

Encouraged

with Paul's letter to the Ephesians

'So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10)'



Handouts to help you read & understand –
for personal Bible study, reading the Bible with a friend or with a group

15th Session **THEME: Equipped for marriage**

1. Start with prayer. Then look at this icebreaker question. 10 minutes to get started

Today we study the topic of marriage. Everyone in some way has to do with this topic, also if you are single and even if you have no plans ever to marry. Marriage – as we will see today – was designed to be a picture of the love between Christ and the church. Yet, around marriage there are many struggles and many misconceptions. Let's start with a sensitive question: what about your parents? If you want to (no pressure, feel free), you may share: were/are they happily married or not? Did/does that affect you?

2. Read Ephesians 5 : 15-33; today we focus on 21-33 30 minutes to understand the passage

Look again at verse 21 *'submitting to one another'*

This verse not only opens a new subsection, but also concludes the subsection about wise living, which started with verse 15. Wise living is Holy Spirit-filled living (wherein we - with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs - focus on our Lord and on God, our Father); opposed to foolish, self-centred and sinful living (as described and exposed in 4:25-31 and 5:3-14). The submission to one another is not absolutely, but to how Christ through the other one addresses you and builds you up.

- Sometimes it is inappropriate not to submit, sometimes it is inappropriate to submit. Can you give examples of that?

Look again at verses 22-24 *'submit to your husbands'*

To submit in everything means that in everything she wants him to be like Christ and to honour and esteem him highly.

- Do these verses mean, that if a husband tries to force his wife to sin, she should give in to that? (see also 4:25-27, 5:7, 5:11)
- Why is appropriate submission counter-intuitive and difficult? Why is appropriate submission also beautiful?

Look again at verses 25-27 *'love as Christ loved'*

- When Christ loved the church, she wasn't lovely (see Romans 5:6-11). What can we learn from that?
- Look at the questions you have about these verses and at what strikes you in these verses.

Look again at verses 28-30 *'love as Christ nourishes and cherishes the church'*

- What do you like about these verses? What do you find difficult? Try to help each other understand these verses.

Look again at verses 31-33 *'shall become one'*

Unity is the purpose and the perspective of the marriage covenant. The two become one flesh. Union is also what Christ provides believers with; a union that starts during their lives and awaits completion at Christ's day (see Revelation 19:6-8).

- What may hinder and what may promote unity in a marriage?
- Many think or say that you can simply start to live together if you love one another; marriage is for later, an option, not an obligation. How might the apostle Paul have responded to such thoughts?

3. Apply and end with prayer. 15 minutes to make it personal and to pray

Around relationships, marriage and what the apostle wrote about this, there can be thankfulness, but also a lot of disappointment, struggle and pain. Take some moments of silence to reflect on this and on what you learnt today. Share one or two points of prayer or of thanksgiving after that (if you want to) and then end with prayer.

4. Digging deeper

When Adam and Eve sinned, their marriage was affected in many ways. For instance, Adam, who had heard God's commandment and told Eve about it, failed to speak on Eve's behalf, when the serpent tempted her (as she hadn't heard it). When God addresses Adam, he blames Eve. So that she may have felt betrayed, not only by the serpent, but also by her husband (though she had sinned herself). What Christ does to believers is the opposite. He took the blame and the guilt of his church. He speaks and thereby nourishes and cherishes the church. The Bible started with an unhappily married couple. It ends with the marriage of the Lamb.