

Dealing With the 6 Stages of Grief in a Servant Marriage

The servant marriage is one of the most amazing and excellent places to be in life. Unfortunately, there are too many Christians who will not experience the servant marriage because of various issues.

One of the things that can hold you back from a servant marriage is grief. Grief can come as a result of realizing our responsibility to serve our spouse. When we have been living a selfish lifestyle prior to marriage, becoming a servant can be a sad experience.

The various stages of grief can exacerbate the distance between spouses. This is why I think it is so important to know the different stages and take the appropriate steps to avoid the repercussions it can have on a marriage.

As a counselor, I have helped many people grieve many different events or realities in their lives. In grief counseling, the model for grief comes from Kübler Ross, who studied people dying. She identified the grief stage as: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and acceptance.

1. The very first stage of grief is shock. Shock is kind of a visceral feeling throughout one's body. When you genuinely hold tightly to an idea and a truth comes against that idea, you can experience shock. It can feel like disconnection or pain or numbness, depending on the intensity of what you are grieving.

2. The next stage is denial. This is a challenging stage. Some people, even after hearing a truth, can stay in denial about it indefinitely. At the core of you, you are aware that something is true, but you keep pushing against it because it might require you to change, grow or admit you were wrong.

Sadly, usually the last person to know they are in denial is the person in denial.

3. Anger is the next stage of grief. I find that people who are losing something can get angry, be it power, control, money or just their emotional footing as they integrate a new idea. Sometimes these people get angry when I say something at a conference like, "Pornography is biblically unacceptable." As they grieve the loss of this medication in their life and stop using it, they not only get angry with the message but the messenger as well.

4. Bargaining is a challenging stage of grief. It wants you to just make the pain go away. Bargaining basically says, "If this had not happened, then that would not have happened," or "If this is not true, then that is not true." Bargaining is another stage that can go on for years. The soul is still trying to process the pain of a significant loss.

Bargaining can look like blame or obsession over a detail of what occurred. For example, a man who has an accident might say that if the roads had not been so wet he would have avoided the accident, when in fact, he was driving under the influence of alcohol. Some people pick up causes in their bargain stage, which is also a way to process the loss of someone or something.

5. Sadness is the next to last stage of grief. You just feel down about the reality you are grieving. This stage is less about fighting grief and more about moving you into acknowledging the new reality.

6. Acceptance is the final stage of grief. Getting to acceptance is sometimes a very long process. Depending on the painfulness of the reality or the resistance of the person to accept the reality, acceptance may be a short or long process.

Why am I talking about grief? Accepting your role as a servant can go against your current beliefs culturally and

emotionally. Years of wrong behaviors or beliefs might well be challenged in you as you 100% accept your role as the servant of your spouse.

I find that those with strong entitlement dispositions, and men from cultures that promote men being served, tend to grieve the hardest. The denial that they are to serve can go on indefinitely, keeping them stuck and more self-serving than is healthy. The fact that I would even suggest that they are called by God to serve someone else can really get some men and women very angry. Some resist service because of abuse or having poor boundaries in the past, so anger can arise there as well.

Bargaining can include, "I'll serve when they start serving me." One could feel sadness that life as one once knew it could be over.

Acceptance is a mixed bag. Some accept their role in marriage as a servant with an attitude of "I have to." This type of acceptance makes every opportunity to serve a building of resentment for their calling. Those who accept their role as a servant with an "I get to" attitude see opportunities to serve their spouse without a whole lot of effort and resentment.

Serving is our spiritual bodybuilding. Marriage is our gym, and our home and family provide the workout. For decades they build us stronger to become more patient, kind, loving, less able to be offended, more forgiving, and I might say, just better believers in Jesus Christ.

Serving is not a chore; it is a lifestyle of freedom. I am not talking about being abused by a tyrant, whether male or female. If that is occurring in your marriage, talk to your pastor or counselor and serve your spouse by getting him or her the help he or she needs!

Every tyrant I have met is like a bully in a schoolyard. They are abuse victims who are afraid of intimacy, have addictions

or secrets, or just cannot be authentic, so they reject themselves and control others to limit being known or hurt.

I would not want any man or woman to be taken advantage of or abused. This teaching is to serve by choice, not by command or due to control. Our service comes from love, not fear. I volunteer daily to serve Lisa and my family. Honestly, some days I am better at it than others. Just as in any sport, you have awesome days and less-than-awesome days.

When the heart of a servant beats in you and you are led by the Holy Spirit, marriage can be fun and enjoyable.

Take today for example. I flew in to speak at a conference last night at 11 p.m., so I did not get to bed until around 12:30 a.m. I had to present our intimacy marriage conference at 8:15 a.m.

I had to eat a quick breakfast before teaching several hours that day. During lunch, I checked my phone and saw I had received a very nice text from my bride. That little act of service made my day. The fact that she considered my circumstances meant a lot to me. {eoa}

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