

Angie's Marriage Column – February 11, 2009

I Want to Leave My Alcoholic Husband of 21-Years!

Marriage Question: Help! My husband of 21 years is an alcoholic. I've lived with it all these years and now my children are grown and can pretty much take care of themselves. But with them out of the house, his drinking has really gotten a lot worse. He drinks and drives at least 2-3 times a week. He sees no danger in it. I have prayed for him for 21 years. But in the meantime, my health is getting worse. I have heart disease, having had 2 open-heart surgeries; I'm worried that I might not be around long enough to see my husband healed. I told my husband 3 months ago that I would have to leave him if he didn't take steps to get treatment. I do not want a divorce! I want to help him, but if I don't take care of myself, I won't be around to help him. I want to do God's will. I think it is God's will for me to leave my husband, but I'd like to know without a doubt. I know that I need to tell my church family, but the opportunity hasn't been there. Leaving my church is what makes me the saddest. I love my church and I love my church family. I don't want to lose faith. I know that God will heal him, but have I lost faith if I leave?

Marriage Guidance: You separating your husband *temporarily* may be what you both need. He needs you to stop enabling him and rescuing him, and you need to get away from the addiction so you can *begin to take care of yourself*. Now, I'm not talking about divorce here. I am talking about a temporary separation.

God will heal your husband only if he **wants** healing. But if your husband doesn't want healed then God is not going to intervene in his life. We all have to make choices for ourselves – some of us will make the right choices and some of us will not. What your husband needs most from you is for you to rescue yourself *from his addiction*. Do you understand what I'm saying?

You said that you want to help your husband. Then help him by not helping him to drink. Let him be responsible for his addiction – it is not your responsibility. Your husband can choose to accept Christ into his life and get sober. You can't do that for him! He has to WANT to do that for himself.

So for now, the best thing you can do, for you and him, is to detach from the addiction. If that means separating yourself physically from him for a time, then be it. Do whatever it takes for you to take care of you!

Marriage Question: Hello Angie, I need some guidance. I have been married for 25 years to an alcoholic who was abusive, unfaithful and non-supportive emotionally and financially. My husband has been in out and of jail, prison and rehabs since we were married. In the process of trying to cope with the dysfunction of my marriage and the raising of are now adult three children 24, 22 and 20. I also became an addict/alcoholic. I surrendered and got sober on Oct. 16, 2008. I sure I was still going through withdrawal from prescribed medications. He was ordered by the court to have no contact with me due to his lengthy arrest record and has been since living with his sister. He has not made a decision to get sober. I have read your articles about marriage and I am confused about what to do? I am not sure if I even love him anymore and I surely do not trust him. I am also scared about maintaining my own sobriety while being around him. I feel interacting with him right now is a threat to my sobriety. Please advise.

Marriage Guidance: I totally agree that living with an alcoholic is not going to help you to remain sober. If you feel that being around your alcoholic husband is going to make you drink again, then I give the same guidance to you as I did the other woman in the question above. I'm not advocating divorce here at all – on the contrary. What I am advocating is for *getting the inner healing you all need*, so you may encourage one another in the Lord, and restore your marriage so you will not have to suffer in your marriages any longer.

It takes focus, faith, patience, and a relationship with Jesus to get through this difficulty in your life. It's not easy living with an alcoholic. The problem is we don't see the alcoholic as being sick but someone we don't like to be around when they are drinking. If they were in bed sick with the flu we would know how to care for them, but when they are drunk sick there is nothing we can really do for them, other than watch them drink themselves to oblivion.

The alcoholic is very sick. They are sick physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The biggest problem for you is the addiction also makes you sick mentally, emotionally and spiritually, because you are allowing it to. When one spouse is alcoholic, the other spouse is addicted to the problems that are associated with alcoholism. So they are actually both addicted but in different ways.

This is why *learning to detach* from the alcoholic is the very best thing to do. First mistake is to think we have to do something! We think we have to fix the alcoholic. We throw out all the booze. We hide the car keys. We bail them out of jail. We help them to bed. We clean up after them. We lie to people about their behavior. We sweep problems under the rug. We allow their verbal and sometimes physical abuse. We remain in denial with the alcoholic. We protect them from themselves when drunk. And we're going crazy for doing all of those things!

What does doing all of these things do to your own mental health? Don't you feel resentful over the rescuing and caring of someone who treats you with disrespect? All of these things make you mentally sick with the alcoholic. You are treating the symptoms of alcoholism with your enabling, and its not working! It's like treating a person who gets chronic headaches with aspirin. Why are they getting persistent headaches? That's what you need to find out?

The Alcoholic Needs To Take Responsibility

The alcoholic must be allowed to take responsibility for themselves and for the addiction. The alcoholic does not realize the ramifications of their alcoholic behavior on others because alcohol takes away all inhibitions and modesty from them. They do not know that they are stunted emotionally because they can't perceive themselves or their behavior. All they can see is how YOU always seem to be overreacting and giving in to their alcoholic whims and behaving moody with them. Do you see where I'm going with this? ***They think YOU are the one with the problem, not them!***

What stands out most for the alcoholic is the behavior of a resentful enabler. Circumstances are different in every home, but perhaps you nag

and complain to them about their drinking. Perhaps you talk badly about them to your children? Or maybe you call them names and blame them for the failure of your marriage. Whatever it is that you are doing will affect the alcoholic and how they react and treat their addiction. Do you understand how that works? I certainly understand why someone who lives with an alcoholic would behave this way, but it is not helping either one of you – it is a non-productive way to handle addiction.

Detach With Love

The alcoholic does not need enabling and rescuing. What the alcoholic needs most from you, even if they don't know it themselves, is for you to **back away from the addiction so they will have to take control of the addiction and themselves.** We should not impede that by enabling or rescuing them. Leave the responsibility, accountability and blame to the alcoholic. They need to be responsible for themselves.

The best thing you can do is to emotionally detach from the alcoholic and their behavior and not take anything personally. Love the alcoholic, but don't love them to the extent of hindering recovery. Once you back away from the addiction and stop taking responsibility is when you won't feel resentful, bitter, and offended anymore. They have a drinking problem and they must come out of denial and take care of that problem on their own.

This does not mean you cannot support them when they are trying to quit drinking or help them with certain circumstances in their life when they are sober. What it does mean is that as long as they are willing to work on healing themselves, you will be there for them. But if they continue drinking you cannot and will not be a part of that – they are on their own. Detach with Love -- and do what you need to do to take care of you!

Book Resources

THE ALCOHOLISM TRAP -- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ This is the complete book on alcohol addiction in two parts. The first part is written for the alcoholic. Why does the alcoholic drink and how they can beat alcohol addiction for good! The second part is written for the loved one (enabler/rescuer) of an alcoholic.

Do you feel trapped with the alcoholic? Do you feel like you are married to a Jekyll and Hyde? You're not alone. You can break free when you stop trying to rescue the alcoholic and rescue you instead. See the chapter preview at Lulu. <http://www.lulu.com/content/946885>

Angie Lewis's book, 'The Alcoholism Trap' is written from a heart of experience and genuine love for the person trapped in an alcoholic lifestyle; as the author is a recovering alcoholic. Firstly, she speaks directly to the alcoholic sharing from her own experiences and addressing some of the underlying conditions of the human body and spirit that cause the distorted thinking that leads people to this self medicating cycle. Secondly, she speaks to the family members and friends who in the beginning unintentionally enable or rescue the alcoholic, thereby keeping everyone in this web of dysfunction. The author weaves in solutions for the alcoholic and loved ones in their life; including intervention and the spiritual aspect of asking for God's help as the center balance, and uses Bible text as the stepping stones to recovery and to a new life in Christ.

Article Resources

Do You Love An Alcoholic? Stop Rescuing and Enabling
<http://www.heavenministries.com/articles/doyouloveanalcoholic-stopenabling.htm>

Do You Love An Alcoholic? Setting Boundaries For You!
<http://www.heavenministries.com/articles/doyouloveanalcoholic-setting%20boundaries.htm>

