

Married To An Unbelieving Spouse

Growing in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is a source of great joy. But it also can be a source of conflict when your spouse doesn't share your commitment to Christ. It makes it more difficult to face life challenges, to make important decisions and even to grow in your faith when you are not both centering your life on God's will.

Even when your spouse is basically a good person, the disconnect of no shared faith in Christ or worrying about where your spouse will go after death can hurt your relationship. It becomes even more difficult if your spouse is hostile to your faith.

How can you honor God when your spouse doesn't? And is there anything you can do to help your spouse become a believer?

Be with believers—but not too much

Christianity is a group faith—something to be lived out among a community of believers. As a body of people following Christ, we give and receive fellowship, comfort, and encouragement (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

You need that community of believers, especially others who are following Christ alone in their marriages. But your spouse needs you as well. God designed marriage to be a source of mutual support. You are accountable to the vows you made to your spouse even if he or she is not a believer. To honor both your marital vows and your place in the body of believers, you should commit to regular church involvement that still leaves time for your marriage.

There's a better chance your spouse will come to faith if you make time to go to church and he (she) sees that God now has priority in your life and has changed you. But if you join every Bible study and volunteer for a broad range of extra activities, it can cause your spouse to feel alienated and less wanted. You might also unwittingly provoke a resentful attitude toward Christianity and deepen the wedge between you.

There's a better chance your spouse will come to faith if you are sincere and authentic in your desire to be Christ to others inside and outside of the church walls, like helping the poor and fostering community in your neighborhood. Socially conscious unbelieving spouses might even join you in these efforts and you can serve together.

Let your actions be your witness

What can you say to help your spouse become a believer? Not a whole lot. What really influences a spouse more than your words are your actions (1 Peter 3).

No amount of nagging or persuading can motivate an unbelieving spouse toward faith. It might even drive him or her further away. The best draw will be seeing you live out your faith by showing respect and loving care.

It won't be easy and there's no guarantee your spouse will become a believer. But if you choose to love your spouse with the love of Christ, regardless of the response, you can leave the rest up to God, knowing you were faithful. Before you talk about God to your spouse, talk to God about your spouse.

Maintain a hopeful perspective

You can't control the timing, but you can believe that God is able to use your commitment to win over even the most reluctant spouse. God is in the business of making people His own.

It is ultimately God's job to woo the heart of your spouse—a job that He is well equipped to handle.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books:

Some books are available in the Faith@Home center or for purchase online.

Beloved Unbeliever (by Jo Barry) and *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage* (by Lee Strobel) provide hope for Christians married to an unbelieving spouse

Recommended Websites:

“Spiritually Unequal in Marriage” is a blog for those seeking “practical help and encouragement to thrive in a spiritually unequal marriage.” Check it out at **unequalmarriage.typepad.com**