

## Small Group Guide:

**\*\*Ephesians 5:21–33 | The Prison Epistles Week 13\*\***

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### ## Opening Prayer & Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

**\*\*Ice Breaker Question:\*\***

- Share about a relationship in your life (past or present) that has reflected Christ's love to you. What made it special?

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### ## Big Idea

**\*\*"Every relationship in its perfect state points back to the redemptive work of Christ. Every household, every friendship, every marriage, when guided by Holy Spirit becomes a living portrait of Christ's love."\*\***

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### ## Key Takeaways

**### 1. \*\*Shared Submission (v. 21)\*\***

- Holy Spirit-led submission is voluntary, not forced
- It's about mutual deference springing from love and reverence for Christ
- This applies to ALL believer relationships, not just marriage

### ### 2. **Christlike Headship as Loving Leadership (vv. 22-30)**

- Leadership is modeled after Christ's sacrifice, not superiority
- Love leads by serving, not controlling
- Righteous leadership transforms others toward God's design

### ### 3. **Four Qualities of Righteous Leadership (vv. 25-29)**

- **Cleansing** - Removing what corrupts (through truth, not condemnation)
- **Nurturing** - Bringing to maturity with patience and care
- **Sanctifying** - Setting apart for God's purpose
- **Elevating** - Lifting toward wholeness and freedom in Christ

### ### 4. **The Mystery of Union (vv. 31-33)**

- Marriage mirrors the divine union between Christ and the Church
- Christ came to redeem what was lost in Eden's fall
- Relationships become testimonies of restored love

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## ## Discussion Questions

### ### **Understanding the Text (15 minutes)**

1. **Verse 21** talks about "submitting to one another in the fear of Christ." How does this mutual submission differ from the world's understanding of power and authority in relationships?

2. In verses 25-27, Paul describes Christ's love for the church. What specific actions does Christ take? How does this redefine what "headship" means?

3. The sermon mentioned that after the Fall in Genesis 3, five things were fractured in relationships:

- Distrust replaced transparency
- Fear replaced intimacy
- Self-defense replaced self-giving
- Desire for control replaced spiritual cooperation
- Shame replaced glory

Which of these do you see most commonly affecting relationships today?

### \*\*Personal Reflection (20 minutes)\*\*

4. The sermon states: "When righteousness is the root motivation, leadership stops being about position and starts becoming about formation."

- In what areas of your life do you have influence over others (family, work, friendships, ministry)?
- Are you leading for position or for formation? Be honest.

5. Looking at the four qualities of righteous leadership (cleansing, nurturing, sanctifying, elevating):

- Which one comes most naturally to you?
- Which one is most challenging?
- Can you share an example of when someone demonstrated one of these qualities toward you?

6. The Greek word \*agapaō\* describes "intentional, other-centered, covenant loyalty—a love that chooses self-giving over self-protection."

- Where in your life are you currently choosing self-protection over self-giving?
- What would it look like to shift toward agape love in that situation?

### \*\*Application & Action (15 minutes)\*\*

7. The sermon's key question was: **"Is your leadership making someone more like Christ?"**

- Think of one person God has placed in your sphere of influence. How can you help them become more like Christ this week?

8. Review the five consequences of the Fall on relationships (from question 3). Which one do you struggle with most in your current relationships? What practical step can you take to allow Christ to redeem that area?

9. The Life Change Challenge offers three steps:

- **Practice one act of voluntary submission** — echo Eden's harmony before pride entered
- **Lead one person through love, not control** — mirror Christ's cross-shaped leadership
- **Speak one word of redemptive truth** — wash someone with grace rather than shame

Which of these three will you commit to this week? Share specifically what you plan to do.

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## Practical Applications

### **\*\*This Week's Challenge:\*\***

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

**\*\*Option 1: Voluntary Submission\*\***

- Identify one situation where you typically insist on your way
- Intentionally defer to another person's preference
- Journal about how it felt and what you learned about yourself and Christ

**\*\*Option 2: Redemptive Leadership\*\***

- Choose one person you influence (child, spouse, friend, coworker)
- Ask God to show you which quality they need: cleansing, nurturing, sanctifying, or elevating
- Take one specific action to demonstrate that quality toward them

**\*\*Option 3: Grace-Filled Communication\*\***

- Think of someone who needs correction or truth spoken into their life
- Before speaking, pray and ask: "How would Christ wash this person with grace?"
- Speak truth with the goal of lifting them up, not tearing them down

### **\*\*For Married Couples:\*\***

- Set aside 30 minutes this week to discuss these questions together:
  - "How can I better reflect Christ's love to you?"
  - "In what area do you need me to cleanse, nurture, sanctify, or elevate you?"

- "What would help you feel more respected/loved in our relationship?"

### **\*\*For Singles:\*\***

- Consider your friendships, family relationships, or mentoring relationships

- These same principles apply to all relationships, not just marriage

- Ask: "How can my relationships become living portraits of Christ's love?"

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## Memory Verse

**\*\*Ephesians 5:25\*\***

**\*\*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."\***

**\*\*Application for All:\*\*** Replace "husbands/wives" with your role (friend, parent, leader, etc.) and meditate on what it means to give yourself up for others.

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## Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

**\*\*Prayer Focus:\*\***

- Thank God for His redemptive love that restores broken relationships

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas where you need to grow in loving leadership

- Pray for specific relationships in the group that need Christ's healing touch

- Commit to being living portraits of Christ's love this week

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### ## For Next Week

- Read Ephesians 6:1-9 (continuing in the Prison Epistles series)
- Continue practicing your chosen Life Change Challenge
- Be prepared to share one way you saw Christ redeem a relationship this week

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### ## Leader Notes

- **Sensitivity:** This passage can be difficult for those who've experienced abuse or manipulation in the name of "submission" or "headship." Emphasize that Paul's model is always Christ-like—sacrificial, loving, and elevating—never controlling or demeaning.
- **Time Management:** If your group is large, consider breaking into smaller groups of 3-4 for the personal reflection questions.
- **Follow-up:** Check in with group members mid-week via text to encourage them in their Life Change Challenge.