

BONUS SESSION ONE

Servanthood In Marriage

By Sue Addington

OUR LIVING ROOM was packed with young women who were gathered to discuss a chapter on submission from our stimulating semester-long study on Christ-centered homemaking. For many in attendance this Scriptural mandate was new and a bit puzzling.

“So what do you think about the topic this week?” was my opening question. I must admit I was expecting groans, eye-rolling, and maybe some initial complaints from this “green” gang.

I’ll never forget the first wife who opened the sharing. She was new to the area and to our group, and a mother to a baby less than one year old. What she said not only got everyone’s attention, but also positively directed the rest of our time of talking together.

“This week, after going through our lesson on submission, I felt that it was important to tell my husband about how I had chosen to follow him to this new place with our baby, to follow his dreams even though it was a challenge. I wanted him to know that I had made an effort to serve him.”

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She paused, “But after I finished explaining about my submissive serving efforts, he completely took me off guard by his response. He asked, ‘Did you think I came here to this new job FOR ME? I came here specifically for you and the baby! I came here mainly because I knew this would make life better FOR YOU. That was my main goal.’ Servanthood!”

Today, even as I type, I personally know two dear couples who are living out selfless, tireless serving of the other. The first, a wife in her 80s patiently, minute by minute cares for a soon-to-die husband, one who does not recognize the faces around him any longer. The other is a young man in his 30s passionately battling to preserve his wife’s eye-sight affected by some mysterious, complex symptoms. Servanthood!

Today a young husband will crash exhausted into bed as night falls after chasing around his two energetic toddlers all alone for a full weekend so his wife has time away with college friends. Servanthood!

Today a busy wife will pick up yet another of the “infamous socks on the floor” to put in the basket for washing, hopefully with a smile. Servanthood!

Ah, this serving one another—Jesus’ clear prescription for greatness—isn’t it mind-boggling at times? Whether in a leading role as husband or in the wife’s helping role, servanthood is constantly happening in so many ways. Neither role from the Divine Portrait has the corner on serving, does it?

Is serving always easy? No. Is serving always hard? No. But serving begs a daily choice in marriage—sometimes obvious, sometimes not, sometimes appreciated, sometimes missed, sometimes demonstrated in large ways, but most often in the small.

Rick Warren points out the commonly experienced rub of servanthood, “Marriage is a life-long process designed to teach you to see the needs of another

person as more important than your own. It's a difficult transition because it's not natural. To think this way requires an intentional shift that can be made only through the power of God in your life."

What about Jesus, the One from whom the power to serve comes? It appears that a primary theme, repeated often, in his comments, conversations, and commands happens to be not about the merits of leading, but more about the absolute greatness of servanthood.

Most definitely His word choice holds no glamour for the human ear—selflessness, sacrifice, dying to self, being last rather than first, giving up our rights for the sake of others and considering others as more important than ourselves.

Jesus not only talked about this serving, he modeled it in the dailies of real life—stopping, touching, helping, giving, attending, caring, loving, being interrupted, and being inconvenienced.

And greatest of all demonstrations, in the end, His death on the cross showed us the most extreme example of serving of all time—laying down His life for mankind.

So, husbands and wives, do you want to be great in God's mind? In marriage? In all of life, really? Daily go to Jesus' simple prescription—choose servanthood!

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Small Group Discussion

- How does the truth of this quote affect servanthood in your marriage?

“Our culture presumes that being first, richest, hippest, happiest, and most liked is the key to finding joy and contentment, the key to being great. The good life is marked by convenience and freebies. Even the church, in some instances, mistakes a blessed life with an easy and unchallenged life.” (Jeremy Kingsley)

- Read Matthew 20:28. How does this account bring contrast to this observation about our culture?

- What did servanthood look like in your home as you grew up? Was the serving equally demonstrated? Looking back, what do you think you might have missed that was going on in the way of serving?

- Do you think a fear of being taken advantage of affects one's courage to serve unconditionally? Is this more true for women than men? Why? Why not?

- Do you find it easier to serve when you offer rather than when your spouse asks you to serve?

- Does serving change in the seasons of marriage? How?

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- Which of these two verses challenges you the most in your own personal choices about servanthood in your marriage?

"Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself."

Philippians 2:3 (NET)

"The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Matthew 23:10-12 (NLT)

- What if you are in a marriage where the serving seems lopsided? Is it important for you to address the inequity with your spouse? Why? Why not?

- Read Matthew 25:34-40. Explain what this account has to do with serving in your marriage.



Take it Home

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Ask each other these questions. The goal is not just to get through them, but to take time to talk...and to listen...as a couple.

- Read Ephesians 5:21-28 and then the following example of one couple's response.

"Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another. Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands. Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church - a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already 'one' in marriage."

Ephesians 5:21-28 (MSG)

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Wayne Grudem is a well-respected theologian/pastor who has written numerous books and teaches around the world. He has also co-authored books and/or articles with both Dennis Rainey and John Piper. Here is his personal experience with servanthood described in a recent interview.

“We moved to Phoenix Seminary in Arizona in 2001, primarily because of Margaret’s health. She had been experiencing chronic pain after an auto accident a number of years earlier, and we found that the pain was aggravated by cold and humidity. Well, the Chicago area is cold in the winter and humid in the summer! After a couple of trips to Arizona, which is hot and dry, we realized that Margaret felt much better there. So I phoned the academic dean at Phoenix Seminary and asked if there might possibly be a job opportunity there for me. It is a long and wonderful story of the Lord’s guidance and provision, but the result is that we have been here since June 2001, Margaret has felt much better, and I also love the seminary where I am now teaching. So we are thankful for God’s blessings in many ways. I am thankful to the Lord that when we were making a decision about whether to move to Phoenix, on the very day we were talking and praying about it, I came to Ephesians 5:28 in my regular schedule of daily Bible reading, and the Lord used this verse strongly in my own decision process: ‘In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.’ After reading that, I thought it was important for me to move for the sake of Margaret’s physical body, her physical health.”

- Explain to each other what surprises you in the story.
- Explain what inspires you.
- Tell each other about ways that you have seen your spouse serve you so unselfishly.

FYI Quote Information

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Rick Warren, article in *Crosswalk*, *Five Biblical Purposes for your Marriage*, Baptist Press, Wednesday, January 19, 2005

Interview—Dr. Wayne Grudem—*Highlights and Reflections*, December 18, 2006 By Adrian Warnock

Jeremy Kingsley, *Be Last: Descending Into Greatness*

Full quote:

“Our culture presumes that being first, richest, hippest, happiest, and most liked is the key to finding joy and contentment, the key to being great. The good life is marked by convenience and freebies. Even the church, in some instances, mistakes a blessed life with an easy and unchallenged life. But Jesus calls us to give up our pretensions of greatness defined by fame, carefree living and accomplishment. Contrary to popular opinion, greatness is defined by the humble and often hidden actions of a person who has given up on coming out on top. It’s consistently putting Jesus and others first. Living a life of greatness is actually walking a difficult path of self-sacrifice and inconvenience, driven by a greater concern for others. A truly great person does not need to be served but is bent on serving others. Jesus said it Himself: ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28).’”