

Learning to Lead: Leaders in Marriage

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[0 : 00] If those who are going to read, if they could come up. There's two readings, one from Ephesians and one from Genesis.

The Genesis reading first and then Ephesians, so we'll do that. Genesis 3, 1-17, you'll find it on page 5.

Of your Bible. That's the beginning of the Bible. Now the servant was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from the tree in the garden? The woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden.

You must not touch it or you will die. You will not surely die, the servant said to the woman, for God knows that when you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

[1 : 12] When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

And they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, where are you? He answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked.

So I hid. And he said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, the woman, you put her here with me.

She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. And then the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? And the woman said, the serpent, he deceived me and I ate it.

[2 : 10] So the Lord God said to the serpent, because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing.

With pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. To Adam he said, because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. And the next reading is taken from Ephesians chapter 5, beginning at verse 22.

And that's on page 1176 of the Church Bible. Ephesians chapter 5, beginning at verse 22. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

[3 : 20] For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ

does the church.

For we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

However, each of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Thanks very much, Ross and Chris, for reading.

[4 : 47] Please keep your Bibles open there at Ephesians 5. That's the main part that we're going to be looking at, but we'll also be going back to Genesis 3. And this is a continuation in our little series on learning to lead.

Last week we were looking at leaders within the church. Next week, well, it's the all-age celebration. So a week after that, we're going to be looking at leaders within the home.

And today we're looking at leaders in marriage. Well, let's ask for God's help as we look at this. Our Father, we are grateful for all that you give to us, but we are needy people, and we always need the help of your Holy Spirit to understand these words that have been written, to see how they apply to us, but also that they would change us and transform us and cause us to live according to your design.

So please work amongst us this morning. Please encourage us all and help us as we seek to understand what it is to lead in marriage as you have designed it.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. And can I say as well, if there's any questions at any time, if it's really a bursting question, you can signal.

[6 : 21] But if you can wait until at the end, that's okay too. But please, you know, we do want to discuss these things, and there may be issues that arise and you want to talk through. So please feel free to talk to me after.

So, leaders in marriage. Well, marriage, it seems, is still very popular. According to last year's census, which I hope you all filled out, 37% of our population is now married.

That's an increase of 145,000 from five years ago. So love is certainly in the air. However, the same census tells us that there's a greater increase in marriage breakdown.

So, for example, divorce is up by 150% from five years ago. That's an extra 50,000 couples who've experienced a broken marriage.

Or to put it another way, 15% of those who get married end in divorce or separation. And that's a very conservative figure.

[7 : 32] And it doesn't stop there. Many stay together, but yet their marriages are very unhappy, and they cease to function as they ought.

And, of course, there's many reasons for that, and we haven't time to look at all of those reasons. But I think the main underlying reason, the root cause for marriage breakdown, is a failure for God's people to follow God's design for marriage.

And, in particular, the husband in his role as leader. So what is God's design for marriage?

Well, as one writer put it, it is politically incorrect and deeply beautiful. Have a look at Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 22.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church.

[8 : 47] So let me summarize it like this. Submission and headship, and when we say headship, we mean leadership. Submission and headship is God's beautiful design for marriage.

Now, I know that's a terribly unpopular statement, and that could get me into a lot of trouble. If I was to write that in a local newspaper, I bet you I would get a lot of replies.

In fact, it sounds very deeply offensive and culturally oppressive. And before you're going to leave in anger or annoyance or start throwing shoes at me or anything else like that, we want to explore what we mean by submission and headship.

Well, first, it does not mean inferiority or superiority. It means equality. At the very beginning of the Bible, no need to turn to it.

In Genesis 1, 27, it says that God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

[9 : 54] So we are all equal in God's sight. We're all made in his image. So men are not greater, and women are not better. Exercising headship does not increase my status or my value any more than exercising submission reduces my status or value.

We are equally loved and treasured by God. Equal in value before God and equal in our position before God.

So there's equality between man and woman, husband and wife. Now, second, while there's equality, this does not mean sameness or likeness.

It means that we are complementary. Men and women are different. Physically, we're different. That's obvious. Emotionally, we're different.

And part of that difference is seen in our God-given roles. So under God's design, we have been given different responsibilities. And we see this as we read through the creation account of the man and the woman, particularly in Genesis chapter 2.

[11:11] Because there's, we read through that account, we see that Adam was given the command not to eat from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden.

Chapter 2, verse 16. Don't eat it, he was told. And then we read a little bit later on and we see that Eve eats the fruit and she gives it to her husband, but it's God who holds Adam to account for what has happened in chapter 3, verse 9.

So this is termed in Ephesians as headship. He's responsible. He's the leader. God holds him to account. And we also see within the Genesis account that when God created Eve, it was with a special purpose of being a helper to Adam.

in chapter 2, verse 20. And being a helper doesn't mean a go for, get this, get that. But that Adam was incapable of doing all that God had called him to do and he needed a helper, he needed a partner, somebody who was going to work alongside him.

And this is termed in Ephesians as submission. So equality but complementarity. Adam needed Eve and Eve needed Adam.

[12:31] This was all part of God's beautiful design for marriage. But third and primarily, God's design for the man and the woman was ultimately that he would reflect the gospel.

So when we look at the role of the husband and the wife, we see a picture of the gospel. The role of the husband reflects the headship of Christ which is seen through sacrificial service.

The role of the wife reflects the submission of the church to Christ through willing obedience. So look at verse 24 of Ephesians chapter 5.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands. And verse 25, Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Verse 32, this is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church. So here he's going on about marriage but then he says, no actually we're talking about Christ and the church.

[13:42] We're talking about the gospel. God's design for marriage is a visible picture of the good news. In fact, a marriage relationship is a working demonstration of Christ's headship over the church and the church's submission to Christ.

So if you want to know what Christ has done, well we're to look at the husband and we'll get a picture of that. If we want to know how the church should respond to Christ, we'll look at the wife and we'll get a picture of that.

The marriage relationship is to be a beautiful picture of the gospel. That is its primary reason. But to get back to the design and the reason for the breakdown in marriage is because we have rejected collectively as a society God's design for marriage especially and I'm going to be hard on us men, myself included, we have rejected God's design for marriage in two ways.

first we abdicate our authority. Look back to Genesis 3 and we'll see how this has worked out. Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis 3 we have the account of the first marriage and sadly the first marriage breakdown.

and traditionally we tend to look at this story and we think well the wife that's Eve she's the one to blame because she's the one who ate the fruit but that's not actually the real story.

[15:30] Look at chapter 3 verse 6. When the woman saw the fruit of the tree that was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom she took some and she ate it.

she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. So Adam the husband was actually there all along.

All throughout that temptation Adam was just standing idly by. He had been given the original command in chapter 2 verse 16 not to eat of the fruit and now he ignores his responsibility to ensure that God's commands are being worked out within his life and within his marriage.

That's why it's God who comes looking for Adam afterwards even though it was Eve who ate the fruit first he comes looking for Adam chapter 3 verse 9 the Lord God called to the man where are you?

Come on Adam show yourself. Down to verse 17 to Adam he said because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you you must not eat of it cursed is the ground because of you.

[17:00] God holds Adam the head of the marriage to account he is the one who is responsible Adam has abdicated his authority he's been sitting back with his arms folded he hasn't taken his role seriously in fact he's turned his back on God's design and the knock-on effects of this are disastrous because abdicating authority leads to the husband abusing his authority look at chapter 3 of Genesis and the last part of verse 16 this is the the pronouncement upon Eve upon the woman for her part in it but let's let's hear carefully what it says it's the last two lines of verse 16 it says that your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you now we need to understand that carefully when it says for the woman to desire your husband it doesn't mean to say that she's going to be totally madly in love with him it means actually to dominate your husband to take his place to put yourself in his place and to take on his role and in response he will rule over you to rule over not in a good way but in a bad way it means to oppress your wife to be harsh today we call it feminism and chauvinism where the wife usurps her authority and the husband abdicates or abuses his authority the wife tries to do what the husband should do she seeks to be head of the family and the husband abuses his role so instead of serving his wife his wife is there to serve him and I hope we can see how this begins to get worked out within our marriage relationships this is part of the fall this is a part of working out of what happens when we go against

God's design the wife tries to control the husband manipulating and scheming and trying to get their own way and in response the husband doesn't like this so he tries to crush the wife and becomes very domineering and aggressive and all of this leads to heartache and pain and brokenness and disorder this terrible ongoing cycle of trying to control the husband and the husband in response crushing his wife so instead of seeing the gospel instead of getting this wonderful picture of Christ all we see is sin in all its ugliness things now let's just take a moment out from this and apply this to husbands and to wives so husbands listen up and not just husbands but all potential husbands okay listen carefully we need to see that our sinful nature our natural tendency is always moving towards abdicating our authority or abusing our authority we abdicate and we sit back because we just don't want to take on the responsibility it's too much like hard work after all we've got much better things to be doing like well there's all the sport we've got to do and there's all those DIY projects and then there's all that work I've got to do it you know in the mornings and everything else why would I waste my time on caring and giving to my wife and to family and investing in them why would I do that when I've got things to do for myself and we abuse our authority because well we're just selfish beings and we're insecure and we want everything done for us we prioritize our comfort and our happiness above our wife we know what our comforts are and we know what we want so they suffer while we savour the moment now I don't know what you think of that husbands and potential husbands but I think we fit into one or at times both of these positions but God has made us and he has given us a role and responsibility that demands our attention and we need to repent we need to acknowledge to our wives we need to come before them verbally and acknowledge and say to them yes I have let you down yes I have failed in this area and we need to seek God's forgiveness and we need to ask of his grace and his spirit to be able to live out his beautiful design so husbands and potential husbands listen carefully to these things but let me say something to wives and all potential wives as well you need to see that your sinful nature your heart tendency is always moving towards usurping authority or becoming a slave to authority so let me unpack that wives tend to usurp their authority to demand their rights to express their autonomy it's my way or the highway unless it's my way we're not doing it but wives can also become a slave to authority they see themselves as just nothing more than a little mousy doormat a yes sir no sir three bags full sir whatever you want

I'll do well such a wife who lives that way sadly has lost sight of her dignity and her value that she is precious and that she's been made in God's image that wives were called to be helpers and partners with their husbands and to make possible what their husbands simply cannot do on their own so wives and potential wives God has made you beautifully and wonderfully but rather than write your own role and your own description for what a wife should be follow God's design which is

best for you and good for you and where we need to repent let's repent and just as husbands need to acknowledge to wives so wives need to acknowledge to their husbands and maybe you're not married maybe you were married where do you fit into all of this well marriages need prayer and support as I said at the beginning the increase in marriage breakdown goes on and on and on and it's just as likely to happen within

God's family as anywhere else we're not immune to the pressures and the temptations so marriages need prayer and they need support and they need encouragement from all of God's family so what does it look like then to live out God's good design for marriage well let's look at two things here the design of headship to start with we need to go back to Ephesians chapter 5 go back to Ephesians chapter 5 the husband's headship of the wife is modelled on Christ's headship of the church so in Ephesians 5 verse 23 it says for the husband is the head of the wife as [25 : 52] Christ is the head of the church his body of which he is the savior verse 25 so husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her headship is about self sacrifice it's about loving service C.S.

Lewis writes that the headship of the husband is not expressed in husbands doing as they like but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion one of service whose wife receives most and gives least so husbands we are to exercise our authority by giving of ourselves sacrificially to our wives and primarily I think this is done by taking and applying and working out the gospel within our marriages and within our family so look at the rest of verse 26 and 27 husbands are to love their wives just as Christ gave himself for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless so just as Jesus

Christ gave of himself to make us the church beautiful so husbands are to give themselves to their wives to make them beautiful not just physically outwardly but in their purity inwardly and in their godliness I find this quote very helpful we who are husbands need sufficient guts to be beauticians that is to give ourselves in loving serving leadership of our wives so that through our love they may become more beautiful on the inside potential wives never settle for anything less than a husband who will give themselves in loving serving leadership so that's the design of head ship what about the design of submission the wife well the wife's submission to the husband is again modeled on the church's submission to

Christ look at Ephesians 5 verse 22 and 24 wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord verse 24 now as the church submits to Christ so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything now let's be clear submission if we were to read the whole context of chapter 5 it starts by telling us that we are to submit to one another verse 21 so submission isn't just for wives just for women we're all to submit to one another in order to submit to God's design and purposes for us and submission is not about obeying every demand or decree of your husband submission is primarily about obedience to God's order and God's design it's about living life as God intended you to live this is his best for you in practice wives it means not being insistent on one's rights not always pushy and demanding your own way but instead becoming a partner instead coming alongside your husband and encouraging him on in his role

John Stott has put it well like this he says submission to the husband's role does not mean living under a tyranny of oppression compassion but under his responsibility and care so here we have these wonderful pictures of what it is to live in God's design together the husband and the wife paint a beautiful picture of the gospel and as we live according to God's design they point people around them to the love of Christ and how we ought to respond to Christ that's why marriage is so vital as we go about our day every day as we go to work as we live amongst our neighbours our marriages are on display all the time our marriages are out there people are looking at us they are always witnessing our marriages are always communicating something to everybody else around us and by God's grace we can communicate through our marriage the gospel of

[31 : 09] Jesus Christ people see a visible picture of Christ's love for the church as the husband loves his wife and people get to see how we should respond to Christ as the wife submits and supports her husband so men and all potential husbands take responsibility take this calling seriously and lead your marriages well and wives take your calling seriously and know what it is to submit to your husbands in partnership and may God give us the grace to live out his beautiful design every single day let's pray our father

God we come to you and well we acknowledge perhaps we're feeling a little bit rebuked and challenged about your your model and your design for how we should live but thank you for your grace that even what we've been looking at reminds us of the gospel the good news of Jesus that we can come to him time and time again and find forgiveness and find the grace and the mercy and the way to go on living as you call us to live I pray for every marriage represented here that you would protect them and keep them enable each husband here to lead his marriage and his family well may every wife and potential wife know what it is to live alongside their husband in submission in partnership and we pray that you would give us the grace to do this and ultimately that it may lead and point others to our saviour jesus christ so please help us and help us all to be an encouragement to one another we ask all this in jesus name amen