

Following Christ Alone

With Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families

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'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 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 give the signal that you are no longer committed to meeting the needs of your spouse - especially if you're doing those things 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? Not a whole lot. What really influences a husband more than your words are 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). No amount of nagging or persuading can motivate an unbelieving husband toward faith. It might even drive him further away. The best draw will be seeing you live out your faith by showing him respect and loving care like he's never seen 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 Books:

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 <http://unequalmarriage.typepad.com>

Married To An Unbelieving Spouse

