

## GOD, THIS MARRIAGE STUFF IS TOUGH

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

—Colossians 3:12–15

If I reach the point where I am at the end of my rope with my spouse, there are many different ways to take it to prayer.

I could ask the Lord to show me just how much my spouse means to me. I reflect back on all the great things he has done for me over the years, and I thank God for each gift.

I could ask the Lord to show me ways to communicate my love for him. For the sake of keeping the marriage fresh, I may perhaps need to come up with new ways of doing so. Maybe I could do so through a letter, or through a small gift. I could perhaps think of a kind but simple gesture such as working a little harder on the family chores. I could seek more opportunities to give simple and quiet compliments.

I could pray for my spouse, lifting him up in my prayers and asking the Lord's blessing on him.

I could ask the Lord to show me ways that *I* irritate or aggravate him. I could humbly ask the Lord for forgiveness and pray for strength and courage to change my ways.

I could explore with God the question of why I let my spouse get under my skin. Why do I lose my cool with him? Is there something within me that I could change so that I don't lose it when I'm around him?

I might want to explore with the Lord how I spend my time. Do I need a little more time away from him, giving myself a little more breathing room? Or, would it help to plan *more* quality time with him by doing some activity that we both enjoy?

I may want to reflect on my unspoken expectations of marriage. Sometimes, I find myself getting frustrated with a person because I subconsciously and unrealistically try to get that person to fill a need for me that simply cannot be filled by him at this time. In my prayer then, I may want to spell out for myself exactly what an ideal spouse would be like. After doing so, I ask myself, “What needs would this ideal spouse fill for me?” Then, I consider which of these needs my real spouse might realistically be able to provide and which seem to be beyond his capacity. Of the needs I feel he could handle, I now must explore healthy ways to express those needs to him. Of the needs he can’t handle right now, I must explore other healthy avenues of having those needs met.

Finally, I always return to gratitude, I praise God for the gift of my spouse and ask God to make me worthy of such a wondrous gift.

### SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

GENESIS 1:26–31: Male and female he created them

TOBIT 8:4–8: Tobias’s marriage prayer

SONG OF SOLOMON: The entire book is a love poem

MATTHEW 7:24–27: Build on a solid foundation

MATTHEW 19:1–9: Against divorce

JOHN 15:12–16: No greater love than to give up one’s life

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31–13:13: Love is...

EPHESIANS 4:25–32: Be kind, watch your words

EPHESIANS 5:22–33: Husbands, love your wives

COLOSSIANS 3:12–17: Clothe yourselves in love

1 JOHN 4:7–12: As long as we love one another,  
God will live in us

## PRAYER POINTERS

I pull out my old scrapbooks and photos from early in the marriage. I prayerfully peruse them, asking God to take me back through the years so that I might relive the memories of the wonderful moments in my marriage. I praise God for those moments.

I scheme with Jesus ways of letting my spouse know of my love. I try to come up with some new and creative ways. They don't have to be extravagant or even romantic as long as they are sincere.

I spend time simply praying for my spouse, praising God for all of the good things in his life, begging God on his behalf for the areas where he needs help.

In prayer I examine some of the past few conversations I've had with my spouse. I ask God to show me where I could have done a better job of communicating and how I could have been more loving.

If I'm going through a difficult time with my spouse, I simply have a conversation with God about that. I ask God to help me to the root of my anger, frustration and so on. I stay open to learn new insights about what's at the heart of the problem.

I prayerfully consider what my needs are right now. Do I need a little more private time right now? Or do I need to spend more time with my spouse? Do I need something from my spouse that he or she simply can't provide right now? If so, how can I healthily get those needs met?

I end as I began, with a prayer of gratitude for the wondrous gift of marriage and for the wondrous person of my spouse.

## RELATED ENTRIES

Angry, Blew Up, Family, Forgive, Grateful

WORDS TO TAKE WITH YOU

My marriage has problems...cuz I'm in it!  
—Pam Stenzel

Perfect love is the most beautiful of frustrations.  
—Charlie Chaplin

The chooser's happiness lies in his congruence  
with the chosen.  
—Dag Hammarskjöld

A friend is one who sees you as you wish you were—  
and likes you as you really are.  
—Robin St. John

He who would do good to others must do it in minute  
particulars; "General Good" is the plea of the  
scoundrel, hypocrite and flatterer.  
—William Blake

## GOD, THIS MINISTRY STUFF IS TOUGH

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What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

—1 Corinthians 3:5–7

For a while, I was addicted to a pop song by Five for Fighting called “Superman (It’s Not Easy).” In it, Superman sings about his difficult life and his existential angst. He confesses that he’s always been afraid of flying and hates to do it. At the time that I was regularly listening to the song, I was feeling a bit overwhelmed by my work as a priest and a teacher and was praying a lot about that. I remember in prayer one day the song came back to mind and I snippily told Jesus, “I’m not Superman, you know.” In my imagination (which is usually how Jesus speaks to me), Jesus snapped back, “Mark, who the heck asked you to be Superman? Nobody’s asking you to be Superman! I’m asking you to be like me, and I was definitely *not* Superman. Superman saves through strength. I save through weakness.”

It’s incredible how often this issue—my childish attempt to be the savior of humankind—comes up in my prayer. Usually, Jesus patiently teases me about it and says with furrowed eyebrows, “Thank you for offering, Mark, but that position is already filled.” I sheepishly smile and say, “Thank God!” Or Jesus will jokingly ask, “Mark, would you mind if I sat on the throne a while?” “Well, OK,” I joke back, “but only for a little while.” I’m lucky he has a sense of humor about it!

I am slowly learning the lesson, though. When I was younger, I would often agonize and get stressed out when I felt unable to fix some problem a student shared with me. Nowadays, I more often remember that “the job is already filled,” and just relax

about it. Over the years, I've slowly learned that the true Savior will fix the problem in his own good time. My job is simply to be open and ready to be *one* (and only one!) of the many tools in his toolbox. Earlier, during these scenarios, I would ask myself nervously, "How could I fix this problem?" Now, with great gratitude, I find myself thanking God for allowing me to play a small role in this person's life and asking God to help me to discern exactly what that small part might be. Am I to be a planter? A waterer? A weeder? A reaper? Chances are I'm only called to be one of these.

The issue is really about trust, isn't it? It's about trust that God will care for his children in his own good time, which often does not correspond to my panic-driven timetable. If I pray for that trust, I won't get so overwhelmed with my ministry. Or should I say "*His* ministry"?

### SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

EXODUS 33:7–17: The Lord to Moses:

"You are my intimate friend"

JEREMIAH 1:4–10: Do not say, "I am only a boy"

MATTHEW 9:35–38: Workers are few

MATTHEW 10: Jesus sending out disciples

MATTHEW 28:16–20: The great commission

JOHN 13:1–20: Jesus washes his disciples' feet

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–7: Some plant seeds, others water,

God provides the growth

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–31: We have different gifts

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1–15: We carry in our bodies

the dying of Jesus

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–20: We are ambassadors of Christ

EPHESIANS 4:1–16: Lead a life worthy of the calling

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–16: I count all else as rubbish

2 TIMOTHY 1:6–14: Rekindle the gift given you  
through the laying on of hands

2 TIMOTHY 4:1–8: I have run the good race...  
now my crown awaits

TITUS 2:1—3:11: Teach what is consistent with sound doctrine

### PRAYER POINTERS

I turn my work back over to God. In my imagination I carry my work to the altar and place it there, asking God to take it and bless it and make it holy. I acknowledge before God that this is truly God's work, not mine, and I thank God for allowing me to play a small role in it.

Using a mantra, I prayerfully turn over the most difficult part of the work to God. For example, if dealing with Billy Thomson is difficult, I chant, aloud or in my mind, over and over: "Billy is yours, Lord... Billy is yours, Lord... Billy is yours, Lord." If the paperwork is overwhelming, I chant, "This paperwork is yours, Lord... This paperwork is yours..."

I pray over the reasons why I'm feeling burned out right now. Am I trying to do more than I'm actually called to do? Have I placed my own agenda above God's? Is there some part of the job God is asking me to let go of? Do I need a break? Do I need a confidant in whom I can vent and seek advice?

In my prayerful imagination, I go back to the roots of the particular ministry in which I'm currently working. When did God first call me to this work? What is it that excited me about this ministry? I go back to the joyful moment of my discernment when I realized that God had chosen me for this work. If the Spirit moves me to do so, I allow God to call me to it again, today.

I prayerfully consider the reasons this work is of God. How does my work promote the kingdom of God? I zero in on one particular person who has been affected by my work. I ask the

Lord to keep this person in the forefront of my mind today as a reminder of why I do what I do.

RELATED ENTRIES

Angry at You, Busy, Evening, Morning, Noontime, Stressed,  
Weary

WORDS TO TAKE WITH YOU

It's your church, Lord, I'm going to bed.  
—Nighttime prayer of Blessed John XXIII

God gets the most unlikely to do the most unexpected.  
—Albert E. Cliffe, *Letting Go, Letting God*

Today, I've resigned as Master of the Universe.  
—Fred Crowe, s.J. (paraphrased)

## GOD, IT'S MORNING

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Awake, O harp and lyre!

I will awake the dawn.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples,  
and I will sing praises to you among the nations.

For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens,  
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,  
and let your glory be over all the earth.

—Psalm 108:2–5

It's Saturday morning, and Dad, in undershirt and boxers, and I, in PJs, are lathering our faces with shaving cream as we look at ourselves in the bathroom mirror. I, being only six years old, stand on the countertop and move Dad's comb down my cheeks, pushing off the foam in rows in the same manner as my Dad's reflection is doing with his razor. I love this ritual. I love the feel of my Dad's smooth cheeks after the stubble of the night is swiped away. At some point during this father-son ceremony, Dad nods toward the rectangular sticker with the face of Jesus that is stuck to the lower-right-hand side of the mirror. My reading skills being new, I try as best I can to follow along as Dad recites the Morning Offering, "O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day...."

My Saturday morning prayer times these days have the same feel as those of my childhood memories. I, in robe and slippers, sit with a cup of coffee while the Father and I prayerfully swipe away the stubble—the worries and concerns I took to bed with me the night before. Last night they kept me up and led me to believe they would soon grow out of control. But this morning I see that my Father and I can easily control them—can keep my soul smooth despite their presence. Last night as I tossed and turned in bed, the waters of chaos crashed upon the craggy

rocks of my worried heart. But this morning God's breath makes everything still and quiet. And at the end of the ceremony, I offer my own Morning Offering. It's a little different from Dad's, but it serves the same purpose: it consecrates my day to the Lord.

Eternal Word,  
 Only begotten Son of the Father,  
 Teach me true generosity.  
 Teach me to serve as you deserve:  
 To give without counting the cost.  
 To fight, heedless of the wounds,  
 To labor without seeking rest,  
 To sacrifice myself without the thought  
 of any reward,  
 Except for the knowledge that I have done your will.  
 Amen.  
 —attributed to Saint Ignatius Loyola

### SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

GENESIS 1:1—2:4: The creation story  
 GENESIS 9:1–17: God's covenant with Noah  
 PSALM 65: Where morning dawns and evening fades  
 PSALM 92:1–5: I proclaim your love in the morning  
 PSALM 95:1–7: Come, and worship the Lord  
 PSALM 108:1–7: Arise, I will awake the dawn  
 ISAIAH 26:1–9: Open the gates that the  
     righteous nation may enter  
 ISAIAH 55:1–6: Seek the Lord while he may be found  
 LAMENTATIONS 3:22–24: Each morning you renew your graces  
 JOHN 21:1–14: Morning fish fry with the resurrected Jesus  
 ROMANS 8:26–39: What can separate us from  
     the love of Christ?

PRAYER POINTERS

I consider the worries that kept me up last night. I see how small they are in the light of this day. I praise God for helping me to put things in proper perspective.

I find my own favorite morning offering. I can use a popular version from a prayer book, or I could compose my own. I make it a daily ritual to pray this prayer.

While pledging to give all that I am to God's will this day, I offer everything: my work, my family, my life, back to God. I place it all under God's care.

RELATED ENTRIES

Awe, Content, Ministry, Proud, Single, Can't Wait

WORDS TO TAKE WITH YOU

Smiling, sincere, incorruptible—  
His body disciplined and limber.  
A man who became what he could,  
And was what he was—  
Ready at any moment to gather everything  
Into one simple sacrifice.  
—Dag Hammarskjöld

The Rabbi Zusya said a short time before his death, "In the world to come, I shall not be asked, 'Why were you not Moses?' Instead, I shall be asked, 'Why were you not Zusya?'"  
—Martin Buber