

Life Group Questions

Feb 25th, 2024

The Beauty of Christian Family – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – **Ephesians 5:22-6:4**

Thank you for your dedication to lead the Life Group. **Please review the questions, selecting any you believe will be most helpful for your group and adapting as needed.** You don't need to go through everything. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your group so that your discussion will build everyone up to love God and each other more.

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

A few notes.

This passage covers submission and sacrifice, meaning loving your spouse even when it's difficult. I want to make it clear that if submitting/sacrificing means enduring abuse or putting yourself or your children in danger, go seek help. Or if you are in a marriage where you're contemplating harming yourself, your spouse, or your children, go seek help. Please talk to a pastor or elder. If necessary, contact relevant authorities. The safety of you and your children takes priority. We love you and God loves you, too.

We're continuing the series by addressing the family unit. Although these commands are to husbands/wives, there's something to learn for single people. For example, singles who would like to get married someday can prepare themselves for marriage by developing learn submission or sacrifice. When I was single, I learned a lot of random skills and hobbies in an effort to impress the ladies. (*SPOILER* It didn't impress any ladies! And now that I'm married, my wife isn't impressed, either!) I don't regret learning those things, but I do regret not working on what was way more important.

Even if singles never get married (by choice or circumstance), it's still beneficial to learn to submit to the authorities in their lives and to sacrificially love the people under their care. So singles can substitute husband/wife with hypothetical husband/wife or current authority figure/someone they love or whatever works best.

In the appendix, I've included a section called **ANCIENT HUSBANDS AND WIVES** that gives a brief picture of what households were like when Paul wrote this passage.

Final note, this discussion is just barely scraping the surface. Check out our marriage ministry resources, including classes, counseling, and mentorship: <https://willingdon.org/marriage>. For parenting, check out our family resources: <https://willingdon.org/family-resources>. You can also contact Pastor Isaac or Pastor Jono and they'll be happy to help you out.

Love you guys,

Pastor Jonathan Hsieh
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Questions



1. What are some similarities or differences between what wives and husbands do?



2. How can submission and sacrifice work together to showcase God's good design for marriage?



3. How can you serve your spouse by submitting or sacrificing?



4. What can you do to make your spouse's submission or sacrifice easier?

Opening Question

What comes to mind when you think of wives "submitting" to someone else?

For many people, wives submitting to their husbands is a terrible, archaic tradition. Here are some possible thoughts that might come up.

Why give up my independence and freedom? Canada prides itself on freedom, scoring a 98/100 (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2022>). There are some exceptions, such as expressing Christian beliefs about gender and sexuality (<https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/bill-c-4-history-concerns-and-response/>), but compared to much of the world we are pretty free. As the saying goes, "You do you." Why would I want to give up my personal ambitions or change who I am?

How come only wives submit? That seems unfair. But wives aren't the only ones who submit. Christian men and women all submit to Jesus (Ephesians 5:24), God (Hebrews 12:9; James 4:7), the government (Romans 13:1, Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13), and church leaders (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Peter 5:5). And just before this verse, Paul wrote that Christians living with the Holy Spirit are "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). We all must submit!

And we'll see in the passage that men also give up something, too.

Does submitting mean I'm lesser? As mentioned above, Christians submit to lots of different people, but it doesn't mean we are less worthy or loved by God. Jesus submitted to His parents (Luke 2:51), even though He was their God and Creator. Submitting to someone else doesn't mean they're better than you! And husbands are called to give up their lives for their wives. That means the husband treats his wife's life as more important than his own.

Peter acknowledges that women are generally physically weaker than men, but husbands should still show their wives honor because they're also recipients of God's grace (1 Peter 3:7).

What if I have to submit to an abuser? In the past few years, scandals have come to light showing how this teaching has been used to trap women in abusive relationships. For example, it's sadly come to light that John MacArthur's church has misused this passage to force women into staying with abusive husbands (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/february/grace-community-church-elder-biblical-counseling-abuse.html>). Women were told that they must submit to their husbands, despite risks to safety for themselves and their children.

Those pastors and leaders really missed the mark, because they unevenly applied this teaching by ignoring the husband's responsibility. John Piper addresses this topic well (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/clarifying-words-on-wife-abuse>).

What if I have to submit to a man-child? Who would want to submit to a dumb oaf who would rather go bowling than be a husband or father? Foolish husbands with responsible wives is a common trope in TV shows, movies, and literature (<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FoolishHusbandResponsibleWife>). Think of Phil and Claire from *Modern Family*, Fred and Wilma from *The Flintstones*, Homer and Marge from *The Simpsons*, Howard and Bernadette from *Big Bang Theory*, or Papa and Mama Bear from *The Berenstain Bears*. Other similar tropes include Parenting the Husband (<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ParentingTheHusband>) or Lazy Husband (<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LazyHusband>). In a recent CBC Radio segment, one of the interviewees mentioned "weaponized incompetence" where the husband pretends to be terrible at something, forcing the wife to do it.



5. What are some similarities or differences between what wives and husbands do?

SIMILARITIES

Spouse specific. Wives submit to *their own* husbands. Some have taken this verse to mean that wives submit to husbands (read: men) in general so that all men have authority over all women in the church. While wives should submit to certain men (for example, church leadership or the police), this command is specifically for wives toward their husbands.

Likewise, all men (and Christians in general) are called to sacrificially love others (John 15:12-13). But Paul's command here is specific for husbands and *their* wives. Husbands give special priority to their own wives.

Jesus is the focus. Wives submit to their husbands the same way the church submits to Jesus. Husbands sacrificially love their wives just like Jesus sacrificially loves the church. Everything comes back to Jesus.

As noted in **ANCIENT HUSBANDS AND WIVES** in the appendix, submission back then was because women were considered inferior to men. But for Christians, submission and sacrifice are because of Jesus.

The church is necessary. Wives see how the church (Christians that gather together to worship and follow Jesus) submits to Jesus. As wives learn to follow and obey Jesus in the church, they also learn to submit to their husbands.

Notice the parallel structure.

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.

This structure is called a chiasm. As one author put it, “A chiasm forms a kind of visual arrow for preachers, pointing to the heart of the passage.” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-should-i-preach-chiasms/>).

Husbands see how Jesus sacrificed Himself for the church as they’re constantly reminded that Jesus loved us so much that He died to save, forgive, and cleanse unworthy sinners. As Jesus’ love fills them, they’re enabled to sacrificially love, too. As the church teaches God’s Word to the husbands and as they grow to be more like Jesus, husbands can also help their wives learn God’s Word and grow to be like Jesus, too.

Sadly, many Christians think they can be faithful to Jesus apart from the church. But Jesus gave us the community of believers for a reason and helping our marriages is one of them.

DIFFERENCES

More instructions for the husband. Growing up, I’ve heard Christians and non-Christians talk about wives submitting to their husbands. Either Christian men demanding women obey their husbands or non-Christians saying this is proof the Bible’s outdated.

But often the domineering men ignore the fact that they’re supposed to love their wives like Jesus loves them. That produces overbearing husbands And modernists forget that Jesus’ self-sacrificial love never goes out of style (John 15:13).

Wives respect. Husbands love.

Paul summarizes his point in verse 33. Of course, both wives and husbands should be loved and respected, but women and men don’t usually respond evenly to both. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, author of *Love & Respect*, surveyed 7,000 people and found that during conflict 83% of husbands felt disrespected while 72% of wives felt unloved. Men are biased towards wanting to feel respected in a relationship while women are biased towards wanting to feel loved.



6. How can submission and sacrifice work together to showcase God’s good design for marriage?

Submission and sacrifice aren’t dirty words! How often have you seen conflict because everyone is out for themselves? We’re naturally sinful and selfish, including in marriage.

Harmony. Instead of pursuing their own goals, they put their spouses above themselves. She doesn’t need to fight for her needs to be met, because he’s doing his best to sacrifice for her. He doesn’t need to fight for his thoughts to be heard because she willingly follows him. When one is missing, it’s hard. But when both are doing their part, it makes the job easier.

This dynamic doesn’t just apply to marriage. As Christians, we are all supposed to love each other like we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39) and look out for other people’s interests (Philippians 2:4). Churches thrive when the leadership sacrifices their own agendas and egos for the good of the congregation and the congregation joyfully follows the leaders.

So, whether in marriage or the church, the world can see that we’re different in a good way.

Shared Goal. Instead of pursuing their own goals, wives and husbands ultimately pursue Jesus. Everything they do is because of what Jesus did, what Jesus is doing, and what Jesus will do. Synergy happens and a couple can work together to serve to build Jesus' kingdom.

That's still the goal even if only one spouse is a believer. Paul writes that God can use a believing spouse to save an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:14-16). Again, it's all about Jesus.

7. How can you serve your spouse by submitting or sacrificing?

Something helpful is understanding each other. Often spouses battle because they don't share a frame of reference. Wives may think they're showing husbands respect, but he doesn't feel respected. Husbands think they're loving their wives, but she's just not feeling loved.

These differences could be because of different gender, childhood upbringing, cultural backgrounds, and more. And it's good to discern between what's right/wrong versus something that's just different.

Understand your spouse's love language. Not all ways of love and respect resonate equally. Let your spouse know your love language and learn about theirs. If you don't know yours, you can take a quiz: <https://5lovelanguages.com/quizzes>. Most people receive and give love through words of affirmation, acts of service, gifts, quality time, or physical touch. And within each love language, there are differences. Gifts can be once a year big blowouts on their birthday or little love notes. Quality time could be traveling the world together or sitting on the couch watching a cheesy rom-com. Physical touch can be holding hands, cuddles, or sex.

For example, I click more with words of affirmation, quality time, and physical touch. And although I'm not that into receiving acts of service, it's something I easily give. In contrast, Mitzi is more gifts and quality time. And even though we overlap with quality time, our definitions of quality time differ.

Understand gender differences. Not all men are the same. Not all women are the same. But each gender has its own tendencies.

Something difficult with my marriage is that I grew up with a brother, so I didn't grow up learning how girls think. At least not in a home/family/intimate setting. Mitzi grew up with a sister, so it's the same for her and guys.

Learn how the opposite gender thinks and ask your spouse to see what resonates with them. You can take a look at Dr. Eggerichs C.O.U.P.L.E. and C.H.A.I.R.S. acronym (<https://brokenchainsintl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Couple-and-Chairs.pdf>). I don't know why women have something nice sounding like COUPLE but guys have CHAIRS.

Remember Jesus. Jesus submitted to the Father by going to the cross, even when it was hard. How hard? Jesus was in so much pain and stress he sweat blood (Luke 22:44). It wasn't easy for Him! And He was doing this for a bunch of rebellious people. But Jesus humbled Himself to the point of dying (Philippians 2:4-8).

Jesus sacrificed His life for a bunch of ungrateful disciples who were snoring while Jesus was sweating blood (Luke 22:39-46) and denying Him while He was being beaten and mocked (Luke 22:54-62). And He

died while you were dead in sin (Romans 5:8) so He could forgive you for everything you've done or will do.

So, we should remember Jesus as our standard and go to Him for help when we need it.



8. What can you do to make your spouse's submission or sacrifice easier?

Yes, your spouse has a responsibility to respect or love you. But if you love your spouse, you'll want to do whatever you can to make their job easier. Besides, isn't that what you would like your spouse to do for you?

Here are some suggestions:

It's easier to sacrifice when you know it's appreciated. As a husband, I want to know that my sacrifices and efforts make a difference and are appreciated. When I was single, I could easily spend 60+ hours a week on ministry, and the rest of the time I could engage in one of my many, many hobbies. But now that I'm married and have a baby, I've had to give up my hobbies and much of that me-time so I can still take care of my family and do my work.

It's tough to lead if it feels like what I do is wrong or a failure. But when I know my efforts are on the right track, it makes everything feel worthwhile.

It's easier to submit when you know they care. It's hard to eagerly follow someone if they don't care about you. I've had bosses who just gave orders and didn't care about any of my needs or concerns. It was hard to get excited about the job and easy to criticize them. I've had bosses who cared about me (shout out to Vinh and Doan's Darlings) so it was exciting to follow their vision and ideas.

As husbands sacrifice for their wives, the wives know the husbands won't be unreasonable in their leadership. They know the husband will lead towards the benefit of the family, not just for himself. They know he will work even harder for the good of the family, so she isn't doing all the work. She knows she is his priority over himself.

Be understanding. Even though wives submit, their feelings and needs matter. Even though husbands sacrifice, their feelings and needs matter.

Even though wives try to submit, their natural sinful tendencies will make them submit imperfectly. Even though husbands try to love sacrificially, their natural sinful tendencies will make them love imperfectly.

We're all humans in need of God's grace. Let's give each other a break and show the same grace that Jesus showed us.

Appendix

ANCIENT HUSBANDS AND WIVES

The healthy functioning of a family was important in the ancient world. To have a healthy political state, you need healthy families. Aristotle wrote about families around 350 BC.

Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253b

And now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for every state is composed of households. ... The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are **master and slave**, **husband and wife**, **father and children** ...

We see these three relationships in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: **wives/husbands** (5:22-33), **parents/children** (6:1-4), and **slave/master** (6:5-9). Note the different order, where husband/wife comes first and slave/master is last. God created the marriage relationship first (Genesis 2), then parenthood (Genesis 4). Masters and slaves come much later (Genesis 9).

Note also the basis for these relationships.

Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253b

Let us then accept these three relationships that we have mentioned. There is also a department which some people consider the same as household management and others the most important part of it, and the true position of which we shall have to consider: I mean what is called the art of getting wealth.

The guiding principle for husbands/fathers to run the household is about getting rich. My wife, children, and slaves are ways I can get rich.

For Paul, the guiding principle of the household (and all of life) is Jesus. Jesus is the One we obey (5:22-24; 6:5-9), the One we imitate (5:25-27; 6:9), and the One we move toward (5:27; 6:4).

Aristotle also wrote that women are inherently inferior to males.

Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1254b

Again, as between the sexes, **the male is by nature superior and the female inferior**, the male ruler and the female subject.

This view was echoed by the ancient Jewish writer Josephus around 94 AD, almost 520 years after Aristotle.

Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.25.199

for, says the Scripture, "**A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.**" Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband.

For hundreds of years, this was the prevailing philosophy concerning family relationships.

Oddly enough, Scripture doesn't say that women are inferior. When God created women, God said He would create a helper for Adam. Although we usually think of a helper as someone with lower status/rank/ability who lends a hand, God is constantly described as Israel's helper and source of help

(Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 78:19; 115:9-11; 121:1-2, 8; 146:5; Hosea 13:9).

God created both man and woman in His image (Genesis 1:27), so both men and women have divinely imputed value.

Besides, woman was God's gift to man. Is God going to give Adam a Wish.com knockoff? Of course not! He's going to give His best. Aristotle might think women are deformed men, but we don't.

Also, Paul states the obvious: men and women both need each other (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). The first woman came from the first man, but every man ever since comes from a woman.

And in Jesus, people may take on different roles, but everyone is equally important (1 Corinthians 12).

Choose Your Next Step

What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?

Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.