

Most Marital Difficulties Stem from One Thing: Ego

A paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that those who [consider their spouse to be their best friend](#) are twice as satisfied with their lives overall. The study controls for pre-marital well-being levels, age, gender, income, and health status.

What is a best friend? Foremost, Melanie Curtin opines, “a best friend has your back.”

Dr. John Gottman has spent his career studying successful marriages. Happier couples more often fulfill their [partner's “bid”](#) for an emotional connection. As partners make emotional connections, each feels that the other is “on their side.”

Do you have your spouse's back? Are you on your partner's side? If not, what do you think is getting in your way?

Those unsatisfied in their marriage might answer that their relationship hasn't turned out the way they hoped; they are not getting what they need, and they're tired of giving more than they get.

You can again have your partner's back if you are willing to relinquish faulty ideas that corrode your marriage.

In her book, [A Gift of Love: Marriage as a Spiritual Journey](#), Ann Linthorst believes marital difficulties begin with a focus on “separate, individual egos trying to get along with each other.” This orientation narrows our thinking to getting the best marital deal for ourselves, rather than having our spouse's back.

When your spouse does something you don't like, Linthorst points out, your ego's thinking traverses these familiar

paths: "He/she shouldn't have done what he/she did. It made me mad. I have a right to be mad because I was badly treated and I'm going to stay mad until he/she says or does what I want him/her to. I'm not going to give in first because it was his/her fault."

Whether we voice our grievances or keep them to ourselves, much of our commentary is about who or what is to blame for what is happening and how we feel because of what is happening.

Notice how these thought patterns place our ego at the center of the universe. An ego orientation, Linthorst points out, leads to an "expectation that our spouses will govern their lives in a way which will please us."

How often have you caught yourself in "my spouse should" thoughts?

If we don't rise above ego's limited perspective, Linthorst cautions that marriage can become "a series of 'marital movies,' interpersonal dramas, written, produced, and directed by and starring the two egos of the marriage partners."

Whew! Sitting through these self-produced movies is exhausting and dispiriting.

In ego land, resolution of grievances is nothing but temporary. Each partner is reacting to the other by producing grievance movies of their own. Linthorst puts it this way, "You never get as much of what you think you need from others, and what you provide to others is never adequate by their—or by your own—standards."

Linthorst recommends shifting our mental focus away from our ego's good (getting what we want) and towards a higher power: "Vitality, health, intelligence, harmony, joy, love, beauty, kindness, generosity, respect, reverence, peace, etc. this is the good of God."

If you were able to speak to each partner during a marital squabble, they would tell you they want harmony, joy, and love; and then may come a *but*: “But why should I be the one to do it all.” When there’s a *but*, Linthorst writes, “Each individual remains *more* interested in the ego-good – the drama, the bad feelings, having the spouse come across with the desired behavior – than in the good of God.”

How do you shift your orientation away from your ego’s good toward a higher power? Here are five steps:

- First, acknowledge where you are. Everyone’s ego is selfish, so you are in good company.
- Second, don’t deny your ego patterns; simply observe them.
- Third, take 100 percent responsibility for your thinking; yet do not justify your thoughts.
- Fourth, ask yourself if you are well served by the ego patterns you observe.
- Finally, as you look at yourself, be willing to feel embarrassed by your antics.

It is helpful to observe how hard you must work to maintain your ego orientation. If you can, remember a time you were upset with your partner for days and then made the choice to let go of the upset. It may be hard to recall what was upsetting you. The moment you are willing to let go, the upset vanishes into nothing. Your ego’s good must be maintained, moment by moment, in a fantasy world in opposition to Reality. The good of God is Reality.

When we are not aligned with the good of God, we are not aligned with harmony, joy, and love. We may think we are justified in choosing the ego’s good, but happiness eludes us. When we stop working so hard on behalf of our ego’s good, in rushes the good of God.

Linthorst points out, “We cannot make our interests change,

but we can allow them to do so.”

If you went on a diet to improve the health of your physical body, you might notice in the supermarket the many varieties of produce. You might become curious about how to prepare vegetables; and with a little practice, you might see you relish eating more vegetables.

In the same way, consider going on an ego diet. You might notice how you and others suffer under a *What about me* orientation. You might become aware of your habitual thoughts patterns that fight to maintain the ego’s good. As you release those patterns and experience the good of God in your marriage, you will wonder why the ego’s good once seemed so important to you.

Marriage becomes a joyous and worthwhile journey as you walk on the path to allow the good of God to orient your life.

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