

Recommended Website:

“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 www.unequalmarriage.typepad.com

Faith  @ Home

Blueprints

Married To An
Unbelieving
Spouse



Following Christ Alone

*From Jody Hayes, Minister of Wellness
With Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families*

Growing in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is a source of great joy. However, it can also 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 an unshared faith in Christ or worrying about where your spouse will go after death can hurt your relationship. It's even worse 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 lead your spouse towards becoming 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 or 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 give the signal that you are no longer committed to meeting the needs of your spouse - especially if the intent is to keep yourself occupied apart from your spouse.

Let your actions be your witness

If you are a wife who is balancing your involvement in a body of believers with your involvement in your marriage, what can you say to help your husband become a believer? Unfortunately, the answer is not much. What really influences a husband or wife more than your words is your actions. To wives of unbelievers, the Apostle Peter said, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1). Even though Paul is specifically addressing wives within the context of this verse it is applicable, in theory, to husbands and wives. 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 unlike what he or she has experienced before. It won't be easy and there's no guarantee that it will generate an immediate response. But if you choose to love your spouse as unto the Lord, regardless of how he responds, you can leave the rest up to God, knowing you were faithful.

Maintain a hopeful perspective

When you are growing within a body of believers and faithfully seeking to serve and esteem your spouse, you can be hopeful. 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.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Book:

(Available to check out from the church library.)

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