

Field Guide and Leader Guide 8.23.26

Family Matters

Synopsis

Every marriage has something at its center, and whatever occupies that center has a gravitational pull that shapes everything around it. For some couples, it is their children, finances, happiness, romance, sex, security, or companionship. These can all be good gifts from God, but good things make bad centers. Children grow up, finances shift, feelings change, bodies age, and circumstances rarely stay the same. None of these things are strong enough to carry the full weight of a marriage.

Paul presents a better center in Ephesians 5: Jesus Christ and his sacrificial love for the church. A Christ-centered marriage is not driven by selfishness, control, or keeping score. It is shaped by mutual submission, a wife's willing respect, and a husband's responsibility to love and serve his wife as Christ loved the church. Instead of asking, "What am I getting from you?" both husband and wife learn to ask, "Because Christ gave himself for me, how can I give myself for you?"

Questions

1. What are some good things that can slowly take the place of Jesus at the center of a marriage, and how can we recognize when that has happened?
 - Which of these good things most commonly competes for the center of a marriage?
 - What practical steps can a couple take to put Jesus back at the center?
2. How does Christ's sacrificial love change the way we understand submission, leadership, and responsibility within marriage?
 - How is Christlike leadership different from control, domination, or simply getting your way?
 - What does mutual submission look like when a husband and wife disagree?
3. What could sacrificial love look like in the ordinary, undramatic moments of your marriage or closest relationships this week?
 - Which is most difficult for you: listening, apologizing, forgiving, serving, or giving someone your full attention?
 - What is one specific way you can put someone else's needs ahead of your own this week?

Scripture References: Ephesians 5:21–33 | Genesis 2:24

Conclusion

Sacrificial love is rarely demonstrated through one dramatic act of courage. More often, it is lived out on an ordinary Tuesday evening when we are tired, distracted, frustrated, or convinced that we are right. It looks like listening instead of lecturing, apologizing without defending ourselves, forgiving instead of keeping score, putting down the phone, helping without being asked, and choosing understanding over winning an argument.

The strongest marriages are not made up of two people who perfectly meet each other's needs. They are made up of two imperfect people who continue looking to Jesus, remembering how completely he gave himself for them, and learning to give themselves to one another. When Jesus remains at the center, his gravitational pull draws both people closer to him and, in the process, closer to each other.