



How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong (Indispensable Guides for Godly Living)

By Leslie Vernick

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Experience the Blessings of an Imperfect Marriage. We all—at one time or another—have the opportunity to act right when our spouse acts wrong. There are no perfect marriages or perfect spouses. We know that having a good marriage requires effort and hard work. Yet we often don't know how to continue to love when we are angry, hurt, scared, or just plain irritated. Nor are we sure what that kind of love is supposed to look like. Should we be patient? Forgive and forget? Do something else entirely?

Acting right when your spouse acts wrong will not necessarily guarantee a more satisfying marital relationship, nor will it automatically make your spouse change his or her ways—although both could occur. It will, however, help you see how God is stretching you in the midst of your marital difficulties, teach you to respond wisely when wronged, and lead you into a deeper relationship with Christ as you yield your will to his plan for your life and learn to be more like him.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

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About the Author

Leslie Vernick, ACSW, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker who has her own private counseling practice and more than twenty years of experience counseling Christians from a biblical worldview. She received her master's degree from the University of Illinois and is an adjunct professor at Philadelphia Biblical University. She is a popular speaker for women's groups, couple's retreats, and professional seminars, and is the author of *The TRUTH Principle: A Life-Changing Model for Growth and Spiritual Renewal*. She and her husband, Howard, live in Orefield, Pennsylvania, and are the parents of two grown children.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is important for every married person—or those who are about to be married. All of us at one time or another face the dilemma of choosing to act right when our spouse acts wrong.

Whenever our spouse disappoints us, fails us, hurts us, or just plain irritates us, whether in big ways or little ways, *from our perspective* he or she is wrong.

Sin is in all of us (Romans 3:23). Attitudes and behaviors that come out of a self-centered, selfish, prideful, deceived, and/or rebellious heart often express themselves in big, bad ways such as infidelity, lying, addictions, or abuse. The same sinful heart can also produce more benign but chronically irritating behaviors such as nagging and criticism, forgetting important occasions, failing to put dirty laundry in the hamper, not listening well, or staying glued to the television when our spouse is attempting to have a conversation with us. It can be just as difficult and discouraging to believe God and live by faith with a spouse who sins in subtle, less blatant ways as it can when a spouse commits the more grievous wrongs.

Most of us acknowledge that there are no perfect marriages or perfect spouses. We know that having a good marriage requires effort and hard work. At times, however, in the midst of that pain and struggle we can lose sight of what marriage is all about. We forget that we have made a covenant promise to love for better or worse. In the better times, love is usually easy. When worse comes, we often don't know *how* to continue to

love when we are angry, hurt, scared, or don't *feel* very loving. We also aren't exactly sure what that kind of love is supposed to look like. Do we just forbear? Forgive and forget? How and when do we apply the bolder forms of love?

Research shows that we aren't doing very well with this struggle. Currently, the national divorce rate is slightly higher for those who claim to be "born again" than for the general population. Each day in my counseling practice I work with Christians who struggle in marriages that are unhappy or problematic. Ending a marriage that one finds difficult or unsatisfying is a real temptation. Christians opt for that path with increasing frequency even though they know, in most cases, that God desires them to stay in their marriage and work out the difficulties. Others stay married but in name only. Their hearts are cold toward their spouse and toward God, whom they think has ordered them to stay in a marriage they find too difficult.

Surely there must be a better alternative. In *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*, you will begin to see yourself and your marriage through the lens of God's eternal purposes. You will learn how God uses the imperfections, differences, and sins of your spouse to help *you* grow to be more like Christ. This book will help you learn *how* to love and to *keep* your promises when it is hard. When you don't feel like it. When you are not getting much in return. And probably most important, this book will show you why this is good for you to learn.

It's been said that marriage isn't about finding the right person but about becoming the right person. I am humbled by the reality that I am still learning to be the kind of wife God calls me to be and the kind of wife my husband needs. I don't always act right or do right, especially when my husband disappoints me or fails me. But in the twentyfive years we have shared, I have learned to do it better and more consistently. Like some of you, I, too, have a long way to go, but I have gained some personal and professional wisdom over the years that may help make your journey more successful.

Unfortunately, these days I meet many who aren't looking for deep personal change or growth. Instead, they want a quick fix or relief from pain. People often say to me, "Just tell me what I can do to make this better—*now!*" I recently gave a seminar on the subject of how to make your marriage happier. At the conclusion of my talk, audiotapes and books were available for those who were interested. Every item that dealt with ways to make yourself or your marriage happier was snapped up in minutes. Tapes and books about the deeper life and attaining spiritual growth and maturity were left behind. Those subjects were less appealing to that crowd, yet God tells us that deepening our relationship with him is the very cornerstone to our well-being and happiness.

Learning to respond rightly when we are wronged and wounded takes maturity and wisdom—and hard work. God is interested in developing the character of Christ within us. Merely learning some tricks or techniques will not be enough to deal with the heart issues that rise to the surface of our lives when our spouse doesn't act in the way we desire. Although the quick fix looks appealing, many of us have already learned (often the hard way) that the path that appears easiest turns out to be the more difficult in the long run.

Maturity and growth usually take place in the context of relationships. Right from the beginning of life, God places us into a family. Within this environment of family interaction we begin to experience love and conflict, joy and sadness, intimacy and alienation. Our parents help shape our character (in both positive and negative ways). We begin to define who we are to a large extent by how we interact with others. Are we kind? loyal? selfish? helpful? Do we think of others or only of ourselves? The people in our family help shape us, and our interaction with them exposes us. We can't pretend for long in the context of family. Conflicts, pain, disappointment, and anger often rip off our pleasant exterior persona and expose our uglier side.

If we have come to Christ through a conversion experience, we also have an interactive relationship with him. He gives us a new identity and purpose. He loves us with an everlasting love. He adopts us as his children, and he seeks to shape our character to become more and more like his. But that's not all. He puts us into another family—the family of God. His Word instructs us how to treat one another, even when we are being treated unfairly. The daily environment of family life, both in the church and in our homes, reveals our weaknesses and sins. Although this is painful, it is ultimately a good thing. When we are exposed, we cannot deceive ourselves into thinking that we are something we are not. Exposure shows us (often in bold colors) the areas where we don't trust God fully and where God wants us to yield ourselves to him so that we might become more like Jesus.

When we speak of acting “right,” we must be careful not to think that what looks like the right response for a person with one type of marital difficulties is always the *right* response for another. When attempting to apply Scripture to life's troubles, many of us often reduce it to a rule book. It is much easier to have pat answers for all of life's difficulties. Yet life is not that simple, and God's Word is much richer than just a set of rules to live by. For example, some women have believed that when their husband mistreats them physically, emotionally, or sexually, they should obey God and become more like Christ by yielding to the abuse as an act of submission. One woman who had been taught this thought that Jesus wanted her to be “led like a lamb to the slaughter.” Perhaps acting right or acting like Christ in this marriage might involve a deeper and more accurate understanding of submission and headship. For this particular woman, loving her husband or acting right may require speaking up respectfully yet boldly against the evil in their marital relationship. It might mean she must learn to speak the truth about how God sees her husband's abusive behavior and how it is destroying their marriage. It may even involve exposing the deeds of darkness to others and allowing her spouse to experience the consequences of his sin in order to bring him to the possibility of repentance. I will be saying more in chapter 9 on how to respond correctly to the more difficult and sensitive marital problems.

To take this idea a step farther, what's right in one situation may be wrong in another. Someone whose spouse commits a grievous sin against him or her may need to speak up and boldly enforce consequences for destructive behaviors. On the other hand, many of us blurt out what we think our spouse is doing wrong without much thought or any prayer. Acting right may involve keeping quiet at times and accepting our spouse's weakness. Too often we take a cookie-cutter approach to solving marital difficulties and try to make answers that fit one type of problem work for a completely different situation. We would never respect a doctor who treated each patient the same way with the same surgical procedure or medication for every ailment. Neither can we take such a naive approach in learning to act right when our spouse acts wrong. Yet in all situations, God's Word calls us to holy actions bathed in loving attitudes.

Today we live in a culture that is more concerned with getting than giving. Over and over again in my counseling sessions I hear spouses complain, “My needs aren't being met in my marriage.” Dissatisfaction, anger, resentment, and bitterness are the mainstays in many homes because we go into marriage seeking what we can get out of it. Acting right when our spouse acts wrong will not necessarily guarantee a more satisfying marital relationship, although it often does. Acting right may not make our spouse turn around and change his or her ways or meet our needs, although it could. God says that we exert a powerful influence over others as we seek to lovingly interact with them. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 27:17.)

As we start learning how to act right when our spouse acts wrong, we will begin to see what God is doing to make us more like him in the midst of marital difficulties. We will become able to look at the idiosyncratic differences of our spouse less problematically and learn how to respond wisely when wronged. Perhaps most important of all, learning to act right when our spouse acts wrong will force us to forage for a deeper

relationship with Christ. For to act right with a pure and sincere heart in the midst of suffering will stretch our faith and trust in God as we struggle to yield our will to his plan for our life.

The marriage relationship is a picture of our covenant relationship with Christ. He is going to be our teacher in this process, for he always acts right.

Even when we act wrong.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Debbie Jones:

The book *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong (Indispensable Guides for Godly Living)* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. So just why must we leave the great thing like a book *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong (Indispensable Guides for Godly Living)*? A few of you have a different opinion about guide. But one aim which book can give many details for us. It is absolutely suitable. Right now, try to closer using your book. Knowledge or details that you take for that, you could give for each other; you may share all of these. Book *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong (Indispensable Guides for Godly Living)* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and big function for you. You can search the enormous world by start and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

Joshua Parsons:

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Jeanne Newman:

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