

# ■ THIS IS US

*Week Eight | October 1, 2017 | Roles in the Family*

## PREPARATION

### ■ MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone with God's Word reading through Ephesians 5:22–6:4. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care

### ■ THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

### ■ DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those that are present.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

In the Church, each member of the family has a specific role and responsibility to the Lord and one another.

### ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

In every institution, various roles are required so that things run smoothly. In the institution of family, three of these key roles include spouse, parent, and child, and they each reflect our relationship with God in some way. When each member plays their part, the family unit works together and God is glorified.

### ■ MEDITATE

“Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

- 🗣️: *Think of some of your favorite TV shows. How are modern families depicted in our culture?*
- 🗣️: *As Christians, how does our faith influence our view of family?*
- 🗣️: *Share some of the ways your family growing up got things both right and wrong.*

While God has created many types of institutions to help order human civilization, marriage and family are at the center. Where strong marriages and families exist, we find strong cities, and where strong cities exist, we find strong regions, and states, and countries. The power of the family unit has ripple effects far and wide! While our culture has a million different (and sometimes confusing) ways to do family, God has made His design for family clear and simple in Ephesians 6. Just like in any other system or institution, everyone must play a part that comes with responsibilities and roles. Instead of allowing family roles to be chaotic, ever-fluctuating, or up for debate all the time, God has given us steady, defined family roles that stay the same over time. Once a person knows where they belong in the family structure, they can enjoy their role and know exactly how to play their part. No confusion, debating, or chaos required!

Where our culture's version of family is full of chaos, God's way of doing family is ordered. Where society's way is muddy, God's way is clear. Where the culture's version breeds anxiety or fear, God's way cultivates peace and certainty. And more than simply making family life run smoothly on a practical level, the roles we play also tell the story of who God is to His people. As we step into Ephesians 6, we will learn more about the family roles that God has given us for our own good and His glory.

- 🗣️: *When it comes to your role in your family, in what ways would you like to grow?*

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

So far in this series, we've seen many parts of our identity in Christ. Now, we move toward another identity we have as Christians: the role we play in our nuclear families. In Ephesians, Paul first spends a good deal of time explaining the wonder of God and the gospel. Next, he explains what this means for the ordinary relationships within the Church, and how the gospel plays out in each of them. In Ephesians, we realize something amazing: our ordinary relationships—especially family relationships—serve as a stage for the world to see what Christ has done for God's people. As believers, we use our roles within the family to tell the story of God and His redemptive work. As each of us plays our part, the world gets a better picture of who God is and what He's done through Christ.

### 1. THE ROLE OF SPOUSE

### 2. THE ROLE OF CHILDREN

### 3. THE ROLE OF PARENT

## GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## THE ROLE OF SPOUSE

### ■ EPHESIANS 5:21–33

- 🔗: *Why should believers submit to one another? (5:21) What does "reverence for Christ" mean? Why does this give us motivation to submit to one another?*
- 🔗: *In what ways did Christ "submit himself" to others?*
- 🔗: *Are you ever tempted to breeze past the instructions that apply to us and focus instead on the instructions that apply to others? Why do you think we often struggle with this?*

The first role Paul brings to the stage is that of spouse, starting with the role of wife. As he explains the wife's role in the family, we see the gospel shine. In verse 22, the first thing we must notice is that Paul is talking specifically to wives. While it may seem obvious, this passage was not intended for husbands to use as forceful weapon against their spouses. This passage was not intended for husbands at all! It was given from the Lord, through the pen of Paul, to wives.

Alternatively, as we move through the rest of the passage, there are places where Paul speaks specifically to husbands or children. Here we learn that while spouses obviously want to hold one another accountable within their respective positions, each much focus on the directions that apply to them specifically and their own particular role, not on their spouse's role. When we spend all our time focusing on the passages that apply to our spouse, we have missed God's word to us. Whatever our role in the family, let's keep our focus on what God is saying to us in our position, and trust that He will work in the lives of our family as they focus on their roles.

**Q:** *In what ways does a wife demonstrate the Church's relationship to Christ? In what ways does a wife also model Jesus' example of submission?*

Next, Paul's direction for wives is to "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Paul follows this up by explaining the beautiful way a husband and wife portray Christ's relationship with the Church. Just as Christ is the leader of his body, the Church, a husband is the leader of his wife. Just as the Church follows Christ's direction in all parts of life, so the wife has the responsibility to follow her husband. First, we note that the submission a wife offers is only to her husband. Paul is not directing all women to submit to all men, as he says "your own husbands," not all husbands or men. This command is within the context of a covenant-bound marriage. Many have abused this verse throughout Christian history, pressuring women to submit to men with whom they have no marriage covenant, whether that be in friendship, in the workplace, or in ministry relationships. To keep this direction within its proper context, we must remember that Paul's direction here is between a wife and her husband.

Next, we see that a wife does this "as to the Lord." Whether in government, work, or within a household, when a Christian willingly submits to a leader it is because they understand that the leader was God-appointed for them. Leadership structures make every type of institution run smoothly, and the same goes for marriage and the family structure. Leaders are a good thing, and they are from the Lord. So, when a wife follows her husband's leadership, she is saying "yes" to the God-ordained, stabilizing structure for the family. Again, the relationship between Christ and the Church is a helpful model. Just as believers can stray into taking the reins for themselves, independent from Christ and his direction over their lives, so wives can sometimes take the reins in the marriage, and operate independently from their husbands. Wives must allow their earthly (and heavenly!) husband to lead. To refuse to do so is to rob a husband of his role and responsibility before the Lord.

The notion of submission is modeled for us among the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal in essence, attributes, and authority and yet the Son submits to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Submission is simply a matter of one's role in the relationship. And so, it is in marriage. The husband and wife each has a role in the relationship. Failing to fulfill or stepping outside these God-ordained roles causes damage to the marriage relationship.

**Q:** *What does it practically look like for a wife to follow the leadership of her husband?*

We must note here that first, when a wife submits to her husband in “everything,” this puts the burden of the general health of the family on him. As the wife steps back to hand the reins to her husband, he takes on a massive responsibility, which we will explore in the next section. Just as God gave Adam rules in the Garden, and came looking for him when “everything” went wrong, so God places the health and direction of “everything” on Christian husbands, and holds them accountable for it all. When a wife tries to take the burden of “everything,” something she is not built to carry, she ends up in anxiety, pride, or despair. Instead, as she works in cooperation with her husband, she finds that the right person is held accountable at the end of the day, and the family thrives.

Second, we see that “everything” simply means all parts of life. There's not one area of life that a wife seeks to live independently from her husband, but instead, she treats the covenant as a one-flesh unit (v. 31.) Just as there is not one part of the church's life that is separated from Christ's loving direction and provision, so there is not one part of a wife's life that should be severed from her husband's loving support. They were meant to be united in everything, not separated.

It's important to note that the husband's leadership over “everything” does not mean a wife does not have a voice on family decisions. It simply means he is responsible for the general goals and trajectory of the family in the areas of spirituality, health, finances, romance, education, discipline, and so on, just as Christ is responsible for the general trajectory of the health of his family, the Church. A wife's input on the trajectory of the family is valuable, and the way each marriage divides the tasks associated with their goals will differ.

**Q:** *What does it practically look like for a wife to follow the leadership of her husband?*

**Q:** *Discuss some ways that Christ demonstrated his love for the Church.*

Next, Paul moves to the role of husbands. Their role is to lead and love their wives “as Christ loved the Church” (v. 25). This begs the question: how did Christ love the church? Verses 25-26 give us a snapshot. He gave himself up for her, sanctified her, and cleansed her by speaking the gospel over her. Why did he do this? Verse 27 tells us he did this to present the Church to the heavenly Groom in perfect, pristine condition. This gives husbands a clear and weighty call as they fulfill the role of “Christ” in the marriage.

First, husbands are called to sacrifice. When it comes to giving up things for his bride, Jesus gave up his very life. He died for the Church. For husbands, this means that leading a marriage is really a call to “die daily” to one’s own preferences, way of doing things, perceived “rights,” and selfishness. The call to a husband to lead, if it looks like Christ’s leadership, is really a call to serve, washing the feet of those around us, especially our wives. We must remember that Jesus loves and leads us through warm service and sacrifice, not by cold force. A wife will want to follow a man who is daily laying down his life for her!

🔗: *Compare the role of the husband to the role of the wife. How do they work together and complement one another?*

🔗: *How does Christ view his bride, the Church? How does this inform how a husband should love his wife?*

🔗: *How did Jesus himself model verse 31 for husbands?*

Next, husbands are called to cleanse. While no man can cleanse his wife on a spiritual level (only Christ can do that), a husband’s responsibility is to “wash over” his wife with the word of the gospel and remind her who has cleansed her! When she struggles to find her identity or forgets her value, when she is too high in pride or too low in despair, a husband must remind his wife of the gospel and who she is in Christ! The more a husband helps his wife return to the truths of the gospel, the more sanctified she becomes over time. Just as Jesus cleansed his Church through the work of the gospel, a husband can help “wash over” his wife with reminders of Christ’s work on her behalf.

In verses 28-31, Paul tells husbands to consider their relationship with their wives so intimate that they are “one flesh.” After all, Jesus himself considers the church his very “body,” and he is the “head” of that body (v. 23). In the same way, a husband should not consider his wife isolated or independent from him. Instead, he should view his marriage as one unit, one flesh, one body. Thus, godly husbands should nourish and “love their wives as their own bodies” (v. 28). The needs and interests of his wife should take up just as much energy and concern in the mind of a husband as his own. This means that, for a husband, the very same energy that goes into advancing his own gifts, callings, career, health, passions, and future should be given to his wife. He is responsible for making sure she

flourishes and advances in all of these areas, because after all, they are one flesh!

If they are one body, then to help her thrive is to help himself thrive, and alternatively, neglecting her in these areas is really to neglect himself. If one-half is not thriving (the wife), then the resources are clearly only being poured into the other half of the body (the husband). In God's family structure, the consequences for a wife who struggles in these areas falls squarely on the husband, for he was commissioned to ensure she flourishes. Leading, for the husband, means to direct the family in all areas of life, and to nourish his wife to the very measure that Christ does for his people. To summarize in verse 33, Paul encapsulates each of the spousal roles. The husband is to love his wife as himself. The wife is to respect her husband.

## THE ROLE OF CHILDREN

### ■ READ EPHESIANS 6:1-3

Q: *What are the two things children are required to do regarding their parents?*

Q: *Why do you think Paul includes "in the Lord?"*

In this section of Ephesians, Paul moves into the next role in the family: children. He starts by giving children their first responsibility, which is to obey their parents. While most people, Christian or not, would consider this a normal expectation for children, Paul adds "in the Lord." Given that his letter is written to believers, Paul is assuming that he's talking to Christian families, and that the Christian parents within them would only instruct their children in a godly way. However, if for some reason a child's parents should instruct him to do things that oppose God's character, desires, and direction, the child is no longer bound to obey because this instruction was not "in the Lord." Overall, to obey one's parents is to say "yes" to the God-ordained, stabilizing structure for the family. Parents are the leadership structure that help the entire family run smoothly, and a child's submission honors God and helps the the whole system work.

Q: *Explain the difference between "honor" and "obey."*

The second responsibility Paul gives children is to “honor” their parents, as cited in Exodus 20:12. This command is connected with a promise that it will go well for them and that they will “live long in the land.” Here, Paul is connecting Old Testament promises with New Testament meaning. The “land” is not a physical one on earth, but eternal life, which starts when one believes in Christ. Paul is not teaching that children will be saved by honoring their parents, or by any other good works. Instead he is teaching that the heartfelt obedience of children is evidence that they truly know God and have been saved, resulting in blessings from God.

For any and every child, “honoring” one’s parents is a lifelong task. Though children may grow out of the house and pursue a life of their own once they are grown, they are still required biblically to honor their parents. This includes using gracious speech with one’s parents, being thankful for their investment and time, speaking well of them in front of others, and treating them with kindness and attention instead of negligence or disrespect. This extends to making sure they are taken care of in old age. Though a grown child who lives apart from his parents does not “obey” them in every waking moment, he is still called to highly honor them for the leadership role they have faithfully played.

## THE ROLE OF PARENT

### ■ EPHESIANS 6:4

Q: *What does Paul command parents not to do?*

Q: *Give examples of what “provoking someone to anger” means.*

In this section of Ephesians, Paul moves into the last important role within the family: parent. He warns fathers not to “provoke” their children to anger, something quite common in both ancient times and today. Fathers, as leaders of the household, set the tone and pace of all relational interaction. The entire relational climate of a household can rise and fall depending on the father leading it, and God makes it clear that a father is responsible for bringing a spirit of instruction, discipline, and encouragement instead of provocation, frustration, or discouragement.

Fathers who tend to be overbearing can squelch the enthusiasm and motivation in a child’s life over time, and God does not desire this for Christian families. It is not an accurate depiction of who God is as a Father, so to help fathers properly reflect Himself, God gives fathers another route to take: discipline and instruction. It’s important to note that Paul is not saying mothers have no role in the upbringing of their children—many other places in the Bible speak to this important role! However, Paul makes it clear that as head of the home, fathers are held uniquely responsible by God for leading and loving their children.



Q: *What comes to mind when you hear the word “discipline”? Is it positive or negative?*

Q: *Where can a parent find the “instruction of the Lord” that they are supposed to give to their children?*

Instead of provoking kids to anger, Paul offers parents two alternatives, the first of which is discipline. This word is translated multiple ways in other translations, two of which are nurture and training. This is an all-encompassing word that includes many aspects of how a child’s character is developed over time. It is the whole training and education of a child during their years at home. This includes the healthy cultivation of their mind, morals, virtues, convictions, and bodies. It includes a parent’s responsibility to increase virtue in their children by teaching them clearly, correcting their mistakes, and curbing their passions as they grow.

While many of us think of discipline as a negative word, this word includes all the parts involved, both pleasant and unpleasant, with teaching kids to grow in godliness. Some discipline is positive and teaches kids what to do. This includes instances when parents lead by example and a child mimics them, and also rewarding children for the good that they do. Other types of discipline involve teaching children what not to do, which includes implementing consequences for their actions.

The second task Paul calls parents to is that of instruction. While discipline is all-encompassing, instruction is very specific. The “instruction of the Lord” means verbally teaching children the ways of the Lord as seen in Scripture, the blessings and warnings God gives us, and the precious reality of the gospel. This includes teaching the positives of Scriptures, but also includes a strong verbal rebuke when necessary. When parents choose to raise their kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, they are following God’s plan for family life.

Q: *What do all these roles have in common?*

To conclude, we must note that each role has an important phrase attached to it. For wives, it was following her husband “as to the Lord” (6:22). For husbands, it was leading and loving his wife “as Christ loved the Church” (6:25). For children, it was obeying their parents “in the Lord” (6:1). For parents, it was raising their kids in the

instruction “of the Lord” (6:4). A common theme all of these have in common is God. Each person plays their part in order to communicate that God’s way of doing family is better than any other way. More than that, each role communicates a special way God relates with His people! If we are a husband or wife, we get to be part of telling the story of who Jesus the Bridegroom is to the Church, his bride. If we are a parent or child, we are part of telling the the story of a good Father who loves and guides His children. As we live out these roles and responsibilities, we tell a story about God to a watching world.

Finally, these little phrases communicate that while we can each try hard to muster up godliness on our own, the power to live in our roles comes from God’s strength alone. The ability to perform our family responsibilities can only be found “in the Lord!” No one person can do all of this perfectly on their own, but with God’s strength, we can do family God’s way.

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- ❓ *Do you usually wait for another family member to embrace their role before you will embrace yours? How is this attitude disobedient to Scripture? In what practical ways can you repent and shift your focus onto your own role within the family unit?*
- ❓ *We all have a role within the family. What are your main roles? How can you take your roles more seriously both now and in the future, given that these are instituted by God?*
- ❓ *If you are a husband or a wife, what part of your role within the marriage have you neglected? Have you been passive in your leadership, not planning for the trajectory of your family? Have you been resisting the call to follow your husband, trying to live independently? Take some time as a couple to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, and make a united plan to follow biblical roles in your marriage.*
- ❓ *If you are a parent, what specific ways do you provoke your kids to anger? How*

*can you replace those habits with healthy instruction of the Lord? Take some time to identify parents in your church who have raised godly kids, and invite their advice and counsel into your family.*

**Q:** *If you are a child, in what ways have you not obeyed and honored your parents? How can you practically repent for this, and reconcile with your parents?*

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, thank you for creating families and all the diverse roles within them.
- God, give me the perspective and power necessary to take my role within my family seriously. Help me obey the way you designed the family to operate.
- God, empower me to live out my role within my family to the best of my ability, regardless of how the other members of my family treat their role.
- God, convict me when I stray from the role you have called me to. Give me other believers who will tell me when I'm doing this, and who will also invest in me to help me become the best spouse, parent, or child I can be.

## COMMENTARY

**EPHESIANS 5:24** It's important to note that "everything" here is a general term for the affairs of the family, and does not include special cases of abuse or uncivil law-breaking. Should a husband be "leading" his wife to overtly disobey the Lord or the law, a wife is not bound to obey, as her loyalty to the Lord overrides her husband's idolatrous or harmful direction.

**EPHESIANS 5:31** "Leaving and cleaving" means that the nuclear family unit changes once two people get married. Whereas the primary role of two single people may be "children," once they have come of age and

married, they have a new primary role, and that is spouse. A husband and wife should “leave” the family they knew before, though still honoring them as they depart, and “cleave” to one another as a new family unit. This new family unit is the predominant concern of the husband and wife now, and their extended families are secondary according to God.

**EPHESIANS 6:4** While he addresses fathers specifically, scholars note that given Paul’s use of “parents” in the immediate context (v. 1) includes the mother’s contribution as well. Obedience from children is due to both parents. The mother’s submission to her husband does not remove her dignity or authoritative role over her child, but rather enhances it, as her husband’s ultimate authority over the household backs her up as she disciplines her children. Also, given the role of leader as the family, when fathers specifically obey this portion of Ephesians, the mother follows his example and the children flourish. Ultimately, Paul is pointing to the fact that the health of the children, both physically and spiritually, falls on the father’s responsibility as leader.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the Expositor’s Bible Commentary.*

