

Practicing This in Your Marriage Can Bring Miraculous Transformation

Throughout 20 years of marriage, Chuck and I have faced many tough times together. Often, I have been the one to give in or sacrifice. Several times I have left friends and family – even uprooting my business – because of his job moves.

At times I've been tired. At times I've pouted. At times I've been tempted to build a case, persuading my girlfriends to agree that I am doing more and it truly isn't fair. Many times I've cried out to God, "I'm working harder and making all the changes. It's just not fair!"

But throughout the years I have also learned a lot about what love – God's kind of extravagant love – in marriage really means. And I've seen God use extravagant love to transform me, my husband and our marriage.

Is your marriage in a tough place? Do you feel you contribute more to the relationship than your spouse? Do you find yourself crying out, "It's not fair?" It's time to stop.

Instead of demanding fairness, allow God to transform your marriage. Here are four steps you can take toward building a healthier relationship.

Love Extravagantly

God's extravagant approach to love really does work. We've made Ephesians 5:1-2 our marriage mission statement: "Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that" (MSG).

Over the years many people have seen me love Chuck extravagantly and commented on my extra efforts, some even critically. It didn't appear that he reciprocated. And for a long time, he didn't. He was never mean or abusive; he was always thankful. But he was struggling with his own issues. Ultimately, God spoke to him, and Chuck has learned to put into action the extravagant love principle. As a result of choosing God's model of love, not only have our attitudes improved, so has our marriage.

Take the Focus Off Yourself

The world's model for marriage tells us to look out for "number one," insisting we should be happy – and if we're not, we should leave. As a result, many unhappy people are making their happiness someone else's responsibility.

God's plan, on the other hand, appears to be a paradox: Do what will make the other person happy, and you will be happier. It doesn't seem to make sense, but I know from experience it does work.

The phrase "it's not fair" is found nowhere in the Bible. God doesn't promise life will be fair; that's not His model. And clinging to the need for fairness only brings grief.

Fortunately for humanity, fairness is a myth. Romans 5:8 says that even though our sins condemn us and disqualify us from God's love, God loves us anyway and gave His Son to save us.

Adjust Your Attitude

Each time I've found myself mentally stomping my foot, claiming, "It's not fair," I've been miserable. Yet when I'm willing to step back and allow the Holy Spirit to adjust my attitude, I can take the focus off myself and truly love Chuck extravagantly, the way God loves. When I consider what is best for him and for our marriage – not what is best for me – my misery fades. I find myself looking back, wondering, "What was

I so unhappy about?"

Every time you hear the words "It's not fair!" in your head, let them be like a red flag, warning that you have taken your focus off God's will and have bought into the world's model—placing yourself and your needs above what is best for your spouse and your marriage.*

Pray for the Holy Spirit to adjust your attitude and to help you love your spouse extravagantly. You'll find this initial surrender will bring almost immediate rewards. It doesn't promise your spouse will change, but you can be sure your attitude will.

Find a Support System

Feeling you are the only one who gives can leave you emotionally drained. When anyone expects his or her spouse to meet every need, it creates a tremendous demand one person cannot fill. That's why godly friends are so important. Friends can get you all stirred up, confirming "it's not fair," or they can pray for you and lift you up, strengthening you when you feel as though you don't have the strength to go on.

Surround yourself with friends who support you and agree with the concept of putting marriage first.

I've found that a support system that embraces the godly model helps relieve burdens instead of making them heavier. For more than a year and a half, two friends and I have met together to pray for our husbands in what we call "The Praying Wives Club." Month by month we've seen amazing changes in both our attitudes and our circumstances. While the results have been nothing short of miraculous, we still face struggles. None of the changes have come overnight. They've begun with our individual willingness to seek the best for our marriages, to honor God by yielding in Christ-like ways, and to let ourselves and our marriages grow, whatever it costs.

Gather a few friends and create your own praying wives (or husbands) club. Meet on a regular basis to share problems and progress and, most importantly, to pray for your spouses and yourselves.

Every marriage is a relationship between two flawed individuals, so no marriage will be without difficulties. But when you love your spouse with God's kind of extravagant love, you will see transformation resulting in a better outlook in the short term and a better marriage in the long term.

**Note: This is not referring to abusive situations where violence or inappropriate behavior is taking place; it simply addresses the daily annoyances as mentioned in this article.*
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