

OUR WEDDING PICTURES

EPHESIANS 5:31-33

Jim Zetz suffers from stage IV pancreatic cancer.

Doctors have told Jim he might not see his 11 year old daughter's next birthday, let alone her wedding day.

But Jim refused to let his impending death rob he and Josie of one of life's most special moments. Jim knows he won't be around when Josie gets married, but that didn't stop him from walking her down the aisle in advance. In a backyard ceremony - with Josie in a pint-sized wedding dress - they took their sacred stroll.

The event was arranged by a wedding photographer.

Lindsey Villatoro knows the importance of wedding pictures. She not only snapped the photographs, she planned the ceremony - with cake and presents.

One day, when Josie does walk the aisle to be married, she'll have photographs of her dad walking with her. And you can bet, the photos of her and her dad will be featured prints in her future wedding album.

And as we've been learning, likewise God is into wedding photos! Jesus loves His Church. He died with her in mind. He's on a mission to save us. One day we'll be reunited. Forever we'll be the Bride of Christ.

But until that day arrives, Jesus has left us photos.

Marriage is a wedding picture! Christian marriage speaks of eternal, spiritual realities. This is what makes marriage *special, sacred - the holiest of relationships*.

Both husbands and wives are posing for pictures by how they conduct their marriage. When wives submit, and respect their husband as head of their home - and husbands love their wives as Christ loves the Church - they both *preach the Gospel* and *please the Lord*.

Over the last two weeks we've been working our way through Paul's instructions on marriage, Ephesians 5:22-33. This morning, let's read the whole passage, and then we'll focus in on today's text, verses 31-33...

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

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So husbands ought to love their own 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 the Lord does the church.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

And now this morning's text... "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Verse 31 is taken from **Genesis 2:24**. God had just performed the world’s first surgery. He put Adam into a deep sleep, and opened up his side. The Hebrew translation says he took out “**something curved**.”

Perhaps it was a rib, or maybe a bone, or (*I know it doesn’t sound as romantic, but...*) a piece of cartilage.

Whatever it was God used it to fashion the woman.

When Adam came out from under the anesthesia God presented to him his bride. He named her “**Eve**.”

Eve was God’s gift to Adam, but after the **operation** the question arose, “**How does the marriage operate?**”

How do we order a marriage for long term success?

And it’s verses 24-25 of Genesis 2 that provide the answer. A mysterious voice utters these words... and where not sure who’s voice it is... It could be Adam - or God’s - or maybe it was an insertion by Moses, the human author of Genesis. But these words link the first marriage to all marriages that come afterwards.

They lay out **four ground rules** for ever marriage.

The voice declares, “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**” Paul quotes this in Ephesians 5:31, and in doing so codifies the first marriage vows.

Genesis 2 finishes the thought, “*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*”

Here Genesis gives us, and Paul confirms, the four essentials of every marriage. I call them “*the musts of marriage.*” Here are **the four musts of a marriage...**

First, is **severance**. *Leave your father and mother.*

Second, is **permanence**. You’re joined to a spouse. I like how the OKJ puts it, you “*cleave unto his wife.*”

Third, is **unity**. “*And they shall become one flesh.*” In essence the two lives are **weaved** together into one.

And lastly, there was **intimacy**. According to Genesis “*they were naked, and were not ashamed.*” Obviously, they **conceived** a physical and emotional closeness.

Here’s the abbreviated version of *the four musts of a marriage... You leave, cleave, weave, conceive...*

This is God’s formula for a successful marriage.

And again, as with “*everything marriage,*” this too is a spiritual picture - these **marital musts** are a portrait of the Christian’s commitment to our Lord Jesus...

Just as a both spouses **leave** their past, *and say good-bye to parents and prospective suitors* - then **cleave** to their spouse... believers break allegiance with their former life, and form new bonds with Jesus.

We adapt and adjust to life God’s way, or **weave** our lives together with His... *We call this discipleship.*

And that's the kind of faith and commitment that **conceives** an intimacy - a deep connectedness - the closeness and experience with God all humans crave.

We've talked about **the wife's wedding pictures** - and **the husband's wedding pictures** - their unique roles.

Well, in verse 31 we find **our wedding pictures**.

These four musts apply to husbands *and* wives.

First, for a marriage to succeed there has to be **severance**. You have to **leave** your father and mother.

But that includes other entanglements that could also hinder your marriage. After you marry, you terminate any and all competing relationships - with males or females - that might risk or interfere with the marriage.

Put the same idea in the positive, and it's all about making your marriage your top priority and loyalty.

Once a boy sat with his grandma at the wedding.

When the bride and groom lit the center candle - *the unity candle* - then blew out their respective candles, the lady asked her grandson, "**Do you know what that means?**" The little guy responded, "***Yea... that means no more old flames.***" And that's exactly what it means.

When a bride and groom say "yes" to each other, they say "no" to every other person in the world.

There're a lot of women with whom I'm friendly, but I've chosen not to be close friends with any woman but my wife. My deepest affections are reserved for Kathy.

A marriage won't be successful if the wife is out with her girlfriends more than she's home with her husband.

Or a husband is hanging with his pals more than he's home with his wife. *Both are slighting their spouse.*

Wives need girlfriends, and husbands need buddies, but there can be no confusion about who comes first.

Here's my suggestion for newlyweds...

She can have **her friends**. He can have **his friends**. But both of you together need to make **your friends**.

Every married couple needs friends who believe the way they do about making a marriage work. You need people around you who support marital commitment.

Sometimes outside friends become a hindrance to a marriage - *but the chief source of marital interference comes from parents*. This is why Genesis is specific, "**A man (and woman) shall leave his father and mother...**"

When one spouse fails to cut the cord, and keeps running home to mom and dad - or keeps pulling her parents into their issues - the spouse feels betrayed.

It's been said, "**In some marriages the problems are all relative...**" Once a wife told her husband, "**Do you have anything to say before my mother gets here?**"

You can do terrible damage to a marriage when you make your spouse feel second fiddle to a parent.

I'll never forget when my oldest son, Zach, was a tot.

We would visit my parents, and my dad would stuff him with chocolate. We'd get Zach home, and he'd be bouncing off the walls. Kathy told my dad to stop - but her wishes went through one ear and out the other.

He felt it was the inherent right of a granddad to feed a grandson whatever he wanted. The situation boiled over into a conflict. And I was caught in the middle.

I had to choose sides - *and for me there was no choice*. I'll never forget confronting my dad in the garage. I told him if he didn't stop O-D-ing our kid with chocolate we would stop bringing Zach to his house.

And how did Dad respond? Like World War III! You would've thought I'd deprived him of his right to vote.

My dad threatened to sue us for his grandparental rights... Thankfully, we settled out of court, *but it made for a tense several weeks*. Yet my wife needed to know my allegiance was with her, even over my dad.

Once, a newlywed daughter called home crying and complaining about her freshly-married hubby. The once happy couple had experienced their first, big fight.

Her mother answer the phone, and listened sympathetically to her daughter for almost an hour.

Finally, the daughter asked to speak to dad. He was on the phone for only a few minutes... His wife wanted to know, *"What happened? Was anything resolved?"*

The dad said, *"She wanted to come home."*

The wife asked, *"What did you tell her?"* And this wise father answered, *"I told her she was home."*

If you're the parent of a married child, stay out of it if you can. *Stay out of God's way.* And if you're married *"leave dad and mom and be joined to your spouse."*

And here's a second *must for a marriage* - *"be joined to your wife."* Or as the OKJV renders it, *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife..."* You *leave* - then you *cleave*.

Severance is followed by **permanence**.

Marriage is *"for better, for worse - for richer, for poorer - in sickness, and in health - for as long as we both shall live."* It's a lifelong commitment. The statute of limitations on marriage is *"until death do us part."*

And this is a **"must"** for a marriage. There's no way a marriage will succeed without a vow of permanence.

Several year ago, a Fox News report talked about the trend today to rewrite the traditional marriage vows.

Couples have replaced *"until death do us part"* with a long list of alternatives. Here's a few, *"For as long as we continue to love each other."* Or, *"For as long as our love shall last."* Or, *"Until our time together is over."*

People are no longer marrying *"for as long as we both shall live"* - but *"for as long as we both shall love."*

A more honest way of wording it, might be, *"Until a better offer comes along."* Or *"a cuter, younger babe."*

It reminds me of the groom - hanging with his best man - just minutes before the walking down the aisle...

He confesses, “It’s odd, but until now I haven’t been the least bit nervous. Yet I’m starting to realize marriage is a big commitment. *Man, seven or eight years can be a real long time.*” It’s sad, but that seems to be the prevailing attitude toward marriage, today.

In fact, a NY Times article recently suggested that marriage could be reduced to a series of short-term contracts where the couple re-upped every 5 years.

One author countered the idea, “*The lower the sights, the more dispensable the relationship, the less and less we would invest in it.*” I agree. Without a dogged, hearty dedication marriage stands *no* chance.

Marriage is the ultimate in unselfishness. You have to cultivate a taste for humble pie. It’s not for the faint of heart. It demands the highest level of commitment.

This means if a lifetime commitment isn’t a couple’s *expectation* - and the goal of their *determination* - then the odds of it happening are extremely slim. There’s so much in culture today aimed at driving spouses apart.

Marriage involves *cutting old ties*, but it also requires *forging new ties*. The Hebrew word translated “**join**” or “**cleave**” means “**to adhere or glue.**” It’s a perma-bond.

One Bible commentator I heard translates it “**weld.**” Leave your parents and *be welded to your spouse!*

You only weld what’s meant to be permanent.

Go to a Jewish wedding ceremony and you’ll witness an interesting custom. The groom will stomp a glass...

A rabbi explains, “Pointing to its fragments, we exhort the young people to guard jealously the sacred relationship into which they’ve entered. For once it’s been fractured - it takes a miracle for it to be fully restored.” And this is true of all marriages.

The most important component in a marriage is the trust that’s shared between a husband and wife. Guard it at all costs. Don’t allow any other relationship to break that trust - or even invite doubt into the marriage.

Leave others behind, and cling only to your spouse.

Years ago, Huey Lewis had a song entitled, “Happy to be Stuck with You.” It was Sandy and Kathy’s theme song. We *leaved* and *cleaved*. Now we’re stuck with each other - *but this provides tremendous motivation...*

In fact, this is the incentive every marriage needs, to be the best it can be. If Sandy is stuck with Kathy, and Kathy is stuck with Sandy - if we’ve burned all our bridges - if there’s no possibility of retreat - if our only choice is to *get over it*, and *work through it...* then **we’ll get’r done**. But if there’s an escape hatch - an easy way out - our selfish, lazy nature might just take it...

Hollywood couples are notorious for brief marriages.

The famous Scientology couple, Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, made it only four years. Apparently, a lifelong commitment ended up “*mission impossible...*”

In contrast, there’s another Hollywood couple who stayed married for 60 years - that’s six decades - *Peter and Joan Graves*. Ironically, Peter Graves, a devout Christian, starred in *the original Mission Impossible*.

After they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary a reporter asked Peter, "*How did you do it?*" His answer was simple, yet profound, "*We promised.*"

For a believer in Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit keeping a promise is not a mission impossible. When a husband and a wife stays committed to God and their spouse, the Lord enables them to keep that promise.

I've used this illustration many times. In World War 2 German bombers reduced the city of London to rubble.

At times the situation looked bleak. During one such siege, British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, went on the radio and encouraged his fellow Londoners to take heart. He said, "*Wars are not won by evacuation.*"

And neither are good marriages. Stick with it! You *leave behind old ties*, and then *cleave to your spouse*.

Then you **weave** together a new life. Which brings up the third must in a marriage, and that's **unity**.

"*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" The two shall become one.

A husband and wife *leave, cleave* – and then **weave** their lives together into one. Harmony is the goal.

I like to compare marriage with moving to a foreign country... Let's say, tomorrow I moved to Germany.

Immediately, I'd have to learn a new language - develop a taste for new foods - familiarize myself with new customs - translate Fahrenheit into Celsius, and miles into

kilometers - fall in love with soccer - and value the World Cup over the Georgia-Florida game.

I'd have to adapt to an entirely new way of life.

Well, welcome to marriage! It's no less challenging.

Your spouse speaks a *different language* - she likes *different foods* - she holds *different customs* - she has *different interests* - she practices *different habits*.

And here's the issue... If I move to Germany, I can't sit back with a pompous attitude, and tell my German neighbors my way is best. That everyone in the country should adapt to me. *Guess who'll end up miserable?*

It won't be the Germans. It'll be an arrogant me.

And this is the scenario with marriage.

For the two to become one the husband has to adapt to his wife - and the wife has to adapt to her husband.

Instead of trying to change your spouse - both of you need to be willing to change *for your spouse*.

Some of you might remember Bob Bryant, a former elder here at Calvary Chapel. Years ago, Bob and his wife, Patricia, moved to Vermont. But when they were here Patricia opened up a landscaping company.

Bob was her one employee. I always accused him of sleeping with his boss, to advance in the company.

Once, a friend of mine hired them to do some work.

Bob was tilling up the soil, when my friend asked him, *“Bob, do you like to garden at home?”*

He answered, *“No, not really.”*

My friend said, *“Then why do you do it?”*

Bob replied, *“Well, gardening is Patricia’s passion, and Patricia is my passion.”*

Imagine a former Marine saying something that mushy about his wife.

But I’ve never forgotten his phrase. His wife was his passion, and he showed it by making her interests his.

This is how two very different and diverse people harmonize and become one... It’s called *unselfishness*.

It’s been said of marriage, *“When a man marries a woman the two become one... the problem though, is deciding which one.” But that shouldn’t be the case...*

Unity in marriage isn’t one person steamrolling over the other, getting their way at the expense of their spouse. *Unity isn’t assimilation or domination, but cooperation.* It’s a husband and wife learning to find a common cadence - getting in step with one another.

Unity is two people learning how to agree.

The moment you get married you become one spiritually - but if you want to be one mentally, and one emotionally, and one physically it requires bending, and learning, and adjusting, and lots of consideration...

Some single folks can’t wait until they get married. They view marriage as the end of all their problems.

Hey, if you're single this morning I hope you always remember, "There's only one thing more difficult than living alone, and that's living with someone else."

Right after Kathy and I were married I picked up a hitchhiker on my way home from work one evening.

We traveled just a few miles before he prayed with me to receive Jesus into his life. The guy needed a place to stay so I ended up getting him a hotel room.

I remember thinking on my way home, "*I can't wait to share this news with Kath. She's going to be elated.*"

Obviously, this little adventure had taken several hours, and I hadn't bothered to call my newlywed wife.

When I got home, there was my wife sitting at the kitchen table in front of a burned dinner. The candles on the table had melted into nubs... Needless to say, she was a little peeved at her evangelist husband.

And I recall her words, "*If only you'd called - if you'd just bothered to think about me...*" and she was right.

When you're single for years you develop habits and patterns of behavior. *Your world revolves around you!*

When it comes to *the daily stuff* - what you consider *the superficial stuff* - you're not *thinking about* or *planning around* anyone else, but you. Then one day you get married - and overnight all that changes.

Now there's another person who charts your movements, inquires about your thoughts, is interested in your actions - and wants to be part of all that you do.

You should appreciate, not resent their involvement.

Some of you won't appreciate this statement until you reach an older age, but here goes, "Marriage is agreeing to spend the rest of your life sleeping in a room that's too warm - beside a person who's sleeping in a room that's too cold." A beautiful unity occurs when both parties to the marriage agree to be unselfish.

When he's willing to adapt so you don't sweat - and you're willing to sacrifice a little so he don't shake.

Hey, marriage is the most unselfish thing you'll ever do. The only other activity that comes close is being a parent. It's so true, "You can't be happily married to another person until you get a divorce from yourself."

Michael Grant, a columnist for the San Diego Union, writes this about his wife and marriage. "We continue to adjust to each other, an adjustment that started 19 years ago and will never stop because we each continue to grow and change. We'll always be different.

I think of anniversaries as a time for roses and candlelight dinners - she prefers Mexican food and a movie. For Halloween she thinks apples are a good treat - I say, since when did Halloween have anything to do with nutrition?

Don't mistake our marriage for a solid marriage. There is no such thing. Marriage is more like an airplane than a rock. You have to commit the thing to flight, and then it creaks and groans, and keeping it airborne depends entirely on attitude.

Working at it, though, we can fly forever. Only my wife and I know how hard it's been, or how worthwhile."

There's a fourth and final *must for marriage* - and it's the by-product of the three that precede it - **intimacy**.

In marriage, if you **leave**, **cleave**, and **weave** - then you'll **conceive** a unique closeness with your spouse.

In Ephesians 5 Paul leaves off this verse, but Genesis 2 finishes the thought, "**They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.**"

The implication is that Adam and Eve *had it going on!* The first married couple enjoyed a passionate, even sexual relationship... *naked with no inhibitions*.

They weren't just *roommates*... there was *romance*.

They weren't just *lifers*... they were *lovers*.

More than just *unity*... there was *intimacy*.

Adam and Eve were in the garden...

With no hang-ups. There was nothing that interfered with their relationship - nothing hidden from each other, or wedged between each other to create a distance.

They came to each other unmasked and at ease. There was no embarrassment - or fear of rejection. There was total acceptance by the person they loved.

Adam and Eve were *givers* - not takers. This couple loved each other more than they loved themselves.

Imagine, two unselfish givers exploring the joys of sexual love and intimacy... the thrills they *achieved*, the depth they *perceived*, the love they *conceived*.

And this needs to be happening in your marriage. *You need to have it going on!* The point of **severance**, and **permanence**, and **unity** - is to create **intimacy**.

You **leave**, **cleave**, and **weave** so you can **conceive**... a child perhaps, but not necessarily...

Rather you'll conceive a closeness, a creativity... a sharing of the soul and body that's so pleasurable and transparent it interlocks your lives on the deepest level.

What's the point of buying a new car if you never take it for a spin? You **leave** the old car behind.

You **cleave** to a new car.

You buy it on credit, and it's a lifetime commitment. Pay cash for the car, and it's until death do you part.

Then you get to know the car, and **weave** a familiarity. But what if after all that effort and expense you never fire up the engine, and drop it into gear?

Sex is not an animal instinct.

God created marriage to *safely* and *creatively* and *regularly* meet our need for sexual intimacy.

Sexual attraction isn't sinful, it's holy - and it binds a marriage. Sex undergirds marriage and the family.

Marriage is a huge commitment. Two people give up their independence, and lay down their lives for one another. You share each other's treasure and trouble.

You pledge to cherish your spouse all the days of your life. So *what motivates this grand commitment?*

Marriage has a lot of advantages, but don't over-spiritualize and underestimate the obvious... **Sex is the prize inside!** The joy, and release, and intimacy of sex are the reward for what is a very sacrificial relationship.

Sex is the cherry on top of the commitment. **It's the wow in the vow!** *If it's not going on* in your marriage you're *missing out* on a big part of what *it's all about*.

Realize sex is also a picture of Christ and His Church. This makes the sex act sacred and holy.

Think of our salvation... God woos us by the Holy Spirit. He penetrates our life, and plants the seed of His Word in our heart. We receive a new nature.

We then cultivate the seed of His Word through faith and repentance until it births spiritual fruit in our lives.

Fruit that we give back to Jesus in praise!

Isn't this what happens in marriage?... A husband woos his wife. He penetrates her with His seed. She nurtures that seed and gives birth - she bears fruit.

Fruit that she returns to her husband in the form of a child... It's all a picture that points to spiritual realities.

Even our sexuality portrays spiritual truths.

By *leaving, cleaving, and weaving*, you're *conceiving* a sexual relationship that will enrich your marriage.

A lifelong commitment shelters your marriage. It allows confidence and love and freedom to grow.

If intimacy isn't happening in your marriage the first place to check for problems are **the four musts...**

What about **severance**? Is there something hanging on or someone hanging around that's a hindrance?

Is there **permanence**? Or a fear of rejection?

How's the **unity**? Are you living unselfishly and looking for ways to be in tighter step with your spouse?

If one or more of these ingredients is missing don't be surprised if intimacy is lacking in your marriage.

*It might be time to **dust the rust off the musts.***

Once, on a late night talk show the host was interviewing a Hollywood hunk - a leading man who played the romantic roles in several chick flicks.

The man was asked to explain what makes a good lover. The host was expecting some juicy details...

But here's what he said, **"A great lover is someone who can satisfy one woman all her life long... and who can be satisfied by one woman all his life long. A great lover is not someone who goes from woman to woman to woman. Any dog can do that."**

What an answer!

According to this leading man if you want great sex, you won't find it at the Playboy Mansion! You'll only find it by observing **God's four musts for a marriage.**

Realize, God made sex a powerful dynamic.

Sex is like superglue. That's why you need to watch where it's applied. Glue together the wrong people, in the wrong places, at the wrong time - and then try to separate them... and its painful pulling them apart.

They don't just tear along the dotted line. They rip and tear in places you never intended. It creates wounds. It hurts. It causes psychological shredding.

Remember the word “**cleave**” or “**join**” means “**glue**.” Thus, if you *cleave before you leave* it gets messy.

But where there's **severance**, **permanence**, and **unity** you can *glue, glue, and glue*. Empty the bottle. Super glue creates a healthy bond that's strong and secure.

Here's a great quote, “**Just as the devil will do everything he can to bring two people together sexually *before* marriage, he does everything he can to keep them from each other *after* marriage.**” Defeat the devil on both fronts. If you're married you need *to get it on!*

If you're single, wait until the musts are in place.

Once a man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He was hooked up to tubes and a monitor.

When his wife arrived, she tiptoed to his beside, and whispered, “**Honey, I'm here.**” She leaned in and kissed his lips. Suddenly, the machines went **blippety-blip-blip-beep!** Ultimately, the husband recovered.

But later his wife confessed, “**My husband was fine, but after 40 years of marriage it was nice to know I can still make his heart skip a beat when I kiss him.**”

And when a husband and wife faithfully observe the **four musts of a marriage** even after four decades together, they'll still be thrilling each other with kisses.

So after God *operated* on Adam, and got Eve, how was the relationship to *operate*?
By **four musts!**

Leave your father and your mother! Make your spouse your unrivaled priority...
Cleave for life! No retreat or escape. Settle it once and for all. It's for keeps... Then
weave a new life together. Adjust. Adapt. Be unselfish. Find common ground... And
you'll **conceive** an intimacy that will bring years of pleasure.

As we've mentioned throughout Ephesians 5 marriage is a picture. Paul reiterates it again in verse 32, **"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."**

Marriage has a deeper meaning than we assume.

It's shrouded in symbolism. It doubles as an illustration and portrays a relationship higher and holier than we ever imagined. Marriage is a spiritual picture.

Yet ultimately marriage becomes very, very practical.

The mystery unravels when we pose for the picture. **Wives need love**, and **husbands want respect**. So, *wife respect your husband, and husband love your wife!*