

How to Help Your Spouse Change

I. Start with the Issues that God Promises to Change (sin problems)

A. Does your spouse show evidence of conversion and receiving the Spirit?

^{ESV} Romans 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

^{ESV} Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{ESV} Matthew 12:33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

B. Is your spouse showing sinful works of the flesh?

^{ESV} Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

^{ESV} Romans 1:20 For [God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

II. Prepare your Attitude

A. Are you hopeful that God began to change your spouse and promises to complete that change?

^{ESV} Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{ESV} 2 Timothy 2:24 And the Lord's servant must *not be quarrelsome* but *kind* to everyone, *able to teach, patiently enduring evil*, ²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness*. **God may perhaps grant them repentance** leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

B. Are you praying for those changes to happen?

^{ESV} Philippians 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

C. Do you first see that you are a needy sinner with things that need to be changed too (maybe even similar things) before you attempt to talk to your spouse about their sins?

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ESV Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged.² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?⁵ You hypocrite, *first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

D. Do you have a spiritual “Gospel-of-grace” attitude that allows you to have gentleness, humility and self-awareness of your own potential to be proud and condemning?

ESV Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, *you who are spiritual* should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. *Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

III. Choose Proper Tools & Methods

A. Have you developed creative or relevant uses of God’s tools for changing your spouse?

Change that God produces can only happen through using the means of grace: the *Bible* (including resources and people that reflect on/teach/preach/counsel the Bible), *prayer* (alone, together, as a family, with other Christians, recruit prayer partners), the *sacraments* of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and *fellowship* (includes small groups, accountability partners, prayer teams, church membership, pastoral care, biblical counseling).

B. Use Language that Builds Up the Listener

ESV Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but *only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

C. Choose an Approach that is Relevant to the Attitude of Your Spouse

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, *admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

ESV Proverbs 9:7 Whoever *corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse*, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.⁸ *Do not reprove a scoffer*, or he will hate you; reprove a *wise man*, and he will love you.

ESV Proverbs 21:24 "Scoffer" is the name of the *arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.*

D. Start by mentioning your “baseline” joy and appeal to change that will complete your joy

ESV Philippians 1:3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all *making my prayer with joy*,⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

ESV Philippians 2:2 *complete my joy* by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

E. Appeal to the beauty of Christ (in the same area that spouse needs to change) as the power for change

ESV 2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, *beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.* For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

IV. If your marriage is not in crisis over big sin problems, work on changing other issues of preference. A preference is a desire that, when demonstrated by your spouse to you, will make you feel loved and cared for. The issue here is HOW to serve each other in ways that meet individual desires and bring a measure of pleasure and joy to the relationship.

ESV Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another.*

ESV 1 Corinthians 7:33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, *how to please his wife*,³⁴ and his interests are divided. . . . But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, *how to please her husband.*