

**Elephants in the Room: The Marriage Elephant**  
**Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-6, and Ephesians 5:21-33 (esp. 31-32)**  
**Small Group Discussion Guide**

Warm-up question:

- If you are single, and you desire to be married, what is the greatest hope that you have for your marriage? If you are married, thinking back to when you decided to marry your spouse, what were you hoping to find in marriage?
- What is your first, gut response to the question, “What is the purpose of marriage?” (Don’t think of the “right” answer, but what first strikes you.)
  - To find love and fulfillment.
  - To procreate children.
  - To find sexual fulfillment.
  - To serve and love another.
  - To improve our character and godliness.
  - To have a partner as you go through life.

1. This past Sunday, Pastor Josh talked about the “elephant” of marriage.<sup>1</sup> He stated that the Bible shows there are “at least three foundational purposes that God has for marriage.”

**TAKE TURNS READING Genesis 2:18-24**

- a. Josh stated that in Genesis 1:1 of our passage, God reviewed his creation six times and “saw that it was good” or “very good.” Then in contrast, in Gen 2:18, God states, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” **Does this statement provide a clue as to one of the purposes of marriage? If so, explain.**
- b. The use of the word “helper” can be misunderstood. The following passages reflect the most common use of the Hebrew word “ezer” in the Old Testament. **Do they give you a clue as to the woman’s role as a “suitable helper” for a man? Explain.**
  - i. Ps 33:20 our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.
  - ii. Ps 54:4 But surely, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.
  - iii. Ps 70:5 but I am afflicted and needy; hasten to me, O god! you are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.
  - iv. Ps 89:19 once you spoke in vision to your godly ones, and said, “I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.”
- c. Gen 2:23 states, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” How does this shed light on a woman’s role as a “suitable helper.”
- d. Scholars say that Adam’s statement in Gen 2:23 is a “covenant-ratifying oath,” which reflects a lifelong commitment to another. How does this clarify the purpose of marriage?

**2. TAKE TURNS READING Matthew 19:4-6**

- a. This passage shows that God is the author of marriage and he designed it to be a life-long commitment that humans should not break. Pastor Josh states that the first purpose of marriage is “to satisfy our need for intimate relationship.” **How do these two facts from this passage about marriage foster intimacy?**

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<sup>1</sup> Note: space prohibits a full discussion of singleness. The Bible refers to singleness as a “gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7). “Both Jesus and Paul indicate that such a call to singleness allows unmarried men and women to devote greater and more undistracted attention to religious service (see esp. 1 Cor. 7:32–35)... In fact, at certain times and in certain situations singleness is preferable to marriage (1 Cor. 7), though marriage continues as the norm (Matt. 19:4–6).” See <http://www.biblicalfoundations.org/the-gift-of-singleness/> for a fuller treatment.

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- b. In Gen 2:24 God uses the concept of “one-flesh.” Do you think that, in context, this only applies to the physical? How does this notion foster relational intimacy?
3. Pastor Josh stated that **God’s second purpose of marriage is to sanctify us (making us holy, better people, becoming more like Jesus).**
  - a. How has your spouse “sanded off your rough edges” and helped you to be a better person (or for those who are single, a really close friend)?
  - b. Husbands, Eph 5:25 instructs you to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up (died for) her.” How can you do this better in the future?
  - c. Wives, Eph 5:21-33 says to “submit”<sup>2</sup> or respect your husbands. Just as Jesus, though equal with God the Father, submitted to him, wives, as equal partners, are to respectfully submit to their husbands.
    - i. First, does this idea grate on you even though Jesus had the role of submission? Explain.
    - ii. Second, how can you show respect to your husband better in the future?
4. Pastor Josh states that **God’s third purpose of marriage is “to show us a lived out picture of God’s grace.”**

**READ THE FOLLOWING (Ephesians 5:31-33):** "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. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

- a. What is the dominating characteristic of the relationship between Jesus and us, his church?
  - b. Where is the line between grace and accountability? It is important to discern the balancing point, otherwise, a lack of grace can turn into judgment and too much grace can turn into free license, codependency, and abuse.
  - c. What would grace look like in a marriage? How do we act grace-fully toward each other?
  - d. This is an “ouch” question: If God gave you the same grace you give your spouse, in how much trouble would you be? ☺
5. **PRAYER:** Among our prayers for each other, let’s pray for radically healthy marriages that reflect such intimacy, holiness, and grace that it attracts the world around us to God.

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<sup>2</sup> See addendum on next page for a treatise on Respectful Submission and Sacrificial Love in Marriage.

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**Addendum: Respectful Submission and Sacrificial Love in Marriage**

Submitted by Randy Fowler

The issue of submission is possibly one of the largest “elephants” in the church, though it need not be. Sadly, this is due in part to Christian men overplaying the “submit card” in their marriages and abusing their wives, contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Another abuse is enforcing strict roles within the home. While I do believe that women and men have some differences per Scripture (see love vs. respect in Ephesians 5:33), these differences are often overemphasized in Christian homes. Notice how vocationally involved and gifted the praised woman is in Proverbs 31, or how Deborah is a Judge, or how Priscilla and Aquilla are an evangelistic training team. In my home, I write the poetry and Coleen wields the power tools. And yet, I do martial arts and Coleen couldn’t kill a bug. Our roles and interests are mixed.

Nevertheless, Scripture is clear that wives submit to their husbands, directing them to do so eight times in six passages (1Cor 14:34; 1Tim 2:11; 1Pet 3:1, 5; Eph 5:22, 24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:4-5). “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church...” (Eph 5:22-23). This submission has precedence as equality exists in the Trinity, and yet Christ submits to the Father (Mt 26:39; Heb 5:8).

However, truly healthy marriages are reflected in reciprocal servanthood (Eph 5:21). Husbands are to love their wives sacrificially “as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). They are to treat them sensitively (Col 3:19) and with honor (1Pet 3:7). Thus, men should be willing to die to themselves before taking advantage of their spouses’ submission!

On a personal note, I will have been married 19 years on September 2nd. From Coleen’s perspective, submission on a daily basis simply looks like respect. Practically, this can be seen in that she asks my opinion more often than she used to, trusts my perspective more, and tries not to get into conflict with me in public.

From my perspective, I try to love Coleen sacrificially (though I’m not sure I do a very good job; I could be much more sensitive). I support Coleen in front of the kids, I offer to watch the kids and in other ways try to protect her Sabbath time, and I try to seek her out to talk (which is no sacrifice).

In the first century when the New Testament was written, the gospel writers presented a radical view of marriage. Women were second-class citizens in those days, could not inherit wealth, few could earn a living, and were in danger of being destitute if divorced. Thus, Matthew 19:4-6 emphasizing the permanence of marriage and Ephesians 5:21-33 highlighting the equally sacrificial role of the husband were radically liberating during those times. Christian marriages were a great witness of Christ to the world. What woman would not have wanted to marry a Christian man during that time? May our marriages be equally and radically a witness to our world.