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Benefit of the Doubt

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Benefit of the Doubt

“He is such a jerk!” “She never appreciates anything I do for this family!” I’m sure you have said similar phrases in your head after an argument with your spouse. Conflict is inevitable in marriages while we live in a sinful world.



▲ Alina M. Baltazar

As a way to defend ourselves from perceived attacks by our spouse, we convince ourselves our spouse is the problem. As a couple and family therapist, I see so many clients who want to convince me their spouse is the one with the problem. When you have these kinds of thoughts towards your spouse, ask yourself, how does your behavior change towards your spouse? Do you start noticing more and more evidence to support your original negative thought? Is it then harder to feel affection for your spouse as a result?

It is believed that our negative thoughts impact our emotions, behavior as well as how we relate to others. If you want to improve your behavior towards your spouse and have more affection in your marriage, it starts with your thoughts. You first need to be aware of when this happens. Our negative thoughts can be so automatic we don’t even notice them. One way to catch them is, whenever there is conflict with your spouse or you noticed a negative mood shift towards your spouse, pay attention to what is going on in your head. You may feel fully justified in that negative thought, but I encourage you to ask yourself some questions before you fully believe what you are thinking.

What is the evidence?

Sure, what he said to you was mean, but how often does he say those mean words to you? In all of his interactions with you, how often does he say hurtful words? How do you know she never appreciates what you do for the family?

Is there evidence to the contrary?

Is he ever kind to you? How often does he say or do kind things for you? Are there times she tells you or shows you how much she appreciates what you do for the family?

Is there an alternative explanation?

Did he have a bad day at work? Is she overwhelmed with taking care of the children?

What would you say to a friend who had the same experience with his/her spouse?

Sometimes it is easier to have a healthier perspective if we think about other people’s problems.

In your wedding vows, you committed to love and cherish your spouse until death you do part. A lifetime is a long time to be harboring negative thoughts and emotions towards the person with whom you live. It is unhealthy for your physical health and for the health of your marriage. People often think of divorce when marriages deteriorate (and may be necessary when there is abuse in the marriage), but we all know the stress and financial losses that occur with divorce. Instead, work on giving your spouse the benefit of the doubt and don’t let Satan get a hold of your mind where he loves to destroy families. Pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit on how best to respond to your spouse during and after conflict.

Remember, we are reminded in the Bible that *Love believes all things* (1 Corinthians 13:7). Let’s believe the best of our spouses. ■

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