

Note: These questions have been prepared to follow the pattern of the series based on the sermon content from Pastor Josh Lilly.

Sermon: The Greatest Story Ever Told — Purpose, Persons, and Problems in Marriage

Text: Ephesians 5:22–33

“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. ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. ... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 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.”

— Ephesians 5:22–23, 25, 31–33

Day 1 — The Purpose: Marriage Tells the Greatest Story

Read: Ephesians 5:31–32; Genesis 2:18–25; Revelation 19:6–9

1. The sermon named three biblical purposes for marriage: multiplying image-bearers, companionship in the work God has given, and representing the gospel. Which of those three has most shaped how you think about marriage—and which have you neglected?
2. Paul does not invent a clever illustration when he ties marriage to Christ and the church. He says the mystery was already there. How does it change the weight of your marriage (or of the marriages you pray for) to believe that God designed it, before the foundation of the world, to display redemption?
3. “If our marriages are to tell the greatest story ever, then we had better know that story.” In your own words, what is the story marriage is meant to tell?
4. The pastor warned against evaluating your spouse while listening to this text. Why is introspection—asking whether Christ’s kind of love is true of you—the more faithful first response?
5. If you are single, divorced, or widowed, how does this passage still claim you? The sermon said part of a single person’s role in the church is to pray for and lift up the marriages around them. What would that look like this week?

Prayer: *Father, You wrote marriage into the world so that it would reveal the love of Christ for His church. Forgive us for treating marriage as a private project or a path to our own fulfillment. Open our eyes to the greatest story, and teach us to live in it—whether we are married, hoping to be, or walking through loss—for the glory of Your Son. Amen.*

Day 2 — Christ’s Love Is Sacrificial

Read: Ephesians 5:25; Philippians 2:5–8; Hebrews 12:2; John 15:13

1. Paul will not let us invent our own definition of love. He says, “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” What does “gave himself up” mean in the life of Jesus—and what cheap substitutes for sacrifice have you called love?
2. The sermon said, “Love that is not sacrificial is no love at all.” Where in your marriage (or closest relationships) do you still protect yourself first and call it wisdom?
3. Jesus did not look at the cross and call it fun. “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame.” What joy is set before you that would make costly love possible this week?
4. Covenant vows are a way of saying, “I am putting you ahead of me.” Which vow you once spoke—or heard spoken—needs to be recovered as a daily practice rather than a wedding memory?
5. Some hear “sacrifice” and feel only exhaustion. The sermon pointed such people to Jesus, not to a pep talk. How is laying down your life different from being used—and how does union with Christ keep sacrifice from becoming despair?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You put us ahead of Yourself. You endured the cross for the joy set before You. Teach us that kind of love. Where we have kept score, kept safe, or kept first place, forgive us. Give us grace to lay tracks that run toward sacrifice, and rip up the ones that only protect our comfort. Amen.*

Day 3 — Christ’s Love Is Sanctifying

Read: Ephesians 5:26–27; John 17:17; Ephesians 4:15–16; 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

1. Jesus died not only to save the church but to sanctify her—“having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” What does it mean, in ordinary language, to wash a spouse with the Word rather than to lecture, manage, or correct them?
2. The pastor confessed that as a young husband he sounded like a principal checking lesson plans. Where has your use of Scripture felt more like inspection than nourishment? What would compassion change?
3. Seasons change—bedtime reading may fail; early mornings may vanish when children arrive—but “washing your spouse in the word of God cannot change.” What rhythm actually fits this season of your life together (or, if unmarried, your life in the body)?
4. “You’re not going to bootstrap or will your spouse into greater sanctification.” How does Paul’s word, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth,” free you from both passivity and control?

5. A sanctifying love “looks out for the best of the other person” and removes what is not holy from the home. What have you allowed in that works against holiness—and what would it look like to put it out, bury it, and not go back?

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, You are the One who grows us. Forgive us for using the Word as a weapon, a checklist, or a stage. Wash us again. Give husbands and wives patience to grow together, wisdom for this season, and courage to put away what does not belong in a Christian home. Make our marriages a place where the Word actually cleanses. Amen.*

Day 4 — Christ’s Love Is Nourishing

Read: Ephesians 5:28–30; Acts 9:4–5; Matthew 6:25–33; Ephesians 1:13–14

1. “He who loves his wife loves himself.” How does the one-flesh union make cruelty to a spouse a form of self-harm—and care for a spouse a form of sanity?
2. When Saul persecuted the church, Jesus said, “Why are you persecuting me?” Your spouse is a member of Christ’s body. How should that truth change the tone of an ordinary Tuesday in your house?
3. Jesus nourishes the church by protecting, defending, supporting, supplying, and cherishing. Which of those five is weakest in the way you love right now?
4. The sermon said a nourishing love begins by becoming “a student of your spouse.” What need in the person closest to you have you stopped studying—or never learned?
5. When raising up elders, the pastor looks first at whether a spouse is flourishing. Whether or not you will ever be an elder, why is a flourishing spouse a better measure of maturity than public gifting?

Prayer: *Father, You seal us, supply us, and know our needs before we ask. Teach us to treat the one You have given us as members of Christ’s own body. Make us students of one another. Where we have starved what we should have cherished, restore tenderness, provision, and protection—for the good of our homes and the honor of Jesus. Amen.*

Day 5 — Christ’s Love Is Covenantal

Read: Ephesians 5:31–33; Matthew 19:3–9; Hosea 3:1–5; Romans 6:1–4

1. “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.” What does “hold fast” require when feelings cool, when family of origin pulls, or when the marriage is no longer convenient?
2. The sermon urged the church to remove the D-word from its vocabulary as a threat or a tool. How does dangling divorce as leverage fail to represent the covenant love of Christ?
3. Jesus names sexual immorality as a ground for divorce, yet the pastor said that even then His preference is forgiveness and redemption—the story of Hosea. How do you hold both the Bible’s permission and the Bible’s preference without hardness of heart or naiveté about harm?
4. Some have twisted covenant into license: “Because my spouse is a Christian, I can do whatever I want.” How does Paul’s warning about sinning so that grace may increase expose that heart?
5. The picture of Ephesians 5 is not grim endurance of a prison. It is a people so nourished they cannot imagine wanting out. If that is not your story, where does the sermon locate hope—in your track record, or in the Christ who can rip up old tracks and lay new ones?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You will never leave us or forsake us. You seal Your people and You do not turn them out. Forgive us for treating covenant as a cage, a threat, or a cover for sin. Make us a covenantal people. Where marriages are thin ice, be the foundation. Where the word “divorce” has been a weapon, take it from our mouths and put the gospel there instead. Amen.*

Day 6 — The Persons in Marriage: One Man, One Woman, and Christ

Read: Ephesians 5:31; Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:24; Ecclesiastes 4:12; John 1:14

1. The sermon was plain: the persons in marriage are one man and one woman for life—one biological male and one biological female—because God, not the culture, defines marriage. Why does the church have to say this out loud in 2026, and why must it say it without being a jerk?
2. “The church can walk and chew bubble gum at the same time.” What would it look like in your relationships to hold the definition of marriage with a full hand and still love those who do not agree?
3. The pastor argued that once a culture leaves God’s definition, marriage becomes an empty word anyone may claim. Why can a union that is not one man and one woman never tell the story of Christ and the church?
4. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. The third person in a Christian marriage is Christ Himself. Where have you tried to make a two-strand marriage work by technique, personality, or grit alone?

5. “If a marriage will ever tell the story of Jesus, it will be because the husband and wife first and foremost submit themselves to Jesus.” What would submitting to Jesus before submitting your list of grievances change in the next hard conversation?

Prayer: *God of truth and grace, You designed marriage, and no city council can redefine what You have named. Keep us from both cowardice and cruelty. Help us love those who are not yet living inside Your design, and welcome with open arms any who come to the same saving grace we have received. Bind husbands and wives first to Christ, then to one another. Amen.*

Day 7 — The Problems We Bring: Idolatry and Pride

Read: Ephesians 5:25–33; Ezekiel 14:3; James 4:1–6; Philippians 2:3–8

1. Idolatry in marriage, the sermon said, is “expecting satisfaction and fulfillment that only Jesus can bring from the person that you married.” In what ways have you asked your spouse to be a functional savior?
2. “You complete me” is a movie line, not a Christian hope. How does making a spouse your completer set both the person and the marriage up to fail?
3. Pride whispers, “My needs, my preferences, my priorities matter most—because no one else is looking out for number one.” Where does that whisper still run your budget, your calendar, or your tone?
4. The gospel answer to pride is not self-hatred. It is this: Jesus has already put you first. Because He has nourished you, you are free to put a spouse first. Which need of yours are you still clutching because you do not yet believe Christ has met it?
5. Looking back over the week—purpose, sacrifice, sanctification, nourishment, covenant, persons, problems—which do you most need the Spirit to form in you? What one practice will you carry forward so that, by grace, a marriage (yours or one you support) tells the greatest story ever?

Prayer: *Father, we confess the two problems we all carry into marriage: we ask people to be You, and we insist on being first. Thank You that Jesus has already put us first, already satisfied us, already served us. Wash Your love over us again—sacrificial, sanctifying, nourishing, covenantal—so that we can love the way we have been loved. Redeem what looks too far gone. We trust You in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Family or Group Discussion

1. Which part of the sermon or this week’s readings most challenged or encouraged you, and why?
2. Where is our family or group most tempted to treat marriage as a path to personal fulfillment rather than a display of the gospel?
3. How can those who are single, hurting, or walking without a spouse in the room still take up this text without shame—and how can the rest of us love them well?
4. Take time to pray for one another: for marriages that tell the story of Christ, for hearts freed from idolatry and pride, for those whose marriages are on thin ice, and for those not yet believing who need the same Savior this passage reveals.

Weekly Practice

Let your marriage—or your care for the marriages around you—tell the greatest story ever.

- Each morning this week, before you speak to your spouse (or about a marriage), ask: “Lord Jesus, Your love first—sacrificial, sanctifying, nourishing, covenantal.”
- Have one honest conversation about how you will wash one another with the Word in this season. Do not impose a picture-ready ritual. Find what actually fits.
- Remove one unholy thing from the home that works against sanctifying love. Do not delay.
- Become a student again: name one real need of your spouse and meet it without being asked. If you are unmarried, do the same for a marriage in the church—by prayer, a meal, or holding up their hands.
- Write and finish the sentence: “A marriage that tells the gospel would change _____ in me this week.” Then take one step. Do not wait for your spouse to go first.

A church that lives this way becomes a people whose homes, however imperfect, point beyond themselves to the Husband who gave Himself up for His bride—for the glory of Christ and the good of His church.

These questions are prepared to serve personal, family, and small-group study of the Word as we continue in Ephesians. May the Spirit who unites husband and wife, who washes us with the Word, and who still indwells His people form in us a gospel-shaped love—for the glory of Christ and the strengthening of His church at Crossroads.