

Fight for Your Dehydrated Marriage With These 7 Insightful Strategies

You try. You really do. But your spouse seems to show no interest. You want your relationship to improve, and occasionally your spouse promises to do better. Then you're frustrated when nothing changes. What can you do when it seems as though your spouse doesn't care about your marriage?

Marriage takes two. That means your spouse gets a vote—just as big a vote as you do. But that doesn't mean you're powerless.

You've learned by now that you can't change your spouse. But you can certainly influence them. And regardless of what your spouse does or doesn't do, there are things you can do to live well yourself and to move your marriage in a healthier stronger direction.

Ask yourself these questions.

How do your attempts to improve your marriage appear to your spouse?

You believe your ideas, suggestions and efforts would make things better if only your spouse would go along. But your spouse may see things very differently.

- You believe your comments help your relationship by sharing your feelings—negative as well as positive. Your spouse experiences your comments as belittling and critical.
- You believe your requests for time or communication would help the intimacy between you. Your spouse feels overwhelmed and controlled.
- You see your corrections and suggestions as trying to

help. Your spouse feels like nothing they do or say can be good enough.

- You believe the relationship would improve if your spouse would do what you ask. Your spouse feels you don't understand or value their feelings, needs, personality and desires.

The point is not who's right or wrong. Every relationship is unique. But try looking at your attempts to "improve" your marriage through your spouse's eyes.

Are you noticing and encouraging the good things in your spouse?

Your spouse may be making attempts to improve, to care, to show you love. Are you noticing them? How are you responding to those attempts? Are you making fun of your spouse's attempts, criticizing his/her failures along the way and holding them to an impossible standard? Or are you being their biggest cheerleader, cherishing and respecting who your spouse is and any way they do invest in your relationship?

This is not to minimize or ignore serious dysfunction, violence or evil. But if you become like a whack-a-mole every time your spouse sticks their head up, can you blame them for retreating? How safe is your spouse around you? Your spouse may not show that they care in the same way you do. Welcome, treasure and value the ways your spouse does show they care.

Most men thrive when their wives demonstrate honor and respect and are their biggest fan. Most women flourish when their husbands show them sacrificial love and treasure who they are as an individual. Look for what is good in your spouse, and you'll likely get more of it.

Is your own heart open?

Forgiveness and trust are big issues in a troubled marriage. If you are holding on to bitterness the poison in your own

heart will keep your spouse at a distance and block any improvement in the relationship. Intimacy and love cannot grow when your heart is closed. The only way to get to an open heart is on your knees before God.

Forgiveness in marriage is absolutely necessary, but it's not easy. Forgiveness does not say everything is OK; it's not OK. That's why forgiveness is the only possible way to move forward. Forgiveness means giving up your right to still be hurt as a result of your spouse's behavior or to hold it over them, and giving up your right to exact revenge.

Forgiveness does not necessarily mean that trust has been restored. Once broken, rebuilding trust takes a long time, and it takes both partners' investment. It takes lots of communication, an open heart and God's intervention.

Are you continuing to grow and mature yourself?

Your own well-being does not have to be dependent on your spouse's degree of caring. Yes, you have needs. Some of them your spouse can meet; some of them they cannot. Learn to feed yourself. Spend time with other healthy believers. Take in some nourishing mental/spiritual food daily, such as books, time in nature, inspiring media and so forth. And spend time in God's presence; let Him fill your heart in a deeper way than your spouse ever could.

You have the choice to be happy. Your spouse cannot make you feel any certain way. Determine that you will own your thoughts and feelings. If you need some help, get it. And most of all, make certain your relationship with God is growing. You are not saved as a couple; your relationship with God is just between you and Him. Take care of that first and most importantly.

Whom does God need you to be in your marriage right now?

Marriages and human beings go through seasons. There's a

specific role God has for you right now, in this season, in your marriage. Find out what that is, and focus there.

Perhaps God needs you to:

- Support your spouse through a season of illness, depression or other serious challenge.
- Be an example of joy, hope, healing, growth and love that invites your spouse to follow.
- Care enough to confront bad behavior from a position of love.
- Set healthy boundaries.
- Forgive what seems unforgiveable.
- Significantly change areas of your own behavior, attitude, communication or character as it relates to your relationship with your spouse.
- Stay on your knees.

Don't underestimate the value and power of a praying spouse. God may use you to be the vehicle through which your spouse and your marriage is healed. You give Him that chance when you let Him do what He wants to do in you.

You cannot force your spouse to care. But you can notice where they do care and become the kind of spouse they want to care about.

Your turn: How have you responded when your spouse seems not to care? How can you respond in a healthier way? Leave a comment below.

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