

The Guaranteed Steps You Need to Change Your Spouse

Oh, if it were only that easy! I hear every day from a husband or wife who says, “I can’t get my spouse to do ... And if they would change, everything would be great!”

You cannot get married expecting to change your spouse. And yet you *can* change them. Sound confusing?

When most people hear “change your spouse,” they imagine some way to manipulate or control their husband or wife to behave differently—to stop drinking, to share feelings, to initiate (or stop asking for) sex, to communicate without anger, to go to church or pray more and so on. To ask the classic question, how’s that working for you?

And so you find yourself trying to exert ever more control, and are met with ever more resistance from your spouse. Or you give up in misery and resort to complaining or bitterness.

Marriage is an amazing laboratory for change. What makes some couples become increasingly closer as the years go by? How are some spouses able to see their husband or wife become transformed before their eyes into the person God created them to be? Is there any hope for your marriage?

When Al and I married, we had both already experienced a lot of life, but our marriage changed us both in dramatic ways. Al stopped smoking and lost weight. I came to embrace intimacy and stepped into the media world. We changed each other in those ways and many more.

You can change your spouse also. Here are some guaranteed ways to change your husband or wife.

Get Your Grubby Hands Off!

Do you like to be micromanaged? Your spouse can't stand it either! Al would never have stopped smoking if I had created a detailed plan, counted his cigarettes and asked him every day when he was going to quit. Instead, I gave him support to quit in the ways he asked me to, and I celebrated each step forward. He said multiple times he never could have quit without my help. But he did the quitting, not me.

Your spouse won't change because you want them to. They will change when they choose to. If you've been trying to make something happen, stop it already and "keep your hands to yourself!" Give God an opportunity to do His work.

Change Yourself

If you change the dance, your partner will have to change too. They'll change because the old dance steps aren't working any longer. They aren't receiving the same "benefits" of their old behavior. They are relating to a new person, a new you.

Changing the dance might look like *you* learning to communicate differently, working with God to change something in your own character, loving well in a new way, or setting new boundaries. Those new boundaries aren't to punish your spouse, but to protect yourself and open the possibility to a new stage in your relationship.

Look at your new dance steps as inviting your spouse into something that's appealing and healthier, even if it's not easy. You're concentrating on the new dance steps, and they have to decide how to respond.

Stay on Your Knees

How many marriages have been rescued and transformed through the power of a praying spouse? The process can sometimes be excruciating. If addiction, violence, pornography or infidelity has been present, both of you will have to change

in dramatic ways. Healing is not instant, and it's usually not easy.

It's fine to pray for God to change your spouse, to get them to exhibit more affection, to go to church with you or to break an addiction. But more than asking God to fix them, seek first His perspective—on your own heart, on your spouse's heart and on your marriage. Seek to understand how He wants you to cooperate with Him in His work on your marriage. It just might start with changing *you*!

These steps will guarantee that your spouse will change. That does not guarantee the change will be the one you wish for. It might be, but that's your spouse's choice.

That's why you must stay on your knees. Keep asking God what step He would have you take next. And remember: He will be with you and can restore *you* regardless of what happens in your marriage.

Your Turn: *How have you been trying to change your spouse? What healthier steps can you take that would lead to change in your marriage? Leave a comment below.* {eo}

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