

**Spiritual Intimacy**  
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In this final session on building healthy relationships, I want to talk to you about Spiritual intimacy.

Essentially, Spiritual intimacy is about knowing and being known; it's about knowing God and being known by Him; it's about knowing each other and being known by each other.

One of the things I sometimes see, as I minister to people is that some of us have a fear of allowing ourselves to be known.

In the church, some folks sit in the congregation, and yet, they can feel all alone.

You see it in the work place also. You work next to someone for many years, only to realize that you never really knew them. And they never really knew you.

It's present in families; some families simply coexist. Children don't allow their parents to know their deep feelings. Spouses feel more like housemates than lovers. Somehow they have found a way to live together and yet remain alone.

Now, here's the simple truth:

**Spiritual Intimacy can only happen in an environment of trust, love and surrender!**

And, the Apostle Paul gave us a picture of what that environment looks like both in the church and in the family in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

So let's open our Bibles to Ephesians 5, and start reading at verse 21. **Ephesians 5:21-33**

<sup>21</sup> **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

<sup>22</sup> **Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.** <sup>23</sup> **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.** <sup>24</sup> **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in**

everything.

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

Before we dig into all that this has to say to us, let me just say that, over the years, this scripture has been wrongly applied. In Christian circles, even as I was growing up, there were some that used this passage as a justification for keeping wives subservient to their husbands. I believe that that interpretation is way out of line, and misses the mark of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus.

So, I want to do things a bit different today. I'm kind of going to start at the end of the passage and work back toward the beginning.

I want to begin by looking at verse 32:

**<sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.**

The deep truth hidden in this text is about the mystery of spiritual intimacy with Jesus.

How is that intimacy described?

The first description Paul offers is that **“We are Jesus’ bride.”**

Consider this a minute. Jesus gave himself up for us. (He gave His life for us.) He is working to prepare us for the wedding day. Cleansing us making us holy, through His word. Folks, we are being changed and prepared for Him. The church is the bride of Christ, the one that He loves.

The next description is found in verse 30... **“we are members of his body.”**

We are part of Him, joined with Him, One with Him! Can you see the intimacy in knowing and being known?

Jesus Loves us and cares for us. The church... we are his bride, we are his body. Those are the closest physical terms that can be used to describe the intimacy that Jesus desires to have with us. This spiritual intimacy is a profound mystery.

I wonder what our actions say about the value we place on living in that intimacy with Jesus?

How much time do we give to being cleansed by the washing that happens as we bathe in His Word?

How much energy do we give to knowing Him better?

How much effort do we give to hearing and obeying Him?

Spiritual intimacy with Jesus is all about making ourselves ready to be with Him, learning to know Him better, and being obedient to his teaching. All of these things build an environment of trust and love and surrender.

Paul encourages us to understand the profound mystery of our oneness with Jesus, and in order to describe that mystery, He used the illustration of the relationship of husbands and wives. That is to say that when a marriage is being lived out according to God's design, it is the best example of what our relationship with God is like. In other words, marriage lived according to God's design is the closest thing to heaven we can experience on earth.

So, what s God's design?

Looking back to verse 25, Paul gives this command for husbands:

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

How did Jesus show his love for the church?

**1. He laid down his life.**

Now, it would be a quick end to a relationship if shortly after the wedding a husband took a bullet for his wife. And, that's not what's in view here.

**Jesus was God and was with God in the very beginning, according to John 1:1.**

And, according to Philippians 2, **he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

**<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death.**

Jesus whole ministry among us was an expression of Him laying down His life. He lay down his life to be born human; he lay down His life to die in our place so that we can be saved.

Husbands, loving our wife means laying down our life for her. It means sacrificing our rights in favor of our wife's desires. It means placing her needs, her desires above our own.

It means spending ourselves for her benefit.

Jesus laid down His life for us; he set the example for husbands. We lay down our life for our wife.

**2. Doing His Father's will was Jesus' first priority. Second and next to it - He gave himself to serving the church.**

Jesus was clear about His priorities. He told His disciples on one occasion that, **“I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.**

He was always clear that His first priority was to do His father's will. But, Jesus also told His disciples, **“He did not come to be served, but to serve”**

Husbands, if we want to provide that environment of trust and love and surrender, where spiritual intimacy thrives, we've got to be consistent in doing God's will and in serving rather than demanding that we be served.

Jesus gave himself to serving the Church. Husbands, we are called to give our selves to serve our wives.

### **3. Jesus is always available to listen to us.**

One of the best ways we give ourselves to our wives is by listening to their heart.

I can't tell you how many times I've needed to talk to Jesus and taken time to stop right where I'm at and speak to Him.

And, I also can't tell you how many times that Phyllis has needed to talk to me, and I haven't been available or I've been available and not been present mentally.

Jesus models listening as a way that we can demonstrate love to our wife.

### **4. Jesus loved the church, before the church loved him back; He took the first step.**

Have you ever noticed that some couples have disagreements?

It may not be true of all of us, but some couples... some families... some churches have disagreements. And, sometimes, those disagreements can turn into arguments, and those arguments can end up with hurt feelings and bruised relationships.

Jesus took the first step in healing our relationship with Him. And, husbands, and leaders, someone's got to take the first step in working to heal broken relationships. Loving like Jesus loved is being willing to take the first step. Jesus set that example for us.

### **5. Jesus is the leader / and he is Servant.**

We are called to lead our families, lead our churches, not with an iron fist, but rather with a servant's spirit.

Husbands, and leaders, God's plan for us is to selflessly love our wife (love our church) and to give ourselves completely to them in helping to build them up into their full God-given potential.

That's what Jesus is doing for the church and how He is giving Himself to us; that's what it means to love our wives and our families as Jesus loved the church. That's how we follow Jesus example as leaders of the church.

So what's the wife's part? Look at **verse 22-24**

**<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

The wife's challenge is to submit to her husband's love and acts of service.

In essence, God's design is for the husband to give himself to the wife through serving her and building her up. That's how He submits himself to her. And, God's design is for the wife is for her to submit herself to her husbands love. That's how she submits herself to him. Which is what verse 21 calls us to do.

It says, <sup>21</sup> **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

It is in this atmosphere of mutual submission where love trust and surrender are found that spiritual intimacy grows. That's the place where we feel safe to let our guard down and allow ourselves to know others and to be known by them. That's the atmosphere where healthy relationships grow.

Now, one last thing that I want us to recognize: We are the bride of Christ. That means that our call as a church is to submit to His love and to follow His lead. That's God's

design for the church, and it's only as we submit to Him that we are given the blessing of spiritual intimacy of knowing Him and being known by Him.

And, folks, we were created for this! There is nothing better than knowing God and being known by Him. The closest thing to it is a marriage lived out by God's design.

My prayer for us is that we will be blessed with spiritual intimacy in our relationship with God, with each other and with our spouse.

Amen?