

# Small Group Study

## Our Mission

To build a Christian community by making fully devoted disciples of non-religious and nominally religious people

## Discussion

Created for Connection: “Dying for Love”

## Scripture

Have a volunteer read the following scripture:

### **Ephesians 5:21-30 (NLT):**

*21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*22 For wives, this means submit 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.*

## Questions

Please feel free to adjust this study to fit your group’s needs and to listen to the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to use all of the questions.

I. Here is a quote by Rob Bell from his book, “Sex God,”:

*I was in New York City last week and took some friends to see Ground Zero. It’s hard to explain what it’s like to be there. A haunting sadness seems to linger in the air. But the actual site where the towers collapsed is not the most powerful thing for me about visiting the site. What moves me is to walk several blocks in any direction and pass the firehouses, where there are memorials to the firefighters from those neighborhood stations who lost their lives climbing up the towers to save people. Why do the flowers and plaques and mementos out on the sidewalk stir us like they do? Why do we hear stories of people risking their lives to save others and we often tear up, even if we don’t know any of the people involved?*

*Because people are worth dying for. We know it to be true deep in our bones. And when we see someone actually do it, it’s overwhelming. Jesus said in one of his teachings that there’s no greater love a person can have than to lay down their life for another.*



### Ice Breaker

Use ONE of the questions to help people open up and to focus your meeting. It is very helpful to go around in a circle with the leader going first. (Remember if you have new members or guests you should take time to introduce everyone.)

1. What are three things you want to do before you die?
2. Tell us of a time when you were wounded (show us the scar if you dare!) -but only if it’s in a place you can show in mixed company.
3. Who in this world would you give up your life for?

*We know this to be true.  
People are worth dying for.*

In our scripture this week, Paul writes to the church in Ephesus about how a marriage is *supposed* to be--how we are to “submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ.” Unfortunately though, we often focus solely on the verse, “*Wives... submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*”

But husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

Jesus “*made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... ..he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*”  
-Phillippians 2:7-8

What would it look like in today’s society for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church? What if the husband were to surrender his desires and wants and plans? He would die to his need to be in control and do whatever it takes to serve her, to make sure she has everything she needs. He would die to himself so that she could live.

He would lay down his life for her, like Jesus laid down his life for the church.  
*This* is submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

How would she respond if it were crystal clear to her that her husband was placing her needs ahead of his own? What if he had a habit of this? What if she knew without a shadow of a doubt that his love for her was so great that he would give his life for her in the blink of an eye? Most men say they would do that when asked that question. But how would that play out in everyday life?

What if he regularly gave her the television remote?

Or cooked.. or cleaned... or took care of the kids so she could have a girls night out each week?

2. The word for love here is the word agape (ah-GAH-pay). We find the word all over the New Testament, and it’s generally used in the context of God’s love for people, as in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world.”

So the man is to love the woman, to agape her, like God agapes the world.

Agape is a particular kind of love. Love is often seen as a need, something we get from others. Agape is the opposite. Agape gives.

Imagine a wife whose husband isn’t the man she wishes he was. He lets her down, again and again and again. She begins to withdraw, to retreat, and to hold his failures against him. If they are even capable of discussing the problems between them, often she will have a list of things she wishes he did. And so this puts him in an awkward position. If he does the things on the list, she won’t know why he’s doing them. Because it just comes naturally? Or because he’s trying to score points with her? From her perspective, his motives are unclear. And so she develops a scorecard, usually subconsciously.

If he’s good, she comes near, but if he fails, she stays at a distance. Her affection, her actions, and ultimately her love become conditional. Not agape.

Agape doesn't love somebody because they're worthy.  
 Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love.  
 Agape doesn't love somebody because they're beautiful.  
 Agape loves in such a way that it makes them beautiful.

There is a love *because*, love *in order to*, love *for the purpose of*, and then there is love, period.

Agape is sacrificial and unconditional.

Imagine growing in your ability to love sacrificially and unconditionally. Describe the man or woman that you will become.

3. What are things you are doing now to make strides to become that future person?

4. It's written in the book of Romans that Christ died "while we were still sinners." And in the letter to the Corinthians, it's written, "Think of what you were when you were called." And the prophet Jeremiah is told that God knew him and set him apart before he was born.

Jesus reminds his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you."

People in the Scriptures essentially are loved into their futures. Think of how many of us had encouraging or affirming or inspiring words spoken to us years ago about our worth, our value, our future, and how those words shaped us. We often carry those words of agape around with us our whole lives.

What if that woman, the one with the husband who constantly disappoints her, what if she treated him as if he already were the man she wishes he was? What if she agapes him exactly as he is, today, with all of his flaws? If you are him, which is more motivating: being reminded of all of your failures and shortcomings, or being loved as if you're a great man?

5. Rob Bell makes the comment, "*When a woman is loved well, she opens up like a flower.*"

He says to young ladies who are wondering if they've found "the one":

*If you're dating someone, what kind of man is he? Does he demonstrate that he's the kind of man who would die for you? What is his posture toward the world? Does he serve, or is he waiting to be served? Does he believe that he's owed something, that he's been shortchanged, that he's gotten the short end of the stick, that life owes him something? Or is he out to see what he can give? Does he see himself as being here to make the world a better place?...*

*...What does he expect of you? Does he expect you to sleep with him when he hasn't committed to you forever? Does he want all of you without his having to give all of him?*

*Can you tell him anything? Is he safe? Can he be trusted?*

*Can you open up to him, allowing yourself to be vulnerable, knowing that he will protect, not exploit, that vulnerability?*

*Are you opening like a flower?*

And he says to the young man:

*Perhaps this is why the text talks about the man dying for the woman. This can be terrifying for a man. Committing to a woman for life is going to demand courage, fidelity, and strength he may not know he has. This is why some men take such pride in their sexual conquests. They're desperately running from their fear that they don't have what it takes to lay down their lives for a woman. Sleeping with lots of women gives them the feeling of being a man without actually having to be one.*

What is one thing you would like to commit to do in the coming weeks to grow in your ability to love unconditionally and sacrificially your spouse (if you are married), your children (if you have some), and others? Perhaps you might discuss this question in the group and then pray over it the next couple days and then email or call the group to let them know what you've decided. "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds!" (Heb. 10:24)

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God bless,

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