

The Bible on Submission in Marriage

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[0:00] Okay, by way of introduction, we are having some microphone questions.

! Right here.

And I need someone with two 16-penny nails. So you can pray that I don't have to have my feet nailed in one spot.

That would be very difficult for me. I want you to open your Bibles, if you will, to Ephesians chapter 5.

And we are going to look at verse 22 through 24 this morning. Let me read the passage to you and you follow along in your own copy of the scriptures.

[1:11] Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

Don't take that to be divine addition. The text is important in itself without the additional help.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and he is himself its savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Let us pray. Father God, for us prayer is not a habit or something that we do because it's part of the plan of this day.

It is the expression of our hearts that reflect our confidence in you, our glad dependence upon your sufficiency and your supremacy and our humble recognition that apart from you we can do nothing.

[2:27] And Father, this morning as we take the scriptures that you have given to us by divine revelation, and you have given us for our good and your glory.

We confess that apart from the working of the Spirit of God, these texts and the lesson that you have for us is going to fall on deaf ears.

I know, Lord, that there are some here in our fellowship this morning that do not know Christ. And there's not a one of us that this morning would not ask that you and your grace would draw that individual and those souls to you.

It's reasonable to think that there are those who also this morning need to hear explicitly what your word has to say regarding this matter. And so we ask that you would give to us teachable hearts, desire for the glory of Christ, and confidence in the work of the Spirit of God.

And we pray this because of Jesus. Amen. As we begin with this passage this morning, let me encourage you to know that one of the dangerous things to do with Scripture is to deal with it out of context.

[3:37] You always have to keep every piece of study within the larger frame of what the Scriptures teach. And so as we take up this passage in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 22 through 24, I want to remind you that actually this is all part of a larger lesson that the apostle has given beginning in Ephesians chapter 1 all the way through to where we are now, in which first of all, he explains to believers the book of Ephesians was written primarily to people who knew Christ.

Most everybody in the church at Ephesus had come to faith by being drawn by the grace of God to realize the darkness of their own soul and the hardness of their spirit.

And they came by faith and cried out and said, I'm a sinner who stands justly condemned before Christ, and I need him to be my Savior. Ephesians takes three chapters to explain that salvation is the work of God in which he changes a man's heart and a woman's heart and brings them into sweet relationship and communion with the Lord of glory.

Following that, Paul takes the remaining three chapters to explain how the church, which is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, is to relate.

And the passage that we are looking at here, actually, in Galatians chapter 5, verse 22, is really an explanation of what we've seen earlier in which the apostle says to all of the members of the congregation that this book was written to, you as God's people are to be, what?

[5:21] Filled with the Spirit. Filled with the Spirit. And following that, the first piece of counsel that he gives regarding that has to do with the way in which we interact with one another, speaking Scripture to one another, the attitude we have in our music and worship, and then also the matter of being thankful in all things.

Following that, he makes one last statement in verse 21, that we are to be a people who are submissive to one another, and in particular because of our fear and our regard and our respect for Christ.

Now, I do want to explain this morning as we look at this passage that one of the first things we need to do is really see the big picture. So I want you to have it in mind. First, the Holy Spirit's greater interest in this passage is not principally that Christians will have great marriages.

Now, that may strike you a little odd because I want you to understand that God does care about Christians having great marriages. But his greater concern is the glory of Christ, and we need to have that fixed in our minds.

The gospel and the glory of Christ is at the center of everything that we are to be and what his instruction is to us. The explicit, on-point instructions that we are going to see this morning that apply to wives is only a part of the larger interest that the apostle has in believers' living, spirit-filled lives.

[7:00] And in living that spirit-filled life, his intention is that we model the wisdom and the goodness of God, that people looking at the way in which our lives are constructed and play out will say, wow, where did they get that idea?

That is novel, and it seems to actually work. Second, I do want you to understand that Paul actually is going to give us three lessons following verse 21.

Remember what verse 21 says? It says, submit to one another. Then he is going to use three different pictures of what that relationship of submission looks like.

One is in marriage. Two is in parenting. Three is in employment. And in every case, along with the lesson that he gives on the matter of submission, he is also going to give a lesson on the responsibility of the one who is in the position of authority in that particular arena or venue.

He is going to address the order of submission in the home, in marriage, and at work. Now, third, when I say to you and when you heard the passage read, I think it would be fair to say that for some this morning, hearing that statement, wives, submit to your own husbands, you may kind of smile on the outside, but the heart, the natural response to any issue of submission is, guess what?

[8:27] It's a little bit like nails on the chalkboard. Do you follow that? I'll never forget as a pastor, one of the things that happens is a couple says to me, well, we'd like to get married, and they come in for premarital counseling.

And I usually have the young man and the young woman in my office. And more than one occasion, I've gotten to this part of the process of premarital counseling. And I ask the little girl who grew up in our church, do you think you're going to have any problems with submission?

And she twitters and giggles and says, oh, not at all. And I think, wow, really encouraged to hear that. I do want you to understand that the issue of submission is not something that is a struggle just today.

And it is a struggle. I want you to turn back in your Bibles just for a moment to a passage in Genesis chapter 3. And I want you to understand that with the fall came the struggle that we see today. Genesis chapter 3, verse 16, God comes to Adam and Eve following the entrance of sin into the garden. And here's what He says in verse 16.

[9:38] He says, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing. Is there any mother here that doesn't think God spoke authoritatively in that passage?

Huh? No. I have been the happy witness to my children's births. And I can tell you, my wife's a trooper.

But I can also tell you, in the good old days, you didn't have private birthing rooms that had a lot of sound protection. And I will never forget Judith and I having one of four stalls in this birthing place. And the woman across the hall had a vocabulary of a drunken sailor. And when she could draw breath, all that she could draw was spent on doing two things.

One of the things that had a lot of time was spent on doing two things. And the woman was just like, oh, my God said, here's some of the consequences of sin.

[10:50] And we find there in verse 16, in pain you shall bring forth children. But mark the next part, it says, your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.

It's not saying, hey girl, you're really going to have the hots for your husband. Thank you. It's explaining that the desire and the heart is going to resist the headship and leadership that God has ordained.

And the husband is going to be inclined to be a little bit of a whiner or a tyrant. How's that? So I want you to have it in mind that when Paul wrote this statement, and you can go back to Ephesians chapter 5, he was addressing a problem that his desire was bent towards helping the body of Christ, and people in particular, honor and adore the Lord Jesus Christ in their marriages.

As a note of history, and I think it is important for us to keep the context in mind, if you're a student of history at all, you will know that in the ancient world, whether you were in Jewish culture or you were in Roman culture or you were in Greek culture, women as a general rule were not highly prized or valued.

I'm not going to get into all the details of what that was like, but I want you to understand that for the larger part, women were kind of viewed as a... I want to be careful how I say that, but they weren't viewed with respect.

[12:32] And the gospel brought deliverance. Do you follow that? If you think with me just for a moment over in Galatians chapter 3, and I want you to turn back just a little bit so you can see this.

In Galatians chapter 3, verse 28, we get a picture of how the gospel delivered believers from the cloud and the pall that set over top of the unbelieving world.

Verse 28, 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.

Now, is that Bible truth? Truth? Yes, it is. And I would suspect that as this liberty and freedom that we find in salvation began to work its way into the culture of the church, which reminds us that in God's eyes we are all equal, and we are, that brutal suppression that had characterized the culture led to the pendulum began to swing a little bit.

And I would suspicion that the Spirit of God sensed we need to clarify something. How many of you understand that the Bill of Rights declares that we are all as citizens what?

[13:55] Equal. But the fact that we are equal as citizens does not change the need for order and structure. Would you recognize that? There are a number of young men in our fellowship that have decided that they want to pursue the military.

And when you go into the military, in one sense you are all equal, but do you understand that being equal before our Constitution and the Bill of Rights does not mean that you don't respect those who are an authority over you?

It would seem that as the gospel began to transform that ancient culture, it became evident that believers still need to be reminded of the fact that God who created all things and was the one who designed order to be what it is, he saw the need and we recognize that there is still a need.

And we need to have attention to that. So, I want you to recognize this morning as you look at this passage in Ephesians chapter 5, that the Bible begins by telling us, it says here, wives submit to your own husband as to the Lord.

And God's plan for order and for what is wise and good, it still remains even though it is countercultural. So, let's take up verse 22 in particular and kind of break it down and begin to pay attention to what the passage says.

[15:25] I want you to understand that without question the Bible makes it clear that spirit-filled submission is for the wife. The believing wife

who values the Word of God, and I want to say that carefully, the believing wife who values the Word of God and seeks to be spirit-filled is subject to her husband.

That's what the Bible says. To put it another way, the Christian wife is under her husband's headship and authority.

That means she is to follow his lead, to submit to his counsel and direction, and respect the office and role that her husband has received from God.

Now, I want you to understand that God has assigned specific roles to each member of society and each member in a marriage in particular. He has appointed the husband to lead and the husband to provide.

I want you to turn back again. You were in Genesis, but I want you to go back, if you would, to Genesis chapter 2, and we are going to discover there several different passages in relationship to a husband's responsibility to be the leader in his home.

[16:41] Genesis chapter 2, verse 7 through 18. Then the Lord formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Man became a living creature. The Lord planted a garden. And we find there in the matter of the garden that God gives explicit instructions to man regarding what he was to do in the garden.

I want you to also notice in Genesis chapter 3, verse 1 through 9, that after sin came into the garden, that God was not going to deal, first of all, with the first perpetrator of the sin, but to the one who was responsible with headship.

The fact of the matter is, is that Eve was the one who was first tempted. She fell. Her husband followed her. But when God came into the picture, his question of what has happened in this situation was not directed to the woman, but was directed to the man.

The proof of God's plan in a home, as seen in the passages that we are looking at here in Genesis 2 and Genesis chapter 3, makes several points.

[17:57] Number one, that God created man first, and in doing so, he did so to establish order. He wanted to make clear what that plan was, and he did that for us so we don't forget.

For another, we find there in the passage, in the Genesis chapter 2 passage, that he gave explicit instructions to man, and he expected the man to pass those on. Many of you work in environments where those who are in a leadership and authority over you, they're the ones who are given the instructions from those who are above them, and they are responsible to see that you know what the instructions are and that you follow them.

And as we recognize, and we've already noted, after sin entered the picture, we find that God came to man and held man responsible.

And I want you to look again, if you would, at Genesis chapter 3, and mark what it says there in verse 9. Do you know what he's trying to do?

Trying to pass the buck. Trying to shuffle off his responsibility. So as we look at this passage, I want you to understand that God has ordained, and I want to make this clear, and we're going to come back to that again, but I want to make it clear that God has ordained that the husband is to be the leader in his home.

[19:40] That is his office and his responsibility. And it is his duty to develop the skill to do so in a biblical and honoring fashion.

I'll never forget the commissioning service that my son was at, and I had the privilege of attending, and there he stands as a newly minted second lieutenant, green behind the ears.

All the experience that he had was getting through officer's training school. And the one who is there to recognize his transition from being an enlisted man to an officer is a veteran of the chase. And the man who is commissioned makes a very interesting statement. He says, follow me. And the commissioned, the man who is, what's the word here?

You have an officer and you have an enlisted man. And the enlisted man says, lead the way. By appointment, in the military, a man is placed in office and he's expected to lead.

[20:51] And by appointment, God has set the man to be the leader in his home, and it is God's expectation that he do that properly. Well, what this passage teaches, and I want us to go back to Ephesians chapter 5 and

mark what it says, there in verse 22 and 23, what it teaches is that a wife, a Christian wife, and I want to make that clear, a Christian wife is not to assert authority over her husband.

I want you to go to a passage that will help us with this a little bit, and you are there in Ephesians. Go forward to the back of the Bible, to the right. Go to 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 12.

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 12, we find that Paul writes to the church and he gives instruction here as well.

And there in the passage, he says, I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

The order, the Spirit of God, God makes clear is an indicator of headship. Secondly, I want you to understand that the Christian wife is to follow her husband's lead and decisions.

[22:08] And going back to Ephesians chapter 5, verse 24, I want you to understand that her leadership and her submission is to be extensive.

Look at the passage. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also the wife should submit in everything to her husband.

The Bible instructs the Spirit-filled wife. Can I stop just for a moment? I want you to understand that apart from the enabling of the Spirit of God, submission is not natural or normal to any woman.

And by the way, so that we don't think this is a gender issue, I want you to understand that submission is not normal to any of us. It is something that happens under the enabling of the Spirit of God, and we need to remember that because as we work our way through this passage, if you're sitting here as a woman and saying, I don't want to do that, and the guy I'm married to I'm not sure about, I want to tell you, your problem is not with him.

Your problem is with allowing the Spirit of God to work in your heart and life and allowing God to be the one who leads. Come back to the point that this submission is to be extensive.

I want you to understand that the Bible instructs the Spirit-filled wife to submit to her husband's lead in all things except where he instructs her to be clearly disobedient to the written Word of God.

[23:39] Over the years, I've had wives call me up and say, hey, my husband wants me to sign the tax form and I know that it's false. I've had wives call me up and say, my husband has prohibited me from going to church.

I've had wives call me up and say, my husband has prohibited me from being baptized. My explicit counsel in such case is, listen, you are to respectfully let your husband know that you are also under someone else's authority and that is the Word of God.

And humbly show him what the Word of God has to say in these regards. Can a husband command his wife to sin against God? The answer is, no.

But if he doesn't want to eat liver and Brussels sprouts and he says, don't ever fix that for me again, don't. You got it? Pretty clear.

And I happen to like liver and Brussels sprouts in case you're wondering. I did that at home. No. In our home, I want you to understand there's kind of a plan that if God produced it and my wife cooked it and we prayed for it, it's going home.

[24:58] Okay? You got that? And we have, of course our children are all grown now and under their own authority and rules, but we had a plan that things that weren't eaten for supper were for breakfast.

And things that weren't eaten for supper and for breakfast were for lunch. You know, eventually, the refrigerator was an amazing thing and eventually, there's a saying, Shakespeare said, hunger makes the best sauce.

Okay, back we go. A wife's humility and submission to her husband is to be extensive.

Let me come to another point that I think is important. I want you to recognize that the Bible says that her husband is the head. I want you to recognize that the Bible says that the husband is the head.

Put your finger, if you will, on verse 23. The husband is the head of the wife. Not might be, not should be, not let's have a vote, it says is.

[26:07] The husband may be a poor head. There may be some pieces missing in terms of his logic and structure, but at the end of the day, if God arrives on the scene and asks a question about what's going on at that

address, he's not going to talk to the wife, he's going to talk to the husband.

Whether the wife recognizes it or not, God himself has appointed the husband to be the head in that home and he is. By the way, if the wife doesn't like the head, she probably should have thought about that before she said, I do.

Don't be saying, yes, I'll follow, I do, and then do it, then not do it. Again, come back to the issue of premarital counseling.

I can tell you on more than one occasion, and I've had the privilege of, for the most part, doing marriages of young people that have grown up in our fellowship. But there have been those rare occasions where individuals have come to me and said, would you do our wedding?

Wonderful opportunity of evangelism. I've done two non-believing people and I did the civil service. But I said, if you want me to marry you, yeah, we want you to marry us.

[27:18] I said, try that again. We want you to marry us. I said, you have to go through counseling with me. Oh yeah, not a problem. It's good, blah, blah, blah. And so there we go and we get over to this part and it's like, whoa, what is that?

I'm not following him. I said, find somebody else to do the wedding. You know, you're going to stand up there and say, I do. What are you saying I do too? I do. So let me give you some practical counsel for godly, spirit-filled wives.

This verse, and by extension these verses suggest that, number one, a Christian wife will support her husband as he learns to lead. Let me say that slowly so you don't miss it.

A Christian wife will support her husband as he learns to lead. In most cases, I think it was last Sunday as I was teaching Sunday school in our class called Home Improvements, I asked, how many of you in this class grew up in Christian homes?

Probably 80% of my class grew up in Christian homes. That's good. I said, how many of you young men or how many of you who are husbands had specific training in what it was to be the leader of your home?

[28:35] No one raised their hand and say, oh, yeah, I had that class. My father taught me the responsibility of being the spiritual leader of his home.

I want you to understand that in most cases, and I trust it does not stay this way, most cases, young men are not explicitly instructed in what the responsibility and obligations are of being the spiritual leader of their home.

And so, wives, godly women, you have to learn how to support your husband as he learns how to lead. And learning how to lead is a challenge. Furthermore, secondly, the Christian wife should pray for her husband as he grows in this area.

Something you learn in leadership is that you learn by trial and error, you learn by consulting those who are wise, you learn upon, you learn how to rely upon the word of God, and guess who suffers as the young man is going through the learning curve.

Does anybody have an idea? It's the other person in the canoe. Poor girl. She decided, yes, I'm going to follow, yes, I'm going to be his wife, and the poor guy, without extensive instructions in what to do as he leads, he's stumbling around and causing accidents, and she is saying, I don't like all this consequence.

[30:06] Here's what usually happens. they leave this place where they've said, I do, and smiles and giggles and stuff, and they walk out and begin life, and that rookie novice husband decides he's going to try out a couple decisions, and he makes a couple boneheaded ones, and she begins to say, that was dumb, that was dumb, that was dumb, and pretty soon he says, well, you take over, and guess what happens when she begins to take over?

Two things. She diminishes her value and respect for him. Can't help it. And number two, he begins to think less of her as well.

So when you have a couple accidents and you tip that canoe over, and he says, why don't you try it for a while, godly, young girl, wife, you say, not on your life.

I want you to understand in relationship to this, the Christian wife must trust the Holy Spirit to be more instructive and persuasive than she is. Now, what do I mean by that?

Let me explain something to you so you get this, and I've got to watch my time here, take my watch off, so that's a real signal I'm going to do that. Truth of the matter is, is that little girls learn a whole lot more about playing house than boys do.

[31:42] Do you follow that? I mean, I'm around my grandkids, and just from this time they're little, they get dolls. Girls get dolls. Do you know what boys get?

In fact, they get guns and swords, and my grandchildren, my grandsons can turn anything into a sword. I mean, almost anything. Do you follow that?

My little grandson had tinker toys crammed down into his pants. I mean, you know, tinker toys, you know how you join them together? And, you know, tinker toy is a really floppy sword, but he pulled that out and said, see my sword?

I mean, boys have swords. Girls have what? Dolls. And they are learning because they're being coached by mommy. Hey, you don't just drop that thing on the head.

Now, why do you say that to the girl? Huh? You know, there's some consequences to dropping a baby on their head, you know? Now, sticking each other with a sword, now those are details you've got to work on, but girls are being coached about being mommies and nurturing and caring, and they learn a lot of things about what makes life happen that boys who are playing with swords and guns and trying to hurt each other, you know, they're not learning.

[33:04] And so, that well-trained little girl marries that rookie boy who has no idea what leadership really requires. And they climb on the tandem bicycle, she says, honey, you're supposed to be in front, and he says, I'll do that.

And so, they get on the tandem by, they go down the road and have a couple wrecks and guess what she says? She lets him know that wrecks are not fun. And he says, well, you drive.

And from then on in, she's up front catching bugs and complaining about it and he's behind wondering about who's doing the driving and it gets messier and messier. I want you to understand that a godly wife will rely upon the Holy Spirit to be more instructive and more persuasive than she ever will be.

And by the way, a Christian wife cannot play the I told you so card. One of the ways men learn to lead is by making dumb mistakes.

How many men here would agree? You learn the hard way. And the wisest thing for a godly wife to do is just kind of smile and let him learn.

[34:19] Can I tell you women that the Holy Spirit is more persuasive and more painful than you will ever be? I'll never forget an experience I had several years ago of driving on 270.

I saw this Land Rover mega SUV blow my doors off. You know, got my attention. And on the back it had a large bumper sticker.

And bumper stickers are how you advertise your view of life. Isn't that right? And here's this bumper sticker. It said, all men are idiots and I married their king.

I thought to myself, whoa. I bet you the woman driving that SUV is a sight to behold. You know, something kind of in the Amazon culture.

You know, 6'5", you know, forearm resting on the... So, I did speed up. I do want you to admit. I pulled kind of, you know, it was a little furtive glance, you know.

[35:31] It was this little Walter Mitty type of guy. You know what Walter Mitty is for you? You know, a wuss. I mean, I looked at it, I thought, heaven, help me.

Bud, you need to get that off. You know, here, given the command that we have, it would be wise for godly parents to help their sons learn how to be godly leaders.

Would you agree with that? It's important. And also, can I tell you that you who are parents would be wise to teach your daughters how to make good picks.

You know, he may be Joe Sixpack in the gym, but if the word of God does not govern his life, he is going to be a leader that is a terrifying fact in your life.

Let's come to one more piece. Going back to the passage in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 22, it says, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

[36:51] I want you to go back with me just for a moment to Ephesians chapter 5, verse 21, where it says, Submitting to one another out of fear for Christ. A godly wife submits because of her relationship with Christ.

And let me say that carefully. A godly wife submits because of her relationship with Christ and her desire to please Him as her Lord and Savior. And where there is a lack of willingness to submit, the problem is not principally with the husband that God has given her.

Her first problem is with the headship of Christ Himself. Her unwillingness to hear the authority of her Savior only plays out in the home, in the place where she lives.

I want to tell you it's quite easy to profess a love for Christ and a faith in Christ, but the real proof is not in what we say, but how we live in the settings where He places us.

A godly child obeys, as we see in this passage later in Ephesians chapter 6, because of Christ. A godly employee works hard because of Christ.

[38:08] And by extension, a godly wife submits because of Christ. So let me close with this wonderful little picture that Jesus gave us.

I want you to turn back in your Bibles, if you will, to Matthew chapter 25. Matthew chapter 25. And we're going to be looking at a little setting that Jesus gives us that's a little surprising.

Let me pick up and read beginning there in verse 31. Matthew chapter 25 verse 31.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, and He will sit on His glorious throne before Him, will be gathered all the nations and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

You know this passage, don't you? One group goes one side, the other group goes the other side. And there in verse 34 it says, And the King will say to those on the right, Come you who are blessed by my Father.

[39:13] Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food and I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me in. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. The righteous will answer and saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink?

When did all these things happen? You know what Jesus is going to say to the godly wife? He'll say, Hey, you served me, you fed me, you cared for me, you honored me, when you followed your husband's leadership.

Look at the passage. Jesus says, What? If you did it to the least of these, you did it, what?

To me. And he says, If you refuse to do it, you refuse to do it to me. Verse 40, Truly I say to you, as you did it to the one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

[40:43] So here's the truth. The godly wife, the spirit-filled wife, who submits to her husband, lifts up the name of Jesus.

Listen to me as I close. Do you realize that God puts all kinds of couples together, and in most cases, A, the young man was not born, well, always not born, but in most cases, he didn't learn how to lead.

The girls had an advantage in many ways. But the godly, spirit-filled wife says, You know what? I want my husband to develop leadership, and I will invest my energy in helping him learn how to do it wisely.

Judith and I, this is the whole truth, I'll tell you the truth.

When I was dating with the intelligent intention of finally marrying somebody, I knew what kind of girl I needed. Do you follow that? I knew, actually, I needed someone that was smarter than I was.

[42:02] And I married a very wonderful, intelligent, capable, organized, outstanding young lady. I, by nature, came into that marriage as a tyrant and a coward.

And our home suffered significantly under my lack of biblical leadership. friendship. And when the doors blew off of our home, God came and talked to me and said, Tim, this is your problem.

And he fixed it eventually. And one of the first things I said after we got reconciled, I said, never let me abrogate or give away my responsibility of leading again.

And I want to tell you, thank you for the Lord that my wife has been smart enough that when there's a scary sound in the house, she sends me to check on it. That's the way it, what, should be. Let's close in prayer.