

The Meaning of Marriage

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Who have you been friends with for the longest amount of time? How did you first meet?
2. Are your overall feelings about marriage mostly positive or mostly negative? How did what you witnessed in your own parents' relationship influence your view?

Read the following passage: Ephesians 5:21-33

God's design for marriage is a lifelong, monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. For many of us marriage can be a difficult topic. It could be that you are presently in a difficult marriage or perhaps you are presently single but wish that you were married. It's important that we have a sober view of marriage as a good thing but not everything. In some ways marriage feels mysterious, with unique opportunities for close connection but also great vulnerability for misunderstanding and pain. Even more than a temporal social arrangement for security and raising children, marriage is an opportunity to incarnate the Gospel. In marriage the love and respect between husband and wife are to portray the relationship between Christ and the Church to the onlooking world.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. The call for wives to "submit to their husbands" can strike us modern westerners as offensive. Unfortunately some people have used this to cause harm. How should the greater emphasis upon the following command for husbands to love their wives protect against misuse and abuse? Have you ever seen a couple model the application of this teaching in a healthy way?
2. What could it look like for a husband to love his wife like Christ loves the Church? If you are married, in what ways do you need to change how you are relating to your spouse in light of this command?
3. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says to the unmarried "it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Why is self control such an important part of the Christian life? Share an example for how your self control has been tested recently.
4. Read Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Corinthians 7:25-28. The Biblical view is to honor marriage but not idolize it. What does it look like for you to have a balanced view of

both marriage and singleness? Do you find yourself more prone to overly elevate or overly diminish the value of marriage? How about singleness?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. In what way might those who are single find it easier to focus on the Lord? How can those who are married still pursue Christ while also honoring their marriage commitment?
6. In whatever your current situation (single or married) what could it look like for you to live a life of “undistracted devotion” to Jesus (1 Corinthians 7:35)? What things in your life are currently pulling your focus and affection away from Jesus? What will you do about it and how can those in the group help?

Pray