

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

**#5 Friendship and Fellowship**

Ephesians 5:25-30

**Read Ephesians 5:25-30 “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.” (ESV)**

**Introduction:** I sent you out two weeks ago with the assignment to ask significant relationships in your life, "What can I do to serve you?"

I want to start off today by telling you about one of the most important marriages in history, though probably one you've never heard of. It is the marriage of Martin Luther to Katherine von Bora. (Mark Driscoll talks about it in his book Real Marriage.)

Luther, as you know, is famous for starting the Reformation. While studying the Bible, he learned that righteousness is a gift God gives by grace from and faith in Jesus Christ and not something earned or merited through human religious and moral performance. **The core of the Reformation was that the Bible, not the teaching of the church, should be our authority for life.**

One of the areas Martin Luther took issue with was the teaching that all clergy be celibate. He said, "That's nowhere in the Bible," and he was, of course, correct. He wrote a book called On Monastic Vows in which he proved that forced celibacy on priests was an invention of man, not God. And he ended the book by encouraging monks and nuns to throw off their vows and get married for the glory of God.

Among the readers of Luther's booklet were Katherine von Bora and the other nuns in her convent. They longed to escape, marry, and become mothers. So, they wrote to Luther, asking the renegade monk to help them escape. To do so was an offense punishable by death.

In the early morning hours one Easter, 12 young runaway nuns climbed into empty fish barrels and were smuggled out of their convent. Their unlikely hero was a renegade monk they had written to, imploring him to rescue them so they could leave the convent, marry, and one day become mothers. The escape was a daring and successful adventure, and it led to a most unusual

friendship and marriage. The hero monk? Martin Luther.

After their rescue, three of the nuns returned to their families immediately, and the remaining nine were taken to Luther's Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. Luther helped six of the nuns find a husband, a home, or job. Eventually every one of the nuns was married except for Katherine—whose devoutly Catholic family did not want her back.

Katharine turned out tough to get a husband for. She was brash, proud, and unattractive. Eventually she came up to Luther and said (essentially), "You got me into this mess. You owe me a husband. If you don't find me one, then you'll have to marry me." Luther, who was 40 years old and quite content in his singleness didn't want to marry her. But she wore him down and they finally got married in the backwoods of rural Germany on June 13, 1525. When asked why he married her, Luther responded, **"To spite the devil."** (Which must be the least romantic reason for a wedding in history.)

Their marriage was a public scandal and arguably the most significant marriage outside the Bible in the history of the world. They set in motion a model for Christian faith and maturity through marriage, sex, and children, rather than through singleness and celibacy.

Something that helped them learn to live together in love was their willingness to dish out and take a joke. They were known for being brutally honest with each other, poking fun at each other, and doing so as friends.

For example, when he would start to bristle against her, she would commonly retort that perhaps a little prayer should occur before "preaching a sermon."

His letters often teased her, but Katherine certainly could hold her own. Martin often struggled with severe depression, and it was very difficult to pull him out of his funk. But Katherine found creative ways to do so.

On one occasion she dressed up like a grieving widow in black mourning attire and met Martin at their door upon his return home. "Are you going to a funeral?" he asked. "No," she replied, "but since you act as though God is dead, I wanted to join you in the mourning." Luther quickly recovered!

Katherine was smart, fiery, and quick-witted. But they were passionately in love. His favorite title for her was, **"Lord Katie,"** but other pet names included "Dear Rib, my Empress, my true love, my Sweetheart, dear gift of God."

In Luther's earliest writings on marriage, he treated marriage as something primarily functional—something God designed to propagate humanity and something we should enter into to avoid sexual temptation. But toward the

end his life he would call Katie von Bora "the greatest (earthly) gift of grace a man could have." **She was more than his lover; she was his confidant, his companion, his best friend.**

Friendship is one of the most forgotten elements of marriage. Many of you probably realize your spouse is supposed to be your friend, but if anything, many people see marriage as primarily romance spiced with a little friendship. But really marriage should be friendship spiced with romance.

Erma Bombeck: A friend is someone who thinks you're a good egg, even though you're a little cracked.

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received were the following:

-One who multiplies joys, divides grief.

-One who understands our silence.

-A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world is gone out.

One respected sociologist says it this way, "The determining factor in 70% of wives feeling satisfied with the sex, romance and passion in their marriage is (drum roll), **the quality of the couple's friendship.**

For men, the determining factor in being satisfied with the sex, romance and passion in their marriage is, by 70%, **the quality of the couple's friendship.**

So, men and women come from the same planet after all.

In Titus 2:2-4, it says, ***"Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children..."*** (ESV)

The word **"love"** here is the Greek **"phileo"**, which means friendship. This is not a romantic love or erotic love, but a friendship kind of love. So, it would not be out of line to translate this verse, ***"wives, be friends with your husbands."***

And in the biblical book of romance, Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 16, the bride says of her groom, ***"This is my lover; this is my friend."***

**Can you honestly say that your spouse is your friend? How about your best friend?**

That's the core of what Paul says in Ephesians 5. Verse 29 says, "**For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.**" (ESV)

The word cherish means delighting in one another's company...holding one another dear. From the Greek "**thalpo**", it literally means, "to hold closely to keep warm." It's talking about friendship.

Friendship ought to reach its very zenith in the context of the marriage relationship.

So, ladies, no relationship you have with any other person should come close to the relationship you have with your husband. Not one of your children, not another lady, and certainly not another man.

Men, the same goes for us. No buddy, no coworker, no hunting partner, no other family member, and no other woman, should be as close as your wife.

Couples should be best friends...but it is by no means a sure thing. It isn't automatic because you exchange vows, trade rings, and swap spit!

**They say that the family that prays together stays together, but it's also true that the family that plays together stays together!**

I ask couples during premarital counseling if they LOVE each other, they say of course they do; but then I ask if they LIKE each other. There is a difference!

**First, Paul teaches us about Friendship with the analogy of the body.**

In one sense we can think of our body as separate from us; in another sense we can't. I am one with my body. My wife is in one sense separate from me, yet she is one with me.

We have fused our entire lives together. Our homes. Our futures. Most of life we will experience together. We are two separate beings united into one.

Throughout this passage Paul refers to the Genesis account of man and woman's creation. In marriage a man and woman should 'leave father and mother' and cleave to one another. That's the essence of marriage. Becoming one.

In fact, when Adam saw Eve in the Garden, he said, "This is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh." Some scholars say that what he is saying is, "I see a part of

who I am, my own soul, my own body!" He didn't say, "Wow, what a hot babe! He said, "I see a piece of my own soul and body!" That's what a friend is: someone who feels and shares your deepest interests and passions.

**Second**, you see in this passage a progression toward a common cause: Christlikeness.

This should be our greatest passion, becoming like Christ, and Nancy and I are assigned to one another accomplish this.

What makes a friendship great is a sense of unity in a common cause. Think of how many epic movies that has this as the plot: ex. Lord of the Rings.

C.S. Lewis says there is one kind of love, eros, in which the lover is focused on each other, face to face, absorbed in each other. But there's another kind of love, **phileo**, which are people side by side, absorbed by some common interest. This is friendship.

Now, friendship can be found around a lot of things. If someone else and I share a common love for a sport, or hobby, or a favorite band or author, we can find friendship around that.

**I have friends in my life like that, and so do you. The deeper the shared interest, the greater the friendship.**

Tim Keller says in Christianity ***"to fall in love is to look at another person and get a glimpse of the person God is creating, and to say, 'I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on earth, but now look at you!'"***

Your hope is that one day you and your spouse will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servants. Over the years you lifted each other up. You sacrificed for each other. You confronted each other. You prayed for each other. You hugged and you loved each other, and you continually pushed each other toward me. And now look at you. You're radiant."

**It is your commitment to your spouse's holiness that keeps the marriage going, because it is friendship on the deepest level.**

One day I will see Nancy in heaven in all her glorified beauty and I'll say, "Wow." I had a part in moving her toward that destination. That is marriage.

STORY

So, let's stop here for a minute and ask,

## **What makes for friendship? (From analogy of body)**

**A. Common cause** - If you don't share common cause the friendship will never last.

**B. Constancy** - A friend is someone you know will never leave because they are as committed to you as they are to themselves. You're like a part of their body. Proverbs 17:17, "**A friend loves at all times, and a brother is made for adversity.**"

A friend is someone who walks in when everyone else walks out. The person who should most trust your constancy is your spouse. They should know that while you get upset with them, you are not going anywhere; you're the one who believes the best about them and give them the benefit of the doubt.

Because here's the thing: Someone is not going to let you in until they know you're not going to reject them, to walk away or humiliate them or expose their weaknesses.

It kills me to hear spouses tearing their other spouse down, because I know that there is no way their spouse will ever open up to them-how could they? They don't feel safe. My body, generally speaking, knows it is safe with me. I may be unhappy with some part of it, but my body knows I'm not going to cut off my foot because it's hurting.

**C. Transparency** - In order to have a friendship you've got to open yourself up. Share what's going on emotionally. A companion, who is like your own body, must see what's really going on!

Some of you men are a closed book to your spouse, and that's why she's not your friend. For some of you men, I have one simple activity that could absolutely transform your marriage. Come home and tell your wife one thing that happened that day and how you (key word) **FELT** about it. This is not easy, because I'm not a feely touchy person myself.

C.S. Lewis said, "Eros will have naked bodies; friendship, naked personalities."

**D. Trust of good intention** - Let me go back to the analogy of the body. Cleaning the body is an intimate thing and you wouldn't want someone else doing it, unless you had to have it done. Imagine someone else brushing your teeth or shaving you. It's scary.

For your spouse to let you "**clean**" their "**spiritual**" body, they must know you have good intentions and won't go in there poking and slashing around.

Simple thing here: for every one negative comment, there should be about 5 positive. This is big mistake fathers make with children; bosses make with employees; teachers with students; and wives and husbands with each other. We tend to only notice and point out the weaknesses.

When people feel like you are down on them, they won't really listen to you. But when they know you are their biggest fan, they will often take your criticisms more to heart because they know it comes from someone who really cares.

Just so you know, you married a sinner; that should not be a surprise. So instead of berating them over their sinfulness, speak blessing and empowerment over their lives. See the beautiful creation at work inside of them and call it out in them. Hold the crown of Jesus over their head and grow them into it. For every one word of criticism, speak 5 words of blessing.

### **Here are 3 take-aways concerning friendship:**

#### **1. Prioritize friendship in the dating process**

If you are single, what are you most looking for in a spouse? It's kind of a stereotype that men overvalue looks in a mate and women overvalue earning potential. But neither of those things make for endearing, enduring marriages. Beauty fades. Earning potential may not turn out. And even if you get those things, neither makes for a really fulfilling relationship. What Adam needed in the garden was not just a sexual partner; he needed a companion - bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.

Let me get real for a minute: Many single people walk into a room and write off 80% of the people immediately. You don't like their face. They have weird hair. They're not athletic. They wear relaxed fit jeans rather than skinny jeans. None of that stuff really makes for a happy, enduring marriage!

Psychologists say that infatuation lasts, at its longest, about 18 months. And then it's gone. Listen to this: Christian counselor Gary Thomas: "In 1967, a study of college-age women found that 76 percent of women said they would marry someone if the man had every trait they were looking for, even if they **didn't** feel 'romantic love' toward them.

In more recent research, 91 percent of women say they pursue relationships based just on infatuation: how's that working out for us?"

When wives go for counseling, it's almost always about character issues: 'He shouldn't do this thing. He should do that but doesn't. How do I fix this?'

Yet most women are not seeking men of character first. They are seeking men with whom they feel **'in love.'**"

Let me tell you why most marriages grow stale and sour. People have gotten through the infatuation stage and now they are bored. They got the idea from books or TV that if you'd just find the right person with whom you have perfect chemistry, and if the passion was strong enough, it would last forever. **But it never does.** You didn't prioritize friendship in the dating process, and you haven't developed friendship after the marriage started.

### **Couple of practical things for you if you are single:**

1. Don't marry a non-Christian! You'll never be able to share the deepest unity. Because if you're a Christian walking with God, the deepest part of you is the part that knows God.
2. Beware the intoxication of physical contact. There are a lot of reasons why you should keep physical contact before marriage to a minimum, but here's one you might often overlook: physical, erotic contact has a way of clouding all your judgment.

### ***So, # 1 for singles, Prioritize friendship in the dating process***

**2. Prioritize friendship in the marriage** Nothing can replace the centrality of friendship in your marriage. If you don't prioritize the friendship, the relationship will slowly die. Your career can't replace your priority of your friendship with your spouse... Your love and commitment to your kids cannot replace the priority of your friendship with your spouse, though this is what often happens.

The center of the home is NOT parent and child; it is husband and wife. The Bible says, Eph 6:4, "Raise up your kids..." You know what that means, don't you? Technically, the word you use is "rear" up your kids. Love that image.

Get behind them and start pushing them up and out to a place where they are not dependent on you! God did not put a parent child in the garden; he put a husband/wife. For my home to be solid, my relationship with my wife has to be strong. The greatest gift I can give my kids is to love and prioritize my wife, even over them!

Marriage has an unparalleled power over your life. You have tied your life to another person, literally, as Paul says, you have become one body with her!



I have heard it said there are 3 kinds of married relationships:

**Back to back:** a couple has turned their back on each other. They live separately, maybe in the same house, but only roommates.

**Side by side:** work together on the house; the kids; the business; serving the church.

**Face to face:** this kind of relationship is one in which, in addition to shoulder-shoulder work, they get a lot of face time drawing each other out in conversation, friendship and intimacy.

Many of you need to work on #3. Through simple communication! I'm reminded of one guy's story in which his wife asks him after he gets home playing golf with a friend who had just broken up with his girlfriend. "How is he?" "I guess fine." Is he dating anybody? I don't know. How could you play with golf with him for 3 hours and that not come up? How would that come up? "Hey, good putt... you dating anybody?" Guys, that's something we need to work on.

Why is companionship and communication so important?

1. Because it is unhealthy for a married person to spend the most enjoyable moments of their life in the company of someone else
2. Because pursuing your own interests without your spouse demonstrates selfishness and leads to going in opposite directions.
3. Because shared experiences lead to shared feelings

What are some things close friends do?

- They share themselves with each other.
- They confide in each other.
- They learn more about each other.
- They discuss their innermost thoughts, ideas, and goals with each other.

**Because marriage has an unparalleled power in our lives, it should have an unparalleled priority.**

1. *for singles, Prioritize friendship in the dating process*

## 2. Prioritize friendship in the marriage

### 3. **Marriage is not the only place to experience friendship**

Remember the first week of this series we said marriage is temporary; the church is eternal. In marriage you become "one body." What is the other institution in the Bible that is called the body? The church. Don't miss that. The church is a place that God intended for singles, married people, young and old to experience cross-gendered friendship. **Church is a community of friends, that leads us to a place of amazing fellowship.**

As John writes in I John 1:3, he mentions the word "**fellowship.**" That means to share; that means to hold in common. **You ought to remember what that word means: fellowship is two fellows in the same ship.**

Fellowship is a Christian word. It applies to Christians only - lost people cannot have fellowship. They call their parties and their gatherings and their socials fellowship, but they do not know really anything about fellowship. Fellowship is something you share together.

John talks about a twofold fellowship. If you are a believer, if Jesus is real to you, there's fellowship with the Father, and there is fellowship with the family of God.

How do you get into the family of God? You must be born into the family. That's how a baby gets into its family, right? You must be born again to get into the family of God, that relationship you establish with the Father, through Jesus Christ when you trust Him as Lord and Savior, and He comes into your life and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you and places you in the family of God. You're born into the family of God. There's nothing you can do to earn your way into the family.

It's wonderful to be a part of a family. Fellowship in the family is tremendous.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus Christ said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will fellowship with him - "and he with me."

I want to tell you; the great God of the universe wants to come into your life and live in your life and have fellowship with you. He wants to share the things of God with you.

But then John said, I John 1:4: "(I want) your joy (to) be full."

Some of you have a policeman God. You think all He wants to do is follow you around and slap your hand every time you do something wrong. You think God wants to incarcerate you with dos and don'ts and not ever let you have any fun.

The God of the Bible says, "I want you to have a joy that is full; I want you to have the best in life; I want you to have joy unspeakable and full of glory. I've created this world for you; I've given my Son for you. I want you to enjoy; I want your joy to be full." And just so you know, **joy** is also a Christian word.

The lost world doesn't have joy. They have pleasure, but they don't have joy. The Bible says, "There's pleasure in sin for a season." You see, every trinket the devil can give you will lose its glitter. Every experience the devil can give you will only give you temporary pleasure. But Jesus Christ can give you a joy that will last now and last for all eternity.

If you don't believe what I'm saying, look into faces of people today. We have more entertainment, more things to do, more forms of recreation, than any other generation. People are just spending money and trying to have a good time, and doing this and that, and going here and there. And yet they don't have joy. Look on their faces; see the emptiness; see the loneliness. They don't have joy because only Jesus can give joy.

### **Conclusion:**

Charles Swindoll has made the observation that, "The neighborhood bar is possibly the best **counterfeit** that there is to the fellowship Christ wants us to have as believers. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality – but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."

The theme song for the old sitcom Cheers says, "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came."

That should be what is said about our homes, our church, and all our relationships as we enjoy the fellowship and friendship of Christ and each other.