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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Puzzling Marriage: Putting the Pieces Together
The Other
Ephesians 5:21-33

Kevin:

Welcome to Chapel Hill Today, Good Morning!

I'm Kevin, Minister of Missions & Modern Worship, and we are glad you're here. You may be aware that we are in a series here entitled *Puzzling Marriage—Putting the Pieces Together*. We have 4 corners in this puzzle of marriage. Not that there aren't other pieces to sort out in marriage, but these four we feel are foundational.

Now if you are Single, don't check out just yet, because the truths we are talking about today transcend marriage and actually apply to every relationship we all are in. You will see some great truths whether married or not as we all look through the lens of marriage.

Last week we looked at marriage from the view point of where it starts, and that is *The Vow*. Pastor Mark shared with us the importance of this pledge—a commitment not just between each other—but something much deeper, and much broader. It's a covenant between us and God. That's the starting point!

Today we dive into the next piece of the puzzle, *The Other*. So what does that look like Chapel Hill? Well, if you are married, turn toward your spouse and if you aren't married, turn toward another single you wish you were married to and try not to blush! Just kidding!! As I said, this works for every relationship, not simply marriage! All of us are in relationship with people. It makes a messy thing of this life, doesn't it? But the Other is just that... the people we are in relationship with!

There are two of you in this relationship. If you want to get married you know how puzzling it is trying to find this Other. And if you are married, you know how puzzling it is trying to figure out the Other... trying to sort out how to communicate with the Other.

So often we try to make our lives about ourselves, about what we want or need. But in reality when you are in relationships with other people you are agreeing to share your life, and especially if you get hitched. You are agreeing to share your life, your everything... which is something that actually transfers in the Vow.

So to make this marriage or any relationship work we need to consider the Other. As I think of the Other, I think of marriage. I've been married 15 years, and we've had some big ups and downs within those 15 years. Which makes me think of a song... these are the things you don't say to your wife. [Sing song] Now there is some practical advice. Men, don't say you didn't learn anything in church today!

With that, I'd like to bring my wife Sarah up here—simply because marriage and relationships are a two sided coin—and I would love for all of you to have both perspectives today as we talk about such an important topic. This is my beautiful wife Sarah... who also has been married 15 years! Something we have in common!

[Sarah reads Ephesians 5:21-33]

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." [b] ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Thank you, Sarah. So let's look at the start of that again: ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

First of all, this is a powerful statement. And as you'll note, the marriage section actually comes right after this. Wow! Like I said earlier, this isn't just for married people. Marriage just happens to be one of the most powerful examples of this scripture we find. ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

If we are always submitting to each other, then does anything ever get done? 'Cuz, who makes the decisions? Who chooses?

Kevin: *Where do you want to go to dinner?*

Sarah: *I dunno, where do you want to go?*

Kevin: *Well, I want to go where you want to go?*

It's deeper than that... deeper than just deferring to each other. Wouldn't it be easier if it was: "Help out on occasion, when its convenient." Or "Lend a hand, if I'm not watching the game."

So what is this "submit" word? Strong's Concordance: hupotassó: to place or rank under, to subject, mid. to obey. Definition: I place under, subject to; mid, pass: I submit, put myself into subjection; "under God's arrangement," i.e. submitting to the Lord (His plan).

This word should not be seen simply as submission or subservience, but rather taking control of, and ordering one's own life, within the bounds of and for the benefit of one another. It is something that one does within and to one's own self, not something that is imposed by another. Submitting yourselves, voluntarily. Literally to place yourself under... It's a humbling of oneself. But it's more than that. It's connected to a military term meaning "to cooperate fully" and the idea of submitting yourself voluntarily and actually choosing to surrender.

In marriage we often think of submission as a negative: that of "letting the other person win". But it actually is intended to be an act of love... this voluntary act of moving toward the position of a humble servant putting others first and supporting them. Using your might, power, will, giftings and cunning intellect to serve the other person... that is submit!

And what does it say early on in Ephesians 5? ¹⁻² Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

He gave himself up for us, and we are told to do the same thing out of reverence for Him. Out of our awe for Him, submit to one another, serve each other. And this shows up in marriage, why? Because it's so needed!

Instead, we all too often fight to be right, which feels so-o-o-o awesome until you realize you are on the couch again. This week Sarah & I were driving in the car, and I ended up being right about something, so I jokingly said, "Sarah, I'm right. This must be the first time," and she replied, "No, I think you've been right once before."

Submit to the Other as you do to Christ isn't necessarily easy... so early on in our marriage we got a glimpse of this didn't we?

Sarah:

In the first year of our marriage, Kevin and I served as missionaries in New Zealand. While there, we were able to participate in an overnight kayaking trip. This was something that Kevin loved to do, but was a first for me. I had wanted to allow Kevin to participate with other guys in his skill level, but I also wanted to go

along with him, so I ended up being the only female in the group. All A to B men, I might add... these guys were drivers!

I worked hard to keep up in our tandem kayak, but after a long, cold rainy night in a leaking tent and a long, cold, blustery morning of paddling against the wind and driving rain... I put my paddle down and announced, "I quit! I am done!!"

Kevin didn't know what to do with me. We were still 2 hours away from home, but I refused to paddle and he couldn't do it on his own. Much to his embarrassment, our guide had to tow us the remainder of the way.

I had started out wanting to put Kevin's desires before my own, but I got tired and my selfishness trumped my desire to serve him.

This happens in our marriages on a daily basis in big and small ways. Some of you here today may be ready to put your paddle down and quit too. To give up because you're feeling like you're getting ready to give out. Tired, worn... I understand. It is hard not to give up when you're weary to the core, and it is hard to not be selfish, because we are all sinners. We know marriage begins with The Vow, but how is it implemented with the Other?

It is a constant challenge to yield to the Other and reject the selfish desires that constantly call out that my marriage is **my** marriage and it's all about me... all about the other person doing what I need them to do so I can be happy.

What if that's not the case? What if marriage is a glimpse of Jesus... a glimpse of the right relationship God desires to have with us? What if marriage is the best example of being selfless not selfish?

Honestly, I feel like I was a better wife before I got married. I had my own expectations of what marriage was going to be like. I thought my husband would complete me. And then I married a real, handsome, kind, selfish sinner...

Kevin: Hey, wait a minute... I married a beautiful, incredible, talented selfish sinner too!!

Sarah: It's true. The reality is that two selfish sinners marrying each other makes for a lot of heated situations where both sinners are fighting to have their own needs met. Last week, Pastor Mark talked about how 'leaving and cleaving' was like metals being melted and molded into one metal. I leaned over to Kevin and said, 'that's a lot of heat.' The heat comes from the refining process of submitting to the Other. Our spouse isn't meant to 'complete' us, they are to be used to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

Kevin: How many of us have heard in movies or have even said, "you complete me"

We so often feel like our spouse is supposed to complete us. Tim Keller in his book *The Meaning of Marriage* gives us a picture of what it's like when two people are trying desperately to find their purpose and fulfillment from the other. When I need to have her meet all my needs—when I need her to be “the one” to give me life—I'm like a vacuum on her making a big sucking sound. And if she is the same way, requiring me to be her everything and in charge of adding significance to her life, it adds another vacuum to the picture. We only get a bigger, stronger vacuum... and a giant sucking sound! And that in marriage will truly suck.the.life.out.of.you!

So let me ask you Chapel Hill—now don't raise your hand when I ask this, keep your answers to yourself—do you ever feel like your spouse is driving you to wits end? Like it doesn't make sense how it was lovey-dovey and is now topsy-turvy? Or how this love of your life can get under your skin... Why does it feel like your spouse can sometimes bring the worst out in you? Because she or he does! They can bring the best out of you, and the Lord also uses them to also reveal the things in you that you are holding on to... those areas where you still want your way!

And guess what? Marriage is designed for that. It's designed by God that our spouses would have that effect on us... The Lord is refining me, tearing out the junk in me, calling me out in areas I am weak or ungodly or unholy or disrespectful. And He does that so often through Sarah... through my wife. Who knows me better?

God wants to use the Other to reveal junk in you. It's not a free pass to shout all the things you don't like about your spouse. You are not refining your spouse. In that, you don't get to use your words or mannerisms or demandingness or cruelty to degrade her or degrade him! Now that's just being a cowardly bully. It is the Lord that is doing the transformation in you and often uses our spouse to expose things within us. God is at work to mold me, refine me, and draw me to Him through my wife. And God is at work in Sarah to mold, refine, and draw her to Him through me.

'Cuz it's not about you, and it's not about her... It is about Him. It's not about getting your needs met or you getting your way. It is about God being glorified in your marriage and you submitting to Him and to each other. He is shining in every part: in conversation, in intimacy, in child rearing, in decision making, in finances. In all of it, He is glorified.

“Greater love has no man than this than he lay down his life for his friend.” John 15:13. Now this laying down of life doesn't necessarily mean dying in a physical way. It could, but there are other ways to do this... like dying to self, putting others first. You can rule and command over each other, but submission is a different thing. It's voluntary; it's a choice... just like you chose who you would marry. It's a daily and sometimes hourly choice to submit to each other. And it's

not wimpy or sappy or weak. It can be so powerful if you recognize what a support you are in your submission.

So today, it starts with you. You lay down your life and serve and love and surrender and support. And you submit out of reverence for Christ. And honestly, sometimes we try and we miss the mark...

Kevin: For example, back in Georgia, several years ago, Sarah said that she longed to have soft green grass in our yard instead of the scratchy grass that was currently there.

Sarah: Actually, I may have mentioned a couple times how I wished I could walk barefoot in our grass but it was too scratchy, which Kevin translated as, "Tear out the entire lawn and reseed it with a softer grass." Which is super sweet, however, he decided to start this process two days before we were to lead a mission trip to Mexico. He tilled the entire yard, which yielded 30 trash bags of weeds!

Kevin: It was actually 32 bags!

Sarah: Right, 32 bags of weeds. We were raking, bending, stuffing weeds and clumps of dirt in the rain and through the night. I finally went to bed and when I woke up, I found Kevin spreading straw on the newly seeded dirt. At one point, in the early dawn, we sat on our front steps. I asked Kevin, "Why did we do this anyway?"

Kevin: "Because you said you wanted to walk barefoot in the grass!"

Sarah: "Oh my goodness! I never would have asked you to do all of this for that!"

Kevin: Yes sometimes even our best attempts fail, but what do we do? Do we give up trying? No!

Sarah: And again, we encounter one of the puzzling pieces of marriage. How can I serve the Other—whomever the Other is—married, single, widowed. You are surrounded by opportunities to die to self, but how can you? How can I? I can't.

Kevin: And I can't

Sarah: We can't, because it is impossible. We need "Another" (Holy Spirit) to help us love the Other, and it can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit... by being filled with Him, like it stays in Ephesians 5. God did not design marriage for our spouse to meet all of our needs, that space is reserved just for Him.

Kevin: And you know what? We have people here today in crisis, at critical points and decisions in their relationships, and some at the point where it's already crumbled apart.

And for you, for you who are wondering how to do this... you probably can't. You probably can't when all trust is broken, when respect has been dashed, when hopes and dreams have been crushed. You probably can't, but you know who can. This is not cliché; this is truth. God, your loving Savior Jesus can... He just happens to be in the business of restoring broken things... broken people, broken lives, broken trust, broken relationships, and even broken marriages.

"But it's embarrassing. I don't know where to start. I can't."

Maybe you sincerely feel like you can't, but He can. So start there. We all need help with marriage. It is the best relationship, the hardest relationship, and it is a puzzle! Marriage is used as a main example, because where else will you find such a relationship based on deep intimacy and deep commitment. God uses that to grow us up in trust to Him, not blaming bad relationships on God... or abuse, or indiscretions, or anything else. He can redeem even the worst situations, and He will use it for His glory and walk with us through it!

There is hope, and it's not based on your spouse. It's first and foremost between you and God! Lean into the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to fill you! Don't wait for your spouse to change, you be the change.

As you came in, each one of you received a bulletin; on the back are some questions we'd like you to ask yourselves to dig-in deeper. And on the front at the very bottom is a challenge we'd like to offer you today to dig-in to each other. Steal some time today, whether it's simply on the way home, or you steal away at home. Find some time with your spouse. If single, grab some time with the Others in your life, and don't assume you know how to serve them or it may end up being a green grass story. Ask them how you can serve them!

As we prepare to leave today and make those packets that will help the homeless, find hope. There is hope, and this process begins with us and God and will be reflected to the Other as we lean on the Holy Spirit to fill us! So submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, because we need Another (Holy Spirit) to help us with the Other.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. Do you have your own "green grass" story? Some area where you have tried to serve and it just hasn't worked? Why didn't it work? What needed to be changed to reveal your heart for your spouse?
 2. What is your initial response to reading Ephesians 5. Are there areas you need to confess? Repent? Are there areas you can affirm your spouse in?
 3. Following today's message, how will you be able to fulfill this instruction?

Challenge:

Today, whether it's on the ride home or at home, steal some time with your spouse and ask: "What can I do to really serve you this week?" Don't assume you know what they will say. Ask them and then make it a point to work on that this week.