**How to Deal with a Quarrelsome and Nagging Wife**

**by Willard F. Harley, Jr.**

*Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife* (Proverbs 21:19)

I've counseled many husbands who have been driven out of their homes by wives who simply won't stop criticizing them. What these husbands want is peace, but what they get is war. What can they do to prevent the divorce that usually follows their escape? More to the point, what can they do to satisfy their wives so they'll stop being so critical?

Their story usually begins in the same way. During courtship, and throughout much of their marriage, their wives seem very happy and supportive of them. They feel that their marriages are just about perfect. But ever so gradually, their wives became quarrelsome. They begin to argue about seemingly trivial matters, only to apologize later, blaming it on having a bad day. As their issues increase, so does the intensity of their criticism. Before long, these husbands find themselves spending more time at work or at play without their wives, just to have a little peace and quiet. And that infuriates their wives even more. Regardless of how patient a husband tries to be, the steady flow of criticism eventually becomes intolerable. Eventually, they find themselves living separately wondering how they will be able to save their marriages.

Their wives' story usually begins with an effort on her part to be accommodating in the face of her husband's thoughtlessness. She mentions the problems she is having with decisions he makes in a polite and restrained way, but nothing ever changes. The problems he creates for her persist indefinitely and the resentment that accompanies them finally boils over. He wants her to forgive and forget but she cannot do either. The more she thinks about what she's been through the angrier she feels. And when she's alone with him, she lets him know about it.

The reason that this problem has persisted for so many millennia is well understood by most women whose husbands ignore their complaints. By expressing their displeasure with intensity, at least they are letting off steam, and once in a while they get their husband's attention. Many of these women I've counseled have told me that they know it doesn't do much good to keep rehashing the past, but they feel better when they do it. One husband told me once that he occasionally lets his wife lambaste him for about two hours because he knows that she will be in a much better mood when it's all over. But then he does nothing to address the problems she raises.

**The Stages of Nagging**

As I indicated above, nagging comes in stages. At first, a wife's complaints are usually introduced with respect. She lets her husband know that she would appreciate it if he would discuss his decisions with her before he makes them. But he tells her that there are some issues in life that he must decide for himself. Or he says that he will discuss them with her in the future, but then rarely does. He considers her complaints to be nagging, but they're nothing compared to what's in his future.

After a while, when she realizes that her husband has no intention of resolving conflicts with her, she raises the volume. That's the second stage of nagging. She tells him that she won't put up with his thoughtlessness and picks a fight whenever he makes an independent decision. That's where demands, disrespect and anger take over. She lets him know that he won't get away with his thoughtlessness. She'll make him pay.

But fights don't solve problems. They just make matters worse. And her resentment over the many thoughtless decisions he's made piles up to where it's all she can think about. The third stage of nagging takes over as she remembers the countless ways that her husband has mistreated her. And her memory is sharpened whenever they are together. She won't forgive him for suffering he caused her, and she certainly can't forget it. One woman recently told me that she felt as if she had been stabbed by her husband a thousand times, and as she lay bleeding on the floor he wants her to forget the past and hope for a better future.

**What can the husband do?**

If you don't face this problem in your marriage, which has existed for other couples for thousands of years, it's relatively easy to see that its solution requires the cooperation of both spouses. Neither can solve it on their own.

During the first stage, when a wife is being respectful when she has a complaint, a husband should take her complaint very seriously. She is trying to work with him to find common ground, and is willing to consider options that would make them both happy. But if he were to call her complaints nagging, and encourage her to keep them to herself, he would be making a great mistake. He'd be missing an opportunity to solve little problems before they grow to become monsters. By trying to shut her up in this first stage, he is not only being disrespectful toward her, but he is also destroying the good will she still has for him.

By the time conflicts get to the second stage of nagging, her good will has been squandered. She no longer believes that her husband cares about her interests, so she must fight for them. She must force him to care for her. So she becomes demanding, disrespectful, and angry in an effort to get her way.

In this second stage, when a husband recognizes a shift in her approach from being respectful to being disrespectful, he usually fights fire with fire. If she wants to be disrespectful, he can be that way, too. But if he makes that mistake, he will see his marriage unravel rather quickly.

The right way for a husband to approach a demanding, disrespectful, and angry wife is to try to temporarily look past her inappropriate way of expressing herself, and try to deal with the complaint in a respectful way. But this is where her cooperation is absolutely necessary. When he's willing to address her complaints the right way, she should somehow restrain her temptation to be abusive toward him. Instead of regarding her abusive methods as the only effective way to get his attention, she should regard his willingness to negotiate with respect as something they should both do.

Demands, disrespectful judgments, and angry outbursts should be completely eliminated from a couple's conversation with each other. They do not help couples solve marital problems. Instead, they prevent those problems from being solved and drive away the only person who can help solve them. Furthermore, they destroy romantic love, the key ingredient for a happy marriage.

But when a husband's wife has entered the third stage of nagging, where all she can think about is the years of neglect that she has endured, and she can't seem to overcome the deep resentment she experiences whenever she see him or talks with him, solutions are very difficult to find.

I've counseled many very intelligent and resourceful women who simply can't seem to talk respectfully to their husbands. In every other area of life and with every other person, they have complete control over their emotional reactions. But faced with their husbands, they simply cannot stop talking about their resentment. In these cases, a husband usually has no other choice but to separate.

There are some women, however, who can control their anger and resentment in this stage long enough to let their husbands recreate the good will they once felt. These women know that if their husbands are serious about resolving conflicts the right way, and prove it in the way they are resolving current conflicts, they can make enough Love Bank deposits to restore romantic love to their marriage. If they give their husbands enough time to correct their mistakes, the resentment that had been building over the years dissipates.

**How to resolve conflicts the right way**

I have created a rule that can set a couple on a path to recovery, regardless of the stage of nagging a woman finds herself in, if both spouses follow it. I call it the **Policy of Joint Agreement: *Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse.***If a husband and wife agree to follow that rule, neither of them will do anything to upset each other. They stop living their lives as if the other doesn't exist and forces them to be thoughtful of each other when they're tempted to be thoughtless. Their discussion should be safe and pleasant if a couple are serious about resolving their conflicts. Both of them must avoid making demands, being disrespectful, or getting angry while they try to come to an agreement.

Since their goal is enthusiastic agreement, they should each focus attention on the other person's perspective so that they can think of ways of satisfying both points of view. Instead of trying to force their own way of thinking on each other, they should try to understand each other. How can they resolve the conflict in a way that makes them both happy?

Equipped with a better understanding of the issue, they give each other ideas that might work. As possible resolutions come to mind, they email them to each other, and every day they respectfully discuss them until they have found a winner.

While this approach to marital conflict resolution clearly works when followed, couples often think it's too complicated to attempt. It's so much easier to try to force the issue, or to try to ignore it entirely. But when either of those tactics are tried, fights usually ensue.

**How to get the ball rolling**

Are you married to a nagging wife? Or does your husband ever accuse you of being a nagging wife? There's a simple way to overcome that problem in your marriage, but it will take the cooperation of both of you.

As a wife, you should put an end to demands, disrespect, and anger whenever a conflict with your husband arises. And don't bring up mistakes of the past. Focus your attention on the problem at hand. Offer your husband the opportunity to discuss it with respect, agreeing to follow the Policy of Joint Agreement until it's resolved. And your husband should have the same right to raise issues with you, without you becoming disrespectful or angry with him.

As a husband, you should address every complaint your wife makes with patience and kindness. You should enter into a discussion with her regarding every issue she raises, and do it without any disrespect or anger on your part. If you think that she has so many issues that you feel overwhelmed by them, organize them together and set priorities. Focus on the three that top her list, and when they are resolved, work your way through it.

When a couple fails to resolve their conflicts the right way, conflicts tend to pile up. And resentment also piles up. In those marriage, couples lose hope that there can ever be peace. But when a couple starts to attack the pile with mutual thoughtfulness, the very fact that progress is being made restores their hope. There's no time like the present to begin resolving those conflicts in a way that completely eliminates nagging.