

Signing Up to be a Disciple

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Al, and to everyone who's participated in our service thus far. Folks, great to have you with us this morning. Let me encourage you to have those verses in Ephesians chapter 5 and 6 open in front of you.

And let me just begin by telling you about a mate that I had in halls at uni. His name is Dave. We call him Army Dave, right?

Differentiate him from all the other Daves that were in the halls, right? We call him Army Dave. And you can probably guess from that what the defining feature of Dave's life was, right?

He was almost a poster boy of the OTC, right? So the Officer's Training Corps, which is kind of like the student branch of the Army. Dave is a poster boy of the OTC, and Dave loved it, right?

Loved it. If I remember being out one day playing football with my mates in the park, and seeing, spotting the OTC in another part of the park doing their thing.

[1 : 07] Now, I say I spotted them. Before I spotted them, I heard them. Heard them. I remember looking, and there was a man in the middle with a whistle, which was strange.

But what was even more strange is that these people were doing exactly what he was telling them to do, right? He would say jump, and they'd jump. He would say march, and they'd march.

He would say drop, and what was it? Give me 20, and down they'd go. And I remember looking at these guys, thinking to myself, wooft, that's pretty hardcore, isn't it? Here's the thing.

To sign up to follow Jesus, to be his disciple, is to sign up for something way more hardcore than that.

To be a disciple is to sign your entire life over to Christ calling the shots.

[2 : 09] And not just over part of your life, all of your life. And not just on one day of the week, but every day of the week. All of it.

To have Christ call the shots. And that's true individually, and it's true corporately for the church. And for us as a local church, as local believers, called to, in our lives together, express and show the lordship of Jesus over every area of our lives.

And we're going to see today, including those most personal of our relationships, that Jesus is king. Now, if you track back with me in the letter, to chapter 1, verse 10.

This is kind of the theme sentence, if you like, that runs over the book of Ephesians. What God is doing in the world. His chapter 1, verse 10, his plan for the future, to unite everything in heaven and on earth, in Jesus Christ, and Jesus as his risen king, the plan is to have everything under his lordship.

That's the plan for the fullness of time. It's where the future's going. And as the church today, the call for us is to be a community where in our relationships with one another, we submit to Jesus Christ as he rules us through his words.

[3 : 42] Have Christ call the shots in our community. And so with Army Dave and all his wee hardcore mates in your minds, come with me to verse 21 of chapter 5, which is the headline verse containing the headline verb of this whole little section.

You ready for this? Come with me. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Now you catch that? What's the verb submitting?

Right? And sometimes our headings in our Bibles, remember they're not inspired, the word is.

Those headings are sometimes in the wrong place. This might be one of those examples where the divisions don't help us because that word submitting goes with the section just before.

Now the Greek word there means to voluntarily put yourself under the control of another. Right?

That's what it means to submit. And do you see how that is the fruit of being filled with the Spirit?

Now do you see how it's the last of the four verbs at verse 18 which Paul pulls out as being the hallmarks of a Spirit-filled community? Addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[5 : 05] Here's number one. Addressing. Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart is number two. Giving thanks. Here's number three and here's number four. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So to submit is to be somebody who is filled with the Spirit. I love that. It's not in ecstatic things. It's in the nitty-gritty details of your life. Filled with the Spirit.

So to submit to Jesus is to allow Him to recalibrate how we think in terms of our relationships with one another.

Right? So this is what we're going to see today. To have Jesus as the Lord of your life. To have Him calling the shots. He's going to call you to be a different kind of wife.

And He's going to call you to be a different kind of husband. And a different kind of young person. And a different kind of parent.

[6 : 08] And a different kind of slave. And a different kind of master. Now remember, all these relationships are going on in the one church. But most likely, all of these relationships might be going on in the one home.

And it's as if Jesus is, Paul is getting into picture, He's, Jesus is walking up to the door of your home. And He's ringing the doorbell. Ding dong, ding dong.

And the call is to open the door and let Him walk into your family life. Walk into your home. Let Christ call the shots in your lives.

Now, let me just deal with Dumbo. Okay? Who is the elephant in the room of this section. Right? Always good to deal with Dumbo. And to acknowledge that this couldn't be any more counter-cultural.

You don't need me to tell you that. But we're just dealing with Dumbo. This couldn't be any more counter-cultural. In our day, this stuff about husbands and wives and family and work, it runs so deeply against the grain of how our society thinks and operates.

[7 : 20] But here's the thing that we need to appreciate. That what Paul writes here is equally as counter-cultural in his day. In fact, I would go so far as to say that this is revolutionary at the time of when he's writing.

But we need to appreciate that the cultural pendulum, generally speaking, is on the other side.

Right? To the one that we maybe find ourselves in today. So this Greco-Roman first century culture where this letter is written, the individuals who were considered lowest down the social ladder, women, children, and slaves.

So notice with me who, when he addresses these three relationships, notice who he addresses first. Wives, children, and slaves.

Do you see it? Do you see it? How counter-cultural that is. I've got lots of friends who've worked for big companies in their lives. Right? Kind of Amazons, your direct line call centers, that kind of thing. And what they always said to me at the time was, you know, when it comes to my work there, just a number. I'm just a number. No one's asking me.

[8 : 34] No one cares if I'm there. No one's looking at what I'm doing. I'm just kind of caught up in the collective. Right? Nobody cares. I love how Paul addresses wives, children, and slaves as individuals.

Right? It's almost as if he was here, if he was walking around this church, these churches, he would be addressing them by name. Right? To you, this is what it says.

To you, this is what this says. See what it's saying. But do you see how Paul is, in doing this, he's bestowing on these individuals a real counter-cultural dignity. And he's massaging home the truth that we saw earlier in this letter, that they are all part of Jesus' one body, and together in the way that they relate to one another, they are called to live in such a way that demonstrates to Ephesus that Jesus is Lord here.

So, let's get into this, shall we? And first up, friends, we have got a Valentine's Day special. How about this? Look what he says, first of all. He goes for the marriage. See it?

Let Christ call the shots in your marriage. Come with me to verse 32. I think this is key for us to see if we're to grasp what he's saying and we don't lapse into moralism.

[9 : 57] Okay? We need to see that as he talks and addresses and thinks about husbands and wives that Paul has got the ultimate marriage in mind.

Okay? The marriage between Christ the groom and the church, his bride. Now, do you see that? It's not our marriages down here that the reality and that's a useful metaphor to call upon.

It is completely the other way around. And this has always been God's created intention. I think that is why he quotes from Genesis 2 there.

So, this is God's design. This is what it's been all about. About Christ and the church. There's a much bigger game that you're playing in. And so, the way husbands and wives, the way I'm praying, the way I want you to live, relate to one another, love one another, you have to do it in such a way that spotlights and showcases and reflects the ultimate marriage.

The one that's eternal, the one that's permanent, the one that's glorious. And so, to the married woman in this church, he says, in the same way that the church submits to Christ, I urge you to reflect that by choosing to submit to your husband.

[11 : 22] Now, let me just clarify before we get on to what that does mean. Let me just clarify what it doesn't mean. Okay? It's good. Grandpa used to use this phrase, hee-haw, right? Meaning nothing. Hee-haw to do with a wife's inferiority, right?

And you, the people have horribly abused this over the years. Nothing to do with that. And that's clear if you want an example of this. If you look at the life of Jesus, I love how he is almost the model for both the wife and the husband here.

The one fully and equally with God, and yet what do we see him doing in John's Gospel in the Garden of Gethsemane? What are the words from his mouth? Not my will, Father, not my will, but yours be done. Submits himself to the will of his father.

And equally, it's nothing to do with the husband's superiority, right? And Paul's going to make that crystal clear about what he says next. What this is, is husbands and wives both equally and wonderfully made in God's image and called to play their distinctive and complementary parts in showcasing the ultimate marriage.

And so Paul says, this one does mean, I think, wives bring all your gifts and abilities that God has given you to your marriage. And in the same way that the church submits to Christ, I want you to choose to submit to affirm and support and encourage and look to and respect the loving and sacrificial leadership of your husbands.

[12 : 51] And I love this, it was Elizabeth Elliott who, I love this quote, right? She said, the fact that I'm a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian. But the fact that I'm a Christian, it does make me a different kind of woman.

And Paul's calling Christian husbands to be equally as radical here. Okay? Husbands in this time, you read around in this, household codes of the day, husbands would never have expected to be addressed here.

and certainly wouldn't have been asked, wouldn't have expected to be asked to do what Paul tells them to do. It's probably why they get a bit more air time in this section. Because husbands, the command, what he writes, is to love your wives.

And it's in the same way that Christ sacrificially loved and shed his blood on the cross to win, to redeem, to buy for himself his bride.

That's how you're to do it. Wow. Wow. And I take it if you're a husband listening in today, friends, all of us, we need to feel the beauty and the weight of what he calls us to do.

[14 : 06] Now, we don't have time to do justice to kind of every glorious detail and image there. You do that in your own time. But let me just pick out one. Okay? Verse 28 and 29. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

Flowing into verse 29. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes it and cherishes it. Now, husbands, think about how you love your own body. Right? Doing it on the car on the way in today.

Doing a wee health checklist of how I've got on over the last 24 hours. Right? Good sleep? Tick. Hearty breakfast? Tick. Hair done? Tick.

Teeth done? Tick. Banana just before I left for that little bit of added energy? Tick. Run this week? Tick. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Friends, looking after my own body comes very naturally to me and I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Paul says that's how a Christian husband should love his wife. Which means, friends, husbands, listen to this. We stop what we're doing and we sacrifice time to listen to our wives.

[15:11] We stop what we're doing, we listen well. We stop what we're doing, we go out of our way to encourage her. We go the extra mile to care for her and we make it our job to lead in such a way that we see her flourish in terms of being the person that God has made her to be.

This is a call to sacrifice for the life of your wife. Husbands, love her like you do your own body. You know, I played a little game this week. It's called the Vanity Challenge.

What I tried to do is every minute I spent looking in the mirror, I would try and spend a minute listening to and trying to act this out with Alex. And do you know what, friends? I failed miserably. Here is the call for the Christian husband to love your wife. And do you see how Paul is saying, husband and wife, as you do this together, you are displaying the ultimate marriage, the ultimate marriage.

And it's so important that we've got that ultimate marriage in mind because if we look for satisfaction, whoever we are watching this today, we look for satisfaction in a marriage relationship, then we're in for a massive fall.

[16:25] Now, one of the most popular Christmas films of the last 20 years, and some of you love this, it's called Love Actually, and it contains one of the most cheesy rom-com lines, and Hollywood loves it.

And it's when the character played by Andrew Lincoln, some of you will know this scene, he's there, he's standing in the freezing cold, he's pretending to be a carol singer, he's at the door, and the character played by Keira Knightley is looking at him, and he's holding up signs, right?

And one of the signs he holds up, and this is the scene, and it says, to me, you are perfect. There's the sign. Now, let me just give you five seconds to have a little moment thinking about that, and enjoying that, and then let me burst the bubble.

Friends, do not buy the lie that any person can complete you. Okay, it's absolute nonsense. You know, I'm so conscious that for some of us watching this today, your experience of marriage will have been so painfully the opposite of what Paul outlines here.

And maybe you're watching this, and maybe you're struggling in your marriage, or you're struggling thinking, will I ever be married? And do you know what? Perhaps lockdown has just brought all those things, all those feelings, to light again.

[17:53] But let me encourage us to see, as we think about that scene in Love Actually, that the role of the perfect spouse has already been taken. And newsflash, it ain't me, and it ain't you.

Friends, we need to look to Jesus Christ. Whoever you are here today, if your trust is in him, would you know that you are in on, and will one day be gloriously and fully part of the ultimate marriage. And I love, this is one of the things that drew me to Jesus when I read about him in the gospel, for the first time when I was young, that I looked at him, not a romantic relationship in sight, right? It doesn't matter what the Da Vinci Code or the like says, nothing like that going on, and yet here is a man who is living life to the full. Here is a man who is full of joy as he basks in knowing the glory of his father.

And it was C.T. Stud to encourage his wife to say a little poem to herself every day. Dear Lord Jesus, you are to me dearer than Charlie ever could be.

[19:02] You see, friends, let Christ call the shots in your marriage. And let him, and these last two points will be quicker, let him call the shots in your family. Right?

Verse 1 of chapter 6, here is Paul's plea to the family children. He goes, first of all, again, thinking what we thought of earlier, children, and I think we're to picture children living at home and following Jesus for themselves.

What does he say? He says, obey your parents. And he roots it in the fifth commandment as a way of life that he has orchestrated, which will see them flourish and please us as the Lord.

So young people, if you're watching this, know that you can worship Jesus, you can honor him simply by the way that you love and you obey your parents.

Isn't that amazing? You can do that whoever you are. And fathers, verse 4, I take it speaking to them as the one that he wants to take the sacrificial and loving lead in the home because if you read around in this one, men in this culture have a habit of being domineering.

[20:05] Paul says, do not provoke your children or discourage them because you've put heavy burdens and expectations on them. But rather encourage and love and nurture and instruct and

pray for and invest in and get to know your children.

And the challenge is, parents watching this today, do we love our children like this? I'll tell you the little challenge in my heart over the last season. And it's to do with the comparison game.

You know, I don't know who started these things, but you know how every year you get those family newsletters through the post or you get them online. I love reading all of them, but you read some of them and you think to yourself, that is just a brag about your children.

Right? You know the kind of thing. Julie's doing classics at Cambridge and Mark has been made captain of the football team and baby Dave spoke his first word last month and that word had 16 syllables in it.

You know that kind of thing. And I find my heart can be so easily dragged away from my primary calling as a Christian parent. Then all of a sudden my little girl goes to play her first ever tennis lesson and in my head I'm thinking her first shot, why is she not Serena Williams?

[21 : 21] Come on! How my heart can get dragged away from something as simple as a photo on Facebook. Do you see the call here, friends, as Christian parents that our primary objective, our primary desire for our children should be that they come to know Jesus, that they love him, that they know him.

And flowing from that, my job as a parent is to put all the Jesus shaped kindling around the fire that I can of their hearts and live out in front of them a vibrant love for and need for the Lord Jesus saying sorry to my children when I've got it wrong and praying that the Holy Spirit would take the kindling around the fire and ignite it.

That's our desire for our children. You know, I love John Wesley who famously said about his mum, Susanna, he said about her looking back on his life that he meant he learned more about Christianity from her than he did from all the theologians in England.

Let Christ call the shots in your family. And lastly, let Christ call the shots in your work. As you see in verse 5, he speaks to slaves.

And you can understand that that's kind of a broad term that's describing, can describe any person who's under the authority of another. And I guess in this culture it's important for us maybe to discern that this is a different thing from what we'd imagine and we see in scenes like 12 years a slave or Selma.

[23 : 00] it's a different thing. You've got a whole economy here built on the kind of master-slave relationship. You have up to, it's estimated up to two-thirds of a Roman empire were slaves.

And slaves could be well educated professionals that could be trained individuals. You've bankers are slaves. You've got doctors who are slaves. So though it's not identical, I think we can draw a lot of parallels to our employee-employer relationships that we have today.

And look what he writes to slaves and see that this is a heart thing. It's a heart thing. Verse 5, what does he write? He says, obey. Obey your masters. Work well. Be known for your reliability.

Be known for your integrity. Be known for your diligence. And his wording, gain a good reputation in the eyes of your master. Be working, not just when they are watching, but be working all the time. All the time. And if you do this, you're going to show to the world that you serve a greater master, Christ, who has claimed you and changed you.

[24 : 14] Knowing that from him you will receive the ultimate inheritance when he comes back. A question to ask at this point, isn't it, is, friends, if we think about our jobs, what it is we do with our lives, those kind of employee-employer relationships, wherever you happen to fall in that.

Do people at work know and do they see it in us that we serve a higher master? You know, I love, I was reading with my kids the other day about Johann Sebastian Bach and how he signed off every bit of music that he wrote with the letters SDG, sold the Gloria, to God be the glory.

That's why he was working, not for pay, not for the plaudits, he was writing, composing for the glory of God. Take that with you this week, SDG, SDG.

Right, as you send that email that nobody will see, SDG. Right, as you're in the hospital, SDG, you know, all these things, to God be the glory. Christ has changed how you understand what you do in your work.

Right, into masters, he says, verse 9, he says, remember that Christ is your master too, and you need to treat your slaves well. You know, I love it, back in 2015, the online magazine 24-7 Wall Street, it published a list of the top ten companies in America to work for, and the only restaurant that made it in there was Chick-fil-A.

[25 : 44] Right, many of you might know that that's a restaurant run by evangelical Christians, and they've got a reputation for paying well for listening to what their employees are saying, to have a bit of flexibility in terms of work-life balance, and because of that, people love working there.

They love working there. So, friends, let Christ call the shots in your work. And how different, friends, this community then that Paul is describing, how different then it's going to look to the watching world.

This is a place where Jesus rules, and this is a place where he is transforming our relationships and the whole goal of our relationships is to glorify him.

Just as we close, let me just give you two thoughts that have been in my mind as I've been praying about this this week. Two thoughts for you, and I'll give you two song lyrics as well. Here's thought number one, and song number one.

It's a song that I used to listen to a lot when I was growing up. My dad used to love it on the radio, and it was called Oolalab of the Faces. Some of you won't have a clue what I'm talking about, some of you will love it. You can Google it afterwards.

[26 : 56] The chorus went, I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger. I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger.

Here's what I know now. Having done this work thing, marriage thing, parenting thing for a little season of my life now, nothing has revealed my own sinful heart and my need for God's gracious help, quite like marriage, parenthood, and work.

I take it, friends, all of us are going to respond to this like that, just feeling, wow, as we look at this. This isn't easy. The question that you're probably asking is how do we do this?

The answer here is not to roll up our sleeves. That might work for a day or two, but it's certainly not going to last long. It's not going to result in transformative change.

The answer is not to roll up our sleeves. The answer is to get on our knees. And remember that this word submitting is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

[28 : 12] This is the fruit of his work. God's God's children. The Spirit who is called the helper.

Friends, I take it if we want to see light in our marriages, in our families, in our work, we see the light as we come closer to the flame of Jesus Christ.

He's given us the Holy Spirit and he's given us one another to help. friends, if you've got questions about anything that's been said this morning or anything that you've read, get in touch.

As a community we do this together. We help one another and it would be our joy to be able to do that. Here's the second thought then and with this we close. And I want to take you back to Army Dave.

Remember Army Dave and his OTC buddies? The thing that struck me about Army Dave every time I saw him was that he loved the OTC. And I mean loved the OTC.

[29 : 16] Friends, as we see this, as we think about Christ as our master, as we think about submitting and letting his word rule over us, I want to remind us just at the close of the goodness of this.

And to see the goodness in this. But then to see beyond that and see the beauty of the Christ who is our master.

And here's the second lyrics and with this we close. There's joy in serving Jesus. The words of the old hymn, as I journey on my way, joy that fills my heart with praises every hour and every day.

There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus. Joy that throbs within my heart every moment, every hour as I draw upon his power. There is joy, joy, joy that shall never depart.

Friends, there is joy in serving Jesus. Let me pray as we close. Oh, Heavenly Father, all of us here will feel the weight of what we've read this morning.

[30 : 28] We'll see both its glory and its weight. And so, Father, I pray for whoever is watching this and whatever is going on in their lives. Some of the questions and some of the pains that will be wrapped up in all of this stuff.

Father, I pray that your spirit would be at work in each of our hearts and in each of our situations. Lord, that you would help us submit our lives to the lordship of Jesus.

And we thank you, Father, that there is none like him. And so, Father, we pray for your help this week as we seek to put this into action. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

Amen.