

Growing Deeper

This Is Us: Rediscovering what it means to be family.

Week One: The First Relationship

Genesis 3:6-20

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. British anthropologist J. D. Unwin made a disturbing connection between the state of a nation and the state of the families within the nation. “Families are the foundation of a nation. When the family crumbles, the nation falls because nations are built upon family units. They are the true driving social force. A nation will not be strong unless the family is strong. That was true in the ancient world and it is true today.” Does he overstate his case, or do you agree with him? Why?
2. How would you describe the quality of families in the U.S. today? How about your own family?
3. The prophet Jeremiah records a dire warning about a nation whose families are crumbling: read Jeremiah 10:17-24. What is the description of family life in this passage? What consequences to the society are there?
4. What is Jeremiah’s plea to God in verses 23-24?
5. Now see God’s promised answer in Psalm 27:5. What is it?
6. You might have noticed the word “tent” was in both these passages. What do you think that word represents in our lives? What does it mean for God to “keep me safe in his dwelling” or “hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent”?
7. End your FIFTEEN by praying Jeremiah’s prayer from verses 23-24. Ask God to lovingly guide and restore all the families of his people. Ask him to sustain and strengthen your own family. Thank him that he welcomed you into the shelter of his own family, by adopting you as his child.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. It shouldn’t be too controversial to say that the strength of a family is built correspondingly on the strength of the marriage that began the family. Think of your own marriage, or your parents’ marriage. What is (or was) the quality of that marriage?
9. German missionary and marriage counselor Walter Trobisch evaluates the strength of a marriage relationship according to Genesis 2:24. Turn there and read the verse. What are the three actions in this description of marriage?
10. Trobisch summarizes these as 1) leave, 2) cleave, and 3) one flesh, and he says they are the three parts of any marriage. Let’s focus on the first one today. What does it look like for the people in a marriage to “leave” their father and mother? (Think about wedding ceremonies you have experienced.)

11. How is this leaving action different in our culture today from 60 years ago? How about compared to Bible times? What part might be the same?
12. What consequences are there for a marriage when either half of the couple doesn't "leave" their parents behind in a healthy way? (Think about the possible problems with mothers-in-law...)
13. What truth about marriage might God be communicating to us by commanding that we "leave" our families of origin when we get married?
14. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for his vision for marriage. Ask him to guide the marriages amongst yourself and your extended family.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Today we continue to work through what it takes to have a healthy marriage. Read again Genesis 2:24. What are the three parts of this verse that define marriage?
16. Let's talk about the second action: "cleave." This is an old-fashioned word. What do you think it means, practically, for spouses to "cleave" to one another?
17. Another word for this aspect of marriage is "love." Some cultures practice arranged marriages. How might this change the way love is a factor in the marriage?
18. Walter Trobisch, German missionary and marriage counselor, describes it this way: "The literal sense of the Hebrew word for 'to cleave' is to stick to, to paste, to be glued to a person. Husband and wife are glued together like two pieces of paper. If you try to separate two pieces of paper which are glued together, you tear them both. If you try to separate husband and wife who cleave together, both are hurt—and in case they have children, the children as well." In what ways can a healthy couple exemplify being glued together?
19. What are some unhealthy practices that might show a couple is not cleaving well together?
20. When love is lost in a marriage, what effect does it have on the other two parts of the triangle, the legal commitment (leaving) and the physical connection (one flesh)?
21. What are the possible negative consequences of romantic love and attachment without the commitment of marriage?
22. Many of us have experienced a "tearing apart" of relationship. If you are still wounded from such a trauma, end your

FIFTEEN by submitting that wound to God in prayer, and ask for his healing.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

23. There's a trend in our culture right now that believes our body is an "accidental" (non-essential) part of our identity. This is why a person can decide that he/she is a different gender or orientation than what their biology indicates. How is integration of our bodies and souls an important truth of our Christian faith?

24. Let's look again at Genesis 2:24. What are the three inter-connected parts of a marriage?

25. Let's not beat around the bush: what does "one flesh" refer to?

26. What are the negative consequences in a marriage where the couple is not physically intimate with each other?

27. What are the problems when sex is practiced outside of the bond of marriage? (See Hebrews 13:4 for some help.)

28. On the other hand, how is marriage strengthened when sex is used in the context God designed it for? (See 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.)

29. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for the gift of sex! As part of that, confess any times where you have used the gift wrongly, and ask God to help make your sex life holy and pleasing to him.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

30. We've had a lot of frank discussion this week about the realities of marriage. But why does this matter so much, theologically? Why do you think marriage is so important to God and to Christians?

31. Look at Ephesians 5:25-32, focusing especially on the last verse. To what does Paul compare marriage?

32. The solution to the mystery is that the relationship of marriage actually mirrors our relationship with Christ. In what way are Christ and the Church like a husband and wife?

33. Let's use our rubric from the week—*leave, cleave, one flesh*. How did Christ leave his father to join with us? See John 3:13 and 16:28.

34. In what way did Christ cleave to us in love? Look again at Ephesians 5:25-27.

35. How did Jesus Christ join himself to us? See Romans 8:9-11.

36. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for all that he did to marry himself to us. Ask him to strengthen your relationship with him, and ask for his vision to strengthen your marriage and the marriages of all those in his covenant community, the church.