

How to Make Your Marriage Work 2

A Full Expository Sermon Outline • TheSermonOutline.com

Key Scripture

Ephesians 4:2-3 ESV: "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Sermon in One Sentence

Thriving marriages are not accidental, but are intentionally forged and faithfully maintained through the consistent practice of Christ-like virtues – humility, gentleness, patience, and love – all for the sake of preserving unity and peace.

Introduction

I recently read a fascinating statistic that challenged my assumptions: according to a study by the Institute for Family Studies, a significant percentage of people who initially experience marital unhappiness report being "very happy" five years later if they stuck it out. This isn't to say that abuse or genuine danger should ever be tolerated, but it does suggest that many marriages aren't broken beyond repair; they just need intentional work and a renewed commitment to enduring. Marriage, as God designed it, is meant to be a covenant of flourishing, a profound reflection of Christ and the Church.

However, the reality for many is far from this ideal. Conflict, misunderstandings, unmet expectations, and the daily grind of life can erode even the strongest foundations. Many couples genuinely desire a better marriage but feel ill-equipped or overwhelmed by the challenges. They long for peace and unity, but often find themselves in cycles of discord.

Today, we turn to the Apostle Paul, a master architect of spiritual living, who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, offers timeless wisdom not just for congregational unity, but for the most intimate human relationship: marriage. His words in Ephesians 4 provide a powerful blueprint for how to make your marriage not just survive, but truly thrive.

Historical & Biblical Context

The book of Ephesians is a profound theological treatise on the nature of the Church, both its glorious calling and its practical outworking. Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus, a bustling Roman city steeped in paganism and diverse cultures, to remind them of their identity in Christ and the implications of that identity for their daily lives. The first three chapters lay the theological foundation, describing God's lavish grace in Christ, the mystery of Gentile inclusion into God's family, and the spiritual blessings bestowed upon believers.

Chapters 4-6 pivot from "doctrine to duty," moving from glorious truth to practical exhortation. Having established who they are in Christ, Paul now calls them to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). Our key passage, Ephesians 4:2-3, comes right at the beginning of this practical section. While its primary context is the unity of the body of Christ, the virtues Paul lists—humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and eagerness to maintain unity in peace—are not exclusive to church polity. They are foundational, Christ-like characteristics essential for any healthy relationship, and profoundly so for the intimate covenant of marriage where two become one flesh. These are not optional extras, but fundamental attitudes for a gospel-centered marriage.

Main Point I — Cultivate a Spirit of Humility, Not Entitlement

Scripture: Ephesians 4:2a: "with all humility and gentleness"

One of the greatest destroyers of marital harmony is the spirit of entitlement – the unspoken belief that my spouse exists to meet my needs, fulfill my expectations, or make me happy. This inevitably leads to disappointment and resentment. Paul, however, starts with "humility" (*tapeinophrosune*), a virtue almost entirely foreign to the ancient Greek thought, which often viewed it as weakness. For Paul, and for Christ, it is strength. Humility in marriage isn't about thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. It's about a willingness to serve, to listen, to apologize first, to admit when you're wrong, and to prioritize your spouse's well-being above your own immediate desires. It is the antithesis of pride, which says, "I deserve better," and the embrace of Christ's example, who "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7).

Coupled with humility is "gentleness" (*praotes*), often translated as meekness. This isn't weakness or timidity, but power under control. It's the ability to respond softly when provoked, to choose understanding over anger, to be gracious even when wronged. A gentle spirit in marriage refuses to use words as weapons, but rather chooses to speak life and affirmation. When both spouses cultivate humility and gentleness, the marital atmosphere shifts from defensiveness and accusation to understanding and grace. It creates a safe space for vulnerability, for growth, and for working through disagreements with respect and love, rather than escalating them into battles.

Main Point II — Practice Patient Endurance, Not Quitting

Scripture: Ephesians 4:2b: "with patience, bearing with one another in love"

Marriage, like all worthwhile relationships, takes work, and that work often requires immense "patience" (*makrothymia*), literally "long-suffering." It's the capacity to endure difficult situations, irritating habits, and prolonged trials without losing hope or giving up. There will be seasons in marriage that are harder than others – financial strain, health crises, parenting challenges, or simply the slow revelation of your spouse's imperfections (and your own!). Patience understands that growth is a process, that change takes time, and that love perseveres through thick and thin. It's the foundational virtue that allows a couple to weather the inevitable storms of life together.

Hand-in-hand with patience is "bearing with one another in love" (*anechomenoi en agape*). This phrase speaks to the active choice to tolerate, to overlook, and to make allowances for your spouse's flaws,

weaknesses, and quirks. It's not passive resignation, but an active, love-fueled decision to accept your spouse as they are, recognizing that you too are imperfect and in need of grace. This kind of love doesn't demand perfection; it extends understanding and forgiveness. It knows that love doesn't just put up with annoyances; it genuinely seeks the good of the other person, even when they're difficult. This sacrificial love, agape, enables couples to navigate the inevitable differences and disappointments, transforming potential points of contention into opportunities for deeper connection and compassion.

Main Point III — Pursue Unity and Peace, Not Division

Scripture: Ephesians 4:3: "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The ultimate goal and fruit of these relational virtues is the "unity of the Spirit" and the "bond of peace." Paul commands us to be "eager" (*spoudazontes*)—diligent, zealous, making every effort—to maintain this unity. Unity in marriage is not sameness; it's two distinct individuals, with unique personalities and preferences, committed to walking together as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This unity is spiritual in its origin, born from the fact that both spouses are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who desires harmony. It's a gift that must be actively guarded and cultivated.

This unity is maintained "in the bond of peace." Peace (*eirene*) is more than the absence of conflict; it's a holistic well-being, wholeness, and harmony. In marriage, this means creating an atmosphere where both partners feel secure, valued, and loved. It means choosing to resolve conflict respectfully, to forgive readily, and to prioritize reconciliation. It means actively working against anything that would threaten the spiritual and relational connection between husband and wife. Just as a physical bond holds things together, the commitment to peace, sustained by humility, gentleness, patience, and love, binds a marriage together, allowing it to reflect God's design and bring Him glory.

Illustration

Shortly after World War II, a young woman named Elisabeth Elliot married Jim Elliot, a missionary with a burning passion for sharing the Gospel with unreached tribes. Their marriage wasn't just about personal happiness; it was a partnership for the kingdom. They faced immense hardships, including their remote jungle assignments and the tragic martyrdom of Jim and four other missionaries. Elisabeth later wrote extensively about her life and marriage. She often emphasized that marriage isn't primarily about finding the right person, but about *being* the right person – a humble, gentle, patient, and loving individual willing to bear with their spouse. Their story isn't just one of missionary sacrifice but a powerful testament to a marriage built on deep conviction and the virtues we've discussed today, weathering unimaginable storms not by luck, but by intentional, Christ-centered living. It underscores that even in the most challenging circumstances, a marriage can reflect divine unity when both partners are driven by a spirit of service and a commitment to Christ.

Practical Application

1. Practice daily gratitude for your spouse: Take time each day to verbally express specific things you appreciate about your spouse, countering any tendency to focus on their flaws.

2. Actively listen for understanding, not just to respond: When your spouse is speaking, put away distractions and genuinely try to grasp their perspective and feelings before formulating your own reply.

3. Initiate apologies and forgiveness, regardless of blame: Be the first to say "I'm sorry" when you've wronged your spouse, and practice prompt, full forgiveness when they apologize, refusing to hold grudges.

4. Set aside dedicated, distraction-free time together: Schedule regular "connection time" – whether a date night, a quiet evening at home, or even just 15 minutes of uninterrupted conversation – to invest in your unity and peace.

5. Pray for your spouse and your marriage daily: Commit to praying specifically for your spouse's spiritual growth, needs, and well-being, and ask God to bless your marriage with humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the virtues (humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with love) do you find most challenging to practice in your marriage, and why?

2. How might a spirit of "entitlement" manifest in a marriage, and what is one practical way to combat it with humility?

3. Can you think of a specific instance where "patience" or "bearing with one another in love" helped you navigate a difficult period or disagreement in your relationship?

4. What does "maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" look like practically in your home, and what steps can you take this week to strengthen it?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the sacred gift of marriage, a reflection of Your covenant faithfulness. We confess our shortcomings and our tendency to seek our own way. We ask that You would infuse us with the spirit of Christ – granting us humility, gentleness, and boundless patience. Teach us to bear with one another in sacrificial love, always eager to maintain the unity of Your Spirit and the bond of peace in our homes. May our marriages be testaments to Your grace and glory. Amen.

Benediction

Go forth, beloved of God, and with humility, gentleness, and patient love, strive daily to build a marriage that reflects the peaceful unity of Christ and His Church.