



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

**Year Four
First Quarter
Relationships**

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First Quarter – Christ and Culture: Issues in the Black Church

Lesson One: What is a Husband? Page 3

Lesson Two: What is a Wife? Page 4

Lesson Three: The Duties of Parents Page 5

Lesson Four: The Duties of Children Page 6

Lesson One: What is a Husband?

Primary Verses: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.” Ephesians 5:25 and 28-29 (KJV)

Teaching Text: Ephesians 5:25-31

Supporting Texts: Genesis 2:23-24, Colossians 3:19, 1st Peter 3:7

Many are aware of the old saying, “Don’t miss the forest for the trees!” Of course, this is meant to imply the danger of being too wrapped up in the specifics (focusing on each individual tree) such that we miss the larger picture (the forest). But sometimes, it’s important to recognize the make-up of the forest is affected by the nature of each tree. The specific parts do, in fact, affect the whole. This is true in the continuing cultural conflict over the definition of marriage. Sometimes we have forgotten to define the parts because of our focus on the whole.

Examine a question asked by an unnamed citizen regarding tax privileges, “My question is, why should I, as a *gay man*, be denied the same right to file a joint tax return, *with my potential husband*, as a straight couple has?” Did you catch that? The self-identified “gay man” did not refer to a “partner,” “lover,” or even a “significant other.” He referred to the person he may be in a civil union or same-sex couple with as his “husband.” How can **he** have a *husband*? The answer is simpler than you may imagine.

If marriage is a human invention, then humans have the power to alter it as they see fit. Even if it’s “traditional marriage,” who or what group, among men, has the ultimate authority to deny or maintain its definition? As government changes, so changes the definition of marriage. He can have a husband because while yesterday the government was against it, today, the government is for it. But if marriage is of God, no man on earth—past, present, nor future—can alter it.

Questions to Consider: While the scriptures speak against homosexuality and include it in the category of sexual sin, are there dangers associated with expounding on those verses when speaking of the Christian view of marriage? Is it possible that by using the Bible to attack same-sex unions, we also weaken and cheapen marriage itself? If so, how? If not, why not? Who was the best husband in the Bible (not Jesus or God the Father)? How did you make your determination? What qualities make for a “Husband Hall of Fame” with biblical considerations? Who is the worst husband in the Bible? What would make for a “Husband Hall of Shame?”

Challenging the Class: It appears that the enemies of the gospel have mastered the ability to create and define the public image of the church. Generally speaking, Christians are far better known for what we stand *against* rather than what and Who we stand for. On the topic of marriage, we simply cannot allow this trend to continue. It is up to each individual Christian—married, single, or divorced—to clearly articulate the gospel-centered purpose of marriage: to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. If we fail to do that and focus on smaller issues, without presenting Christ and Him crucified for sins in order to provide eternal life for believers, we may win debates on earth, but we’ll lose souls in eternity.

Lesson Two: What is a Wife?

Primary Verses: “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’” Proverbs 31:25-29 (NIV)

Teaching Text: Proverbs 31:10-31

Supporting Text: Titus 2:3-5 and 1st Peter 3:1-6

It is almost impossible to overstate or exaggerate the degree of change introduced into society for both good and for ill regarding what might be broadly named, “women’s rights.” In many ways, if not most, the progression of women into fields that only 100 years ago were almost entirely male-dominated has enriched society and the world on many levels. Advances made by women in academic, professional, and governmental arenas have been a positive blessing, both in the US and abroad.

However, as with nearly every good thing, the good intentions behind the movement to secure equal footing in the sight of the law for women has, at times, been greatly corrupted. Some of the most vocal leadership in the women’s rights movement have taken the position that the abuse of some men against women legitimizes a war against all males in general. Take for instance the following quote from Sheila Cronin’s “Feminist Declaration,” “*Since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the women’s movement must concentrate on attacking this institution. Freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage.*”

What God created to work like the two halves of a pair of scissors has become two swords combating each other. Sinful oppression of women by males, as well as the sinful combative stance of some strains within feminist theory are both forms of rebellion against God’s good intent to bless creation with a unified picture of Christ’s love for the Church. When men and women are viewed as being in perennial conflict and competition instead of having been divinely designed in a complimentary manner, it is not a sign of progress, but of regression. As Senior Pastor Patrick J. Walker has reminded our church family several times, “Where purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable.” And so it is when men and women forget they were made for each other and not made to be against each other, abuse is inevitable.

Questions to Consider: Why did God create the first woman? Does the fact that the woman was made second make her inferior to the man? Is there a difference between being inferior and being subordinate? How might these two words be confused? Why are those two terms (inferior; subordinate) used interchangeably so often? Wives are clearly called to submit to their husbands. What would you identify as the root reason why it is so difficult to obey this biblical command? Who is the best wife in the Bible? What qualities would make one a candidate for the “Wives Hall of Fame?” Who is the worst wife in the Bible? What qualities would make one a candidate for the “Wives Hall of Shame?”

Challenging the Class: Man-bashing is very popular today. Whether it’s sayings like, “All men are dogs’ or the ridicule that comes to the male character on leading sit-coms. Christian ladies, particularly Christian wives, must resist the temptation to join in the trashing of husbands. Christian men, particularly Christian husbands, must endeavor with the Holy Spirit’s power to live in a manner worthy of the gospel—far above the so-called acceptable and expected norms for men today.

Lesson Three: The Duties of Parents

Primary Verses: “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand... And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always that He might preserve us alive, as we are this day.’ Deuteronomy 6:20-21, 24 (ESV)

Teaching Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-25

Supporting Texts: Proverbs 19:18; Matthew 7:9-11; Ephesians 6:4

Parents are responsible for the education of their children. This premise is almost entirely without controversy and while we expect children to do their part, society as a whole rightly places the bulk of this obligation on adult parents (especially for little children). Parents are charged with the duty to educate their children. But what kind of images does this statement conjure up? Saving for college funds, buying the latest “Baby Einstein” material for children, tutoring services, promoting advanced placement classes...? All these are well and good. They demonstrate the kind of sacrifices that well-meaning and sincere parents are willing to make to ensure the best for their kids. However, consider this:

The word “educate” has Latin roots. The Latin meaning is closely associated with the idea of “leading from” or “to lead out of.” The educator’s job then is to lead the student from something into something else; to usher them from one state into a better state. Education takes place when one leads or is led from being “in the dark” about something to where they are now aware or “in the light.” Is there a more terrible darkness to lead children out of than the dark ignorance of God? Is there a greater light to lead children into than the light of God’s word?

Parents have numerous duties. Provision of food, clothing, and shelter are among the most basic. Parents have a charge to punish willful disobedience in children without “provoking them to wrath.” Parents ought to ensure a child learns basic manners and help them to understand the world around them. Certainly, there are ways in which mothers and fathers need the support of community to help instill and provide for all these things in their children. But there is no need more urgent than that of ensuring each child is raised “in the fear and admonition of the Lord” through prayer and Bible instruction.

Questions to Consider: Why do you think people are having fewer children in our modern era than just two-three generations ago? Would you say society is welcoming of parents with three or more children? Why or why not? In what ways can/should the Church avail itself to assist parents in the raising of their children? Are there guidelines for knowing how much is too much help or how much is too much delegation of responsibility to the church by parents? What accounts for the shift of opinions against corporal punishment among parents? Does one need experience being a parent to teach about parenting or are the scriptures themselves sufficient to instruct about parenting? How does parenting experience aid/hurt in the teaching process?

Challenging the Class: Today, the so-called “child-centered” parenting style is still very popular. In this approach, the child’s needs and wishes are deemed to be the most important consideration in child-rearing. Naturally, every healthy parent has the good intention of raising happy, joyful children. But parents must overcome the urge to make anything and anyone else the central focus of their responsibility to parent. If children are a gift from God, is there anyone else we should be pleasing besides Him in our parenting?

Lesson Four: The Duties of Children

Primary Verses: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching; indeed they are a graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck.” Proverbs 1:7-9

Teaching Text: Proverbs 1:7-9 and 4:1-4

Supporting Texts: Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 20:11; Luke 2:52; Ephesians 6:1-3

Attentive to Instruction: There is simply no way around it, short attention spans or not, children are commanded to give full attention to the instruction of their parents. We recognize the importance of assisting them towards growth in their listening skills and certainly this is age-appropriate. However, we account for their inabilities based on immaturity, we cannot allow the culture’s low expectations to interfere with God’s written standard regarding their need to hear what parents and other appropriate elders teach.

Honoring Parents: The command to honor is a very expansive one. This is seen in at least three different applications. Firstly, the most basic form of honor is in the way of obedience. Children are to obey their parents in all things, assuming their parents don’t forbid them to do what God requires; nor should their parents require them to do what God forbids. Even in these cases, when parental commands are rooted in sinful rebellion against God’s law, a child still living at home with their parents should, by prayer, seek divine intervention to change the hearts of their parents.

Secondly, children are to honor their parents with deep respect and affection. There are notable examples of this respect in the pages of Scripture. Solomon, although a king, paid homage to his mother Bathsheba by rising in her presence and bowing to her (1 Kings 2:19). Also, there is the example of Joseph who, as an adult and second most powerful man in the world, embraced his father Jacob (Genesis 46:29).

Finally, adult children are to assist in the care of their aged parents. This is not only a moral obligation but one strongly implied by Jesus’ condemnation of the practice of “corban.” In Matthew 15:1-9 and in Mark 7:9-13, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders who approved of those who made offerings (Corban) to the temple and used such gifts as a false rationale to excuse themselves from caring for their parents. Even Jesus, while on the Cross, called upon the Apostle John to care for His own mother as a dutiful Son, honoring His mother with the last few breaths He had in His body. What an example!

Questions to Consider: In what ways has society successfully driven a wedge between parents and children? Agree or disagree: Parents have accepted excuses that permit their children to continue in disrespectful attitudes by simply attributing their differences to “it’s not like the old days.” While children are commanded to honor their parents, it is not always appropriate for them to listen to all adults. What guidelines should parents give to enable children to understand which adults to follow (especially in their absence)? How much influence should parents have in the choice of their child’s spouse?

Challenging the Class: Apart from Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, or birthdays, how often do you express gratitude to your parents for their care, love, and assistance in your life? Thankfulness towards parents mirrors the thankful heart we should have towards God. We should endeavor to ensure our parents are never left to wonder whether we remember and respect them for the position God gave them in our lives.