

**+ Ephesians 4:1b-2, 32 + A Marriage Worthy of Christ's Calling +
+ Wedding of Lori Brzeczowski and Gary Piatkowski + 12 September 2015 +**

Dear Friends of the Bride and Groom, especially you dear Gary and Lori,

We're finally here. No more need to count down days. No more need to wonder if the building would be ready enough for the wedding—although you may not want to lean against some of the walls. No more agree/disagree questions in pre-marital class—although none of us have all the answers to all the questions that come up in married life. We're here!

Gary and Lori, how you got to this point, to this place, to this day is probably nothing like what you expected when you first met at a polka festival back when your friendship first started when you were teenagers. Both of you have been through a lot since then—ups and downs, times of blessing and times of challenge, good times and rotten ones. You've both seen what happens when a marriage is built on a shaky foundation and what can happen when Christ is not at the center of a marriage. Yet you have also seen the jaw-dropping grace and undeserved kindness of our Savior Jesus Christ and what he accomplishes through his Word.

Now we're here in this place this evening to celebrate the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and how he has worked all things for the good of those who love him. Today you start a new chapter in your lives and in your relationship with each other—no longer just as friends, but as husband and wife brought together as one in Christ Jesus.

You see, that Savior who is uniting you in marriage today called you to faith in him through the Gospel. Years ago, he made you his own son and his own daughter through the waters of Holy Baptism. Then through the hearing and studying of his Word, he caused your faith to grow. Jesus helped you realize that in his grace he called you to the holy calling of being his saints—his holy children by faith in him. As I hope you have learned well, being called to such a holy calling impacts every aspect of your life, even your marriage. Paul writes to the Christians in the city of Ephesus, ***"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*** So it's our prayer today that you would have **A MARRIAGE WORTHY OF CHRIST'S CALLING**—that your daily walk with Jesus would be one worthy of his calling, not just individually, but as husband and wife.

To have a marriage worthy of Christ's calling, we need to take a closer look at what you are being called to do as husband and wife. While what Paul has to tell us here in Ephesians 4 applies to all of us as believers, these verses take on special meaning when applied to God's gift of marriage.

So what exactly are you being called to do? You are called to be humble and gentle. Paul says it pretty simply. ***"Be completely humble and gentle."*** To have a marriage worthy of Christ's calling, God expects you to be unselfish, modest, and humble. It's the very opposite of arrogance and pride and it's certainly not false humility. That means carrying out your God-given roles as husband and wife both willingly and humbly. Gary, that means humbly loving Lori with a self-sacrificing love just as Christ loved his church and gave his life for her, and Lori, that means willingly submitting to Gary as the church submits to Christ. As you unselfishly carry out those God-given callings together, the Lord promises to bless your marriage.

God also expects you to be gentle and considerate. It means not being overly impressed by your own importance and therefore not taking advantage of the other when you are weak. It means knowing each other so well that you can both provide a gentle strength that is considerate of each other's needs—especially when times are tough.

...But there's a problem—a problem that every marriage faces, a problem that can hinder having a marriage worthy of Christ's calling for even the strongest Christians. I hate to tell you this, Gary and Lori, but you'll have this problem too. You both have sinful natures and you will be two sinners living under the same roof. Your sinful nature loves you and you alone—what you want, how you feel, and daily reminds you how important you think you are. So rather than humility and gentleness, ugly traits like arrogance and pride, self-importance and thoughtlessness creep into your words, your thoughts, your actions. You don't want to be humble. You don't want to be considerate—and your spouse should know that! Before long, your marriage becomes about you and not what God wants for it.

So what are you going to do? Compromised by your sinful nature, you can't depend on yourselves, but there is One who once said, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*** (Matthew 11:28-29) Look to Jesus who came in humility and gentleness for you, who knows all your faults, who knows how hard your sinful nature works to ruin your faith and wreck your marriage, who knows all

that and yet still came to give you rest. Look to Jesus and find forgiveness for your arrogance and thoughtlessness and self-importance and then learn from him true humility and gentleness.

To have a marriage worthy of Christ's calling, you are also called to be patient and burden-bearing as Paul writes, **"Be patient, bearing with one another in love."** God expects you to patiently bear with one another. That means not just putting up with each other, but being patient even when the other is being frustrating and even being patient without complaint. It means being willing to bend when it's necessary and learning to look past little traits or preferences that might be annoying. It means listening to each other and enduring with one another when times are tough. God wants you to do this with a self-sacrificing love that puts the needs of the other first.

On a day like today, it's easy to think, "Yes, I can do that! No problem! I've learned from my mistakes. I will always put the needs of my spouse ahead of my own!" I would love to tell you that that's going to happen, but remember your sinful nature? Yeah, patience and selflessness are some of the last things it wants to do. Rather your sinful nature prefers selfishness and impatience and only putting up with each other, because you know, you have to. Your sinful nature wants nothing more than to make marriage all about you.

Again that's where Jesus takes you by the hand and directs your eyes and heart and mind away from focusing on yourself and instead focusing on him. Remember what moved Jesus to come to this world in the first place. Recall what we heard from 1 John (4:9,11) earlier, **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him...Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."** God's self-sacrificing love for you moved him to send his Son to not just put up with you, but to patiently bear the burden of your sin, to patiently put your needs before his own no matter how frustrating you might be, to patiently love you with a jaw-dropping, self-sacrificing love.

Now that leads to one more way that you can have a marriage worthy of Christ's calling. You are called to **"be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."** God expects you to be kind and benevolent like him—compassionate with truly tender feelings for each other. God expects you to graciously forgive and pardon each other—not holding a debt of guilt over each other and reminding each other of past sins and offenses, but cancelling them for good.

Your sinful nature definitely doesn't want to see you do that. It's much easier to be loveless and hard-hearted. It's much easier to refuse to forgive, to withhold forgiveness from each other—and you know that your sinful natures will do their best to remind you how the other has wronged you in the past. Such lovelessness and hard-heartedness can do tremendous damage to a marriage and is clearly not what Christ wants for your marriage.

So what will you do? Sure, you can always improve communication, but Paul makes it pretty clear for us where real help can be found. Look to the One who with undeserved kindness and compassion forgave your sins! Recall that 1 John lesson once more, **"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."** (4:10) Forgiveness starts with Jesus, who took on all your offenses and your guilt and your sins and washed them away with his own blood. Then in Christ, you can extend that same forgiveness to each other with Christ-like kindness and compassion reflecting God's love for you in your love for each other.

Well, it's almost time to begin this new chapter—to begin a marriage worthy of Christ's calling. Don't depend on yourself, because that will only lead to failure. Instead together depend on Christ—who humbly and gently came to be your Savior, who patiently bears your burdens in love, and who graciously and compassionately forgives all your sins. That is our prayer for you. May Christ bless and be at the heart of your marriage always! Amen.