

Title: God's love changes our marriage Part 1
Text: Ephesians 5:22-24

July 14, 2019
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We are in a series on the book of Ephesians called "God's love changes everything." And today, as we read God's word, what we are going to see is that **God's love changes our marriage**. So to help me with this message I've asked my wonderful wife Keren to join me. Will you welcome her to the stage? There are so many aspects of marriage where it's certainly fine for a man to speak into, but there are some specific areas where it is more helpful for a woman to speak into. Keren is one of the most discerning and wise women I've ever met in my life, and I think our discussion on marriage is going to be so much better with her help. Since we are talking about marriage today, why don't you share the story of how we met.

Keren: My older brother actually introduced us. He heard Dan teach a Bible study, loved it, and invited Dan over to my parents' house for the weekly meal that we had together. Dan enjoys telling this part of the story more than I do, but Dan and I ended up sitting across from one another at the table. Conversation was going great; we were enjoying getting to know Dan and about halfway through the meal I started tapping/rubbing the table leg with my foot. Eventually, I notice that Dan is looking a little more intently at me than anyone else and I realize I'm not rubbing the table leg. I'm rubbing Dan's leg.

DAN: I wasn't going to say anything. I thought it was just some good ol' fashioned Kentucky hospitality! It took us several years to end up together, which in and of itself is a long story but we ended up marrying about four years ago and marriage really has been an incredible gift from God.

Before we jump into our discussion on marriage, know that it is not my heart to exclude anyone from the discussion (those who are single, divorced, widowed). Part of going through a book of the Bible means that we will hit on topics that don't directly relate to everyone. There may be times when we talk about singleness and dating, and it doesn't seem that relevant to those who are married. We may talk about raising children, and that's hard because your children are already out of the house, or because you are still praying, hoping for God to bless you with children. We may talk about how to relate to your boss, and you may be self-employed or retired. You get the point. Our goal is simply to walk through the books of the Bible so we can understand the whole of scripture, and know what God wants for every situation, whether or not it directly applies to us in our present season of life. The next two weeks we are going to talk about marriage, but if we come humble and open, I guarantee there will be something relevant for everyone.

We will be the first to say that we don't have a perfect marriage, but we love our marriage. Though at times marriage can be challenging, we have seen God do incredible things in our lives through marriage. We've also had the opportunity to do mentoring with young couples who are getting ready for marriage. We've done counseling with couples who have hit a difficult stretch in their marriage. So many times we have witnessed God change lives. Individuals and marriages where you thought there might be no hope, where people were ready to throw in the towel and just be done - God has brought about a miracle. We know that some people who are here with us today are in a really tough place. Maybe marriage isn't what you expected. Maybe having kids is a lot harder than you anticipated. Maybe financial stress and inlaws and health concerns have

discouraged you greatly. Maybe the friendship has gone away. The intimacy has gone away. The trust has gone away. If you are married, no matter where your marriage might be at today, here's what we have to know: God is not done working yet! He's not done with you yet, he is not done with your spouse yet; he is not done with your marriage yet!

One of the passages that I think is really helpful about marriage is found in Acts 5. This is where a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira sell a field, and then keep half of the money for themselves and give the other half to the church. Incredibly generous. 50% to the church! But here's the catch - instead of telling the truth and saying, "We're giving 50%" they lie and say, "We're giving everything to the Lord." And do you remember what happened to them? They died. Now here's why I tell you that story. It's not because we're not asking for 50% of your money or 100% of your money. That's not it! In fact, I want to move away from the financial component entirely. And here's why: There are a lot of couples in the church who say with their mouths, "We are a couple who is 100% devoted to the Lord. We put Jesus first, we do things God's way. We are all in!" That's what they say. That's what they advertise. But in reality, they are holding parts of their life and parts of their marriage back and are only giving God the 50%. Keren and I have been praying about this message for a long time now, and we keep praying that as a church, we would move to a place where every couple in our church would say, "God, we are 100% committed to you. As a couple or as a family, we are entirely surrendered. We are all in. We are doing things your way."

Keren: As Dan and I have counseled with many couples in tough places, we've seen incredible breakthroughs. But we've also seen some couples stay stuck and we've seen some couples give up altogether. But do you know what the common denominator is for the couples who experience breakthrough? Humility. They come to God with open hands and open hearts and a willingness to learn new things from his Word. So whether you've studied this passage before or it's new to you, we will get so much more out of it if we face it with humility and honesty about whether we're actually doing it or not.

Dan--Let me set the cultural context for this passage. Everything that Paul writes here is in dramatic contrast to the cultural norms of his day. In this letter, he gives wives more honor and value than any other writer in the ancient world, and at the same time he gives husbands a higher standard for leadership than any other writer in the ancient world. He reminds us of God's ultimate purpose for marriage. That marriage isn't just two people coming together because they like each other, or because their families would benefit from the union, or because of societal expectations, Marriage is a man and a woman coming because God wants their relationship to be a living picture of his gospel to the world. And because that is God's purpose for marriage, that shapes everything that Paul says.

Let's dive in and see how Paul begins this section. 5:22-24, 33 **22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything....33 The wife must respect her husband.** We are going to make this a two-part sermon. We are going to spend time today talking about God's instructions to wives, and then pick up next week and talk about his instructions to husbands. This is a two-part sermon; you can't listen to just one week and have what you need. In the Greek, Paul writes 47 words to wives and 147 words to

husbands. One hundred more words, three times as many. So men, be sure to be here next week! But today, we are focusing on the verses to wives. There are basically two instructions that God gives wives: **“Wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”** **“The wife must respect her husband.”** So basically everything comes down to two words: **submission** and **respect**. I recognize that these words are somewhat countercultural and can even make us feel uncomfortable at times.

Keren: Which I think is why Dan brought me up here today. A few years ago, Dan and I were teaching a Bible study and when we got to this passage, Dan asked the women in the room to raise their hands if they cringe when they hear the word “submission.” Every single woman raised her hand. And then he asked the guys if it made them uncomfortable, and they all raised their hands too.

DAN: This is one of those areas that is challenging for us. Most of us don’t like the word submission...especially those who are called to do it! But instead of rejecting it, or minimalizing it, or writing it off, this is one of those areas where we have to come to God’s word with humility and say, “God, teach me how this is supposed to look in my life.” Keren and I are close friends with a Christian couple from our old church, and I remember having a conversation with them about this. They told us they understand what the Bible says about roles in marriage, but that because the woman is a really strong leader, they figured out a way that works better for them. They’re really happy with it. I think I understood where they were coming from, but I looked at them and said with a lot of love, “That’s not Christianity. We don’t get to pick and choose what we apply and what we don’t. If we are followers of Jesus, our desire has to be to do things his way, not ours!” When you read these 12 verses on marriage in Ephesians 5, Jesus is mentioned 11 different times. 11 times in 12 verses. What does that tell us? We are not supposed to choose a paradigm for marriage because of our personal preference, based on our personalities, based upon cultural norms, but based on Jesus. If our number one goal in marriage is to honor Jesus and reflect his love to the world, that changes how we approach words like submission and respect.

With that being said, let’s focus on the first word, **submission**. Keren, let me ask you: What do you think it looks like for a woman to submit to her husband?

Keren: First, I’d like to say that I’m not naturally a submissive person. If you had told me five years ago that I would be on a stage talking about submission, I would have laughed at you. Before Dan and I married, several of my mentors said that submission would be really hard for me. And, sometimes it is hard – especially when it conflicts with my agenda and what I think is best. But when my desire is to obey God, I’m able to give up the need to have my own way. I’m able to put Dan first, and find a lot of joy in doing it.

Submission looks different for each couple because it’s less about specific actions and more about our disposition toward our husbands. It’s voluntarily yielding to them in love. It’s saying, “You lead, I’d love to follow you.” It’s interesting - the New Testament never tells husbands to make their wives submit. Instead, God invites us to submit. We can choose to support our husbands and champion them with all the giftings God has given us. Or we can make their job to lead really difficult.

I want to tell on myself a little bit to describe what submission is not. The other day, Dan and I were giving someone a gift, and he wanted to give it in a different way than I did. When we couldn't agree, I said, "Well, you're the leader, I'll do it your way, but only because I have to" and more or less stomped out of the room. THAT was not submission. My spirit wasn't in the right place. What I should have said was, "I'd be glad to do it that way." And really mean it.

Dan: I love what you are talking about, Keren, "The willingness to gladly let your husband lead." Submission doesn't mean being a slave. It's not being a doormat to be walked on. It doesn't mean that it's your job to bring your husband pretzels and give him foot rubs while he watches ESPN all day (though if you did that one or two days a year they would probably really love it! (And let me speak a word to those who might be in a dangerous situation. Submission does not mean allowing abuse to continue in your marriage. If you are in harm's way in your marriage, the most loving and honorable thing you can do is reach out to someone and get help. We as a church are here for you if you need help). There are a lot of things that submission is not that we have to disassociate with. It revolves around the willingness to gladly follow your husband's leadership. *Just like the church gladly follows Christ's leadership.*

Ladies, if I could speak to you from a man's perspective. Nothing is more empowering to a man, and nothing calls him to a higher level of leadership, than when you look at your husband and say: "You are our leader, I trust you. I will gladly support you as you lead our family to honor God."

Husbands, we have to appreciate how hard it is to be submitted to another person. It can be scary - I mean, what if you make the wrong decision, what if you head off in the wrong direction? That's why it is so, so, so important that even as a wife is submitted to the spiritual authority of her husband, the husband is submitted to the spiritual authority in his life—under the Lordship of Jesus, under the guidance pastor, the elders of the church, his close Christian friends that he is accountable to. Before Paul says "Wives submit yourself to your husbands in 5:22, what does he say in 5:21? "**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**" So if you are connecting the dots, a husband should be able to say to his wife, "Look at my life, you can see that I am gladly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus. You can see that I am gladly submitted to the spiritual authority of my community. And not only does the husband model submission for his wife, but it also provides an incredible safety net to his wife. Because she is not only submitted to him, she's submitted to him, as he walks in submission to the godly people in his life.

A real practical example: A few months into our marriage I was planning on investing \$500 into something. When I told Keren about it, she didn't think it was a great idea. But very kindly she said, "Why don't you talk to Trent about that. And if he says it's a good idea, then do it. Trent is a close friend and a financial advisor. And I knew that if I asked him for his advice, he would tell me it was a really risky investment and that it wasn't a wise use of money. So I quickly decided not to do it. Was Keren willing to be submitted to me? And she was very respectful. But I was willing to be submitted to the godly, wise men in my life, and that protected her.

So that's the first word, submission, the second word is **respect**. Keren, what comes to your mind when you hear the word respect?

Keren: First I think about the depiction of marriage that we see in popular comedies. The husband is usually clueless and making a mess of things and the wife has to set him straight. This depiction is so far from what it should be.

I really love the way the Amplified Bible defines a wife's respect for her husband. It says, "**The wife must see to it that she respects and delights in her husband [that she notices him and prefers him and treats him with loving concern, treasuring him, honoring him, and holding him dear.]**"

Respect often comes down to how we talk to our husbands, and that includes facial expressions, body language and tone of voice ... the rolling of our eyes! We make fun of them, cut them down, are sarcastic, impatient, short and irritated and then we come up with excuses for our disrespect. I'm tired, you were rude first, you left me with the kids all day, you're on your phone all the time ... It is so easy to fall into these patterns of communicating where it actually feels normal. What I have found helpful is to ask Dan whether I'm doing anything that doesn't honor him and then I bring my close friends in on that conversation and ask them to help me and pray for me and keep me accountable. I don't love being called out, but in the long run, I'm really grateful.

Dan: If I can speak to the ladies one more time: this is such a critical part of how God wired your husband. If feeling pursued and loved and cherished and romanced is the way to speak into your soul and make you feel like a million bucks, showing your husband respect is the way to do that for him. For you to build him up in public, for you to compliment him on his leadership, for you to champion his victories, for you to praise him for ways he's growing, that is so empowering, like wind in his sails. A man is not motivated by complaints, nagging, criticism, or snide remarks in front of your friends. Those things will crush his soul, even if he doesn't show it right away. Men crave the respect of their wife; they thrive on it. So find ways to show respect to your husband. I can almost guarantee you there will be a shift in your relationship.

When God created men and women, he created us differently. That should be pretty obvious to all of us. We see this in Genesis 2, in the very beginning. After God created each aspect of the world he said, "**It is good.**" Then he created man and said, "**It is NOT good for man to be alone.**" Genesis 2:18 So what did God do? The rest of the verse says, "**I will make a helper suitable for him.** This word "**helper**" is another word that it is pretty easy to wrestle with. Keren, would you flesh out some of the meaning of that word and talk about the struggle it can be?

Keren: This word is so hard that we often try to dress it up. Culture tells us that if we're not leading, we're not living up to our full potential. We're supposed to follow our dreams and live life to the fullest. Ultimately it is very self-focused. But that's not the wisdom the Bible gives us. Instead of making life about the realization of our goals, we need to walk in unity with our husbands as we pursue a common goal together. For example, I know that God has called Dan to accomplish specific things with his life, and instead of pursuing all of my passions, one of God's callings on my life is to support Dan, to be his helpmate. This past week, I ran into some of my colleagues from before I was married. We talked about my time as a newspaper editor and lobbyist on the hill and they reminded me of some of the leadership positions I turned down to

get married. But, it has been such a privilege to lay aside some of my preferences to help my husband. That is a unique calling God gives wives.

Let me take a moment to speak to the single women in the room. When I was getting to know Dan, the question I was asking God was not, “Is he attractive, is he funny, will he provide for me?” I was asking God, “What is the calling on Dan’s life? And is it that what you want to do with my life?” I wanted to really figure out what God wanted to accomplish through Dan and then determine if I was the right helpmate for him. Single women...that is the question I would really encourage you to ask. And if a man doesn’t yet know what his vision is, if he doesn’t know what God is calling him to, it might be best to let him figure that out with God before you jump in!

Dan: I can’t tell you what it means to me, as a man and as a leader, to have a wife who actually wants to be my helpmate. Women, if you want to empower and encourage your husband like never before, go to this passage and then look at your husband and say, “Whatever God has called you to, I want to help you live it out.”

That is relevant and a lot easier if your husband is a Christian. Keren, what would you say to the women who are here today who love God, who agree with everything we’ve talked about in regards to submission and respect and being a helpmate, but whose husbands are either non-believers or who are very immature in their faith, and it’s really, really hard for them to live these things out?

Keren: I know a lot of women in this room are in this position and it requires deep dependence on God. The natural tendency is to talk about it - urging him to attend church, lead better at home, pray or read his Bible. But this often turns into nagging and becomes counterproductive. God knew that many women would find themselves in this position and he asks them to do the very same thing as women with godly husbands. He says to win your husband over with love and respect. Look at 1 Peter 3:1-2 **Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.** This is infinitely harder but it is the fastest route to a man’s heart – not more words but through supernatural love. And I’ve personally encountered so many beautiful stories about how husbands have come to know Christ because of the example of their wives, sometimes after decades!

Dan: There is so much in God’s word about how to honor him in marriage. Today, we have talked about wives, next week we are going to see what God has to say to men. Make sure to join us for that, it’s the second part of the conversation. And there are two things I want to invite you to: **All night prayer**. Come and do this with your spouse! Second, and sign up for this extended class on **Marriage on Monday** nights. You won’t want to miss it.

Invite forward for prayer.