

SESSION 11 (Joint): A MAN AND HIS WIFE (Ephesians 5 v 21-33)

THE BIG IDEA

Marriage is designed by God to be a picture of how Christ leads His people lovingly and sacrificially (a husband); and how His people lovingly submit to Him (a wife).

Note:

Your teenager (probably!) isn't married! But there are some good reasons for thinking carefully about the biblical view of marriage:

- It's good to realise that God sets the agenda for what we think about in the Bible, not our questions or current issues.
- Knowing what marriage is helps us to think about issues like dating and sexual ethics.
- Marriage helps us understand the relationship between Christ and His people, the church.

Do keep in mind the teenager's family background as you go through this study. Marriage may be a very raw topic.

GUIDANCE FOR QUESTIONS:

Because the Bible's view of marriage is always based on the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, we start in Genesis 2 v 21-25 before going to Ephesians.

1. Marriage (v 24—"A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife").
2. Perfect. They didn't want to hide anything from each other; they had no insecurities or embarrassment; they could trust each other completely. This was a perfect human relationship.
3. Because it would remind you of how lovely that place was.
4. It would be worth *something* (if only the paper it's printed on!). The better the likeness, the more valuable it would be. But it would never be as good as the real place itself.

Note: When you reach the image on page 60, return to the answers to Q3 and Q4. The idea is that marriage is a picture of something more wonderful than marriage itself—the relationship between Jesus and His church. Marriage is valuable in and of itself; and the more it portrays the love between Jesus and His church, the more valuable and enjoyable a marriage will be. But it can never be as good as the relationship it pictures.

5. Christ's example, in loving His church (this simply means His followers) and in giving Himself up for "her".

6. He gave Himself up for His followers. Make sure you both understand this means that, ultimately, He died for His church.

7. To die for her. It means giving up what's easiest, most comfortable, or most fun for you as a husband, and doing whatever it takes to do what's best for your wife. You won't have to die every day (obviously!), or perhaps ever—but every day, you will die to what you want, to do what's best for your wife.

8. The beginning of verse 27 is the place to focus—“radiant”, “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish”.

9. “Holy” (ie: pure) and “blameless” (ie: not having done anything wrong in God's sight).

10. A woman's purity, and the way she lives to please God. That should be more important to us as men than how a woman looks physically; and a husband's main aim in his marriage should be to help his wife continue to follow Jesus, and to do so better and better. It's worth pausing here to ask: how is this different from what films, magazines and our friends say matters most? How do you feel about this idea of the inner beauty of godliness being far more important?

Pause on the picture after Section E (p60 in the booklet): it might help you link this back to Q3 and Q4 by asking:

What is marriage a picture of? What should we be reminded of when we look at a husband and a wife together?

Is marriage worth anything in itself (Yes! Just as a picture can be great in and of itself.)

Is it as good as what it points to? (no! Jesus' love is better and achieves more than a husband's. Being a submitting follower of Jesus is more important and more wonderful than being a wife.)

11. If your teenager struggles to come up with these differences, you could read out the “society” statements here, and get him to come up with the biblical response to them by asking: Does the Bible agree with this view? Why/why not?

Society: Sex is to be had as early as possible, as much as possible, and probably with lots of different people. It might be that you choose only to have sex with someone you're in love with—but it's definitely crazy to wait till you're married. That would mean you were missing out.

Bible: Sex is a wonderful gift, to be kept for someone you can totally trust, and be honest and open with, because you know they're sticking with you for life—a marriage partner. If you have it outside that wonderful relationship, you're missing out—and you're making yourself miss out on enjoying sex only within marriage.

Society: Marriage is a temporary thing, between two people, man and woman, two guys, or two women. If you stop feeling that you're in love, or the other person doesn't make you happy, then you can leave. And if you just want to live with someone, that's fine—you don't need to get married.

Bible: Marriage is a lifelong commitment, designed by God, between one man and one woman. It's the place where sex is to be enjoyed. It's the place where you can be yourself—where you can be open, honest, vulnerable, trusting. It's wonderful!

Society: Husbands and wives have the same role in a marriage. (Apart, obviously, from the fact that wives are the ones who give birth!)

Bible: Husbands are the loving, sacrificial head of a marriage. It's their responsibility to lead the marriage, giving up what's easiest for them to do what's best for their wife—even if that involves dying for them. Their main aim is to help their wife keep following Jesus, and to become a better follower of Jesus.

Wives love and submit to their husbands, letting them lead and encouraging them to do it. They let their husbands give up what they want to do what's best for the wife.

12. We need to ask: Am I willing to die for this girl? Am I going to, with God's help, put her first every day, even when I'm tired, or annoyed, or ill? Is my greatest desire for this girl that she keeps living as a Christian, and do I help her to love Jesus better and better? Am I willing to commit to her for life, whatever happens? If she got ill the day after our wedding and never did anything for me again, would I stick by her, loving her and doing what's best for her?

We need to ask: Is there a possibility I might marry this girl one day? Ie: is she a Christian, do we help each other follow Jesus, would I want to have sex with her once we're married? And, will I be able, with God's help, to go out with her and not be sexually immoral, because that would mean taking away her joy of only knowing her husband sexually, and it would mean stealing her future husband's (me, or someone else) joy of knowing she'd not already been sexually active with someone before marriage?

These are all big, and challenging, questions. It's worth pointing out that it's not the kind of thing most teenage guys ask! But Christian guys should do, because our love is meant to be like Jesus' love—giving, not greedy. We're meant to live as real men, not children who just are out to get what we want. And we are supposed to treat girls as real people, not just ways to sound impressive to our mates, or get pleasure for ourselves. It's very easy with marriage, sex and dating just to do the easy thing, especially when everyone else seems to be; but Christian men should be real men, and do the right thing.

Note: There are a couple of pages on what the Bible says about the issue of dating on page 66; and a couple of pages on a biblical view of homosexuality, too.