

MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY FOUR

Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

What are some biblical tips we can apply to help our marriage stick? Five of them are tucked away in the last few verses of Ephesians 4. Based on the commands in this passage, I draw five principles that give us practical advice for keeping a marriage together.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A wise guy once said, “The most difficult years of marriage are those following the wedding.” With a prevailing attitude like this, it’s no wonder the divorce rate soars higher than ever before. Sadly, many couples struggle through their marriage, as they often face arguments, unmet desires, and an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction.

Shouldn’t marriage be *better* than this? It doesn’t make sense that years of high expectation and excitement for marriage would be followed by many more years of disappointment and conflict.

The good news is that God *did* design marriage to be better than this. He intended a man and a woman to join to one another in a beautiful relationship characterized by commitment, unity, and intimacy. Yet every man and every woman are sinful, which means that sin has tainted every marriage. And where sin abounds in marriage, hardship abounds all the more.

To expose the sins that destroy marriages, this *Searching the Scriptures* study will look at Ephesians 4:25–32. Though not a typical “marriage” passage, these few verses will reveal what kinds of actions tear apart unity and will provide guidance on how to glue it back together—both among believers *and* between spouses.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Ephesians 4:25–32



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to enter into God’s Word today, first enter into His presence using this prayer:

Father, I know that life is not easy. But thank You for the hope You’ve given me—that one day, I will live a renewed life with You for eternity. As I journey this earth, help me see the sin that pollutes my life so that I can allow You to cleanse it from within me. Do that today as I study Your Word. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reads like a Christian “how-to” manual that masterfully lays out both essential truths and practices. The first half of the letter focuses on key truths such as salvation being available by grace *alone* and through faith *alone* in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9).

As he moves to the second section of the letter focusing on proper behavior, Paul heavily emphasizes the theme of *unity*. In your own words, summarize Paul’s exhortation in [4:1–3](#).

“Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit.” Paul knew his readers would wonder, *How can I do this?* And thankfully for us, he answered that question in 4:25–32 by addressing those actions that will tear apart even the closest of bonds—like those between spouses.



Observation: Behaviors That Untie Unity

Before we can apply the truths preserved in the pages of Scripture, we must understand what a passage *means*. And to know what a passage means, we must first observe what a passage says.¹



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Read *Ephesians 4:25–32*. This passage is chock-full of parallel commands. Don't do *that*. Instead, do *this*. Using the chart below, record the kinds of *negative* behaviors that damage the unity of the body of Christ and the corresponding *positive* responses (if any are given).

Verses	Don't do <i>that</i>	Instead, do <i>this</i>
4:25		
4:26–27		
4:28		
4:29		
4:30–31		

What back-to-back commands did Paul give in the first part of 4:26? (Hint: looking at a more word-for-word translation like the New American Standard Bible can help you see these commands more clearly.)

1. _____
2. _____



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According to *Ephesians 4:29*, in what two ways can a person use his or her words?

The tongue is the most powerful enemy in your home. With it you can rip apart, you can murder, you can assault, and never bring blood. Every time we open our mouths, we either build up or tear down. We either affirm or we assault. It's just that simple.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to *4:32*, whose example should we follow when extending forgiveness?

The apostle Paul never minced words. The commands are direct and convicting. Yet, these kinds of sins often creep into our lives without us ever realizing their presence. When we finally notice them, they've planted their roots, and a one-off sinful act has grown into a full-blown habit.



Interpretation: The Subtleties of Sin

Certain sins are blatant and egregious. Some people, however, sin with such finesse that they cause subtle damage to their victims. Occasionally, we commit sins so slight that we don't even realize we're doing something wrong. *Ephesians 4:25–32* addresses three particularly covert sins: deceit, theft, and sinful anger.



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According to Paul in *Ephesians 4:25* why should believers tell the truth instead of lying? How can one person's deceit harm his or her broader community?

Lying wears many faces: diplomatic hedging, stretching the facts, not telling the whole story, staying silent when we should speak, flattery—very common in marriages. But marriage is built on trust, and trust is built on truth. No marriage is more in bondage than a marriage that is wrapped in lies. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In what ways can a person steal from another without taking material possessions?

There's more to marriage than material possessions. There's time, there's trust, there are promises, there are expectations. I steal from my partner when I steal time I promised her. I steal from her when I take a secret she may have shared with me and announce it. Partners can steal from each other in the way they spend money. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Many people wrongly teach that experiencing the emotion of anger is sinful. But this passage teaches the opposite (see also *Psalms 4:4*). In fact, Paul *commands* his readers to be angry in *Ephesians 4:26*! This emotion sometimes is referred to as “righteous indignation.” (Check *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org for a more detailed discussion of this term.)



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What does non-sinful anger look like? What kinds of things deserve our anger? How can we respond to such anger *without* sinning, as Paul commands?

How easy is it to welcome these subtle sins into the home! Given enough time, these unwelcomed guests will squat down and will join every meal, every conversation, and every interaction. If we don't expel them from our lives, they will tear apart any family. However, after they're gone, we should fill their vacancy with something much better.



Correlation: The Fruit of the Spirit

The well-known “Fruit of the Spirit” from Galatians 5:22–23 sounds similar to Ephesians 4:25–32. While Paul instructed the Ephesians on correcting specific behaviors, he aimed to adjust the Galatians' attitudes. In Galatians 5:19–23, he contrasts the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit with the vices of the sinful flesh.

What are the vices, or the “desires of your sinful nature,” listed in [5:19–21](#)?



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What are the virtues, or the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit, listed in *Galatians 5:22–23*?

How do these virtues and vices relate to the dos and do-nots of *Ephesians 4:25–32*? Which virtue would you like to cultivate more deeply and how might you go about doing so?

Through Paul’s commands and exhortations, he creates a beautiful image of a truly unified and harmonious relationship. Some of these ideas may still feel abstract, so let’s move to application and allow the concrete truths of Scripture to solidify in our lives.

Application: Learning to Grow

In Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s application of this passage, he candidly shares five lessons he and his wife Cynthia are learning as two Christ-followers seeking to live out a godly marriage:

1. *We’re learning to cultivate complete honesty in our relationship.* No more telling lies. No more pretense. Just the truth.
2. *We’re learning to express our anger in appropriate ways.* Don’t use bitterness as fuel for revenge. Don’t stay angry. Express your anger the right way and at the right time.
3. *We’re learning to stop stealing from each other.* Don’t steal time that belongs to your spouse. Don’t make promises you won’t keep. Don’t betray his or her trust.



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4. *We're learning to be very careful with our words.* There is no weapon more dangerous to a marriage than a sharp tongue. Use your words to build up, not to tear down.
5. *We're learning to demonstrate grace and to continually forgive.* Continually rub the salve of forgiveness on your relationship. Forgiveness is the ointment that can heal a scarred marriage.

Which of these five lessons do you need to apply to your relationship first? Why? How can you do so, starting today?

In the space below, share some things you are in the process of learning with your spouse or someone close to you. Feel free to restate some of Pastor Chuck's examples or to come up with your own. As you write these down, commit yourself to working on these things in the coming days and weeks.

So long as sin still inhabits our lives, friction will still inhabit our marriages. But King Jesus sits on the throne, and those who are citizens of His kingdom have the power to break sin's grip. The challenges of marriage won't simply disappear, but by God's grace, two believers can navigate the struggles and experience the joys of marriage as He designed it.



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A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study, offer this prayer adapted from Pastor Chuck:

Father, I hail Your name because You are the one who originated marriage. You brought me together with my spouse. Forgive me for working so stupidly to push us apart. Do the serious work of surgery in my life in areas that need to be addressed. Start with me. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

