

RELATING WITH YOUR IN-LAWS

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When a person gets married, he enters into relationship with the partner's family members. It is not possible to be married and not have a form of relationship with members of the family of the one you love and have married. This is the reason why some families always take time to investigate the family their son or daughter wants to marry into before final approval is given for the marriage. For the belief is that a woman or man may be good enough to make a good wife or husband, but the family may not be good enough to be in-laws. When they are not good enough, they pose a threat to the marriage relationship in future. Many marriages have crashed as a result of problems associated with in-laws.

Just as there are good and bad wives and husbands, there are good in-laws and there are bad in-laws. Even in a family that is labeled "bad", there is always someone in that family that is good. Being good has to do with individuals rather than family or tribe. It is not right to condemn everyone in a particular family or from a particular tribe because of one or two persons that have proven to be bad. It is important that that we establish this from the start that it is not right to give everybody the same evil name or place them on the same level. Everyone must be given a chance to prove who they really are. Just as it is very clear that not everybody that go to church is really living the life of Christ as the scripture instructs us to, in the same way, all in-laws are not the same though they come from the same family or from the same womb. People are different. As people are different facially and in stature, so are their personalities, habits, and character different. That your friend or relative is having a hard time with his or her in-laws does not mean you too will have a hard time with yours.

The problem is that many, especially women go into marriage expecting to have challenges with their in-laws, so they go into marriage prepared for a fight. With that kind of mindset, they misinterpret and misjudge words, gestures, actions and responses, and get easily upset and pick holes and find faults in virtually everything that is said and done by their in-laws, especially the mother in-law. With a mind prepared for a showdown, suspicion reigns, criticism becomes the order of the day, anger builds up quicker than normal, tolerance, patience and respect is set aside as the flesh takes over as troubles, quarrels, fights, confusion and bitterness reigns unchallenged by all in the home and family. This is the problem that is faced by many in their marriages and requires urgent attention by all experiencing it. Many marriages have crashed and ended in separation and divorce

It is good we face our challenges and overcome them. And to do this we need to be sincere in looking at the peculiar nature of our very experience. Everyone's experience with his or her in-laws is different. There are many reasons why some don't have any problem with their in-laws and are relating very well as one big family, and there are also many reasons why many are having problems with their in-laws. I cannot presume to know why each person is going through what they are going through, but there are in most cases common experiences and reasons. It is on this premise that I will offer some suggestions that will help to ease tensions and create peace in such homes and families. It will take an open and sincere heart to accept that one has made a mistake and retrace his or her steps and make corrections where and when necessary to make sure that all is well in the home and family. Therefore, if you want to live well and have a happy

home without problems with your in-laws, be ready to address your own person rather than your in-law whom you presume is the guilty one.

1. Acknowledge that it takes two to quarrel.

No one quarrels all by him or herself. It takes two to do that. It is not right to believe you are without a fault, that it is only your in-laws that have problem. It may be true that your in-laws may be manifesting an unpleasant attitude and character towards you, but if you have a positive attitude towards them with forbearance and forgiveness in operation, peace will still reign. Jesus taught us to first take a look at our person and deal with all the wrong things in our lives before we see and deal with the wrongs in the other person's life.

Matt 7:3-5

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

NIV

If you deal with the weaknesses in your life, I believe you will be able to cope with and get along well with your in-laws. You need to take a good look at yourself and identify why things are going the way they have been going in your relationship with that particular in-law or in-laws. You may need to make some adjustments, forgo some things, change your beliefs about them in relationship to your marriage, and your attitude towards them or that particular person in your spouse's family that you are having conflict with.

2. Acknowledge that when you relate with someone with a bias mind as a result of what you have heard, you will always have problem with that person.

Many people relate with people based on what others have told them about that particular person or people from that family or tribe. It is wrong to work with information another has given that is negative and go on to put up a wrong attitude always antagonizing the person influenced by what you have heard. I remember the problem I had to deal with in church about some people who ganged up against a sister. When I had a meeting with them, I asked them one after the other what she has really done. I went on to ask one of the sisters if the said sister have ever offended her, and she admitted such had never happened. I then inquired to know why she was against her; she told me it was because of what she was told. From that moment, she realized she was wrong in ganging up against someone who have always been nice to her and had never offended her just because of what she was told. She allowed her mind to be poisoned against a good person.

Prov 4:23

3 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

NIV

Rom 12:2

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

NIV

Always remember that everyone is influenced by the knowledge he or she has inside. Give everyone a chance to prove themselves good or bad. Do not let what you have heard about mother-in-laws or father-in-laws influence you to disrespecting, fighting and avoiding them. Let the love in your heart for God and your spouse motivate you to receive, love and take care of them.

3. Acknowledge that everyone needs a chance to prove who he or she really is.

If you relate with me with a biased mind, you will never get to know who I am and how lovely and sweet I can be. You will always see me and assess me based on what you have heard or read, so you can never make a good judgement of my words, actions, responses and person. Never relate with anyone, especially your in-laws based on what you have read or told about his or her country, tribe or family. Never relate with anyone based on how soft or strong the face (countenance) of the person is. The real person is inside and not on the face. A serious countenance does not mean a hard and wicked heart. A smiling face or countenance does not prove softness and goodness inside. Draw near with a good and receptive mind and you will get to meet the person despite all you have heard, read or thought. Give your in-laws a chance and you will see how sweet they are. You can live in peace with all your in-laws.

1 Cor 13:6-7

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

NIV

4. Acknowledge that anyone, including you can make a mistake, and no one should be crucified for making a mistake.

Ps 103:14

14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

NIV

1 John 1:8-10

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

NIV

God who made us knows that we do fall and has made provision for our forgiveness and restoration. That is why the promise of restoration when we repent was made. In the same way, we must give room for offence and mistakes for they are human. You too make mistakes and want to be excused and forgiven without making a big fuss out of it. Do what you will have others do to you when you make mistakes or do wrong things. Relate with this understanding and you will enjoy your relationship with your spouse and his or her family.

Luke 6:31

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

NIV

5. Acknowledge that it is not right to marry a man or woman and reject his family, so it is essential to have a good relationship with your in-laws.

The moment you propose to a lady or accept a proposal from a man, you have decided to have a relationship with the family. You will have to meet, relate and fellowship with the family. Marriage connects you to the family your spouse comes from whether you like it or not. You need their friendship, love and acceptance. And they need yours. Let's give it and receive it and all marriage will always be exciting.

Moses had a good relationship with his father-in-law and that enabled him to send his wife and sons to him until he finished his assignment in Egypt and bring out the Israelites, and took his advice to appoint faithful men to sit as judges over the people to hasten the justice system and reduce stress - Ex 3:1-2; Ex 18:2-6; Ex 18:14-26. A good relationship with your in-laws may be the best thing that ever happened to you.

6. Acknowledge that forbearance and forgiveness is essential in relating with people especially your in-laws.

Love can only become unshakeable when Forbearance and Forgiveness is in place. These two are the two great pillars of love. They are needed in every relationship for that relationship to last a lifetime. These two hold the building of love together, firm and unshakable. Practice forbearance and forgiveness towards you spouse and your in-laws always.

Col 3:12-14

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

NIV

7. Acknowledge that if you take your in-laws as members of your own family you will all live in peace and you will enjoy your marriage and relationship with them.

8. Acknowledge that it does not pay to fight your in-laws or make enemies with any of them.

What will you gain by making all your spouse's family members to run away from you and your spouse? Have you come into your spouse's life to alienate him or her from her blood relations? Have you considered how your spouse feels about your attitude to his or her family members? Do not be self-centered. Except on extreme cases of the family or a particular in-law doing all to control your spouse to the disadvantage of your marriage, will you consider as a last resort to keep a distance as a corrective measure for a season as the case may require. There is no need having enemies in the family you are married into.

Luke 6:32-36

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is

that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

NIV

9. Acknowledge that love and much love can change anybody even the worst criminal or sadist.

Don't love by mouth. Be practical. Let everybody see your love. Love is contagious. Spread it. Win your in-laws through love. Affect someone positively through love. Let your faith in God and in our Saviour Jesus Christ be seen through practical love. Everyone bows to persistent love coming from a heart that is full of love and will not give up loving and trying to win through it.

John 13:34-35

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

NIV

10. Acknowledge that it pays to heed the Biblical injunction to "leave and cleave".

One of the reasons why there is conflict with in-laws is because one of the married parties is not willing to "leave" his or her family and "cleave" to his wife or husband. Consultation must be done on practically every issue before decisions are made. It is like someone is always reporting to dad or mum or someone in the family and must take counsel on almost everything. Such are not independent yet from their families as a result, many conflicts with spouse who does not like it abound.

Eph 5:28-32

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

NIV

When a man decides to marry, he is saying, "I have grown and I want to be independent and make my own decisions. I don't want anyone in my family controlling me anymore". It is therefore advisable that the married for the sake of unity and preservation of and success of their marriage, be truly independent. Never allow anyone in your family to dictate what happens in your home. They can make observations, and render counsel, but not direct or dictate the happenings in your home if you want peace in your home, and don't want your spouse having problems with your family.

Never reduce your spouse in the presence of your family. Never scold or talk down on your spouse in the presence of your family. Never join your family to insult or bully your spouse. Make your family members know you love your spouse and you hold him or her in high regard, and if they love you, they should equally respect your spouse as they do you.

11. Acknowledge that we all need God to help us in our relationships with people, and we bring Him into it through faith in Him and prayers to Him, especially as unpleasant things happen.

We all need God's help in relating with people. Only God understands man, and knows what each person is and will become in the future. He alone can supply the wisdom needed to live in peace without bitterness and stepping on each other's toes. He alone can supply the strength that is needed to bear with people and overlook offenses. He alone can heal the wounds of relationship and keep love alive and help us forgive when deeply hurt by the people we love and respect. So we need to continually trust Him and look up to Him for support, wisdom and strength which he has promised to give us when we call on him in faith. Pray rather than quarrel. Pray in faith rather than fight. Pray rather complain or hate. Never take laws into your own hands, rather prayer for guidance and follow the Spirit in responding to situations as they arise. He will always answer you without hesitation. If the answer seem slow in coming, don't stop praying and trusting.

1 Thess 5:17
17 pray continually.
NIV

12. Acknowledge that your thoughts and words influence, manipulate and push your hearers to respond as they deem it fit.

Your thoughts create your feelings, determine your decisions, motivate your actions, reactions and responses to what is said and done to you or around you. Therefore, you must be careful how you think and what you think about your spouse, his or her family members and your marital experiences. If your thoughts are right, you will feel good and respond well. If they are wrong, you will feel bad and respond in a very negative way and this will provoke bad words from you which will provoke more negative thoughts from your hearers and generate evil reactions which may come in form of evil words and curses, anger, fights, and some evil actions. What you say and do will always be interpreted and reacted to. So you must be careful seeing that you cannot do the interpretation for your in-laws. They will always react to everything you say and do, and you are always motivated or influenced by your thoughts.

Prov 27:19
19 As in water face answers to face, so the mind of man reflects the man.
RSV

Through controlled thoughts, control your words.

1. Words give birth to words.
2. Words pierce like a sword.
3. Words wound and kill.
4. Words heal and comfort.
5. Soft answer turns away wrath.
6. Words spoken carelessly will produce a destructive result.
7. Words spoken with wisdom from God's word will heal, pacify, mend fences and comfort the angry and wounded.

Col 4:6

6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

NIV

Think good thoughts about your in-laws no matter what happens. This will generate a positive attitude and responses to all their words and actions. Let God help you in this as you make up your mind to walk in peace with your spouse and his or her family.

WORD OF WISDOM

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- 2. Never scold or talk down on your spouse in the presence of your family.**
- 3. Never join your family to insult or bully your spouse.**
- 4. Make your family members know you love your spouse and you hold him or her in high regard, and if they love you, they should equally respect your spouse as they do.**
- 5. Everyone bows to persistent love coming from a heart that is full of love and will not give up loving and trying to win through it.**
- 6. Love can only become unshakeable when Forbearance and Forgiveness is in place. These two are the two great pillars of love. They are needed in every relationship for that relationship to last a lifetime.**
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