

Learning How to Walk:
Dance with Your Partner, Part 2
A Study of Ephesians 5:25-33a

Characteristic of Completeness: Family Living

Big Idea: Husbands are to prove, provide, and protect.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 5:15-20; Malachi 2:14-16;
Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7

Introduction:

- A. Marriage produces a lot of problems and pain. This is no secret to anyone who has been married for a while. Even the Bible does not glamorize marriage. The Apostle Paul in ► 1 Corinthians 7:28 says,

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 7:28** But even if you do marry, you have not sinned . . . Nevertheless such will have trouble . . .

Amen? If marriage is like a dance, then as married couples, we often step all over each other.

- B. Because marriage is prone to have problems, there have been many suggestions offered on how to fix it.

1. Some have suggested that we return to traditional marital roles—back to the good old days when divorce was less common.

This suggestion has a certain appeal to it. But, I think part of the appeal is that we tend to make the past better than it really was.

A good, hard, honest look at the traditional marriage of the 50's and 60's sees many absentee husbands and fathers, many devalued women, and many couples living under a cold contract of mutual tolerance. I don't really want to go back there. I don't think that's what God had in mind when He designed marriage.

2. Some have suggested we eliminate marital roles altogether. This has been a very popular view for the past few decades. Two people. Two careers. Two incomes. Identical roles. Fifty-fifty parenting. Fifty-fifty household chores. Democratic, negotiated, leaderless decisionmaking. And, respect for each other's autonomy.
 - a. This view has a ring of fairness and equality to it. Nevertheless, it doesn't seem to be working. After many years of positive press and experimentation with the roleless marriage, no one can reasonably conclude that marriages are in better shape today because of it.

- (1) Marriage problems persist and the divorce rate remains high.
- (2) Among those couples who espouse this view, the wives often come out on the short end of the stick. In a book titled, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, researcher Arlie Hochschild says twenty-five years of research has shown that, when you consider work both inside and outside the home, employed married women work “roughly fifteen hours longer each week than men.”¹

In an article in the *Dallas Morning News*, one woman says, “When we first got married, we discussed how we would try to keep the housework at a 50-50 split. That lasted until the house needed to be cleaned.”²

- b. I think the marriage-without-roles model is not working because it’s not what God had in mind when He designed marriage.

¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, (New York: Avon Books, 1990, Penguin Books, 2003), 3-4.

² Lisa Thatcher, “His & Hers (But Mostly Hers),” *Dallas Morning News*, 1 November 1990.

- C. What roles does God want a husband and wife to play in a marriage? What's His design?

Last Sunday, we studied the biblical role of wives. This morning I want to consider the role of husbands in marriage by studying ► Ephesians 5:25-33. Once again our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is Family Living.

Ephesians 5:25 begins with a very straightforward ► command:

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives . . .

In the face of this command, some may question, “How can God command us to have an emotion over which we have no control? I fell in love with my wife, and I’m afraid I’ve fallen out of love with her. I just can’t get those feelings back. I’ve tried.”

The kind of love that is being commanded here is not really an emotion, it’s a decision.

1. The original Greek word for ► love that is being used here is *agape*—that’s the noun. *Agapao* is the verb. According to one Greek dictionary *agape* love is . . .

. . . not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. [It is] the

*love that values and esteems. It is an unselfish love, ready to serve.*³

2. So, then *agape* love is a decision—a decision to serve sacrificially and unconditionally for the benefit of another.
 - a. Theologian William Barclay distinguishes *agape* love from romantic love. He says,

*We speak about falling in love. That kind of love is not an achievement; it is something which happens to us and which we cannot help. There is no particular virtue in falling in love. It is something with which we have little or nothing consciously to do; it simply happens. But agape is far more than that.*⁴

- b. One of my seminary professors, Earl Radmacher describes *agape* love as a

. . . thought out and reasoned love. It is a determination of the will, the

³ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, unabridged ed., s.v. "love (ἀγαπάω cf. φιλέω)," (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.).

⁴ William Barclay, *More New Testament Words*, (New York: Harper, 1958), 15, quoted by Earl. D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church*, (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 254.

*exercise of which is not dependent on the loveliness of the object loved.*⁵

So, we're not talking about some emotional, sissy, sappy love. We're talking about a suck-it-up-and-do-it love.

- D. Well, how are we husbands supposed to love our wives in this way? What are we supposed to do? Our text gives at least three ways in which we are to love our wives. They are represented by the words, prove, provide, and protect. In fact, the big idea of my message is ► this: Husbands are to prove, provide, and protect. You can think of it as the three-legged stool that supports love: prove, provide, protect. If you prefer something a little more "techy," you can think of it as an MP3: Men prove, provide, and protect. We'll be discussing each of these in order this morning.
- I. The ► first way in which we are to love our wives is represented by the word, "prove." We are to prove to our wives their value to us. We are to provide evidence that we love them. We are to demonstrate how important they are to us.
- A. You ask, "Where do you get that we're supposed to prove our love from the text?" Well, let's look at ► Verse 25 in its entirety. It says,

⁵ Radmacher, 254.

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her

The “church” here is not a building; it’s the people who have or will become believers in Jesus. How did Christ love the church and give Himself up for her? He proved His love through personal sacrifice. Romans ► 5:8 says,

^{NKJ} **Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The Greek term for ► “demonstrates” literally means to prove or to provide evidence of a claim.⁶ Christ proved His love for us by giving Himself up to be crucified. He claimed to love us, and he backed it up by going to the cross voluntarily on our behalf.

There are three important aspects to the proof that Jesus provided.

1. First, Christ proved His love for us through ► personal sacrifice. It cost Him something very significant. It cost Him His own life.

⁶ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “συμίστημι,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

2. Second, Christ proved His love for us, the church, in a way that ► defines our value to Him. His sacrifice was paid in currency that we all understand. No one can mistake how important we are to Christ in light of what He did for us. In dying on a cross, He defined for us how valuable we are to Him. We are worth more to Him than His own life.

3. Third, Christ proved His love for the church in a way that ► benefits her. We're better off for what He did. His pain was our gain. Verses ► 26 and 27 explain that Christ gave Himself for the church . . .

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Christ's purpose in giving Himself for the church was to pay for her sins, to cleanse her from her wrongdoing. Notice ► all the terms which relate her betterment through His cleansing: "Sanctify" which means to purify or make holy. "Cleanse." "Washing." "Not having spot or wrinkle." "Holy." "Without blemish." These are all benefits that accrue to Christ's bride, the church, and actually enable the relationship between Christ and His church to flourish.

- B. Well, ► how do we apply all this? Are we supposed to arrange our own crucifixion so that we can somehow cleanse our wives' sins? No. But, the underlying principle applies to us. Namely, as a husband, you are to prove your love to your wife by making ► personal sacrifices that define her value to you and benefit her. All three elements need to be there: a personal sacrifice, a definition of value, and a benefit to her.
1. You say, "Well what am I supposed to do?" Well, outside of God and your family, what would your wife say is most important to you? To put it another way, what might she think is competing with her for your attention?
 - a. I asked a couple of wives to give me some ideas on this. One said,

For [my husband], scheduling and routine are really important. . . . What really speaks to me is when he interrupts his plans or schedule for me. There have been times when I've had something on my heart or I have something to share with him and he can't entertain what I have to say until the dishes are done, his workout is finished, he irons his shirt, etc. And that can be discouraging. . . . I

remember one conversation we needed to have and he said he couldn't have it right then because he was on his cell phone and driving. I asked if he could just pull over and stop for a minute and he said no. That made me feel like he couldn't be inconvenienced for me. On a positive note, just this morning, [he] could tell from our phone call I was a little preoccupied. So he kept asking questions until we got to the thoughts that were on my heart. It took quite some time and it was at the beginning of his work day, so, I know for a fact that his decision to set aside his task list and patiently listen was a huge sacrifice for him. I felt valued.

- b. What would your wife say is important to you? If it's money, show her that she's more important than that. Buy her something.
- c. If it's time, show her that she's more important than that. Spend a day focused completely on her.
- d. If it's your career, show her that she's more important than that. Say "no" to that deadline, or

that conference, or that meeting so you can spend time with her.

- e. If it's convenience, show her that she's more important than that. Surprise her with something that obviously took some thought and planning. Maybe a trip, or a romantic overnighter at a hotel, and you've made arrangements for someone to take care of the kids.
- f. If it's your invulnerable, macho image, show her she's more important than that. Write her a poem. Or, arrange to go to a marriage conference.

By the way, we are having our second annual marriage conference in February. You can sign up for it in the lobby right after this service. It's going to cost you some time and some money. But I can't think of a better sacrificial investment you can make in your marriage. Don't procrastinate on this. We can only take fifty couples, and I think there are only fifteen slots left. Scholarships are available. Get on it, men.

- g. And in the process of proving your love, keep asking yourself the question, "Is my wife better off because she's married to me?" Real, proven love will benefit her.

2. Let me give you a couple of examples of ways we husbands might think we're proving our love to our wives, but they don't really count because they fail to meet the three criteria: sacrifice, define, and benefit.

a. There was a movie out a few years ago called *Mr. Wrong*. I don't remember much about the movie, but I do remember that a guy was trying to prove how much he loved this woman. They were eating dinner out and as a demonstration of his love, the guy broke his own finger in her presence. That was certainly a personal sacrifice. But, it wasn't really loving in that it didn't benefit her at all. It was just weird.

b. I can almost hear some husbands thinking, "Well, I work hard all week long so that my wife can be secure and provided for. That's a personal sacrifice that benefits her. That's proof of my love."

Maybe. Maybe not. It's not really solid proof in my household. I'm sure Cathy appreciates my working hard at my job, so it may qualify as a personal sacrifice. And in some ways my work does benefit her. But, at the same time, she knows that I would work just as hard if I were not married. So, my

hard work on the job doesn't really define her value to me because I would do it anyway.

- c. And, sometimes a certain act can be proof of love and sometimes it's not. Let's say a husband buys his wife a lovely Christmas gift. Let's consider several different scenarios.
- (1) Let's say the wife knows that her husband sent his secretary out to buy her whatever gift the secretary thought was appropriate. And, although the gift would seem rather expensive to most people, the husband is making enough money that the cost is really immaterial.

In this case, the gift may not be strong proof of love because it doesn't represent much of a sacrifice.

- (2) Let's consider the same gift, different scenario. Let's say the married couple is so tight financially that they're having a hard time keeping up with the bills. The husband is in the doghouse for buying a new set of golf clubs that he really didn't need. In an attempt to get back in his wife's good graces, he buys her the expensive gift.

The gift is probably not strong evidence of love because the wife doesn't feel the benefit of it. It just puts them more deeply in debt.

- (3) Let's consider the same gift, different scenario. Let's say the husband takes the time to find this gift. He does some research. He has to make some special arrangements. And it's her favorite color. It's something she's been wanting for a while because she's mentioned it in conversations, but she would be reluctant to purchase it herself because she thinks it might be too self-indulgent.

The gift is probably strong evidence of love in the eyes of the wife in this scenario because it meets the three criteria.

Husbands, we need to prove our love to our wives by making personal sacrifices that define their value to us and benefit them.

- II. The ► second way in which we are to love our wives is represented by the word, "provide." We are to make sure that our wives are getting what they need, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.
- A. Verses ► 28-30 of our text say this:

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:28** So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies . . . ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

We are to love our wives as we love our own bodies. At first that sounds weird, but it makes a lot of sense when you think about it. Our text says that one of the ways we love our own bodies is by nourishing them. We provide for them.

1. The word translated ► “nourishes” in our text comes from the Greek word, *ektrefo*. It’s a compound word, made up of *ek*, which means “from,” and *trefo*, which means, “feed.”⁷ Literally, it is that which results from proper feeding and nurture. We nourish our bodies by giving them what they need—things like food and sleep.

One of the primary ways we provide nourishment to our own bodies is by simply listening to what our bodies tell us. Our bodies tell us they’re hungry; we listen and we eat. Our bodies tell us they’re tired; we listen and we sleep. Our bodies tell us when they’re hurting; we listen and we stop the hurtful activity. We get ourselves into trouble when we stop listening.

⁷ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, unabridged ed., s.v. “nourish, ἐκτρέφω,” (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.).

2. It's the same way with our wives. First ► Peter 3:7 says,

^{NKJ} **1 Peter 3:7** Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding . . .

Listen and understand. We husbands need to listen and learn about what our wives need, and then provide it. Be attentive to your wife's needs. Become a student of your wife. Just as our bodies are designed to tell us what they need through hunger, pain, and fatigue, so our wives are the best source of information about what their needs are. Our wives are a built-in marriage manual. Read it and follow the instructions!

- B. You say, "Bob, that's sounds nice, but I don't even know where to start. What kind of needs are you talking about?" Dr. Gary Chapman, a Christian counselor and author has identified ► five basic things that are needed in a marriage relationship—five ways that we provide love. He calls them the five love languages with which we communicate love.⁸

1. The first love language is providing ► affirming words, expressing verbal appreciation for the things you like about your wife.

⁸ Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992, 1995, 2004).

“You really look beautiful in that dress. Wow!”

“It makes me proud that you have such a good reputation at your work.”

“You are so sensitive and caring when you talk with people. It’s no wonder people are drawn to you.”

“I’m so grateful for your hard you work at making our house a home.”

Part and parcel to providing affirming words is minimizing discouraging words. According to psychologist Scott Stanley, “research has shown that a single negative statement can blot out the positive effect of as many as 20 compliments or words of encouragement.”⁹

2. Another love language is providing ► quality time. Giving her your undivided attention. Doing something with her that she enjoys doing and doing it wholeheartedly and attentively.
 - a. Meet her for lunch.
 - b. Take her out to dinner.
 - c. Go on a picnic.

⁹ Scott Stanley, “Crimes of Passion,” *Marriage Partnership*, Fall 1995.

- d. When you're together at the end of the day, devote some time to asking her how her day went.
 - e. Regardless of the venue, quality time with our wives is most often marked by lots of eye contact, lots of listening, lots of open-ended questions about how she feels about things, and no interruptions or distracting multi-tasking like keeping one eye on the TV while you're talking.
3. Another love language is providing ► gifts. A rose, a card, her favorite cookie, a meal you bring home, whatever.
 4. Another love language is providing ► acts of service.

“Cooking a meal, setting a table, washing dishes, vacuuming, cleaning a commode, getting hairs out of the sink, removing white spots from the mirror, getting bugs off the windshield, taking out the garbage, changing the baby's diaper, painting a bedroom, dusting the bookcase, keeping the car in good operating condition, washing or vacuuming the car, cleaning the garage, mowing the grass, trimming the shrubs, raking the leaves, dusting the blinds, walking the dog, changing the cat's litter box . . .”¹⁰

Glamorous stuff like that.

¹⁰ Chapman, 97.

5. Another love language is providing ► physical touch.

Touching under the table when dining out, holding hands in public, kissing when you leave and when you arrive, hugging often for no particular reason. Lots of non-sexual touching with no expectation of, or pressure for, a sexual pay-off.

According to Dr. Chapman, people are wired differently with respect to these five love languages. Wives can be quite different in the value they place on the various love languages. As husbands, we would be wise to know which languages score the most with our wives. Take this list and ask your wife which love language communicates love in the clearest way to her. And, then use that language as much as possible.

I have learned that my wife appreciates acts of service the most. Cathy has said to me, “Bob, I love when you are working to improve our home, when you work in the yard. I like it when you’re out there sweating and grubby, making our home look nice.” She likes it when I bring her coffee in the morning to wake her up, and when I walk the dogs. Conversely, flowers on Valentine’s Day aren’t that big a deal to her. When I provide acts of service, I’m speaking her love language. I’m providing what she needs.

III. The ► third way in which we are to love our wives is represented by the word, “protect.” We are to protect our wives from harm. We are to be their defenders, their advocates.

A. Once again, this comes in the context of the loving-our-own-bodies argument. Verses ► 28 and 29 say,

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:28** So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies . . . ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.

The word ► “cherishes” in our text comes from the Greek word, *thalpo*. I know it sounds like a brand of dog food, but it’s not. One of the literal meanings of the word, *thalpo* is “to keep warm, as of birds covering their young with their feathers.”¹¹

So, the essence of cherishing, then, is providing protection and comfort and security. It’s natural for us to protect our bodies. When it’s cold, we bundle up. When it’s hot, we want to cool off. When our bodies are threatened we have a fight-or-flight instinct. We protect our own bodies.

B. Notice also in our text that it says that we are to cherish or protect our wives as Christ cherishes or protects the church. Verses ► 29 and 30 say we are to cherish our wives . . .

¹¹ Vine, s.v. “cherish (θάλλω).”

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:29** . . . just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body . . .

Also, in ► Ephesians 5:23, it says of Jesus that . . .

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:23** . . . He is the Savior of the body.

The term, ► “savior” can refer not just to Christ as the deliverer of His people from their sins, but also to Christ as the protector or preserver of His church.¹² Christ as protector is probably the point of emphasis in Ephesians 5:23.¹³

Well, how does Christ cherish or protect the church? He demonstrates His undying commitment to us. He lets us know that we’re safe and secure with Him. We’re protected. Jesus says in ► John 10:27-28,

^{NKJ} **John 10:27** “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ► ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand.”

¹² Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “σωτήρ” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977).

¹³ Gordon Fee, “The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18-6:9: Is there a divinely ordained hierarchy in the life of the church and home that is based on gender alone?” *Priscilla Papers*, Winter 2002: 16:1, 8.

That's eternal protection and security. Jesus says in ► Matthew 16:18,

^{NKJ} **Matthew 16:18** “. . . I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Jesus is vowing to protect His church as his own body. The things Christ did for the church—for us—were not based on how lovely we were or what we had done to earn His love. Having believed in Christ, there is nothing we can do to enhance His love and commitment to us, and there's nothing we can do to detract from it. We're safe and secure. We're protected.

C. How ► are we to protect our wives? How do we make them feel safe and secure? Again, it might be a good idea to ask your wife how you could make her feel more secure. But, a ► few things come to mind.

1. First, demonstrate ► unconditional commitment, as Jesus does.

One way to do that is to build a mental fence around divorce so you don't even get near it with your words or actions. If you demonstrate, in a moment of anger, that you are even thinking about it, insecurity will result.

A counselor asked a six-year-old daughter what makes her feel the worst when Mommy and Daddy argue. The little girl frowned

and said, “It’s when Daddy takes off his wedding ring and throws it away.”¹⁴ Wives and children need unconditional commitment.

2. Second, ► demonstrate absolute honesty. There’s nothing I can think of that is more destabilizing in a marriage than a husband deceiving his wife. Trust is the bedrock of any good relationship, and honesty protects that foundation. Don’t lie. Don’t stretch the truth. Don’t manage information to create a false impression. Not in big things. Not in little things. Once trust is violated, it’s hard to get it back. One of the primary ways we can protect our wives is by being honest.
3. Third, ► demonstrate servant leadership. It’s very unsettling to try to follow somebody who is not leading.
 - a. Husbands, we should be out front, setting an example of how to have a relationship with God. How to love Him. How to pray to Him. How to read and apply the Bible. Are you out in front?
 - b. We should be proactively and painstakingly investing in the life of each member of our family. Would it be a shock to your wife if you took the initiative to arrange to go to the marriage conference? (It’s not too late; you can sign up this morning.) Would she fall off her chair if you had a quiet time with one of your children? Would she be surprised if you asked how you could pray for her or if you

¹⁴ Gary Smalley, *Love is a Decision*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 106.

said, “I want to know what I can do to make our marriage better”? A servant leader does these kinds of things, and it provides protection and security to your wife.

4. Fourth, ► demonstrate relational advocacy. Sometimes we need to step in when someone else is not treating her right. Sometimes we need to be her relational advocate or defender. One woman says,

I really feel a need sometimes for [my husband] to step in and provide some protection for me relationally. For instance, starting with our sons, if they are beginning to be disrespectful to me, I really desire for [my husband] to have a man-to-man talk with them so he can nip that in the bud, without me having to ask him to. If others are starting to be a little aggressive with me (mother-in-law, neighbor, car repair guy, whomever) I want him to pretty strongly step in there and provide some boundaries. That can be pretty tough for [him] because his tendency is to be a peacemaker and those situations can be uncomfortable. However, if he hesitates to step in because he wants to preserve the other relationship, it can feel like he is prioritizing that person ahead of me, even though I know he doesn't intend to convey that.

Conclusion:

- A. So ► husbands, in summary, how can we improve our marriages? Three things:
1. First, ► prove your love by making personal sacrifices that define for your wife how valuable she is to you—sacrifices that benefit her.
 2. Second, ► provide for your wife by listening to her needs and responding with affirming words, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch.
 3. Third, ► protect your wife through things like unconditional commitment, absolute honesty, servant leadership, and relational advocacy.
- B. When we love our wives as God designed, we are actually doing ourselves a favor. Our text explains it this way, beginning in the middle of ► Verse 28,

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:28** . . . he who loves his wife loves himself.

This is connected to the biblical idea that the husband and wife are a single unit. They become one. Therefore, when you serve your wife, you serve yourself. When you love your wife, you love yourself. In fact, our text refers back to Genesis 2:24 which first explains this one-flesh principle. Verse ► 31 says,

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:31** “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Verse ► 32 continues by saying,

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 5:32** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³
Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself . . .

The mystery is great indeed. Somehow, I never gain more than when I sacrifice. Somehow, I never get more than when I provide. Somehow, I never feel more secure than when I protect. Somehow, I am never more happy than when I’m loving my wife in a biblical way—proving, providing, and protecting.