

#2, “One Simple Question” //

First Love, Ephesians 5:21

Announcement:

We have begun a series on relationships.

And throughout this series, we have multiple resources that we want to make available to you as tools to enhance your relationships. Be sure that you're keeping up with them at summitrdu.com/firstlove. You'll want to note **2 events** that we have scheduled the next few weeks to supplement what is going on:

The first is our ***Gospel Centered Marriage: Finances Seminar*** starting next week, led by our Pastor of Counseling, Brad Hambrick:

- “Finances” is usually THE area that creates the most conflict in our relationships, and a lot of you simply lack the tools to wisely about your money, so this seminar will help you do things like think biblically about money; develop a budget; get out of debt; and learn to talk about money with your spouse without punching each other.

The other is our ***Equip Seminar on gender roles*** on April 23: *One of the biggest areas of confusion in our culture has to do with gender roles—what the Bible does and doesn't say.* We've got a great night planned for you on this.

Introduction:

Couple of important points from last week: **First**, *there are no married people issues; only single people issues that get worse in marriage.* Marriage doesn't **create** problems; it merely **exposes** them.

- *Let me apologize in advance for this illustration*, but how many of you saw the **Louisville/Duke** game a couple of weeks ago

where the Louisville player broke his leg? It might be the nastiest sports injury I've ever seen. When you watch the replay, it didn't really look that bad; it looked like just a normal jump and landing, but it snapped his shinbone in half and tore through the skin... They say something was already wrong with bone (disease, a hairline fracture), because that kind of pressure should not have broken the bone unless there was already something wrong with it.

- *The jump and landing didn't create the problem; it just revealed it.*
- In the same way, *the pressures of marriage don't create problems in our hearts; it just reveals them.*
 - And some of you don't want to admit that, because you want to blame your spouse, or your marriage, for all your problems, but, if you were honest with yourself, you'd probably admit that your marriage is just unearthing the existing problems in your heart—**selfishness; control impatience; anger.**

Second, we saw last week that marriage and singleness are, according to Paul, one of the things God uses most to teach us about our relationship to him.

- Paul calls this the **divine mystery of marriage**,¹ and when you unlock this mystery, it will yield so much understanding about what God is doing in your marriage, and why it is the way it is—and even what he's doing in those seasons in your life when you are not married.

Both of those points are going to be really important today, because the Apostle Paul is going to teach us a principle that should undergird all of our relationships.

People say: why are you doing a series related to marriage when you have so many single people at your church? 1. Our focus is on

¹ “Mysterion” in Greek means a wondrous, unlooked-for truth that God is revealing now through his Spirit. Tim Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 45.

the human heart, and what is revealed about it in marriage; 2. I want some of you who are single to know what you are getting into when you get married.

I'm going to try to summarize this principle Paul's going to teach us about relationships today in **one question**—one question that **if you would ask** this question in your relationships, it would transform all of them. It's one of the **secrets to happiness**, and probably **do more to replace strife** with peace than anything else you could do. And not just in marriage, in ALL of your relationships.

(I'm not going to give you that question until about halfway through the message, because I want to let the Apostle Paul build for you the reasoning behind the question—because, I'm warning you, it is VERY counter-intuitive.)

Ephesians 5:21–25

OK, here we go. We'll pick up in vs. 21, where Paul is literally mid-sentence: **...21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to **their husbands.**

OK—*this is probably the most unpopular verse in the NT.*

- When you see someone on TV that wants to dis the Bible, this is one of the verses they always throw out. *“Oh, you can't possibly believe the Bible, it's so backwards, it actually says...”*
- And **sadly**, this verse has sometimes been used as a justification for the subjugation of women.
- But that's because it has been misunderstood and lifted out of its context.

Two quick observations here:

- First of all, what is the first word in verse 22? *“Wives.”* **Who is he talking to in this verse?** Not “husbands.” *Wives.*
 - You husbands will get your own verse in a minute—this verse was not written for you to give you a tool to wield on your wife. If God intended for you to use it that way, he would have addressed the verse to you.
 - So you stay out of your wife's verse. You don't like her messing with your stuff; don't mess with her verse.
- Second, don't forget the verse right before vs. 22: **21...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Now, that's written to every follower of Jesus. We are all to be submitting ourselves to each other; wives to husbands; husbands to wives.
 - *“Wives, submit to your husbands”* is a specific application of a principle given to every follower of Jesus.
 - Now, I am *not* trying to deny that this has unique implications for women in marriage. Just that **this verse is given in an overall context** of a whole new way of looking at relationships and you can **never separate** it from that context!

See, Paul continues: **25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Both husband and wife submit themselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. The husband does so by laying down his life for his wife; the wife by submitting herself to her husband.

This was done, Paul said, to teach us what it means to love like God and be loved by God.

Let's explore this further.

Philippians 2:3–11

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Women:

- Was Jesus equal to God? Yes, of course he was. He was God! But he voluntarily submitted himself to the Father.
- **This was not an assault on his dignity** and did not imply any inferiority on his part. He was fully equal to God.
- If it **wasn't an assault** on his dignity to do that, it's not an assault on yours either.
- **Quite the contrary:** it makes you more like him.
- If it was **not below him** to voluntarily submit to another to whom he was equal, it's not below you, either.

And, what Christ did is an example to you men, too:

- He laid aside **his glory**. He laid aside **his comfort**.
- He **leveraged his power** not for his own benefit but for ours.

There are **two phrases** in that passage that are absolutely counter-intuitive. I had you underline them.

- **2:3, "Count others (and their interests) as more significant than yourselves."** As I walk around each day, I recognize that other people have interests. Sometimes I even want to be empathetic to your interests; but your interests are almost always secondary to *my* interests. Here he is telling us to think of another person's interests as *more important* than our own.

- **(2:7), he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.** When I have power, I leverage it for me. When I have the money; when I have the position, I am using it to serve me. That's what we do. If I know that I am in the right, that's a kind of power, and I press for my rights and I demand them.

But Jesus had these things and he emptied himself and **took** the form of a servant.

- You don't usually **take the form** of a servant. You are **assigned** it. **Jesus took** it.
- If you have a **roommate**, you think of **your interests**; they think of **theirs**; you figure out how to compromise and get along. Jesus walked in and said, "I'm going to think of your interests, not mine."

9 Therefore (underline that too) **God has highly exalted him** (why? Because he thought that way) **and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,**²

- He took the low road, so God gave him the high place.
- He took the role of the servant, so God gave him the name that is above every name.
- A very important principle! God **takes responsibility** to exalt those who humble themselves. **The way up is the way down.** It's completely counter-intuitive.

Mark 10:43–45

Mark 10, James and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, come to Jesus and say, "Jesus, we have a favor, and we want you give it to us." He said, "OK, what is it?" They said, "We want to **sit on your**

² Even the Father gets in on this. The Son submits to the Father; the Father then lifted up the Son to the highest place. In the Trinity, all the members desire to please and to serve each other. They are always lifting each other up. In that way they are submitting themselves to one another, like Paul tells us to do in vs. 21. Keller, 176.

right and left hand (VP and SEC of STATE) in your new kingdom.”

- That’s natural. We stuck with you Jesus; we’ve been loyal; we bought in when stocks were low; so when you’re in power later, we’d really like to sit in your section of heaven; have your box seats overlooking the field.

Jesus said, “That’s how people outside of the kingdom of God think.” ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” **Mark 10:43–45**

This was a *revolutionary* view of power. That someone would use their power to serve someone else? No way. What good is gaining power if you’re not going to use it to serve yourself? Isn’t that why you go after it?

John 13:1–17

On the night before Jesus died, the disciples had just eaten their last meal together, and ⁴ He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet

- Now, that would be gross today, but you have to think about the situation in those days. All those animals that walked the streets, peeing and pooping everywhere. People walked around in open-toed sandals.
- These were not nicely manicured feet where Jesus slipped off their Versace loafers and their satin socks and dabbed their feet with a hot, lemon-fresh towel.
- This was dirty. Humiliating. It was the work of a servant.

Here’s the Lord, who deserves all power and glory, laying it all aside and taking the form of a servant, washing dirty feet.

And not just dirty feet. *Think about it:* In just a few hours, these same feet would carry the disciples away from Jesus as they fled

from him in the hour he needed them most.

This might have been the clearest picture of the cross he gave them that night, even clearer than the bread and the cup, because in just a few hours he would **take off the garments** of glory, **lay aside his power** and his **right to rule** and clothe himself in the **garments of shame** so that we could be **washed in his blood**.

¹² “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **John 13:12–15**

In places where we are “Lord” or “Teacher” or “boss” or “head,” we are to use it to serve, not to be served.

Husbands, whatever power you have, you use it to serve your wife

Wives, whatever power you have, you submit it to your husbands. Serve him.

You say, “He doesn’t deserve it.” Did the disciples deserve for Jesus to wash their feet?

You see, do you remember that phrase back in **Ephesians 5:21**, **“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”**

- They don’t deserve it. But Jesus does.
- Can you imagine being so grateful to someone that any child of theirs you just want to pour out love on...
- Christianity is being so overwhelmed with God’s grace given to you that you become like that...
- It’s a way of saying, “I love you! And I am so grateful for your grace and for saving me from hell that I would gladly serve anyone as a way of honoring you.”
- When I survey... were the whole realm of nature mine...

Elyse Fitzpatrick: (who spoke here to our ladies last year) *The primary point of marriage is to teach you to wash the feet of another sinner.*

- Many of you think the primary point of marriage is to fulfill all your needs and make you happy, which is why you are frustrated, because it's not working.
- But **God's primary point in marriage is not to make you happy, but to make you holy** (like him).
- And how do you learn that? By learning to wash the disgusting, betraying, self-centered feet of a sinner.
- **Many of you feel like you married the wrong person.** Of course you did. By God's design. *You always marry the wrong person because you always marry a sinner.*
 - But the **wrong person is the right person** for you, because God has a **higher agenda for your life** than giving you a **flawless roommate**, and that agenda is to make you **more like him**.

Write that down: *The "wrong person" is the right person for me, because God has a higher agenda for my life than giving me a flawless roommate, and that agenda is to make me more like him.*

- I'm not saying "choose someone you hate..." Marrying you is like washing dirty feet.
- Marriage is a blessing. You get to be with someone you love. I'm just saying that when the infatuation wears off, there is something about that person that was **so bad that Jesus had to die to fix it**. If it was so bad Jesus had to die to fix it, it's going to cause you some irritation.

One, Transforming Question

So I want to make this tangible through one, simple, transforming question—one that if every time you saw your spouse, or your friends, or your parents, or boss or your employees, this popped into your mind and you answered and obeyed it, would change everything:

What can I do to serve you?³

(**Very simple**... but what if every time you walked into a room you thought of this and then obeyed it?)

What if that's what I thought and said when I got home from work? (tired; kids)

What if that's what my wife was thinking when I get home?

- Want a little insight from the Greear house? **My wife and I really struggled with this for so many years in our marriage.**
 - I'd come home with my guard up. "Been carrying the church all day."
 - Her too. "4 heathens, about to lose my mind; you've been with your friends all day, going out to lunch..."
 - Little dance, both protecting our turf.
 - Somewhere we learned this. I'll admit that my wife did it first. And still is better than me. But it creates it in me toward her.
 - Submitting ourselves to one another is so much better than defending and protecting ourselves against one another.

Men: to ask this question (*I don't mean just in your head, but to actually ask her sometime, "What can I do to serve you?"*) would scare some of you, because you are afraid of what she might actually say, but I'm telling you, this question is *powerful* and unlocks the key to happiness for you in your marriage.

- *Some of our wives are afraid to ask us to help them.* They can feel the resistance as they are walking up to us. You start saying this, you watch how it transforms your marriage.
- What if when you chose **what to do on your day off**, where to

³ I got the idea for reducing this principle to a question from Andy Stanley, in *Future Family*, pt. 2. A couple of the illustrations/applications below are from him as well.

go on **vacation**, where to go **out to eat**—your **first thought** was, “*How can I serve her?*”

- What if you started to ask this question romantically? What does she need from me?
 - What are her **affection** needs?
 - Does she need us to have a **weekly “date night”**— maybe you don’t think you need it but it could be a way of serving her.
- What if you just started to serve your family by taking leadership?
 - Many of you men are **disengaged** from your family.
 - The primary sin of men is that we are complacent when it comes to taking initiative for the benefit of others but enthusiastic when it comes to taking initiative for the benefit of ourselves.
 - You are **zealous about your job**; about your hobbies, but your **family is on autopilot**.
 - Your **wife is unhappy**, but you don’t care, as long as she doesn’t **nag** you, **cheat** on you or **leave** you.
 - And then when she threatens to leave you suddenly get all concerned about how to fix it... and you make some drastic changes that last for about 3 months until the threat of her leaving is gone...
 - And the problem is that you’ve never fixed the problem: the **only reason you changed was because you thought YOUR life** was about to be affected. It was never a change for her sake. That’s why she’s leaving you. She sees through all those temporary, self-centered changes. I’m not saying she is right in doing so. I’m just trying to tell you why.
 - Men, you were made the leader, but you are to be a servant leader. Definition of a **servant leader**: “taking initiative for the benefit of others.”
 - **Spiritual headship is not license to do what you want to do, but empowerment to do what you ought to do.**
 - Crown I wear is first a crown of thorns
 - **90% of the disagreements** in my house I should

probably lose, because they are not about the moral and spiritual direction of our house. Color or carpets and curtains and I should be asking, “How can I serve you?”

Ladies, this is a powerful question for you to ask men. “*What can I do to serve you?*” (or, help you)

- You know, **most men are going to say “nothing.”** But just asking let’s them know that you are aware of their burdens.
- What if that became your attitude in the **home you create** for them...
- How you treat them when they **come into the home**, or **return back home off of a trip** (your stressed with the kids, but what if you thought of their needs as more important than your own);
- What you **do for them on their day** off...
- What if in how you relate to them you did so through the filter of how can I build this guy up to become everything that he can be? How can I communicate honor to him—that I believe in him? **Submit** to him?
 - Can I **brag on Veronica** for a minute? She is awesome at this part. The way she has **submitted herself** to me, and **respected me** and **affirmed me** over the years?
 - She is **so affirming** of me sometimes, I have to go in and open my shirt and see if there is a Superman emblem underneath. **And I know it’s not because I deserve it**, but because that’s her way of serving me.
 - You see, some of you ladies say, “**Oh, but you don’t understand.** My husband is **NOT** a spiritual leader; **he’s lazy; he’s hard to respect.**”
 - **Veronica:** (**V** was going to get up here today, and she actually wrote out a talk, but she forgot she had a prior commitment for one of our services. But what she was going to say is) “Many women are seem to be like, ‘I would submit if my husband would be the spiritual leader J.D. is. But that’s because they don’t see the real J.D. You see J.D. as he presents himself, not as he always is.’ Her submission to me is out of reverence for Christ,

not always me.

- **Here's what's happened over time:** I have become the man, or am becoming the man, she has always told me I could be.
- She has held the crown of Jesus over my head and I have grown/am growing into it. Somewhere along the way I started to believe I had the S emblazoned on my chest.

What if each of you had this attitude toward sex?

- What if sex was less about your needs, and you started to ask, "How can I serve you?"
- What if, in regards to sex, you *"let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus... think not of your own interests, but the interests of others and put their interests higher than yours."*
- For many of you, sex is only about what you feel like. It is, like all dimensions of your relationship, best experienced as an act of service, and act of mutual submission.
 - **Some of you guys are like, "That's the kind of service I'm talking about! I'll volunteer 7 days a week; 24 hours a day. I'll show up early; work late; nights; weekends; holidays; Sundays.**
- (BTW: Soapbox: I read somewhere recently that **65–70%** of college students participate in the "hook-up" culture. A lot listening to right now.
 - Sex outside of marriage is a problem in its own right, but **if a guy uses your body to serve himself now, do you really feel like he's going to serve you in these ways when you get married?**
 - Some of you girls here me describe this kind of relationship and you think, "I want that!" How do think you get it?
 - **A guy who serves himself in this area when you're not married is a guy who will likely serve himself in all other areas when you are married.**
 - I know he might seem sweet and charming now, but what he does with this shows you his character.)
 - **You don't just luck into a relationship where you marry a good husband and father.** You can see the character qualities in college.

What can I do to serve you?

Teenagers: What would it look like if you asked that question of your brothers or sister? We certainly don't want to limit this question to marriage; that's just one arena...

What if you walked in the kitchen and made that statement to your parents? (don't do it today as they'll know I put you up to it).

"Mom, Dad, what can I do to serve you right now?" Little secret: **they are probably not going to say anything.** They'll probably pass out. After they wake up they'll probably come into your room and offer to buy you anything you want!

- (And by the way, if you really want bonus points, **do it when they have some of their friends over.** And watch their friends' expressions... because you're parents will say, "Nothing," and then as soon as you leave their friends will say, *"How in the world?"* And they'll be so happy that you made them look so good in front of their friends they'll probably come to your room and say, "Do you want a new car?")

Try this question in your job. Say it to your boss. Boss, say it to your employees. I'm telling you, it will change the whole culture of your work environment.

What if you took this attitude when you were wronged? "I am hurt right now. But even in this I want to serve you and wash your feet."

- Now, **please note that I'm not talking here** about enduring physical abuse, or ever keeping yourself in a situation where you are unsafe. No, you should always get out of that immediately. And if you're unsure about whether or not you're in a situation you need to get out of, talk to one of our pastors or counselors.
- But I'm saying, *"What if even when you were wronged, you washed the feet of the other person who was doing the wrong?"*
- You know what would happen? What happened to the

disciples. Those who betrayed Jesus became those who would be faithful to him to the end.

What would happen if you started to ask this one simple question in all of your relationships?

- Here's what would happen. For some of you, everything would change. The gospel would saturate your marriage or your home or your workplace and you know what happens when the gospel saturates an area? It makes it new. It re-generates, re-creates it.

My challenge is going to be for you to say it at least 1x every day this week to people in your families; or if you are single, you're roommate.

- I've had friends who were like this with me and I loved them and, guess what... it made me want to be like that toward him. *Their* Christlikeness toward me produced that spirit in me toward others!

Your boss. Employees.

Say it with me: **What can I do to serve you?** SAY IT TO YOUR SPOUSE.

Feel that? You know that emotion you just felt? We call that "FEAR."

FEAR

- **Fear of what they might actually say** and that **our needs** won't be taken care of.
 - You're scared to obey? **Welcome to being** a follower of Jesus. **Fear is always** a part of faith.
 - Do it out of "reverence for Christ."
 - Here's what I'll tell you. **Most of the things you fear** will never happen.
 - But you also have to believe that **if you, like Jesus, take the low road**, God will take care of your needs. He will exalt you to the highest place.

- Some of you say, "**Well, if I do this, they'll never change.**" They are just going to be taken advantage of." Sure, maybe a little.
 - But one of the biggest myths we believe in relationship is that we **change others best by paying them back**, by making them feel the pain when they wrong us. **If I pay you back** then maybe you'll think twice about hurting me again.
 - **Gospel secret:** Grace is the most powerful change agent on the planet.
 - **That's how God changed me.** Not through threats of the law, but through taking my sin.
 - **That's how my wife changed me in our marriage.**
- Some of you it's a fear that if you live this way you'll never be happy.
 - **The happiest person ever to live was Jesus, and he spent his life washing feet and dying for sinners.** There is a **joy in being like Jesus** and **walking with Jesus** that you'll never experience with when you're the **king and defender** of your **tiny, dark, cold, self-centered** kingdom.

HOW:

Vs. 21 points clearly to where you get the power to do this: ...21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- "**Out of reverence for Christ:**" Underline that if you haven't already. Christianity is becoming so overwhelmed with worship at the preciousness of God's gift to you in Christ that it begins to change your attitude toward everybody. They may not be worthy, but he always is.
- **One other secret in this verse:** See how **vs. 21 starts mid-sentence?** Some English translations mess that up and treat vs 21 as a standalone sentence (The **NIV** does that), but that is a bad translation. In Greek "submitting to one another" is the last clause in a sentence that begins in vs. 18 (look back up in your Bibles) with "be filled with the Spirit," and then he gives you a bunch of ways that being filled with the Spirit manifests itself

in your life. "Singing and speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks always and for everything, vs. 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

- The power to submit your life to your spouse is a **supernatural power that the Spirit of God has to give you**, and he does it **in and through** the gospel **as you grow in reverence for Christ**.

So, as always, meditate on the gospel; that's the place where all the power for Christianity comes from. **Fill your heart with reverence** for Christ, and then **depend on the Spirit** to give you the ability to serve others. LOVE TRIANGLE

1x a day in each significant relationship for each day this week!
Deal?

OK. Should be fun.

Prayer