Walking as Family
Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships.

Ephesians 5:22–6:4
Memory Verses: Ephesians 6:2-3

Read Ephesians 5:22–6:9, First Thoughts (p. 124), and Understand the Context (p. 124). As you read, ask God to open your eyes to the truths in His Word.

Study Ephesians 5:22–6:4, using Explore the Text on pages 125–129. Review Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys), noting the significance that Paul visited Ephesus in both his second and third missionary journeys.

Plan the group time, using Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 130–131) and More Ideas (p. 132). Keep in mind the main idea of this week’s study: Believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships. Consult QuickSource for additional questions that you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for this week’s study.

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

Gather the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; ☐ Enlist a couple to share about the role of submission of wives and Christlike love of husbands in their marriage; and ☐ Note cards and pens for each group member. Make copies of the following Pack Item (if needed): ☐ Pack Item 12 (Handout: Unity in the New Testament).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Frequently, a relationship is described in these terms: “Well, it’s complicated.” What does that really mean? It could indicate the absence of a genuinely committed relationship. On the other hand, a truly loving relationship isn’t always easy; it may indeed be complicated. Nowhere do we need this clarification more than our closest family relationships—between a husband and a wife, and between parents and children.

(In PSG, p. 109) What factors make a marriage relationship complicated? How do these factors impact other family relationships?

**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**EPHESIANS 5:22–6:9**

Like Jewish society, Greco-Roman political leaders understood the household to be the basic building block of the state. Their philosophers wrote heavily about the relationships of authority and subordination in the home. They believed that order in the home created an ordered society. The Roman Empire was a paternal society, with the rights of the man elevated far above that of the women, children, and slaves. Yet, women in the first century were gaining greater legal and domestic independence than in previous centuries. Children and slaves had few rights, and the authority of the husband over them was near absolute. Slaves were considered part of the household, and even their religious preferences were dictated by the patriarch of the family. Romans were offended when their slaves converted to Judaism or Christianity.

The prevailing type of marriage according to both Jews and Romans was monogamous, though standards of faithfulness to the marriage bed differed greatly in Roman society. In Roman culture, prostitution and adultery were common occurrences.

Against this backdrop of the social institution of the family in the Roman Empire, Paul wrote Ephesians 5:22–6:4. The apostle divided his discussion into the three categories of husband and wife, parent and child, and master and slave. What Paul wrote about each of these categories of relationships was starkly different than the norms of his society. In fact, he centered his entire discussion of family relationships to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

WIVES (EPH. 5:22-24)

VERSES 22-23

Paul began his instructions to the family by encouraging wives to submit to their husbands. The verb does not appear in the Greek text of verse 22 but is assumed from the previous verse, where all Christians were told to submit to one another in the fear of Christ (v. 21). Like in the previous verse, this submission was voluntary and based on the proper ordering of an institution, in this case, the family. It did not imply that husbands were more capable or important than wives or that all women should submit to men outside of the marriage relationship. It simply created an environment in the home where order and respect were present.

Paul encouraged wives to submit as to the Lord. He was not implying that the relationship of the wife to her husband is directly comparable to her relationship with her Lord, but rather it is a duty she assumes not for her husband alone but for her Lord. This parallels Colossians 3:18, which says, “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.” She submits because it is an act of service to her Lord.

(In PSG, p. 112) How has modern society misunderstood this command for wives to submit to husbands?

Submission in the home reflects the relationship between Jesus and His church. Paul stated that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. The metaphor of the head has been oft-discussed, and most commentators either view it as carrying some sense of leadership and authority or as the source and point of origin from which women came. According to the first view, the role of the husband was ordained by God for servant leadership in the home because God created man first and entrusted him with those responsibilities. It had nothing to do with capabilities or worth. The second views the head imagery as referring to the man as predating the woman in creation with no attempt to assign any leadership or authority.

Paul showed how marriage is a beautiful picture of the gospel.

Maybe both attempts are missing the imagery. The idea of the head and the body is not that they are in competition with one another but that they are part of the same body, functioning in different roles. In a stroke of the pen, Paul showed how marriage is a beautiful picture of the gospel. He said that Jesus is the Savior of the body. He did not say that the husband was the Savior of the wife. Jesus is the Savior of them both.
What does Christ’s leadership in the church say about the husband’s leadership in the home?

VERSE 24
Paul reminded his readers of the relationship between Christ and His church. He stated that the church submits to Christ. What would a church look like without its voluntary submission to Christ? That church would be in chaos. Each member would be seeking his own way and doing what he pleased. A healthy church is a church where its members submit to Christ. This is the same way for marriage. Paul reminded wives that they should submit to their husbands in everything. He did not use the word obey as he did later in Ephesians 6:1 and 6:5. Therefore, the wife was to submit to the husband as he submitted to Christ. If the husband asked her to engage in sinful activities or behaviors or if he asked her to be victimized by abuse, that would negate the equation of her submitting to her husband as to Christ. He cannot and should not force her into obedience. He should love her as Christ loves the church and win her submission by his own servant attitude.

Why is submission not a blanket call to obedience?

VERSES 25-27
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.

VERSE 25-27
Turning from the responsibilities of the wives, Paul commanded husbands to love their wives. In Roman society, it was recognized that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not husbands to their wives. Christianity was revolutionary in that it submitted the characteristic of godly love into the home. Instead of using the words for love that meant sexual love or friendship love, Paul used the word that described the love of God for His children.

Marriage is a call for husbands to die to self and serve their wives.

Paul again showed that marriage was a picture of the gospel. He encouraged husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. The sacrificial death of Jesus is a picture of the attitude and actions that a husband should take as the leader of the home. Marriage is a call for husbands to die to self and serve their wives. How could anyone not submit to one another in this type of setting?

The purpose of Christ’s death was to make the church holy. The word literally meant “to set apart,” and the purpose of Jesus’ death was to set
apart a people for Himself. Jesus longed for His bride as a husband longs for his wife, and Jesus sacrificed Himself to make that bride all that she should be in His eyes. Jesus set apart His bride by **washing of water by the word**. By the word of the gospel believers were transformed from their old way of life to the bride of Christ. Then they were baptized with water, demonstrating an inward transformation. By virtue of Christ’s love, He cleaned and sanctified the believer to make them His own bride. Paul expected a sacrificial attitude of husbands toward their wives.

Jesus sacrificed for His bride to cleanse them, but He also did so to **present the church to himself in splendor**. The word **splendor** was often used of clothing, so the idea is that Jesus’ desire is to present His bride to Himself in eternity as a beautiful bride adorned for the wedding. He listed several characteristics of that transformed bride. She would be **without spot or wrinkle or anything like that**. Incredibly, Christ will present a bride who has no stains of sin and no blemishes of any kind. He will have made all things new when it comes to His bride, and she will be a glorious treasure to Him. Husbands who receive their wives in this context will sacrifice themselves to help their wives display the characteristics of Christ.

**Marriage is more than a living arrangement and more than a means to fulfillment.**

**VERSES 28-30**

Returning to his idea of the husband as the head of the body, Paul declared that husbands should **love their wives as their own bodies**. Jesus loves the church not as if it were His body but because it is His body. Husbands and wives are connected as a head is connected to the body. They are incomplete without each other. Thus the husband who loves his wife in turn **loves himself**. Marriage is more than a living arrangement and more than a means to fulfillment. Marriage creates one new person out of two. Marriage unites the husband and the wife in a way that makes the head and the body want to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). The wife is not a piece of property or a trophy won in conquest. She is part of the man, and he is part of her.

**Why is the body analogy important for one’s view of the permanency of marriage?**

A wise person takes care of his body. He **hates not his own flesh** because the head needs a healthy body. Likewise, the husband cannot merely decide he no longer cares for his bride. Rather, he **provides and cares** for his wife. **Provides** carried the idea of nourishing and providing food. The word **cares** originally had the idea of providing heat, as a mother bird would brood over her nest. (See Deut. 22:6.) The two terms together emphasize the nurturing and cherishing of one’s spouse. Once again, Paul held Christ as the standard.
of how to care for the bride. He had nourished and cherished His church, and in doing so provided a standard for all husbands to follow.

The reason Jesus cared for His church is that all Christians are members of His body. Earlier in Ephesians Paul had spoken about the church as a body and Christ as the head (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:12,16). The two had become one flesh as the husband and wife become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). For the husband not to nourish and cherish his wife would be like neglecting his own flesh or like Christ neglecting His church.

The husband and wife are one flesh in every sense—spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and physically.

VERSES 31-33

31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 to show how two separate individuals become one flesh. It is the divine mystery of marriage. Prior to this verse, Adam had recognized Eve as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23). She was not an addition to him but part of him. The husband leaves behind his old life with father and mother and enters a new relationship where he is joined to his wife. This had the literal sense of bonding or gluing two objects together. They are bonded together in a one flesh relationship. Obviously this refers to the sexual, physical union of a man and a woman, an act reserved only for the marriage relationship. However, in light of all that is said above this verse, it is more than a mere sexual union. The husband and wife are one flesh in every sense—spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and physically. It must be that way as they are one body.

The relationship between Christ and His church was a great mystery. Paul had already used this term four times in Ephesians, and it always described something that was hidden for a time only to be revealed by God in its due time (Eph. 1:9; 3:3,4,9). He would use it again in Ephesians 6:19, and each of the five times it related to the gospel message. The mystery was the hidden plan of God that came to fulfillment in Christ. He called the mystery profound. Paul understood that the original marriage relationship (Gen. 2:24) modeled Christ’s forthcoming union with the church as His body. Thus, Paul’s description of the relationship between a husband and wife presented God’s ideal for all marriages that would point to the relationship between the bride of Christ and Christ Himself.

Paul concluded his portrayal of Christian marriage by summarizing the responsibilities of the husband and wife. First, Paul encouraged the husband to love his wife as himself. He encouraged the wife to respect her husband. This may shed light on what Paul meant by submission. He did not intend to mean the laying aside of all rights and opinions. By submission he meant a healthy respect for the husband and his spiritual leadership in the home.
CHILDREN (EPH. 6:1-3)

VERSES 1-3
The one word that described a child’s relationship with parents was the word obey. This obedience is not based on the parents’ worthiness but on the children's relationship in the Lord. Obedience to the parents is right, meaning that it is a part of God’s divine pattern for children.

Paul quoted the fifth commandment, honor your father and mother (Ex. 20:12), and identified it as the first commandment with a promise. But Exodus 20:6 also carries a promise that God would show faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands. Since that is the case, what did Paul mean by first? Paul probably meant that it was the first commandment of importance to children. They learned obedience to their parents, and in doing so it emphasized the importance of obedience to God.

The promise was that it may go well with you. Paul quoted here from Deuteronomy 5:16. Children who obeyed their parents would have lives that were fulfilled and ordered according to God’s commands. He also promised that you may have a long life in the land. This was tied to the occupation of the promised land. This promise was directly tied to the old covenant, and it would be wrong to deduce that all obedient children will live a long life. Some link the longevity of life with eternal life, but others believer that this promise was only part of the previous covenant.

How can the obedience of children to their parents result in a more fulfilling life?

PARENTS (EPH. 6:4)

VERSE 4
Just as children had the responsibility to obey, parents had the responsibility not to stir up anger in their children. Specifically, this was addressed to the fathers because ultimately discipline reflected their leadership in the home. Inconsistency in discipline and lack of love and nurturing for children can stir up this anger. Instead, parents should raise their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. The first word emphasized a more formal setting of education, while the second term emphasized verbal counsel and exhortation to proper behavior in a less formal setting. Parents have the responsibility of educating their children formally and informally in the ways of the Lord.

What are ways that ineffective parenting stirs up anger in children?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, direct them to read the paragraph on page 109 of the PSG. After most have arrived, ask: What are some specific ways that your family has influenced you, for better or for worse? What factors make a marriage relationship complicated? How do these factors impact other family relationships? (PSG, p. 109) Why do you think family is important to God? Record responses on a board.

SUMMARIZE: Review key points of Understand the Context in the PSG (p. 110). Emphasize the impact our new life in Christ is to have on our family relationships, which will be the focus of today’s discussion.

TRANSITION: Through today’s reading and discussion we’ll be reminded that believers are to demonstrate God’s love in their family relationships. Paul gave several examples of what Christ-centered familial love should look like in action.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Ephesians 5:22-24, while the group records Paul’s key command for wives when they hear it read.

GUIDE: Submission is a polarizing word for many people in our culture, yet it’s a central command of the Christian faith. (See Eph. 5:21.) What are some ways submission is misunderstood by people today? How has this warped people’s perceptions of a wife’s relationship to her husband?

EXPLAIN: Although submission has taken on negative connotations over time, it’s a concept ultimately rooted in love and respect—a mutual yielding to one another. Write the word “submission” on a board. Read the paragraph beginning “The mandate for all Christian wives ...” on page 111 of the PSG.

ASK: Call for responses to the questions on page 112 of the PSG.

READ: Invite another volunteer to read Ephesians 5:25-33, while the group records the main command Paul gave to husbands when they hear it read.

EMPHASIZE: Paul appealed to the example of Christ to illustrate how a husband should act in marriage (PSG, p. 113). Critical to understanding Paul’s teaching in this text is understanding that marriage is designed to be a reflection of the gospel. Call on pre-enlisted volunteers to present a summary of the following verses that describe Jesus’ love for us: Isaiah 53:2-12; John 3:16-18; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 4:7-11. Write the word “love” on a board. Read aloud the following statement from the PSG (p. 113): Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the barometer for a husband’s love for his wife.

SHARE: Invite a pre-enlisted couple to share about how these two commands from Paul (submission of wives and Christlike love of husbands) are lived out in their marriage. Encourage them to share reasons these commands are challenging to obey and ways their marriage has been strengthened when both are living in obedience to these commands.
ASK: How does a marriage demonstrate a couple’s understanding of Christ’s love and the gospel? (PSG, p. 114) For those who aren’t married, how can you apply the principles of submission and Christlike love to your own relationships?

TRANSITION: After detailing the mutual submission and love of a godly marriage, Paul shifted his focus to another family relationship—children and parents.

READ: As you read aloud Ephesians 6:1-3, direct the group to listen for the two commands Paul gave to children. Add these commands to the board.

SUMMARIZE: To help distinguish between the command to obey parents (v. 1) and the command to honor them (v. 2), summarize the commentary from verses 1-3 (pp. 114–115).

ASK: What did it mean to obey your parents when you were a child? Which of those actions would be inappropriate as an adult? (PSG, p. 115) What are some of the best ways we can honor our parents as their adult children? How does respecting one’s parents reflect the gospel story we’re part of?

STATE: Showing respect and honor to one’s parents matters so much to God that He made it one of His Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12). When we show love and respect to our parents, no matter our age, we glorify God and the design for family He created.

EMPHASIZE: Recall Pack Item 12 (Handout: Unity in the New Testament). State: Unity within the body of believers begins—and is often most difficult—in our own families. Especially in strained or difficult relationships, we must rely on the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 6:4. Encourage the group to add to their list on the board the final command, given to parents (fathers in particular).

ASK: How would you articulate the connection between the command to children (vv. 1-3) and the command to parents (v. 4)? Highlight from the PSG (pp. 115–116): A family that demonstrates love in their relationships is a family in which everyone seeks to fulfill what God expects them to do within that family.

ASK: In what ways will Christian parenting be different from secular parenting? (PSG, p. 116)

CONCLUDE: Mutual submission—love and respect for one another—is at the heart of all family relationships. As Paul frequently pointed out, the only way one can live in obedience to the commands Paul set forth in this passage is through the power and presence of Jesus at work in your own life.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Review the statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 117). Distribute note cards and instruct each person to record the statement(s) that apply to them. Encourage them to carry these cards as reminders of how God desires for them to relate to their families.

CHALLENGE: Discuss the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 117): As a group, discuss how the group can encourage godly marriages in your community. What actions do you need to take as an individual to encourage godly marriages?

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God that He has ordained the family as the foundational institution of society. Pray all will glorify Him in their familial roles by loving and respecting others.
PRACTICE

• Contact any group members who were absent from this session. Let them know the study was about family relationships, and ask if there is anything you can pray with them about.

• Text or email the group during the week. Remind them of the high standards to which God calls His people—a standard rooted in loving others the way Christ loves us. Encourage them to continue learning the memory verse (Eph. 6:2-3), and to be sure and attend next week for the final week of the Ephesians study.

• Spend time personally reflecting on the following question from In My Context (PSG, p. 117): What do you need to do to honor your parents at this point in your life?

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

For an alternative Focus Attention option, spend time as a group making a list of famous families (think: TV, movies, history). Record responses on the board. Guide the group to identify one or two words that capture the essence of that family. An example might be “the Ricardos (from I Love Lucy)—humor and love.”

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To aid in your discussion of Ephesians 5:22-33, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 112) activity in pairs: Reflect on Ephesians 5:22-33, focusing on the imagery. What does the imagery communicate about the importance of marriage? What does it indicate about the permanency of marriage? How can a person safeguard a marriage from outside threats?

• For further application of Ephesians 6:1-3, encourage the group to memorize Ephesians 6:2-3 this week. Remind the group that even if their parents are no longer alive, they can encourage friends, grandchildren, and others in their lives to obey this important command.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Review the commands given by Paul that were recorded on the board. Lead the group to suggest ways these commands could be lived out this week. Direct each person to select at least two actions listed and commit to doing those actions this week.

Invite another volunteer to share his or her story of life before and after Christ. (See Session 9.)

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play the song “Broken Vessels,” by Hillsong United, or sing “Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound,” by John Newton. Remind the group that we are all broken people, trying to be in relationship with other broken people, but through Jesus our relationships are made whole.