

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Boys to Men

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Series: The Church and the Home

Ephesians 5:25-33

BIG IDEA - WHAT IS REQUIRED OF HUSBANDS IS HARDER

All right, guys. The summer was halfway over yesterday. There's always so much going on in the life of our church. For us, the summer is about many things, but it is about short-term mission trips. You just heard from a middle schooler and a high schooler.

Here's what I'm excited about. Every time I talk to Pastor Justin, whenever they get back from a trip, there's always the fun story of all that God did through the students who went. That's always exciting. "This is how they impacted, and this is how this family or this home will be different." What's more exciting and what you heard in the video is not just what God does *through* you but what God does *in* you on a mission trip. We're unbelievably excited about that.

Now listen, guys. I mean this. In a few weeks, I'll probably get up here and give you another update about our future home and hub, and we're really excited about that, but I mean this. Hear me say this. Our sending capacity is always going to be more important and more foundational than our seating capacity.

Here's what I'm so excited about. This year so far (and we're only in July, so it has been a little over six months), we've been able to send 225 people on short-term mission trips. Isn't that incredible? Thank you, Vinny, Spencer, and Justin, for putting all of that together. That's over 10 percent of our church we've been able to send on missions so far.

Of those 225, my wife and I were two of them, and we got to go to Uganda recently. I want to show you a picture. We got to meet our sponsored kids from Compassion. This was such a cool experience. What ended up happening, by the way... They needed to

bring the three kids from... There are 451 Compassion projects in Uganda. Our kids were at different Compassion projects. They brought them all to us. One went seven hours to meet us.

Now, here's what's really interesting. I wasn't expecting this. Our three kids (we got the same age and same gender as our kids) don't speak the same language of each other. We had three different translators because they were from three different parts of Uganda.

Let me just tell you. You have an experience like that... My wife and I just came back, and we feel like we have to be advocates for Compassion. They are doing an incredible work there. You probably know this. We did a Compassion weekend a year and a half ago, or whatever it was, and we sponsored over 430 kids. That means a lot of you in here got to sponsor one or more kids.

Let me just ask you this on behalf of Compassion: Can you write your kids? Here's what I found out. All of our kids read all of our letters, and I talked to a lot of former Compassion kids, and they would be brought to tears talking about the significance and importance of the letters.

This is a huge part of what we're about, guys. We're about local, national, and global missions. In fact, tomorrow night, I want you to come back. I want you to make it difficult on us. I want every nook and cranny of this place to be packed for our prayer night. We're going to have prayer night tomorrow night.

Our prayer nights are never events that could have been emails. Never. These are going to be meaningful. We're going to be praying for our local, national, and global partners. We've actually asked several of our partners to send in videos from where they are to us, specifically, with the progress they're making and the prayer requests they have. So, you don't want to miss this.

Donovan and his team are going to be leading us in worship, and then we're going to be having a significant time of prayer together. So, let's pray right now for our partners and for our sending culture, and then we're going to dive into the end of Ephesians 5 and speak about men and marriage today. Let's pray.

Lord, we just take a moment right now. We're so grateful. I'm grateful for the 225 people in our church who got to go out. I'm thankful for the work you're doing in them and through them. I pray that our church would take seriously being a sending, shepherding, and supporting church, that we would send people and resources, that when we send we wouldn't forget, that we would care for them, we would pray for them, and we would shepherd them.

I pray that tomorrow night would be a significant moment where people more and more understand the needs in our city, in our nation, and in our world, and we come together to seek your face, seek your heart, and seek your hand. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Why aren't men growing up, and why aren't men getting married? Now, you may say, "Those are two different questions," and the answer is "Kind of." They're actually very connected questions. There's a very simple reason for this. Throughout all of human history, basically, to get married was the exact same thing as to grow up. I mean, there were some exceptions, but almost everybody got married, and for almost everybody, that was the sign to everybody else that you grew up.

Think about why. That might be because you have to leave your parents, and you have to become financially independent, and you have to become the kind of person a woman would want to spend her life with, and then you have to learn how to woo and pursue her. So, basically, all of culture thought, "If a guy can do that, he's probably a man." Right?

The problem today is men aren't growing up and men aren't getting married. We're going to get to Ephesians 5. You can type or turn to Ephesians 5:25. I'm going to pick you up and meet you there in just a few minutes, but I have to talk about our culture. We always have to do this. We have to look at the text, the Bible, and our culture, and we have to understand both.

Here's what you need to know. Men are not growing up, and I want to tell you why. Some of *you* are not growing up, and I want to tell *you* why. It's like, why aren't you growing up? Let me tell you why. It's the sad condition of men in America today. There are three words that define a lot of young men. By the way, I'm very hopeful for young men. We believe in young men, and we want to invest in young men. We want to call young men up.

Here's the condition of young men in society today: they are dependent and they are addicted, and because of those two things, they play off themselves and view themselves as victims. So, let's talk about how men are dependent. This really exacerbated, amplified, and magnified through COVID when everybody moved back in with their parents.

Listen. They say the number-one place an 18- to 34-year-old lives now is with his parents. We're becoming more dependent. By the way, here's what a boy says: "Somebody else should take care of me." That's what a boy says, and a boy *should* say that. A man says, "I need to grow up so I can take care of somebody else."

Do you know that right now 20 percent of American men who are able-bodied have been without work for one year? What is going on? It's like, "Go live with your parents and be dependent on the government." That's not going to work. Then when you do that, all of a sudden you're not working, and we know this: a bored man is a very dangerous man.

So, a man finds himself in all types of trouble. Some of you are like, "How did I get here?" The answer is "One step at a time." Men find themselves drinking too much. Men find themselves eating too much. How about this? Of young men, 70 percent are so obese they can't join the military. What is wrong with us? We're addicted to pornography. We're addicted to drugs and alcohol.

Young men are addicted to video games. I mean, men are just absolutely addicted, and then, because of those two realities, here's what has happened: men are victims. Have you heard of incels? A couple of you have heard of incels. You never want to meet them, but here's what they are.

Incels are a group of men. They're on the Internet. They're growing. They're somewhat violent. *Incel* stands for involuntarily celibate. These are young men in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, and they're angry. Who are they angry at? Are they angry at themselves? No, that would be a good place to start. They're angry at women.

They're like, "Women don't want to date us. Women don't want to have sex with us. Women don't want to marry us. *All* women don't want to do that with us." All right, guys. Listen. If every woman you meet rejects you...you can finish it...you might be the problem. If everywhere you go it stinks, maybe you're the one who smells.

Now, here's the other hard thing. We have to constantly talk about the difference between men and women. Girls naturally become women. It just happens. I don't fully understand it. Nature does it to them. Very rarely, almost never, will you meet a 35-year-old woman who you're like, "You're still kind of a girl." It's like, "No, no. Nature did this to you, and you will naturally become a woman."

It's deeply biological, and it will just happen, but men must be brought kicking and screaming into manhood. Honestly, it needs to happen with other men. Men have been trying to figure out how to bring other boys into manhood for as long as we've existed. Our best answer is rites of passage. It's our best answer.

We draw a line in the sand and say, "When you're 13" or "When you're 15" or "When you're 12, you're going to do these things, and I'm going to mark it. I'm going to tell you, and you're going to know when you're not a boy anymore and you're a man." We don't have those anymore.

The closest thing we have left is the driver's license. What's so strange to me... I grew up at a time where I got my permit the day you could get your permit. I had to wait six months (that was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the time) from that day to get my license, and I went and got my license the day I could get my license.

I don't know why young men aren't wanting to get their license today. Maybe they want to ride in the back of an Uber and look at their Instagram. I don't know. It's the symbol. I cannot think of a better symbol of responsibility, authority, autonomy, and freedom. Marriage calls a man to grow up like almost nothing else does.

I'm not saying a man can't grow up before he's married. I'm just saying it's very, very hard because it's very, very hard to grow up until somebody becomes more important than you. That's the moment. We see this biblically. Remember Jacob? Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and he said it seemed as if it was a few days.

David, when he was a young man, went to King Saul and said, "I want to marry your daughter." Saul said, "If you want to marry her, you have to kill 100 Philistines." Remember what he did? He killed 200. There's something about marriage that makes a man grow up.

Well, why aren't men getting married? You could say, "Well, people aren't getting married," and that's true. Marriage used to be the foundation of adulthood, and now it's the finishing touches. You used to get married and kind of grow up together. It was like, "Here we are, 18, 20, or 22. We get married. We grow up together." Now it's like, "Let me express myself as a part of my adulthood later in life with the type of wedding and the spouse I marry. It's another way to express myself."

I know I have to talk about this stuff all the time. Why aren't men getting married? We know the number-one reason. Right? Sex. Men are addicted to pornography. That has this weird effect on guys where they end up being more attracted to pixels than a real person. We have this hookup/shack-up/breakup culture.

We have the sexual revolution. Basically, men no longer needed... As a general rule, men needed to get married to have sex. So, as a general rule, men viewed marriage as the beginning of their sexual lives. Today, in the culture, men view marriage as the end of their sexual lives.

Then there's this whole other thing that men basically have been doing the math. I've read all about this, and this is really interesting. Men are afraid to get married. They're afraid to get married for a couple of reasons. First, they saw their parents' and grandparents' marriages. They either thought, "That marriage was so horrible I don't

want it" or they thought, "That marriage didn't last, and if my parents or my grandparents can't do it, I don't know if I can do it."

Then they look at the court system (you could argue this, and I don't mean this in a political way) and potentially how it's not very good for men. The chance that you get custody of your kids in a divorce case is 10 percent if you're a guy. In North Carolina, you pay alimony the rest of her life or the rest of your life. A lot of guys go, "Um, no thanks."

So, what I want us to do... Men need to be encouraged about marriage, its goodness, its high aim, and what they need to do in it. I'm going to read in the entirety nine verses, starting in Ephesians 5. Paul is calling men to grow up, get married, and enjoy it. It says this. **"Husbands..."**

Last week, I spoke to the women. This week, I'm speaking to you men the rest of the time. Here it is. Underline it. Highlight it. Circle it. This is the key and controlling word for the rest of the passage: *love*, which men do not understand. We'll talk about it.

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ..." So, he's the point and pattern of marriage. **"...loved the church and gave himself up for her..."** Why?

"...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should..."

Here it is again for the third time. **"...love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."** Then he gives us this high view at the end. He's quoting Genesis here.

"'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Okay. We are in the part of Paul's letters that are called the *house codes*. These are the house codes. Martin Luther... He was a famous monk turned Reformer, a church leader. In the 1500s (he was really the first person to do this), he noticed, "Wait a second. At the end of a lot of Paul's letters, he applies deep Christian doctrine..." We were really in deep Christian doctrine in chapters 1-3.

He applies deep Christian doctrine in practical ways to the home. Now, what's interesting is he says three times as many things here to the men as he did to the women. I want the

women to understand this about the men, and I want the men to understand this about themselves. Men are practical theologians, much more than a woman is. This is why men don't read fiction almost ever. Men don't read, actually. True story. Most fiction books are bought by women.

If a man decides, "I'm going to give my time to read," he normally wants to read something really practical. Like, "Okay. If I'm going to read, how do I grow my business? How do I make more money? How do I figure out the tension between work and family?" That's what he wants to do.

So, what we're going to do today is we're going to look at this passage to men. I will tell you that this part was the offensive part in that day. Not today. I mean, part of the thing is whenever we say, "Men need to do these five things," everyone is like, "Yeah, and 10 more things as well." That's kind of how people are, unfortunately. People are very tough on men.

The non-offensive part was what we did last week, although that's very offensive in culture. It's very interesting to see how things become, depending on the time and place you live in... Certain things were offensive and aren't anymore. "Wives, submit to your husbands." Zero percent offensive back then. "Husbands, lovingly sacrifice for your wives." Very offensive back then. Not offensive today.

Okay. We have to talk about a lot this morning. We'll see what we can get through. The first thing we have to talk about is what love is. Here's the difference between men and women as well, and you know this. Women are harder on themselves. Women tend to notice the flaws in how they look or in their character, in their personality.

In general, what I have found is that if you basically give a sermon, like I did last week, and you say, "Submit to your husbands and respect them" and "You might be the problem in your marriage," most women go home, if they're rightly oriented, and go, "Oh, I probably am not where I should be. I should be submitting more. I probably could be more respectful. Oh man. I feel really bad about all this."

But if you tell men, like I'm doing this morning... If I tell you men, "Love your wives," most of you think, "You're welcome. I'm doing it." I mean, this is how men are. We're dense. We think we're loving our wives. You know, the chance that you're doing all of the things Paul is telling you to do here is almost certainly 0 percent. Some of you are doing an okay job of this. Some of you are not doing this at all. Okay?

So, men tend to think, "I'm loving my wife." Why? Because they say, "I love you" when they leave the house. Guys tend to look back at a moment. They're like, "Well, I wouldn't

have done the vows and gotten married if I didn't love you, and I wouldn't work, and I wouldn't do all of the things I'm doing if I didn't love you and the kids."

That's the first thing. Then the other thing is men tend to view love... Either they think they're doing it or they view it only in sexual and passionate terms. They're all like, "Oh, yeah, I'm ready to love you, baby." And all of the wives are like, "Hold on, Casanova. No, thank you, because I don't feel loved."

Here's what headship means. That's what we talked about last week. *Headship* means the husband is to be the loving leader and the leading lover. This is where you guys have to get with yourself. You have to have a conversation with yourself and go, "I'm in a place of inescapable leadership." It doesn't say, "You *will* be the head" or "You *should* be the head" or "Vote on who the head is." It says you *are* the head.

Here's what this means. And I've seen this. When a man leaves his family and marries a woman half his age and moves across the country and starts over, the family he left... Do you know what dominates that family? The empty chair at the dining room table every evening.

If a man is weak, wimpy, and passive in his marriage and lets his wife wear the pants, it will be the thing the kids remember about the marriage. It will be the thing the wife resents in the marriage. What does it mean to be the loving leader? Again, men, you need a lot of help. So do I.

Here's what it means. You say, "Let's" all the time. You lead in saying, "Let's." "Let's pray together. Let's go on a date night. Let's think about where the kids are and what would be best for them. Let's put together a financial plan for our family and our marriage."

Now, you may ask this question: "What does it mean that a woman needs to feel loved?" Why does it say *love*? This is interesting. Nowhere in the Bible does it say women are supposed to love their husbands. Why? Because they naturally do that. Here's what I think. I think both men and women are equally insecure. We live in a sinful, broken world. We're aware of our weaknesses, our sins, our struggles, and our failures.

A man's insecurity... What he needs from his wife in his insecurity of "Am I doing enough? Am I accomplishing enough? Do I have what it takes...?" Every man is asking that question. "Do I have what it takes?" The desire is the wife would respect and see and encourage that. The wife has her own insecurities, and what she needs...

When you think "love," men, here's what you need to think for your wife: Is she secure and does she feel seen? The number-one thing I'm hearing from a lot of women is they basically feel invisible. What's the opposite of loved? The opposite of loved is not hated.

The opposite of loved... And many of you men are doing this with your wives. Your wife feels taken for granted. Nobody and nothing is honored by being taken for granted.

So, what Paul is going to do is he's going to give us five types of love. This is where we're going to spend the rest of our time. You're going to see them. They're going to rise right out of the text. Each man in here needs to take responsibility to do these things. I promise you, if you do these things, your marriage is going to get better instead of bitter.

I promise you... God has created women this way. We hit them hard last week. God has created women this way. They will respond to this. They want men to lead. Listen. It doesn't matter what... The data is in. The truest way of "How do women want men to treat them?" is still the dating scene. I know marriage rules have changed.

When you go to dating, women have the exact same expectations they've always had. "I would like the man to lead. I would like him to initiate. I would like him to pay for things. I would like him to communicate. I would like him to clarify where the relationship is. I would like him to propose." It's like, "Exactly." Okay. So, we're going to go into them. Here they are.

01 A SINGULAR LOVE

Turn with me back to verse 25 and we'll see the first one. Five types of love. They all start with *S* because I wanted to make this simple for the men so they could remember it. First, it says, "**Husbands, love your wives...**" Or we could even make it more simple. "Husband, love *your* wife." I know it kind of said the same thing to the women, but here's the first thing: you need to have for your wife a singular love.

See, here's what it doesn't say. It doesn't say, "Men, love women." Why doesn't it say that? Because men *do* love women. Ever since a man goes through puberty, he's like, "Women are beautiful. They have long hair, and I like to make them laugh. They're interesting and terrifying at the same time." All that's true. So, it doesn't say, "Men, love women." It says, "Husband, love your wife."

Here's what men need to do. Men need to love one woman and a real woman for their whole life. Now think about how hard this is in our culture today. Think about the amount of images the average man, especially if he's not a Christian and has not been trying to fight this at all... Think about the amount of images he has seen, whether it's explicit things, whether it's filtered Instagram accounts of fake women's lives.

Think about how with the culture of "hookup/shack-up/breakup...get emotionally and physically entangled with somebody for three to six months, then leave them, and do that again, and keep doing that for a decade of my life, and then try to settle down..." People wonder, "Why do I have so much trouble loving my wife?" It's because you haven't learned how to love one woman. You're still trying to love a bunch of women.

So, here's what men need to hear. That ideal woman you have in your mind you need to get out of your mind. She does not exist. Women have this too. Women think, like, Noah from *The Notebook*. "He built a house." Remember that? And in the rain he yells, "I wrote you every day!" Remember? He climbs the Ferris wheel. Ladies, that guy doesn't exist. I hate to break it to you.

Men have their own view of this. Listen. I'm just going to get really real with you guys. The ideal woman does not exist. If she did exist and she met you, she would run away. This is the stuff no one ever says. You basically marry someone of equal status. It got really quiet in here. I mean, you really do. I know we always tell the guys, "You married way up." We never tell the girls that. She'd be like, "I will kill you." You don't say that to a woman.

The truth is most people marry someone of equal problems, of equal mess-up, of equal attractiveness. Guys, do not lie to yourself and think, "Well, you know what? If I wasn't with her, then I'd be..." You would be with nobody. Okay? Because you're an older, fatter version of who you were when you met her.

The problem with this is if we don't get this right... If we're going to get real again today, this is why men struggle to love an older woman: because all their life all they were ever taught was that beauty is these young women. Here's the thing. If you will commit to one person, husbands, in that one person, across time, you will get many partners.

Your wife will change so many times you're going to basically be married to 10 different women. Okay? And that will be enough. I mean, think about it. She'll be a young woman, and she'll be an older woman. Wait till she becomes a mom. It's like she's a completely different creature. You're a mom, and you're never not a mom again. That's a whole different... "You weren't a mom when I married you."

This is something to think about. Marriage is such an incredibly powerful institution that when you enter it and your wife enters it, you're both different people. So, people all the time... They're in the first year of marriage, and they're like, "I married the wrong person." Yeah, and you're the wrong person also. No. What happened is you both were different people before you entered an institution that's as big as marriage.

So, here's what you need to do. You need to say, "Okay. I'm going to love my wife." Now, very practically, here's where you can start. Men are like, "How do I specifically love my wife?" Why don't you think through the five love languages? How about that's a good start? We're in the city of the five love languages. Right? Why don't you start with the five love languages?

There are words. Women need food, shelter, clothing, and compliments. That's what they need. Men do not compliment their wives nearly as much as they need to. Men go, "Well, how much do I need to compliment my wife?" When you're embarrassed by how much you're saying, you're getting close. You're getting very close. Probably 5 to 10 times as much as you think you need to.

Other people need to serve their wife more. Serving your wife is basically, "How can I make your life easier?" That's going to be different based on her life stage, based on her lifestyle, based on her age, based on her work schedule, based on all that. Some people need gifts. Surprise and delight her. I know. Guys are like, "Flowers die and get thrown in the trash." They're still important.

For other people it's touch. I know all of the guys are like, "That's my love language." It's like, "Okay. Hold on." Touch is normally when your wife asks you to give her a back massage, and 15 seconds in you're like, "My hands hurt." That's what happens with me. There are gifts. There are words. There are acts of service. There's time.

Now, certain wives are fine just relaxing. "Hey, if you're on your laptop and I'm on my laptop or you're on your iPad and I'm on my iPad, if we're in the same room, that's great." Other women will require more. They'll say, "I don't want to just relax; I want to relate." Now, here's the thing. You may go, "What is my wife's love language?" The one you're not doing, usually.

Here's one other thing with men, and we have to understand this. Men think of relationships like they think of math or science. A lot of times, men are like, "Okay. Well, I brought her flowers, and I held her hand, and then things went really well." Then the next week, he brings flowers and holds her hand and nothing happens. He's like, "What's going on?"

It's not a formula; it's a relationship in which you need to creatively think. Every person needs to get a PhD in their wife, her unique joys, struggles, temptations, challenges, and things she loves. Okay. First is a singular love. Instead of loving many women and fake women, you need to love one woman and a real woman.

02 A SACRIFICIAL LOVE

The second type of love is sacrificial love. I'll show you this. This is the main emphasis of the text. Here it is. "**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church...**" How did he love the church? Sacrificially. "**...and gave himself up for her...**" A couple of different times, he pauses really quickly and goes, "Hold on. Before I tell the husbands what they need to do, I need to root it in what Christ has already done."

So, what did Christ do? Christ suffered for us to serve us. I mean, there's a lot of suffering. Leaving heaven...suffering. Becoming a man...suffering. Living among humanity for 33 years...suffering. Dying...suffering. Dying a criminal's death that's painful and humiliating while being wrongly accused, while being betrayed, while being forsaken by your friends, while dying at a young age in front of your mom...suffering.

The problem with men today (and it's probably an ancient, old problem) is we don't want to sacrifice. Here's my assumption in reading the Bible. Whatever the Bible tells us to do we're not doing, and in fact, we're probably doing the opposite. That's how I approach the Scriptures. So, if we're told to sacrifice for our wives, we're probably doing the exact opposite. Instead of sacrificing, we're usually being very, very selfish.

Here's what sacrifice has to do with. Sacrifice has to do with the future. I mean, that's it. Let me give you the classic example that I think most of us will get with sacrifice: someone who goes to be a doctor. Many of you have or know people who have or have spouses or parents or siblings.

Think about this for a second. Medical school, and before that organic chemistry, and then residency, and then maybe chief resident, and then fellowship, and then, finally, you're 35 years old and become an attending doctor. Think about that. We act this out before we articulate it, but basically, anybody who decides to do that understands, "I'm going to go through an enormous amount of sacrifice."

In fact, what you basically do... You cannot go through medical school, residency, and fellowship without sacrificing your youth and sacrificing being a normal 20-year-old, for sure. Everybody sacrifices that because they know the reward. By the way, sacrifice and reward are always connected.

I saw a picture of sacrifice recently that was really powerful. I was able to go to an early showing of *Mission: Impossible 7*. Don't worry. I won't ruin it for you. You know Ethan Hunt played by Tom Cruise. You're all going to see it. I won't ruin it for you. Here's what happened.

There's this moment in there where he has this young woman he's trying to get to be on their team, the Impossible Mission team. She has seen a lot already. She has seen people die. She has seen all this stuff. So, there's this really moving scene where he's talking to her, and he wants her to join the team, and she's afraid.

She says, "What if something happens to me, and what if we lose something?" There's this really powerful moment where he looks at her and says, "I can't tell you that you're not going to get hurt, and I can't tell you that we're not going to lose people, but as the leader of this team, here's what I can tell you: your life will always be more important than my life."

It's a turning point in the movie. When I was in the movie theater, I pulled out my phone. I was like, "I need to write this down." I had the brightness really low. I felt it last night, and I felt it this morning as I shared this. A statement like that softens the whole room. We all know. Every man is like, "Yes! That's the environment."

You know, am I going to hurt my spouse unintentionally? Yes. Am I going to fail? Am I going to be selfish? Yes. But what is the promise I'm going to make to my wife? I'm going to say this: "I promise you that I will always come back to the commitment that your life will be more important than my life."

What is sacrifice? Sacrifice is when you give something up that you love for something you love more. Every man, when he enters marriage, realizes, "There are a lot of things I have to give up, and I give them up because of someone I love even more."

Now, there are two things I think most men need to practically give up. The first is the dream of personal potential. Whenever you get married (and kids add to this too), you will not be able to accomplish as much in your personal hobbies and in your personal work that you would otherwise.

I have a friend. He's 70 now. He's a mentor. He said that he wrote a book. It was a Christian book, and it became a best-selling book. He wrote it when his youngest kid was 10. His kid said to him, "When Dad writes, I don't like it because he doesn't spend time with me."

So, he said, "I made this commitment to my wife: 'I'm not going to write another book until our youngest son is out of high school.'" He tells this story now as a 70-year-old. He said, "When my youngest son left... I didn't write another book for eight years, and then once he left, I wrote another book, and it was a best seller, and I wrote another book, and it was a best seller."

He said, "All of these things happened in my life, but I delayed my career by eight years." He said, "Everything that happened in my life could have happened eight years earlier, which means I could be making more money and be farther ahead in my career than I am now, but I don't regret it at all because my calling to be a husband and father limits my potential personally." But it expands your potential as a family.

Okay. That's the easier one. The harder one is...*What do you need to sacrifice?* The worst parts about you that you still love, and I don't know what those are. You do know what those are. You'll probably not want to think about it, but you should. You should sit on the edge of your bed and think, "What am I doing in this marriage that is making things worse?"

Something will pop up in your head, and you'll try to throw it down and pick something else, but the first thing that pops up in your head is usually what you have to deal with. You're like, "Oh, I drink too much in this marriage, and it actually makes me isolate myself. I'm working and traveling too much, and I know it. I have some secret habit that I thought I had under control, and actually, I don't want to connect the dots, but if I connected the dots, this is why my marriage is where it is."

Now, here's what I want to encourage you men with. I believe this. By the way, sacrifice, I told you, always has to do with the future, and sacrifice always has to do with faith. Here's what sacrifice believes, and I believe this is true, men. If you sacrifice in your marriage today, things will get better eventually. How do we know that? Because we know for sure the opposite is true.

Have you ever seen a marriage where one or both spouses is selfish? We know for sure that doesn't work across time, and it makes the marriage worse. The opposite of that is when the husband, as the leader, says, "Your life will always be more important than mine. I am willing to limit my personal potential to take care of you, and I am willing to deal with the worst parts about me that are hindering this marriage."

03 A SANCTIFYING LOVE

Not just a singular love, not just a sacrificial love, but a sanctifying love. I want you to see this. Verse 26: ***"...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."***

Okay. A sanctifying love. Now, we have to go back to what Christ does for us because we have to understand... Some men are not good husbands because, genuinely, they don't understand the gospel. They're not good Christians so they're not good husbands. They don't understand what Christ has done for them. Christ has done two things, at least, that we can talk about here.

The first I already kind of talked about, but it's important. Christ loved us when we were unlovely. The Bible says we were enemies. No one had a more unlovely bride than Christ. I know some of you men. I want to encourage you. You're dealing with a very difficult marriage. You're dealing with a very difficult wife. This is just how it is.

As an aspect of faith, you're going to have to say, "This is very difficult, but this is not as difficult as Christ loving me when I was unlovely." I mean, Christ loved his bride while she was crucifying him. Some men can relate to that at some level in their marriage. It's like, "Okay. I'm going to be like Christ, and I'm going to believe things are going to get better, and then, by an act of faith, I'm going to love my wife even while she's unlovely."

The second thing we have to talk about that this passage is talking about is what *sanctify* means. What is sanctification? It means to become the godliest version of yourself. It means to become more like Jesus. So, here's what this means. You need to hear both of these. Christ loved you when you were unlovely and Christ, when he loves you, makes you more lovely.

Every husband is trying to fix his wife, and that's why he gets in trouble. This is the classic thing. The wife comes in with some problem, and then he tries to fix it, and she's like, "I didn't want you to fix it." "Oh no. Okay. What am I supposed to do?" The answer is you're supposed to love her with an efficacious love that changes her.

Now, why *sanctify*? That has a particular spiritual meaning. It has to do with spiritual growth. Men, you need to take responsibility for your wife's flourishing. The leadership of a husband is seen on the face of his wife. So often, I see men who seem to be doing well. They're certainly golfing a lot. They're very tan. They travel a ton, and their wife is dying on the vine.

We've seen this before. She's crying to other women in our parking lot about how hard the marriage is and how the husband is completely unaware of this and isn't taking any responsibility for it. Okay. So, you have to be the spiritual leader. Men need to understand this too. If you could only focus on one thing with your wife, why would you want to focus on her spiritual growth?

By the way, you don't have to take care of everything yourself. You need to make sure everything is taken care of. This is a little different. But here's why. This is so practical

and helpful for men to know. This works for men and women. If you grow spiritually, it will affect every other area of your life. It's the only area of your life, the only dimension of your life that, if you focus on it, impacts every other dimension.

You can send someone to CrossFit, and they'll get in great shape. It's not necessarily going to affect their finances or their relationships. You can send someone to some Dave Ramsey class, and they'll get their finances all together, and that's great, but that's not necessarily going to affect their marriage. I'm just telling you. I've seen this for 20 years.

When a man or a woman starts to focus on their relationship with God... I mean genuinely... Not just reading the Bible and praying in the morning. I'm talking, like, "I want to meet with God. I want to pray." You meet that woman. It's like, all of a sudden, she's feeling convicted about certain areas of her life. All of a sudden, she's caring more about eating and exercise. All of a sudden, she's caring about the finances. All of a sudden, she's caring about the relationships in her life.

So, husbands, what does your wife need so she can flourish spiritually? You may need to ask her that. It's not that hard. You need to lead her to church. It's so sad how many wives have to drag their husbands to church. Every husband has a casual relationship with the church, not a committed relationship with the church.

You need to be in a Community Group. Why do we emphasize Community Groups? Because here's what we know about you and Americans in general. The average American will only give two time slots a week to the church. It's like, "Okay. We'll take the worship service. Here it is." Then if we only get one more time slot from you, we want something where you and your wife are together. That's why we chose Community Groups.

We want you and your wife ministering and being ministered to together. Then you need to figure out... Honestly, your wife needs to be with other women. I told the men last week they need to be with other men, but women need to be with other women so those women can encourage and challenge her appropriately. So, you're going to have to figure that out. You need to have a sanctifying love.

04 A SELF-LOVE

Now, this is interesting. He first says a singular love, a sacrificial love, and a sanctifying love. Now a self-love. I'll show you this. He actually repeats this twice. ***"In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies."*** That's where I'm getting self-love. Look at what he says here. ***"He who loves his wife loves himself."***

Now, we may think, "This feels a little shallow compared to all of the deep things." We got deep with sanctifying. You know, "Take responsibility for her flourishing, especially spiritually." And sacrificial. "Lay down your life." And singular. "Love her completely as a unique woman, and don't think about other women." Then it's self-love?

Well, here's what this is rooted in. I taught this in Song of Solomon. This is rooted in a theology of what's called *oneness*. Whenever you get married, at the wedding day you spiritually become one. That's what happens through vows. Then that night, you physically become one, and then the rest of your life you try to kind of practically and progressively become one. Oneness is a reality.

Basically, Paul is like, "You shouldn't think of your wife any differently than you think of yourself." See, here's another thing about women that's different than men. Women naturally understand oneness. Men need to learn it. The average man, when he gets married, has no idea how much his wife wants to do with him.

Every night she's like, "Let's go to bed at the same time," and he's like, "Why? If you go to bed at 9:00, I can stay up and watch two hours of sports." My brother had been single for a long time, and he was newly married. One night, like, the second or third week of being married, he came home with takeout just for himself. His wife was like, "What are you doing?" He went, "I was hungry." She was like, "We eat together. In fact, I was cooking dinner."

Women naturally understand oneness. Men need to learn oneness. What Paul is saying is when you are hurting your wife, you're hurting yourself. Here's what Paul is trying to get us to do. This is the big thing for men, and this is the thing men really struggle with: to take full responsibility for the marriage.

That's what all of this is about. That's what headship is. Headship is not some privilege. It's not some high hierarchy you stand on. It is a massive burden and a massive responsibility to where you completely take responsibility for the marriage. About 13 or 14 years ago now, my wife and I were in premarital counseling, and I had the scariest premarital counselor.

I mean, he was former military, 65 years old. He had done, like, 40 weddings. He told us the first time, "I've done 40 weddings, and none of these marriages have ended in divorce, and I will not have a marriage end in divorce." It was like, "Yes, sir." He had all of these sessions. Again, he was very scary. I was grateful he was a Christian. Very violent man.

I was just a young man, not even married yet, engaged. He said, "Kyle, everything that happens in this home will not be your fault, but it will be your responsibility." I

remember thinking, "That's not fair." But what did Jesus Christ do? Think about Jesus. I mean, it's such a deep idea. Jesus took responsibility for the sin and brokenness of his bride.

Here's what every man needs to do. I think this is going to be the toughest thing men need to do, and you're going to need to do it. You're going to need to have an honest conversation with yourself. No matter where your marriage is, you're going to have to say this to yourself. "How did I...?" That's the important first part of the phrase. "How did I let my marriage and my wife get to this place?"

I know some of you are in really painful places. Here's the hard thing about marriage. Everything you say to your wife is connected to everything you've ever said to your wife. Some of your marriages are full of such bad memories. One of the first things you tell people in marriage counseling... It's like, "You need some new memories together now."

For some of you, there has been such a lack of affirmation. You get in a crazy cycle. By the way, the way you know that you're one... What does it feel like when you're fighting with your spouse? Say the fight is over and there's no reconciliation. You're still fighting about something. You're still angry about something. What does it feel like? If you're not married, here's what it feels like: like you have a headache. You have a headache all the time. Nothing is right when this marriage isn't right.

So, you have to say this, men. You have to go, "How did I let my marriage get to this place?" Then you have to fill in what the place is. Then you have to do the hard work to go, "How did we become sexless roommates raising kids?" I know you're going to want to blame her because she's not as sexually available as you'd like her to be.

Then you have to go back and go, "No, no, no. I'm responsible for this. How did the marriage get to this place?" Then you're probably like, "Well, yeah. She did dress up really cute, and I never said anything about it, and I haven't prioritized date night." Sometimes you have to say, "How did I let my wife get to this place? How did I let my wife get so overwhelmed? How did I let this happen?"

Sometimes, "How did I let my wife treat me like this?" It's like, "How have I let my wife talk to me like this for years? How have I let her disrespect me in front of others, in front of the kids?" It's like, "I am ultimately responsible for this." But Paul tells us how we have to go about this.

05 A SENSITIVE LOVE (NOURISH & CHERISH)

He continues the self-love by talking about the last thing, which is a sensitive love. Look here. **"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes..."** That literally means strengthens. **"...and cherishes..."** That literally means to keep warm. That's what the word means. To *cherish* means to keep warm. I know women are always colder than men. Isn't that true? To keep warm.

"For no one ever hated his own flesh..." Remember, he's appealing to self-love. **"...but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."** Men, here's what you need to know. And you know this, and your wife knows this. Women want a sensitive man, but they don't want a soft, weak, and passive man.

Women hate weak men. They hate them. They want to punish them. They want to claw them apart. They want to run as far away from them as possible. So, you need to figure out how to be tender with your wife and tough for your wife. You need to figure out how to be strong and sensitive. For some of you, the practical thing you need to do is, today, you need to start opening the door for your wife when you go out to the parking lot. Chivalry should not be dead.

Here's what we mean when we say we treat women differently than men...better. That's what I think. Men should treat women differently than men treat men, and they need to have a sensitivity to them. This doesn't mean you're weak and passive. Men, you need to be sensitive, kind, gentle, and all of the biblical virtues, and you need to stand up for yourself.

Here's what he ends with. I'll show you this. With all that, verse 31 says this: **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound..."** Remember, a mystery is not something we don't know; it's something we didn't know but now do know.

"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." The final word he gives us is he says, "Guys, this is all pointing to Christ."

Husbands, what are you saying about Christ with your marriage? This is a powerful picture. He goes all the way back to quote Genesis, and he says, "A man must leave in order to get married." Here's what it means for most of us. I know when you think leaving, you're like, "Yeah, leave your family," and all that.

Here's what *leave* means for us, all the men. Here's the final word to the men. If we're going to be the husbands we need to be for our wives, we have to leave. What does that mean? You can't stay where you are. That's what it means. Manhood means moving.

The problem with many men is they just feel stuck, and they don't know where to start. I just want to encourage you that wherever you are, that's where you start. You need to aim high. Paul gives us the highest aim possible. Some of you are not aiming high enough in your marriage. You're not. Your aim is to kind of have a marriage like your parents. Stop that.

You have to have the highest aim possible. It's like, "Okay. Christ and the church. That's it. I'm aiming to be sacrificial, to be singular, and to be sanctifying in my love. I'm aiming as high as possible, but then I know how weak and pathetic I am, so I'm going to start as small as possible." That's what you do.

I haven't said really anything to women. Here's the one thing to women. Listen. This is what happens every time I give a men's talk. The men go home, and then they start to lead, and they say something like, "Let's pray tonight." Do you know what the wife says? "You're just doing this because Kyle gave that sermon." Not helpful. Okay? Anytime your husband does something good, you need to go like this: "Hercules. Hercules. Hercules." That's what we need from you.

Men, we want to help you. Really. We're here to build you up, not to beat you down. Look. Marriage is hard. The worst thing you could do is be struggling in your marriage and say, "I'm not going to tell anybody." If your marriage is in the same place that it has always been, one of the reasons it's still there is because you've not gotten the help you need. You need help.

Everybody starts off as a novice in life. None of us know what we're doing. Older men in this room, do not check out. We need you. We need you to finish well, love your spouse, and we need you to help the next generation. We're going to do this together because the stakes are so high. This isn't about us. This is about Christ and the church. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for this word. I pray for men in here who feel discouraged. I pray you would encourage them, Lord. The job of the preacher is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Lord, some men are really struggling. One guy wrote me an email this week, and he said, "Great sermon last week. Can't wait for the guys' talk. I'm reading the verses all week, trying to get it right."

I pray for that heart among the men and the women. "I'm reading the verses, and I'm trying to get it right." Lord, I pray for the men and the women, that we wouldn't focus on "Is our spouse doing the things he or she is supposed to do?" but we'd be focused on whether we are doing it and picturing Christ and the church. We pray this in your name, amen.