

Battle Strategies to Win the War on Your Marriage

Most likely your spouse has disappointed you in the past—and will disappoint you in the future. That's life.

You have probably caused some disappointment to your spouse also. Once you accept this, you will no longer respond to pain as a personal affront. This inherent conflict in marriage is part of the process I call *the war of love*.

Being married, you are automatically engaged in this war of love. That doesn't mean that your spouse is the enemy and that you are on the side of justice. No, the war is not about right or wrong—it's about being Christlike and seeking the truth as an opportunity to grow.

You see, you must understand this powerful biblical principle: *if you love, love never fails*. (See 1 Cor. 13:8.) I like the fact that love never fails, even though I know I can fail. This knowledge assures me that if I can love, I will learn to fail less and less and will someday win the war of love.

Love is the cornerstone of marriage. The one who loves wins the war. There is no doubt that some days you will find yourself in a battle to love when you feel hurt, misunderstood, tired or just want to lash out at your spouse.

But because of Christ and your love for Him and the love you have for your spouse, you have a much better likelihood of winning than if you ignore the problematic issues in your marriage and attempt to keep love ethereal and intangible. I've given you tools for wrapping your hands around your marriage and moving it out of the war of love.

Prepare Your Battle Strategies

There are some battle strategies you can use to be successful in your journey through the love agreements.

One battle strategy is called a *blitzkrieg*, which is a simple, powerful and very effective technique of war. The blitzkrieg technique puts all military forces against one front at a time like a concentrated laser beaming in one direction, moving through the land like an arm sweeping across a table.

Take all your effort and focus it on one thing. Suppose you are working on being kinder in the way you speak or consider your spouse. Make a plan on how to implement your kindness based on what you've learned about your spouse over the years. Choose one element of that plan and carry it out, measuring your progress. Stay consistent in that one element of kindness until you think you have achieved your goal.

Then take on another goal. Measure that goal, and stay in blitzkrieg mode until you have achieved each goal you set for yourself.

Now you are going to see some real results in your war of love. Keep a log of your progress so that you can see proof that you are actually much kinder today than you were weeks or months ago. Your written notes demonstrate your strategies and the victories you have won.

You are not attacking all fronts at all times but have isolated your efforts to one front at a time. As you secure an area like kindness and hold that ground successfully for a time, you can move on to the next goal.

In this way you have the practice, discipline, focus and determination you need to take another part of your territory in the war of love.

Due to changing your behavior from your old trench tactics, your spouse is forced to face a growth opportunity. There may be times when he or she faces this new opportunity graciously.

But at other times, your change may create real conflict.

For example, suppose in your marriage you previously didn't serve your spouse well by doing things around the house. Your lack of service in this area has created a "trench tactic" system, causing your spouse to harbor resentment. You also created an anger-producing situation for your spouse each time the subject of your lack of helpfulness comes up. The shame that would produce in you would distract you from whatever issue you were trying to discuss.

However, with your blitzkrieg maneuver, you have been serving your spouse consistently for several months. Now you are winning the war of love. Your spouse's counterattack of trying to shame and distract you is no longer effective. Obviously, it is no longer true that you are not helpful. As a result, your spouse now has an opportunity to grow out of the resentment and anger you formerly caused.

The changes that you make probably will cause some conflict—battle skirmishes. Conflict is inevitable and guaranteed in a marriage relationship if you are actively and intentionally changing from your former "trench tactics" to the more effective "blitzkrieg tactics." When conflict comes, patiently stay consistent. Your consistency is crucial for you to ultimately win the war of love.

Your consistency will bring results. In Galatians 6:9 (NIV), we read, "Let us not become weary in *doing good*, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (emphasis added).

I can't think of anything better than trying to love your spouse more than before. Like a harvest, there is a season of planting and then a season of harvest—and harvest takes time and nurturing.

So, be patient as you go through the war of love.

Keep It Real

You have embarked upon a pathway for new growth. You will not be perfect on this road of growth. *Stay real, and avoid the “always” and “never” traps.* Neither you nor I is capable of always being loving or perfect and never being imperfect. This is a growth process.

There will be ups and downs in your growth process. Why do I say this? Because you will need to be patient with yourself as you grow. Some days you will be very successful, and you will feel great. Other days in the war of love, you might feel like a failure. You may have tried to be patient and kind or to serve, and you just failed. That's life, and it will probably happen again.

Don't worry about losing some of the *battles* in the war of love—your goal is to *win the war*! It's important that you maintain your resolve to continue. You'll have the temptation to give up, just as Jesus did.

One area of concern that could cause you to become weary and discouraged is when you start to get frustrated because your spouse is not appreciating all the changes you are implementing. After all, you are really working hard, and you start to feel that even if your spouse is not going to change, he or she should at least notice that you are making such a big effort.

This is a tricky trap. As soon as your motivation moves from pleasing Jesus and trying to be more like Him to needing appreciation from your spouse, you can—and probably will—get disappointed, hurt and discouraged.

I'm sure that somewhere along the path of false accusations, beatings and crucifixion, Jesus might have been tempted to say, “That's enough!” Yet He never lost sight of His long-term goal: “the joy set before him,” which was for our salvation. He continued in the battle until He won the war.

I want to encourage you to stay in the war of love because it is worth winning. {eo}

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