



When Your Spouse Doesn't Believe: 3 Postures for Faithful Living by Sheila Dougal

"We need to work on your posture," the physical therapist told the woman with a fractured femur. "The right posture will make all the difference in your pain levels and safety when walking."

I work as a case manager in a rehabilitation hospital, and I frequently hear admonitions like this from the therapists. Life has dealt my patient a disabling blow, and the therapist is there to help her learn to navigate life with the injury or illness she's suffered.

When you realize your spouse doesn't have faith in Christ, it can feel like your union has suffered a major injury. Where God meant oneness, there's dislocation, and you can't heal it. But you can learn to walk by faith. In Scripture, I see at least three postures that help me hope in Christ while walking through life with my unbelieving husband.

Farmer's Posture: Let Go of Controlling the Outcome

I'm no farmer, but I am a novice gardener living in Arizona's Sonoran Desert. I plant seeds in a place where there's little water. I have a role in making my tomato plants and snow peas grow here, but when I press my selected seeds into the soil, I bury and release control of the harvest I may or may not get weeks later.

In 1 Corinthians 3:7, Paul uses the metaphor of farming to illustrate a similar reality in spiritual growth: "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." This truth guides how I navigate marriage to an unbeliever. I can do the good work the Lord has prepared for me, but I must trust him with the results.

Some practices can contribute to a healthy marriage, such as learning to be a good listener and a clear communicator. And some practices cultivate a healthy faith—daily prayer, Bible reading, and gathering to worship. But we don't control the outcomes.

We can control what we plant in our marriages, but

we can't control how our spouses respond. We can seek to build ourselves up in the faith (Jude 1:20), but it's the Lord who can keep us from falling (v. 24). So I take a farmer's posture, committing myself to good works that honor God and plant health in my marriage, letting the results rest in the hands of the One who turns deserts into springs (Ps. 107:35).

Stargazer's Posture: Let Nature Declare God's Glory

In my house, there's no shared prayer, Scripture reading, singing, or worship. Opportunities for me to speak God's Word aloud with my husband are rare. But I've found that the more I can draw my husband out of the house and onto a trail, into the garden, or even to stargaze from the backyard, the more I can join him in listening to God speak through creation.

My husband may not praise God for the blue sky and buzzing bees, starry nights or iridescent hummingbirds, but Psalm 19 assures me that God's glory is proclaimed to him through creation: "Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge," the psalmist says (v. 2).

God's beauty in creation encourages me too—teaching me to look up, listen, give thanks, and join creation in demonstrating God's goodness in the land of the living. Creation humbles me and teaches me to speak a message of God's faithful love, not simply with words but with my life. I may not get to practice the rhythm of spiritual disciplines with my husband, but I can experience the glory of God in nature with him.

Singing Prisoner's Posture: Let Nothing Keep You from Worship

In Acts 16:25, we read that while Paul and Silas were in prison, they prayed and sang hymns to God. In a setting that wasn't conducive to singing, they worshiped nonetheless. Marriage to an unbeliever isn't prison, but it can be a strained context for worshipping God. When your spouse rejects the gospel

or lives a life that doesn't line up with his professed Christianity, singing hymns to God isn't usually our natural reaction.

But living a life of worship, a life that prays, sings, and serves despite the strain of a spiritually divided marriage, is freeing. Though you're bound in marriage to an unbelieving spouse, you're free to worship God. In fact, living your life as worship to God amid your difficult marriage may be the very thing God uses to save your unbelieving spouse. Paul and Silas's faithful witness in prison led to the Philippian jailer coming to faith in Christ (v. 30). As you and I unashamedly worship Christ in a life of freedom that

feeds on God's Word, serves, prays, and sings, our spouses hear their own path to freedom.

These postures of faith help me live with hope in Christ in the marriage I have and let go of the wish-one I don't have. I kneel in the dirt, humble in the humus like a farmer, open-handedly doing good, entrusting God with the outcome of my marriage and final harvest of my faith. I look up with my husband at the vast night sky, praying God will speak to us through his creation. And I seek to live a life of worship, responding to Christ's mercy and goodness, knowing my husband is listening.

Counseling Available

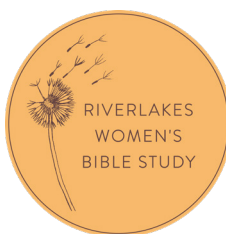


People Encouraging People (PEP) is a ministry of trained Biblical Lay Pastoral Counselors to hurting people. PEP counselors

draw upon the comfort they have received from God to help others move closer to Jesus in the midst of their problems. When life challenges get tough, are you strong enough to ask for help?

Referrals to Christian professional counselors are available as well. Don't let your spiritual and emotional health be threatened. Call (661) 589-9733 x222 for assistance, appointments or referrals.

Women's Bible Study is Coming Soon



Draw close to the Lord and other women, find support and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in a small group environment. You may choose Thursday mornings or Tuesday evenings for fellowship, discussion, prayer, and encouragement. Groups begin

this Fall. Look for more information in next month's Connections Newsletter!

Passionate Hearts Ministry

Hope, Help, and Healing for Women. Were you wounded by childhood sexual abuse? Are you wanting to defeat disordered eating? Do you long for emotional health and wish for heart-connections? Have you wondered how to overcome the bondage of dysfunctional relationships? Come and discover a better understanding of who God created you to be.

Passionate Hearts:

For women who experienced childhood sexual abuse.

Courageous Hearts:

For women struggling with anorexia, bulimia or compulsive overeating and body image issues.

Feeling Hearts:

For women wanting to learn more about the appropriate role of life's emotions.

Loving Hearts:

For women striving to overcome dysfunctional and co-dependent relationships.

Invisible Hearts:

For women recovering from multiple past issues. Prior group participation preferred.

Passionate Heart Ministry offers these support groups this fall. If interested call (661) 331-3392 and leave a confidential voice message. Preregistration is required by August 30. These groups are Christ-centered, curriculum-based, highly confidential for women 18 years or older. Space is limited. Materials fee \$50. Childcare is offered by prior arrangement only.

