

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

February 21, 2016



Discussion Guide

Giving not Getting

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 state they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Describe what you think the perfect marriage would be like. Could you explain your answer?

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.)

- Using the notes, explain the nature of submission.
- Read Ephesians 5.21-33 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to hear it for the first time as a member of the Ephesian congregation.
- According to Paul, what should the followers of Jesus expect in the marriage relationship? Seek to discover as many expectations in the text as possible.
- What might people today expect in the marriage relationship? In what ways are these like or unlike the expectations outlined by Paul?
- Trace the trajectories of pursuing these various expectations. Where do these trajectories lead?
- With these trajectories in mind, react to the following statement: Marriage is not about making you happy. Marriage is about making you holy.
- Do you find it difficult or easy to pursue marriage on the terms Paul describes? Could you explain?
- What might make it easier to engage in

marriage on the terms Paul describes? What, if anything, keeps you from utilizing these approaches?

- Consider closing by discussing the role of this community as a help and encouragement to engage in marriage as an act of taking up the life of Christ.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SUBMISSION

The idea of submission is one which rankles our modern sensibilities. It brings about ideas of servitude, loss of identity and even violence. However, these realities are not to be associated with the concept of submission in the New Testament.

In the language of the New Testament, the word submit bears the idea of being placed under another person. It is a word which denotes order and hierarchy. As such, it can be used to describe the process of putting things in their proper place. However, the verb form can also be applied to people, and often is. When it is in the active voice, the word does imply an external actor placing people in their rightful place. However, in the New Testament, this form of the word is only associated with God as the actor (Romans 8.20; 1 Corinthians 15.27-28; Ephesians 1.22; Philippians 3.21; Hebrews 2.5).

The remaining instances within the New Testament are not in the active voice and generally indicate by the context or verbal form conscious choice to submit; that is, a person (or demon, Luke 10.17) consciously and voluntarily places himself under the authority of another person. These authorities can be part of established authoritarian structures such as governing rulers, both secular (Romans 13.1; Titus 3.1; 1 Peter 2.13) and in the Church (1 Peter 5.5). This authority can also be God himself (Hebrews 12.9). Many of these examples have corollaries in the ancient secular world. However, a unique use of the word appears in the New Testament, the voluntary submission among the people of God as an outworking of the gospel and filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5.21-24). In this case, hierarchical structures are mentioned but not dwelt upon because every believer willingly submits to every other believer (Ephesians 5.21). In this instance, the focus is less about who is over whom but upon the process of taking up the life of Christ, a life

which modeled submission (Philippians 2.6-11; Ephesians 5.25-27).

THE TEXT

EPHESIANS 5.21-33: *IT'S NOT ABOUT ME*

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is his most general letter, a letter describing the redemptive work of God in the person of Christ and how this work brings glory to God (Ephesians 1-3). Having described this work, Paul goes on to describe our response as those who have responded to God by allowing his rescue to work out in our lives. According to Paul, any proper response leads to a life in the present which demonstrates the work of God in Christ (Ephesians 4.1). This response fundamentally transforms how people live, creating the Church (Ephesians 4.2-16), and reshaping how people relate to one another and the world around them (Ephesians 4.17-6.17).

As Paul outlines the radical transformation which the gospel brings, he dwells extensively with the marriage relationship, one of the most fundamental relationships experienced by people. He begins his discussion by noting that those who respond to the gospel seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5.18), a filling which transforms how people behave. One of these transformations is the willingness of people to submit to one another. Rather than engaging in power plays or struggles for control, followers of Christ intentionally seek to put other believers above themselves. This act does not involve a relinquishment of worth or even authority and position, but is willingly choosing to honor, respect, and affirm the other in such a way that they recognize their worth and value in the relationship. While Paul applies this principle to the relationship of marriage, he also applies it to the relationship of parents and children (Ephesians 6.1-4) and masters and slaves (Ephesians 6.5-9), the ancient form of our modern employer/employee relationship.

Within marriage, both the husband and the wife are to submit to one another. Paul explains that for the wife, this submission involves responding to the husband in the same way she responds to Christ. This does not mean that the husband replaces Christ, but that the submission modeled is the same. The wife is to approach her husband

as the head of the relationship, the one holding positional authority because Christ holds positional authority within the Church. Paul is quick to note that the nature of this authority is not tyrannical but is a form of servant leadership which seeks the good of the Church. As the Church seeks to honor and respect the positional authority of Christ, so too is the wife to honor and respect the positional authority of the husband. It is important to note that Paul does not explore the nature of this positional authority within the marriage relationship as this is not his point. The positional authority actually fades to the background in the following verses. Paul's point is simply to describe what submission on the part of the wife looks like, not the nature of the husband's leadership. The wife submits by receiving the husband's leadership, affirming and supporting his person, and resisting the impulse to seize control or complain about direction because this is the way she relates to Christ.

It is also important to note that Paul does not stop with his description of a wife's submission to her husband but he continues to outline a husband's proper submission to his wife using three times as many words as he did for the wife. This is probably due to the strong cultural mores of Paul's day which bolstered a strong patriarchal role of the man within the family. The husband was to submit to his wife by loving her in the same way that Christ loved the Church which involved the sacrificial giving of himself on her behalf when she was most undeserving (Ephesians 2.1-5). Christ gave himself so that he could have a Church that was set apart and beautiful. Thus, he acted to cleanse her and lead her to become the person she was meant to be. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way. It is hard to sniff out any claiming of authority in these verses. The attitude which comes through is that of selfless love which is willing to sacrifice everything for the well-being of the other. This approach to marriage is encouraged because of the reality of the union between a husband and a wife. They are one flesh and no one hates their own body. Rather, they care for it. This is the relationship of Christ and his Church and the relationship of a husband and his wife.

How a husband and wife become one is mysterious to Paul, but his main focus is upon Christ and the Church. With these words, Paul reframes the entire

argument, giving purpose to his words and the voluntary mutual submission within the marriage relationship. The marriage relationship enables one to experience and grasp how Christ relates to the Church. In some ways, the experience of submission within marriage prepares one to relate eternally to Christ. Thus, the instruction to submit to one another gains a new level of importance because it is nothing short of a spiritual training ground.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

What should I expect out of marriage? When I was approaching marriage, I thought that I should expect Rachel to make me happy, to be my partner in all things, to be my constant companion. Boy was I disappointed. It took about a week to recognize that she didn't always want to be with me. She didn't like doing all the things I did, and sometimes she didn't "do it" for me. I was with her but I felt somehow less than satisfied. Did I marry the wrong person? Was something wrong with our marriage? Hardly. The only thing wrong was my expectation that Rachel would somehow be everything for me, an expectation rooted in the teaching of Plato not Christ. Over the years, I have come to view our marriage relationship in a completely new light. Our marriage is not about what I get but about what I give. What I mean is marriage is not about Rachel being all I need. Only God can do that. Rather, our marriage is about my willingness to serve Rachel, putting her first in every way, guarding her, valuing her, helping her to become the person God meant her to be. I do all of this, not perfectly mind you, because it trains me to take up the life of Christ. When I serve Rachel, I am acting like Christ. I am giving of myself as Jesus gave himself of the Church. When Rachel serves me, she too is taking up the life of Christ, taking up the humility and service of Jesus to his Father. It isn't easy. We both have our moments where we balk against service. We struggle for our way. We complain about the other. This is normal, and it provides an invitation to recognize that we have not yet arrived. We have much work to do and for this we need one another. We need one another because in our relationship with one another we are learning and growing to relate as we were always meant to relate, as people created in the image of God.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

What should we expect out of marriage? Culture tells us that any good marriage should make us happy and fulfilled. Somehow the expectation is that the other person completes us and makes us full. It is no surprise that many of us get married and find ourselves disappointed. Our spouse simply doesn't live up to our expectations. This is because our spouses were never meant to fulfill us. This is a narrative rooted in the teaching of Plato not Christ. In God's mind, marriage is not a relationship meant to complete us but a relationship meant to transform us. We were created in the image of God and the point of the gospel is to experience life as we were created. In this journey, marriage plays a key role. Marriage is the practice field, a safe place to practice taking up the life of Jesus, the one in whose image we are made. We do this by approaching marriage as a relationship in which we submit to the other. Willingly and intentionally we resist the urge to control and complain, but we seek to put the needs and well-being of our spouse first. In so doing, we find we are taking up the life of Jesus. This isn't easy for us. It certainly cuts against our self-centered, individualist American upbringing, but it is the way we were made to live. We can prepare for engaging in the marriage relationship by using every relationship as an opportunity to submit. This is best done within the context of Christ-centered community. Every conversation, every relationship becomes an opportunity to practice putting the other first. Should we marry, we have a constant relationship within which to practice. Every moment of every day, even when we are not with our spouse, becomes an opportunity to practice submission, the life of Christ. This week, consider looking for one way you can practice submission in your relationships. This could be the choice to listen and empathize rather than becoming the focus of the conversation. This could be to defer to the wishes or needs of another, even when it is not convenient. This could be the willingness to keep a promise even when it is difficult. It will not always be easy, but you can invite God into each of these experiences, telling him how you feel and asking for the grace to proceed.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP