

**Series: Family Portrait: A picture of God's design for the family.**

**#3 Have You Asked THE Question**

Ephesians 5:21

**Introduction:** You know how on a roller coaster there's a warning label posted just before you get on that says something like: "This is a high action thrill ride. Not recommended for pregnant women or people with heart problems, etc." There should be a warning label before every biblical sermon: "The statements of Jesus can turn your life upside down."

Jesus reduced life to one simple goal--seeking God's rule over my life. Matthew 6:33 **"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** NKJV

As we continue our series on seeing the picture of God's design for the family. I'm going to try to summarize the principle Paul is going to teach us about relationships today in one question...one question that if you would ask this question in your relationships, it would transform them and turn your life upside down. It's one of the secrets to happiness, and probably do more to replace strife with peace than anything else you could do. And not just in marriage, but in ALL your relationships.

(I'm **not** going to give you that question until the end of the message, because I want to let the Apostle Paul build the biblical foundation behind the question.)

So, let's get started. Go with me to: **Ephesians 5:15-33 (ESV)**

**15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

**22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.**

**25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of**

**water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.[a] 28 In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.**

In these verses, we find some very important instructions about marriage, family, and relationships. Last week we started at the end of this passage with verses 31-32; **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (ESV)**

### **Couple of important points from last week message, The Mystery of Marriage:**

**First**, Jesus clearly taught that marriage is between one woman and one man.

**Second**, there are very little married people issues; only single people issues that get worse in marriage. Marriage doesn't create problems; it exposes them. The pressures of marriage don't create problems in our hearts; it just reveals them.

**Third**, both marriage and singleness are gifts. Romance and marriage are not the highest forms of relationship. Your relationship to Jesus is the most important relationship.

**Lastly**, we saw that marriage and singleness are, according to Paul, one of the things God uses most to teach us about our relationship to Him. Paul calls this the divine mystery of marriage, and when you unlock this mystery, it shows us what God is really doing in your marriage and relationships. Marriage was designed from the beginning to display Christ and the church.

Jack Hayford writes that...The covenant of marriage is the single most important human bond that holds all of God's work on the planet together. It is no small wonder that the Lord is passionate about the sanctity of marriage and the stability of the home. This covenant of marriage is based on the covenant God has made with us, His bride, the Church.

**These points are going to be important today because Paul is going to teach us a principle that should undergird all our relationships.**

**OK, here we go.** Go back to verses 21-24, where Paul is literally mid-sentence; **"...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (ESV)**

Verse 22 is probably the most unpopular verse in the NT. When you see someone on TV that wants to dis the Bible, this is one of the verses they always throw out. "Oh, you can't possibly believe the Bible, it's so out-dated" And sadly, this verse has sometimes been used as a justification for the subjugation of women. But that's because it has been misunderstood and lifted out of context.

### Two quick observations here:

**First**, what is the first word in verse 22? **"Wives."** Who is he talking to in this verse? Not "husbands." He's addressing Wives. You husbands will get your own verse in a few minutes. This verse was not written to give you a weapon to use against your wife.

If God intended for you to use it that way, he would have addressed the verse to you. So, you stay out of your wife's verse. You don't like her messing with your stuff, so don't mess with her verse.

**Second**, remember that the verse right before this one; verse 21 says, **"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."**

In Greek **"submitting to one another"** is the last clause in a sentence that begins in vs. 18, that says, **"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit"**. And then, what comes next? God applies this Spirit-filled walk with an explanation how the Holy Spirit graciously fills our hearts with a submission that overflows into every aspect of life. **"Singing and speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks always and for everything**, and then verse 21 **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."**

Let's back up a minute and note that Paul had been writing in Ephesians about equality before Christ. He has laid out the fact that salvation is established based on grace.

He abolished distinctions among the believers in Ephesus, declaring that all of them come to God in need of love, forgiveness, and grace.

The location of the word, **submission**, is important because it does not relate specifically to women. It applies, instead, to all social relationships among the body of the church. It applies to women, to men, to parents, to children, to

slaves, and even to masters. **Without the Spirit of God, it is impossible to submit.** Romans says the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God.

Jesus spent thirty years submitting to his family, learning carpentry. Then it was time to submit himself to three years of people-serving: touching leprosy; healing hurting, and sick souls; and laying down his life daily for his friends. In the upper room, he stripped to the waist, tied a towel around himself, and washed men's dirty feet. That was submission. The spirit of submission led Him to the cross where He died for our sins. If you want to know what submission looks like, look at Jesus.

Anne Atkins, in her excellent book Split Image, says, "Before we can hope to be good husbands or wives, we must learn to be good Christians. We must all become self-sacrificial and submissive."

We are **all** to be submitting ourselves to each other. "Wives, submit to your husbands" is a specific application of a principle given to every follower of Jesus.

Submission already had a place in Paul's day. We cannot understand how the Ephesian wives felt about this unless we understand a little of their culture. In Paul's day, the Gentile wife was dominated by her husband.

The Greco-Roman world viewed the household as a foundation of the state. Any upsetting of this hierarchical order of the household was considered a political menace. As early Christianity spread, it brought incredible liberation into the thinking of these new families and relationships.

So, can you imagine this little group of people who were just beginning to feel this new freedom in being treated better than property, now hears Paul say, "Wives submit to your husbands," must have been confusing.

**Paul was calling to submission those who already were.** Women, slaves, and children were hearing this. These people had no choice at all. So, why did Paul tell wives to submit to husbands when they were in submission already? The clue is in the grammar. The verb **submit** is in the middle voice. Literally, it means **"place yourself in submission."** Sit down on the inside as well as the outside.

**You've been sitting down on the outside because you had no choice. Now you have this choice, as an act of the will rather than a legal requirement.**

Richard Foster says, "[Paul] made decision makers out of those who were forbidden to make decisions."

"Wives submit." The word is hupotasso. This word means to rank under, to take your post. It's a military term. How are wives to do this; gladly, voluntarily, and

without hesitation. That's how you submit to the Lord, and to your husband—not because you must but because you may. Not because you **have to**, but because you **get to**.

What happens if you're married to a man who bears not the slightest resemblance to Jesus? What if he never nourishes or cherishes you? What if he dominates, abuses, stifles, and destroys your self-worth? You submit out of reverence for Christ. Submission says, "My happiness does not depend on my getting what I want."

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul is talking about giving money. He says there are three ways to give. You can give grudgingly, give of necessity, or give cheerfully. The word in Greek is **hilaros**. Wife, you can submit grudgingly, submit because you have to, or because you want to because you want to out of reverence for Christ. It's a hilarious thing. It's freedom.

Now contrary to what the feminists say, this is not a social issue, nor is it a philosophical issue, a cultural issue, or an intellectual issue. **It is a spiritual issue.**

Now anyone who knows biblical theology knows that God the Son is not inferior to God the Father. God the Son is indeed equal to God the Father; they are co-equal and co-eternal. Yet over and over in the word of God we read that **Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the authority of His Father.**

The Father and the Son are equal in deity, but distinct in role: equal in dignity but different in duties. Jesus voluntarily yielded His will to the will of the Father. Think of the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus said, "your will, not mine be done." In doing so He does not become less than the Father.

Submission is not a matter of integrity; it is a matter of identity. Galatians 3:28 says, "**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**"

Verse 22 goes on to say, "**submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**" Wonder why the bible would say your own husbands?

There are Christian wives who would never submit to their husband because he's not 'spiritual' enough or maybe not even saved at all. There are wives who would not submit to their own husbands because they pay the bills, not the husband. There are wives who submit to their pastor, spiritual leader, Christian friend, or counselor; but only submit to your husband when it's convenient.

Proverbs 31 describes a model wife and mother but **the first quality mentioned in her relationship is to her husband.** Verse 11 says the heart of her husband safely trusts in her. Verse 23 explains what his confidence in her does to him – it makes him a leader at the city gate! Just a thought, but maybe you're the reason why

your husband is still on the level he is! If you emasculate your man at home, he might never rise to his full potential.

Now wives, you have a choice. You can complete your husband, or you can compete with your husband; but you cannot do both. If you complete him, you will confirm him. But if you compete with him, you will cripple him.

You ladies need to ask yourself before you marry: **"Am I willing to submit to the spiritual leadership of this man?"**

I heard about a man that was getting the cold shoulder from his wife for a few weeks, and finally he confronted her and said, "Admit it, the only reason you married me is because my grandfather left me \$10 million. She said, "Don't be ridiculous. I don't care who left it to you."

Unless it is unscriptural, unethical, or ungodly, you ought to submit to your husband, as unto the Lord. If you want to be treated like a queen, crown your husband as king in your home, and without violating conscience or Scripture, submit to him, support him, and strengthen him.

Now men, just so you know, far more is said to the husband than is said to the wife; because far more is demanded from the husband than is demanded from the wife. Paul continues in verse 25, **"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"**

Both husband and wife submit themselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. The husband does so by laying down his life for his wife; the wife by submitting herself to her husband.

We are told specifically exactly what we are to do for our wives. **First**, husbands are to LEAD their wives. **"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."** (v.23)

But husbands are also to LABOR for their wives. The Bible says in 1 Tim. 5:8, **"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."**

I heard about a young husband who said to his young wife, "Why don't you make biscuits like my mother used to?" She said, "Why don't you bring home the dough like my dad used to."

Let me also say this to you husbands who work, and your wife stays home - the money you make is not your money, it's her money too. She is an equal partner.

But the real task of being a husband is found in this statement: Husbands are to

**LOVE** their wives. **"Husbands, love your wives...the way Christ loves the church."**

But it goes deeper. **"...that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."** (vv. 26-27) The Lord, at this very moment, is making His bride as beautiful as He possibly can. That is exactly what we are to do for our wives; make them beautiful. Husbands, if you are not making your wife better, you are making her bitter.

**"So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."** (vv.28-29)

We would do well at this point to look back to Jesus' words on servanthood and greatness. They seem to form the basis for Paul's argument here. Jesus had told his disciples that those who would be great in God's kingdom must learn to be the servants of all. [Let's explore this further in Philippians 2:3-11 \(ESV\)](#)

**3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.**

When we have power, we tend to leverage it for ourselves, don't we?

**4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** (ESV)

Women: Was Jesus equal to God? Yes, He was God! But He voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father. This was not an assault on His dignity and did not imply any inferiority on His part. If it wasn't an assault on His dignity to do that, it's not an assault on yours either. Quite the contrary: it makes you more like Him.

As husbands we need to consider that Jesus laid aside His glory. He laid aside His comfort. He leveraged His power not for His own benefit but for His Bride, the church and for each of us.

Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a servant. You don't usually take the form of a servant. You are assigned it, but Jesus took it. You think of your interests; others think of theirs; Jesus walked in and said, **"I'm going to think of your interests, not mine."**

**9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.**" Jesus took the role of the servant, so God gave him the name that is above every name.

In Mark 10, James, and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, come to Jesus and say, "Jesus, we have a favor to ask, we want to sit on your right and left hand in your new kingdom." That's natural. When you're in power, we'd really like to sit in box seats in your section of heaven."

Jesus said, "That's how people **outside** of the kingdom of God think." **But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**" Mark 10:43-45 (ESV)

This was a revolutionary view of power. That someone would use their power to serve someone else? No way. What good is gaining power if you're not going to use it to serve yourself? Isn't that why you go after it?

In places where we are "Lord" or "Teacher" or "the boss" or "leader," or the BMOC (big man on campus) we are to use that position to serve, not to be served. Husbands, whatever power you have, you use it to serve your wife. Wives, whatever power you have, submit it to your husbands. Serve him.

Do you remember that phrase back in Ephesians 5:21, "**submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**" Christianity is being so overwhelmed with God's grace given to you that you become like that... It's a way of saying, "I am so grateful for God's grace that I will gladly serve anyone and everyone as a way of honoring the Lord."

**Many people think the primary point of marriage is to fulfill all your needs and make you happy, which is why you are frustrated, because it's not working.**

Marriage is a blessing. You get to be with someone you love, but God's primary plan is not to make you happy, but to make you holy (make you more like Him).

And how do you learn that? By learning to wash the disgusting, betraying, self-centered feet of a sinner. Many of you feel like you married the wrong person. Of course, you did. By God's design. You always marry the wrong person because you always marry a sinner. But the wrong person is the right person for you because God has a higher agenda for your life - to make you more like Him.

So, I want to boil this message down to one simple question. A question that if every time you saw your spouse, or your friends, or your parents, or boss or your employees, or your kids, or your brothers and sisters in Christ, and asked it, it



would transform all your relationships. **How can I serve you?**

**(What if every time you walked into a room you thought of this and then did it?)**

The tendency in a male dominated society is for women to use subterfuge to manage the dominance of the men in their lives. Paul rules that out as inappropriate. The tendency is for the males to assume control and direct their lives and the lives of others in subjection to their own needs, dreams, ambitions, and desires. Paul rules that out as equally inappropriate. Neither the man, nor the woman is granted authority to dominate the other.

Relationships are **not** supposed to be about power and control. They are supposed to be about love, service, and placing personal needs and desires in submission to the needs and desires of others.

**Men:** to ask this question (I don't mean just in your head, but to really ask her), "How can I serve you?" would scare some of you, because you are afraid of what she might say, but I'm telling you, this question is powerful and unlocks the key to happiness for you in your marriage.

What if you started to ask this question romantically? What does she need from me? What are her affection needs? Does she need us to have a weekly "date night?" What if you just started to serve your family by taking leadership?

The primary problem men have is that we are complacent when it comes to taking initiative for the benefit of others but enthusiastic when it comes to the benefit of ourselves. You are zealous about your job; about your hobbies, but your family is on autopilot, and your wife is unhappy, but you don't notice. Men, you were made not to be just a leader, but a **servant leader**.

Definition of a servant leader: "taking initiative for the benefit of others." Spiritual headship is not a license to do what you want to do, but empowerment to do what you ought to do.

**Ladies,** this is a powerful question for you to ask. "How can I serve you?" Or what can I do to help you? You know, most men are going to say "nothing." But just asking lets them know that you are aware of their needs and burdens.

What if that became your attitude in the home... what if you thought of their needs as more important than your own?

What you do for them on their day off... What if in how you relate to them you did so through the filter of how can I build this guy up to become everything that God wants him to be? How can I communicate honor to him-that I believe in

him? Submit to him?

Can I brag on Nancy for a minute? Sure I can, she's my wife, and this is my sermon. She is so affirming of me sometimes that I have to find a phone booth and open my shirt and see if there is a Superman emblem underneath. I know she doesn't bless me because I deserve it, but because that's her loving way.

And let me just say this, to those of you who are real spiritual, who are really tuned in to the Spirit's leading, you won't have to ask this question very often, you'll just know what to do for those around you.

**Teenagers:** What would it look like if you asked that question of your brothers or sisters?

What if you walked in the kitchen and made that statement to your parents? (don't do it today as they'll know I put you up to it). "Mom, Dad, what can I do to serve you right now?" Little secret: they are probably not going to say anything. They'll probably pass out. After they wake up, they'll probably come into your room and offer to buy you anything you want!

And by the way, if you really want bonus points, do it when they have some of their friends over. And watch their friends' expressions... because your parents will say, "Nothing," and then as soon as you leave their friends will say, "How in the world?" And they'll be so happy that you made them look good in front of their friends they'll probably come to your room and say, "Do you want a new car?"

**How can I serve you? What can I do for you? Is there any way I can help you?**

Try this question in your job. Say it to your boss. Say it to your employees. I'm telling you; it will change the whole culture of your work environment.

What would happen if you started to ask this one simple question in all your relationships? Here's what would happen. For some of you, everything would change. The gospel would saturate your marriage or your home or your workplace and you know what happens when the gospel saturates an area? It makes it new. It re-generates and re-creates it.

My challenge for you is to say it at least 1x every day this week to people in your life. Say it with me: **What can I do to serve you?**

Did you feel that? You know that emotion you just felt? It's called "FEAR." Fear of what they might say and that our needs won't be taken care of. You're scared to obey? Welcome to being a follower of Jesus. Fear of the unknown and of going into new territory for God is always a part of faith.

Here's what I'll tell you. Most of the things you fear will never happen. But you also must believe that if you take the low road of servanthood, God will take care of you. Do it out of "reverence for Christ."

One of the biggest myths we believe in relationship is that we change others best by paying them back, by making them feel the pain they gave us.

**Let me close with this Gospel secret:** Grace is the most powerful change agent on the planet. That's how God changed me and you for that matter. Not through threats of the law, but through taking my sin. Some of you it's a fear that if you live this way, you'll never be happy. The happiest person ever to live was Jesus, and He spent His life washing dirty feet and dying for sinners.

There is a joy in being like Jesus and walking with Jesus that you'll never experience if you're set on being the king or queen, and the defender of your small self-centered kingdom.

Verse 21 points to where you and I get the power to do this: ...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. "***Out of reverence for Christ:***"

**The power to submit your life to others is a supernatural power that the Spirit of God will give you, as you grow in reverence for Christ.**

**If we are unable to submit our lives and ambitions to others, have we really submitted to Jesus as Lord?**

Remember this:

**Submission & Servanthood will keep you FROM ABUSING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

David – Passion

Samson – Strength

Joseph – Dreams

Solomon – Wisdom

King Saul – leadership

Exalt yourself:

Your gift will lead to your DOWNFALL and others DESPAIR

Humble yourself:

God will use your gift for His DELIGHT and others DELIVERANCE

If Christ Jesus is truly the pattern for our living, then our conspiracies, maneuvers, plots, and designs to press forward with our own agendas over the needs and desires of others are completely out of place. As servants of Christ Jesus, manipulation of one another is contrary to the lordship of Christ.

**We must lay aside any sense of superiority, position, or power to embrace role as servants of Christ.**

