

An Unbelieving Spouse

My friend, is your heart aching right now over a spouse who is busy in immorality or won't go to church, is distant, doesn't seem to care about you? I urge you to focus not on your need, but on the Lord's bountiful provision for your life. I've got a secret for you. When your spouse sees you eating at the table of bounty in the Lord, he/she will begin to get hungry as well- be patient and keep the matter in prayer.

One may say, "That's all fine, but my spouse isn't a Christian" or "My spouse is dead in his/her faith." The beautiful thing about these truths is that they can be applied even when only one person in the marriage is walking in the Spirit. God will richly bless and use the one spouse that is faithfully pursuing Him to shine His truth regarding His love to the world even through the one spouse alone. This is why Paul strongly urged believers not to divorce their spouses, "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband."

God will shine His glory through the faithfulness of just one spouse, and use that spouse to proclaim to the world (especially his/her spouse) the glory of the unity and love of Jesus Christ- what an awesome thing God does in the midst of situations like these to those believers who walk in obedience and faithfulness to God's commands and pursue His will of total commitment to their spouse, regardless of what evils and lack of faith their spouse is involved in. Indeed, fulfilled in them are these promises, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." and "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

My precious struggling Christian friend, married to an unbelieving or straying spouse: God has given you a mighty honor- are you aware of it? He has given you a privilege as a minister of reconciliation to reclaim your spouse for Jesus Christ, snatching him/her from death as you pour out God's mercy and bear with his/her failings as you seek to introduce them or build them up in Jesus Christ! Consider the honor God has called you to: first to your spouse and then to the rest of the world. As the world sees the light of the glory of Christ shining in your life through your unconditional love toward your spouse, the aroma of your relationship with Christ will reach out to many. It isn't your power that will accomplish this, but the power of Jesus Christ working through your broken, humble, faith-filled spirit. "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." God will use the fragrance of your life- walk by faith, and in fervent prayer and fasting for

your spouse. Cast all your burdens on the Lord and serve and love your spouse in all humility, meekness and gentleness with great patience. Let no judgmental words proceed from your mouth, but instead let the Holy Spirit teach your spouse, and not yourself. Commit their sin in prayer to the Lord and watch the Holy Spirit do the convicting. If you point out their sin, you can be sure they will have a finger pointing back at you, but if you are silent, humble and gentle, committing their sin to the Lord in prayer, they will be left arguing with the Holy Spirit. No one ever wins an argument with God!

Peter told wives how to handle unbelieving husbands- it is a recipe that works: “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” Likewise when believing husbands are humbly, meekly, gently loving their wives without preaching and words, God will reveal to the wife through her husband the love of Jesus Christ.

Walk by faith in the confidence of these truths and pray fervently for your spouse and for yourself, that you would not develop any bitterness or anger, but would be full of the grace of God toward your spouse, knowing that He will meet your every need, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Bitterness in your heart is a warning light indicating that your heart is not right with God. Ask the Lord to reveal to you early when bitterness is beginning to creep in to your heart. If you have entered into bitterness, dear brother or sister, repent before the Lord, receive His forgiveness and renew your love and service to your spouse. “Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth,” is God’s challenge to a godly Christian, regardless of what his/her spouse is doing. Satan will do all he can to tempt your spirit to influence you toward bitterness, and then if he is successful, all sorts of other uncleanness will enter the heart- envy, covetousness, anger, rage and lust. Walk by faith in the covenant of marriage, for the unbelieving spouse is sanctified through you- take God at His word and trust in the work He will do in the midst of a faith-filled, prayerful, humble spouse! Recommit your heart to the permanency of the marriage bond and strive with a “one-flesh” attitude of winning your spouse over without words. Catch again the vision of these passages: you have been put in an awesome position to powerfully impact the world for Jesus Christ as you minister to your spouse. See this trial as a blessing and see the outcome through eyes of faith, a faith that prays, “Lord, You said in your Word that godly marriage is to be like this, and this, and this [go ahead, quote the scriptures back to the Lord of what His vision is for Christian marriage!] for Your children who are living according to Your truth. Lord, with all my heart I am pursuing Your truth in my life. I have humbled myself before You. I have repented of all sin and received Your forgiveness. I believe that You will do these things in due time in my marriage! In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

The Lord promises this to you in the midst of your trials in marriage- “The testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” God will use these trials in your life to sanctify you, not to hang you out to dry!

Jesus said, when asked about whether divorce was lawful by the Pharisees, who took divorce lightly, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.” Jesus pointed them back to Genesis two: the two shall become one flesh. “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” My friend, if there are any thoughts roaming around in your mind about a “plan B” if things don’t work out in marriage, hear the words of Jesus and guard your spirit! It is your hardened heart that is allowing these thoughts to fester into full blown daydreams. Repent now and cry out to God for help to live as a righteous spouse in purity of heart, before the bitterness of Satan grabs hold of your heart even more and destroys yet one more marriage and one more example of the unity of Jesus Christ with the Father and with the church, His bride!

“But what if my unbelieving spouse leaves- does that mean I’ve failed?” Of course not. You are not in control of your spouses’ response to your love. Paul wrote, “As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” (*Romans 12*) That includes your spouse. If you’ve done all you can and have repented of all sin, then take comfort in your relationship with God- that you are in His will . Paul wrote, “If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage [tied to marriage] in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (*1 Corinthians 7:15-16*) You are not responsible for your spouses’ behavior! They alone will give an account before God. If they seek divorce, gently remind them of the promise they made before God and others and you “till death do us part” and remind them continually that you truly do want them to come home and live with you and make peace. There must be no thought in your spirit of pushing them out of the marriage- if there is, your heart is not right with God- as the passage in Malachi says, “Guard your hearts” for God hates divorce, and He hates those who take joy in divorce or secretly connive ways to get their spouse to divorce so that they can be free (and so they can point the finger and say, “it was his/her fault, I did all I could.” God sees and knows the heart.

You’re responsible for what God has called you to as a wife or husband. Pursue the commands of God and leave the rest in His hands. It is out of your control. There is a great freedom that comes when we can say to God (repeatedly!), “Lord, I believe I’m doing to the best of my knowledge what you are calling me to. I believe I’ve repented of all sin and am pursuing being the godly husband/wife you’ve called me to be and your son/daughter that You’ve called me to be. I once again commit my husband/wife to You. I can’t change one hair on their head from black to white. You alone have the ability to work change in their lives as they begin to pursue You. I release them. I choose not to attempt to control them or their decisions. I give all worry and anxieties I have for them over to You. I will not seek to control this situation. I set them free of my expectations and simply choose to love them and serve them as You have called me to. In Jesus’ precious name, who died for me and loved me while I was yet a sinner (*Romans 5:8*), Amen!”

“But does being a good Christian husband/wife mean that I just roll over and play dead, giving in to all their demands?” Absolutely not! Jesus Christ is your Lord and Master. As

the Bible says, “Abhor what is evil and cling to what is good.” (*Romans 12:9*) Not for one minute are you to compromise your godly convictions, and at times you will need to make stands. Isn’t that what is called “tough love?” Consider what tough love means for a parent with a rebellious child. Consider what tough love means for a Christian employer who has an employee who is violating company policy. Even in the Lord’s love for us, He disciplines us (*Hebrews 12:5-12*). If your boss told you to lie for the company, would love demand that you do so? Even in the wonderful chapter of love, Paul reminds us that love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” (*1 Corinthians 13:6*) Love must discern when to make a stand for righteousness, and then stand firm in the Lord and in His truth. Love must also know the difference between a necessary stand and an unnecessary stand. Indeed, true love always has the interests of the beloved placed first, whether it is tough love or whether it is love that yields the right of way. Indeed, “love never fails” (*1 Corinthians 13:8*).

“But what if they are in love with another?” The Bible gives two acceptable conditions for divorce: abandonment, and adultery/fornication (*Matthew 19:9, 5:32*) One has an open door to file for divorce in either of these cases, but I urge you to consider, has God given you permission in your heart to file for a divorce? Is there no hope for reconciliation? Have all avenues for reconciliation been exhausted? Has your spouse completely abandoned the marriage for good? Is their heart completely hardened? If so, then you have God’s green light to cease the hostility of living together in bondage and bring peace through divorce instead of continuing in this hostile situation (*1 Corinthians 7:15*). However, in many cases, the wayward spouse is looking for an open door back into the marriage- your demonstration of love and commitment and willingness to forgive may be what he/she is looking for to return, repent and seek to make the marriage work. Seek out counsel in these situations, particularly the counsel of the Lord. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight.” (*Proverbs 3:5-6*)

God bless you, my Christian friend. These are likely the hardest days of your life. God is faithful, and He loves you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He has your best interests at heart and has allowed this trial into your life, knowing full well every detail before it happens, and knowing that His grace is sufficient in your time of weakness. Indeed, I have found that those who cling to the Lord in the midst of difficult marriages end up being so much stronger in their faith, their love, and their compassion for others as time goes on- it truly is a mystery how God uses the trials of life to purge us of the sin in our lives and make our faith like fine gold. Keep in mind that your suffering is well known by our Lord Jesus. It is a light suffering compared to what He went through, and compared to what many other saints have gone through throughout the ages. It seems so ironic, but Paul, a man who went through tremendous suffering, came to the point of realizing that all his suffering drew him closer to the Lord, and he came to say to the Lord, “Whatever you need to do to draw me closer, Lord Jesus, do that in me and through me- I just long to be closer to You.” Paul wrote, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” (*Philippians 3:10*) I have learned that when I submit to the Lord and accept His lot that He has given me in life, and rejoice in it and cooperate with Him in the midst of it, that

He fills me up with His resurrection power and His comfort in the midst of my learning how to die to self and all its desires.

One friend who is a marriage counselor told me, "Marriage was created for holiness." We have in our minds when we get married of how romantic and exciting it will be- and indeed, God intended marriage to be that way, but primarily marriage is a training ground for holiness- both in learning how to relate to our spouses per God's design, and also learning how to raise up children. Both require us to change and conform to the image of God as we cry out, "Lord, I can't, but You can!" This leads to our holiness. Take a look back on your marriage and see through eyes of faith that God can use even the worst of marriages to shine His light and bring growth to your life. Are you cooperating with God's plans to conform you into the image of His Son through your trials? I'm sure that marriage has brought you to a point of realizing, "I can't." When we get to the bottom and realize that "I can't," then we can look up to heaven and realize that He can! "God, who has called us into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful!" (*1 Corinthians 1:9*) "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (*Philippians 1:6*) "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." (*Jude 24-25*) He will do it- trust Him!

In Christ's Love,

Mike Porter
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References

(1 Corinthians 7:12-14)

(Matthew 5:9)

(2 Corinthians 5:17-20, cf. James 3:18)

(James 5:19-20)

(Jude 22-23, Matthew 5:7)

(Romans 15:1-2)

(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

(2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

(James 5:13-18)

(1 Peter 5:7)

(Ephesians 4:2-6, James 4:6,10, 1 Peter 5:6)

(2 Corinthians 10:1, Matthew 5:5)

(Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 3:4, 1 Timothy 3:2-3, Ephesians 4:2, Matthew 11:29))

(James 5:7-11)

(1 Peter 3:1, James 4:11-12, Matthew 7:1-5)

(John 16:8)

(1 Peter 3:1-2)

(Hebrews 12:15)

(1 John 1:9)

(Revelation 2:4)

(Malachi 2:15)

(James 1:3-4)

(Matthew 19:8)

(Matthew 19:6, see also 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, Hosea 1:2-11, 2:13-3:5, 8:8-14, 11:1-11, 14:1-9)

(Romans 12:1-2)