

Empathy:

Willingness to feel with another person



Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott write that empathy is the single greatest relationship skill set a couple can master. A couple who learns to empathize with each other change their marriage dramatically for the better. While most authors define empathy as understanding another person's feelings, I have a hard time with that definition - I don't know that I can ever truly understand my wife's feelings. But, as I have been willing to *feel with her*, it has improved our marriage - a lot! I do try to listen well and ask questions to better understand where she is coming from and through that process have begun to better empathize with her feelings.

As Carmen and I both have sought to understand each other's feelings and been willing to feel with each other, we have developed more patience for each other and have been less judgmental. There is more grace with each other and our marriage relationship has improved dramatically. In short we are better practicing what it means to be a *Christian* husband and a *Christian* wife. Galatians 6:2; carrying one another's burdens has become more of a fixture in our marriage. The verse tells us to carry one another's burdens and *in this way fulfill the law of Christ*. It is caring for one another and loving each other as Christ wants us to love.

Empathy was *not* a part of my life early in our marriage. Sadly, I remember specific instances of being very unempathetic. I am not proud of those instances, but by the grace of God, I am not there any longer. As I have grown in my love for Christ, I have learned to be empathetic. While I may and not fully understand what my wife feels, I can be *willing to feel with her*. I can *validate* her by communicating that her feelings or thoughts are *legitimate* for her. Friends, you can do this also! The challenge is to be willing to enter into your spouse's world and seek to understand their feelings; to validate them and demonstrate you care, rather than dismissing their feelings or trying to fix them. Empathy is a choice we make whether we feel like or not; it is fulfilling *the law of Christ* by caring for our spouse enough to feel with them.

Helpful Resources:

Fortified Marriages Resource page: www.fortifiedmarriages.com - The Fortified Marriages Manual & Workbook is a great resource to help you understand your spouse better.

Articles to check out:

Empathy In Marriage - 3 Steps To Develop It by Dr. Wyatt Fisher - www.drwyattfisher.com

How to Show Empathy in a Relationship: 15 Healthy Tips by Rachael Pace - www.marriage.com