

## MAIN POINT

The marriage relationship symbolizes Jesus' commitment to and love for His church.

## INTRODUCTION

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

**What do you think are some of the most common misconceptions about marriage?**

**What are some factors that contribute to these misconceptions?**

**What do you understand to be the purpose of a Christian marriage? How does that purpose compare with the goal of the Christian life in general?**

God designed marriage to symbolize Jesus' commitment to and love for His church. As such, it is important that Christian marriages include specific traits that help them display the gospel to a watching world. The texts in today's discussion reveal these traits to include vulnerability, communication, unity, and submission.

## UNDERSTANDING

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

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 2:18-25.

**The first relationship between created beings was the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve, which we read about in Genesis 2:18-25. Why do you think God referred to Eve as a "helper" in verse 18? What does this tell us about the purpose of marriage in God's kingdom?**

**What basic aspects of marriage are noted in verse 24? Why is each one important?**

The creation of the man in Genesis 2 left creation incomplete. The man was alone, which was deemed not good. He needed someone to whom he could relate and with whom he could fulfill God's will, so God created the woman as a helper for the man. The woman's strengths complemented his own and allowed them to accomplish God's commands together. Genesis 2:24 expresses God's original intention for marriage—spouses relying on each other for their needs. A marriage relationship involves all areas of life: physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional. Unfortunately marriage, like everything else, is broken by sin.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 3:1-15.

**What impact did the entrance of sin into the garden have on Adam and Eve's relationship?**

**What deeper issue did Adam and Eve's shame about their nakedness reveal?**

When sin entered the world, the relationship between Adam and Eve and was severed by shame, as was their relationship with God. The shame they felt before God mirrored the shame they felt before each other. The couple's desire to cover their nakedness indicated a deeper rift had occurred. In the past, they had stood before each other naked, each able to see the other as he or she was, and each trusting the other for acceptance. The shame of guilt created a lack of trust, causing them to hide the truth from one another and from God. Thankfully, God's plan for the redemption of humanity included a plan for the redemption of the marriage relationship, which centers around the gospel.

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

**How do Paul's instructions to husbands and wives in these verses show God's plan for redeeming marriages from sin? What role does the gospel play in this process?**

**Paul compared marriage to the relationship between Christ and His Church. How are these relationships similar? How does the relationship between Jesus and His church help you understand the goal of marriage?**

One of the keys to a healthy, redeemed marriage is the central role of mutual submission between husbands and wives. Paul challenges wives to submit to their husbands by having a servant's heart, placing their husband's needs before their own, as they would in serving Christ Himself. Similarly, husbands are to lead their wives in the same way Christ leads the church—sacrificially and selflessly. Both the husband and the wife, as members of the church, are to submit to the leadership of Christ.

**Now look at verses 31-33. What new insight and commands about marriage did Paul bring up in these verses?**

**What has always been God's intention for marriage? What is each person's responsibility in reaching God's ideal? What do you think it means for couples to be joined together and to become one flesh?**

As Paul concluded his instructions to husbands and wives, he emphasized that the expression of unity in a marriage goes far beyond sex. It includes every area of a couple's life and relationship. In marriage, two "become one flesh." Pointing back to God's original design in Genesis 2:24, this phrase describes the physical and spiritual union that binds husband and wife. Becoming one does not mean losing the individual personality and characteristics that make us distinct persons, but implies a closeness such that what affects one person also affects the other.

**What do you think Paul meant when he said that the joining of a husband and wife illustrates a mystery about Christ and the Church? Why would living in true unity make it a delight to be married?**

Marriage should picture the unity we experience in Christ. Husbands and wives may have separate interests and friends, but these should always be subordinated to what is best for the marriage relationship, which is the higher priority. The connection between marriage and the gospel is seen clearly in John's vision of eternity,

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 19:6-9.

**How does this picture of the marriage supper of the lamb in Revelation help you understand how marriage is a picture of the gospel?**

Jesus is the Lamb. His sacrifice as the Lamb is now to be rewarded with claiming the bride whom He purchased with His blood. His bride has made herself ready. Theologically, the bride is made ready through the work of Jesus and His death on her behalf (Eph. 5:23-27). The bride's clothing captures her splendor. The linen is defined as the righteous acts of the saints. The bride is prepared by demonstrating her salvation with her faithfulness. Some see the righteous acts as the imputed righteousness God gives those who believe in Christ. No one will earn the right to attend. The invitation is from God Himself and is for believers only. The patience and longsuffering at the heart of a marriage models the patience and longsuffering of Jesus' disciples while we wait for our redemption to be completed.

# APPLICATION

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

**What stands out to you about the big picture of marriage throughout Scripture?**

**How are you challenged in your own marriage when you think about how marriage is to be a picture of the gospel?**

**What is something you can do this week to show love and respect to your spouse? To someone in your family?**

# PRAYER

Pray that the marriages of this church, as well as all other relationships, would send a profound message of the love of Jesus to the world.

# COMMENTARY

| GENESIS 2:18-25

2:18-23. The theme of God providing for Adam's needs is picked up again here, as God declared that Adam's being alone is not good. God created the man with a need to relate to one as his complement, and now God will meet that need. Adam's understanding of the nature of the animals he named only highlighted the differences that existed between him and the rest of God's creatures: no helper was found as his complement. At what must have been a moment of loneliness in Adam's life, God stepped in to create one who would perfectly meet Adam's need. Because God took one of his ribs to use as His raw material, the woman would correspond perfectly—though not identically—to Adam. Like Adam, the woman possessed God's image. Adam's first recorded words express his delight with God's handiwork and his recognition of the unique suitability of God's last recorded creation in the creation accounts.

2:24-2. God's timeless design for marriage is declared here. The one flesh relationship certainly involves sexual union, but also includes a husband and wife coming together in spiritual, mental, and emotional harmony. Because the devastating effects of sin had not yet ravaged nature or humanity, there was no need for clothing. Adam and Eve could live without the barriers needed to shield them from their environment and each other without a sense of shame.

| GENESIS 3:1-15

3:3. The woman's claim that God said, "You must not... touch the tree, or you will die," goes beyond anything recorded in God's instructions to Adam. Therefore it seems that Adam had given his wife an additional command beyond what God said, or else Eve herself exaggerated the command as Satan tempted her to view God as selfish and overly restrictive. If Adam added to God's command, he almost certainly had a good motive—after all, if Eve never touched the tree, she certainly wouldn't eat its fruit. However, the sad truth is that when people add to the word of God, they create confusion and trouble.

3:4-6. The serpent, recognizing the woman's confusion, found a point of attack. Knowing that the woman would not die by merely touching the fruit, he boldly contradicted what she had reported to be God's command. He then skillfully lied (Jn 8:44) by distorting God's word (Mt 4:6), implying that God had prohibited people from eating the fruit only to keep them from becoming as knowledgeable as He. The woman was now fully deceived (1Tim 2:14). Since the woman did not die when she touched the fruit—in contradiction to what she had thought God said (v. 3.)—she ate it. Though Adam was with her at the time, he did nothing to stop her. Perhaps he wanted to eat of it as much as the woman did, but fearing the consequences, used his wife as a "guinea pig" to make sure it would not cause instant death.

3:7. As the serpent had indicated, the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew, but instead of producing godlike power, the knowledge brought only a sense of human inadequacy, fear, and shame.

3:9-13. God took the initiative in reaching out to sinful humanity. This pattern—humanity sinning, then God seeking out sinners—becomes the primary theme of the rest of the Bible. Its ultimate expression is found in Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save people alienated from God because of their sin (Lk 19:10); in Him God once again walked on the earth in search of sinners. The all-knowing God asked Adam, Where are you? for Adam's benefit, to encourage Adam to face his sin. When Adam heard God, he was afraid. Rather than walking with God as righteous men of later generations would do (Enoch, 5:22; Noah, 6:9), Adam hid from Him. Through the use of two direct questions God brought Adam to accountability for his sin. God does not overlook sin, but He can be gently firm in confronting it. Adam answered neither of God's questions. Instead he sought to shift the blame for his sin first to the woman, and then to God. The woman passed the blame to the serpent and admitted that prior to eating, she was deceived (1Tim 2:14).

3:14-15. Though accountability began with God's confrontation of Adam, judgment began with the serpent. Because of the serpent's key role (being used of Satan) in bringing sin into the human experience, it would be permanently consigned to the position of ultimate shame, under

the foot. Just as conquered kings were made to lie on the ground under the foot of their conquerors (Jos 10:24), so now the serpent would live under the feet of humanity. Hostility between the first woman and the serpent would be passed on to future generations. This verse is known in Christendom as the protoevangelium, or “first good news,” because it is the first foretelling of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Using an emphatic Hebrew construction, God announced here that a male descendant— He—would someday deal the serpent (meaning Satan) a fatal blow. The NT writers understood Jesus Christ to have fulfilled this prophecy (Heb 2:14; 1Jn 3:8). In an extended sense, the NT also indicates that God would work through the church—those indwelt by the Spirit of Christ—to destroy the works of the devil (Rm 16:20). The assertion that the snake would only strike his opponent’s heel (as opposed to head) suggests that the devil will be defeated in the ensuing struggle (Rev 2:2,7-10).

## | EPHESIANS 5:22-33

5:22. Wives submit directs wives to be submissive to their own husbands (cp. Col 3:18-4:1). The distinctive feature here is that the relationship between husband and wife is compared with that between Christ and the church. No verb is in the original language of verse 22. The imperative “submit” is understood from verse 21. Paul addressed wives first. They were to be voluntarily submissive to their husbands. No external coercion should be involved, nor should submission imply that the wife is a lesser partner in the marital union. The submission is governed by the phrase as to the Lord. Christian wives’ submission to their husbands is one aspect of their obedience to Christ. Submission is a person’s yielding his or her own rights and losing self for another. Submission is patterned after Christ’s example (Php 2:5-8) and reflects the essence of the gospel. Submission distinguishes the lifestyle of all Christians.

5:25. Paul turned to the duties of husbands. The society in which Paul wrote recognized the duties of wives to husbands but not necessarily of husbands to wives. As in Col 3:19, Paul exhorted husbands to love their wives, but Ephesians presents Christ’s self-sacrificing love for the church as the pattern for the husband’s love for his wife. Husbands are to love their wives continually as Christ loves the church. The tense of the Greek word translated “love” indicates a love that continues. Love is more than family affection or sexual passion. Rather it is a deliberate attitude leading to action that concerns itself with another’s well-being. A husband should love his wife: (1) as Christ loved the church (vv. 25-27); (2) as his own body (vv. 28-30); and (3) with a love transcending all other human relationships (vv. 31-33).

5:26-28. Cleansing her with the washing of water: Paul explains more fully the result of Christ’s atonement for the church: it makes the church holy and pure. The purpose of Christ’s giving himself up for the church is the church’s sanctification and cleansing. Since husbands are to

love their wives as Christ loved the church, they give up their personal rights for the good of their wives. It is a solemn picture of covenant love.

5:29-30. On first sight, Paul seems to have descended from the lofty standard of Christ's love to the low standard of self-love when he says no one ever hates his own flesh, but he reminded Christian couples of their oneness, their "one-flesh" relationship. For this reason a husband's obligation to cherish his wife as he does his own body is more than a helpful guide. His sacrificial love is an expression of the sacred marital union. True love is evidenced when husbands and wives have this spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness.

5:31-33. Paul appealed to Gen 2:24, which is God's initial statement in the Scriptures regarding marriage. The marriage commitment takes precedence over every other human relationship. One flesh means closely joined. It hallows the biblical standard of covenantal heterosexual marital relations and excludes polygamy and adultery. What is primarily a divine ordinance graciously and lovingly is designed for mutual satisfaction and delight. "Love... respect" concludes and restates this section's theme. The husband's ultimate responsibility is to love his wife with a Christlike love.

## | REVELATION 19:6-9

The praise of the vast multitude as a heavenly choir now turns to (1) the coming reign of the Lord and (2) the joyful marriage of the Lamb. The wife of the Lamb (Christ) is the church (Eph 5:31-32), those redeemed from all nations (Rev 5:9-10; 7:9) by His blood (1:5-6; 5:9-10). Since these descriptions are equally true of the vast multitude (7:9; 19:1,6) and the "heaven dwellers" (12:12; 13:6), it appears that there is a shift in imagery from the same group of people being portrayed as a choir to being the wife of the Lamb. If a person accepts the "invitation" and goes to the marriage feast of the Lamb, his faith will make him part of the wife (the church). It is called a "feast" because it endures, beginning on the evening of the wedding and continuing for days.