunately, we are not instructed to feel in love with our wives.”



So what does this look like in reality – back to the video clip again - two further sporting examples – as you would expect from us - Tandem & C2 canoe.

Leading from behind – C2 – sometimes roles need to be reversed – power from behind – steering in front – step back and allow her to lead take control – but again its team work – you need to work together to balance the boat and make sure you don’t capsize – as in the picture !

Tandem – In many areas as husbands we need to lead from the front – our role to take the weather / wind rain ! – we may have the controls, steering/guiding – but with this comes the responsibility to keep us on track/stop safely etc. When we are leading we have a responsibility to the other person behind who can’t see round us and is trusting their safety to us.

Both cases – team work – each bring / contribute differently – but need to work together

C4F – Marriage sessions story – wage earner role swap – example of a young couple. He was trying to set up his own business, she was looking forward to being a Mum at home – His business struggled, she got offer of a senior teaching role – headship. When time came to start a family – he stayed at home, she developed her career. They talked it through – it was a step change on both sides – but for their family/marriage at that time they felt it was the right way. So what steps can we take as a husband to help our wife flourish ?

As with the authority of Christ over the church, this is not a self-centred exercise of power but leadership that takes care to serve the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the wife.



The problem is we don’t live in the garden of Eden, the perfect match doesn’t exist, we don’t always ‘fit’ together - in some areas we may be total opposites and often these differences aren’t exposed until we are living together as a married couple. Sometimes our differences don’t come to the surface until years later as we face new challenges. Into our marriage we bring different experiences, expectations, we are pulled and pushed with the pressures of life. Again as JMC said it it’s not until we are married that we realise our own selfish desires and really get to know our partner. These times might be likened to finding ourselves in the water; having capsized because we misread the wind or ignored the signs.

When we found ourselves in a capsize situation we needed to know how to respond ~ To do this we practiced on calm days so when we found ourselves upside down in high winds we knew what each of us had to do. Having checked we were both ok we would take up our positions, me inside an over turned boat and John ready to heave on the centre board, again we needed to work together to get ourselves

back up right and moving. It is the same in our marriage we need a backup plan. What can we do to avoid the consequences that come with the challenges of life and how can we protect ourselves to avoid being blown off track?

Drifting apart is now stated as the greatest reason for divorce ~ Harry Benson in his report states 'too many happy couples split up' ~ Most family breakdown appears to come totally out of the blue 60% of divorces and 80% of unmarried separations involve couples who reported they were happy and not arguing, especially, just one year earlier.

In 1 Corinthians 13: 4-5 we read "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Yet our spouse is often the one who takes the brunt of our shortcomings, at the end of a long day having given out to others".

I want to share three principles that help create a more harmonious relationship. These principles also work for other family, friendship and work colleague relationships.

- Firstly let's look at what can erode and eventually destroy relationships. Study yourself and ask, what do I do or say that exasperates my spouse???

Do you find yourself 'Scoring Points'? "But you didn't put your coat away". STOP, it's not a competition, you don't have to have the final word ~ a simple request can very quickly turn in to a full blown conflict situation.

Do you find yourself 'Thinking the Worst'? "Why has he bought me flowers? What does he want, what has he done?" STOP ~ this maybe his way of saying thank you or sorry.

What about 'Opting Out' ~ say difficult conversations? STOP, take a big breath, ask for some time to think and reflect before replying / discussing. Walking away can make your spouse feel you don't care.

Or do you have a tendency to 'Put Down' ~ "You never....", "How can you be so stupid". It elevates you and undermines them. STOP this destroys confidence.

If we continue with these bad habits it is likely that our spouse will eventually shut down or retaliate. The great thing about these STOP signs is that you are in control; you are not waiting for the other person to change. You have the power to change the environment and divert a potential conflict situation.

- The second principle: Know how to make your spouse feel loved and valued. Remember 'Love' is a doing word.

In relationships there are times that our spouse needs to feel and not just know that they are loved, valued and appreciated. Through the five love languages Gary Chapman discusses how we can show our appreciation to others in a way that they understand. Which of the following actions would help your spouse feel most valued?

Serving ~ Help around the house: If you notice they often offer to help others, it is likely that they will respond positively to you offering to help them.

Time ~ Just spending time together: You notice they are much happier after you have done something together. It may be going for a walk / gardening or cooking together.

Gifts: Receiving a gift ~ Not necessarily expensive, just a token to show I was thinking about you.
Remembering special occasions, beautifully wrapped.

Touch ~ Physical contact, holding hands, a hug or more intimate.

Words ~ Talking: Being listened to and being affirmed: I really appreciated it when you..... You look really attractive in that.....

Study your spouse to know how you can show them that you value them. For them to feel loved you need to regularly speak in their language, remember love is a doing word. For example: John's two key love languages are SERVING and AFFIRMATION ~ If he is out of sorts, struggling with the pressures of life, by me relieving him of some of the tasks at home (washing the car / meal on the table when he comes in) and / or affirming him in his role, speaking in his love language can help lift his spirits. It helps him to feel valued as a husband, at least at home. For more on this search 'The 5 Love Languages'

- The third and equally important principle is to regularly make time to connect and communicate. It is important to make time for each other, to catch up, share the highs and lows of the day, concerns and fears, hopes and dreams ~ remember your partner isn't a mind reader, learn to listen, put other things aside and spend uninterrupted time together. Prioritise time and protect it ~ sometimes this will mean putting your spouse first, over your children / parents / friends / work or hobbies and even church activities.

If you sense you are starting to feel disconnected or niggled, do something straight away to get back on track. To work it through you may need to say no to something or drop out of an activity for a season. Listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit if you sense a red flag, for the sake of your marriage don't ignore it.

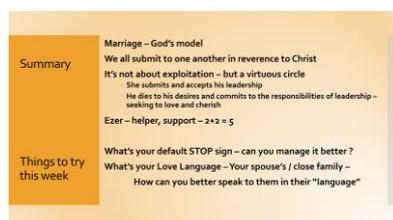
In work we regularly have appraisals and set goals. With our car we need to keep it well serviced and put it through an MOT annually. If we implement this into our marriage we may avoid a lot of unnecessary stress and problems. Read books / blogs / listen to talks / attend a marriage course together / find a mentor.

Recognise your bad habits and STOP yourself, discover which love language your spouse responds to best and prioritise time for each other, protect it and communicate.



Clearly this passage is directed at and focused on marriage – but marriage is a particular/unique form of a partnership – and aspects of Paul's words can apply more broadly – to other family relationships and also our relationship with God.

For others – how can we collectively support the marriages in LCC – what can you do ? As a church we have a role to support others - at the marriage ceremony – the declaration we respond to - empty nesters, older members - supporting younger marriages – practical – baby sitting etc to allow them to have their date nights, mentoring / guiding – youngsters – youth marriage preparation / relationship guidance.



Marriage is God ordained / his model

We are all called to submit to one another in reverence to Christ

Its not about exploitation - but a virtuous circle

Working to re-create each other

She submits - supports and accepts his leadership

He dies to himself and commits to responsibility of that leadership – loves and cherishes

Ezer – helper /support / $-2+2 = 5$

So this week – in between doing Jacqui's daily challenge !! –

What's your default STOP sign ? – and how are you going to try and manage your reaction better ??

What's your Love Language ? What's you spouse's / close family member ? What can you do to speak to them in this language ?

Further reading –

John Mark Comer – Loveology - <https://bridgetown.church/series/loveology/>

Patrick Morely – Man the Mirror - <http://patrickmorley.com/mim25/>

Gary Chapman – 5 Love Languages - <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/>

Harry Benson – STOP signs – article –

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/harry-benson-our-children-all-but-drove-us-apart-1972248.html>