

# Give Each Other Grace

I've seen couples who supposedly still love each other but nonetheless attribute some negative motivation to what their spouse is doing or saying to them. It becomes an automatic response for them and usually follows a pattern that was set in motion in childhood, when self-protection required them to prepare for the worst from a parent.

When this protective pattern is carried over into marriage, the spouse will have no rational reason for assuming the worst. It just seems to come naturally.

Few things put a bigger damper on expressing love than for your spouse to misunderstand your motivation for what you are doing or saying. By contrast, few things are more powerful in keeping love alive than showing grace and forgiveness to your spouse.

The Balswicks write: "As agents of grace, each spouse participates in ... talking and listening, giving and receiving, honoring differences and affirming giftedness, forgiving and being forgiven. The far-reaching effects of [this] culminate in a deeply satisfying relationship."

When a couple assign negative motivations to each other, the complaint often follows that the two spouses aren't compatible. Whenever a husband and wife say this to me, I always agree—but add that every couple is incompatible. The incompatibility is universal simply because one spouse is male and one is female.

The differences between male and female are enough to make every marriage an incompatible relationship. When you add to it personality and family differences and the couple's differing expectations, you wonder sometimes how any marital relationship succeeds.

When we don't give each other grace, especially for our incompatibilities, we eventually make those things even greater. When both spouses accept each other's differences with loving grace, their marriage experience is better.

In our marriage, we've developed compatibility where there had been incompatibility. When we embraced each other's differences, we experienced grace and love that has fueled our desire to keep our love for each other alive.

Grace is a gift we give each other. It is never earned. I can't say, "I would give you more grace if only you would ... ." Giving grace to your spouse includes the ability to forgive when he or she has failed you in some way.

As followers of Christ, we are encouraged to "forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, NKJV). How did God forgive us? He did so freely without any expectation of us except that we accept His forgiveness. We can't earn or buy God's forgiveness. Like grace, it is His gift to us.

Think what will happen in a marriage when the partners freely offer forgiveness to each other, and act and believe that their spouse's motives and intentions are for the best, even when it doesn't seem that way.

That's what it means to give each other the gift of grace.

These principles are the essential ingredients of a healthy and fulfilling relationship. They are foundational to keeping love alive in marriage. We trust you will be able to apply them to your unique circumstances and that they will enrich your lives as you and your spouse journey together.

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**David Stoop, Ph.D., and Jan Stoop, Ph.D.,** *lead seminars and marriage retreats nationally and internationally. More tips to*

*keeping the love fires burning in marriage are available in their book Better Than Ever: Seven Secrets to a Great Marriage. Or visit them online at .*

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