

Displaying Christ: [Key Relationships](#)

[What's the Big Idea?](#)

God wants to create beauty in our key relationships as we anchor our lives in Christ.

[What's the Problem?](#)

We let sinful self-centeredness influence our approach to key relationships in a way that keeps us from experiencing the beauty of Christ in those relationships.

[What's our Response?](#)

We should draw on God's power to let love, submission, and obedience shape our key relationships as we anchor our lives in Christ.

[Memorize](#)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Colossians 3:23-24

[What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?](#)

This passage is the last part of a larger section that starts in 2:6. It shows from a positive perspective how to anchor our lives in Jesus Christ. After calling his readers to put off the old self and put on the new self (3:5-17), Paul gives specific instructions for showing Christ in key relationships. Help your group members see that as they take off the old self and put on the new self, this section describes what that transformation should look like in key relationships. While your group members may not be married or have kids, you'll want to make sure they understand these important principles so that they'll be ready to display Christ if God calls them into these relationships.

[Wives and Husbands-Colossians 3:18-19](#)

Paul leads off with a command that wins no popularity contests in today's culture. When Paul says that wives should be subject to their husbands, he's not saying that they should be second-class citizens or turn into a doormat for their husbands. New Testament scholar Doug Moo says this command means that God calls a wife voluntarily to put herself under her husband's leadership and direction. In doing this, wives picture the submission of Jesus to his Father's will (e.g.: Matthew 26:36-46) and draw attention to God's beauty through their marriage.

God calls husbands to love their wives and not be harsh toward them or embittered against them. Husbands face the danger of using their God-given position of leadership for selfish purposes at the expense of their wives. But God calls husbands to look to the example of Christ, who laid down his life in love (see Ephesians 5:25-33).

Help your group members see the beauty of a husband and wife relating to each other when their lives are anchored in Christ. Each pictures an aspect of our Savior as he or she draws on the power of the Spirit to relate to one another.

[Children and Parents-Colossians 3:20-21](#)

It pleases God when children obey their parents in all things. This obedience is ultimately a reflection of obedience to God, who placed the parents in their lives (see Romans 13:1 ff). Although obedience to parents should be comprehensive, it shouldn't include obedience in situations where a parent tells a child to do something that's contrary to God's will (see Acts 4:18-20). This command also likely focuses on dependent children, not adults who are living on their own.

Paul commands fathers not to exasperate their children. They shouldn't come down too hard on them (The Message). Although focused on fathers, mothers can also take this command to heart. When parents exasperate their children, they might give up trying to follow the path that God and their parents have pointed them toward.

Lead your group to see the beauty of Christ's obedience (e.g.: John 8:29) and how his Spirit empowers us to relate to our parents in a similar way. Also help them see how Jesus leads his people gently (e.g.: Matthew 11:28-30) in a way that parents can emulate as they draw on God's power.

Slaves and Masters-Colossians 3:22-4:1

Some people fault the Bible when they read this section because it seems to advocate slavery. But it's better to understand this section as merely speaking to an issue that was common in first-century culture (as much as a third of the population in the Roman empire was in slavery) and therefore needed to be addressed.

God calls slaves to obey their masters from the heart as an act of service to Christ. Although your group members probably haven't experienced slavery firsthand, they can apply these principles to the way they respond to those who are in authority over them. Help them to see that they show Christ in these relationships as they draw on God's power to follow the example of the One who delighted to do his Father's will (Psalm 40:8).

God calls masters to grant justice and fairness to their slaves, realizing that their Master in heaven relates to them in the same way. While your group members likely won't have experience ruling over slaves, they will probably be in authority over others at some point in their lives. You want them to see the opportunity they have to display Christ's just and fair rule over these people (see Psalm 72:2) as they draw on the power of the Spirit to relate to them.

What Are the Questions?

Launch

Think of all your closest relationships. Which one is the most challenging right now and why?

Explore

Read Colossians 3:18-19

1. How does God command wives to relate to their husbands?
2. What do you think this command means? What do you think it *doesn't* mean?
3. What does God want for husbands as they relate to their wives?
4. Read Matthew 26:36-46 and Ephesians 5:25-27. How is Jesus a picture of the submission God asks of wives and the love he asks of husbands?

Read Colossians 3:20-21

5. Why do you think it's well-pleasing to the Lord for children to obey their parents?
6. What do you think verse 21 means by "not exasperating your children" (other translations use the verbs "frustrate," "provoke," "aggravate," "embitter," and "come down too hard on")?
7. How can parents exasperating their children result in the children losing heart?
8. Read Luke 2:51 and Matthew 7:11. How does Jesus picture the obedience God calls children to, and how does God picture the fatherhood he calls earthly fathers to?

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1

9. How did God call slaves to relate to their masters?
10. What motivation do these verses give for slaves obeying their masters?
11. What is God's call for masters?
12. Why should masters give justice and fairness to their slaves?
13. Read John 8:29 and Psalm 103:6. How is Christ a picture of the obedience slaves should give their masters, and how is God the Father an example of how masters should rule over their people?

Apply

14. How does Jesus' picture of the submission he asks of wives and the love he asks of husbands encourage you as you think about being that kind of wife or husband?
15. What steps can you take now in God's power to develop as a future wife who submits to her husband or a future husband who loves his wife without being embittered against her (or what steps can you take in your current marriage if you're married)?
16. In light of Christ's example of submission to his earthly parents, how do you sense God calling you to draw on his power to live out that example in relationship to your own parents?
17. What can you do now in God's power to prepare for parenthood (or live out your current role if you already are a parent) by being a lover and not an exasperator in relationships?
18. How do you sense God calling you to draw on his power to apply the principles of verses 22-25 to your relationships with those in authority over you or those you work for?
19. In light of Colossians 4:1, how do you need to think or act differently in relation to those you're in authority over?

What Are the Answers?

1. Wives should submit to their husbands, which is fitting from God's point of view.
2. Submission means voluntarily putting oneself under her husband's leadership. It doesn't mean becoming a doormat.
3. Husbands should love their wives and not be harsh or embittered toward them.
4. Jesus submitted to his Father's will and loved his people by laying down his life for them.
5. God has placed parents in the lives of their children, so it honors him when children obey the people he's placed in their lives to care for them and teach them.
6. Parents (and particularly fathers) shouldn't use their authority and power over their children in a way that frustrates them. They also shouldn't frustrate them by failing to give the guidance, direction, love, discipline, and leadership they need in life.
7. Being under parents' misused authority or failed leadership for a long period of time can result in children concluding that it's not worthwhile to please their parents or God.
8. Jesus submitted himself to his earthly parents, and God relates to us as his children in goodness, not harshness.
9. Their obedience is an expression of love for God, and he gives his people the reward of the inheritance for living a life that honors him. Those who fail to honor him receive the consequences of their actions as well.
10. It involves centering our relationships on the truth of God's word. It involves worship and thanksgiving to God.
11. Masters should treat their slaves with justice and fairness.
12. They themselves are accountable to a Master in heaven.
13. Christ always did what pleased his Father, and God is righteous and just toward all, even the oppressed.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Allow the group to discuss.
19. Allow the group to discuss.