Creating and Building a Ministry for the Spiritually Mismatched

A Church Resource Created By

Mismatched & Thriving Ministries
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The Spiritually Mismatched Marriage

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Look across the auditorium of a typical church in America on any Sunday and you will observe some recent findings:

- The typical U.S. Congregation draws an adult crowd that’s 61% female, 39% male. This gender gap shows up in all age categories. (U.S. Congregational Life Survey)
- On any given Sunday there are 13 million more adult women than men in America’s churches. (Barna)
- This Sunday almost 25 percent of married, church-going women will worship without their husbands. (Barna)

Although these trends have been evident for a sometime in our modern churches, I believe that churches are beginning to take intentional steps to reach out to the last segment of believers who have been widely overlooked in previous years. Hallelujah!

I would like to encourage churches to lead a ministry for spiritually mismatched women who are desperate to grow spiritually. These women desire to serve the Lord but feel as though they are excluded and unseen in the mainstream of church ministries because they are spiritually mismatched.

The Spiritually Mismatched Marriage

My name is Lynn Donovan and I am one of these women. I have attended church alone all of my married life, twenty-two years and counting. There are many aspects of being a Christian wife who attends church without her husband that the majority of church leaders haven’t considered. It’s my earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit continues to stir the hearts of church ministry leaders cultivating an awareness of the unique struggles these women face as well as the gifts and talents they can offer the Body of Christ.
Four Types of Spiritually Mismatched Marriages:

- One spouse comes to faith after marriage.
- One spouse returns to faith after a prodigal period.
- Spouses are of different religions.
- One spouse is growing spiritually and their partner is not. *

*Nearly half of those who participate in our ministry are wives whose husband is less committed to his Christian faith.

These women are truly gifted and committed servants of the local church. They find encouragement and pleasure in their faith when they serve God by serving others. Often when this segment of the Body of Christ is recognized and boosted, they become strong prayer warriors. They serve in many aspects of church ministry, such as children’s and youth ministry as well as in ministries outside of their local church. There are many areas of ministry where their involvement is vital and contributes to the well-being and growth of the Body. There are also many areas of the church where they feel left out because they are a married-single.

How To Reach The Spiritually Mismatched

Understanding her home life is instrumental. The spiritual state or world view of her husband can range from ambivalent to hostile; uninterested to superficially spiritual and carnal; atheist to agnostic; or casually to zealously committed to another faith. How a woman lives out her faith at home and in front of her children varies depending on her husband’s position. While each set of circumstances is different, there are common concerns.

The ideal presented in the church is that of the man as the spiritual leader with the woman submitting to his headship, as they jointly create a home where the children are trained up in the Lord. But this woman’s home isn’t like that. This unequal yoke is a source of pain for her (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). If she knew she shouldn’t have married her husband, she may even question whether God is punishing her.¹

¹ Adapted from Spiritually Mismatched Marriages: 30 Things Women’s Leaders Must Know
By Karla Downing
Page 12  The Spiritually Mismatched Marriage
By: Lynn Donovan
**She may feel:**
- Lonely and isolated
- Disappointed in her life
- Different and/or inferior to other women in the church
- Responsible for his lack of faith
- Fearful about her marriage and husband's salvation
- Judged by others because of his lack of faith
- Uncertain and fearful about what to do

**A Spouse can be:**
- Critical, sarcastic and accusatory, using her faith against her, calling her a hypocrite
- Hostile about anything faith related
- Jealous over her relationship with the Lord and church
- Defensive, especially if he feels convicted
- Afraid they're growing apart
- Feeling insufficient and disrespected

**Conflicts in which they may engage:**
- Clash of values over raising kids to faith, media choices, discipline and recreation
- Missing church functions to be with him
- Tithing—monetary as well as time spent at church
- Activities the children are allowed to participate in
- How openly she practices her faith and teaches her children in

**Truths she needs to hear:**
- She's not responsible for his salvation
- She should submit to his decisions but say no when his request violates her conscience
- Her love and actions can make her home "Christian"
- Accept her husband's spirituality; don't nag or be judgmental
- Let joy come from the Lord
- Focus more on positive things in common than spiritual differences
- Live her spiritual life in a quiet way (1 Peter 3:1-2)
- Keep husband first and continue to need him
• Don't compare him to other "spiritual" men
• May need boundaries with addictions, anger, abuse
• She is not alone. Nothing can separate her from God’s love for her (Romans 8:38-39)

How you can help:
• Have activities jointly for singles and couples encouraging women to come alone
• Have husband-friendly activities like a Valentine's dinner, mother's/father's day brunch, or church picnic, where the focus isn't preaching
• Start a support group for these women to connect
• Have mentors with similar experience available
• Include examples of her situation in your teaching

Support groups:

By providing an opportunity within the local church for these women to meet other women who are also spiritually mismatched is paramount in their healing. Most of these women feel as though they are completely alone facing their struggles. All of these women contend with a significant season of loneliness as they are unable to share their faith with their spouse. When they discover there are mentors and a group of ladies who are in the trenches along with them, their hope soars.

A number of studies are available that are specific for the spiritually mismatched. Through these studies women grow in faith while they learn skills to successfully lead their children to faith and maintain love and respect for their spouse while they pray for his salvation.
Bible Study Resources:

*Winning Him Without Words, Regal Books 2010:*

Presents 10 Christ-centered keys to thriving in a spiritual mismatch. Readers are encouraged to commit to Christian community, to release their spouse to God’s capable hands, to believe their marriage is blessed, to pick and choose their battles, and to continue their pursuit of a growing faith and to love their spouse with fresh enthusiasm.

“It matters not how we came to be in our crazy, mixed-up and unexpected marriage situations. What matters is that God desires that we honor our marriage commitment and fulfill our marriage vows through His power and His strength,” says Miller. “There were many years of confusion, sadness and unfulfilled expectations, but I discovered it's possible to love, live and thrive in an unequally yoked marriage.”

Both Donovan and Miller are Christian women in spiritually unequally yoked marriages, but believe that God wants every marriage to exude peace and love. Chapters include:

- **Know You're Not Alone:** (Lynn) Recognizing that we aren't the only person living in an unequally yoked marriage is a key aspect to restoring hope. Having Christ in our lives enables us to view our husbands as the wonderful man God created, regardless of your different beliefs.
- **Don't Save Your Husband - Save Yourself:** (Lynn) The best thing I ever did was to get out of the way so that Jesus could be Jesus. I relinquished control and turned my man completely over to Christ and an unexpected, peaceful freedom emerged in our marriage.
- **Trade Perfection for Authenticity:** (Dineen) I came to understand that many of my disappointments had come from expectations I'd placed upon him to fulfill needs he wasn't even aware of. In the end, all I really accomplished was a heart full of resentment.
- **Keep Your Armor On - You're at War!** (Dineen) Instead of putting on the label of martyr in a spiritually mismatched marriage, we need to put on the label of missionaries. We need to think of ourselves as soldiers on the front lines of our marriages.

Other chapters include parenting children in an unequally yoked marriage, praying into the life of your spouse and scriptures to encourage and strengthen you.   *Winning Him Without Words*
empowers readers to create that environment in their homes and thrive as God works. Published by Regal Books. February 2011. Trade Paper, 224 pages.


This book is the answer to the desperate cry of a spiritually mismatched mother who wants her children to grow up into a strong faith in Jesus. Award-winning authors Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller offer compassion, encouragement and practical wisdom for the spiritually mismatched mom, whether she is married to a non-Christian, single, divorced, or navigating the challenges of a blended family. With grace, dignity and hope, *Not Alone* shares the personal experiences of both authors in raising their own kids to know and love Jesus and weaves scripture and prayer to empower spiritually mismatched moms and help them embrace the truth that they are not alone. When mothers allow God to guide them in raising their children to thrive spiritually, moms will be amazed to see how God honors their efforts and leads them every step of the way. Published by Regal (October 7, 2013) Paperback: 208 pages

Each book is an 11 week study which includes questions that prompt women to grow in their faith, marriage and family. They include a Leader’s guide, class materials, and additional information such as prayers for their spouse and children.

Other studies in this genre are: Beloved Unbeliever by Jo Berry and When He Doesn’t Believe by Nancy Kennedy. These do not offer specific study questions for groups but still can be used in this setting.

**Preparing to launch a small group:**

As mentioned earlier, there is a significant population of churched women who find themselves spiritually mismatched to some degree. However, often there are women who hesitate to attend a small group. They fear others in the church will realize they are struggling in their marriage or perhaps her husband appears to be an on fire believer at church, but at home, it’s a different story. This woman’s husband would be angry or embarrassed if she were to attend.

Making this group available, comfortable and personally inviting a woman who you know is struggling privately has been successful. Overall the attendance of these small study groups can be small in number. Don’t be overly concerned with the numbers in attendance. At times a
group of three women can bring about enormous change and hope that transforms lives, marriages and families and ultimately glorifies Christ.

The following is from a small group leader:

Our mission statement is “to provide prayerful support and encouragement to help women sustain marital hope and harmony when her husband does not share the same commitment to the Lord.”

This ministry has been an awesome experience for all of us who have participated. We continually learn how to be the wife Christ wants us to be and learn how to stay focused on our relationship with Christ as we await that blessed day when our husband will come to know the Savior we love. Two of our ladies’ husbands did come to know the Lord with changes they made in their marriages, so there is always hope for all our husbands to be saved in God’s perfect timing; after all He is in control of everything and we need to relinquish that to Him all day long. This fellowship of ladies has been like family. If one of us needs anything, they are there for you. I facilitate this ministry that God spoke to me to start in 2006. It has been a spectacular journey that has blessed my life and my marriage, but more importantly has intensified my relationship with God.

Praise the Lord!!

These spiritually mismatched marriage ladies are often a group neglected in churches and they deeply need your help. These women should be lifted up for their perseverance. May God lead you to explore the idea of starting your own Spiritually Mismatched Ministry.
Sincerely, Susan Conklin

Additional activities in or outside of the study group can include:

**Class Speakers/Activities:**
- Women who were in an unequally yoked marriage
- Husband who became saved recently
- Bring wedding pictures to class/fellowship activity – guess whose picture is whose and then reflect why you fell in love with your husband

**Outside Class Fellowship Activities:**
- Ladies Night Out to the movies or another venue
- Salad Socials at someone’s home (everyone brings an ingredient for a salad)
First Sunday Church Service of the Month, ladies go to the altar to pray for their husbands and families.

Reach out:

Understanding and reaching out to these women, whose husband isn’t the spiritual leader, can be done with love and intentionality. As many of them mature in their faith, they become leaders in the church, helping the next generation as they quietly lead their family in faith. And they remain hopeful for their spouses’ full salvation.

Join these ladies in prayer for their husbands and families and watch God transform their lives.

_Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives._ ~1 Peter 3:1

Leader’s Kit is attached and can be downloaded in full at:
Mismatchedandthriving.com
http://www.spirituallyunequalmarriage.com/LeadersKit.pdf

Visit our Resources page for study support resources: Video Lessons, Printable Scripture verses, Words of Affirmation and other marriage encouragement.
- Dealing with Conflict and Confrontation
- Identity In Christ
- Power Prayers for Marriage
- Power Scriptures for Marriage
- Power Devotion for Marriage
- Power Words, Phrases, and Quotes for Marriage
- Words of Affirmation for Husbands
- Tips to Fire-up the Romance
- Praying for Your Husband
- Raising a Struggling Teen
- Shore Up the Walls: Praying Through Nehemiah
- Renewing My Marriage (Article by Dineen on Today’s Christian Woman)

To request free bookmarks for your small group study, please drop us a request through our contact page.

Page 8 The Spiritually Mismatched Marriage
By: Lynn Donovan
The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. — Matthew 23:11-12

Dear Leader,

Leading a small group is one of the most rewarding investments you will make for the kingdom of God. Thank you for giving your time, love and prayers to help others discover hope and healing for their marriages. Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller, the authors, thank you, and we have prayed, asking the Lord to bless you as you facilitate this study.

This kit is designed to give you resources that are easily used and reproduced. Use as much or as little as you need. We hope you’ll consider the [www.SpirituallyUnequalMarriage.com](http://www.SpirituallyUnequalMarriage.com) and [www.MismatchedandThriving.com](http://www.MismatchedandThriving.com) websites, as well as the Yahoo group, 1Peter3Living, resources to share with the women in your group. You will also find many free downloads and teaching videos under the RESOURCES tab on our Mismatched&Thriving site.

Please tell us when your group will be meeting so that we can pray for you during your study (contact us through our website, www.MismatchedandThriving.com). Feel free to contact us if you’d like to set up a time if you’d like one of us to Skype into your group.

We are honored to be on this journey with you!
Lynn & Dineen
(lynn@mismatchedandthriving.com, dineen@mismatchedandthriving.com)

**Kit Resources:**

- Getting Ready to Start a Small Group
- Helpful Hints Before You Begin
- Small Group Flyers
- Sign-up Sheet
- Small Group Agreement
- Member Class Card
Getting Ready to Start a Small Group

- Use your church bulletin and the flyers in this kit to let women know about the group. There’s a place on the flyers to add your group details, contact information, etc.

- Books can be ordered at a group discount through Regal Books at www.GospelLight.com. They are also available through Amazon.com, ChristianBook.com and Barnes&Noble if you prefer participants order their own books.

Helpful Hints Before You Begin

- Each week, greet the women as they arrive. Love on them. Make them feel welcome and comfortable.

- Listen more and talk less. Keep confidences. Encourage the women to share, and assure them that your meeting will be a safe place where they are free to be authentic.

- Encourage uplifting talk of husbands and let the women know that your group is not a place for husband bashing.

- Encourage each member of your group to speak. Although there are some individuals who can share easily, do not allow them to dominate a conversation. Steer the conversation to allow everyone a chance to contribute. Thank those who share frequently, and then ask someone who is quiet to share their thoughts.

- Always use the Bible as the basis for truth in your group. Allow for differences of opinion, and for the women to search out and provide Scriptures to support their opinions.

- Use your discernment, share your heart with authenticity and allow yourself to be vulnerable without making the group uncomfortable.

- Be sensitive to your members’ time. Begin the meeting on time and end it on time.

- Remind the women to silence their cellular phones.

- Invite the Holy Spirit into your group and expect the love of Christ to transform lives and marriages.

- If at any time you feel any of the members may be in a marriage where abuse or addiction is present, privately encourage her to seek professional Christian counseling.

- Have a box of tissues nearby.
Winning Him Without Words

Do you feel like you’re walking a tightrope of spiritual survival—guarding the flame of your belief in Christ, yet unable to share it with the person you love most in the world?

Your spiritually mismatched marriage can be a vibrant, blessed relationship where you’re free to grow in love with God and your husband!

Join this 11 week study and learn the keys to thriving in your spiritually mismatched marriage.
You’re Not Alone

As a mom do you ask yourself if you’re enough? Do you worry over your children’s eternity?

This is a parenting book, but it’s much more. It’s a love letter to all mothers—a message that changes our homes, our kids and our lives. It’s about the Father’s love that impacts those around us and changes ordinary moms into women of extraordinary grace, beauty and wisdom.

You may sometimes feel you’re on your own when it comes to godly parenting, but Jesus promised to be with you always. You’re not alone!

Join this 11 week study and learn how you can really can trust God to help you raise godly kids.

WHEN:

WHERE:

CONTACT:
I will pray to grow spiritually as an individual and as a group. I will ask God to help me build a strong family through the application of biblical truth.

I will give priority to the group meeting, arriving on time with reading and study questions complete.

I will pray regularly for group members

I will pray daily for my husband and children by name.

I will help the meeting be a safe place where women are free to be authentic and develop trust and godly relationships.

I will keep confidences. What is said in the group stays in the group.

I will be patient with others, offer love and stay clear of judgments.

I will feel free to invite other women to join the group who would benefit from the study and prayer.

I will feel free to laugh, love and cry.

I will expect the Holy Spirit to show up.

Signed _____________________________________________ Date ___________
Name ________________________________
Address ____________________________________________
Phone ________________________________
Email ____________________________________________
Spouse’s name ________________________________
Children’s names and ages ________________________________

What are you hoping to learn from this study?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is your greatest spiritual, physical or emotional challenge at this time?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How can your group leader pray for you throughout this study?
What in particular would you like the leader to pray for?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What questions do you have?

________________________________________________________________________