

3 Ways to Make Sure You Don't Settle for a Miserable Marriage

Marriage affects your well-being. If your relationship is healthy you are happier, healthier and generally live a longer more productive life. If your relationship is unhealthy, your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being are at risk. The stakes are too high to settle for a miserable marriage.

That doesn't mean you can "make" your marriage happy. Trying to manipulate your spouse to get what you need or want is guaranteed to end badly. God did not promise human beings a happy marriage.

In fact marriage is not about making you happy! As a reflection of the relationship God desires to have with each of us, *marriage is about learning to love well.*

When your marriage is not happy, it's easy to settle. I can't get my spouse to do what I need. I'll either have to leave, or be satisfied with misery.

You don't have to settle. There are things you can learn that will make a difference.

1. Learn to feed yourself.

At least 90% of the people who contact me about their marriage say something like, "How can I get my spouse to ...? If they would only do ..., I would be happy."

That perspective will disappoint you every time. Yes, your spouse affects you—in many ways. But you don't get to choose for him/her; you only get to choose your own thoughts, words and behaviors.

You get to choose the mental/emotional/spiritual nourishment you feed yourself, just as you get to choose your physical food. See yourself as responsible for getting what you need. Learn to feed yourself!

That includes valuing the good parts of what your spouse brings to the relationship and inviting more connection in those areas. It also includes other uplifting positive relationships (not sexual!), inspiring growth-producing media, time with God and whatever else fills you up.

The more your soul is nourished, the more you will have to bring to your marriage and the more clearly you will be able to look at and address the very real challenges that come.

2. Learn the skills you need.

Not one of us comes to marriage knowing what we need to know. Immature, self-centered, proud, afraid—truthfully, what words would you have used to describe yourself?

And when you get married, you're expected to know things such as healthy communication, intimacy (physically, emotionally, spiritually), handling conflict and more. Or at least learn those things quickly. Is it any wonder so many marriages struggle?

A great many things that make marriage work can be learned. You can learn to communicate. You can learn how to have difficult conversations. You can learn how to invite intimacy, show respect, and give and receive support. You can grow to become the kind of person God needs you to be to your spouse in this season.

3. Learn to love well.

Since the bottom line of marriage is learning to love well, this is the most important thing of all to learn.

That implies that you and I don't go into marriage knowing how

to love well. You may have seen and experienced ways of relating that pretended to be love, but were really control or manipulation or subservience. You may have been wounded such that trying to come closer together seems to further hurt both you and your spouse. You may instinctively be looking for something from your spouse that they are unable to provide.

So yes, learn to love well. It takes learning.

Love does not mean weakness, or accepting abuse or other destructive behavior. Love is able to set difficult boundaries. Love has difficult conversations and insists on telling the truth. Love takes time to get filled up so you have something to give.

Learning to love well doesn't come easily. Marriage is guaranteed to uncover both your own spines or wounds, and those of your spouse. Working on your relationship can allow your spines to become smoothed and your wounds to become healed.

Don't Settle for a Miserable Marriage

Learning these things will not guarantee marital bliss. But it's the only chance you have to make things better.

And that's what God wants for you too. {eo}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

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