

When God Calls You to Stay in a Bad Marriage

Every marriage will have periods of challenge, times when “till death do us part” seems beyond your ability to handle. Let’s assume you have prayed and fully considered the circumstances, and are certain that God is calling you to remain in this marriage. What then? How do you survive if you stay in a bad marriage?

You have several options. You could see yourself as the victim, misunderstood, unloved, disrespected, destined to be hopelessly miserable. You could present yourself as the martyr, somehow holier because you are righteously putting up with your spouse’s sins. You may get some sympathy by looking at yourself that way, but you won’t thrive. And you certainly won’t be righteous.

You could buckle under the blame and shame, certain your misery is because of your own sins even when your spouse is behaving badly. You could embrace the messages your sinner-spouse gives you that the marriage problems are all your fault. And you could feel powerless to change anything because after all, you caused this. (Note: Did you *really* cause this?)

Or you could gear up for a perpetual boxing match, continually showing your spouse his/her sins, manipulating or managing circumstances to try to keep your spouse in line, endlessly expending energy trying to get your spouse to change. And you’d wear yourself out.

Wouldn’t it seem great if there were another option? That other option is what I’d like to present.

Choosing Your Mindset

In line with the Serenity Prayer, the healthiest mindset is

almost always to accept what you cannot change, change what you can and embrace the wisdom to know the difference. Yes, it takes prayer to do any of that.

Perhaps your spouse is an alcoholic. Rather than enabling, you can choose to accept the reality of who they are, refuse to cover up for them, possibly do an intervention, and learn how to live healthy yourself regardless of their behavior.

Or your spouse has cheated on you. Rather than either ignoring the problem or holding it over them, you can choose to explore whether reconciliation is possible, do the very hard work of forgiving, and extend trust gradually and incrementally only as your spouse demonstrates they are becoming trustworthy.

Those are big issues, but the point is this: You look at reality, take appropriate action, care for your own soul wisely and learn what loving your spouse well in this season is truly about. (Hint: It is *not* accepting bad behavior. And you'll need help to do all this.)

Being the Right Person

Choosing to stay in a bad marriage may be what God asks you to do. But it does *not* mean you embrace misery. Your circumstances must not be allowed to determine your state of mind. Is it easy? No. But as Paul said, "for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Phil. 4:11, ESV).

You will undoubtedly need to change in order to thrive in a painful marriage. That change does not mean accepting bad behavior if your spouse continues to act badly. It does mean that if you stay, you focus most on changing *you*.

That means you learn how to communicate wisely, refusing to sweep tough stuff under the rug or to dissolve into fighting. You intentionally move toward your spouse in any way they *will* accept intimacy. You regularly invest in nourishing your own soul through healthy friends, uplifting media and time with

God.

In short, you continue to become the person God needs you to be, the person your spouse will find inviting and safe as God continues to work on their heart.

God's Intervention

Stories abound about God intervening and restoring marriages even where neglect, abuse, addiction or other serious problems have been present. Those problems can be healed. I don't know whether or not that will happen in your marriage; remember, both you and your spouse get a vote, and you cannot vote for your spouse. But staying on your knees gives God opportunity to do what He would be thrilled to do.

You can become healed regardless of what your spouse does or doesn't do. And as you do, your spouse will be presented with the opportunity to join you in that healing journey. You can't decide whether your spouse will or not, but your change will present him/her with that invitation.

Stay on your knees. Keep asking God to show you who He needs you to be to your spouse in this season of your marriage. That may change from time to time. You may need to learn new communication skills, set difficult boundaries, take your grubby hands off your spouse or change some other part of your own behavior. Only ongoing prayer will help you know what it is that God is doing in *you*.

And your prayers may well be a deciding factor in God working a miracle in your spouse's heart as well.

Your Testimony

Decide in advance what you want your testimony to be. Please don't settle for "I stayed even though it was miserable."

Instead, let your testimony be, "God used my painful marriage to work an amazing transformation in *me*."

And who knows? Perhaps your testimony will also be, “God restored our marriage.”

P.S. These are appropriate steps once you have become clear that God is asking you to stay. There are times God releases someone from a marriage. If you are facing serious problems, seek God’s answer to that question first.

Your Turn: *Have you felt God asking you to stay in a bad marriage? What has been your mindset? Does your mindset need to be adjusted? Leave a comment below. {eo}*

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