

Family Matters 4: TOGETHERNESS MATTERS
Philippians 2:1-4 (5/29/16)

As we begin, I want you to listen to a familiar passage of Scripture, but read from a less-familiar translation. This is **Philippians 2:1-4** from Eugene Peterson's translation of the New Testament known as *The Message*. To me, this sounds like a throwback to an earlier day—see if you agree.

2¹⁻⁴ If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

We'll be looking at several passages of Scripture this morning. The one we just read helps us focus on being together and sharing life together in ways that are beneficial to us all. I'm talking about having a strong sense of "togetherness"—and understanding that "Togetherness Matters."

The Bible speaks to the challenges we face while living together in families, churches, workplaces, and communities. And although I've chosen to focus today on "togetherness," our "oneness in Christ" and our "witness for Him" are heavily influenced by how well we handle being "together." So with that, let's take a look:

1. We'll start with this: **Togetherness Requires Understanding.** This is one of the greatest challenges in any relationship—trying to truly understand another human being. And often we find ourselves attempting to do this with several people...simultaneously!

Here's some advice from the Apostle Peter in relation to husbands and wives. He writes: **"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives..." (NIV)**

The New Living Translation puts it this way: **"You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way..." (I Peter 3:7, NLT).** Are we hearing this, husbands? We're told

in Scripture to understand our wives. Yeah, riiiiight!?! Anybody remember the old show called *Mission Impossible*? But, then, fellows, maybe our wives would say the same thing about us!

During premarital counseling sessions, I point out to the bride-and-groom-to-be that they are about to spend their lives with someone whom they will never fully understand.

No man will ever understand what it's like to be a woman; and it's unlikely that any female will fully understand manhood either—although I do believe men tend to be easier to figure out.

I then remind the couple that they will have a lifetime, hopefully, in which to grow in their understanding of each other. A happy marriage requires this. Not that we ever fully achieve it, but part of the mystique of the marriage relationship is the honest effort to understand the other better.

So how do we do this? Well, for starters, we **listen to each other** (there's that word again!). James 1:19 tells us to be **"quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."**

So often we shoot first and ask questions later. If we would take the time to listen and try to understand, maybe we would react with a bit more compassion and a lot less anger.

This principle of understanding one another applies to other relationships as well. Parents and children, for instance. As parents, we have a huge advantage over our children.

We've *been* children; but they've never been adults. At the same time, we have never been this particular child—so we have to make the effort to understand each of our children as the unique little persons they are.

If you aim for understanding, you must **make what is important to the other person important to you**. I read about a father who was not much of a sports fan, but his son developed an interest in hockey. Because of this, the father started taking his son to as many hockey games as he could.

It cost him some time and money, but it proved to be a strong bonding experience for the two of them. A friend asked him,

“Do you really like hockey that much?” “No,’ He said, “but I like my son that much!”

Aim for understanding. Make it a point to really listen to each other. As Yogi Berra wisely said, “You can hear an awful lot by just listening.”

It truly is one of the most important gifts you can give another person—to listen with the aim of understanding them. That’s requirement number one. Here’s the second:

2. Togetherness Requires Loyalty: Companies talk about loyalty a lot. They try to foster loyalty among their employees and customers. It’s an important part of a successful business.

The same is true for families. Loyalty matters. The promises we make to one another, the covenants we enter into, are serious. They’re to be honored as a means of achieving the stability we must have for our families to provide the love and security that we all need.

When a man and a woman promise to love, honor, and cherish one another for as long as life shall last, and then live up to those vows, it gives that couple the opportunity to grow strong together in love and mutual support. They know they can count on one another in good times and bad. The relationship is secure.

Listen to **Proverbs 3:3-4—“Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you! Wear them like a necklace; write them down within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will gain a good reputation.”** (NLT)

When we keep our commitments to one another, it builds trust. Trust is the firm foundation upon which all togetherness is built.

Many parents work jobs that require long hours away from home. They travel in their work. Family time’s at a premium. Have you known a Mom or Dad who would drive all night long to make it to a child’s ball game or to a program they promised to attend?

That’s not easy, but how does their presence at that event make their child feel? Secure. Important. Loved. Blessed.

And the parent's sacrifice also instills in that child the importance of keeping commitments, which should help that child grow up to be a good parent some day! This kind of loyalty, this promise-keeping, is important in all the vital relationships in our lives.

3. Togetherness Requires Respect for One Another:

Respect is something all of us want and need as part of any relationship. In fact, it's next to impossible to have a deep relationship with another person without mutual respect.

Maybe some of us are not experiencing the kind of relationship God wants to have with us because we do not have the respect for Him that He deserves. In the same way, there may be family or other important relationships that are insecure because God's will for us is not being respected.

Proverbs 14:26 speaks to this. It says, **"Those who fear (or respect) the Lord are secure; he will be a place of refuge for their children."** (NLT)

Another word for respect is "honor." Romans 12:10 states that, as followers of Christ, we are to take delight in honoring each other. Did you catch that? We are to honor other persons—and surely this applies especially to members of our own families.

This isn't supposed to be a hassle for us. When we delight in honoring one another, it makes us all feel valued and brings meaning to our lives.

In families, we need to respect each other's...property, and privacy, and time. We also need to respect the uniqueness of each member of the family.

We may share many things in common, but each one will have characteristics that belong only to them—and we need to accept the fact that some members of our family may seem a bit odd to us—just as we do to them.

Paul shares this good word with us in Philippians 2:3—**"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."** (NIV) In other words, respect others.

4. Togetherness Requires Encouragement: Perhaps the easiest way to grow healthy relationships is to be encouraging. Just take care that your encouragement doesn't take the form of being overly demanding or of setting unrealistic goals.

Family members encourage one another by affirming the gifts God has placed in each person's life and helping each other to use them. We achieve our highest potential by relying on God's help combined with the support of an encouraging family.

I Thessalonians 5:11 says, "**Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**" How good is that? Even as Paul is instructing these Christians to encourage one another, he affirms them for being encouraging!

How can we be more encouraging? Well, something as simple as **a smile** can help. Job, the Old Testament character who experienced so much grief and sorrow, recalls how that when people around him were discouraged, he would smile at them; and "...the light of my face was precious to them." (Job 29:24)

Never underestimate the influence of something that simple. A smile always increases your "face value."

Second, be encouraging through **the words you speak**. It's been said that "Man doesn't live by bread alone. He also needs some buttering up." Words are powerful. They can do enormous harm, but they can also do tremendous good.

How much would our "togetherness" improve if we all focused a bit more on the positive? A reporter once asked Andrew Carnegie, the great business leader and philanthropist, why he hired 43 millionaires to work for him.

Carnegie had to point out to the reporter that those men had not been millionaires when he hired them. The reporter then asked, "How did you develop them in such a way that they became so valuable to you that you paid them this much money?"

Carnegie replied that people are developed the same way gold is mined. In the mining process, several tons of dirt must often be moved in order to get an ounce of gold; but you don't go into the mine looking for dirt--you go in looking for the gold!

How does this speak to our role as parents? How about our role as spouses--or as teachers, bosses, or fellow members of our church and community?

Let's **look for the gold** in each other: our children, spouses, parents, co-workers, and fellow believers. I can't help but think that Jesus had to look real close to find the gold in some of the disciples he chose.

Guess what, friends? He still does! Like Jesus, we need to be encouragers too!

5. Togetherness Requires Forgiveness: Here's an important word for all relationships. It's found in **Colossians 3:13--**
"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Most couples who have enjoyed a long marriage will tell you that the health of their marriage is due, at least in part, to overlooking a lot...and forgiving the rest. Oh, they'll talk about loving each other too; but for love to survive, we must do some overlooking and forgiving—which genuine love is always willing to do!

Love that consistently refuses to forgive is only self-love—a kind of love that cares about the other person only so long as they are meeting my needs. It's the way of the world, but it's not the way of Christ.

It's completely natural, in a worldly kind of way, to love self so much that we want from other people only that which we think is best for us. In the same way that carrying a grudge is natural.

Keeping a record of wrongs is natural. Seeking revenge is natural. Trying to hurt you because you've been hurt is natural.

Listen, friends: Jesus Christ died on the cross to set us free from what comes naturally. We are to forgive one another even as we've been forgiven.

That's not natural. It's not normal. It's Divine--"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling!"

There is a story in Spanish culture about a father and son who have a terrible fight. The anger is so intense, the son leaves home. Later, the father has a change of heart. He sets out to find his son. He searches for months with no success.

Finally, in desperation, the father turns to the newspaper for help. He places an ad that reads: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father."

Saturday comes, and eight hundred young men named Paco show up at that newspaper office, all of them hoping to find forgiveness and love from their fathers. Hostility and division destroy so much togetherness. And it's always sad. It's always tragic.

Some of us may be involved in relationships right now that do not have a chance of surviving unless somebody forgives somebody. That shouldn't be so hard, but it is. It goes against every fiber of our being to forgive—until, friends, until we know in our heart of hearts that we have been forgiven.

When we know beyond all doubting that Christ Jesus has forgiven us, we can forgive one another. And as forgiven people, we are set free to forgive. Marriages are saved. Families are preserved. Churches prosper. Other important relationships get back on track—when we forgive.

Have you received God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ? We all need it! No exceptions. And once we receive it, then we can give it.

Forgiven people know how to forgive. And with all the hang-ups, differences, and failures that exist in our lives, forgiveness is absolutely essential for us to be together!

This list doesn't cover everything, but if "togetherness matters," friends—and it does—then it also matters that we: 1) seek to understand each other; 2) that we be loyal; 3) that we respect one another; 4) and try to be encouraging.

5) Finally, since we won't always get it right, we must be ready to forgive. All of this matters if life "together" is to be good. So may all of this that clearly matters to God...also matter to us!