

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Identity*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: A lady dragging five children onto a bus was asked by the bus driver, “Are those all yours, or is this a picnic?” to which she retorted, “They are all mine and it ain’t no picnic!” Living in a family is no picnic. Things are not always ideal in the home. Humorist and author Erma Bombeck wrote, “Raising a family isn’t something I put on my resume, but I have to ask myself: would I apply for the same job again?” Needless to say, raising a family is not an easy task. It requires hard work, sacrifice, and submission.

Now, there’s a word no one likes—submission. The word *submit* conjures up images of doormats, of being run over, of second class citizens, and of being subordinate to a person in authority. We don’t like it. Submission is often thought of as only the role and responsibility of the wife. Men are quick to quote Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands” (Ephesians 5:22 ESV), while ignoring the verse before it. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21 NIV). Paul gives the world a distinctly Christian element. Here he defined submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love. Let me contrast it: The military use of the term, submission to authority is expected and can be commanded with the threat of punishment if obedience is not given. The Christian use of the term, submission is yielding in love as a voluntary act in relationship to the family.

1. Wives submit. (5:22-24)

Submission does not mean to give in to the husband’s every whim, to be trampled underfoot, to be treated disrespectfully. Instead, wives give up control by placing themselves under the influence of their husbands. Submission is a matter of the heart—a voluntary action. J. B. Phillips translated this verse: “Wives, adapt yourselves to your husbands.”

How does a wife submit to her husband? By allowing the husband to take leadership in the relationship. Authority is not domination but responsible headship in the family. This action includes listening, encouraging, cultivating a calm and gentle spirit, and respecting. Such behavior is not one of weakness and inferiority but of humility and prayer.

Matthew Henry said it best: “The woman was made out of Adam’s side. She was not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.”

Submission is like traveling to a foreign country with a friend who has made all the arrangements, planned the itinerary, made the reservations at the hotels, knows the

transportation schedule, and how to get to all the sites with you in mind. All you have to do is follow their lead, enjoying the trip. The stress-related details have been taken care of. Why fret? Why not follow their lead? The friend has your best interest in mind (as we will discover next) and wants nothing but the finest for you.

Richard Foster, writing in his classic *Celebration of Discipline* about submission as a spiritual discipline, identified a corresponding freedom when submission is practiced. He wrote, “It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.” Too many of us, men and women, feel like we have to be number one, like we have to be in control, like we always have to have our way. Submission recognizes that many matters aren’t as important as we think. Like the subtitle of the popular book, *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff*: “And it’s all small stuff.”

It takes a strong and mature woman to be submissive and a loving and selfless man to exact Christ-like influence—one who loves his wife.

2. Husbands love. (5:25-28)

Interestingly, twice the space is used in Ephesians 5-6 to address the husbands as the wives. Love sums up the action and attitude of a husband. “Husbands *love* your wives.” The word used is the same as God’s love: *agape*. It’s a self-giving, self-sacrificing, self-denying love that puts the other’s needs ahead of one’s own. It’s a love that has no limits.

A marital questionnaire asked the question: “What do women love most about their husbands?” The leading answer was a “husband’s sensitivity and love for them.”

For a husband to love his wife goes beyond merely being committed to the relationship. It is more than sending flowers, writing love notes, and taking her out to dinner (though she would appreciate these acts of love). *Agape* love requires an active commitment that entails sacrifice. This kind of love costs. It takes time, mental and emotional energy, and self-discipline. Such love denies self-centered desires and preferences and focuses instead on the needs of the wife. It might mean engaging in conversation when sitting quietly is preferred, or focusing full attention on her instead of watching a ball game, or listening to her frustrations after hearing coworkers complain all day. It definitely means praying with her and for her even when physically exhausted and sleep is needed, being committed to her spiritual growth, and engaging in her personal well-being.

A correct understanding of love makes submission possible. Too many husbands bang the drum of submission but don’t practice God-like love. In a family where Jesus is Lord, genuine submission can’t exist without sacrificial love. Or, the whole relational balance is upset and the possibility of damage is paramount. For the correct picture of love, study Jesus’ sacrifice.

The strongest virtue a man can pass on to his children is to love his wife. The old saying bears repeating: The best thing you can do for your children is to love their mother. Love her openly. Love her deeply. Love her continually. Love her faithfully.

3. Children obey. (6:1-3)

Children are to accept the leadership of their parents. They do what their parents say. Obedience is expected and rewarded. In fact, as Wayne Grant states in his book, *Growing Parents Growing Children*, “children feel more secure and protected when their parents set rules and regulations and enforce them consistently.”

As with submission, a corresponding benefit manifests with obedience: “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Ephesians 6:3 ESV) or as the NIV

translates it: “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:3 NIV). Who doesn’t want things to go well? And who doesn’t want a long life? Unfortunately, for many children life is difficult and short, dying too soon. The home is disintegrating. The moral fabric of families is unraveling. Houses are war zones.

How do we teach our children to obey? By saying “no” with love, by setting boundaries with love, by spending time with them, by listening to them, by praying for them, by being there when they really need us, by praising our children, and by setting the right example. The best way, however, to teach obedience is to model obedience. Like many important traits obedience is more easily caught than taught. Children quickly learn from parents following scriptural teaching, most importantly: “Wives submit to your husbands . . .” and “Husbands love your wives . . .” Our children will learn to honor us as we honor our parents. Our children learn respect as we respect each other. Children don’t do what we say; children do what we do. They become what we are.

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