

5 Joy-Filled Tactics to Resuscitate Your Marriage

Wouldn't you love a new marriage for 2017?

Have you been making some New Year's resolutions? Or perhaps you gave that up long ago, believing that doing so just sets you up for failure and disappointment.

Either way, we're at the beginning of a new year. Remember that God loves to do new things—even in your marriage. “See, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not be aware of it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert” (Is. 43:19).

In addition to losing 20 pounds and being more consistent with reading your Bible, perhaps you've also decided to work on your relationship in this new year. Perhaps you'd like to:

- Be more loving and respectful to your husband
- Stop nagging and complaining so much
- Be the submissive wife the Bible says you should be
- Pray for your husband more regularly

“Woah! Stop right there! You've just hit my red-button issues. You had me for a moment, but I'm not going to read any further!”

I get it! Being “submissive” has often come to mean getting stepped on and abused. “No nagging” sounds like letting him get away with whatever he wants. Praying more feels like spiritualizing something that falls apart the moment your needs aren't getting met.

Take a deep breath, girlfriend. This is not the older “be nice” kind of religious marriage advice. Nor is it the newer “be yourself” message many women have tried and find less than satisfying in the end.

I believe God has a new marriage waiting for you. Remember, He loves creating new things!

You do want a new marriage, don't you? If your marriage is full of misery, wouldn't you welcome a "reset" button and an infusion of love and real intimacy? If your marriage is generally healthy, wouldn't you enjoy a whole new level of security and fulfillment in your relationship?

Let me suggest five steps you can take toward experiencing the kind of marriage you most desire—a marriage that's characterized by love, intimacy, safety and growth.

That's the kind of new marriage that God wants for you too.

5 Steps to a New Marriage

1. Unravel Destructive Patterns in Your Relationship

How do you respond when your husband does something that hurts you? Or when you face problems over money? Or sex? Or parenting?

Do you nag and complain? Talk negatively behind his back? Or bottle it up inside?

To use Dr. Phil's question, "How's that been working for you?"

The patterns that naturally develop in our relationships may or may not be healthy.

The first step in experiencing a new marriage is looking honestly at what is or is not healthy in your current relationship.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How do (or don't) you communicate?
- How do you handle conflict?

- How do you handle money?
- How do you handle intimacy and sex?

Whatever the patterns are, look at them honestly.

And then decide which you would like to be different in 2017.

2. Deal With Anxiety as you Develop New Patterns

Have you imagined a new behavior pattern you'd like to develop in your marriage?

Your brain is almost certain to complain loudly when you try to behave in a new way. You may feel very uncomfortable as you begin to practice new ways of interacting.

But that's a good thing! In one study, 75 percent of people who made important improvements in their lives experienced significant anxiety in the process. Instead of pulling back, see anxiety as providing the emotional fuel you need to persist in developing new patterns.

Those less-than-helpful patterns didn't develop overnight, and it will take time to develop new ones.

See small failures as an opportunity to learn what works and what doesn't. Sometimes enlisting others to help—such as a “mother in the Lord,” a wise friend or a knowledgeable counselor—can help you work this through.

3. Stay Alert to the Enemy's Attacks on Your Marriage

Your marriage is under attack! And the enemy of your marriage is not your husband, regardless of how irresponsible or inconsiderate he may be.

You may know that intellectually. But when you're facing marriage misery it's easy to see your spouse as the enemy.

I believe Satan attacks marriages with a special hatred because he knows:

- How much pain he can inflict on God's children through disrupting marriages.
- How much damage a healthy marriage can do to his kingdom of darkness.

You can fight for your marriage this year!

You do that by praying for your marriage daily. Pray for yourself, for your spouse and for your union together.

And then take action on your prayers. Learn what healthy forgiveness is all about. Invest in friendship together. Talk about spiritual things together. Each action you take in fighting for your marriage is demonstrating that you will not allow the enemy to win! That's true spiritual warfare.

4. Bring Your Best Self to Your Relationship

Marriage is not primarily about your happiness. It's about learning to love well.

Loving well opens your heart to joy and intimacy, but it takes a consistent investment of time and energy. Sometimes loving well includes suffering. It always includes becoming increasingly mature.

Learning to love well includes taking care of yourself in a way that allows you to have something to give.

If you want to bring your best self to your marriage, you will need to get filled up again regularly.

Learn to Feed Yourself. Take some time to consider what nourishes your soul, and then find ways to do more of that. That may include time outdoors in God's green earth, reading a good book, time with positive people, playing or creating music or art or time alone simply thinking. God makes nourishment available; it's up to you to find it and take it into your being.

Look to God for what only He can provide. Even in the best marriage, spouses cannot give each other everything they need. Choose to enter God's presence regularly. Invest regularly in your relationship with Jesus, and you will have much more to bring to your marriage.

5. Step Forward Into the New Marriage God Has for You

When God created you, He built into you the ability to nurture life. That goes far beyond giving birth to physical children. It means nurturing life in other people, in His church, in the world—and in your marriage!

And with that ability comes responsibility.

Your husband is always responsible for his own behavior. But it's almost crazy empowering when you realize the degree to which offering or withholding the gift God put within you can minister either life or death to your marriage.

Your marriage has a purpose. As awesome as God's purpose is for you as an individual woman, there is something especially awesome about what He can do through you as a couple.

I encourage you to sit in God's presence for a time and ask Him to show you a piece of His purpose for your marriage.

Then take your husband's hand (physically and spiritually), and joyously step forward into the next dimension of the new marriage God has for you. {eoa}

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