

Angie's Marriage Column ~ February 10, 2010

Define Your Boundaries When Living with an Alcoholic

Ask Angie: After 30 years of marriage to an alcoholic even as a believer I struggle with resentment towards my husband. I know that is as great a sin as the alcoholism, which leaves me feeling like I am no better than he. This causes me to freeze up when it comes to asking God for healing in his life and I feel all bottled up unable to even pray. Most of the time all I can do is cry as I have begun right now. God gives me peace daily and I know HE loves me personally. I do feel isolated as going to church I can't participate in married functions nor do I qualify for singles events. The Lord gave me 6 children that have filled my life with busy years of which are about over. I wonder what will be when it is just me, and the man who is my husband, but who acts more like my adversary. He is angry most of the time, finding reason to hate even the smallest thing as a blue jay, allowing it to consume his day!!!! I have tried to talk to him about these issues only to be slammed by his anger (verbally) myself, so we live in silence literally. Once we drove 7 hours and said not one word, most of the time I am lucky to get a grunt in response to anything I say or ask. Most of my questions go unanswered, that includes "could I have the bank deposit slip?" This is sounding like nonsense; it's what happens when I try to put 30 years into a paragraph seeking help....

Marriage Guidance: Your feelings are normal for a spouse to have when [married to an alcoholic](#). We at Heaven Ministries *know* your suffering and pain. Living with and loving an alcoholic is quite a hardship on a spouse. For 30 years you have endured the emotional grief of loving an alcoholic. Believe me, there is light at the end of the tunnel—you need to keep your focus on Jesus Christ and allow Him to come into your heart and mind and He will give you the comfort you need. Allow Christ to forgive you for your negative emotions and He will...

Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, now any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD! (Romans 8:35-39)

Detach Emotionally From the Alcoholic

You need to learn how to [detach from the alcoholic](#) and set boundaries for yourself. The more you play into your husband's addiction, whether it is reacting to his behavior, or enabling his addiction, it will only reinforce *in him* feelings of denial, and he will not face up to his drinking problem.

I know from experience, having a problem with alcohol myself that the alcoholic loves to get reactions out of the people around him or her. It is a sense of security for the alcoholic to see their spouse with emotional problems because it makes them feel like their spouse is the one with the problem. Alcoholism is cunning and sly, and the alcoholic will turn the tables around and make it look like you and everyone else has a problem, but not them.

Detaching is not allowing the alcoholic's behavior, when they are drinking, to upset your emotional self and cause a commotion, even if they come out of hiding and cause a commotion, do not retaliate. Let the alcoholic be in their little tirade when they are drinking—just don't have any part in it. You can't stop them from being abusive, but you can let them see that you will not entertain their emotions any longer!!

[You need to set personal and emotional space boundaries for yourself.](#)

Loving an alcoholic and living with one is not about taking care of them but about taking care of YOU! Only when you *take care of you* will the alcoholic take care of themselves. I discuss about detaching and setting boundaries in detail in our book, [The Alcoholism Trap](#). This book is very helpful for Christian spouses of alcoholics. It will show you how to deal with the alcoholic and how to take care of YOU. Plus it has some great encouragement written by experience of being controlled by alcohol for the alcoholic to contemplate for themselves. (If the alcoholic is physically

abusive, it goes without saying you will need to separate yourself from them)

You not only need to detach, but you need to set boundaries to define your area, to protect your space - physical, emotional, mental, sexual, spiritual, financial, etc. ***You set the boundary because it is what you need to do for your self.*** The great aspect about this whole boundary thing is you will be helping the alcoholic to look at himself for a change and actually see that he does have a drinking problem and he needs to deal with it accordingly. (Be sure to not only verbally talk with your husband, when he is sober, about your boundaries, but also write them down on paper and pin them up somewhere, lest he forget)

Only when you, the [enabler and rescuer](#), stop entertaining and inviting more alcoholic abusive behavior by your reactions will they see in themselves that maybe they do have a drinking problem after all. The main thing to remember when detaching is to be consistent. For an example: You shouldn't one day scream and yell back at the alcoholic and the next detach and walk away. This will confuse the alcoholic. Be consistent.

Every single day you have to let the sickness of addiction, behavior and all, fall along the wayside. Don't let the addiction to take you into the pit of despair with them. You can do this by understanding that [the alcoholic is seriously sick in every aspect of their life--emotionally, spiritually and physically.](#)

Your husband's anger is fueled by the addiction. In other words, if he were not drinking, he would still be angry and bitter, but at least he would not cover up his emotions behind alcohol, and possibly he would get the inner healing he needs through Jesus Christ. In other words, *the drinking* for the alcoholic is putting a band aid on the wound, but it is only a temporary solution to a more complex problem within them.

Most alcoholics have deep inner negative issues that are affecting them, whereby they mask these pangs with alcohol. Sadly, no one can help the alcoholic directly but himself. He has to be the one who wakes up one day and says, "I can't stand being this way any longer, Please God help me!" [Only when the alcoholic gets down on their knees](#) in sincerity, will they

truly understand the way to healing is with God through forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ? And it does happen because I have been there myself. Alcoholism is just another hurdle in the way of our personal growth and rebirth with Christ. Anyone can get sober—they have to have ***the faith to believe that God will heal them*** of this sickness.

Although, you can't make your husband stop drinking you can influence him through your Godly actions. First of all take care of you by detaching and setting boundaries for yourself and any children living in the home. Then begin a bible study at home with your children and any close family and friends you would like to have be a part of this home church study group. You cannot make your husband join in on these bible studies but when, and if he is ready he will participate.

Once you start taking care of your emotional self, the resentment will begin to let up and you will start to feel the peace and contentment of Jesus Christ within you. Without Christ we are nothing! We need Him for our comfort and peace of mind. Don't allow another minute of your day be trapped in the addiction with the alcoholic!! Take Care of YOU!

**So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
(Isaiah 41:10)**

Here is an excerpt from our book, [The Alcoholism Trap](#): Because loved ones of alcoholics usually become resentful and bitter, it goes without saying that they can become an emotional wreck if they don't do something for themselves, such as forgive, detach, and stop enabling and rescuing. In other words, your life does not have to revolve around the alcoholic. Why should it? You still have a life and responsibilities and you need to live it in happiness, not in an emotional depressive state, or in anger, or in denial with the alcoholic. You don't have a drinking problem, right? So don't act like you do. Don't give them any ammunition, that's all I'm saying. Be happy and carry on with *your* life the best you can. That's what this book is for. It is your ammunition for staying healthy in mind, body and spirit. [Order The Alcoholism Trap](#)

In Christ,
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I'm going to end this marriage column with some awesome sayings from the Al-Anon book about dealing with resentment and detaching from the alcoholic. These excerpts come from the Al-Anon book—One Day At A Time ---There is a lot of wisdom and encouragement for loved ones of alcoholics in this book. [Order One Day At A Time in Al-Anon](#)

The great danger of admitting resentment into our minds and hearts is that it often leads to retaliation. We feel justified in “evening up the score” and paying others back for what they have done to us. But how can I logically punish someone for what he or she did to me when I cannot fathom intentions or motives? Perhaps the hurt was not intended; perhaps we were over-sensitive. Or, as in the case of the alcoholic, most of us have suffered from unkindness. We have often been told in Al-Anon that *the alcoholic's behavior toward the family is actually the backlash from his or her own guilt and self-hatred.*

In Al-Anon we hear many warnings against harboring resentment. It is a rare person who does not yield to resentment when he feels wronged by someone. Or we resent our fate, our bad luck, our lot in life. No amount of self-discipline can heal us of resentment. Sometimes it seems the more we struggle against it, the more it sneaks up on us, surging like a dark sickness into the mind, plunging our emotions into turmoil.

We know it's destructive; we may earnestly want to free ourselves from it. What can we do? First we think of our own personal good. Does it hurt the person we are resenting? Or does it hurt us? Then we reflect that this damaging emotion comes from *not understanding its cause*. Let's dissect it and find out what, inside us, made us react the way we did.

I know how easy it is to let anger well up inside me at the thought of someone who has injured me. What is much more difficult is to take a

detached view so we can stop the building up of this “head of steam”. Unless I do this, it will explode, damaging me and everything around me. When we are frustrated in our desire to punish the one we’re angry at, we may take it out on innocent bystanders, sometimes even our own children, those young lives which God has entrusted to our hands, surely we have an obligation—a duty of love—to avoid aggravating the emotional damage that the drinking parent may already be inflicting on them.

I refuse to let my serenity be drowned out by happenings that are in themselves unimportant. I will not be made uneasy by what others do, whether they intend to hurt me or not. I will not clutter up my thoughts with resentment; it would not profit me but, worse, it would hurt me.

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