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GUIDE

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Week 1: Intimacy with **God**

This week, we discussed intimacy with God: how vital it is and how readily available it is.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 3:14-21 | John 14:23

Sermon Recap

There is an assault on intimacy. With the rise of social media, hand-held mini-computers (phones), and netflix binging, we are increasingly isolated and alone. In a “plugged-in” world, it is entirely possible to go days without really *connecting* to anyone. Mother Teresa said, “The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love.” Why is intimacy in such short supply?

I think Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians would resound well in our culture today. Listen to what he prays for them: that Christ may dwell in their hearts (3:17), that they may be rooted and established in love (3:17b), and that they may grasp how much God loves them (3:18-19). Paul seems to think that knowing the love of God and being rooted in an intimate relationship with Him would change the lives of the Ephesians. I believe it will change our lives as well.

Paul’s prayer can really be broken up into two requests: 1) that God fill the Ephesians with His presence and Power, 2) that the Ephesians know God’s love.

First, can we take a moment to reflect on the idea that God wants to live INSIDE of us? This is an amazing claim. Paul didn’t come up with this idea, though. He got it from Jesus! In John, Jesus tells us that the Trinity would make a home in us (John 14:23). This is the definition of intimacy - you can’t get closer than inside! Our creator is not content sitting far away from creation. Apparently, putting on a body and moving into the neighborhood wasn’t close enough! He wants to move inside our bodies! Why would God want to be that close? To answer that question, Paul prays that the Ephesians would know the love of God.

God’s love is not a casual love. He loves us more than we can fathom. God loves us so much that He would die so we could be with Him forever. Because of His love, God *wants* to be close to you. Intimacy with God is not something that should be difficult. God wants it so badly! He is willing to go to great lengths to provide it.

Discussion

- 1) Does anyone have a story about a bad/embarrassing date?
- 2) Take a guess concerning the average number of facebook friends a person has? Do you think people are “close” with all of these “friends?”
- 3) How would you define “intimacy?”
- 4) What are some common barriers to intimacy in our culture?
- 5) Do you have a hard time labeling your relationship with God as “intimate?” Why? Why not?

“When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that God loves man: not that He has some ‘disinterested’ ... concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect’, is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. How this should be, I do not know: it passes reason to explain why any creatures, not to say creatures such as we, should have a value so prodigious in their Creator’s eyes.” - C.S. Lewis

- 6) Consider this clip from [Martian Child](#). Why is it sometimes difficult for us to see God as a Father who pursues us with His love and wants to be with us forever?
- 7) What are some barriers we have to intimacy with God? Why do we put up those barriers?
- 8) What is one step you could take to knock down just one of those barriers of intimacy with God?

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Week 2: Intimacy with **Spouse**

This week, we discussed how to develop intimacy in marriage through mutual submission.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 5:21-33

| Philippians 2:1-4

| John 17:20-23

Sermon Recap

Today, we venture into a potentially hot topic. Within today's passage is the famed scripture, "Wives, submit to your husbands." For sure, this scripture has been abused and misused. But, rather than avoid it, I think it's important to dive into it and see what Paul was getting at. Remember, this whole series is on the topic of intimacy. Paul begins this section of the letter with a prayer that Christ would live in us and we would know the love of God. Apparently, the way we treat our spouses impacts our intimacy with God.

It often goes unnoticed that Paul has much more to say to husbands in this passage than he does to wives (9 verses of instruction vs. 4 verses of instruction). There are instructions to both spouses and we need to pay attention to both sets of instruction if we are going to get to the heart of what Paul is saying.

The first command is given to everyone (to both wife *and* husband): "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (vs. 21). Paul is calling for a mutual submission. Paul's instruction to spouses should not be taken out of the context of his instruction to every Christian. What did Paul mean by telling us to submit to each other? I think we can get a picture of the kind of submission he is talking about from **Philippians 2:1-4** - "in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but, each of you, to the interests of the others." This should be our posture toward our spouses. So, if we are approaching Ephesians 5 to put our spouse "in their place," we are approaching it the wrong way. After we assume the right posture toward one another (that of humility and putting the other above ourselves), we are able to move on to Paul's specific instructions to husbands and wives.

Each relationship is compared to the relationship that Jesus has with the Church. This is such an important aspect of this portion of Scripture. It is, in fact, what this passage is about. The instructions to husbands and wives are peripheral comments to Paul's larger teaching. In this passage, Paul quotes Genesis and tells us that this union between a husband and wife is a representation of God's plan for Jesus to be intimately united with His church. He elevates marriage as a picture of the intimacy that God longs for and that Jesus prays for (see John 17:20-23). This is why our posture toward each other matters - because marriage is a parable for something much bigger and deeper.

In Paul's metaphor, the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the Church. So, he appears to be pointing to the different ways that each spouse is to submit to one another.

First, he tells wives to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ. This has to do with leadership. The *way* a wife is instructed to submit is to allow herself to be led. Leadership is not solely about authority, it is about influence. The Church submits to Christ by allowing Jesus to influence the way they live. This instruction is not to put a woman in a lesser standing than a man. In fact, the mere fact that Paul gives more instructions to the men concerning how to treat their wives was radical in his day. Also, if wives are to be compared to the Church, let's allow C.S. Lewis to capture our imaginations of what the Church is. In Screwtape letters he describes the Church as, "...spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners." He goes on to say that it makes the boldest demons quiver. I would argue that, If you see wives as somehow the "lesser" or "weaker" sex, you are not seeing them how Jesus sees the Church.

So, if Paul's instruction is *not* meant to make women out to be "less-than" men, what is he getting at? Well, he has already quoted Genesis 2. In this instruction to the wives, he is alluding to Genesis 3. God speaks to Eve after the fall and tells her that her desire will be for her husband but he will rule over her. The same language is used in Genesis 4 when God tells Cain that sin *desires* to control him but he must *rule* over it. In this context, God tells Eve that she will desire control over her husband but he will not be controlled by her. Paul knows that "Eve's" posture toward her husband is to want to control him. To walk into new creation, however, she must be willing to follow his leadership.

Paul also gives instruction to the husband. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. If the whole marriage relationship is characterized by mutual submission, this speaks to the *way* a husband is to submit to his wife. Paul is holding up Jesus, who wraps the towel around his waist (taking the lowliest of household chores) and washes the disciples feet is the model for all husbands. Paul puts on husbands the responsibility to lead with the kind of love that is willing to die in order that the wife may live. If a husband is to be a Christian husband, he must copy Jesus, not Archie Bunker. As Jesus said in Luke 22:26, the leader must be like the one who serves.

Finally, the point is intimacy. Paul is telling us that intimacy only comes through submission.

Discussion

- 1) The median age for the first marriage has increased in recent years.^[2] The median age in the early 1970s was 23 for men and 21 for women; and it rose to 28 for men and 26 for women by 2009^[3] and by 2017, it was 29.5 for men and 27.4 for women.^[4] Why do you think people are waiting longer to get married?
- 2) Describe the relationship your parents have/had with each other.
- 3) How does the relationship we witnessed in our parents impact our own understanding of marriage?
- 4) What is your initial reaction to Ephesians 5:21-33? Does this Scripture come with any baggage for you? If so, what?
- 5) What does mutual submission mean in the context of marriage? Why is mutual submission difficult?
- 6) Do you agree that Paul is instructing wives to allow themselves to be led by their husbands? Why do you think this is the instruction to wives?
- 7) Do you agree that Paul is instructing the husbands to love and serve their wives? Why is this the instruction to husbands?
- 8) How does it increase intimacy for wives to allow themselves to be influenced by their husbands and for husbands to lead through self-sacrificial service?

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Week 3: Intimacy with **Family**

This week, we discuss how to develop intimacy within a family.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 6:1-4 | Philippians 2:5-8

Sermon Recap

We are all a part of family. You might not have children, but, I guarantee you have parents (unless, of course, you're a clone or a robot - then I want to meet you). I think it is a bit easier to think about intimacy with God, the Church, and even with a spouse then it is to think about intimacy with your family. For many of us, we are blessed with a wonderful family who loves to spend time with each other. And, for others, we would trade in our families for another one in a second!

Remember, in this section of Ephesians, Paul is speaking about intimacy. He opens it up with a prayer. He prays that the Ephesians would know the intimacy of Christ dwelling inside of them. Then, he follows that prayer with instructions on how to live in intimacy with the Church and with our spouses. Today, we are going to enter into his instructions to the Christian family.

All of Paul's instructions so far have focused on mutual submission. Why does Paul think that intimacy comes through submission? He is simply looking at the most intimate relationship there is - the Trinity. God exists in relationship - three persons in one. It is indeed a mystery. However, this intimacy is so central to who God is that John can say, "God is love." There's a lot of places we could look to see what characterises the intimacy of God (Jesus submitting to the Father, the Father doing "whatever Jesus asks," the Spirit lifting up Jesus all the time). The Trinity exists in a mutually submissive relationship. That is what Paul sees. In fact, in one of Paul's older letters, this is made abundantly clear (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus is the exact representation of God, right? Well, Jesus emptied himself and became submissive and obedient. We can say, "that's just what Jesus did." Or, we can say, "apparently, that is what God is like." God exists in an intimate relationship that is based on mutual submission. **Intimacy comes through submission.**

So far, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is giving instructions on *how* to submit to one another. There are special instructions for the church, for spouses, and for families. This week, we will take a look at the instructions to families.

Children submit to their parents through obedience. This obedience has a quality to it - "in the Lord." Now, this does not mean you don't have to obey your parents if they are not Christians. It means your obedience to your parents is the way you obey the Lord. Your

obedience is first and foremost to the Lord and it is demonstrated in your obedience to your parents. However, it should be pointed out that if you are being abused or being asked to do something unethical, there is a higher law at work - "obey God rather than man." Paul goes on to say that this command comes with a promise! He is not only pointing out that obedience is commanded, he is pointing to the healthy life that comes out of obedience. One of those things that make our lives healthy is intimacy.

Finally, Paul instructs parents (he is speaking to both parents when he says, "fathers"). Parents are to practice submission to their children by not provoking them to anger. This does not mean parents shouldn't anger their children. It means parents should provoke anger. Some discipline will make children angry. However, the anger shouldn't be the point. We shouldn't aim to take things just because we are angry and we want to "hurt" them. No, our posture towards our children should be for their wellbeing. "Rather, bring them up in the Lord." This means that we should always be thinking about their spiritual formation and the development of their hearts. To do this, we must set aside our desires for the way things should be (behaviors, personalities, time-frames). We lay those things down in submission to the real needs of their hearts. Parent's instruction should shape and form - not merely discipline. This is not about being merely an authority in the life of your children, it is about being an influence.

Discussion

- 1) Consider this clip from [Home Alone](#). How close is this to the way you feel in your family? Have you ever felt disconnected from your family? When? Describe the feeling.
- 2) What was/is your relationship with your parents like? Describe it.
- 3) What does it mean to honor our mother and father?
- 4) What are the limitations to Paul's command "children, obey your parents in the Lord?" Should there be limitations? Why? Why Not?
- 5) How do we discern the difference between obeying something we don't feel like obeying and being asked to do something wrong or unethical? How can young children tell the difference?
- 6) Why do you think submission from children takes the form of obedience to parents? Why does that lead to intimacy?
- 7) What is the difference between punishment and formation? Which one takes more effort and time? Why is it easier to punish bad behavior than form good identities?
- 8) Why do you think submission from parents takes the form of not provoking anger? How does this lead to intimacy?

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Week 4: Intimacy with **Church**

This week, we discussed deep connection to the local Church.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 4:1-16 | Ephesians 4:29-32 | Hebrews 10:23-25

Sermon Recap

We can see Paul's posture toward the spiritual journey when he says this: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul understands that the Christian journey isn't a sprint. It's a marathon. There is an African proverb that says, "if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This is why Paul instructs the Ephesians (from prison) to bear with one another in love - "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." He understands that we need each other on this journey if we are going to press on and take hold of the prize. The way we help each other is similar to how all the parts of a human body help the body thrive (Ephesians 4:16).

I have bad knees. They hurt when I run or play a sport. I might have a fun time playing basketball for an evening. But, you better believe that my knees will make me pay for it over the next month! There are some things that my body can't do because my knees won't let it. Now, I could go to the gym, work out my legs and strengthen my knees. But, that would require discipline from my mind and support from other parts of my body to make that happen. My knees are a part of my body and my body is home to my knees. I can't have one without the other. The same is true in the Church. Some of us are trying to walk the Christian journey disconnected from a body and wondering why we are limping. But, the opposite is true as well. The church body is limited in health and ability when all the parts aren't working together and doing their part. Intimacy with the Church is not only necessary and beneficial for the individual, it is needed if the Church is going to be the healthy body of Christ it is meant to be.

This is so important to Paul that he not only tells the Ephesians they should stay connected, he gives them basic guidance as to *how* they can stay connected (Ephesians 4:25-32). It's simple instruction, but simple doesn't always mean easy! He tells them to: 1) tell the truth, 2) control their anger, 3) contribute to the community (work), 4) watch their mouths, 5) and forgive each other. This is basic. True, it can be challenging. But, if we are going to lay hold of the prize, it will be together.

Discussion

- 1) What comes to mind when you hear the African proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together?” What is true or untrue about it?
- 2) Consider watching this clip from [Unbroken](#).
 - a) Why do you think the younger brother considered himself nothing?
 - i) Why are we sometimes tempted to think we are nothing?
 - b) How was the younger brother able to keep running after he wanted to stop?
 - i) What is it about the encouragement of other people that enables us to do greater things than we thought possible?
 - ii) Who is your cheerleader in life? Who are you taking responsibility for?
- 3) Consider watching this clip from [Freedom Writers](#). (0:37 - 2:57)
 - a) What was it about the community that made the character feel at home?
 - b) Why does feeling at home and a part of a community heal us in deep places?
- 4) Read Paul’s guidance to the Ephesians in 4:25-32. Which of the things on that list are the most difficult for you to practice? Why?