

## Maintaining a Culture of Nourishment for Spiritual Growth

The fruit of the filling of the Spirit is supernatural and wondrous to behold. However, it is a work of art seldom seen in that it disappears immediately when carnality arises. Carnality causes the fruit of the Spirit to quickly fade into obscurity like hundreds of forgotten Sunrises. This is the context of God's instructions regarding the nurturing environment for spiritual growth within the Christian home. There are five key phrases in Ephesians 5:17-6:4 providing five general requirements for creating a supernatural and spiritual environment to nurture spiritual growth.

“<sup>17</sup> Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but **be filled with the Spirit;** <sup>19</sup> Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup> **Giving thanks always** for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>21</sup> **Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.** <sup>22</sup> **Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,** as unto the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. <sup>24</sup> Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. <sup>25</sup> **Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;** <sup>26</sup> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. <sup>29</sup> For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: <sup>30</sup> For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. <sup>31</sup> For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband. <sup>1</sup> **Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.** <sup>2</sup> Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) <sup>3</sup> That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. <sup>4</sup> And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:17-6:4).

Before expounding upon these five key phrases in Ephesians 5:17-6:4 that provide five general requirements for creating a supernatural and spiritual environment to nurture spiritual growth, it is important to deal with the one major character flaw that circumvents building a nurturing environment – personal insecurities. Most children grow into adulthood having never confronted the issues of their own self-worth before God. Self-worth is not the same as self-esteem. Self-worth is the outcome of seeing our lives from the context of God’s love for us and His continue forgiving, long-suffering with us throughout our many failures in our relationship with Him. Self-worth is the outcome of seeing our lives on the context of the price of our redemption and the patience of God in His workings to help us escape our own carnality and selfishness.

The point of emphasis here is that everything *produces after its own kind*. Parents, you *will* reproduce yourselves in the personality and character of your children’s lives. The fact is that most of us do not have a clue about our own character weaknesses and personality flaws. The truth is that most of us, if not all of us, think of ourselves more highly than we ought. *Your* character and personality are the seeds you are planting in the garden of your children’s lives. Until you can honestly evaluate your own character weaknesses and your own personality flaws, how do you expect to be transparent with your children? How do you expect them to see their self-worth from the perspective of God’s love and patient longsuffering? How can you build security regarding their self-worth in God’s eyes when they see their models of God represented in outbursts of anger, pride, and unwillingness to listen to them? Do they see God in your constant exhibitions of duplicity in contractions of what you expect of them with how you live those expectations in your own life? Where do we begin in building a culture of spiritual nourishment for the home and family?

## **Be filled with the Spirit**

This begins by manifesting a *confessional environment* in our homes. People are quick to expose failures and confess the faults of others without ever dealing with their own failures and inconsistencies of life. A Spirit-filled life is a life that habitually keeps short accounts of sin. The first step in being a Spirit-filled Christian is to confess sin and be cleansed by God’s forgiveness (I John 1:9). When you sin or fail before your children, confess and receive God’s forgiveness before your children. When your children fail and receive correction, the first person to whom they should confess is God. Then they should confess (tell the wrong they did) to others at whom they aimed their act of disobedience and ask their forgiveness.

This is a pattern that must be repeated until it becomes habitual. The confession should be immediately followed with yielding or submission to God and to others involved. In other words, it is the attitude that communicates the idea – I have failed and I am willing to receive what I deserve for my failure. What a relief when forgiveness is given instead. A Spirit-filled life is cultivated in a confessional and submissive attitude. If these two mediums for spiritual growth are not evident, do not expect spiritual fruit.

### **Giving thanks always**

An environment of confession, submission, and forgiveness generates a thankful person. Although in this context, forgiveness is a great gift that is often taken for granted. How often do we cultivate a spirit of thankfulness for God's forgiveness? God's forgiveness is viewed like the oxygen we breathe with little consideration of the cost of its provision.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

The “blood” that cleanses and provides forgiveness is the “blood” of the eternal and incarnate Son of God that was shed for the remission of our sins. Take this fact for granted and you will become ungrateful for the forgiveness given you as a gift of grace. If there is one person that should always be thankful, it is the person that understands the price it cost to give forgiveness as a gift.

Watch for an attitude of thankfulness when the gift of forgiveness is given. If the attitude of thankfulness is not evident when the gift of forgiveness is given, that person has not understood the pricelessness of the gift. The *attitude of thankfulness* is a fruit of the cultivation of the garden of spiritual growth. If you do not see the fruit, continue to pull the weeds of selfishness and water with regular reminders of the Cross. When someone gives you the gift of forgiveness, be sure to respond with rejoicing and thankfulness because you received what you did not deserve.

### **Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God**

Although this imperative is mainly directed to the environment of the fellowship of believers within a local church context, the Christian home should be a practical model of the life of the larger local church family. The problem is that the opposite is often the case – the local church becomes the extension of numerous dysfunctional families contributing to the dysfunction rather than correcting it. This is the tension that exists within ALL churches. The solution to the tension is simple – “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

This is why the local church government must have priority over home government. The local church is governed by one dominant principle –“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). Submitting to one another is manifested by the *servant attitude*. Our carnal natures seek to dominate by bullying and anger. These are merely carnal methods of manipulation to control.

Do not confuse the *gift of submission* with *forced submission*. Forced submission will eventually seek to escape from the person doing the forcing. Gifted submission is an act of trust and love of the person receiving the gift. I submit because I already chose to be a servant. I lead people into being servants by modeling being a servant. Submission is the fruit born from a culture where being a servant is the normality rather than the abnormality. This is difficult soil to cultivate because it is the responsibility of those in positions of power, like pastors and parents. Submission and being a servant are communicated first in our attitudes *towards* others and then in our relationships *with* others. The attitude must precede the practice. It is the *attitude of submission* that creates the culture for nourishment for spiritual growth in the practice of submission.

## The Practicums of Attitudes

A *practicum* is a graduate level course, often in a specialized field of study, that is designed to give students supervised practical application of a previously or concurrently studied theory. Those things we teach to children as governing spiritual principles must be shown to be viable and valuable enough to us that we are willing to generate a culture in which they might grow. Almost all professional fields require practicums before allowing people to be given credentials to work in those professional fields. We have medical internships for doctors and nurses. We have apprenticeship programs for tradespeople. The local church is the *practicum* for parenting. The local church is where we learn the principles of spiritual leadership and learn how to live out those principles in the tension of diverse personal relationships. The relationship between the husband and wife, lived within God’s defined parameters, is the *practicum* for parenting. A husband or wife who cannot live within the parameters of God’s definitions for governing their relationship will never produce a culture for nourishing spiritual growth. In fact, the opposite will be true. Carnality will destroy any hope of them ever raising children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 4:6).

As a young Christian, I never even considered that my outbursts of anger were abusive and destructive to the spiritual growth of my wife and children. Love was not on the top of my list of priorities. I might even justify my angry outbursts as acts of love. Carnal people are not known for intelligently evaluating their actions. Will-worship, selfishness, outbursts of anger, and all other uncontrolled emotions will generate suffocation of everything that is spiritual. How husbands and wives practice submission and love (sacrificing self for the benefit of another) in the reality of the tension of their intimate human existence is the *practicum* for successful parenting.

## **Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands**

The word “submit” is translated from the Greek word *hupotasso* (hoop-ot-as'-so), which basically means *under orders*. The implication is that of a *chain-of-command* that is ordained by God. When used in relationship to God, the meaning is absolute in that there is no one higher in the *chain-of-command* than God. Secondly, God will never ask us to do anything that He will not enable us to do or anything contrary to righteousness.

The husband is second in the *chain-of command*. The facts that are true and consistent about God are not always true of husbands. Husbands often expect wives to do things that the husband has not enabled the wife to do. For instance, a husband should not expect his wife to provide nutritious and delectable delights for his meals when all he has provided is a paltry budget for food. He should not expect his wife to keep an orderly home when he is the primary source of its disorder. A husband has no right to demand that his wife submit to him in anything that God has forbidden. A wife is not obligated to obey unrighteous commands.

The first criterion for a young woman to carefully consider is the character of the person she intends to marry. Barbie Dolls naturally seek out Ken Dolls. The very nature of a person’s external priorities reveals vast quantities of facts about his character. Find a man who loves Jesus first and foremost and you will not have to spend the first few years of your marriage relationship praying for a miracle of transformation in his life. Selfish people will destroy everything they dominate. They manipulate and desecrate. They do not edify. Do not let desperation or lust determine who you will marry. When choosing a husband or wife, do not trade loneliness for misery.

A father that does not know how to love his wife and daughters will create disparate women who reach out for any semblance of affection from anybody that comes along their pathway. Fathers are forced to watch in horror as some degenerate monster seduces his daughter away, and sometimes even his wife. Men put too much emphasis on the submission of their wives. They would solve the dilemma they create if they would be more concerned about being a husband trustworthy of his wife’s gift of submission.

It is not difficult to *gift submission* to a husband who manifests both the *mind of Christ* and the *heart of Christ*. If a man has married a godly woman and a woman has married a godly man, neither will find it difficult to fulfill their roles in their marriage relationship. It will not be difficult to submit to your husband “as unto the Lord” if your husband is living as the Lord lived. However, if your husband lives like the devil and acts like a devil, expect to find great difficulty living with him and submitting to his decisions.

“. . . as unto the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. <sup>24</sup> Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing*” (Ephesians 5:22b-24).

These few verses give us the governing principle as the prototype for all relationships between believers. The relationship of Christ to the Church and the church to Christ is the prototype for the pattern of behavior for parties within the three main relationships within every culture. In other words, the government of the local church is the prototype for all government and is counterculture that is intended to shape the corporate ethic of all levels of culture in which the local church exists. The cultures that are outside the local church culture should not be shaping the church, but vice versa. The method of shaping cultures outside the local church is not Theonomic in methodology, but evangelistic and discipleship centered in its focus. In other words, the government of the local church is not *forced* upon a culture through *political activism*, *political maneuvering*, or through *Christian Reconstructionism*. A culture is changed by leading souls to Christ and making disciples of Jesus Christ through teaching the Word of God. This is the pattern for the three main relationships in all cultures existing apart from the local church.

1. The husband to his wife and the wife to her husband
2. Parents to their children and children to their parents
3. The master to his servant and the servant to his master

Without an established biblical model, these relationships become extemporaneous and are reduced to improvisation (*learn as you go* or *make up the rules as you go*). Without the *ethos* of established biblical models, all these relationships become experiments in pragmatism (*whatever seems to work*). We do not see the failure of these various forms of pragmatics until generations of people have already been destroyed and are now corrupting future generations with other forms of experimentation.

Therefore, the relationship of local church members to the headship of Christ becomes the biblical model for these relationships. The concept is that the local church members are governed by the absolutes of the incarnate Word of God and administrated through God ordained leadership in their pastor. The home is not the prototype for the Church, but vice versa. This is one of the errors of the *Integrated Family Movement*. They try to make the home the prototype for the Church and dictate to the Church how it is to be operated. The local church is the model for the husband/wife relationship. The local church is the model for the parent/child relationship. The local church is the model for the Christian businessman/servant relationship. Each of these three main types of relationships is administrated by a God ordained leader who is governed in his administration by the incarnate Word of God.

Each administrator's main tool of administration is the Word of God. Therefore the first and foremost level of responsibility is to know the Word of God, teach the Word of God, and live the Word of God. Since this is the first level of responsibility, it is also the first level where abuse and failure are judged. The pastor, father, parent, or Christian businessman who fails to learn the Word of God, to teach the Word of God, and to live the Word of God will also fail at the level of the basic foundation of biblical leadership.

Uniquely, the wife in her submissive relationship to her *Christ-like* husband is the first model presented for shaping a culture. The godly wife models submission to the Lordship of Christ. By submitting to her *Christ-like* husband, the mother teaches her children how to submit to the Lordship of Christ. The wife is actually submitting to the Lordship of Christ when she submits to her husband in that Christ commands her submission through His Word. Perhaps, the wife in relationship to her husband is the primary model that shapes a culture in that it shapes the lives of her children.

### **Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church**

An abusive, unloving, husband, who is not *Christ-like*, will do more to destroy the influence of the local church model than perhaps anything else. Poor spiritual leadership in the home is the culprit that destroys families and ultimately destroys the cultures in which those families exist. Rebellion begins in the home.

The wife's rebellion is equally destructive to a culture. This is the outcome of the Feminist Movement. Granted, ungodly husbands are the primary cause of rebellion in the lives of their wives. Feminism is a reaction against a cultural aberration created in most part by men abusing the leadership roles in the home. The Feminist Movement helped women escape from abusive homes on numerous levels. In some cases, it is difficult to criticize due to the extreme abuse that exists in many homes. This in turn required women to find surrogate mothers for their children in childcare centers. This produced children raised almost exclusively apart from the nurturing care of a mother and from a biblical role model of a godly father. Is it easy to see the cascading nature of cultural aberrations when wives and husbands fail as godly role models. Cultural failure is like a rock-slide that begins when one rock begins to slide and becomes more destructive as the slide becomes magnified in each succeeding generation.

How did Christ love the church? Answering this question defines how a husband is to love his wife. First, Christ's love for His bride is defined by His extreme sacrifice in His death at Calvary. We cannot define biblical love apart from extreme self-sacrifice. Christ put the needs of His bride before anything else in the world to the degree that He sacrificed His life so that His bride might have life. Jesus died that His bride might have eternal security.

“<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. <sup>37</sup> Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

The primary definition of a man loving his wife the way Christ loved the Church is selflessness. Imagine what our children’s lives might be like if fathers could model and reproduce this character in their children. What is the single most annoying character flaw that manifests gross and disgusting immaturity in anyone’s life? What are the two words that communicate this single most annoying character flaw manifesting gross and disgusting immaturity in anyone’s life?

1. Me
2. Mine

Love is a gift given of grace. Love is not a gift given because it is deserved. God does not love sinners because we are *lovely* or *loveable*. The fact is we are just the opposite of *lovely* or *loveable*. God loves us because God is love. God loves sinners because of what His love does for them. God does not love sinners for what loving them provides to Him. Biblical love is always selfless and sacrificial. This is the way a husband is to love his wife. This is the model of loving that the father teaches his children.

Although children are selfish by nature, their selfishness is reinforced and sanctioned by selfish fathers. Mothers who refuse to *gift* submission to their husbands will most probably produce rebellious children. However, fathers who fail to sacrificially love their wives will undoubtedly produce selfish children naturally accompanied by their rebellion. Failing to teach children how to love selflessly and sacrificially is perhaps the greatest of all child abuses known to man. Every outcome of such failure will be the grossest of carnal abuse actually resulting in a criminal mindset that cannot even consider that another person’s rights might supersede your own.

A selfish person refuses to recognize his selfishness. Therefore, a selfish person will never confess he has been selfish to his wife or children. The first avenue of correcting being unloving is to admit and confess selfish behavior to God. The second avenue of correction is to confess it to your wife and children. The third avenue of correction is to stop living selfishly and begin living selflessly.



## **Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.**

The word “obey” is from the Greek word *hupakouo* (hoop-ak-oo'-o). As already said, the word “submit” is translated from the Greek word *hupotasso* (hoop-ot-as'-so), which basically means *under orders*. The Greek word *hupakouo* means to *hear under orders* with the understanding that the orders are to be obeyed *without question*. When we say *without question* that does not mean that explanation cannot be requested. In fact, if the details of the order are not understood, an explanation should normally follow. To obey means to hear and conform to the exact orders of the command.

There is also something known as an *obedient spirit*. An *obedient spirit* is the evidence of a predisposition to please by obedience. Although an *obedient spirit* may be accompanied by a degree of fear of what might happen if a person disobeys, the primary motivation for obedience is love for the person being obeyed. We should not obey God merely because we fear the consequences of disobedience (and we should fear those consequences, Proverbs 1:7). We should obey God because we love Him and want to please Him. We should want to bring God joy by being a blessing to Him as much as God wants to bring us joy by blessing us. Children who are taught obedience from this perspective see God's ordained purpose in obeying. This perspective completely transforms obedience into a wonderful thing with glorious expectations.

Parents should be careful to express their joy when their children obey. The opposite is usually true. The only communication children hear is displeasure when they fail or when they have disobeyed. A hug and a *Thank You* will reinforce and sanction obedient behavior making it a joyful experience that will want to be reproduced. Why is it that parents just do not see how unpleasant they make obedience because they never reinforce it with praise? In fact, even when dealing with a single act of disobedience, a parent should try to find at least three acts of obedience to praise a child for before the disobedience is dealt with. Surely we can see the benefits of such a practice. Why is it that parents do not do this? The fact of the matter is that they are lazy and selfish. Raising their children and building character in their lives are not seen as priorities. There is nothing in your life more important than raising your children to be loving, obedient people. You cannot see them as interferences in your planned agenda for the day.

Take away the impatient, harsh, and critical words and replace them with tenderness, understanding, and nurturing patience. Look at your children the way God looks at you. He knows you are a sinner. He knows if you are really trying to live right. He understands you will fail and make bad decisions. Yet, he is right there waiting with loving open arms willing to provide gentle instruction and unending forgiveness. The need to correct your child should be accompanied with your own tears before you ever see theirs. They have sinned against God. Carefully and gently help them understand that. Then lead them to His forgiveness and reconciliation. Correction that does not end with forgiveness and reconciliation has failed in its purpose.