

Shall We Dance?

You married an amazing person but has your Woman of the Year become a wall flower, frozen by fear? If her fire has cooled and her pizzazz has fizzled, then take her in your arms and lead her to dance again.

Maybe you wonder where she went—that woman you fell in love with so deeply that you asked her to marry you. Remember her? The one with lots of energy. The adventure girl who inspired you with her enthusiasm. The woman who lit up the room just by showing up. The passionate, alive, beautiful person who stole your heart and made you want to be a better man.

Maybe it's been years since you've felt like you've seen that woman. Maybe today you live with a version of her that reminds you there is more to that person than you're experiencing now.

Maybe you didn't realize when it happened, but at some point during your marriage, the woman you love became comfortable standing in the background, perhaps even sitting on the sidelines. She became a wallflower, no longer exuding passion, enthusiasm and hope for the future.

I was that woman once—a passionate, enthusiastic wife who turned into a grown woman living in a daze. I kind of knew I was dead to life because when I saw other people who looked like they were living, I didn't believe I could ever be alive again. In the midst of the ups and downs of marriage, taking care of the kids, difficult circumstances and day after day of disappointment, it didn't seem possible.

After those years all had run together, I wasn't sure I even wanted a real life anymore—a life with passion, one in which you are able to feel and respond to people and events. I had become the “unperson”—neutral, safe, asleep, numb, vanilla,

harmless. And I was living an “unlife”—going through the motions, surviving, reacting, smiling.

Somewhere along the way, I had given up. For a million reasons and because it seemed like the easiest way out, I had become a wallflower.

The Big Dance

Women don’t just wake up one morning and think: OK, today I am officially giving up on life. I am checking out, going numb, going nowhere—only breathing and surviving from here on out. Yet for many of us, it happens anyway. We embrace various degrees of giving up, various degrees of living as an unperson with an unlife.

As it turns out, I am not the only woman who has ever given up and retreated into the barren life of the wallflower.

I recognize that same familiar emptiness in women everywhere I go. I sit beside them on airplanes. I look into their eyes at conferences. I live in the same neighborhood, go to the same church and wait in the same carpool lines with women who are fading away: women who are playing it safe, blending in and “unbecoming”—morphing into the unperson.

Depending on the amount of disappointment and overwhelming circumstances she faces, a woman might become a wallflower because giving up feels like the most painless option she has. Increasingly it seems that many women are surviving for decades of their lives by turning their hearts inside out and trying not to feel.

Becoming an unwoman with an unlife is the unhappy reality for many of us.

If you live with a woman who has given up, then I’m sure your heart is broken. You fell in love with an amazing woman whose heart danced. Now you share life with a very good woman whose inner brilliance has faded.

Before you too give up, I'm going to ask you to try—and then try again. You can't let go of her. Her heart is too valuable for that. God is the only one who can bring healing to your relationship, but your love is one of the vessels He can use to accomplish that miracle.

She will always have to do her part in responding to and obeying God's prompting, but if the love of your life has withdrawn to the background or the sideline, then here is my best advice for inviting her to dance anew:

Become her partner again. Dancing alone isn't as fun as it is with a partner. But this is not a Sadie Hawkins Day dance. A woman who has become a wallflower doesn't have the courage to ask anymore.

So the responsibility of inviting her to dance falls on you. You will have to recommit afresh that you are her partner. She will have to hear your invitation and see that you mean it.

Don't leave her standing by the wall feeling like she is facing life by herself. Does she feel alone in your marriage? Does she feel like she is raising the kids by herself? Does she go to church alone or to most social events without you?

You need to realize that the woman you fell in love with also remembers the man you used to be. Have you pulled away from her? If she feels physically or emotionally abandoned, she will eventually begin to fade away.

So, if you are charming and she's heard all your words before, then she needs to see you follow through with action. If you have been a man of few words, then it's time to speak your desire. Tell her you want her to dance the dance of life in your arms.

Call out the best in her. I realize that what I am going to say may sound like the goofiest stuff you've ever heard. But every woman I know would agree with me, so here you go.

The woman you love needs you to call out her strengths and her passions. In a way, it's like you are giving her permission to be the woman that she has always desired to be.

Much of my own heart restoration happened because the strong men in my life began to speak truth to me, essentially calling out the best in me. They told me I could, and over time I began to believe them and act like it was true.

Use your words and every creative idea you have to bring affirming attention to her gifts. Lay off the negativism. The wallflower beats herself up every day; no one else needs to do that.

See for her what she cannot see for herself, and point it out to her. Surround her with belief—an atmosphere of hope. Orchestrate circumstances that give her little victories.

Tell her when you see a spark of passion in her. Celebrate the best in her.

Wrap her in arms of love. God wired women with a need for this. Your wife functions in greater strength and confidence when she has been given physical and emotional security. Ultimately God is our source of security, but you, as the man who loves her, play an important role, too.

So make sure she is wrapped in a healthy, consistent, “no matter what comes” kind of love. When she feels your righteous strength, it imparts strength to her.

Lead her into the dance. Dancing is contagious—especially when you live with people who dance. Your wallflower is watching you dance and yearning to be where you are.

She wants you to see her across the room. She hopes you will want her enough to come to her, take her by the hand and lead her into the center of the dance floor. Even though she was made for the strobe lights and funky music, she'll truly need

you to lead her there.

No Better Time Than Now

It is an amazing, beautiful thing when a man who is filled with the passionate love of God takes his place as partner and starts inviting his wallflower to dance.

Your invitation may be rejected at first. Keep asking.

She may be unsure of herself after having spent many years in the shadows. Keep asking.

Her spirit may be downcast and her two left feet may embarrass her. Keep asking.

A wallflower can find healing and restoration when the man she loves determines to invite her to dance. With all my heart, I believe that the woman you love truly wants to dance the dance of her life.

She longs to become the woman she has always dreamed of being. You can be a part of that becoming—and of reversing the unbecoming.

So tonight, no matter how you feel or how drippy you think the whole idea is, right in between loading the dishwasher and getting the kids ready for bed, put on a CD, take the woman you love in your arms and hold her until she believes it's really you.

Then dance.

And when that song is over, dance to the next one. Let her know that she is seen, that your love for her is steady and unchanging, that from here on out the woman you love will be asked to dance.

A very wise man once wrote, "There is ... a time to dance" (Eccl. 3:1,4; NIV). Let this be your time.

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