

Are You Wounding or Healing Your Spouse?

You're probably doing both. Two sinners getting married is a setup for pain—and for transformation. It's likely you're getting both wounded and healed yourself, perhaps more of one than the other. But that's for another day. For now, what affect are you having on your husband or wife? How are you bringing yourself to the marriage? Are you wounding or healing your spouse?

We all come to this moment in life with strengths and weaknesses, helpful parts and hurtful parts, attractive aspects and destructive aspects. Your spouse couldn't marry a perfect person even if they wanted to; there aren't any of those available!

Hear me carefully now; you are not responsible for healing your spouse. Yes, your spouse needs healing, and Jesus is the only one who is the healer. How your spouse chooses to embrace that healing process will be the determining factor for them.

But one of God's big ideas about marriage is that it's the place where healing can happen. His design for marriage is that it be the place where you and your spouse can each be known deeply and intimately, warts and glory and all. And when the person who knows you best loves you anyway, healing happens.

Yet in so many marriages, there is much more wounding than healing going on. Your needs and personality and brokenness collide with those of your spouse. Your prickly immature sinful natures often create death by a thousand cut and/or deep bleeding gashes in each other.

How can you move away from wounding and toward healing your spouse?

Ways You Wound Your Spouse

Stop looking at how your spouse may be wounding you for a moment. Take an honest look at your own behavior, and see whether you are doing any of these things in your marriage.

Withholding Unconditional Love: Men and women both need unconditional love first and most. Withholding love, or making love conditional on their behavior, is perhaps the most destructive way you can wound your spouse. Unconditional love does not mean you must accept or like everything your spouse does, and this has nothing to do with trust. Conditional love usually looks something like, "I'll withhold love from you unless you do what I want, unless you make me feel good." When you see yourself doing that, stop!

Focusing on What's Wrong: Belittling, criticizing, blaming or shaming your spouse will wound them deeply. If your spouse senses they must walk on eggshells around you, or that they can never be good enough for you, that needs to change. Especially damaging can be negative critical remarks in public about your spouse. If you need some support or feedback about a marriage problem, get that help from a few people in private. Don't air your dirty laundry publicly to those who cannot help.

Making it All About You: Marriage is not primarily about making you happy, getting your needs met, or even being sexually fulfilled. Marriage only works when both parties make it primarily about loving each other well. Your spouse may or may not be doing that right now, but that's no excuse for you. Intentionally and deeply seek God to understand who He needs you to be to your spouse in this season. Most of your focus needs to be on what you can give rather than what you can get out of your marriage.

Ways You Heal Your Spouse

There are many ways you can cooperate with how God is seeking

to heal your spouse. Here are a few of those ways.

Starting and Ending with Love: Whatever problem comes along, make love the bookends and the foundation of whatever you do. If you need to have a difficult conversation, begin by affirming your love and your desire to make the relationship stronger. If you need to call out bad behavior (see the next item), do the same. Learn your spouse's love language, and speak it to them extravagantly. Remember that love is a commitment, an action, and not primarily a feeling.

Calling Out Bad Behavior: This is a dangerous thing to talk about here. You cannot play Junior Holy Spirit in your spouse's life; that job is already taken! Your spouse does not need you to be a parent or a cop. But reflecting back to your spouse how their angry or defensive communication, demanding or withholding of intimacy, addiction or selfishness is causing them and you serious pain may be a role God needs you to play. It takes courage and moment-by-moment prayer to do this anywhere close to helpfully.

Bring Your Best Self: Your own character growth is important in healing your spouse. How God is changing you can both inspire and encourage your spouse in the same vein. It's also important to intentionally and regularly feed yourself, taking in the emotional/spiritual nourishment you need, so that you have resilience and substance to bring to your marriage. This also includes seeking your own healing where needed, so that you are able to bring your best self to your spouse.

Supporting Their Transformation: God has your spouse on a journey, and He is calling you to be His partner in helping your spouse get there. This is more about who God wants your spouse to become than who you want them to be. Instead of trying to make your spouse into your own image, look for how God is working in their life. Intentionally affirm and support what God is doing in them, and celebrate that.

May you know the joy that comes from walking through tough stuff together as a couple and being an important tool in the healing God wants to bring to your spouse.

Your Turn: *How is your spouse experiencing you? Are you bringing your best self to your marriage? Is God encouraging you to do anything differently? Leave a comment below. {eoa}*

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