

What God has joined together

This chapter is for couples whose marriages have been constant daily struggles. Please let Jesus help. He said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28, NIV)

“I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built.” (Lk 6:47–48, NAB)

You Are Blessed

An effortless marriage is one in which there are no problems, and the husband and wife get along very easily with each other as best of friends.

Not all marriages are like that. Those of you who do not live in ‘ideal’ situations should take heart in knowing that it is in troubled marriages that more opportunities may exist for meritorious conduct. Jesus said, “For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?... And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?” (Lk 6:32, 33, NAB)

Those of you who have to summon up all your strength every day to hold your tongue, to overlook snarly remarks, to stop yourselves from letting arguments get out of hand, to forgive, to make peace... deserve a great deal of praise. You are leading a life that is nothing short of heroic. You exemplify many of the beatitudes that are so dear to Jesus.

“This is what he taught them:

‘Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

‘Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

‘Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.

‘Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.’” (Mt 5:2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, NJB)

And what does ‘blessed’ mean? Blessed ones are those on whom God bestows his favour and special predilection. Continue to live by the beatitudes and you will eventually receive the fulfillment of all the promises attached to them.

The Little Ones

“See that you never despise any of these little ones.” (Mt 18:10, NJB)

The ‘littleness’ of your spouse may exhibit itself in many ways. A few examples are given here.

The individual in question is disgracefully ill-tempered, shamelessly demanding and blatantly self-centred. The person harbours an inflated and destructive sense of superiority, gets angry at anything remotely disagreeable, insists on being right and reiterates this supposed rectitude ad nauseum, retells a problem over and over again while putting little effort to finding the right solution; always looks at the gloomy side of things, offers no support in difficult situations but spews forth ugly invectives at everyone instead; poisons the family’s minds against you, creates tempests in teacups and makes mountains out of molehills. Every answer to your questions is a dagger-like insult, every request – a threatening ultimatum. He or she is born with excellent gifts from on high (such as a fine memory), but instead of thanking God for them, uses them to attack you and scold, and to belittle the dignity of those who do not have the same.

The list goes on and on. To live with this man or woman is like walking through a mine-field: a ferocious explosion erupts at any moment with the slightest ‘wrong’ step. You have to coax and carry this person through countless ‘crises.’ There is no peace in the home.

How do you handle ‘little’ people like that? On the previous page, in Mt 18:10, Jesus asks you never to despise them. He asks more.

“He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’” (Mk 9:36-37, NIV)

Small Kindnesses

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Mt 25:31–40, NIV)

In God’s sight you love greatly if you do kind-hearted things such as occasionally preparing for your spouse a cup of coffee, or organizing a nice meal either at home or in a restaurant, giving to your spouse a greeting, a compliment, friendly support in situations of embarrassment, attention during illness and discomfort, conversation and companionship when the other is imprisoned in discouragement and loneliness.

Forgiveness

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” (Mt 18:21–22, NIV)

Amiable Discussion

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.” (Mt 18:15, NIV)

It is fruitful to talk things over with your spouse in a friendly way. This is not done for the sake of justifying yourself or of accusing the other, but to halt the festering of bitterness and resentment.

Of course, it is understandable that bashfulness and timidity are often massive deterrents to heart-to-heart dialogue. Please pray to the Lord for the resolution of this predicament.

Bless and Pray

“Bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly.” (Lk 6:28, NJB) To bless people is to speak well of them and to them.

Here is a nice exercise. On a night when you are calm, try to recall something good that your spouse did that day. When you look for goodness you will find it! Perhaps you will gradually get into the habit of noticing and appreciating the positive elements in your marriage.

Pray, both for your spouse and for yourself, that there will be healing and conversion. Try to involve your spouse in concerted prayer. Jesus said, “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt 18:19–20, RSV)

Look Inside Yourself

Use the following readings as check-points in your relationship with your spouse.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:25–28, NAB)

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Lk 12:48, NIV)

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...” (Phil 2:3–7, NIV)

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” (Gal 5:13–15, NIV)

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Mt 5:21–22, NIV)

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Mt 12:36–37, NAB)

“Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Mt 26:52, NAB)

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?” (Mt 7:1–4, RSV)

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Lk 6:31, NIV)

“As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body.” (Col 3: 12-15, NJB)

Live Jesus' Teaching

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn 15:11, RSV) Live by the things that Jesus has spoken to you and his joy will come into your soul. Live by the things that Jesus he has spoken to you and your joy will be full. Live by the things that Jesus has spoken to you and nothing will ever erase that joy. He promised, “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (Jn 16:22, RSV)

Live by the things Jesus has spoken and you will find that what God has joined together he will help keep together.

A Simple Prayer

Whenever turmoil arises again with your spouse, or whenever you feel trouble brewing, turn to the Lord in quiet trust with these words, “Jesus, we need you. Help us.” And stay calm. Do not worry. Do not be afraid. Do not be agitated. He will restore harmony. He will do it very quickly. He will bring peace.