

WEEK 6

“Sent Into Your Closest Relationships”

Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9

A Love That Gives Itself Away

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

There is a Greek word that Paul uses here that most English translations flatten into the single word “love.” The word is agape. And it is not the love of warm feelings, romantic attraction, or even deep affection, though it may include those things. Agape is a love that makes a decision — a love that chooses the other person’s good even when it costs something. Even when it costs everything.

The example Paul gives is not subtle. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That’s not a metaphor for being nicer. That’s a man on a cross. Paul is setting the standard for the household codes at the highest possible point and then asking: now live from that.

Notice what Christ’s love produces in the one it is directed toward. He cleanses. He presents. He makes radiant. He removes every stain and wrinkle. Agape love in Paul’s vision doesn’t leave the other person where it found them. It moves toward them with the specific intention of their flourishing, their wholeness, their becoming more fully who they were made to be.

Most of us love people in the way that feels natural — when the relationship is going well, when we feel appreciated, when the other person is easy to be around. Agape asks a harder question: what does this person need to flourish? And then it gives that, even when it isn’t convenient, even when it isn’t returned, even when it costs more than you feel like spending.

That kind of love doesn’t come from trying harder to be a nicer person. It comes from being so grounded in the love that was given to you first — costly, unconditional, directed specifically at your flourishing — that it begins to overflow into the way you treat the people around you. You were loved that way. The question is whether you’re learning to love that way too.

Personal Response

- Think about the person you are in closest relationship with. What would it mean to love them with the specific intention of their flourishing — not your comfort, not the relationship’s ease, but their becoming more fully who God made them to be?
- Where in your closest relationships are you loving from convenience rather than from decision? Name it honestly.
- Ask God to give you a specific act of agape love toward someone in your life today — something that costs you something small and gives them something real.

The Picture Your Life Is Painting

Ephesians 5:31-32 (NIV)

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Paul quotes Genesis here — the very first description of human marriage in all of Scripture — and then says something that reframes everything: I am actually talking about Christ and the church. Marriage, in Paul's understanding, was never just a human arrangement. It was always a picture of something cosmic. A living illustration of the love between God and his people.

This is what theologians call a type — a human reality that points beyond itself to a divine one. The marriage is real. The love is real. The leaving and cleaving is real. But underneath all of it, embedded in the very structure of human intimacy, is a picture of the most profound relationship in the universe: the one between Christ and his bride, the church.

Which means every committed relationship you are in is, whether you intend it or not, saying something to the people who observe it. It is painting a picture. The question is what picture.

A relationship characterized by self-giving love, by the pursuit of the other's flourishing, by faithfulness and patience and the willingness to stay — that relationship points somewhere. It tells a story about a God who loves his people that way. A relationship characterized by self-protection, by score-keeping, by conditional love that withdraws when it isn't returned — that relationship tells a different story.

Paul isn't describing marriage only. He is describing every significant relationship we are in as a potential witness. The people closest to you are the first ones to read the story your life is telling about the love of God. Not the story you intend to tell. The one they actually see.

What story are your closest relationships currently painting?

Personal Response

- Think about someone who observes your closest relationships from the outside — a child, a neighbor, a coworker. What picture of love do they see? Be honest rather than idealistic.
- Is there a relationship in your life where the picture is out of alignment with the story you want to be telling? What would it take to change it?
- Ask God to help you see your relationships the way he sees them — not just as personal arrangements but as witnesses. Ask him to make the picture worth pointing to.

Whatever You Do

Ephesians 6:5-8 (NIV)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

The context Paul is writing into is one most of us will never fully inhabit. Slavery in the Roman world was brutal, dehumanizing, and without the legal protections modern employment relationships carry. Paul is not endorsing this system. He is writing to people who are in it and have no legal recourse for leaving it, and he is trying to give them a framework for living with dignity and meaning inside an unjust situation.

What he offers them is a radical reorientation of motivation. You are not working for the person who holds your contract. You are working for the Lord. The task in front of you is not a degrading obligation — it is an act of worship offered to the one who sees everything, rewards everything, and is not limited by the injustice of the system you're in. The phrase that carries the most weight is this: "as if you were serving the Lord, not people." That phrase crosses every century and lands on every Monday morning. The irritating coworker, the unreasonable deadline, the thankless task, the role you didn't choose and don't love — Paul is saying: what if the person you were doing this for was Christ himself?

That question doesn't make the work easier. It doesn't make an unjust situation just. But it does something to the worker that nothing else can: it gives the work meaning independent of whether it is recognized, appreciated, or even fairly compensated. You are not waiting for the right person to see what you're doing. The right person already sees.

The most ordinary work, done with sincerity of heart as an offering to God, becomes something Paul calls "doing the will of God from your heart." Not the exciting version. The Monday morning version. The version nobody sees. That's the one God rewards.

Personal Response

- Think about your work this week — whatever form it takes. Which part of it is hardest to approach as an act of worship? What makes it feel disconnected from God?
- What would change about how you showed up to work — not what you do, but why and how you do it — if you genuinely believed Christ was the audience?
- Ask God to sanctify your ordinary work this week. Ask him to help you find him in the tasks you'd rather skip, the roles you didn't choose, and the moments nobody else notices.