

HOME SWEET

HOME

WEEK TWO

HOME SWEET HOME

A Seven-Day Devotional — Week 2

Wives, Husbands & the Gospel

Welcome to Week Two

Last week, Home Sweet Home began with the ground floor — identity, work, obedience, and marriage as God first designed them in Genesis. This week turns to a sermon preached to wives, walking through Ephesians 5, and follows its arc from the opening call to walk in love all the way to the closing charge to respect.

This is not a checklist meant to overwhelm or a standard to hit before God is finally pleased. It's an invitation — to gratitude, to mutual submission, to an identity marriage was never meant to supply, to headship that serves and partnership that wins, to answering the question every person carries about whether they have what it takes, and finally, to choosing, day by day, to be a crown.

Each day includes the full text of Scripture, an expanded teaching section drawn from the sermon, three reflection questions, one practical step, and a closing prayer. Move through a day at a time and let it do its slow work.

DAY 1 A Bigger Lordship Claim

Ephesians 5:1–2

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Most people who preach this passage start at **Verse 22**: “*Wives, submit to your own husband.*” Everyone already knows it's coming. But that's a little like reading the Constitution starting at the Third Amendment. The real banner over everything that follows about marriage starts back at **Verse 1**: “*Be imitators of God and walk in love as Christ loved you.*”

It helps to remember where this letter landed. Ephesus was the center of worship for Artemis, a pagan goddess whose temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was a city known for magic, spells, the occult, and sexual immorality on every corner. Everything in that culture orbited around the worship of a false goddess. Paul is writing straight into the middle of that situation to ordinary Christians trying to build extraordinary Christian homes inside a city organized around something else entirely.

But notice the progression he builds. Chapter 1: Jesus is over everything on earth. Chapters 2–3: Jesus is over the church. Chapters 4 through the first half of 5: Jesus is over my life and my behavior. Then the second half of chapter 5: Jesus is over my marriage. Chapter 6: Jesus is over my kids, my family He is and bigger than every spiritual force of darkness against which the Ephesians feared enough to cast spells.

That order matters. Marriage doesn't get its own separate rulebook disconnected from everything else. It's simply the next place the Lordship of Christ shows up. Whatever gets said about wives and husbands in the verses ahead only makes sense inside that much bigger claim: Jesus is Lord over all of it, including marriage. It's also worth saying plainly that what's real about our identity, worth and value before God doesn't wait for a wedding ring to become true. We sometimes forget that Paul was single as was Jesus. Many of the disciples were most possibly single.

Some of you are widows/widowers. Some are single, single again, happily married or struggling in your marriage. You need to know God sees you right where you are. He

knows the longings of your heart. At the same time, you don't need someone else to make your half a whole. You are already complete in Him. Regardless of your marital status, your value to the Lord is absolute.

Before a single word gets said about submission or headship, sit with this: Your marriage (or your singleness, or your hope for marriage someday) exists inside a much bigger story. It's a story where Jesus already claims Lordship over everything, including the parts of your life you haven't handed him yet.

Reflection

- How does seeing marriage as one more place Christ's Lordship extends --- rather than a separate topic --- change how you read the verses that follow?
- What competes for the same kind of ultimate devotion in your life that Artemis held over Ephesus? What does this world prize more than anything?
- Where in your life --- married or not --- have you been living as though Jesus's authority stops at a certain door?

Take It Further

Read Ephesians 1–5 in one sitting this week and notice the progression for yourself. Everything including the church, our lives, our behavior, marriage, family is under His Lordship.

Prayer

Father, thank you that your Lordship reaches every corner of my life, including my marriage. Where I've kept parts of it walled off from you, break down those walls. Teach me to walk in love the way Christ loved me. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 2 From Entitlement to Gratitude

Ephesians 5:20

"Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Every one of us lives somewhere on a spectrum between entitlement and gratitude. The difference between them shapes almost everything else in a marriage. Entitlement says: You owe me something. Gratitude counts blessings instead. Entitlement keeps score; gratitude breeds contentment. Entitlement magnifies what's missing; gratitude magnifies what's already been given.

Lay the two side by side and the contrast gets sharper still. Entitlement breeds resentment, gratitude breeds contentment. Entitlement is offended by what it doesn't get; gratitude is amazed by what it does get. Entitlement makes you miserable with much; gratitude makes you joyful with little. Entitlement says: I deserve better. Gratitude says: I've been given better than I deserve. Read that last line twice. It's the hinge the whole spectrum turns on.

One of the first things to quietly disappear in a struggling marriage is gratitude. We stop saying thank you for the small things and start expecting them instead: the cup of coffee in the morning, picking up the kids from school, cooking, washing the dishes. Somewhere along the way, we decided we were owed. The gospel is the only thing strong enough to interrupt that pattern, because it tells us plainly what we deserve in no uncertain terms: We are sinners in need of a Savior. We deserve Hell, forever.

We don't like to hear that statement. We want to fight it, compare ourselves to others, and say we're not so bad ("I'm no Jeffrey Dahmer!"). Okay, maybe we haven't had his peculiar dietary desires, but he's not our standard. Jesus is. Compared to Him, we are in sorry shape. God's grace shows us that we were given forgiveness instead, not because we earned it, but because He is that good.

It's amazing that two people can live in the very same marriage and experience it completely differently depending on what they've trained themselves to notice. Entitlement trains you to notice what's missing: You criticize, your spouse withdraws, connection shrinks, and you find even more to criticize. Gratitude trains you to notice what's there: You appreciate, your spouse feels valued, they respond warmer, and you find even more for which to be grateful. Both are self-reinforcing loops, running in opposite directions. Only one of them builds anything worth keeping.

This isn't just a nice theory. Researchers who studied 180 couples found that gratitude predicted not only a person's own marital satisfaction, but also their spouse's satisfaction as well. Gratitude doesn't stay contained to the person feeling it. It moves outward, quietly, and changes the whole marriage around it.

The starting point isn't a behavior change or a new system for dividing chores. It's a prayer. An actual prayer said out loud to God, thanking him for the specific person you married. Not a request for them to change. Not a fix-them prayer. Just gratitude. The kind that trains your eyes to see what's already there.

Reflection

- Which loop have you been feeding this week: the entitlement loop or the gratitude loop?
- When was the last time you prayed for your spouse rather than about them?
- What's one small thing your spouse does regularly that you've stopped noticing & thanking them out loud for?

Take It Further

Before bed tonight, thank God specifically for your spouse and tell your spouse one thing you noticed and appreciated about them today.

Prayer

Father, move me from entitlement to gratitude. Thank you for my spouse. Not for what they do for me, but simply for who they are. Teach my heart to notice and to say so. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 3 Submitting to One Another

Ephesians 5:21

"Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Before Paul ever gets to wives and husbands specifically, he says this to everybody: Submit to one another. A good marriage runs on mutual submission. Submission is an

unpopular concept these days because we want to be free agents and not allow anyone to tie us down. But submission is what's best for a marriage. Submission is simply considering someone else's needs as a bigger deal than your own. That's not a marriage technique. It's just what good friends do for each other all the time. But this one gets taken all the way to the altar. Paul says it plainly elsewhere, in Philippians 2: Consider their needs as more important than your own. Your deal is a bigger deal than my deal. That is the posture, before either spouse's specific role in chores or responsibilities even enters the conversation.

The phrase "out of reverence for Christ" carries the real weight here. It means at least three things. First, your marriage isn't about you. It was never designed to make much of the husband or the wife. It's designed to make much of Jesus. When love, forgiveness, and sacrifice show up in an ordinary marriage, it puts the gospel on display for everyone watching.

Second, Jesus must be in the center of it. Without him, marriage becomes personality roulette. You roll the dice and hope you have enough in common to make it work. But when Jesus is at the center, the closer you grow to Him, the more you become like Him, and the more likeable and more able to love you become. In John 15, that's the fruit He promised to produce in us as we seek Him. Galatians 5:22-23 names them: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Ask yourself honestly: Would any of one of those fruits help your marriage this week?

Most marriage problems aren't actually marriage problems. They're gospel problems. Leaving dishes in the sink and forgetting the cap on the toothpaste were never issues when you were single, because your dog didn't mind. They became issues the moment two selfish people started sharing a life, because we naturally think the whole world should revolve around us. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ is what turns gospel problems back into gospel opportunities, one dish, one cap, one decision at a time.

Third, your identity is found in Christ, not in your marriage. This truth shapes how you handle daily friction in your marriage. When your spouse fails you, and they will, the

question isn't whether the marriage has failed. The question is whether you were asking the marriage to be something only Jesus was ever meant to be. Trying to make your spouse the source of your completeness will always disappoint, because he was never built to carry that weight. Only Jesus can.

Put those three together --- Marriage is not about you, Jesus must be at the center, Our identity is secure in Christ --- and mutual submission stops sounding like a threat to either person's independence. It starts sounding like the only sane way two selfish, gospel-needing people could build a life together.

Reflection

- Where has your marriage quietly become about making much of yourself instead of making much of Jesus?
- What recurring conflict in your home might be a gospel problem wearing a marriage problem's clothes?
- What would it look like this week to treat your spouse's needs as a bigger deal than your own, even once?

Take It Further

Identify one recurring point of friction in your marriage and ask, honestly, whether it's really a gospel problem --- pride, selfishness, control --- dressed up as a marriage problem. Bring it to God before you bring it up again with your spouse.

Prayer

Lord, my marriage is not about me — it's about making you visible. Put Jesus back in the center of every gospel problem I've been treating like a marriage problem. Teach me to submit out of reverence for you. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 4 An Identity Marriage Can't Give — or Take

Colossians 3:1–3

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above,

not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

When you ask a spouse to give you your identity, you place a weight on them they were never designed to carry. A marriage can affirm your worth, but it was never built to define it. That's good news! Your husband or wife didn't give you your identity, which means they can't take it away either. When marriage does become the source of our identity, it becomes the measure of our worth. That scale will eventually break, because no spouse, however good, can hold that much weight forever.

Two ditches show up on either side of that road of finding our identity in our marriage. One ditch is perfectionism. Perfectionism says: If my marriage looks perfect, then I must be okay. The problem is that we can't enjoy the family we have, because the family isn't finished yet. The house never gets to just be lived in, because it must be perfect. The vacation never quite matches the picture in your head. The holidays feel like a pressure cooker chasing a memory that was more fictionally idyllic than real life. We just remember it better than it actually was.

The other ditch is comparison. Comparison says: If my marriage looks better than hers, then I must be okay. This turns someone else's highlighted, filtered life into the measuring stick for your own real one. It leaves you in one of two places: Pride, because you think you're ahead, or insecurity, because you think you're behind. Either way, comparison is the fastest way to kill gratitude, and gratitude is what a healthy marriage runs on. Comparison always measures your real, unfiltered Tuesday against somebody else's carefully chosen highlight. That's not a fair fight.

The cure for both ditches is the same: The gospel. You don't deserve anything good, and yet the Most High King made you his daughter and son anyway. When you know that God is deeply satisfied in you, you stop needing your marriage to prove anything. You don't have to prove yourself or have this or be this. You already are His and He is enough.

Our security doesn't arrive all at once. It isn't a one-time realization you never have to revisit. It's a daily reorientation. It's setting your mind on things above, as Paul puts it,

instead of on the shifting scoreboard of a perfect house or a better-looking marriage than the one down the street.

Reflection

- Which ditch do you find yourself in more often: perfectionism or comparison? What usually triggers it?
- What's one place you've been asking your marriage to prove something about you that only God was ever meant to settle?
- How would today look different if your identity were fully secure before you even walked out the door?

Take It Further

Notice one comparison trigger this week. It might be a social media feed, a friend, an image in your head of what marriage “should” look like. Then, consciously bring it to God instead of letting it run unchecked.

Prayer

Father, my identity is hidden with Christ, not with my marriage. Free me from perfectionism and comparison and remind me that you are already deeply satisfied in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 5 Headship That Serves, Partnership That Wins

Ephesians 5:23–24 & Genesis 2:18

“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. ... It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Why submit to a husband? Not because he's smarter. That's often demonstrably untrue. Not because he's a better leader. The only reason given is that by God's design, he is the head. Notice why this starts with wives at all: Scripture consistently begins with the wife because she sets the tone in the home. There's an old saying for a reason: If

mama ain't happy, nobody's happy. That's true about the atmosphere a wife carries into a household.

Headship doesn't mean he does everything. It means he's responsible to see that it gets done. A godly husband takes responsibility, creates safety, gives direction, develops people, speaks truth, pursues God, and goes first in serving. This is his job description, and it's a demanding one. Read that list slowly and notice what's missing. Nowhere does it say he has to be the smartest person in the room, or win every argument, or make every decision unilaterally. It's a list built entirely around service, not status.

For plenty of wives, this creates an odd tension. You may genuinely know more Scripture, pray more consistently, and show up to more Bible studies than your husband does. It can be an enormous gift to the marriage if the husband sees it this way. Pastor Phil's wife, Danna, has forgotten more about science than he has ever learned. Her knowledge of how science relates to the Bible is incredible. That's not competition with his leadership. A wise husband sees it as a gift instead of feeling threatened by it. Headship was never meant to require that a husband out-perform his wife in every category. It requires that he take responsibility for the household regardless of who's ahead on any given metric.

Right alongside headship sits the word *ezer* from Genesis 2:18 which is translated "helper." When we think of helper, we may think of a servant fetching your shoes, but that's not the Biblical meaning here. It means something closer to an ally. Everywhere that word appears in the Old Testament, *ezer* describes God's own role in Israel's life. A wife isn't a lesser assistant brought in to handle what a husband can't be bothered with. She's the strength that completes a calling too large for one person to carry alone.

Great teams only win when they actually work together. No husband is going to do it perfectly, and he's not going to do it exactly the way you would. If he's constantly corrected, eventually he'll stop trying at all. The same is true in reverse: A husband who never lets his wife's strength shape the household is squandering an ally God specifically built for him.

Headship that serves, and partnership that functions as a team is the design. It's not one person over the other, but two people moving toward the same goal, each carrying weight the other one can't carry alone.

Reflection

- How does understanding headship as responsibility and service, rather than control, change how you view it?
- Where has your knowledge or competence in one area unintentionally undercut your spouse's confidence in leading?
- What's one shared goal your marriage is working toward right now and are you functioning as a team on it?

Take It Further

Have an honest conversation this week about one area where correction has crept in and quietly discouraged your spouse from leading or trying. Name a way forward together.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for designing marriage as a team, not a hierarchy of worth. Teach husbands to lead by serving and teach us all to work together toward the goals you've given us. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 6 Lid or Lift

Genesis 3:16 & Romans 5:8

"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. ... But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Every man wrestles deep down with one question he'll rarely say out loud: Do I have what it takes? For the first twenty-some years of life, most men spend their energy trying to prove that to their father. For the sixty years after that, the question quietly transfers to his wife. That's an enormous amount of influence for a wife to carry. A wife will be, almost without exception, either his lid or his lift. It's unbelievable, honestly, how

much weight a wife's words carry over a husband, far beyond what any coworker's praise or friend's compliment could ever accomplish.

Genesis 3:16 names something that runs underneath a lot of marriage friction: *"Her desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."* This scripture isn't describing a woman's romantic longing for her husband! It's describing a desire to overthrow, to take over. Sometimes...what feels like helping can actually function like a takeover. Correcting the story he's telling, redoing the task he already finished, quietly taking the reins because you know you could do it better. Picture the everyday version of this. He's mid-story with friends, getting a detail slightly wrong, and the correction slips out before you can stop it. It usually comes from a genuinely good place. It still lands as an answer to that fundamental question: No, you don't have what it takes. I have to save you from you.

This is delicate territory in a marriage. This kind of behavior comes from familiarity, not malice. The closer two people get, the easier it becomes to stampede over each other's feelings without meaning to. But the effect on him is real regardless of the intent behind it. You need to slow down enough to notice the pattern before it hardens into a habit neither of you want in the marriage.

There's a familiar pushback here: But you don't know my story! If you knew my husband/wife, you'd understand why I have to do this. We have slipped into a marital contract. Contract is: "If, then." If you do this, then I will do this. If he/she would be different, then I would be different. The problem is that a contract has no room for unconditional love. God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Not once we cleaned up. Not once we deserved it. The gospel is lived out in a marriage by doing your part even when your spouse isn't doing theirs. Not because it's fair, but because that's exactly the love you were shown first.

We are not our spouse's Holy Spirit. We do our part and pray and let God do His part. The gospel teaches us that we don't have what it takes to change or save ourselves which is why we need Jesus. When His Spirit lives in someone, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives there too. A man/woman has what it takes when the

Holy Spirit is within them. Your words to your spouse can either echo that or drown it out. Who would you'd want to hear from after a hard day: the voice that keeps a mental record of every misstep, or the one that reminds you, plainly and often, that you have what it takes because of who lives in you? I think you know the answer.

Reflection

- Where have you recently taken over the reins in a way that, however well-intentioned, communicated “You don't have what it takes”?
- Is there a contract mindset (“if he/she would just ... then I would”) that's ruining your marriage right now?
- What would it look like to do your part this week regardless of whether your spouse is doing theirs?

Take It Further

Choose one specific moment today to be a lift instead of a lid. Give some encouragement.

Prayer

Father, thank you that while I was still a sinner, Christ died for me. You didn't bring a contract with conditions. Root out any if-then thinking in my marriage and make me quick to lift the people I love instead of taking over. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 7 Crown or Cancer

Proverbs 12:4 & Ephesians 5:33

“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. ... Let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

God's design for marriage is genuinely unique in the ancient world: One husband and one wife making one new family. Not a wife simply absorbed into her husband's existing household, as was the norm for most of history. Leave and cleave means something is being formed here, not merely added to. Practically, that means even the people who

love you most — including your parents — don't get a vote inside this new household. Honor them for the rest of your life, but the house you're building together answers to God first, not to the family you came from.

Inside that new family, the final word to a husband is this: Love her as himself, and let her see that she respects him. What does he need most? Respect. He already has plenty of love in his life. Respect is different, and rarer, and it's something almost no one else can give him the way a wife can.

Which brings the whole message to a single question borrowed straight from Proverbs 12:4: Are you a crown to your spouse or cancer in their bones? That's not meant to produce shame. It's meant to produce an honest kind of conviction a loving parent gives. The kind that catches something early enough to change it. Most marriage problems, underneath everything else, come down to this: He feels disrespected, and she feels devalued.

Here are three places to start: Give thanks, out loud for your spouse. Unspoken gratitude is worthless. Confess and repent where you have been messing up in your marriage. Encourage your spouse this week. Make them feel like the person God made them to be. For spouses, resources like *The Five Love Languages* book can help identify exactly how you and your spouse best receives encouragement, because it won't look the same for every person. For wives, men aren't complicated. We're a bit like puppies. We repeat what gets rewarded. Get something right and watch what happens next time.

A crown or cancer? On most days, the choice is smaller and closer than it feels. It's found in the tone of a text message, the response to a question, and the words chosen in front of other people. None of it requires a grand gesture. It requires a decision, repeated daily, about which one your words are building.

Reflection

- Looking honestly at this past week, would your words have read more like a crown or like rottenness?
- Where do you tend to defend instead of confess when God's conviction comes?

- What's one specific way you could show respect and love to your spouse this week?

Take It Further

Pick one of the three action steps and act on it today, specifically and out loud, before the day ends.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we love you because you first loved us. Make me a crown, not a source of shame, to the person I love. Where I've kept score or stayed defensive, bring a conviction that points me to the cross. Thank you for this family, and for this church family. May we bring you glory. In Jesus' name, amen.