01 / THE GROUNDWORK

Marriage and the Cross

Learning to Love Your Spouse Through the Eyes of Jesus

OUR PRINCIPLE PASSAGE / EPHESIANS 5:22–34

Read Ephesians 5:22–34. Consider how Christ's love for the church shapes the way husbands and wives love one another. His self-giving love seeks their lasting good. As you read, consider how this pattern of sacrifice, care, and faithfulness can shape the marriage you are building together.

Marriage is not separate from discipleship. The way we love our spouse reflects our relationship with Jesus. Scripture points us beyond our past experiences and the examples around us to Christ Himself as our pattern of love.

Ephesians 5 makes that connection directly. The husband looks to Jesus and learns sacrificial love: Christ gave Himself for His people and acted for their holiness and future good. The wife looks to Jesus too, while the church's faithful response to Christ helps define her role. Both spouses are shaped by Him. Together, they are given a pattern larger than their own preferences and past experiences.

Our marriage also teaches the people around us. Children learn what love, leadership, respect, sacrifice, and faithfulness look like by watching us. Others may encounter the gospel through our home before they study Ephesians 5. A Christian marriage can help them understand the relationship between Christ and His church.

The cross shows us how deeply Jesus loves us and how to put love into action. His pattern is committed and self-giving, with the other person's good in view. It asks, *What can I give? How can I serve? Who can my spouse become because I faithfully love them?* The closer we move toward His example, the more strength, trust, and gospel influence our home can carry.

THE QUESTION FOR THIS WEEK

Is our relationship modeled after Christ and the church, and does the world learn about the gospel through what they see in us?

THE CROSS / THREE MARKS

The Love That Goes Both Ways

COVENANT / SACRIFICE / PURPOSE

COVENANTAL LOVE

Christ moves first. He gives Himself to establish a covenant with His people and makes clear that He is fully committed to the relationship. The church answers that covenant with faith, allegiance, and a willingness to belong to Him.

Marriage reflects that same two-way commitment. A husband and wife both say, in different ways, *I have given myself to us.* Covenant gives security because neither person treats the relationship as disposable when life becomes difficult.

SELF-GIVING SACRIFICE

Jesus sacrifices Himself for the church. The church, in turn, is called to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Him. His sacrifice is saving and unmatched, but it also creates a people who learn to give themselves back to Him in grateful devotion.

Healthy marriage carries that same rhythm. Husband and wife learn to lay down pride, preference, and personal convenience for the good of the other. Love becomes strongest when sacrifice is not demanded from one side but willingly practiced by both. The result is a relationship where no one's needs are left unattended.

PURIFYING INTENTIONS

Christ loves the church with a holy purpose: He wants His people to become what God calls them to be. The church does not improve or purify Christ; instead, she receives His instruction, submits to His work, and joins His purpose of holiness, faithfulness, and service.

In marriage, neither spouse is the savior of the other. Yet each can help the other grow closer to Christ. Rather than trying to control our spouse, we can speak with kindness, pray together, and lead by example. In these ways, we help each other remain faithful in a world that often pulls us away from God.

> **A TWO-WAY PICTURE**
> Christ gives Himself to the church, and the church gives herself to Christ. Marriage is strengthened when husband and wife learn that same pattern of committed, sacrificial, purposeful love. We lift one another toward God and deepen our faith together.

THE HUSBAND'S PATTERN

Christ's Love for the Church

GIVE / SERVE / BUILD

HE GIVES HIMSELF

Ephesians 5 does not tell husbands merely to be in charge. It tells them to love as Christ loved the church and *gave Himself up for her*. That immediately defines leadership in the shape of a cross. Jesus uses strength for the good of His bride.

A husband therefore begins with responsibility, not privilege. His question is not, How much authority do I have? but, How can I use what God has entrusted to me for her good? Christlike leadership takes the initiative and accepts personal sacrifice instead of placing the burden on his wife. It uses strength to serve, protect, and build a safe, grace-filled home where his wife can flourish.

HE SEEKS HER GOOD

Jesus has an intention for His bride. He wants her holy, strong, and prepared for glory. His love is never careless about what His people are becoming. He leads with their ultimate good in view, always drawing them closer to the Father.

A husband should think beyond keeping the peace or getting his own way. His leadership ought to make it easier for his wife to flourish spiritually and emotionally. He listens, learns her burdens, encourages her gifts, protects the health of the home, and makes decisions with her good before him. The goal is not control, but a relationship in which his strength consistently creates room for her good.

HE NOURISHES AND CHERISHES

Later in Ephesians 5, Paul says Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. Those are tender words. Jesus does not lead His people through indifference, intimidation, or coldness. His strength is joined to care.

This gives husbands a demanding but beautiful standard. Leadership that resembles Jesus pays attention, carries weight, and creates a steady sense of care. A wife should be able to feel that her husband's strength is being used to support and protect her. The tone of the home should consistently communicate that she is valued, protected, and deeply cared for.

> ### WIVES LOOK TO CHRIST TOO
>
> These qualities are not only for husbands. Every wife is also a disciple of Jesus. She looks to His example and learns to love with the same self-giving spirit, using her strength to serve the good of her husband and the health of their shared life.

THE WIFE'S PATTERN

The Church's Love for Christ

TRUST / HONOR / RESPONSE

Ephesians 5 also asks wives to look at the church. The church belongs to Christ, listens to Him, honors Him, and willingly places herself under His leadership. That relationship gives a wife direction for the spirit she brings into marriage.

There is, of course, an immediate difference: Christ is perfect and a husband is not. A wife is never being asked to pretend that her husband is Jesus, to call wrong right, or to surrender her own responsibility before God. But she can still learn from the church's relationship to Christ: a spirit that wants the relationship to succeed, respects God-given responsibility, speaks with honor, and seeks to strengthen rather than undermine.

The church's submission to Christ is not mindless weakness. It grows out of trust in His goodness and a desire to walk with Him. In marriage, a wife may have wisdom her husband needs, concerns he has missed, or a perspective that protects the family. Biblical respect does not silence her. It shapes the way she brings that strength into the relationship: honestly, faithfully, and with a desire to help rather than defeat.

The church also responds to Christ with devotion. She wants to know Him, please Him, serve beside Him, and share in His work. A wife can bring that same intentionality into marriage by showing interest in her husband, encouraging what is good, speaking gratitude, supporting faithful leadership, and helping the two of them move toward God together. Her strength is not diminished by support; it is directed toward the good of the shared life they are building.

And the picture can be studied in reverse. A husband should also pay attention to the church's love for Christ. The church responds with respect, humility, gratitude, loyalty, and a willingness to listen. A husband can learn from those qualities too. He may lead in the home, but he is not above showing honor. He should be humble enough to listen, willing to receive correction, quick to express gratitude, and careful not to treat his wife's support as something he is entitled to receive. Studying the church's devotion to Christ can teach a husband to become more respectful, more humble, and more appreciative in the way he loves his wife.

> **BOTH SIDES CAN LEARN**
> The wife learns from the church's faithful response to Christ. The husband can learn from it too - especially respect, humility, gratitude, and a willingness to listen.

WORK PRIVATELY

Four Commitments

Read each commitment on your own. Consider what it would require of you, then make these commitments to your relationship. Give each one at least thirty seconds of thought before moving on.

01

REMEMBER THE COVENANT

I will remember that our marriage is a covenant. When tension rises, commitment will steady the way I think, speak, and act.

02

GIVE BEFORE I DEMAND

When something feels unfair, I will first ask what Christlike sacrifice should look like in me. I will offer kindness and service without waiting for my spouse to earn them.

03

HELP MY SPOUSE GROW

I will use my words, strength, influence, and example to make it easier for my spouse to become stronger in Christ. I will encourage more than I control and serve more than I criticize.

04

MAKE THE GOSPEL VISIBLE

I will remember that the gospel is being taught by the way I live at home. I want my spouse and those who watch our marriage to see the love of Christ in how I treat the person closest to me.

REFLECT PRIVATELY

Before We Discuss

Work on this privately and be prepared to discuss it in an upcoming conversation.

BEFORE WE TALK
Answer each question for yourself. Then, with a kind and considerate heart, note how you think your spouse might answer as well. Be prepared to listen and discover whether you understood them correctly.

FOR THE HUSBAND

1. When I compare the way I lead and love to Christ's love for the church, where am I strongest and where do I most need to grow?

2. Does my wife experience my strength as something that serves her good? What is one way I could nourish and cherish her better?

FOR THE WIFE

1. When I compare the spirit I bring to marriage with the church's response to Christ, where am I strongest and where do I most need to grow?

2. How can I show more respect, humility, gratitude, or willing support while still bringing my wisdom and concerns honestly?

OUR CROSS-SHAPED CHECK-IN

Rate yourself from 1 (needs growth) to 10 (consistently strong). Compare your answers with your spouse during the conversation.

Area to Consider	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Covenant commitment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Self-giving sacrifice	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Seeking spouse's good	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Nourish and Cherish	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Emulating Christ	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Which one of these, if improved, will bring renewed love to my marriage?

PRACTICE TOGETHER

The Ten-Minute Conversation

Sit down together without distractions. Share what you wrote on Before We Discuss. Be mutually inquisitive, then use the four helps below to guide your conversation.

CONVERSATION STARTER

Each name one way your spouse already reflects something beautiful about Christ or the church. Be specific about what you see and why it matters to you.

01	**REMEMBER OUR COVENANT** Recall a hard time you walked through together. What helped you stay committed, and what did it teach you?
02	**THE HUSBAND'S PATTERN** Wife: name one way your husband's leadership or service makes you feel cared for. Then name one area where greater listening, tenderness, or sacrifice would help. Husband: listen first, then respond.
03	**THE WIFE'S PATTERN** Husband: name one way your wife's respect, support, wisdom, or humility strengthens you. Then express one way you would feel more respected or supported by your wife. Wife: listen first, then respond.
04	**WHAT ARE THEY LEARNING?** Think about your children and other people who see your home. What do you hope they learn about Christ and the church from watching your relationship? Choose one quality to make more visible this week.

ENDING QUESTIONS

What is one way I can make the love of Christ more visible to you this week?

What can we pray about together this week?

PRAY AND COMMIT

Live the Picture

COVENANT. SACRIFICE. WITNESS.

OUR PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving us Jesus and for showing us in Him what faithful love looks like. Help us remember our covenant and give ourselves for one another with humility and grace. Teach me to love my spouse with a willing heart, choosing their good even when it costs me something. Help me listen better, serve more willingly, and bring the spirit of Christ into our home. Help us learn from every part of the picture You have given us in Christ and the church. Let our children and the people around us see something true about the gospel in the way we treat one another. In Jesus' name, amen.

THIS WEEK WE WILL

- [ ] Husband: as Christ gave Himself for the church, choose one sacrifice you can make this week for your wife's good. Do it gladly, without seeking recognition.
- [ ] Wife: as the church responds to Christ with love, choose one meaningful way to show your husband that you value him and are committed to walking beside him.
- [ ] Together: name one quality you want your children and others to learn about Christ from your relationship, and practice it visibly this week.

THINGS I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT MYSELF AND MY SPOUSE