

Twenty-six Patterns of Living to Enhance the Glory of Your Marriage

Dr. David and Dr. Mary Ford



“Marriage is a revelation and a mystery. We see in it the complete transformation of a human being, the expansion of his personality, fresh vision, a new perception of life, and through it a rebirth into the world in a new plenitude,” writes Fr. Alexander Elchaninov. That certainly is far from the knowledge of most people today, and those who have an intuition that marriage is meant to be something more than cohabitation might not dare even hope that they might ever experience what Fr. Elchaninov describes.

Why is this? One reason is that the knowledge of God has dimmed in the broader culture and with it the knowledge of the necessary virtues that allow a marriage to flourish. We need teachers to show us how to be married, how we need to think about marriage and how we husband and wife ought to treat each other so that those virtues can be recovered and applied. Indeed, the application of the instructions given to use by Drs. David and Mary Ford in the 26 Patterns below does just that. In treating our spouse in the ways the Fords instruct, virtue is rediscovered and restored and human flourishing can increase.

1. ***Do everything with love and prayer.***
2. Always see yourself and your spouse as ***partners*** on the road of life, the path to holiness, the journey to the Kingdom of Heaven.
3. ***Be faithful in morning and evening prayers together***, no matter how brief, as far as possible; and be faithful in attendance at church. Remember, husbands, that as the head of the family, the spiritual and material well-being of your home is ultimately your responsibility.
4. ***Conflict resolution***: find a way to resolve conflicts as soon as possible. Perhaps this will mean letting the one who feels the most strongly about a situation have the final say about it.
5. Ask *forgiveness* whenever something comes between you, no matter how small or large.
6. When your spouse is talking to you, ***really listen***, with full attentiveness. Demonstrate that you have really listened by responding accordingly *with your mind and your heart*.
7. ***Always keep your word*** to each other, and give a full explanation and apology whenever you're not able to.

8. ***Do your daily chores*** and other jobs around the house faithfully, even cheerfully, without having to be reminded, as a way of serving God through serving your family.

9. Have ***regular weekly family meetings/conferences*** to discuss issues of common concern; this is more important with children as they get older.

10. Consistently ***do little things*** that you know will please your spouse, even if it takes an extra effort.

11. Find out from your spouse ***the ways that he/she feels the most loved***, and consistently express your love for him/her accordingly, even if the ways your spouse feels most loved are different from the ways you feel most loved.

12. In addressing your spouse, frequently use ***a term of endearment***, as St. John Chrysostom advises.

13. Whenever your spouse does or says something that irritates you, quickly ask the LORD to help you ***love him/her more*** at that moment, and then talk it out! And ***maintain your inner peace***, no matter what!

14. As far as possible, ***fulfill requests made by your spouse*** as quickly and thoroughly as you can—***even if you think they are unreasonable***. This is a big part of ***marital asceticism***.

15. **Be fine with being interrupted** by your spouse or children. Accept it as **an opportunity** to die to your own self and to serve the ones you love. This is more marital asceticism.
16. Whenever you are away from home, stay in contact with your spouse as much as is reasonably appropriate.
17. Make sure to have **regular substantial times for just the two of you**, especially if you have children at home; having a “date night” every week or two is ideal.
18. Make sure to **remember your wedding anniversary**, and your spouse’s birthday and namesday, and celebrate accordingly.
19. **Tell your spouse you love him/her several times each day**, and give frequent hugs and kisses.
20. **Be quick to say “Thank you,”** even for mundane things.
21. **Be slow to criticize**, and never criticize your spouse with exaggeration or scorn; and never criticize him/her in front of someone else.
22. When your spouse is sick or hurt in any way, be **extra-tender and solicitous** towards him/her.

23. ***Don't wish your spouse were different***; try even to enjoy his or her foibles! If he/she is involved with some form of ungodliness, pray for him/her, and gently help him/her back towards Christ.
24. Truly ***take delight*** in all the wonderful things about your spouse; rejoice in ***the fascinating male/female complementarity*** that you are partaking of so intensely.
25. Have ***at least one icon in every room in your house***, as reminders of your calling ***to center every aspect of your marriage in Christ***, and to be in constant communion with the saints and angels.
26. Always remember ***the tremendous glory and honor of marriage***, and every day ask Christ and the Married Saints to help you and your spouse to fulfill this exalted calling in all the ways He desires for you to do so.

“Marriage is a revelation and a mystery. We see in it the complete transformation of a human being, the expansion of his personality, fresh vision, a new perception of life, and through it a rebirth into the world in a new plenitude.”

“Our modern individualism creates special difficulties in married life. To overcome them, a conscious effort on both sides is necessary, in order to build up the marriage and make it a ‘walking in the presence of God.’”

“Marriage, fleshly love, is a very great sacrament and mystery. Through it is accomplished the most real and at the same time the most mysterious of all possible forms of human relationship. And, qualitatively, marriage enables us to pass beyond all the normal rules of human relationship and to enter a region of the miraculous.”

“In the education of children, the most important thing is that they should see their parents leading an intense interior life.”

“In marriage the festive joy of the first day should last for the whole of life; every day should be a feast day; every day husband and wife should appear to each other as new, extraordinary beings. The only way of achieving this: let both deepen their spiritual life, and strive hard in the task of self-development.”

Quotes taken from Fr. Alexander Elchaninov's *The Diary of a Russian Priest* (SVS Press, 1982), pp. 45-47, 89-91