

## **The Christian Home, Teacher's Guide**

### **Lesson 3: The Husband's Calling: To Love as Christ Loved**

**Ephesians 5:25–33; 1 Peter 3:7**

#### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

This lesson and the one that follows are the most likely in the study to be heard through the noise of the surrounding culture, so the teacher should prepare to teach them clearly, lovingly, and without apology or harshness. What is doctrinally at stake is the New Testament's actual teaching on the husband's calling, which is neither the domineering authority some have claimed nor the role-less partnership others prefer. Scripture calls the husband to sacrificial, Christlike, servant leadership. The defining command is Ephesians 5:25: love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Everything else (nourishing, cherishing, understanding, honoring) unfolds that one cross-shaped command. The teacher must hold two things together firmly: the husband is genuinely called to lead, and the only leadership Scripture authorizes is the self-giving servanthood of Jesus. Headship is a weight of responsibility to love and serve, never a license to rule for one's own advantage.

Be ready to name the abuses on both sides so students are not left to guess. On one side stands the man who uses "headship" to dominate, to demand his own way, to belittle or frighten or harm; the teacher should say plainly that this is a betrayal of the passage, not an application of it, for Christ never dominates His bride. On the other side stands the man who abdicates, who is passive, absent, or disengaged, leaving his wife to carry what he was called to bear; this too falls short, for Christ did not withdraw from His church but gave Himself for her. First Peter 3:7 anchors the equal worth of the wife (a "fellow heir of the grace of life") so that no one mistakes distinct roles for unequal worth. Keep the tone warm and aimed at the heart throughout; this is not a culture-war lecture but a summons to a beautiful and demanding calling.

The lesson is also aimed at deep spiritual formation, because nothing exposes and shapes a man's character like how he treats his wife behind closed doors. A man may be admired at work and respected at church and still be selfish, harsh, or neglectful at home. These verses press the lordship of Christ into the most private corners of a man's life. The disciple being formed here is a man learning the strength that kneels, who finds in the towel and the cross not a loss of manhood but its redemption. Send husbands home not crushed by an impossible standard but drawn toward the One who first loved them that way, and stirred to love their wives as they themselves have been loved.

#### **Question 1**

**Student Question:**

*Paul commands, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). Of all the things Paul could have told husbands to do, why do you think he reduces the whole calling to one word, love, and then defines that love by the cross? What does this tell us about the heart of a husband’s role?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul could have given husbands a list (provide, protect, lead, decide), and all of those have their place, but he refuses to start there. He reduces the husband’s entire calling to one verb, “love,” and then defines that love by the most costly act in history: “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” This is deliberate. The Greek word is *agapao*, the love that seeks the good of the other at cost to oneself. By tying it to the cross, Paul makes self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, the very center of the husband’s role.

This single verse quietly dismantles every domineering reading of headship. The husband is indeed called “head” (v. 23), but the head is commanded to spend himself for the body, exactly as Christ did. There is no room here for a man to use his position to get his own way. Christ’s headship cost Him His life. A husband who grasps this stops asking, ‘How do I get my wife to submit?’ and starts asking, ‘How do I lay myself down for her good?’

It is worth pausing on the order of the household code. Ephesians 5 tells wives to submit (vv. 22–24) and then gives husbands a command roughly three times as long, all of it about sacrificial love. The greater word goes to the one with the greater responsibility. The teacher can gently point out that if any partner in this passage is given the heavier assignment, it is the husband, who is told to love like the crucified Christ.

Finally, let this be gospel before it is law. A husband cannot manufacture Calvary-shaped love out of his own resources. He loves this way only because he has first been loved this way. The command flows from the indicative: Christ gave Himself for the church, and out of that overflowing love a husband learns to give himself for his wife.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The husband’s whole calling reduced to cross-shaped, self-giving love
- *Agapao* as seeking the other’s good at cost to oneself
- Headship redefined by sacrifice, ruling out every domineering reading
- The husband given the longer, heavier command in the household code
- A husband loves this way only because Christ first loved him

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does Paul define a husband’s love by the cross rather than by authority?
- How does this command reframe the question of who submits to whom?
- Where does a husband find the power to love sacrificially?

## Question 2

### Student Question:

*Loving as Christ loved means giving yourself up. Husbands, where in your marriage are you most tempted to insist on your own way, your own comfort, or your own convenience instead of giving yourself up for your wife? Name one specific place where laying yourself down would look like Christ this week.*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the cross-shaped love of verse 25 into daily life. Giving oneself up for one's wife rarely means literal martyrdom; far more often it means a hundred small surrenders: yielding a preference, swallowing the last word in an argument, taking the harder task, listening when you would rather be left alone, putting her rest ahead of your hobby. These ordinary deaths to self are where a husband actually becomes like Christ.

Help husbands locate the specific places they tend to insist on their own way. For one man it is the remote and the recliner; for another it is the schedule; for another it is always needing to be right. The aim is not vague guilt but one concrete identification: here is where I grasp instead of give.

Caution against a counterfeit. Some men 'give in' resentfully and then collect the debt later through sulking or reminders of their sacrifice. That is not Christlike love; it is manipulation wearing love's clothing. Christ gave Himself up freely and joyfully 'for the joy that was set before him.' Invite husbands to lay something down this week not to win points but to bless.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-giving love expressed in small, daily surrenders
- Identifying the specific places a husband insists on his own way
- Free, joyful sacrifice versus resentful giving that collects a debt
- Concrete obedience this week rather than vague resolve

### Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to insist on your own way at home?
- What does laying yourself down for your wife look like this week?
- How can you tell free sacrifice from giving-in that keeps score?

## Question 3

### Student Question:

*Paul says Christ gave Himself for the church "that he might sanctify her ... so that she might be holy" (vv. 26–27), and then that a husband should "nourish and cherish" his wife as Christ does*

*the church (v. 29). What does it look like for a husband to actively help his wife flourish and grow toward Christ, rather than merely coexisting with her?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul gives the husband not just a manner of love but an aim. Christ loved the church “that he might sanctify her ... so that she might be holy and without blemish.” The husband’s love, then, is not content to leave his wife unchanged; it actively seeks her flourishing, including her growth toward Christ. He is to be invested in her becoming all God made her to be.

Paul reinforces this with two tender verbs in verse 29: “nourish and cherish.” To nourish is to feed and help grow; to cherish is to warm, to hold close, the word used of a mother caring for her children. A husband is to create the kind of home climate in which his wife can thrive spiritually, emotionally, and practically, the way a gardener tends a plant toward bloom.

Guard carefully against a distortion here. ‘Helping my wife grow holy’ must never curdle into a husband appointing himself his wife’s reformer, criticizing and correcting in the name of sanctification. Christ sanctifies His bride by giving Himself up for her and by ‘the washing of water with the word,’ not by nagging. A husband chiefly helps his wife flourish by loving her, serving her, praying for her, leading in their shared walk with God, and creating safety, not by managing her faults. The teacher should make this distinction explicit, because well-meaning men can weaponize this verse.

Practically, nourishing and cherishing look like attentiveness: noticing when she is weary and carrying the load, encouraging her gifts, protecting her time with the Lord, speaking words that build rather than diminish. The opposite, mere coexistence, is the slow starvation of a marriage in which two people share a roof but no one is being fed.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Christlike love aimed at the wife’s flourishing and growth in holiness
- “Nourish and cherish” as feeding, warming, and tending the relationship
- The crucial difference between helping a wife grow and policing her faults
- Sanctification by self-giving and the word, not by criticism
- Mere coexistence as the quiet starvation of a marriage

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it look like to help your wife flourish rather than just coexist?
- How is loving toward holiness different from correcting and criticizing?
- Where could you nourish or cherish your wife more deliberately?

### **Question 4**

**Student Question:**

*“Nourish” and “cherish” are warm, attentive words. Husbands, would your wife say she feels nourished and cherished by you, or neglected and taken for granted? Where has the cherishing gone quiet in your marriage, and what is one way you could revive it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question lets the warm words of verse 29 do their searching work. The test it proposes is humbling and clarifying: not whether the husband feels loving, but whether his wife feels cherished. Love is finally measured by its landing, not merely by its intent. Many husbands are surprised to learn that what they consider provision or presence does not register to their wives as cherishing.

Help husbands locate where the cherishing has gone quiet. Often it fades not through conflict but through autopilot: the relationship that was once pursued becomes assumed, words of affection grow rare, attention drifts to phone and work and worry. The flame does not usually go out in a gust; it dies down for lack of tending.

Aim at one concrete revival. A husband might name a return to genuine conversation, a recovered habit of expressing appreciation, a deliberate pursuit of his wife’s heart rather than merely her help with logistics. The single man can apply the principle to whether he tends or takes for granted the people closest to him. The point is movement: one specific way to begin cherishing again.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Love measured by how it lands on the beloved, not only by intent
- The slow fading of cherishing through autopilot and neglect
- Pursuing a wife’s heart, not only her help with daily logistics
- One concrete step to revive attentive, warm love

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Would your wife say she feels cherished or taken for granted?
- Where has attentive love gone quiet in your marriage?
- What is one way you could revive cherishing this week?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Peter writes, “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way” (1 Peter 3:7). The phrase means to dwell with her according to knowledge, paying attention, learning her. Why would God specifically command a husband to know and understand his wife, and how is this an essential part of loving her well?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Peter turns to a dimension of love that is easy to neglect: knowledge. “Live with your wives in an understanding way” translates a phrase that means to dwell together according to knowledge. The husband is commanded not merely to provide for or protect his wife but to know her, to study her, to understand how she is made and what she carries.

This is striking because it is a command, not a personality trait. A man may protest that he is not naturally perceptive, but Peter does not offer that as an excuse. Loving his wife well requires that he learn her: her history, her fears, her joys, her burdens, the things that wound her and the things that make her feel safe and seen. Love that does not bother to understand is not yet mature love.

Connect this to the cross-shaped love of Ephesians. Christ knows His church intimately; He is not a distant ruler but a Shepherd who knows His sheep by name. A husband images that knowing love when he pays attention. Failing to understand one’s wife, by contrast, leads to a hundred avoidable wounds: decisions made without consulting her, needs unnoticed, words that land harder than intended because he never troubled to learn her.

The teacher can note how counter-cultural this is for many men, who were taught that strength means self-sufficiency and that understanding is optional. Peter makes attentive understanding part of a husband’s obedience to God. It is one of the chief ways he loves.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- “Live with your wives in an understanding way” as a command to know her
- Understanding as obedience, not merely a matter of temperament
- Christ’s intimate knowledge of His church as the model
- The wounds caused by a husband who does not trouble to understand

## **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God command a husband to understand his wife?
- How does a lack of understanding cause avoidable hurt in a marriage?
- What keeps men from becoming students of their wives?

## **Question 6**

### **Student Question:**

*Knowing your wife is a lifelong study, not a fact you mastered at the wedding. Husbands, how well do you actually know your wife right now, her fears, her hopes, what wearies her and what gives her joy? What would it take for you to become a student of her again?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-application makes the command of 1 Peter 3:7 personal. Knowing one's wife is not a milestone reached at the wedding; it is a lifelong study, because she is a living person who grows and changes through seasons of joy, loss, motherhood, age, and faith. The husband who assumes he 'already knows' his wife often knows the woman she was years ago, not the woman beside him now.

Help husbands take an honest inventory. Could he name her current fears? The thing that most wearies her this season? What makes her feel loved, as opposed to what he assumes makes her feel loved? Many men discover, uncomfortably, that they know their work or their hobbies in far more detail than they know their wife.

Point toward the practical work of becoming a student again: unhurried conversation, real questions and patient listening, noticing rather than assuming. The goal is not a one-time talk but a renewed posture of attention. Invite each husband to name one way he will study his wife this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Knowing one's wife as lifelong study, not a settled fact
- The danger of knowing the woman she was rather than the woman she is
- Honest inventory of how well a husband actually knows his wife
- Renewed attention as the practical shape of understanding love

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Could you name your wife's current fears, hopes, and burdens?
- Do you know your wife as well as you know your work or hobbies?
- What is one way you will become a student of her this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Peter tells husbands to show honor to the wife "as the weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7). Far from demeaning her, this calls the husband to a special, protective honoring of his wife. What do you think "weaker vessel" means and does not mean here, and how does showing honor reflect Christ rather than the world's ideas of strength?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The phrase "weaker vessel" has been misread in both directions, so the teacher should handle it with care. It does not mean the wife is weaker in worth, intelligence, character, or spiritual capacity. The very next phrase calls her a "fellow heir of the grace of life," fully equal in the inheritance of salvation. Whatever 'weaker' means, it cannot mean lesser.

Most faithful interpreters understand “weaker vessel” to refer primarily to relative physical strength, and perhaps to the vulnerable position wives often occupied in that culture, more exposed to mistreatment and dependent on a husband’s protection. The word ‘vessel’ pictures something precious and valuable, like fine pottery, to be handled with care. Far from demeaning the wife, the command tells the husband to treat her as one treats something precious and entrusted to him.

The response Peter commands is honor: “showing honor to the woman.” The husband is to use whatever strength or standing he has not to dominate but to protect, to shield, to esteem. This is the opposite of the world’s instinct, which uses strength to take advantage of the weaker. Christ used His power to serve and protect the vulnerable, and the husband is called to the same. The teacher should stress that this verse, rightly read, is one of Scripture’s great safeguards for wives, not a basis for diminishing them.

It follows directly that this honoring rules out every form of harshness, contempt, and certainly abuse. A man who uses his greater strength to intimidate or harm his wife has turned this command exactly upside down. Honor and harm cannot coexist. Where abuse is present, the teacher should be ready, quietly and pastorally, to affirm that Scripture never asks a wife to submit to sin or to endure abuse, and to point toward the protection of elders and other help.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- “Weaker vessel” as not lesser in worth, dignity, or spiritual standing
- The phrase understood chiefly of physical strength and cultural vulnerability
- ‘Vessel’ as something precious, to be handled with care
- Strength used to protect and honor, against the world’s use of strength
- Honoring as a safeguard for wives that rules out harshness and abuse

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does “weaker vessel” mean, and what does it clearly not mean?
- How is honoring the “weaker vessel” the opposite of the world’s use of strength?
- How does this command protect rather than diminish a wife?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Showing honor is concrete: it is how a husband speaks to his wife, speaks about her to others, protects her, and treasures her. Husbands, in what specific way could you honor your wife more visibly, whether in private, in front of the children, or in front of others? Where might you be dishonoring her without realizing it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**



This question makes honor concrete, because honor that stays an abstraction changes nothing. Peter's command shows up in tangible ways: how a husband speaks to his wife when no one is listening, how he speaks about her to others, whether he defends her or joins in slighting her, whether his tone builds her up or wears her down, whether he treasures her openly before the children.

Invite husbands to consider all three arenas the question names. In private, is his speech to her honoring or cutting? In front of the children, does he model honor toward their mother, knowing they are learning how a man treats a woman by watching him? In front of others, does he praise her or make her the punchline? Children in particular absorb their picture of marriage largely from how their father treats their mother.

Press also on the second half of the question: where might he be dishonoring her without realizing it? Often it is in small, habitual things, a dismissive tone, jokes at her expense, interrupting, correcting her in public, failing to thank her. The aim is one specific, visible act of honor to begin this week, and one habit of subtle dishonor to lay down.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Honor as concrete speech and action, not abstract attitude
- Honoring a wife in private, before the children, and before others
- Children learning how to treat a spouse by watching their parents
- Naming and laying down small, habitual forms of dishonor

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How do you speak about your wife when she is not in the room?
- What are your children learning about marriage from how you treat their mother?
- Where might you be dishonoring your wife without realizing it?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Peter says the husband is to honor his wife as “a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). Here Scripture holds together the equal worth of husband and wife (they are fellow heirs of eternal life) and the husband’s distinct calling to lead by serving. How do equal worth and distinct roles fit together without contradiction, and what does it mean that a husband’s treatment of his wife is serious enough to hinder his prayers?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, because it holds together the two truths the culture insists must be torn apart: equal worth and distinct roles. Peter does both in a single verse. He calls the wife a “fellow heir of the grace of life,” affirming her complete equality with

her husband in the most important matter of all, the inheritance of eternal salvation. And he addresses the husband distinctly, charging him with understanding and honoring her as the one called to lead by serving. Equality of worth and distinction of role stand side by side, unembarrassed.

The teacher should state this clearly, because it is the hinge of Lessons 3 and 4. Husband and wife are equal in worth, dignity, value, and standing before God; neither is superior as a person. Yet God has assigned them distinct and complementary callings in the home, the husband to sacrificial leadership, the wife to respect and godly support (Lesson 4). These are not in tension, any more than the equal worth of two musicians is threatened by one playing melody and the other harmony. To deny the equal worth is to fall into the harsh error; to deny the distinct roles is to fall into the egalitarian error. Scripture refuses both.

Then note the astonishing warning: a husband must treat his wife rightly “so that your prayers may not be hindered.” God takes a husband’s treatment of his wife so seriously that mistreating her disrupts his fellowship with God Himself. A man cannot wound the fellow heir of grace at home and then expect an open line to heaven. This single clause demolishes any notion that headship is a privilege a man may exercise selfishly. Far from giving the husband license, his position carries a heightened accountability before God.

Draw out how seriously this dignifies the wife. The God of heaven so values her that He will close His ear to her husband’s prayers if that husband dishonors her. There is no higher estimate of a wife’s worth than that. The teacher should let this land as both warning to careless husbands and comfort to wives who have wondered whether God sees how they are treated. He does, and He takes it personally.

Finally, return to the warm center. The point of all this is not to win an argument about roles but to summon husbands to love. A man who truly believes his wife is a fellow heir of eternal glory, precious to God and entrusted to his care, and that God watches how he treats her, will not lord it over her. He will lay himself down, as Christ did, and find that the strength that kneels is the only strength worth having.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Equal worth (“fellow heir of the grace of life”) and distinct roles held together
- The harsh error (denying equal worth) and the egalitarian error (denying distinct roles) both rejected
- Distinct callings as complementary, like melody and harmony, not as ranks
- Hindered prayers: God’s severe view of a husband who mistreats his wife
- Headship as heightened accountability before God, not selfish privilege
- God’s personal valuing of the wife as warning and comfort

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How can a husband and wife be fully equal in worth yet have distinct roles?
- What does it mean that mistreating a wife can hinder a husband's prayers?
- How does God's valuing of the wife guard against any harsh use of headship?

## **Question 10**

### **Student Question:**

*Look back across both passages, from Christ giving Himself on the cross, to nourishing and cherishing, to living with understanding, to honoring a fellow heir of grace. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the husband's calling that you most need to carry into your marriage or your future this week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone gathers the whole of the husband's calling: the cross of Ephesians 5, the nourishing and cherishing of verse 29, the understanding and honoring of 1 Peter 3:7. Ask each man to name one specific way Jesus is forming him through these verses, resisting the safety of generalities.

Different truths will grip different men. One needs to repent of harshness and learn the strength that kneels. Another needs to repent of passivity and step back into engaged, sacrificial leadership. Another needs to become a student of his wife again, or to honor her openly before the children, or simply to believe that God watches and cares how he treats her. The single man can resolve to build these patterns now, before marriage. Let the Spirit press the door He chooses.

Close on grace, not pressure. No husband loves like Christ by gritting his teeth; he loves this way by drinking deeply of the love Christ has poured out on him. Send husbands home not buried under an impossible standard but lifted by the One who gave Himself for His bride and who supplies the very love He commands. The towel and the cross are not a burden laid on men so much as an invitation into the kind of greatness Jesus Himself displayed.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Synthesis of sacrificial love, cherishing, understanding, and honor
- Formation as specific repentance and growth, not vague resolve
- Both the harsh man and the passive man called to Christlike leadership
- Grace, not willpower, as the source of a husband's love

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What single truth about the husband's calling do you most need this week?
- Are you tempted more toward harshness or toward passivity, and what does Christ ask instead?

- How does being loved by Christ free you to love your wife His way?