The Mystery of Marriage

“There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.” Proverbs 30:18-19

“God, the best maker of all marriages, Combine your heart in one.” Shakespeare, Henry V

The Changing Landscape of Marriage
As an institution marriage is taking a beating. Its popularity is at an all time low as more and more opt for alternatives such as co-habitation, an option that features a convenient escape clause.

[...the earlier] ideal of marriage as a permanent contractual union designed for the sake of mutual love, procreation, and protection is slowly giving way to a new reality of marriage as a terminal sexual contract designed for the gratification of the individual parties.” John Witte, Jr.

The Mystery of Marriage
“This is a profound mystery…” Ephesians 5:32

Mystery is a word that puts us in our place. It reminds us that there are things we simply do not know, apart from God’s revealing. Here, Paul uses the term “mega-mystery” to clue us in that the mystery of marriage can only begin to be unraveled when we humble ourselves and look to the profound example of Christ.

Verse 21 is a hinge verse - “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

“Destructive to marriage is the self-fulfillment ethic that assumes marriage and the family are primarily institutions of personal fulfillment, necessary for us to become “whole” and happy. The assumption is that there is someone just right for us to marry and that if we look closely enough we will find the right person. This moral assumption overlooks a crucial aspect to marriage. It fails to appreciate the fact that we always marry the wrong person. We never know whom we marry; we just think we do. Or even if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage, being [the enormous thing it is] means we are not the same person after we have entered it. The primary [challenge] of marriage is learning how to love and care for the stranger to whom you find yourself married.” Stanley Hauerwas, ethics professor at Duke University.

Mutual submission is the radically counter-cultural idea that will revolutionize your marriage if you take it to heart.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

The Wife Submits
Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 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. Ephesians 5:22-23

This passage stings our cultural ears for a couple of reasons (misunderstanding, selfishness).

1. Misunderstanding –
2. Selfishness –

The husband’s need: RESPECT

“When a husband feels disrespected, he has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. When a wife feels unloved, she has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband.” Emerson Eggerichs, Love and Respect
The Husband Submits

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Ephesians 5:25-29

As we look at what kind of leader Christ is, two things jump out: Service and Sacrifice. In the Kingdom of God headship is not about authority and power, but it’s about loving sacrificial service.

 “…the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28

The wife’s need: LOVE
- Security
- Conversational companionship
- Sense of significance
- Affection

Passive husbands/Angry wives

Husbands are called to engagement.
1.
2.
3.
4.

Concluding Thoughts
Marriage is hard. And often it is filled with hurts and heartbreaks.

All good marriage work must start from the place of grace.

“A Christian ethic... says, ‘We all begin from the wrong place; this gospel is precisely addressed to us who start in a mess.’ The doctor came for the sick, not for those who reckon they are healthy (Matt. 9:12).” Christopher Ash, Marriage: Sex in the Service of God

To conclude... I am deeply indebted to my own wife Kim who has taught me about unselfish love more than anyone I know. In addition, I am grateful to Dave Montoya (FBCs former college pastor) whose sermon on this passage is among the best I’ve heard (can be found at http://www.fbcdavis.org/groups/premarital.html).

Scott’s Favorite Marriage Resources:
Sacred Marriage (DVD or book) by Gary Thomas
The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller
Mystery of Marriage by Mike Mason

Digging Deeper into Ephesians This Week

This week’s passages:
Monday – Ephesians 5:17-21
Tuesday – Ephesians 5:21-24
Wednesday – Ephesians 5:21; 25-33
Thursday – Philippians 2:1-4
Friday – Philippians 2:5-11
Weekend – Ephesians 5:17-33

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21

The big idea this week is that only when we approach marriage (or any relationship for that matter) by putting the other first as Christ did for us, can our marriage relationship flourish.

Each day you can read the day’s passage and then respond to the following questions. You might find it beneficial to use a journal or notebook.

1. **Read** the passage prayerfully, listening for the voice of God and asking him to speak to you.
2. **Record** or write down the word, phrase, or verse that God impresses upon you.
3. **Reflect** and write down what it is about this word, phrase or verse that is meaningful to you.
4. **Respond** by writing down what you think the Lord wants you to do in response to his word (“Be doers of the word and not hearers only” James 1.22).