

# Equality in Marriage<sup>1</sup>

By Timothy D. Evans, Ph.D.

One of the underlying issues in unsatisfying marriages involves the issue of equality. Inequality means somebody is feeling “less-than” in the relationship. Consequently, the ‘together experience’ has ceased and replaced with an emotional distant relationship. It is a one-sided relationship with the dominant partner calling all the shots and often leaving one partner feeling angry or depressed.

Equality does not simply mean sameness. It means respect and dignity for our inherent differences. Each person has his own uniqueness, which is to be treasured and valued. To convey acceptance, that you only want more of the same from your partner.

Unfortunately, many of us have learned how to make unhappy choices. We are experts at putting each other down. When this happens, we chip away at marital satisfaction and move ourselves further from mental health. If we continually engaged in one-upsmanship (criticism or blame), on a daily basis, the marriage is in jeopardy.

One day, the signs become clear. The marriage is floundering, and one person is so unhappy, something has to change. It is only then, in their desperation that the couple considers outside help. However, once the decision is made that therapy is needed, it is difficult for the couple to define the problem. The only thing they know is feeling hurt, and the tendency is to blame the other person.

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Disturbances in equality fall in three categories: the issue of status, control, or fairness. When status is the concern, someone's prestige is being questioned. One's feelings of significance or need for belonging is being challenged. When control is the issue the right to decide is being lost. The person's opinion or judgment is not being considered and there is no shared decision making. Finally, the most difficult is fairness. This creates an atmosphere of retaliation or even revenge in the relationship.

To alleviate inequality requires a willingness to work on your together experience, to be open to change and learn how to make wiser choices that improve the quality of your relationship. To improve one must stay out of self-blame and give yourself credit for having a desire to change your own behavior. The first steps may be faltering and scary. Yet, have the courage to stumble and work on creating a meaningful marriage based on equality. We are all in the same boat learning how to relate as dignified human beings.

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