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SERMON TITLE: **Power for Success in Marriage**

Marriage Series: The Honeymoon is Not Over

SCRIPTURE: **Ephesians 5:1-10, 17-21**

DATE: **September 20, 2020**

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Isaiah 40:25-31.

How big is your God? God wants us to understand who we call LORD. Isaiah writes:

- Understand how big God is (bigger than the stars –universe)
- Understand how powerful God is (creator, over all in heaven and earth)
- Understand that God sees your troubles and cares about your rights
 - God never lacks knowledge
 - Never grows weary or weak
 - God gives strength and power to the weak who trust in Him

Isaiah proclaimed this to a people who were very weak spiritually. They were so weak they turned to idols they made with their own hands or who were worshiped by the pagan nations around them. They prayed and sacrificed to these idols to solve their problems. That seems weird to us in 2020. We would just not pray at all! We'd be secular.

So Isaiah is correcting his people's path. He's drawing them back to the truth. God's children are to live in the world according to these facts about God:

*God is big,
God is powerful,
God sees your troubles and cares about your rights.*

No substitute can do for the Christian. **We must live secure in this realm and put God, rather than false idols, first.**

But the culture puts constant pressure on us to follow a false path, a **self-devised path**. When we don't have a balanced spiritual life, it is easy to be deceived into following a false path.

However, connecting with God's power and strength gives us power and strength as we go about our daily lives. Are you experiencing these truths?

- God never lacks knowledge
- Never grows weary or weak
- Gives strength and power to the weak who trust in Him

God shares knowledge in the Scriptures. Do you read them each day? Balance your work, schooling, chores, entertainment, music, socializing with reading the Bible and praying. It's to your benefit. You want God's blessing, right? You need to put something into it.

So let's do it. Let's turn to Ephesians, one of Paul's later letters. In this letter Paul writes his most mature thoughts. Many

churches had been formed by that time and his understanding of the larger Church was unique in this letter. Paul uses marriage to describe how Jesus and you and I, the body of Christ, relate. The way we establish this is through the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

To describe our relationship with Christ as a marriage means there's intimacy and trust. This closeness to Jesus overflows then into our church relationships—into the body of Christ, and then more specifically, our marriage.

Paul says this close relationship we have with Jesus—like a marriage—comes from living in the power of the Holy Spirit. To have success in all our relationships, we need the Holy Spirit.

So today we discover the power for success in marriage through the lens of growing in the Holy Spirit. This is not pablum. It is deep spiritual stuff for those who give God time to teach them.

Are you giving God time? It's not that hard: *balance your work, schooling, chores, entertainment, music, socializing with reading the Bible and praying. It's to your benefit.*

I'm going to read from Ephesians 5 which ends with this sentence:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (v. 21).

This sentence is the goal. Let's say that together: *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."* READ Ephesians 5:1-10, 17-21 (see below)

That's everybody. Be subject to one another. Says nothing about spouses yet; first we have to get it right among people in the church.

Christians who really understand the faith have to make a radical change in how they relate to each other. *We have to put others' needs ahead of our own.*

Is anyone thinking at this moment, *are you kidding me?*

Go ahead; get it off your chest: *Are you kidding me?* Why should I have to put others first? I assure you, I did not say this; it was the Apostle Paul who wrote. "Put others first." A basic biblical principle is you gain nothing by clinging to your own rights. You gain when you put the needs of others before your own.

Let's make it simple. Here's what we have to give up: **self-seeking**

Now how do we tell if this is our problem? According to Tim Keller, one way to assess when you are being self-seeking is: irritability, impatience, lack of graciousness or kindness in speech, envious brooding over the better situation of others, jealousy, holding grudges, and the like.¹

Perhaps you are never like this! But it is important to be honest with ourselves.

Or perhaps you are like this ONLY when your spouse (or boss or parent or child) is like this toward you. Keller says, "Avoid returning your spouse's self-centeredness with your own."

What's the solution? Tim Keller says, "**Love economics.**" When we are tanked up with the Holy Spirit, we have some fuel to work with. When we spend enough time opening ourselves to God through the Scriptures, and conversing with Jesus in prayer, we gain more and more of the Holy Spirit. We understand more of God's advice; we see the world more through the lens of faith; we interpret our lives from a broader perspective. We can settle down with the realities around us.

We have spiritual "money in the bank" to be generous with love, even when our spouse fails us.

Once Jesus said, "Those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). When you serve Jesus and serve your spouse, Keller says, several things will happen.

1. You find a new happiness because Christian marriage reflects self-giving love.
2. You become a part of a greater unity; you are no longer operating alone.
3. You have to give something up for it to become truly yours.²

Learn to have the outlook on life of submitting to one another and your relationships become rich.

We struggle, though, because we all have our own history, and sometimes we have suffered mistreatment or hurt or we have been wronged by lovers or former spouses. This lowers trust in the other sex. These things create self-doubt and guilt which we carry into our relationships.

You cannot build something by living for yourself. We cannot overcome problems without facing them. You get out of the pain and into joy through the Holy Spirit.

Remember the goal, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

So let's say two people have trouble and neither wants to give in. You're headed for a "tit for tat" relationship of constant struggle against each other. Those around you are affected. You need the Holy Spirit's help!

If you do this together, it's the best. But, if only ONE of you turns to the Lord's path that is, prays, and asks for the Holy Spirit, here's what will happen: the Holy Spirit is powerful and goes to work immediately answering your prayers.

Remember what Isaiah said?

- Understand how big God is (bigger than the stars–universe)
- Understand how powerful God is (creator, the One over all in heaven and earth)
- Understand that God sees your troubles and cares about your rights

My husband took these things to heart. He had a "man-cave"—a small shed in our backyard. I found a sheet of paper on his desk. At the top are the words "Started 1/1/14." It's a list of prayer requests with names and dates. His prayer requests were for our kids; for this church; for extended family.

Out to the side is the word "Granted!!" Do you know how that makes me feel? *LOVED*. Do you know what it made me want to do? *THE SAME FOR HIM*.

*God is big,
God is powerful,
God sees your troubles and cares about your rights.*

You give your rights to God and God will work it out for you. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and your relationships will become blessed.

AMEN

Ephesians 5:1-10, 17-21 ¹ Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. ³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes-- these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ⁵ You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. ⁶ Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. ⁷ Don't participate in the things these people do. ⁸ For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. . . . ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, ¹⁹ singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

¹ Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.