

MAIN POINT

Don't let false expectations distract you from God's dream for your marriage.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Before you got married, or if you are currently single, what is the biggest expectation you had/have about marriage?

If you are married and were counseling a young couple for marriage, what would you tell them is the biggest surprise you've experienced in marriage thus far?

For most, the early weeks and months of marriage are one extended honeymoon. Intimacy, patience, kindness and service define the relationship. The feeling of love we have for our spouse plays no small part in motivating that kind of behavior. Eventually, however, those feelings wane from their euphoric highs, and we find ourselves bound to another person by a promise that we sometimes don't feel like keeping. Today we will consider the false expectations we all bring to marriage and what happens when those expectations shatter our dreams.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:22-33.

What are some of the key differences between Paul's instructions to spouses in Ephesians 5 and the list of expectations we came up with earlier?

What do we learn about the purpose of marriage from this text?

Paul's description of marriage in this passage centers around the idea of mutual submission. What are some of the biggest obstacles to biblical submission that exist in our marriages today?

God established marriage as a representation of His relationship with His followers; He is our groom and we, as the church, are His bride. Key to our relationship with Christ is the concept of submission, which means that we yield ourselves and our self-interest to God and His will for us. God has built sacrifice and submission into the fabric of a marriage, but it's complicated by the fact that we are marrying another sinner like us. When we compare our marriage to God's ideal for marriage, we realize how selfish we are and how much we are in need of grace every day.

Because a marriage is made up of two sinful human beings, it will inevitably face trials, hiccups, and shattered dreams. But just as God forgives us of our sin and uses it to shape us into His image, He can use the struggles we face in marriage to draw us closer to Him.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 PETER 1:6-7.

What does Peter say brings great joy in verse 6 (see vv. 3-5)?

If you feel comfortable, share about a time when this proved true in your marriage—a time when a false expectation was shattered but you experienced God's grace like never before.

Trials and difficulties in relationships can be a blessing because they often force us to cut ties with the things of the world and run to Christ. When we face trying times, God challenges us to consider where we have been turning for hope and joy. In these moments, believers will turn to Christ to strengthen their faith and deepen the joy they have in Him.

Peter indicates in verse 7 that God has a plan for the trials that He lets believers face. What is that plan? What is God doing in the hearts and lives of believers as He lets them face trials?

What is it about a marriage that makes it such a great place for our faith to be stretched and strengthened?

Peter says that trials show the proven character of our faith. He compares trials to purifying gold in a furnace. To make higher quality gold, a craftsman would heat the gold in a very hot furnace so that the impurities would rise to the surface and the craftsman could remove them to make the gold more precious and valuable. In other words, God allows us to go through trials in order to draw us closer to Himself and so that Christ would be more precious to us than anything else.

When you find yourself asking, “What was I thinking?” as you look at your marriage, the better question to ask just might be, “What is God doing?”

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15.

In your own words, what is Paul saying in these verses?

What is the implication of this text on our marriages, or any relationship really?

What happens when our marriages are motivated by something other than the gospel?

In order for our marriages to honor God and be a source of joy in our lives, we have to shift our focus off of ourselves—what we stand to gain from our marriages—and toward Christ—how can our marriages bring glory to Him? Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5 that Jesus sacrificed everything out of love for us, and we are to live for Him in return. Just as we were made a new creation when we became Christians, so God is willing and able to transform our marriages into vessels for His glory.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What was the most impactful point for you from today’s discussion? How will that change your love for your spouse or others?

What is one expectation for marriage that you need to let go of at this time?

What is one thing you can do this week to remind your spouse of your commitment to your marriage vows?

What are the implications of a passage like this for those of us who are not married?

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, asking God to help the married couples at our church to grow in love. Pray that the marriages in our church, as well as all other relationships, would send a profound message of the love of Jesus to the world.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 5:22-33

5:22-24. The wife is to be subject to her husband as to the Lord. This does not mean that she submits to her husband in the same way and to the same degree as she does the Lord, since the husband might ask her to disobey God. Rather, she serves the Lord by having a submissive heart toward her husband and by obeying him as long as it does not require her to disobey the Lord. The reason she is called upon to be subject to her husband is that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. As the church is to be subject to Christ, so the wife is to be subject to her husband. This subjection does not mean inferiority. It is clear that male and female are both created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and that in Christ, where personal worth is concerned, there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). However, in the overall scheme of things, God has placed all of us in differing positions of authority and submission. The man may be in authority at home but submissive at work. The woman may be in submission at home and in authority at work. The point is, all social order depends on people's willingness to work together and ability to determine who is the head of certain endeavors. God's intention is that the husband be the head of the relationship with his wife.

5:25-27. After instructing wives to submit to their husbands, he instructs husbands to love their wives so completely and so righteously that the wife need never fear or suffer from her life of submission. Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He gave Himself up for her. Jesus dedicated His life to the establishment and welfare of the church. He ultimately gave His life for the church. To that degree, and in that quality, the husband is to love his wife. He is to give himself up for her. He is to dedicate his life to the physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare of his wife. Following the example of Christ, he is to give his wife not only all that he has but also all that he is. When a husband loves his wife so completely, the wife need never fear submission.

Paul goes on to extend the picture of Christ and the church. Christ loved the church that He might make her holy, or set her apart for Himself. He did this by the washing with water through the word. Some Bible teachers do not think Paul is referring to water (baptism) in this verse. They understand the water to be a figure of speech, referring to the cleansing that the Holy Spirit brings to the soul through repentance, after hearing the Word of God. It is as Jesus said in John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." Applying water to the outside of the physical body can have no effect whatsoever to the spiritual cleansing that makes one holy. Through repentance, the water of the word reaches the innermost recesses of the soul, cleansing and making it holy.

Other scholars, however, believe that Paul is, indeed, alluding to baptism here, understanding that the early church would only have baptized someone who had truly repented. In this

understanding, baptism would be an outward sign of repentance and of the spiritual cleansing resulting from the repentance, itself a result of hearing and obeying the Word. The New Testament does not suggest that baptism cleanses a person apart from repentance or that baptism apart from personal faith can save a person. We might amplify the meaning of this phrase by saying that the true church heard the Word of Christ preached and believed it. They were born again, regenerated, washed and cleansed spiritually by believing the Word. If Paul were alluding to baptism here, then the washing of the water in baptism would be symbolic of the inner cleansing that had already taken place through the Word. The result of this work of Christ is that the church is radiant ... without spot or wrinkle ... holy and without blemish. If a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, his love and care will have a sanctifying influence on the wife, who will experience personal benefit and progress as a result. The wife will never be perfect, but she becomes more than she would if the husband does not love her as Christ loved the church.

5:28-32. After having presented the work of Christ for the church, Paul now comes back to the reality of husband-wife relationships. He repeats the fact that husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. Even though the husband lives in an imperfect body, he loves it, nourishes it, and cherishes it. So he is to do the same for his wife, even though she is imperfect. Paul repeats Genesis 2:24, establishing that a husband and wife are to become one flesh, and closes by restating that the relationship between the wife and a husband is like the relationship between Christ and the church.

5:33. After discussing the role of the husband, Paul comes back in a summary statement in verse 33 to add that the wife is to respect her husband. In summary, she is to be subject to her husband and to respect him. Respect literally means "fear." It can refer, however, to the fear a person should have before God, a reverence and respect (Luke 1:50; 18:2; Acts 10:35; 1 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 14:7; 19:5). This type of reverence and regard should characterize the relationship of a wife and her husband.

| 1 PETER 1:6-7

1:6. This kind of care from God the Father suggests a response of great rejoicing. Verse 8 repeats this emphasis on joy, calling it an inexpressible and glorious joy. Such joy springs from the contemplation of God and of the salvation that comes to us from God. This joyous response occurs even in the midst of grief caused by suffering through all kinds of trials. Suffer grief forms a metaphor derived from a military expression for being harassed. It includes the inner mental distress or sadness that comes because of painful circumstances. All kinds of trials literally means "varied, multicolored, or diversified" trials. This takes on a depth of meaning

against the background of the ghastly persecution led by the Roman emperor Nero. In that persecution, Christians were wrapped in freshly slaughtered animal skins and fed to dogs and wild animals. They were dipped in pitch or tar and set on fire as torches to light Nero's gardens at night. This persecution was the first of nine that took place under the Roman Empire during the next 250 years. Peter himself very likely died during this first persecution.

1:7. Why does God allow this suffering to occur? Faith is being proved genuine through the trials. One purpose of trials is to sift out what is genuine in a person's faith. Followers of God, in both the Old and New Testaments, know that God uses trying circumstances to test the hearts and lives of His people in order to mature them spiritually. Through difficulties God often tests whether our faith is genuine. Peter cemented his point with the illustration of a goldsmith. To form a useful object, raw gold must be cast into a mold. For that to occur, the solid ore must be melted, requiring a temperature of 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. When the gold is melted, the impurities rise to the surface, where they are skimmed off or burned off. A goldsmith knows the gold is ready to cast when the liquid gold becomes mirror-like and he can see his face reflected in the surface. The parallel in a believer's life is obvious. Through the refining heat of trials, we as followers of Jesus Christ grow spiritually and thus reflect more of Christ's character in our lives. The language of this illustration may also refer to the first-century process of making pottery. Potters baked clay pots to give them strength. The process sometimes cracked pots that had flaws, but the ones that survived the process were then marked with the same Greek word that Peter used here (*dokimos*) for "genuine."

| 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15

What truly controlled all of Paul's behavior was Christ's love. Paul's meaning seems to be that Christ's love holds us fast, controls us, and impels us forward in ministry—His love for us is our motivation. Christ expressed His love most fully in that One died for all. Christ died to extend the offer of salvation to all people (Col. 1:20; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). His death was the sacrifice sufficient for the salvation of all, and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Love motivated Jesus to die for others (John 15:13). His death is now our reference point for understanding love (1 John 4:9-10,16).

Paul's main point was that Christ died for them and they all died with him so that those who live through the power of his resurrection should no longer live for themselves. Those for whom Christ died are "bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20), and they no longer belong to themselves. Therefore, they are to live ... for him who died for them and was raised again. Paul ministered for the Corinthians' sake because he was compelled by the love displayed in Christ's death. He died

to redeem the lost so those for whom he died might live for him. Because this was the purpose of Christ's death, it became the goal of Paul's ministry.