

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

GREAT **EXPECTATIONS**



February 2, 2014

Discussion Guide

Resetting Expectations

Ephesians 5.21-33

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you got married, what were some of your expectations about the way your marriage would work? If you are not married, what expectations do you have about the way marriage should work? Did your expectations match with reality? Would you elaborate?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of Ephesians and the idea of submission.

- Read Ephesians 5.21-33 aloud slowly. Pause and read Ephesians 5.21 aloud once more.
- Paul notes that followers of Christ should expect to submit to one another in their relationships. What reactions, if any, do you have to Paul's words?
- In what ways, if any, does Jesus exemplify a life of submission? (You might consider Mark 10.42-45 and Philippians 2.5-11.)
- In what ways is the expectation of submission similar or dissimilar to our expectations for how relationships work? Would you elaborate?
- Read Ephesians 5.21-33 aloud slowly.
- Paul applies the expectation of submission to the marriage relationship. In what ways does the expectation of submission work out in the marriage relationship?
- If you were to write a paragraph on modern expectations for the marriage relationship how might it read?
- What issues, if any, arise when we pursue these modern expectations for marriage? Could you explain?
- What impact, if any, might the expectation of submission have upon these issues?
- Is submitting easy or difficult for you? Would you explain?
- What might encourage or enable you to submit in your relationships?
- Conclude by holding your group members before God, asking for the grace to live out the expectation of submission.

Context and Background

Submission

The term “submission” brings about an allergic reaction among many in our culture because of the inherent overtones of forced obedience implied within our modern context. However, in the first century world, the term did not carry the meanings we often impart today. In the language of the New Testament, the term is best translated as “placing under.” In the first century, this placing under involved the proper ordering of one’s life with regard to leadership; that is, one placed himself under a leader. While obedience could be part of this proper ordering, the idea that such obedience was brought about through coercion was absent. Rather, submission was a voluntary choice made rather than a response forced upon another. In its proper context, submission was the willingness to support another person by putting the needs of the other person above one’s own personal needs. While the willingness to support another person could be in response to an established hierarchy, such a hierarchy need not be in place for one to submit. Thus, submission does not require the presence of an established order, but it does require the presence of humility.

The Text

Ephesians 5.21: *Living our calling*

Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church is a circular letter (a letter meant for the churches in Asia Minor) which describes the work of Christ on behalf of people and the resultant practical impacts this work makes upon those who choose to follow Christ. The first three chapters describe God’s work in the person of Jesus while the final three chapters outline the impacts of this work. These final three chapters are governed by the thesis that followers of Christ are to live their daily lives with an eye to what Christ has done for them (Ephesians 4.1).

With this thought in mind, Paul discusses the practical realities of living with other people as individuals whom Jesus has redeemed. Paul concludes these thoughts by noting that this life results in the willing choice to submit to others (Ephesians 5.21). (See Submission.) Paul links his call for submission to one’s reverence for Christ; that is, submission comes out of a proper relationship with Jesus. One might interpret Paul’s statement as meaning Jesus commanded submission or that he modeled submission which his followers are therefore imitating. More than likely, both ideas are wrapped up in Paul’s words. Jesus did command that his followers obey his commandments (Matthew 28.20; John 14.15) but Jesus locates his commandments within his own manner of being and calls his followers to obey by taking up his way of life (Mark 10.42-45; 1 John 2.6).

Paul expands upon this idea of submission by providing three examples drawn from daily life illustrating submission in practical terms. His expansion has been taken as prescriptive by some, meaning Paul is outlining hierarchies in relationships. However, Paul is actually describing how submission looks in culturally relevant hierarchical structures. This means that Paul is not affirming hierarchies but demonstrating how submission is present in all hierarchies. We do best when we do not translate his description of submission within hierarchies into prescription of hierarchies, for then we would find ourselves affirming slavery (Ephesians 6.5-9). Paul concludes his discussion of submission by explaining that living in this way takes great effort, something he likens to a spiritual battle which can only be won as one lives by the power of God (Ephesians 6.10).

Ephesians 5.22-33:

Submission within marriage

Having outlined the idea that living out our calling leads the followers of Christ to submit to others, Paul elaborates on what this submission looks like in the major relationships of his day: husband/wife, parent/child, master/slave. Within the marriage relationship, wives are to submit to their husbands. The model they have for how this looks in practical terms is the church's submission to Christ who is the head of the church. Much ink has been spilt on what headship means with the two major camps being headship as leadership and headship as source. More than likely both ideas are present with the resultant thought being that of prominence or priority. Just as the church puts Jesus first—it is all about Jesus—so too is the wife to put her husband first. In this way the wife is acting out of reverence for Christ for she is taking up his manner of life, for Christ put the church first by serving as its savior. Having addressed wives, Paul turns to husbands calling them to love their wives.

Paul's call to love is simply a restatement of submission, for he defines this love as the love Christ had for the church. This love led Jesus to put the church first, giving up his life for her so that he might make her into her best possible self. In the same way, out of reverence for Christ, the husband takes up this same love for his wife by putting her first and seeking her best. He does this because the wife is an extension of his body in the same way that the church is an extension of Jesus' body. Hierarchy is the last thing on Paul's mind, for the husband loves the wife not as someone separate from himself but as someone who is part of himself.

Application:

We enter marriage with many expectations. One of the primary expectations we have is we expect that our spouse will expect what we expect. What quickly becomes apparent is that our expectations differ from those of our spouse and the result is that many of our expectations go unmet. When we experience a gap between our expectations and our reality—we call this gap disappointment—we often attempt to close the gap by entering into a power struggle with our spouse. In this struggle we attempt to force our spouse to meet or agree with our expectations. The result is anything but marital bliss. When we are honest, most of our expectations have to do with what other people will do, specifically, what they will do for us. As followers of Christ, we approach expectations much differently. Within relationships, the followers of Christ have but one expectation for our interactions with others. We expect that we will submit to the other person; that is, we expect that we will seek the good and well-being of the other above our own well-being and good. When we live in this way we are taking up the life of Christ, living in a way that aligns our daily lives with what God has done for us in Christ.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at blakeshipp.blogspot.com.



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