

The Secret Ingredient That Can Make Your Marriage Work

The trash didn't get taken out—again. His underwear is there on the floor—again. She was late getting ready—again. He didn't listen—again. She made an excuse to say no—again. Should you have to put up with this?

Because marriage is the union of two sinners, your spouse will fail you. Repeatedly.

And yet marriage can be the most wonderful thing in the world. What's the secret ingredient that makes marriage work?

It's Gratitude

Yes, marriage is a challenge. Your spouse needs to change. (And you need to change, too!) But continuing to focus on what's wrong will make you and everyone around you miserable. Misery is almost always optional. Instead, pause and ask, what is your spouse doing *right*?

My marriage to Al was complicated and difficult. Between his snoring and the commotion he made getting into or out of bed, I could never get a good night's sleep. His medications and medical care seemed to eat up our time and money. And why did we have to move to a new city where he needed and wanted to be, and where I knew no one?

Writing that last paragraph stretched me. I had to try hard to think of things that were "bad" in our marriage. I was truly blessed by the man God gave me, even though we faced those challenges and more. But if I had focused on the problems, I would have certainly missed the treasure!

Because of Al, I know what it's like to be cherished. I learned about media—something that makes it possible for me to do what I'm doing now. It was a great privilege to be loved by

a man who had worked so hard to overcome his hang-ups and who loved and served God with humility and intelligence. The belief he had in me gives me courage every day. I miss him, and I so look forward to rejoining him in heaven.

Can you see the difference? My gratitude for Al, and for who he was to me, is not because I'm looking back with rose-colored glasses in my grief. We both learned to cultivate gratitude, and it made our marriage beautiful even during the challenging times.

Gratitude Can Transform Your Marriage Too

Gratitude really is the ingredient that makes marriage work. You will feel happier and be much more pleasant to be around. Unless your spouse has an evil heart, he or she will naturally tend to do more of what you notice and appreciate. Gratitude will make you resilient in walking through challenges together, and provide you with fuel to fulfill your purpose in many ways.

Extolling gratitude in marriage does come with a caveat. Gratitude does not mean you ignore problems. If abuse, addiction, infidelity or other seriously destructive issues are happening they absolutely must be dealt with. Someone reading this could be tempted to accept bad behavior because of many "good" qualities in your spouse. Codependency, the cycle of violence or going outside the marriage for sex are never OK. Absolutely never. End of story.

Much more often, however, I hear from husbands and wives who are disappointed, lonely or frustrated because their spouse is not living up to what they want or "need" in a partner. "If my spouse would only do this, I'd be happy." Your spouse likely does need to change. But such marriages could usually be greatly transformed simply by embracing gratitude.

Here's the Challenge

Today, find something your spouse is doing right. Write it down.

And then tomorrow find something else your spouse is doing right and write it down again.

Do that each day for 30 days.

Then at the end of 30 days, do something special to show your spouse how much you appreciate who they are to you. As Stevie Wonder sang, don't wait for a special occasion: "just call to say, 'I love you!'" Make it a surprise, just because. Make it unusual, and make it totally about your spouse, in a way you know will mean something to him/her.

And no "I appreciate this, but ..." No pointing out how you wish your spouse would change. Just gratitude pure and simple.

Here are some things you might start to notice and be grateful for:

- I loved how you wanted to share your excitement with me about
- In you, our children have an example of courage (or persistence, or kindness or ...).
- It felt so good when you sat beside me in church.
- You made me laugh after a difficult day.
- I look forward to coming home when I know you'll be there.

So now, will you take the challenge—writing down something you're grateful for your spouse about for the next 30 days?

You might enjoy it so much you'll want to keep it up.

Your Turn: Name something you are grateful for about your spouse in the comments below. Let's see how many gratitude comments we can get. {eo}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

This article originally appeared at .

To learn more about having a healthy marriage, listen to the podcast included with this article!