

Lesson 5





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will have compared Christ's love with their relationships with family members; recognize the depths of Christ's sacrifice to show love and care for the church; and be encouraged to take responsibility for personally showing love among family, as Christ has demonstrated.



All for One

Janet told her brother, Robert, that he was being ridiculous and selfish. He asked her not to hang up as he clicked over to take another call. This was the third time in one week she had called him about their ailing mother.

Robert clicked back onto the line with Janet, and jokingly said, "Old lady?"

Flustered, she replied, "Grow up, Robert."

"I have been, but not nearly as long as you have been, which is why I call you 'old lady.' "

They launched back into the discussion about Robert needing to help out with their mother.

"Love is active," Janet said. "It looks a certain way, and offspring do this, Robert. They reciprocate love."

"You don't need to lecture me," Robert said.

"I'm not lecturing you. I'm reminding you."

Sarcastically Robert said, "You can snatch that holier-than-thou tone from your voice."

"Now who's lecturing who?" Janet responded.

Robert sighed. "Oh, now Ms. Jesus has an attitude."

"I really hate it when you call me that."

Condescendingly, Robert said, "If the shoe fits."

"Christians have been taunted and persecuted for centuries, and we're still being persecuted, even by our own family members," Janet said.

"Nobody's persecuting you," her brother countered, "I'm teasing you. There's a difference, and I don't have to be a Bible-toting Christian to know that."

She sharply replied, "Christian or not—and you have clearly shown the world that you're not—you still need to love your parents."

"I love them. I send flowers."

"Love is so much more than that, Robert," she continued. "It was more than that during all of the years they took care of you!"

Yawning, he replied, "Whatever."

"Mom is very sick," Janet said.

"So help her."

"I live in Texas, and you live three miles away from Mom," Janet said, as her voice weakened from exhaustion and sadness. "A whole 15 minutes on the train, Robert?"

"Still," he insisted, "that doesn't make me any less busy."

She sighed. "You're sick. You are really sick."

Coldly, he replied, "We need to finish this conversation later, Janet. I've got someplace to be soon."

Janet ended the call with Robert, and immediately phoned a family friend who was a member of her mom's church. She asked the woman to check in on her mother until she could make family leave arrangements with her job and get a flight there.

Happy to oblige, the woman said, "Of course, she's always been like a mother to me. Take your time. I'll pack an overnight bag or two."



Real Talk

1. What were some of the issues between Janet and Robert?
2. What are some responsibilities we have toward family members according to scripture?
3. When it comes to consistently showing godly love, with which person in your family do you face the most challenges? Why do you think this is so?



The Players

A Household Code. The verses found in Ephesians 5:21–6:4 comprise what is called a household code. At the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many Romans were concerned that religions such as Judaism and Christianity would negatively influence traditional Roman family values. To allay these fears and show their support for



Make It Stick

“And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Ephesians 5:21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

23 For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church.

24 As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her

26 to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word.

27 He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

28 In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself.

29 No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church.

30 And we are members of his body.

31 As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.”

32 This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.

33 So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 6:1—Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.

2 “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise:

3 If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have long life on the earth.”

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

these values, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups would often employ a standard form of statements. Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give God’s directives for family. Also known as household codes, the statements were often broken down into discussions of husband and wife, father and children.



Backstage

In Ephesians 5, Paul calls on believers to live out a life of holiness in relation to the world around them. He challenges them to live wisely, being led by the Spirit. Such a life will produce a believer who becomes more like Christ every day. As we become more like Christ, we will learn to respect and submit to others in love and humility. And the foundation of family relationships is to be modeled after Christ’s love for the church.



Combing Through

1. Wives’ Submission Should Reflect Christ’s Authority Over the Church (Ephesians 5:21–24)

Ephesians 5:21 is a general instruction to all believers to submit to one another in love. This principle is directly associated with verse 18, where Paul instructs believers to be filled with the Spirit. When we are living a Spirit-led life, God gives us the grace to live in an attitude of humility and submission to others. Paul addresses the wives first. He instructs wives to submit to their husbands “as unto the Lord” (verse 22). The word “submit” in this verse means to yield one’s rights or to cooperate. This word does not imply slavish obedience or being silent in the home. Though the household codes of ancient days often required a wife to obey her husband, Paul does not make this a requirement, as he does for children. Rather, he appeals to a wife’s dedication to God as a basis for submission to her husband. In other words, when a wife honors and respects her husband, she submits to God and His plan for the family.

In verse 23, Paul explains why a wife is to submit to her husband: because he is the “head” of the wife and family just as “Christ is the head of the church.” Christ was appointed by God to be the head of the church. On the basis of this authority, the church is to submit to Him. Some people might conclude from these verses that there is an inequality between male and female. But Paul makes clear that in Christ, all are equal (see also 1 Corinthians 11:8–12; Galatians 3:28). Within this equality, however, order and respect for authority should exist.

2. Husbands’ Love for Their Wives Should Reflect Christ’s Love for the Church (vv. 25–33)

Paul now turns his attention to the husbands. Interestingly, he does not stress the husband’s authority or headship over the wife. Instead, Paul charges the husband to love his wife. And not only is the husband supposed to love the wife, he is to love her “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (v. 25). A husband’s love for his wife is to follow the pattern of Christ’s love for the church. Christ’s love for the church was self-sacrificing. A self-sacrificing love is unselfish love. A husband with self-sacrificing love will demonstrate his love by seeking the best for his wife. This kind of love is committed and faithful, even through rough times. This kind of love does not depend on emotions or circumstances but strives to hold the marriage together forever. A loving, Christ-like husband will also provide for his wife. Just as the church is the body of Christ, a wife is a part of her husband. God says that a husband should love his wife just as he loves himself. As a husband nourishes, protects, and provides for his wife, he “loves himself” (vv. 28, 29). Christ’s love for the church is a secure love. The love of a husband for his wife should be the same (verse 31). When a couple marries, they become “one flesh.” Paul explains this as part of the “mystery” of marriage (v. 32). Within the security of this relationship, a wife can submit to her husband.

3. Children Should Be Obedient and Loved (Ephesians 6:1–4)

After discussing the husband-wife relationship, Paul now gives specific instructions to children. Children are exhorted to obey their parents “in the Lord,” that is, in the spirit of obedience as if they were obeying God (6:1). Paul also instructs children to obey their parents because it is the right thing to do. Obedience to parents is also a commandment of God (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). And according to Ephesians 6:1–3, when a child honors, respects, and obeys his parents, that child is blessed. Just as children have a responsibility to obey their parents, parents also have responsibilities to their children. In verse 4, Paul speaks specifically to fathers as the head of the family. He first gives the fathers a negative instruction—“do not provoke your

children to anger by the way you treat them” (v. 4, NLT). A father’s role in his child’s life makes a direct impact on the child’s concept of God the Father. Fathers, therefore, need to be watchful and consider how their behavior influences their children’s actions. Unreasonable expectations, harsh or unfair punishment, or playing favorites will dishearten a child and can lead to disillusionment or rebellion.

Instead of these behaviors, fathers are encouraged positively to “Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that

comes from the Lord” (v. 4). It is the father’s responsibility to see that his children are being raised according to God’s principles. Fathers are to nurture their children, which means to care for them tenderly and to lead them gently into God’s ways. Therefore, parents are to give correction and instruction with the goal of developing their child’s character and pointing the child toward righteousness. We give our children a great gift when we teach them how to obey God and His Word.



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. What does Paul mean when he says that wives should submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24)?
2. How can a husband love his wife “as his own body” (Ephesians 5:28)? Why is this important?
3. Why are believers commanded to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)?



Next Steps

How can we serve one another in the home in the name and Spirit of Christ? Think about your relationship with each family member. Are you following God’s principles for family life? Pray that God

would show you areas that need improvement, and then be willing to change and grow.



Say Word?

Nurture. NUR-cher.
Admonition. ad-muh-NISH-un.

SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future.—Alex Haley



Lesson 6





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, students will come to know the differences between joy and happiness; understand that they can have the joy of the Lord in any situation; and realize that God often gets great glory out of the lives of believers during seasons they might consider unfavorable.



Tea for Thee

Ms. Flowers invited Isaac into her home office. She ordered him hot tea. He graciously thanked her. They sat for a while comparing and sifting through her vast tea selection.

Eventually, Ms. Flowers asked, "So, you're writing an article about churches and evangelism?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered as he nodded.

"I think you're the first journalist I've met within our church family."

"I'm pretty sure I'm the only one," he replied. Their church was small, and Isaac knew he was the only professional journalist there. While sipping tea, he turned on his recorder, placed it atop the coffee table, and started the interview.

Ms. Flowers was at ease, and spoke eloquently, almost as if she did interviews every other day.

Nearing the end of the interview, Isaac asked, "Why do you do what you do for Christ with such fervor and dedication?"

"Oh dear, my answer is simple," she said. "In fact, I tell people why I talk about Jesus every time I talk about Him."

Obviously enjoying this time with her, Isaac smiled and replied, "Do tell!"

Without hesitation, she answered, "I love Him and I love them."

"You love Him and you love them?" He replied with a puzzled look on his face.

"Exactly," she said. "I love the Jesus I'm speaking of, and I love the people I'm speaking to about the Jesus I love."

"You do seem to enjoy sharing the gospel," Isaac said.

"I pray for that," she continued, "because I don't think you're truly sharing and communicating the Gospel unless you're telling people how you really feel about Jesus."

Isaac's tone became more serious as he asked, "Does that mean you have to always feel joy in all things and situations?"

She shook her head quickly and said, "Oh, no, not at all. That wouldn't even be realistic."

"What do you mean then?" he asked.

"It means that talk about faith must include talk about how we came to faith. Whether we come broken or joyful, those feelings connect with that faith. People don't come with one set of emotions, and God says come just as you are. I just want to always find ways to show people how much joy and peace is in my God."

Isaac listened intently as Ms. Flowers answered the rest of his questions, jotting down notes while thinking about his own faith and wondering why exactly he does what he does for Christ and the church.

Isaac could not help but reflect on Ms. Flowers' faithfulness and where he was in his own faith journey. Ms. Flowers truly was an inspiration for Isaac as a journalist and for his faith walk.



Real Talk

1. Why did Ms. Flowers share about Jesus with others?
2. Why was Isaac interested in sharing her story?
3. What situation in your life is God calling you to be joyful about even though you aren't happy with it?



The Players

Prison. During the time that the New Testament was written, people could be imprisoned for non-payment of debt (Matthew 5:25–26), political insurrection, criminal acts (Luke 23:19, 25), and certain religious practices (Acts 8:3). The Apostle Paul was often in prison. On one occasion, he and Silas were placed under the charge of a lone jailer, who put them in an inner cell and placed their feet in stocks (Acts 16:23–24). The inner cell was probably for maximum security or solitary confinement. In Jerusalem, Paul was detained in a Roman barracks (Acts 23:11–18). In Caesarea, Paul's confinement did allow him some freedom, and he was allowed to have visitors (Acts 23:33–35). As he awaited trial in Rome, Paul was guarded constantly under a type of house arrest (Acts 28:16–17, 30). While there, he met his own expenses and was free to receive visitors and preach the Gospel.

Roman Empire. In the early days of the Christian movement, several emperors ruled the empire. Most of Paul's ministry is believed to have occurred under the reign of Gaius (Caligula, A.D. 37–41) and his aging uncle Claudius (A.D. 41–54). Claudius reportedly expelled some Jews from Rome because they were creating



Make It Stick

“But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.” (Philippians 1:18, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Philippians 1:15 It’s true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives.

16 They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News.

17 Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me.

18 But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

19 For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

20 For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.

21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

22 But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better.

23 I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.

24 But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

25 Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.

26 And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

disturbances with their efforts to spread the Gospel. It is believed that both Paul and Peter were martyred during Nero’s reign (A.D. 54–68), perhaps in connection with the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, an event for which Nero blamed Christians.



Backstage

It’s interesting how some people can devote themselves to encouraging others in the midst of their own struggles. Many terminally-ill children, instead of feeling sorry for themselves, have been a source of encouragement for the families they leave behind. Paul was encouraging to his Christian family. Even as he sat in prison, his letter was full of love, encouragement, and instruction for those who were carrying on the work. It is very likely that his co-laborers in Christ were feeling worse about Paul’s imprisonment than he was. Paul recognized that his release from prison was uncertain. However, as he contemplated his fate, Paul did not lose faith in God. He did not become bitter or angry about his circumstances. He did not cease the work to which he had been called. Through good times and trials, Paul remained faithful to God and his task.



Combing Through

1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)

Paul’s confinement led to many new efforts to spread the Gospel. No one particular movement could do the work. Some followers were stronger because Paul was in jail. Perhaps they felt they had to fill in the gap left by Paul’s absence. Paul called into question the motives of those who were preaching about Christ. Some were preaching out of “envy and strife” (v. 15), while others were preaching out of genuine goodwill. Some may have been jealous of the attention Paul was receiving despite his imprisonment. This very well may have been the case in Rome where Christianity had been established before Paul came. His presence there may have posed a threat to the Christian leaders who were already there. Some were likely vying for Paul’s leadership role within the Christian community, assuming he would not be released. His rivals must have felt that their success would cause Paul to become jealous, perhaps adding to his troubles. Instead, he rejoiced that others were spreading the Gospel, regardless of their motives. Paul recognized that the Gospel is powerful enough to transcend human pettiness. If this were not so, the spread of the Gospel would have stopped at Calvary. When the Gospel is preached people come to Christ. Paul’s solution was to continue making the Gospel known and rejoice that it came through multiple means. The Good News cannot be held hostage to human imperfection. No one can alter its power. Not even the worst example of Christianity can take away the power of the Gospel.

2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

Paul was confident that his experience—of being both jailed and harassed by rival Christians—would lead to victory. He wrote confidently of salvation as a result of his circumstances (v. 19). Some translations refer to Paul’s “deliverance,” and others suggest he was referring to salvation in its fullest sense. The latter is that full redemption would be realized through Christ. The apostle was sure of his dependency on Christ for the impending victory. He quoted Job 13:16 (the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) where Job looked confidently to his ultimate vindication. There is no indication, however, that Paul was certain of his release from prison, nor did he appear to be excessively concerned about it. Paul’s primary concern was not with life or death, as determined by the outcome of his trial. He appears to have been chiefly concerned with his own constitution, that he would not be afflicted with any manner of shame. Instead, he hoped for Christ to be “magnified” (Philippians 1:20). Paul was not looking to be a hero. He was willing to meet his fate, whether life or death, so that all could see how much Christ meant to him.

He viewed death as a portal into the greater realm of a life already filled with greatness. To Paul, life was Christ, who gave Paul’s life meaning. Apart from Him, life held no meaning or purpose. He knew that death was not final. Conversely, if Paul’s life was spared, he viewed it as an invitation to do more fruitful work for the kingdom. His only interest in being released from jail was that it would allow him to continue his ministry. He could preach the Gospel a while longer. He could continue to encourage the churches that had become so dear to him. Through life, he could continue to live and do more for Christ.

For years, Paul had been working in the trenches as a missionary—spreading the Gospel and encouraging and guiding the faithful. His hard work was just beginning to show results. Like a farmer who has been tending to trees hoping they will bear fruit, Paul is longing to see evidence of the harvest. He desires to stay because there is so much to be done. The two options the apostle faced did cause some divided feelings, which he expressed in verse 23. Understandably, Paul was pulled between his two options. Not that he viewed either as negative. Instead, in his heart, he longed to be with Christ. His was not a morbid desire, however. Paul probably envisioned a life with Christ too wonderful for the human spirit to totally conceive.

On the other hand, he wanted to be of service to his fellow Christians. He viewed the continuance of life as being necessary only for the sake of the Philippians (v. 24). Paul was willing for his life to be used in whatever way the Lord deemed necessary. The Philippians were openly proud of Paul, whom they, in a sense, regarded as their own special apostle. Paul lovingly reminded them that Christ, not he, must remain the subject of their boasting. If he was to return to them, they should rejoice in the works of Jesus Christ, not himself. Paul's ability to have hope, even in the most hopeless of circumstances, came from his own experience of being granted new life after his former life had passed on. The boldness he possessed came from his certainty that Christ would be honored by him, whether through his life or his death.



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. What do you think Paul meant in Philippians 1:21 when he wrote, “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain”?
2. Why didn't it matter to Paul whether the Gospel was preached with pure or impure motives?
3. Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi that their prayers, along with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, helped him and would lead to his deliverance. How can that knowledge help you when you find yourself “imprisoned” in a difficult circumstance?



Next Steps

If you were told today that you may not live much longer, what preparation would you make to ensure that Christ would be glorified through your experience of passing from life to death?



Say Word?

Philippians. fi-LIP-ee-uhnz.
Praetorian. pray-TOR-ee-uhn.

SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

Nobody is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart; for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.—James Baldwin

