



**Series:** Ephesians: Life In Christ

**Date:** November 19, 2023

**Speaker:** Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text:** Ephesians 5.21-6.9- "What Can I Do to Serve You?"

### Advent Intro

Hey guys, next Sunday we wrap up our study of Ephesians and JUST LIKE THAT we are into our Advent Season. Man, if you've never celebrated Christmas with us before it's AWESOME and we take a whole month to do it. We call it Advent.

[mercycharlotte.com/advent](https://mercycharlotte.com/advent)

Advent is the Latin word for arrival. And we do it up. Next weekend we will be giving away a really cool Advent family devotional Called the Advent Blocks. We'll have a great giving opportunity for you called

Christmas Missions Offering. AND one thing I want to put on your radar today - we have 100 volunteer opportunities for you to serve those in need in our community. Real simple guys. We have 100 spots in December to serve. Most are only 3-4 hours. Go to [mercycharlotte.com/advent](https://mercycharlotte.com/advent) to sign up to serve. Advent is a celebration of hope. Well, that is what we want to BRING to our community here. HOPE. Take your community group, or maybe your family, or your roommates, and pick an opportunity to bring hope to our community.

BTW this is a GREAT segway into our sermon today because today is all about serving others. Let's remember the theme of Ephesians: LIFE IN CHRIST. What does it mean to be a Christian (Chapters 1-3) and then what does life look like as a Christian (Chapters 4-6). So we are now deep into what life looks like and today is going to be SO SO PRACTICAL. Like you can't escape how practical this is.

Ephesians 5.21 - 6.9.

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### Works Consulted:

Chester, Tim. [Titus for You](#). Good Book Company, 2014.

Constantine R. Campbell, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary.(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023.

Greear, JD. "God's Laboratories." Preached 19 March 2017. Accessed 10 November 2023 at <https://summitchurch.com/message/gods-laboratories>.

Keller, Timothy, and Kathy Keller. [The Meaning of Marriage](#): Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God. Penguin Publishing Group, 2013.

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Sorry, you can't hide behind "I'm not sure what the sermon was even about." Because here it is RIGHT OUT FRONT. There is one application our writer keeps making to the church. He's made it in different ways but he keeps on. And today I want to draw it out and put it front and center. He says, **We Christians should cheerfully serve others like Christ served us.** That's it. **Our lives should have a posture of serving others at expense to ourselves.** THAT'S IT. That's our call to action today. And if you are like oh, great. Got it. Done. Let me just say - If we all got this...our homes and church and workplaces would look radically different than they do. The problem today, as in much of Ephesians, is not understanding but openness. It's willingness to take our faith out of the pulpit and walk it out in real life. And today real life gets real...well, real. Good news - and invitation to you who are here but don't yet believe - There is deep purpose and joy in the life I'm going to describe to you today. You should hear it out.

**"Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."  
Ephesians 5.21**

That's our first verse. It's our linking verse to last week. We are to sing to one another, encourage one another, and submit to one another. What does that mean? It means die to self to serve the other. That's the CULTURE of Christianity. And here it is in your

application step today. This is the main point AND the application step. I want you to ask this question this week to the people around you.

**THE BIG IDEA: "What can I do to serve you?"**

It's a weird question to say out loud. What can I do to serve you? It's gonna be a TOUGH question for some of you to ask and others to answer. Some of you are helpers and you love to ask this question BUT HATE when people ask you cause helpers rarely want help. They need it but don't want it. Some of you moms are like... I can't help anyone else. If you tell me to help somebody I'm going to call you at the next 2am feeding pastor and Jesus isn't awake then. I get it. I try to say this often, what I heard a pastor say - There is NO EXCUSE for not waking up every morning and spending time with God...no excuse - unless you are the mom of a kid 5 & under. In that case God loves you, your church loves you, and I promise it's gonna be ok.ok back in. Some don't want help but...

Some of us just don't want the inconvenience. Life is full and I don't know what that person is going to ask of me. And your mistake is thinking the full life is a packed schedule. Maybe the full life is margin to serve others. And today is the confrontation you need to stop running for yourself and start living for others.

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The lived experience of a church has got to be brothers and sisters in Christ thinking intentionally about how we can SERVE one another. Die to ourselves to meet the needs of others. THAT is love.

Now here is what our text is going to do today - It's going to apply this idea to 3 of the big arenas of life. To Marriage, To Parenting, and to Work.

But if you are like man I'm in 10th grade. Or I'm a junior at Queens or I'm single...You might jump to the conclusion that some or all of this sermon isn't applicable. But REMEMBER a couple of things.

**FIRST** - The big idea isn't conditional on the arenas you ARE in right now. Whatever arenas you are in...the big idea remains - what can I do to serve you? What can I do to serve my roommates, my friends, my parents.

**SECONDLY** - this whole letter was written to the whole church. And they were reading it in a setting like this where there were couples and singles and kids and grandparents. So God WANTED couples to hear him talk to parents. Wanted employees to hear him talk to employers. So don't tune out to a message God designed for you to hear.

**And lastly** - for some of you - not all - but some may find yourself IN one of these arenas in the near future. 3 ARENAS to ask the question: WHAT CAN I DO TO SERVE YOU?

By the way, this might feel like 3 sermons all in one. SO, you better hold on to something cause we are going to be MOVING. And we begin with the arena of Marriage. The one that will take the most verses today. And this passage is very well known in Christian circles but if you are new to church and new to the Bible the way it starts might catch you off guard. So stay calm. I'm going to read the whole section on the arena of marriage and then we'll talk about it. READY?

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up,

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each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

Ok, so let's talk about this. Remembering verse 21 - submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. He says **the arena of marriage is A PICTURE of Something Eternal**. Something more powerful than marriage. Hear that? Before we talk about roles. Do you see this? Look at verse 32.

This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Marriage is a mystery. To which all the couples with some years under their belt will say "AMEN." But the real mystery is the **meaning** of marriage... The meaning of your marriage is to point one another AND those around you to something eternal. Your marriage is temporary. You won't be married in heaven.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage -- Matthew 22:30 (CSB)

So part of WHY you are married - your purpose - is growing in Christ-likeness together. It is to point to something ETERNAL: To the love between God and His people. To the love between Jesus and His church. So as you HEAR him talk about how husbands and wives do this remember the POINT is your marriage isn't just about you. It's about Jesus and Jesus making you more like Him. Now this is very practical for those of you who

are not married but desire to be. It means when you are choosing a spouse you need to choose someone who will help you become more like Christ. Not someone who IS a perfect picture of Jesus. Nobody out there. You aren't looking for a savior. You are looking for a partner who will help you become like your savior and vice versa.

BLOCK OF MARBLE.

See, the world tells you to look for someone who won't change you. Someone who will kind of be a chief accessory to your life. Enhance your overall life but not change you. That's crazy. For two reasons - first you are going to change anyway - Stanly Haurwas - five people all same person.

But also, what makes Christianity so powerful is that there's a better version of me, that God wants for me, and instead of giving me an accessory to stroke my ego He gives me a partner to help me grow and gives me a partner that I can help. That's such a powerful purpose.

How does it work? Well, in the articulation of the roles of husband and wife what the bible is doing here is celebrating gender differences. Showing how we participate with one another in a gospel dance. Both husbands and wives embrace their roles in the gospel dance. Now, I warn you that you won't see examples

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BECAUSE the bible is true for all times and all cultures. So it will always look different in expression. But should be consistent in underlying belief. So I'll try and give you a little here but won't let it take our whole sermon.

Husbands - Let's talk to you first.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

See in the dance of marriage verse 23 says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...

So yes husbands you are called by God to a position of leadership. Wives, this is the role God has called your husband to. I believe that's the clear reading of this text. So let's look at this. How did Christ lead the church? Through Sacrifice! He gave himself up for her. That's verse 25. Here's your take home:

A husband serves his wife through sacrificial leadership.

The nature of your leadership is so important. Yes you are the head, but not to lord it over your wife. Instead you are to lead through sacrifice. So what does this mean? Well it doesn't mean you get your way. It means you pretty much never get your way. You die to your way to serve her needs. Keller example - Should we buy the blue Car or red car?

Also, it means you are God's primary agent of loving spiritual encouragement in her life. Look at verse 26. One that feels a little odd at first.

26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.

What this means is that a husband leads his wife spiritually. He takes the lead in applying the scripture to her life and others in the family. He sees her, sees what she's going through, and speaks LIFE through God's word. And guys I know some of you are like yeah but my wife is WAY more knowledgeable than me about the bible and she's just WAY ahead of me spiritually. Ok Ok. listen - this isn't about knowing more than her. Marriage isn't a competition. All you have to do is go home tonight and take her hand and pray over her. God thank you for this woman. She's amazing. I don't deserve her. Help me love her like you love the church. Because she deserves that. I love her. Amen. Man just start there. And then, get in the word and pay attention to your wife. See her and speak God's word over her. Don't preach at her. Listen FROM A PREACHER let me tell you my wife loves nothing less than me preaching at her. That is not romantic. But instead, speak life over her. Listen here's a little test. **If her emotional security were based solely on how YOU speak to her - how would she feel?** Cherished? Valuable? Loved? Beautiful? And if you are like where

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do I start. Well, go look at the passages that talk about what a woman of God embodies. 1 Cor 13 & what love looks like. Prov 31 - what a godly wife looks like. To say hey I SEE THIS IN YOU. Man that will start to breathe life into her.

Then to the wife he says to submit to the husband's leadership. Verse 24 - in everything. And remember the bible is not beholden to our modern liberal - conservative spectrum. It was written long before that by a God who is way smarter than that. This is often taken out of context but as I've said at many of your weddings....God is calling the wife to the most profound picture of the gospel. Let's talk about what this does not mean:

- This is not a license for the man to dominate his wife. As if she's there to do his bidding
- This does NOT mean women should submit to physical harm or abuse of any kind
- This does not mean all women submit to all men in anything

**This is a word from God to wives.** Guys, don't try to jump in between the Lord and her and be like - let me tell you what God says your job is. Let her hear from God.

So what does it mean? Simply it means God has called you to yield to the husband's final responsibility before

God for your family. You work together, you cooperate together, and if there is a difference in something you are working through he has the responsibility before God to die to self & lead the family toward what is best. And you have the responsibility to encourage that and follow Him in it.

- The way Tony Evans says it - Headship and submission is God calling the wife to duck so God can punch the man.

What does this look like? Well the bible doesn't give details. ON PURPOSE. You gotta work this out. But a good starting place - Similar to what I was saying to the husbands if you don't know where to start just start by telling him where you see Christ-like leadership in him. Encourage him and recite your vows that you are ready and willing to submit to his leadership. Man submission here is positive. I'll apologize all day for the way it has been misapplied but I'll never apologize for the bible. There is a beautiful rich relationship offered to husbands and wives and we don't apologize for it.

In fact, when this is working right, Christian marriage is very attractive to the outside world. You get a couple serving one another through these two ways and I doubt you are going to hear "wow that is archaic." What you will probably hear, the more you get to know them, is "wow that is beautiful." "#couplegoals." A lot of

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people turned off by the christian teaching of marriage are attracted to the Christian marriages they see.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly let me say something - REMEMBER this is a picture of what is SUPPOSED to happen, not what always does happen. Husbands and Wives are called to this picture but so often fall short. Which is why we need the forgiveness of Jesus. So we can walk in humility and so we can readily extend forgiveness when we don't walk as we should.

So let's just start with a simple question to one another in our marriage: **What can I do to serve you?**

Ok that's the first arena. Marriage. Don't worry the second two have far fewer verses and we'll go quicker. Second arena where we apply this principle of serving others as Christ served us is the relationship between kids and their parents. Check this out:

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right.**

**2 Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, 3 so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.**

Children - listen up. God expected you to be in the room hearing directly from Him. So who is He talking

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Chester - Titus For Everyone.

to? To those old enough to comprehend but young enough to still be in their parents home under their authority. So while that's different in every era for us we have a group of people we call teenagers. Listen when talking to wives He said submit. That's a different word. The word for you to your parents is "Obey." What is going on here? Well he connects it the OT command "honor your father and mother" and reminds us of the promise - so that it may go well for you and you have long life in the land.

See here is what is happening - Your parents are a stand-in for God in your life. The home you are growing up in is your arena for learning to obey God the rest of your life. You will be there 18 years. You will live 80 years. He's preparing you for a life that flourishes under his leadership. **So HONOR your parents. Obey them. Because the habits you make will DEFINE how you follow God the rest of your life.** Parents are temporary stand ins. THANK GOD for them and trust and obey them.

Think of it this way: ATTITUDE & ACTION. Honor and obey means attitude and action. Cause you know you can obey... with a bad attitude. Anybody? We call this EYE ROLL OBEDIENCE. Better name is defiant obedience. That's dishonoring to your folks and represents a heart of defiance. But one day you'll be on your own, out of the training arena, and the question

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will be what will your relationship with God be like? DEFIANT OBEDIENCE? Sounds exactly like the bitter Christians I know that walk around the bible belt. Doing what they are “supposed to do.” Eye rolling God but don’t love Him. Just feel bound to His commandments. Don’t let that be your life. Learn to honor your parents in attitude and I promise it will go well for you in the land.

Oh, let me acknowledge the obvious problem - they aren’t actually God. You’ve learned that by now. So they mess up. They often have no idea what they are doing. And still - obey them. And pray for them. Teenagers - how often do you pray for your parents parenting? Why wouldn’t you? It will only be better for you if God helps them right? Kids - this week - to mom and dad - **What can I do to serve you?**

Ok before he leaves this arena he addresses fathers. **4 Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** So let me address fathers and father stand-ins. We’ve got some single moms who carry part of this role. Obviously can’t carry it fully but you feel it and I want you to hear it too. Don’t stir up anger. When your children submit to your authority, don’t abuse it. Your kids will get angry plenty and it has nothing to do with you, it has to do with them learning obedience. But this is why you need the gospel. You need to remember you

have a heavenly father who you rebelled against and He didn’t respond to you in anger but instead he saved you AND he disciplines you in love still. So, Paul gives a positive. Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Make your parenting about them and the Lord instead of about you and your ego. MUCH easier said than done.

There is so much more on this so let me recommend something - Raising Boys & Girls by Sissy Goff & Dave Thomas. Fantastic ministry with books and podcasts for all ages and stages. Super helpful to Courtney and I.

### **Last arena: The Workplace**

**5 Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ. 6 Don’t work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing God’s will from your heart. 7 Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people, 8 knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord. 9 And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. -- Ephesians 5:22-6:9**

Ok, I say workplace because the closest arena we have to this is the employer - employee relationship. Here’s why - The relationship here is SO FAR from what you and I hear when we read slave and master. In fact, the



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chattel slavery that existed in America is something the bible elsewhere will condemn as wickedness.

Paul is referring to more of a practice LIKE indentured service. Where you voluntarily sell yourself into service in order to work off a debt you owe. It wasn't based on race at all and it wasn't for a lifetime. Now was it great? NO. But this also isn't talking about the morality of the practice. It's talking about how to live as CHRISTIANS inside a socio-economic reality of the day.

And if you can see it that way you can see a Christian theology of work. Which so many of you have asked me about. And I hope this helps. Couple of principles you see in this text. And in a way that echoes the other two arenas he's gonna talk about attitude and action

- **Approach work with a cheerful attitude** - This doesn't say if your boss is a nice man or woman you should THEN have a good attitude. No, it says your attitude is actually to the LORD and not to your boss anyway. So, approach work as an arena to practice a thankful, positive outlook given to you from Christ. And trust the Spirit in the hard times.
- **Aim for excellence in your work** - You see that "don't work only while being watched?" Oh man. Basically...don't do the bare minimum to please your boss. Don't get caught up in the quiet

quitting epidemic happening in the workplace. Because you are not there to serve your boss you are there to serve CHRIST. And how you do your work is a representation of who you are in Christ. This is one of our staff values on the mercy staff team. We aim for excellence. We don't always hit it. But we aim for it. Because above all our effort represents the Lord.

Then to those in authority, to the boss he says treat them "the same way." Use your power to serve and lift up not to control. Why? Because this is how Christ used His power over you. He used it to lift you up. Will you use your power to empower and lift up those under your authority? Truthfully I have to CONSTANTLY check myself in this. I'm a boss now and I feel that weight man. But hey a caution to bosses, often I'm blind to where I mess up here. So you need people who are not just yes men and women around you. To help you see where you slip back into a controlling posture. At least, that's true for me. I need our elders, I need our senior leadership team who I've given license to correct me on this. And above all I need to be close to the lord EVERY SINGLE DAY. I pray through my daily calendar each morning asking the Lord to help me embody this in my meetings because I represent Him above all else. I need to be asking those under my care: What can I do to serve you?

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You've probably noticed something in all three arenas. As Paul is approaching the end of the letter he's saying in ALL of our relationships. In the church, in the home, in the workplace, man in all our relationships we are really serving the Lord. That's what's really going on.

So in arenas where we have authority we use it to bless those around us. We sacrificially die to serve them. And in areas where we are under authority we serve like Jesus.

And listen - in all of these arenas, maybe the best way to think of them is horizontal relationships that are DIRECTLY impacted by the health of our vertical relationship with Christ. When that is healthy, I have a chance at the others. When that is unhealthy, I'm walking in the dark in the others.

GRACE - I fail all the time in all of these. This was a painful sermon to write because I'm such a work in progress in all of these. In fact THIS WEEK I failed in all 3 arenas. Had to apologize. Had to seek forgiveness. Had to come back to Christ and rest in His forgiveness so that I don't just feel like a failure.

Maybe you just need to rest in that grace. And the first person you need to ask this question to is Christ himself. Jesus in light of who I am and what you've

done for me....what can I do to serve you? And let Him direct your horizontal relationships.

PRAY