

Spiritually mismatched marriages: 30 things women's leaders must know

by Karla Downing



As a women's ministry leader, you minister to a variety of women, including the woman who is married to a man at a different place spiritually than she is. Whether he is unsaved or less spiritually committed, this woman faces a unique set of circumstances and has a unique set of needs.

Her husband's spiritual state could be anything from ambivalent to hostile; uninterested to superficially spiritual and carnal; atheist to agnostic; or casually to zealously committed to another faith.

These are all factors that affect how openly she presents her faith in the home and to her children. While each set of circumstances is different, these women will share some common concerns.

The ideal presented in the church is that of the man as the spiritual leader with the woman submitting to his headship, as they jointly create a home where the children are trained up in the Lord. But this woman's home isn't like that. This unequal yoke is a source of pain for her (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). If she knew she shouldn't have married her husband, she may even question whether God is punishing her.

To reach these ladies, you've got to know what they're facing and practical ideas for how to help. Here are 30 things to keep in mind as you minister:

How she may feel:

1. Disappointed in her life
2. Different and inferior to other women

3. Responsible for his lack of spirituality
4. Fearful about her marriage and husband's salvation
5. Confused about what to do

How her husband may be:

6. Critical, sarcastic, and accusatory even calling her a hypocrite
7. Defensive, especially if he feels convicted
8. Afraid they're growing apart
9. Feeling insufficient and disrespected
10. Jealous over her relationship with the Lord and church

Adjustments she may have to make:

11. Values differences over kids, entertainment, discipline, recreation, and finances.
12. Missing church functions to be with him.
13. Money she donates.
14. Things children are allowed to see and do.
15. How openly she practices her faith and teaches her children.

Truths she needs to hear:

16. She's not responsible for his salvation.
17. She should submit to his decisions but say no when his request violates her conscience.
18. Her actions can make her home "Christian."
19. Accept her husband's spirituality; don't nag or be judgmental.
20. Let joy come from the Lord.
21. Focus more on positive things in common than spiritual differences.
22. Live her spiritual life in a quiet way (1 Peter 3:1-2).

23. Keep husband first and continue to need him.
24. Don't compare him to other "spiritual" men.
25. May need boundaries with addictions, anger, abuse.

How you can help:

26. Have activities jointly for singles and couples encouraging women to come alone.
27. Have husband-friendly activities like a Valentine's dinner, mother's/father's day brunch, where the focus isn't preaching.
28. Start a support group for these women to connect.
29. Have mentors with similar experience available.
30. Include examples of her situation in your teaching.

By being sensitive and proactive to the woman whose husband is not the spiritual leader, you can minister to her and her family. Join these ladies in prayer for their husbands and families, and watch God work.

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