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UNIT TWO

THE MYSTERY OF
MARRIAGE

The Search for Oneness

UNIT ASSIGNMENTS JRNY.org/g4-2

- Work on and be prepared to give your *60-Second Testimony*
- 21 Days of Personal Worship
- Listen to audio message *The Mystery of Marriage*

TRUTH

► BY MEMORY

"³¹Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

EPHESIANS 5:31-32 (ESV)

► IN BIBLE

Last week you learned about two marriage myths: first, that with the right partner a good marriage will develop naturally on its own; and second, that the right partner will meet your deepest needs. Was this teaching difficult for you? Perhaps a light bulb switched on in your head and you understood for the first time how unrealistic your expectations of marriage have been. Did this realization leave you discouraged? This is understandable but please know, God's plan in your singleness or your marriage is to show you how wonderfully satisfying your relationship with Him can be. So, embrace Jesus fully and ask God to satisfy you daily with His presence.

This week you will investigate the two-fold mystery of marriage from two passages of Scripture. Marriage is a mystery in that God built in the potential for a kind of oneness that *cannot* be realized merely through co-habitation. And secondly, marriage is a mystery in that this oneness is an astounding illustration of the mystical union of Christ and His Bride, the Church.

It is recommended that you use these passages in your personal worship this week using the **PRAISE** model for personal worship:

PRAY FIRST | **READ THE TEXT** | **ASK QUESTIONS** | **INTERPRET IN CONTEXT** | **SUMMARIZE APPLICATIONS** | **ENGAGE WITH GOD**

Remember how important personal application is.

GENESIS 2:18-25 – You studied this passage last week, but this week you will take a deeper look.

Last week you discovered that God created Eve with equal dignity and value to be a complementary partner for Adam. **How would you describe Adam's response when God presented Eve to him (v 23)?**

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Verse 24 is sometimes called the leaving and cleaving verse. A man is to leave his parents and cleave to (unite with) his wife. The idea is that there is an important reason that a man's union with his wife trumps his union with his parents. **What is that reason?**

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What do you think is the significance of the mention of nakedness in verse 25? Why is the absence of shame important to mention?

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EPHESIANS 5:21-33 – In this passage Paul describes how Christian husbands and wives are to relate to one another and he quotes Genesis 2:24 as the reason for giving this instruction.

Describe the difference between the roles assigned to husbands and wives in verses 22-24.

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In verses 25-33, Paul describes the duty each partner owes to his or her spouse. **How would you summarize the essential difference between a husband's and wife's responsibility in marriage?**

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Why do you think Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 in this passage? Why is this verse important here?

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► TO SUMMARIZE

Last week you examined two false expectations about marriage and hopefully you now agree that finding the right partner won't guarantee a good marriage, nor will finding the right partner meet your deepest need. So, should we conclude that marriage is generally more difficult than rewarding and is therefore not to be desired?

Not so. Marriage is a good thing and the false myths about marriage don't diminish God's grand design for it. He intended that husbands and wives experience a depth of oneness in marriage that is so satisfying and lasting that it serves as the clearest illustration of the bond between Christ and his Church. In other words marriage was given to teach us how to rightly relate to Jesus. You may wonder whether, in this fallen world, such a unity between a sinful man and a sinful woman is possible. Certainly it is. Otherwise, marriage could never be a picture of Christ's mystical union with the Church. However, Paul declares that marital oneness is a profound mystery, both in terms of the spiritual union it symbolizes, and in how it is achieved in a fallen world.

So, assuming that oneness is possible in our marriages how is it to be achieved? How can two fallen people become one? It certainly is not what most people experience. The answer is found in recognizing that marriage can only reflect Christ's oneness with His Church when husbands and wives follow God's pattern for the marriage relationship as seen in Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5.

This pattern is introduced in Ephesians 5:21 with this first requirement for experiencing oneness, "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" Now, even this general command is daunting for it requires that both partners possess a selfless heart in order to experience oneness. And apart from Christ's work, your fallen human heart simply lacks the capacity for selflessness when your spouse is unlovable, mean, rude, ugly, and inconsiderate. It simply will not happen naturally. Our society typically has a narcissistic attitude about God. That is, we treat Him as if His

sole reason for existence is to meet our needs and ensure our happiness. We know the reverse is true, that in fact, our purpose for existence is to glorify Him. But, this narcissism can slowly poison our attitude toward our spouse, so that we come to think of that person as existing primarily to meet our needs. We become, as it were, a tick on a dog. Unfortunately, in many marriages there are two ticks and no dog.

But the good news is that if you are a follower of Christ, He has created a new heart in you and given you a new capacity to be selfless that surpasses human nature (see II Corinthians 5:17). So for you, there is a true hope of experiencing oneness with your spouse when you both have hearts that are transformed by Christ and your goal is to focus more on your partner's needs than on your own.

This should make you aware of the impact your spiritual pilgrimage can have on the quality of your marriage. A changed heart is so vitally important to marital oneness. If you are experiencing disappointment in marriage, if the relationship is stretched to the breaking point, look first at your spiritual pilgrimage, not the marriage itself. If you are single and desiring marriage, commit yourself to the spiritual development of a selfless heart, both in yourself and in your future partner.

A second requirement for experiencing oneness in marriage is that both partners must assume their God-given roles. Paul describes these roles in Ephesians 5:22-24. Husbands must lead their wives, following Christ's example of the servant-leader. Wives must be subject to their husbands, following Christ's example of voluntary submission.

Our society has largely rejected the concept of male leadership in marriage because it is thought that it implies male superiority or provides an excuse for male domination. Nothing could be further from the truth. Non-Christian cultures often treat women as lower-class citizens who might be viewed as mere property, but the gospel invariably exalts the position of women in marriage and society. Let us be perfectly clear that neither Paul nor the rest of Scripture teaches a masculine superiority and feminine inferiority. The account of the woman's creation in Genesis 2 makes it clear that Eve was a partner uniquely suited to complete Adam. In terms of inherent value, she was in every way his equal. In terms of function, she was everything that he was not, and thus they two were together, one.

Jesus was in no way inferior to the Father. He is *ontologically equal* to the Father, that is, they are the same in power, substance and glory. And yet Jesus, who claimed to be one with the Father, voluntarily submitted himself so that He was *functionally subject* to the Father. So also, a wife is on equal ground with her husband as far as personal worth and significance are concerned. Yet, for the purpose of marital oneness she takes up her God-given role in submission to her husband's leadership. In fact, just as Jesus was exalted for his submission to the Father, so husbands must honor and cherish their wives for the invaluable service they offer to the marriage partnership.

A third requirement for achieving oneness is that both partners must be faithful to their appropriate responsibilities in marriage as described in verses 25-33. Husbands must love their wives, again, following the example of Christ's love. And wives must respect their husbands.

Husbands are to follow Christ's example of love in three ways. First, they must demonstrate Christ's sacrificial love (v 25). Just as Jesus offered a love

that cost his life to a people who were not worthy of it, so a husband must love his wife, looking to her best interests. Though she may not always *deserve* her husband's love, she *needs* his love. She may be at times disrespectful, uncooperative, and difficult, so to offer such a love, a husband needs Christ's supernatural work creating a selfless heart.

A husband must also demonstrate a sanctifying love (v 26-27). Christ gave His life to make His bride pure. So also, a husband must do the same. He should never provoke his wife to resentment, anger, or compromise. A single Christian man must never coerce a woman to compromise sexually in the name of love. That's selfish, not Christ's love. His love makes His people pure. In the same way, a man must guard the purity of the woman he loves.

Lastly, a husband must demonstrate self-like love for his wife (28-29). That is, he must look after her needs as attentively as he would look after the needs of his own body.

In verse 31, Paul instructs wives that they must respect their husbands. Certainly both husbands and wives should love and respect one another, but a wife's primary responsibility is to respect her husband. He may at times be unkind, unloving, and aloof. He may not *deserve* respect, yet he *needs* it. Ladies may wonder how to respect a man who isn't respectable. First, it's a matter of respecting the leadership role, but more than that, it takes a changed heart. You will need the selfless heart that only Jesus can give.

When both partners have selfless hearts, pursuing the interests of their spouse, assuming their God-given roles and responsibilities, then you have the requirements to achieve oneness in a marriage. And marital oneness will tend to be proportionally as strong as your own oneness with Christ. That is not to say that oneness doesn't require dedication and effort. It does. Yet it must begin with a growing selfless heart.

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Here are some suggestions for expressing selflessness to enhance oneness in your marriage.

- Communicate your love or respect in the way that speaks most clearly to your spouse, not in the way that is easiest for you.
- Find your spouse's greatest need – whether love, respect, appreciation, time, or leadership – and ask God to allow you to be a vehicle for meeting that need in your partner's life.
- Engage in mutual life activities that foster friendship and fun. Divorce rates peak in the 2nd – 4th years as the reality stage kicks in, and again in the 15th – 20th years as children begin to leave home. So during those years make sure you and your spouse share some significant activity that you both enjoy.
- Schedule talk time (dates, weekends away, etc.) to explore your spouse's questions, emotions, and spiritual life.
- Pray together regularly. 90% of marriages that include regular, meaningful prayer survive for a lifetime. Lack of prayer between married Christians is a sign of an unhealthy blockage in the relationship that should be seen as a threat to long-term oneness.

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EQUIPPING

In Genesis 2:23 Adam was completely delighted by his new bride. However the fall quickly eroded that delight for both Adam and Eve. **How important is it to you to maintain your delight in your spouse, and their delight in you? What could you do to build (or rebuild) that delight?**

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Think about your heart. Have you been becoming more or less selfless? Write a few sentences explaining the condition of your heart toward your spouse over the past few weeks or months.

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Take some time to pray about the distinct roles and responsibilities in marriage that Paul describes. Journal your thoughts about whether you agree, struggle, or disagree with what Paul wrote. Ask God to help you understand and embrace His pattern for marital roles and responsibilities.

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ACCOUNTABILITY

Before your Journey Group meeting, use the questions below to examine your life in light of the truth you explored this week.

Are you embracing your God-given role and responsibility in your marriage? Explain.

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Would your spouse say you consistently demonstrate a selfless heart in your relationship?

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Do you still delight in your spouse and are you faithful to your marital vows?

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If single, are you maintaining your personal purity before Christ?

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Did you complete the mission assignment this week?

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Describe your most significant time of personal worship this week.

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How have you attempted to impact someone on your prayer list this week?

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SUPPLICATION

“Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

– EPHESIANS 5:22 (ESV)

“Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church...”

– EPHESIANS 5:25A (ESV)

“...And let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

– EPHESIANS 5:33B (ESV)

Husbands, in prayer, ask God to give you a supernatural-godly love for your wife. Wives, ask God to help you in submitting to and respecting and your husband. If you are single and desiring to be married, in prayer, ask God to provide a godly spouse.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

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My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

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“The Christian is supposed to love his neighbor, and since his wife is his nearest neighbor, she should be his deepest love.”

— MARTIN LUTHER

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