

Ephesians 5:22-33 - Storytellers Part 1: Husbands

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Date: 16 August 2015

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[0 : 00] Last week we started a series on marriage and the family as we have arrived at this point in the book of Ephesians.

And we talked last week about the fact that marriage is not first and foremost about us. That's not actually the primary reason that God designed marriage in the first place.

What God had in mind in marriage was to reveal a mystery, was to show people the reality of a relationship between Jesus and His bride, the church.

We said that marriage, rather than ours, was the primary story, the real Cinderella story. It's the story of Jesus, right, the prince of heaven who didn't consider His privileged position in heaven as something to hold on to, something that He needed to grab tightly, but He left His throne and He came down to grab hold of us.

It's a story where the princess He comes after is not lovely on her own. Just in her own condition, she's not attractive.

[1 : 23] She's actually abandoned and forlorn and pitiful. But the prince loves her. That's the story, is that the prince loves that bride.

That he pursues his bride all the way to his own death just so he can have her hand. That he actually lays down his own life for her, a high cost in order to have her as his bride.

He sacrifices his own life. He dies for her, purifies her, restores her to her original beauty and lives in love with her forever.

It's a glorious story. And the most glorious part about it is that it's true that Jesus actually loves us like that. That's the story of marriage.

So when we begin to read about marriage, the first thing that we ought to understand is we're not to get so focused on our own marriages that we miss the great story.

[2 : 29] It's in that context of the love of Jesus for us that we all are to live as His people and to tell that story to others. And then some of us within that group of God's people who are all telling the story, some of us have a particular job of telling that through our marriages.

Paul's telling us that husbands and wives are to be storytellers. To be retelling and reenacting for all to see that glorious story in our relationship with each other, a relationship where we're not the heroes, He is, but where we get to tell in a special way the grandest story, the one the world most needs to hear.

So today we're going to look at how husbands are to do that. And next week we'll look at instructions to wives. Now why in that order? You know, why not ladies first after all?

Isn't that the way it's supposed to go? There's a very spiritual theological reason for this, and that is that if I put that sermon off for one more week, there's an increased chance of Jesus coming back before I'm forced to preach it.

And so that's the very important reason that we're starting with husbands. I'm just kidding. Mostly. We will look at Paul's words to wives next week.

[3 : 57] But we're going to read the entire passage again this morning, focusing on Paul's words to husbands and their role in telling the grand story. Ephesians 5 at verse 22.

Hear God's holy, inerrant, infallible word. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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.

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. [5 : 21] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Pray with me. Oh, Father, open our eyes this morning that we would behold wonderful things in your word.

Your word is precious to us, so speak to us through it, we pray. It is perfect. Your word is perfect. Perfect. The man who speaks is not. He's a husband who's far from perfect, who sees more of his failures than successes.

And so, Father, we need you to speak. Speak in spite of me for the glory of Jesus, the perfect husband, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. You know how sometimes things seem like really good ideas in your head, and then when they actually play themselves out in reality, you know, not so much?

[6 : 34] Well, when Christy and I were engaged, I had about nine months or so, you know, to figure this husbanding thing out. It was very important to me. I really wanted to be a godly husband, a good spiritual leader.

And so, I thought, I know what I'm going to do. During these nine months, I'm going to, on my own, go away and privately study through the Psalms. So, I started doing that, and I started studying the Psalms, reading commentaries, taking notes of all of the key things that I learned, even picking, like, hymns and songs to go with each Psalm, right?

Because I'm going to be ready to lead my wife the first few weeks of our marriage. And I think that if we had just stuck with it long enough to get with my wonderful thoughts on, like, Psalm 4 or 5, if we'd gotten there, I think maybe it would have stuck.

But having set myself up as the one who had all of the wonderful thoughts, among many other things wrong with that approach was I was forgetting the mutuality of marriage, that we have mutual needs that we struggle with, things that we both need to learn.

And so, I'd set myself up in this case as the expert, right? The one who'd studied much ahead of time and had many, many books worth of wisdom to teach and direct my wife in all things spiritual.

[8 : 06] And that, of course, would be a pattern for a marriage where I would be the one who has it all together, has things figured out, and would be bringing her up to speed all of the time, apparently. Brilliant idea.

If you're not married yet, don't do that. Equally unhelpful, though, was my reaction to this idea not working so well.

What do you think I felt when I basically put my best foot forward and fell on my face? What was my reaction to that? Backing away altogether, right?

I don't want to fail again. I hate that feeling. I guess I just should have nothing to do with this. Really nothing to say. I don't have anything to offer in this area. I'm going to stay back, play it safe, not risk failing again.

And I think both of those are struggles we have regularly as husbands. On the one hand, in our pride, we're at times overly presumptuous.

[9 : 11] We're high and mighty, belittling our wives. Or, in our insecurity, in our self-doubt, we're passive, withdrawn, neglecting our wives altogether.

We struggle with that. Before we even get to Paul's words directly to husbands in this passage, husbands find out in verse 23 what? Their role in the story is to be the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

Now, that word head in this context refers primarily not to superiority over, but to responsibility for those who have been entrusted to one's care.

So, we're called to be the head of the wife. And it's important to point out what that means and doesn't mean because men have misused this verse to justify abusing the authority they've been given by God in marriage.

Assuming they're wiser. Concluding they should make all the decisions. Relegating their wives to being controlled by them. Trying to teach their wives the Psalms from a position of superior

knowledge and all those things that we all do, right?

[10:31] Y'all all did that when you were engaged, right? You didn't all do that? Well, you did stuff like that, right? You thought you were going to have it together and teach her.

And it's disgraceful of the image of God in the women we're married to. Further, as we'll see in this passage, it completely misses the picture of the way Jesus serves the church as her Savior. It doesn't tell the story well at all. You're not playing that role because you're better than she is. But, on the other hand, God has designed you for and called you to it.

On the other hand, all the way back to the Garden of Eden, the opposite struggle has been one that men particularly wrestle with. We call it passivity.

Just as Adam in the garden stood idly by while Eve was tempted and fell into sin, standing by, not stepping forward.

[11:36] I would say especially these days, men abdicate this role of headship even more than they abuse it. We abdicate the responsibility God has given us for those in our care even more often than we overdo it.

We more often neglect than we do overdo things. We fear failure, perhaps like I did after experiencing it.

We doubt our ability to fulfill such a high calling. And after all, our role is to be like Jesus, right? That's the role we're given. So, I mean, really, who's going to be able to live up to that?

And so the self-doubt comes, I could never possibly do it well enough. For some of us, we've just dealt with pressure at work all day. One decision after the next.

And we come home and what we want is to check out. Not to have to speak into anything. No decisions to make. No responsibilities to have. And so we don't provide any leadership at all.

[12:38] And doing nothing is certainly not the role of Jesus either. Being domineering is not what Jesus was like. But doing nothing is not what He's like either.

If we're to be responsible for those God has put in our care, we have to engage with them, not be checked out. We have to listen and understand their hearts. Not just blow them off or patronize them.

We have to think intentionally about what's best for them. Not just placate their every whim in order to buy ourselves some peace and quiet. Men, we do those things.

All of them. All of that is entailed in being a husband. In doing our part to show the incredible story of Christ pursuing, initiating, going after His bride and saving and cleansing her.

So if it's not domineering on the one hand and it's not neglecting our wives on the other, what does this role, this headship look like? What does God call us to as husbands?

[13:41] Husbands. The clear answer of this passage is love. It starts with love. Look at verse 25.

Husbands, love your wives. It continues in the middle of the passage, verse 28, in the same ways husbands should love their wives.

And he gets all the way to the end and he's summarizing what he said. And verse 33 says, Let each one of you love his wife as himself. It's not hard to figure out what Paul's message for husbands is, is it?

Love your wives. It doesn't get much clearer than that, but let's try to make it a little more tangible for us. It's easy to say, it's easy to say I love you, right?

But harder to experience that reality, to actually demonstrate it. As Paul describes what it means for husbands to love their wives, he says there are really two things to keep in mind and be regularly doing to play your part in this story well.

[14:47] Two things. The first is lay down your life. The second is lift her life up. Lay your life down and lift her life up.

That's what this love looks like. I want those two simple thoughts to be constantly running through our minds day by day.

Men, we've got to be thinking, what does it look like for me today to be laying my life down and lifting her life up? Because when these two realities become regular parts of your relationship with your wife, you'll be displaying the love of Jesus for his bride through your marriage.

And that's what it's all about. So first, lay down your life. Verse 25 again. Husbands, love your wives.

How? What's it going to look like? As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. As we saw last week, the love of Jesus for his church involves sacrificial action.

[15 : 52] It's costly. You've heard of husbands sacrificing others, wives, children, friends, on the altars of their own goals, their own success, their own glory.

But the love described here is exactly the opposite of that. It sacrifices self for the sake of others. In this case, one's wife. The word itself that Paul uses for love here in this passage is agapao.

The word that means the self-giving love that seeks the good of the beloved rather than of self. Love, remember from 1 Corinthians 13 and that great passage, is not self-seeking.

So being a husband by definition can't be about serving the power, glory, and success of yourself. It's intended to be a costly role. To protect your wife, you may have to suffer great cost to yourself. Being a husband is not a safe role to play in the story. And you don't get a stunt double for it. It's yours. I remember in middle school and high school, at least where I grew up, that if a guy was interested in going out with a girl or wanted to take her to a dance, he never asked her first.

[17 : 08] Who did he ask first? Did you all do this at your school? Who do you ask first if you wonder if she likes you? Yeah, you ask her friends, right? Now, why do you ask her friends first?

Yeah, because you're a wimp, right? Essentially, yes. Because the guy doesn't want to risk the potential cost of embarrassment or rejection or public shaming in the middle school cafeteria and other horrific things.

The disgrace that would come upon a guy if she didn't like him back, right? So before asking her, I'll find out what the answer would probably be.

The terrible pattern in that is that the guy would stand safely back at the trunk of the tree while pushing the girl out on the proverbial limb, right? Do you see how that happens?

I'm not going to be the one who gets burned. I'm going to push you out there and then see. He protects himself and his reputation at all costs. Godly love, on the other hand, risks self and sacrifices self to protect the beloved.

[18 : 22] It walks out on the limb and takes the heat for the difficult decision rather than passing the buck to her from the safety of silence. Guys, think about what's valuable to you.

What's something that you think, oh, that's really valuable to me? Think along the lines of national championship tickets. Think of promotion at work.

Think that car that I've had my eye on for a while. I know those are things that would be valuable to me. Ask yourself, what would you do in order to get that?

What would you sacrifice in order to have it? Money? Time? Even rearranging your calendar so that you can be a part of it? That's how you can really tell something's valuable to you, isn't it?

By thinking of what you would give up in order to have that. Do you wonder if you're sacrificing for your wife? Or if you're sacrificing your wife for what you really value?

[19 : 25] Ask her if she feels valued by and beloved to you. What could you do that would make her feel valued by you the way Christ values us?

What sacrifices could you make? As I've thought about sacrifice recently, I've realized that for many of our wives, from the beginning of the relationship, they've sacrificed a lot.

Perhaps not just marrying me, I understand that in itself sticks out, but sometimes their own plans or agendas or goals, careers.

And many of them have sacrificed for their husbands. And we often get stuck thinking about our careers, our goals, our plans.

And we say, oh, it's for the sake of my family. I'm just providing for my family, which is a very important thing. Don't get me wrong. But if we're honest, guys, is it often beyond providing and more about pursuing my own dreams and goals and success?

[20 : 32] Does your marriage seem costly to you? If marriage seems to be costing you, husbands, that's the idea. That's the story we're telling.

Marriage, Paul says, is not about finding a wife who can help you move to the top of the social circle, have your physical desires fulfilled, or really succeed in professional life.

It's not. It's about committing to moving down, to love your wife, to value and cherish her. That's the story of Christ's love for His church, isn't it?

He laid His life down to rescue and protect her. Now, you may be willing to take a bullet for your wife. But in the meantime, while you're waiting on that opportunity, as I've heard several of our wives say, would you unload the dishwasher?

Or pay attention to the kids? Or listen to what's on my heart? How do you know Christ cherishes the church? Because He came for her at great cost to Himself.

[21 : 41] He sacrificed everything for her. Telling that great story in your marriage will require valuing your wife dearly and sacrificing yourself for her good.

That's what it looks like. And sacrificing yourself for her good brings us to the other side of the coin of laying your life down, is lifting her life up.

This is pictured beautifully in verses 26 and 27, when verse 25 ends up saying, giving Himself up for her. That the goal of what we're doing in our marriages is for her, for our wives.

And then how does He describe it? What's going to happen to her as we lift her life up? That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word. 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.

And don't forget, that's not the way she is when He finds her, is it? He finds her not looking like this and He's going to make her into that.

[22 : 49] The love I'm called to show my wife involves intentional consideration of what blesses her. It seeks to understand her needs and move toward meeting them.

Ask yourself honestly, do you think or dwell more on what she needs or what you need from your marriage? What's the focus of your heart?

What's the focus of your heart when you're frustrated about your marriage? There you go, that's an easier one for you. I'll tell you what the focus of your heart is when you're frustrated about your marriage. I'm not getting what I need out of this relationship.

Where do our hearts focus so quickly? What are my needs? Look back again at what Jesus' love did for us. He saw that we were dirty and He began to wash us clean.

He saw we were impure and began to make us pure. He saw we were neglected and forlorn and began to make us beautiful and full of splendor. I'd say it this way, part of the responsibility of the husband is to make sure his wife experiences God's grace in her life in a transforming way.

[24 : 00] That's what she most needs, right? She needs His grace to be impacting her life. So that's what lifts her up. That's what makes her into the woman God has created her to be.

Sanctifies her by washing with water through the Word. We can't ignore the priority of the Word of God in this. Just as Jesus uses it in our lives to cleanse and sanctify His church, so we must see that our wives are exposed to God's Word in a regular and transformative way, which is different from teaching them the Psalms every day of your marriage like you know them better than they do. It's more than that. And one of the things I've learned about spiritual headship or being a spiritual leader in my family is that it is typically more about me pointing them to Jesus Himself than being Jesus myself.

That's usually more helpful. And that may seem obvious, but what I mean is that the comfort in this passage for husbands is that God is calling husbands to do for their wives something Jesus is constantly doing for all of us.

So it's not all on us. By the way, ladies, that's why you're not lesser Christians or incomplete people if you have no husband or one who doesn't love you well.

[25 : 29] Because your being loved and led and made radiant has never been all on one man. Jesus cares passionately about it.

He's committed to that for you whether you don't have a husband or has one who's never loved you like He does. So I'm convinced that some of my best spiritual leadership has been when I've just quit trying to fix things myself and prayed for Jesus to help.

Asked Him to do what I was failing to do for my family. It's why saying I'm sorry is often great leadership because in repentance we point to Jesus and highlight our need for Him and for His help.

And I know these sound like just basic spiritual things. Just the Bible and pray and repent and you knew all of those before you got here. But do you do it for your wife?

That's what it means to lift your wife up. To be concerned about her needs. To point her to Jesus. To pray that He would make her flourish and even use you and your successes and in your failures to that end in her life.

[26 : 46] This may sound like a little bit of a bleak picture for husbands. I am one. I don't want it to be a bleak picture laying down your own life lifting her up. Listen, here's the beautiful thing.

We're going to see this this week and next week in marriage. The beautiful thing about it is that in marriage we're actually connected to each other. So we don't have to have one go up and the other

go down.

Because you're united to each other you actually thrive together. I think it's what verse 28 means by he who loves his wife loves himself. It's part of the mystery of our connection in marriage.

When the church looks like a pure and radiant bride Jesus gets glory too doesn't He? When your bride flourishes and thrives you do along with her.

In many relationships when one party thrives the other one suffers. There's only so much to go around so when one goes up the other one goes down. But the beauty of marriage is we're connected to each other.

[27 : 46] United in one flesh so when we lay down our lives for our wives and lift their lives up we're lifted up along with them. So if you're not married but considering it make sure you've asked yourself if you're willing to lay down your life for your wife and lift hers up.

Don't marry someone because they make you look good or meet your needs. Are you willing to meet hers? If you are married are you intentionally seeking your wife's flourishing?

Are you seeking to help her experience God's grace in her life? Are you bringing her regularly before Jesus? Are you loving her the way you promised you would? Robertson McQuilkin served over 20 years as president of Columbia Bible College until in 1990 his wife Muriel who'd been struggling deeply with Alzheimer's got too bad for him to continue.

Whenever he was not with her she would become fearful and frantic no matter what the situation or who else was there. She regularly used to leave their home and walk searching for him to his office looking all over for him until she came home with her feet bloodied.

And so McQuilkin decided to step down from the job that he loved that he knew God had called him to. And he wrote this to the Bible College community about that decision.

[29 : 15] He said the decision was made in a way 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel in sickness and in health till death do us part. So as I told the students and faculty as a man of my word integrity has something to do with it.

But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years. If I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of her debt. But he goes on.

Duty however can be grim and stoic. But there is more. I love Muriel. She is a delight to me. Her childlike dependence and confidence in me.

Her warm love occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so. Her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration.

I don't have to care for her. I get to. It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person. He got to care for her for 13 more years.

[30 : 24] Apparently still deeply in her debt. But he didn't merely fulfill a duty toward her did he? A vow he'd made. He loved her.

Do you hear in his words how he didn't just lay his life down for his wife? It wasn't just stepping away from a career or from something he was excited about but he also lifted her up treasured her saw and highlighted the beauty and even the distressed and broken version of his wife.

That's the kind of love described here in this passage. Pastor Tim Keller said of love to be loved but not known is comforting but superficial.

To be known but not loved is our greatest fear but to be fully known and truly loved is well a lot like being loved by God.

To be fully known and truly loved a lot like being loved by God. How God loves us. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.

[31 : 37] How has Christ loved you? He knows everything about you doesn't he? Even the worst. He's seen you in your darkest moments your greatest failures and yet he doesn't turn away he doesn't berate you he doesn't give up on you he is patient and kind.

He forgives and persists in loving you. He has come to lay his life down for you and now he continues to lift you up to love you back to your original beauty that you might be perfect and glorious and he insists on living in that relationship with you forever.

Fully known and truly loved. What a great love story. The greatest story ever told and it's true and the world desperately needs to hear it and see it from all of us to know that amazing love and husbands we in particular have the privilege of telling that grand story every day as we lead and love our wives.

Let's pray and ask for God's help. Oh Father we would love nothing more than to see Jesus exalted in the lives of those we know and love.

We want people to see him and his love for us as glorious and as the thing that they most need and we so easily and so regularly fall short.

[33 : 14] We know we don't love as well as he does. We need your grace. Father we all fall short of telling that story perfectly.

we husbands in particular have a task of telling that story in our marriages and we're well aware of our limitations and our failures.

Thank you for loving us. Thank you for continuing to show us the kind of love we're to pass along.

Father would you fill us with that overflowing that we might make Jesus glorious to those who are watching our lives.

May we even in our failures point to one who continues to love us and may they see his love so clearly. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org Thank you.