

Attunement – How Your Marriage Can Be Transformed By An Attentive Ear

Question

My wife is a difficult woman. We have been married for almost 15 years and instead of getting easier, our relationship is getting more challenging. By now I expected that my wife would have been more in tune with my likes and dislikes, and would have adjusted accordingly. However, every day feels like we are back to square one, and I am getting tired of this silly and very uninspiring routine. It is so much easier to stay at work later and later so I don't have to deal with her constant negative attitude. I am not sure how much more of this undesirable life I can endure. Please share your advice with me so I can help my wife change and start being a more positive person. I thought that marrying a Christian like me would have made my life easier. However, our marriage is no better than our neighbors who don't even go to church. Help! –Michael–Overland Park, Kansas

We are very sorry to hear about your marriage predicament. Marriage was instituted by God to be a blessing, and to provide companionship and support to both men and women (Genesis 2:18, 24). However, the opposite tends to occur in this fast-paced society of ours where husbands and wives pass each other every day like ships in the night.

One of the most prominent concerns in every marriage is managing differences that are often overlooked prior to marriage, but become very obvious once a couple gets into the nuts and bolts of married life. What you have described about your marriage relationship is pretty consistent with what happens in most marriages. The key to turning things around, however, is based on the choices one makes in response to whatever one's spouse is doing or saying. As a Christian man, you know that the Bible states the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This means that the husband should be the leader in the home. Being the leader means the husband carries the principal responsibility of the smooth running of the home. Based on what is happening in your marriage, we encourage you to ask yourself how this applies to you. What can you do to address the situation with your wife based on Christ's example with the church? Throughout Scripture, the patience, love, kindness, and forgiveness shown by Christ to a church that doesn't deserve such a response is inescapable, and husbands are commanded to do the same in their homes.

Ephesians 5:25, 28 states: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. . . So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." Romans 5:8 declares: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us (the church), in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." These pronouncements give clear evidence that Christ's response to us, as sinners, is forgiveness and love, even while we are still in our state of rebellion. And husbands are called to do the same with their wives.

We find it remarkable that social scientific research is in agreement with the Bible on what a husband can do in his relationship with his wife. John Gottman, currently one of the leading marriage researchers in the world, in one of his recent publications* suggests that women need to feel respected, heard, and connected to the men in their lives, and for this to take place, a man needs to be in tune with his wife, a concept Gottman refers to as attunement.

Essentially, Gottman suggests, a man's relationship with his wife would completely change if he did the following:

- Give her his complete attention when she's talking to him.
- Physically turn toward her when she is speaking to him.
- Show genuine interest in what she is saying by asking questions to make sure he understands what she is saying.
- Listens nondefensively even if he doesn't agree with what she is saying.
- Shows empathy and compassion for what she said.

By doing what the Bible and social science is suggesting above, we believe your relationship with your wife will be transformed into the marriage you desire. After all 1 John 4:18 says: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. . ." And Mark 10:27 says: ". . .for with God all things are possible."

Ask God to help you love your wife like He loves the church, and trust Him to keep His promises. You will continue in our prayers.

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