



# LOVING YOUR IMPERFECT MAN

by Janet Chester Bly

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I married a perfect man.

That is, I thought I did.

That is, he's perfect for me.

That is, we're becoming perfect for each other after decades of working through various turmoils and disruptions, disputes and dilemmas, dissensions and detours, in otherwise glorious moments of marital bliss. As Jimmy Buffett sings it, *After a few false starts, we finally found our stride* ("Coast of Carolina"). Now I'm more crazy in love with the man I married than ever before.

But you wanna know the gritty truth?

There's no perfect men. None. Anywhere. Ever. Up close and personal for long stretches, any human's irksome in some way. However, most women seek one anyway. If you think you've found a perfect man, you haven't lived with him long enough. Sooner or later the mate snoring in bed every night only slightly resembles your romantic suitor. Instead of a virile, freshly showered charmer at the door, there's a pile of dirty underwear in the corner. Instead of mousse and Chateaubriand by candlelight, there's a half-full milk carton spoiling on the kitchen counter. Instead of an evening filled with the scents of Ralph Lauren or Charlie, you wake to big belly burps and morning breath.

Even so, most any duo can grow into a committed, caring, even ideal couple:

When you figure out a laudable *purpose*.

When you search out *practical advice*.

When you admit you need lots of *prayer*.

When I mentioned that my husband and I would be speaking at a couples' conference, the hotel clerk leaned on the counter and sighed. "I knew my marriage was in trouble while we stood in the reception line right after the wedding. My husband introduced me to this stringy-haired, buxom blonde as 'the girl I almost married.' It's been a real struggle ever since." Right from the beginning she got hit with the gauntlet of loving an imperfect man.

Do you remember the first day, the first moment, you recognized a flaw in the love of your life? A slight defect, barely noticeable at first, like a tiny chip on a fine China plate. But the crack opens for some like a chasm that seems impossible to cross, too huge to simply patch up.

What complex human personalities God created. Each one different. Unique. With their own special craziness. And quirks. Yet, unfulfilled without other humans. To be sure: every pair-some contains two imperfect people. But quarrels don't mean you hate each other. Collisions don't foreshadow that one's right and the other's wrong. That very diversity forces you to attempt to get all the gears into their proper grooves. . .which may never happen to your full satisfaction. But that's not all bad. The gritty sand in your relationship, with patience and nurture, may produce exquisite pearls of traits like perseverance. . . patience . . . peace.

Every relationship comes unassembled—like a tandem bicycle in a box. Each couple has its own foibles. Each also contains potential for fantastic closeness, oneness. Documented instructions through the ages provide parameters for making it work. There's steps to take to put you two together, mesh the puzzling parts, produce a measure of compatible, healthy co-existence.

Whether paired up now or single, whether you've faced a major fallout already or not, loving an imperfect man pertains to most every female. Will an article like this solve all your romance problems? Of course not. But maybe you'll get some helps. Some story could trigger hope. A word or phrase could spark an inventive solution. You may discover just one next step to getting closer to the man you're learning to love.

## **IMPERFECTION IS . . .**

relative to you.

Faultfinding accentuates negative traits and behaviors. When you pay undue attention to your partner's mistakes or irresponsible behaviors, you tend to reinforce instead of eliminate them.

H. Norman Wright & Gary J. Oliver, *How To Change Your Spouse*, p.21

Angela was Hispanic and in love with Bruce. When Angela's parents got together with Bruce's Caucasian parents to plan the wedding, tension mounted. Bruce's parents wanted an evening wedding; Angela's insisted it be at noon. His parents wanted a small reception at a local restaurant; hers demanded an eight-hour affair at the Memorial Building. His parents thought three or four attendants would suffice; hers emphasized the need for eight. Bruce agreed with his parents. Angela sided with hers and their very strong family traditions.

The wedding took place, a conglomerate that didn't satisfy either side. Not their last point of conflict. It's not unusual for a wedding to spark tensions between families. An interracial coupling adds all the miscues of culture clash and the undercurrent of latent prejudice. Angela and Bruce continue to face irritations with in-laws and misunderstandings between themselves. Angie says, "We've had lots of long talks with each other and our parents. And sometimes we've made some painful compromises and awkward apologies. But I think it's smoothing out. Some of our problems, we've come to realize, would happen for anybody. We can't blame it all on our different races."

## **Imperfection can be a form of . . .**

seeming incompatibility . . .

a dissonance that appears in what at first blush seemed angelic harmony.

You're shocked to find out he disagrees with you about killing gophers in the yard. . .or global warming. You're amazed he's contrary about kids. He strikes you as inconsistent. One day his job is his lifetime career. The next, he threatens to quit.

I hate to make dumb mistakes. In what I say. In what I do. It's so humiliating—whether on a platform, in a circle of friends, or in front of my mate. The old defense mechanism rises. My face flushes. I want to scream, "But I know how to do it right. Forget that. Let me begin again." Of course, that's the old pride getting pricked.

Sometimes it's just as hard to bear my mate's gaffs. After all, we're a team. We represent each other. We're one. What he says and does becomes part of me. And that may be something I'd never do.

If you're like me, you long for perfection. It's a haunting urge at times. But that has nothing to do with love. It's about ambition. Vanity. Even arrogance. Wanting to improve yourself isn't bad. It's what makes living on this sinsick, war torn planet palatable. To dare try to overcome, to compete with your peers, to rise to hallowed levels—that inspires others and keeps you going. But only God is perfect. That's the reality. That's the no-nonsense universal principle. Those who attempt too high a perfection seek to derail God from his holy post. It's called idolatry.

Sometimes you want to be omnipotent in your relationships. The power broker. The supreme opinion. The infinite last word. Or you sense that's his problem. If so, let the spiritual wars begin. It's going to be nothing but a knock down, drag out. Until you give God his due.

## WHAT'S YOUR MAIN BEEF?

How is he imperfect?

The book *Questions Women Ask in Private* was based upon the results of a survey from seven hundred professional counselors and ministers. They were asked to identify the five most frequently asked questions by women in counseling. Do you have any idea what the most frequently asked question was? "How can I change the man in my life?"

H. Norman Wright & Gary J. Oliver, *How To Change Your Spouse*, p.13

Sherry met Tom when they both worked in the Peace Corps. Each was excited to find someone else who had a driving desire to help people in other lands. Sherry saw her work as a direct response to her faith. Tom viewed his efforts as meeting the pressing needs of a crowded, hungry world. The couple married in Ethiopia, and they served six years in Africa. Every day they maintained a tight balance between success and failure, with very little personal time. They returned home fulfilled but exhausted.

Back in the States, they developed a less hectic routine. Sherry thought that for sure Tom would now begin to seek spiritual truth. He had always said he wanted to understand her faith better, if he ever had the time. But that was long ago in the African wilderness. Now he wanted nothing to do with talk of God, acted insulted is she wanted to go to any church functions, and ridiculed her faith in front of the children. Tension pushed them both to the exploding point several times.

You're up to here just coping with life. And you can't get him to talk. He's got lots of things on his mind; none of it to do with you. He doesn't meet any of your needs. You're bored with him and marriage. You don't know who you are anymore—apart from him. You're locked into your own personal Cold War.

How is he imperfect? I'm sure you've counted the ways. Many times.

But take stock of what you do have. You can't help weigh the negatives, but count the positives too. Surely he has some. What's his total true nature, not just the imperfect parts? Browse through your mind's files, especially the ones that emphasize what attracted you in the first place. Being consumed by his imperfections narrow your vision. Have there been good times—more of them than the other sort? Review your duo's dossier--the loving memories, wonderful surprises, special events. What's been right about you and him? What do you as a couple bring as a gift to the world that's missing when you're not in sync?

## **Incompatible Imperfects Can Be Prevented**

Cynthia grew up in East Cleveland, her first eighteen years shaped by urban living. Then she flew off to school in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Wayne grew up in Marshall, Oklahoma (pop. about 400). His experiences centered around rodeos and listening to his father preach on Sundays. Then he rode away to college in Tulsa.

Wayne and Cynthia met in botany class in their freshman year, fell in love during their second year of French, and got married at the end of their junior year. Everything breezed along until graduation—then fireworks. Cynthia longed for the city. Wayne could hardly wait to get back to the country. He envisioned a cabin overlooking a ranch; she wanted a condo overlooking Lake Erie. He liked breakfast early; she preferred a late brunch. He plotted for a new pickup; she shopped for a Miata. He wanted children right away; she planned a career. So, she flew back to East Cleveland alone. And Wayne showed up in Marshall without his bride.

Lack of communication before commitment made this marriage a mistrial.

As with all relational complaints, there are surface symptoms and root causes. Sometimes you blame a partner as the tension producer, when you're really coping with personal, inner struggles that have little to do with him. Or you fall apart adjusting to a less-than-perfect man, when you should realize that all people are imperfect—and that your relationship might actually be normal. The root cause can lie within yourself, your mate, or both of you. But you can't come to terms with the whole situation until you can clearly state what's wrong.

### **"My man would be so great, if only. . ."**

. . . fill in the blank with your current problem.

Margaret thought her marriage would be so much better if Ben would stop drinking. Because of Ben's alcoholism, she was trapped in a miserable cycle of anxiety and failure. "If only. . ." she often whined. At least she could identify one specific weakness to combat. She just had to motivate Ben to want to change and to seek professional help. Then, the miraculous moment arrived when Margaret announced to her friends and family, "Ben checked himself into a detox center!"



**Which of these values interfere with your wholly loving your man? Public image? Beautiful home? Family traditions? Personal appearance? Financial stability? Material possessions? Personal goals? Being right in a conflict? What other prompts come to mind?**

Soon after came the shocker. Margaret still dealt with problems with Ben. As long as Ben drank, she blamed everything on the liquor. But now he's still hard to live with. She didn't know how to cope with the sober Ben, either. They had to start from scratch in living together.

"I feel I haven't gained anything," she complained. "Doesn't it ever smooth out so you can just relax and enjoy each other? Is contention all there ever is?"

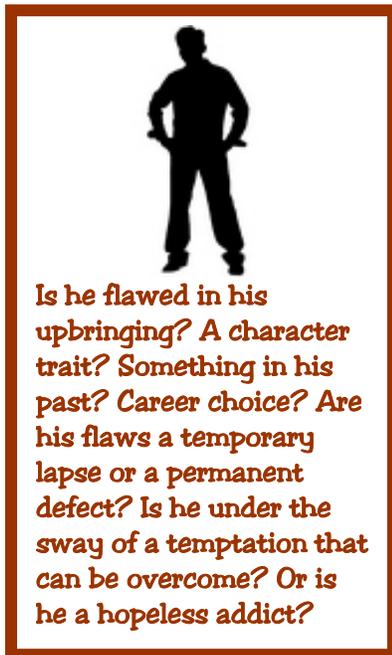
It is important to realize that God has been involved in marriage since its beginning. He is the one who built the human personality, and he is able to fit us together so our differences don't chafe on each other; rather, they become a means of making the union stronger.

Jim Conway, *Men In Midlife Crisis*, p.184,185

## Determine the difference between *faults*, *diversities*, and *fatal flaws*.

*Don't let a little dispute injure a great friendship.*

From *Life's Little Instructions from the Bible*



Are you incompatible or will you be incomplete without him? That's a big question worth serious consideration.

**Faults** are habits, blemishes, or chronic disabilities that detract from a person's overall appeal. But they can and should be condoned, if possible, when loving an imperfect man.

**Diversities** are personality distinctions that characterize a certain viewpoint and response to challenges and decisions. These differences provide variety and fresh perspectives. Diversities should be welcomed in relationships. They can even prove the validity of your love when you put his desires above your own.

**Fatal flaws** are defects in character that could lead to disastrous or evil consequences. They need to be confronted, with God's help. They can be overcome, but if they're not, they deceive, distort, and destroy. There's some things love alone can't do. Never ignore evil. *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good* (Romans 12:9 NIV). And *overcome (master) evil with good* (Romans 12:21 AMP)

## HOW ALL THIS MAKES YOU FEEL

You feel trapped. He needs emotional support. You blame him for all your stresses. He fights back. You invest all your energies in outside activities. He withdraws. An impasse is inevitable.

When you seem stuck with an imperfect man, self-pity sets in: you should have been more discerning. Others appear to have more loving relationships. You're jealous when you witness open, friendly give-and-takes between couples. You regret your past decisions.

Howard had been the bookkeeper at Mid-Valley Steel for over seventeen years. Then someone discovered \$52,000 missing—and Howard had a history of Las Vegas trips. He was

fired; criminal investigations were pending. Headlines splashed across the newspaper nearly every week. Carole just couldn't take it. She and the kids moved away, but Howard keeps hoping that she will forgive.

Barbara and Bill were barely eighteen when they married. They had a lot of growing up to do. Seven years later, the immaturity still shows. When Barbara's younger sister, Elaine, confided that Bill made a pass at her shortly after their marriage, Barbara couldn't stand it anymore. She hasn't left him, but he sleeps on the couch. Forgiveness is not in sight.



**What are the three toughest situations you've ever had to forgive? How did your unmet expectations affect each of these situations? What can you learn from these experiences to help you forgive now? Self-pity prevents forgiveness. What other barriers prevent you from forgiving?**

## WHY FORGIVENESS IS SO HARD

*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.*  
Ecclesiastes 3:1 NKJV

The craft of forgiving requires practice. To do relationships means to give room for mutual humanity. But forgiveness is not the first thing that comes to mind when you're furious, when you're in pain, because . . .

**You're a 'me first' thinker.** Each day centers around your needs, your wants, your schedule of events. Sure you love the guy, but there's a limit to what he can say or do before you act out. Pride avoids forgiveness, especially if he fails to meet your expectations.

**You've never practiced forgiveness in daily doses.** Little irritations and clashes confront most people every day. Forgive and release is a habit anyone can develop for the tiny tussles in dealing with neighbors, clerks and co-workers and in your love life. It flexes the forgiveness muscles for the huge hassles too.

**He stomped on your heart's treasure.** He crossed a major 'no no' line. At stake was your trust. A broken promise. A humiliation. He trespassed over a sacred value. Trust is so crucial. Once lost, it's hard to regain. It can be one huge big deal. Or a pile of piddling things. But credibility's been busted. The road to restoration in such a case can prove long and difficult.

**A basic bond broke.** A committed couple form a legal link, a social network, an emotional dependency, many mental synapses, a physical union and. . .more than that. . .a spiritual covenant. Unfaithfulness at any of these levels rips one or more of these hallowed connections apart. The pain's so deep and hurts so bad that you can't imagine any good coming from it.

**You haven't talked it through long enough.** Give yourself time to work through the phases. Find a place that's conducive to uninterrupted conversation. Listen to all he has to say. Don't put words in his mouth. Explain exactly what you're having trouble forgiving. Express yourself with reason and compassion. If you've got the nerve or humility, ask him what you can do for you both to get through this struggle. Calm confrontation can purify your relationship, get it back on a more honest track. Figure out when to talk, when to shut up.

**He's never said, "I'm sorry."** If your mate asks for forgiveness, you're way ahead of many couples. If he refuses to see his personal blame, then at least let him know what bothers you and why and how you intend to handle it from your side. He doesn't have to fess up, for you to forgive. It's the highest test of the truest love. It's a decision of the heart.

**It's so difficult to forget.** At least at first. You've got to clean the closet of your mind. . .often. Old hurts and unaddressed resentments can rise at the most unexpected occasions. But even for serious crimes, there's a statute of limitations. Settle it now and every time it pops up.

**You expect more of him than you do of yourself.** Give your mate the same consideration that you want him to give you when you flub. Unless you're perfect in every way. If so, you definitely should be able to forgive with no effort. A perfect person could—like God can. If you honestly cannot drum up any faults of your own, ask your mate to enlighten you.

**You can't quite forgive yourself.** Your threshold of standards is so high, you can't bear to fail, to let yourself down. Therefore, you won't let others off the hook either.

**You want him to snap out of it. . .now!** Are you willing to help find a workable solution? Can you come alongside him and aid in the gritty job of overcoming some challenge? It's so much simpler to say, "Boy, you've got a problem and you'd better do something about it." And shine him on. That's not what best friends and true lovers do, if you're in this thing to the end. . .together.

## HOW TO LOVE HIM

Loving your imperfect man is a learned art. Learning to live together demands grace. Even after years of co-habiting, you may be just beginning to understand a complex variable of his personality. Continuing to express your love in the same way you did five or ten or twenty years ago won't suffice. But there's no foolproof smooth sailing in any romance. And there's always something new to discover about the man you're learning to love. You may never know everything about him. (Or yourself!)

Unsettling alterations.

Unexpected adjustments.

Flexibility helps deal with the shifting dynamics in a growing relationship. Explore what's happening with yours. Every coupling's unique—fluid or brittle, fragile or unbreakable, flexible or frigid. A few fires or sorrows help determine which is yours. When you finally accept the reality that all people contacts present problems, you can relax and accept yours. And find the humor in them. Or appreciate the lessons learned.



***"But I don't feel very forgiving," you say. Start with the habits of the acts of love. Be polite. Be kind. Do a thoughtful deed. See where that leads. Pray for him. Ask God's help. Ask Him to reveal if there's a fault of yours to face. Ask Him for wisdom to understand your mate, why he responds the way he does. Ask Him to bring about the widest spiritual benefit possible from this situation.***



**One idea:**  
**rejuvenate your original attraction for him by remembering the details of your meeting, the moment you realized he's the love of your life. Reminisce with him all the good times.**

The Goldmine produced meals, not metal. It was the best place to eat in town. Kenneth and Sandi spent almost every waking hour to keep the restaurant in smooth operation. They owned a two-story house on the hill with one of the largest swimming pools in town. Kenneth drove a German sports car. Sandi liked her furs and diamonds.

Then, Kenneth and Sandi announced one Sunday evening at church they were selling the restaurant and their house to do mission work in West Africa. Some folks advised caution and moderation. "Don't go overboard on this too quickly," they advised.

By summer's end, they had sold all their belongings and headed overseas. They wrote to us often. And they faced one disaster after another.

The funds they sent ahead to secure housing and office space for a bookstore had been absconded. An auto accident sent Sandi to the hospital with a broken leg. Complications forced a flight to London to a specialist. Their health insurance didn't cover any bills incurred in that country because of a civil war in the south. Their cross-cultural training had been so limited that Kenneth alienated most of the people they were supposed to be reaching when he insisted that meals be cooked according to modern American restaurant standards.

The second year, their bookstore was robbed four times, and Kenneth got sick with a respiratory disease none of the doctors could diagnose. For a while he could survive only with a rare and expensive tank of oxygen close by.

The third year they returned home. No thriving business. No house on the hill. No fur coats. No German car or diamonds. They live in a small apartment on the highway behind the supermarket. Sandi is the office manager at an insurance company. Kenneth isn't strong enough yet to return to work yet.



**\*\* Tap into spiritual resources. Reach out to God's power to work out the delicate details of doing your relationship. He's proved faithful in our own marriage. He can help you too. Study the Bible's promises. Claim them as your own. Ask God for insight, understanding, creativity.**

**\*\* Give the problem time. Keep alert to insights—the big picture of what's going on with you two. Meanwhile, try not to nag. Don't repeat the same subject. Try not to pound the issue against his last nerve. Instead, spot any improvement; give praise where it's due.**

**\*\* Find ways to stay steady. In the midst of your crisis. . . Study. Play. Exercise. Take a class. Help at a hospital. Take your kids on a field trip. Do anything but mope at home or work, ready to**

After a long day at her job, Sandi planned an office party with several co-workers. "Well, if we still had the swimming pool. . ." then she caught herself. A tear fell but she offered a warm smile that rearranged her wrinkles. "No regrets," she added. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Failure as well as success can be deemed a team effort, a risk you embraced together.

## Groaning or Growing Through His Imperfections

Marriage...requires the management of hurt feelings. Marital arguments and fights often revolve around hurts of the heart. . .A conversation crosses the line and becomes an argument or fight when one spouse believes his feelings have been overlooked, ignored, or wounded. The hurt spouse begins to feel that her husband is not there for her and does not care about her perspective.

Dr. Archibald D. Hart & Dr. Sharon Hart Morris, *Safe Haven Marriage*, p.141

One day Emily got so angry with her husband's stubbornness that she locked herself in the bathroom. "I'm not coming out until I've decided to leave Dan, kill myself, or completely accept this situation as God's will for me," she cried.

Four hours and a box of tissues later, she emerged. "I finally decided, no matter how frustrated I got, I wasn't going to commit suicide or walk out," she said. "With those two options eliminated, that meant I had to find a way to accept these impasses, and work them through. Maybe that's what the Lord had in mind all along when he brought Dan into my life. He wanted me to stop running away from crises and to grow up."

Now Emily sees each day as part of God's plan, complete with Dan's complications. It took her months to get used to that idea, and several years to express mature responses. But Emily's surviving. In fact, she'll admit, "We're growing closer than I ever imagined we could."

Emily's loving her imperfect man. But not every woman comes to that conclusion. Each one's got her own limits, her line he better not cross.



**You can practice the art of forgiveness. An imperfect man will provide you plenty of resources for forgiving something most every day. Learning to forgive is a necessary attribute in going about your daily business, as well as bumping up against the man you're learning to love. Or else you can blow out all your gaskets instead and his too. It's your choice. Forgiveness means a) You don't bring the offense up again, b) You don't bring it up to anyone else, c) You don't sit around sulking about it to yourself.**



**With God's help, there's no limit to how much you can forgive. It's not like running out of milk or a battery dying. Forgiveness and love come in limitless quantities, when you release yourself in daily doses to God, who is the ultimate source.**

## WHY SHOULD YOU TRY TO FORGIVE?

*It's wise to be patient and show what you are like by forgiving others.*

Proverbs 19:11 CEV



**An enduring marriage is a living, breathing miracle. It is plain proof that love can actually exist in this loveless world, and not only exist but persist and grow through all the vicissitudes of life. . A loving marriage is a solid guarantee that no matter what else may happen, at least there will be some love in the world.**

**Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, pg.107**

Always risky. Sometimes impossible. But so refreshing, healing when it's done right. Every up close and personal relationship requires a flood of pardons to survive. It's an inescapable part of human interaction. But it takes a process of steps. Peace doesn't always happen the instant after revelation or confession. There's a whole gamut of emotions to work through, for one thing. And perhaps a lot of questions and discussion and getting used to an altered view of loving an imperfect man who you once thought perfect. Here's some truths to consider, to determine if it's worth the hassle . . . .

**Most everyone needs another chance.** If you had only one shot at getting thing's right, you'd never succeed at anything, especially relationships. No one does getting along at the first attempt. Years of building poor habits, of self-centeredness, of having little self-control do not reverse instantly when two people fall in love. Good unions require room to grow, space to change, breadth to mature. You're the one who can hang in there when the imperfections become transparently obvious. When your proud mate needs time to face up to his failure. Don't deprive him of his hope--that may be all he has.

### **You'll suffer if you don't forgive.**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* Matthew 5:7 NKJV

You multiply your own sorrows. You rob yourself of your full potential for wholeness. You'll alter how you look at every action, every word, every event—with suspicion that can make you a cynic. You'll become a slave to your bitterness. Love twists into a war fest where everyone's on the losing side. Life's tough enough without the extra burden of unforgiveness pulling you down. And you most likely will need lots of practice. He may step on your toes the scriptural seven times seventy (Luke 17:4). Loving an imperfect man thoroughly requires a lifetime. The saddest thing, a form of hell on earth, is to have no one to love and no one to love you.

**Others you care about are watching and reaping.** There's always other victims besides you. What's the best solution for them? How can they be spared the full brunt of your vindication? What healthy model of doing relationships can you exhibit for them that will help them with their own? Be the first to forgive.

**You can make the same allowances for his faults as you do your own.**

*You can see the speck in your friend's eye. But you don't notice the log in your own eye.*

Luke 6:41 CEV

No matter how many times you've been right, it's just possible that in this instance you were wrong.

**In a world where a good God exists, justice wins out.** He won't get away with anything. You're not responsible to meting out the punishment for your man's every fault and failure. God's always at work to even the scales, to rule with fairness. You might not see that happen right away, but your forgiveness helps God accomplish the highest goal in the circumstance. Think about every wrong you've ever done. Do you really want him and you to get everything you truly deserve?

**It's the only way to grow a lifetime relationship.** Every perfect set of long-time lovers you've ever admired had a whole lot of pardoning to do to last. Forgiveness fulfills the intertwined destiny with your imperfect man.

**You've been given that gift.** Has he ever forgiven you for any hurt or offense? Has God? Think about it—isn't it ironic that a holy, perfect God can forgive the most heinous obscenity, yet faulty you wreak with self-righteous non-forgiveness?

**It's a true test of love . . . and knowing God.**

*The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love.* 1 John 4:16 MSG

**Miracles happen.** Love that doesn't give up can accomplish amazing things.



**Finding peace. . .your aim is to become a team in the midst of disappointment, to be filled with well-being despite differences. That's the unique calling of marriage. And for marriages not quite made in heaven, that goal will invigorate some of the highest, purest examples of human devotion.**

**A Praise Calendar. . .You don't need to chart your tense times—you'll remember those. But don't forget the special moments that'll get buried under a mountain of mundane or mishaps. Get a yearly calendar that shows the months at a glance. Use it to jot down bits of hope, hints of healing. Keep it short, positive. Read it during good and bad times. A great attitude adjuster. It might even change your opinion of your imperfect man.**

*I believe from experience and observation, that some of God's greatest works have been done in private, in the very delicate details of dealing with critical crises, by overcoming the dysfunctions in relationships. Some day he will exhibit his incredible artistry for an admiring crowd of heavenly witnesses.*

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Stuart and Stella had been married thirty-five years when a girl twenty years younger made a pass at Stuart. He surprised his wife, his grown kids, and even himself when he ran off with his new-found sweetheart.

A crushed Stella tried to start life over, but at fifty-eight, she felt past her prime. She also believed she'd never forgive Stuart. While Stuart played like he was thirty-five, or so Stella thought, she got a part-time job and found new interests. And she tried to release Stuart in her mind and heart, for her own sake. She didn't want to grow into a bitter, old woman. Over the next six years she worked through her tears and anger and discovered a measure of spiritual growth. She relied on the goodness of God, in spite of it all.

Then, she felt free enough to send Stu a Christmas card, the first positive communication in all those years. At Easter she mailed a card and a little note about what she was doing. On June 25, Stu showed up at her front door, on her birthday. With great difficulty he admitted that he hadn't seen his paramour in five years. He confessed he'd made the most horrible mistake of his life, but he'd been too ashamed to presume on Stella's grace. "I've thought about you so much," he sobbed. "I know I behaved like an inexcusable jerk."

Stella nodded agreement.

On July 4, Stu asked Stella if she'd go to dinner with him at the Riverbend Lodge.

Stella accepted.

On December 17, their original wedding date, Stu walked her back down an aisle and asked her to marry him.

Stella said, "Yes."

That was nine years ago this winter. Now, that's one happy couple. And three delighted children. And eight thrilled grandchildren.

Of course, none of this was easy. Their love came very close to being destroyed. . . forever. But Stuart repented and Stella forgave. Joy wells up every time I think of them.

Of course, not every story ends this way. But repentance and forgiveness made it possible. And if you let him, a holy, perfect God will fill the gaps in your imperfections, making something beautiful of your determination to keep loving an imperfect man.

Meanwhile, the earth quakes. Volcanoes erupt. Waves pound. Fires jump creeks. Bridges collapse. Plagues surge across the land. We don't live in a perfect world.

And there are no perfect men. Not exactly. However, there's a man who's perfect for you. Being happy with him doesn't mean he has no flaws. But you choose to look beyond them to love the whole person and cooperate with the couple you're becoming.

## \*\*\*\*\*THE END\*\*\*\*\*

Do you have a story about how God helped you keep on loving your imperfect man after some tough times and distresses? I'd love to hear from you. Tell me what lessons you've learned. Let me know if you would be willing for me to share your account on my website. I'll use only your first name or a pseudonym, if you prefer. Send to [janet@blybooks.com](mailto:janet@blybooks.com) and put "Loving An Imperfect Man" in the subject line.

This article was adapted and expanded from *Be Your Mate's Best Friend*, by Stephen and Janet Bly (Moody Press, 1989) and *When Your Marriage Disappoints You*, by Janet Chester Bly (CrisisPoints For Women Series, finalist, ECPA Gold Medallion Award, NavPress, 1990)

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