

Ephesians 5:22-33 - Storytellers Part 2: Wives

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- A couple of things about next Sunday before we jump in this morning. Next Sunday is scheduled to be Chad's last Sunday on staff here at Southwood. There will be a brief congregational meeting after the service to handle some of the details of that.
- But please pray for their family as they prepare to transition to Florida and the pastoral call that he has there. Please be praying for them and please join us after the worship service next Sunday for that meeting.
- Next Sunday will also be the final sermon in this series. Series we've been having this little mini-series on marriage and the family within the book of Ephesians. It's a passage next week that speaks directly to children and to parents.
- So parents, the sermon will be intentionally a little bit shorter. You glad for that? Yeah? You're excited? You'll be here next week. It'll be a little bit shorter and more specifically geared towards children.
- [1 : 1 0] They will get to come and be in here and also hear what God's Word has to say to their parents. So a couple of things. One is kids' worship will not take place next week because of this.
- So bring your kids with you. I knew none of you would want your kindergartners, first graders to miss out on hearing obey your parents. I didn't want mine to miss, so they'll be in here with us.
- Consider sitting a little closer or telling them to pay particular attention next week as they get to hear words to them and to you in the same passage. God's Word speaks to them directly and that's exciting.
- I want them to be a part of that. Don't forget the following Tuesday as well, we have a Pastors on the Patio lunch conversation about marriage so we can sit down and discuss some of these issues together.
- I can't address every situation up here, but I'd love to sit down and talk about them with you. So that's Tuesday, September 1st. Please join us for that.
- [2 : 0 9] Before we read this section on marriage relationships one more time, let me remind us of the story that it's telling. The story that God says marriage is really about.
- We said that first week, marriage is not first and foremost about us. It's about telling the glorious story of the relationship between Jesus and His bride, the church.
- As that story goes, there's a princess. One who is created and intended for greatness. To be beautiful and have a significant role.
- But she's lost and abandoned and forlorn. She's in need of rescue. And there's also a prince.
- In this story, it's the prince of heaven. Jesus who steps down from His throne and comes on a rescue mission. To seek that lost princess. To rescue her.

[3 : 04] To restore to her the beauty and the glory for which she was created. And He does that at great cost to Himself, right? He marries her and she delights in His love and lives in intimate relationship with Him happily ever after.

Forever. That's the story. And we've said that the highest purpose of our marriages, God's grand design, what He's about in marriage, is for us to tell that story.

To put on display for all to see the remarkable relationship between Christ and the church. So we talked last week about how Paul tells husbands to be storytellers.

To fill their role of leading through sacrificial love. It was hard enough on the husbands last week that many of their wives told me they were going to skip this morning.

So that may or may not be the case. But today we are going to focus on wives. How they too are to be storytellers of this great story that the world so needs to hear.

[4 : 11] Let's give our attention to the reading of God's Word. It is true. The only thing you can absolutely count on. His Word is authoritative because it is His Word.

The Word of our God and King. And it is needful for us because He created us and He invented marriage. So He's going to tell us how He designed it to work.

And that will be for our good. Let's read Ephesians 5 at verse 22. Verse 22.

Verse 22.

This mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

[5 : 56] Pray with me. Father, these are Your words. And so we trust that You by Your Spirit will use them to guide and direct us.

May we find ourselves submissive to Your Word. All of us this morning. We are not above it. We don't stand in judgment on it. We stand under it.

And we ask that we would be blessed by it. That You would give us great blessing in knowing You better. Father, in knowing Your love for us in new ways this morning.

And that Jesus would be glorified as we talk about this passage together. Father, will You do that because You love Your church dearly.

So we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Imagine for a minute this morning that you went to see a production of the wonderful musical Les Mis.

[6 : 54] Anybody like Les Mis? It's a great musical. A wonderful story of law and grace. Of mercy and justice. Of the ex-con turned mayor Jean Valjean.

The hardened policeman Javert. It's a great, great story. Imagine though that you go to this production of it and it's wonderful. You're loving it.

The actor portraying Valjean and the actor portraying Javert are doing a great job. They're wonderful singers. Then about halfway through the production, they decide that they want to start playing a little bit of each other's roles.

You know, the guy playing Javert thinks he can hit that high note just a little bit better than Valjean. And so he sings that song. And then the guy playing Valjean thinks he can really capture the angst of Javert's solo.

And so he just sings it for him right in the middle of the play. Now, for those of you who love it, that would be awful, wouldn't it? Can you imagine that?

[8 : 01] These two guys have brought us this far. We've built up the tension. We understand the story. And now, y'all just ruined the story. I mean, it's so confusing now. I don't even know who stands for what.

But they may both be great singers. They may sing the songs beautifully, but you've lost the beauty of the story and the confusion of who is who, haven't you?

You need someone to play each role well in order to have the full story. You need Cinderella and Prince Charming, not two of either of them.

And God says that's vital in marriage too. We have a story to tell. Well, the distinction in our roles then is important. It's not random. It's not meaningless.

And losing those distinctions loses the beauty of the story that's being told. So the passage says husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

[8 : 59] They're to play the role of Jesus in that sense. And then this morning, as the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands, playing the role of the church within the marriage.

And I want to talk about the beauty and the glory of that arrangement this morning. To have those two complementary roles come together in such a way that the story is told beautifully and it's glorious.

But we have to acknowledge up front that because of the confusion of our culture, because of the sin in our own hearts and lives, this idea has been twisted and ridiculed into something that is not beautiful and glorious, but rather ugly and shameful.

The idea of a husband and wife in complementary roles is often not thought well of these days. And I hope that we can clarify and demystify some of the confusion around the idea of biblical submission this morning.

In order to do that, it's important to remember a couple of things up front. For men and women, husbands and wives, our value, our significance comes first from being created equally in God's image.

[10 : 18] Genesis 1.27 God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created him male and female. He created them equally in God's image.

Men and women are uniquely valuable in God's creation above all else in the creation. The one thing created in His image, man and woman. And so they share worth that comes from being in the image of the creator of the universe.

And then even as God begins to restore His broken and fallen creation through the redemption of Jesus, what do we find out?

Is our identity then in what we do? At that point, do we get significance from how we perform? No. Is it from our social status? No.

From our religious activity? No. As all of Ephesians has told us, our new identity comes from being connected to Christ.

[11 : 18] In Christ is our new identity. Galatians 3.28 There's neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, male nor female. You are all one in Christ Jesus.

The value and worth and significance that we have comes from being created in the image of God and redeemed and connected in Christ. Being united in Christ brings a commonality and identity and worth that far outweighs ethnic or social or gender differences before God.

That is vitally important. We must remember that. Men and women in God's image, in Christ, together. So important.

And so when God's Word speaks of gender distinctives as vital, and this passage does do that, it's not unclear. It can't be speaking to value differences.

The distinctives can be vital, but they can't be about value. Value was established already. Not by the unique role. Value was held in common as image bearers, as children of the king.

[12 : 32] So both of the singers are fantastic. Together they're going to tell a beautiful story, right? They're both valuable. Think of a basketball team, for example. On most teams, some guys shoot the ball more than others.

Some of them pass the ball more than others. Some of them rebound better than others. But on the best teams, you really have a hard time telling which of those is the most valuable player on the team, don't you?

You need all of them. It's the same way in the body of Christ. There are different parts that have different gifts and play different roles in the body, but the eye can't say to the foot, I don't need you.

I'm more valuable than you. When you're singing a duet, one voice may be on the melody line and the other on the harmony line.

Did you hear James and Kayla just then? It's a beautiful song, right? A great duet, but both of those voices are absolutely vital to the beautiful song.

[13 : 31] They must complement each other. Otherwise, even if they're both wonderful, if they don't work together, the beauty of the song, the beauty of the story is lost. Think about that.

In all those examples, and there are many, many others you could come up with, beauty and success is achieved by complementing each other, not by competing with each other.

That's God's design in marriage. Gender distinctives are vital. That's the way He designed it, for them to complement each other. But they don't impact one's value.

There's a lot of overlap, even in the roles, the specific roles between husband and wife. Of course, both should love. Both should serve. Both should respect and seek the good of the other.

That's the way God's designed marriage, is for us to be seeking the good of the other. But there are clearly differences too. Particular reasons that we are to play particular roles uniquely in order to tell the great story.

[14 : 33] And that's what it's about, right? Telling that story, not about us. It's about telling the story of God's love for His church and the church's joy in response to what God has done for her.

So last week, we saw the husband's role as head was sacrificial love. Wives actually get two different words where love is used both times for the husbands.

So we'll look at both of them. Those two words are submit and respect. Let's start with submission, verse 22. I met with a group of ladies a few weeks ago to talk about this passage, to get input from them.

Because I'm stupid, but I'm not that stupid. And so we talked, and one of the things they told me is there are a lot of unhelpful definitions for submission out there.

Definitions that refer to inferiority, that would suggest weakness is involved in submission. That silence and passivity is what is meant, that you should disappear and not be worthwhile or valuable.

[16 : 02] Let me give us a different definition to work with for what biblical submission means. Willingly placing yourself under the authority of another for your own good.

Notice in this definition, willingly placing yourself actively choosing not to be stuck somewhere that you're by nature inferior, but willingly choosing from a position of strength, making a decision about what's best.

Placing yourself under the authority of someone for your own good. In this case, for what's best, not only for you, but for what's best for telling the story.

You might picture yourself taking cover under a shelter from an oncoming storm. In other words, submitting yourself to being under it instead of somewhere else, but for your good and for your protection.

Or picture cars merging onto an interstate where you might end up knowing that there's an order to be followed if you want to be safe. Even if that means that you fall behind a car that's no better than you.

[17 : 13] I think these pictures are helpful because it fits with what we see in this passage. We don't get as many details, do we, for the church's submission, for what that looks like.

We got verse after verse last week of what it looks like for Christ to love the church. And husbands, love your wives and do this and this and this. There's not as much detail, but do notice in the midst of talking about submission, Paul brings in Christ's headship of the church and says it involves being its savior.

It involves saving the church. Verse 23. In other words, there's help, rescue, protection needed that submission avails itself of.

What does it look like for the church to submit to Christ? To begin with, when the church submits to Christ, she is protected. He takes the blows. He stands in the way of danger, shielding her.

That's the design. And so the church follows His direction rather than her own ideas. Jesus, as the head of the church, directs us to desire and to follow His will for our own good.

[18 : 24] In fact, if you remember, Jesus Himself models this kind of submission in His relationship with His Father. When He prays, not my will, but yours be done.

Let me take a side note here for just a second. I want to slam the door shut on the idea of submission having to do with value. You know the absolute best way to remove the possibility that submission has to do with value?

Jesus did it. Not just in the Garden of Gethsemane, but the conquering risen King of all when He brings everything under His feet, when He's the ruler of all, 1 Corinthians says this is what happens.

The Son Himself will also be subjected, exact same word from this passage, to Him who put all things in subjection under Him that God may be all in all.

Jesus willingly for His good and the good of the glory of God in the universe submits. There's a distinction in roles in the Godhead between Father and Son and Spirit, but certainly no loss of value or glory whatsoever.

[19 : 37] Don't even consider it. Okay? End of pastor ranting on side note. I want to put that to bed. It shouldn't cross our minds, but we're broken.

And it does. So the church, in following the guidance of Jesus, has to trust that He has her best interest at heart. That's another aspect of the church submitting to Christ, isn't it?

Trusting Him. So I want to ask the obvious question that I have felt for you already three or four times, ladies, so far. What if He doesn't?

What if He doesn't have my best interest at heart? Because with Jesus, we're all set, right? It's easy to talk about that. As the church submits to Christ, He's perfect.

He always has our best interest at heart. We can always trust Him. You'll have this objection come to mind again before the end of this sermon. My husband is not like Jesus.

[20 : 39] I know at least one of you who has that objection. And I agree. No husband is perfect like Jesus. But I want to suggest that we have to start by noting Paul is making a comparison rather than a contrast here between husbands and Jesus and the role they're playing in the story.

Don't start by objecting to the differences even though there, of course, are some. Let me tell you what you're trusting when you entrust yourself to your husband's direction. This passage says you're to do it as to the Lord.

There's nothing and no one else who will never fail you or let you down. You know that. But you're supposed to submit to your husband as though he might come through for you.

As though he really does want what's best for you. Listen, your idea may be better. Your plan may be wiser.

And submission doesn't mean you don't speak. We'll get to that in a minute. But how do you foster in your own heart and communicate to your husband your trust and confidence in him even when you doubt or disagree?

[21 : 56] We said last week men have struggled with their role since the Garden of Eden. They've wanted to be passive and step away and not be what God has called them to be. Women have too.

Part of the curse on the woman is her desire for her husband's role. And I'm going to suggest that that comes back to where we find our value. Hang with me here for just a minute.

I talked a lot about value at the beginning partly for this reason. When we don't find our value in being made in the image of God and being daughters of the King through our union with Christ when that's not enough in the particular moment where do we find it?

Where do we find our value? We find it by comparison, don't we? Been on Facebook lately, ladies? Comparison is a thief of joy.

Facebook is a greenhouse of comparison. Not just for women. For all of us. You see everyone else's highlight reel.

[23 : 01] They look better in the pictures next to you. They seem to make more money. Their house is bigger and cleaner. They fit more stuff into their schedule than you do. They even eat more healthily than you while making more money.

And how quickly does your worth and your value get attached to that? Answer that question honestly. How quickly does your worth and value get attached to that comparison to others?

You're a daughter of the King of the universe. He loves you. You're precious to Him. You bear His image. All of you.

You're not the sum of your likes and your retweets and your blogs. And the things that people say about you or you see about yourself. So in marriage, I don't think that many of you wives compare your role to His in itself.

I don't think that's the comparison. Ah, do I like headship or submission? I think the comparison that we struggle with is we compare how well He's doing in His role to how well I would do.

[24 : 11] Man, it's hard to trust Him when you're smarter than He is. My wife knows that. And so your concern is that in submission, it means giving in to be run over by someone who's more foolish or doesn't know as well.

That you'll be undervalued, underappreciated. Listen, God doesn't undervalue you. You're His daughter. You're worth so much to Him. Whether you're smarter than your husband or not, it's not where your value comes from.

Here's a hard one. What about when you're more spiritually mature than your husband? And we talked last week about him needing to show spiritual leadership in the relationship.

How do you allow him to be a spiritual leader like we talked about when you're more spiritually mature? That's genuinely hard. So what you're actually having to put your trust in is in God.

Not just in your husband. Is that God knows what He's doing. That He hasn't lost sight of how to do things. That God has put you in a relationship for your protection and your good.

[25 : 17] And so submission is willingly placing yourself under the authority of another for your own good. So when you trust your husband's leadership, when you follow his direction joyfully and expect He'll bless you, you're picturing the joy of the church following the one who has blessed her.

What a great privilege that you get to show what that looks like. There's a second word used for wives though in verse 33. When Paul summarizes, he says it differently.

Let each one of you husbands love his wife as himself. Let the wife see that she respects her husband. He picks a different word. And here I want to make sure that when I talk about submit or follow or things like that, that you don't hear silent withdrawing from engagement.

You know, just sit around and hope he provides spiritual leadership against all odds. In fact, if you think about how the church submits to Christ, that's not the picture at all, is it?

The church is to use actively all the gifts and abilities Christ has given her to work for the extension of his kingdom. It's why he's called us to himself. So when you think about respect, think this, using all your gifts and abilities for the honor of another.

[26 : 44] I love how Paul's explicit here about the importance of telling the story. Look back at verse 21. Right as he enters into talking about marriage, he finishes the last section.

It says, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. That's all of us. Then verse 33, as it comes in and closes this section, let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The word translated respects is the verbal form of the same word used for reverence in verse 21. It's likely why he uses a different word in this context.

What's Paul saying? This is not random. He's saying this is about not just what you do towards your husband. It's about the reverence due to Christ. Now reverence starts to push the envelope a little bit on respect, doesn't it?

In our context, that's a little bit stronger feeling. It's the thing we're all supposed to do in regard to Christ. Is your husband worthy of the reverence and respect due your Savior?

[27 : 51] Still thinking on that one? Is he worthy of that? Of course our initial response is no. No, he's not. No, he's not worthy of the honor and reverence and respect due to Christ.

But that's the role that wives are given. To respect, to lift up, to honor their husbands for the sake of telling that story because Jesus really is worthy of that kind of respect.

If we think of it in relation to how the church does this with Christ, that's where it becomes such an active thing. All our words, all the gifts he's given us by his Spirit, all the energy they expend in the church is not for their own glory, but for his.

He's the hero of the story, not them. So wives are to use their sometimes, usually superior gifts, their intellect, their words, to support, strengthen, and honor their husbands.

In fact, it's even a harder job for wives than for the church in regard to Christ because their husbands fail. Christ is worthy of being respected and honored, but how do you respect and honor him even in failure, even when he falls short of earning it?

[29 : 12] Now listen, the Bible of course mentions exceptions. You're never to promote or honor sin. But push yourself to stick with the model that we're given here.

Ask yourself, how do you speak about your husband? To him and behind his back. Do you say things about him that you would never say about your Savior?

When you disagree or have input to give, do you give it in such a way as to shame him or encourage him?

Do you capitalize on his weaknesses to gain control and get the upper hand or do you seek to build him up in those areas? Do you pray for him regularly because he needs it?

Listen, the beauty of God's design for this in marriage is similar to what I told the men last week. When husbands lift their wives up and that's their job, because they are united as one flesh in marriage, they're lifted up too.

[30 : 18] The same thing is true for wives. When wives seek to honor and respect their husband, remember, they don't work against each other. They're united together in marriage and so the beauty of God's design for marriage is that both are honored.

Sometimes it feels to us like running your husband down can actually get you honor because you must be so amazing to put up with a slouch like that, right? And so it feels good.

What an incredible wife I must be. But then you realize it doesn't work like that at all. You want to be proud that such an amazing man has chosen to love you.

Then you feel honored, right? You want people to think well of him. Isn't that what happens to the church? When the church seeks the honor of Christ, he makes her radiant and blameless at the same time.

It's such an amazing man as Jesus would love her and cleanse her as a great honor to the church. There's mutual honor because we're connected to each other.

[31 : 20] And the good news of the gospel, ladies, and you need to hear this because I know your husbands let you down. Because you're part of Christ's bride, Christ will make you glorious even when your husband fails to.

He will. He's absolutely committed to you like that. It grieves me when only one spouse seeks to fill the role that God has given him or her in the marriage.

It's so painful to watch. And the things that can happen and the ways that people are taken advantage of and the ways these words are used to hurt instead of heal are terrible.

But Christ is the perfect husband. The one who will ensure that you also are honored. That you reflect his glory the way he created you in his image to do in the first place.

He'll see that that happens. He's absolutely committed to it. I couldn't think about this passage this week without thinking about the many wonderful examples of this that we have in our congregation.

[32 : 27] Many of you will know Betty Bates who just this week lost her husband of 64 plus years John. John was a wonderful gentle man.

But in the last several years he suffered greatly from dementia. And he was hurting and needed a lot of help. And Betty stayed with him every step of the way.

She woke him bathed him and dressed him took him to places he loved to go like here every week. She gently told him what he needed to know which was nearly everything.

She held his hand while he slept so that he would feel secure. But she didn't mock him or belittle him she respected him. He needed her but she let him feel needed too.

What a gift it has been to watch someone joyfully love someone the way that she has been loved. What a gift that is to us to be able to watch that modeled.

[33 : 36] It's one of the best things about a multi-generational body of Christ like this. Please don't miss that. Please don't miss those relationships and the gift they are to you to watch others walk through different seasons of life and to love the way that they've been loved.

It's a great great privilege. Thinking of Betty reminded me of the story of David Ireland. Shortly after David's young wife got pregnant David found out he had a disease like Lou Gehrig's disease and his body began to shut down rapidly and David realized that he may never meet his child.

So he started doing parenting through writing letters to the child in his wife's womb. They've been collected and published in a book called Letters to an Unborn Child.

He introduces his baby boy to his mother this way. My child I want you to know what your mother is like. She is absolutely incredible and I think I can make it clear to you by just telling you what happens when we go out to eat at night.

When we go to a restaurant this is what she has to do. Because I'm a quadriplegic now and in a wheelchair she has to bathe me dress me empty the urine and fecal bags strapped to my legs then put me in the wheelchair drive me out to the garage open the garage open the door get out a board pull up the arm on my chair slide me across the board put me in the car put down the arm fold up the chair open the trunk put in the chair close the trunk close the door get in the car back it out close the garage door and drive to the restaurant.

[35 : 20] When we get there the whole process is reversed. We sit down at a table she feeds me wipes the drool from my mouth because I can barely eat gets up pays the check and then the whole process is reversed again.

Go out to the car open the door take off the arm put down the board slide me across put down the arm fold up the chair go to the back open the trunk put up the chair close the trunk get in the car drive get to the garage up goes the garage door everything else reversed take me in clean me empty the fecal and urine bags bathe me put me in my pajamas and lays me in bed.

Then he says this son these are her last words to me thank you honey for taking me out to eat tonight. thank you honey for taking me out to eat tonight.

Do you hear the echoes of the greater story in that one? Do you see the beautiful picture of the incredible gracious love of God that gives dignity to the spiritually weak and helpless?

The gospel is there in that story from so many angles but for this morning especially notice she used all of her energies to honor him and she is honored too.

[36 : 44] Southwood I know it doesn't make sense to us but marriage is best for us when husbands lay down their lives for their wives and wives respond by honoring their husbands and more importantly not only is it best for us we have the great joy and privilege of telling the story of a church loved so well by her Savior that she would seek his honor in everything because he is so good to her.

Let's pray. Father it is a great privilege you have given us to tell this story. There are many ways that you allow us to share it with others and every one of your children gets the privilege of telling it but Father especially in marriage you have given a picture and given us a responsibility forgive us when we look at it as a burden rather than a joy when laying down our lives seems less than desirable when using gifts that otherwise would be for our own good to seek the good of another Father that seems unfair thank you that you're wiser than we are thank you that you're committed to us so that when we sacrifice what seems like a huge cost to us you pay us back abundantly because of your love for us thank you thank you that you found us needy and weak and helpless and that you have loved us and you've made us clean we rejoice in your kindness to us in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org