

Understanding Your Partner

How would you like to understand your marriage partner better? How would like your marriage partner to understand you better? You and your partner are very different and those differences can become a source of conflict and misunderstanding. In this chapter I want to look at some of the common differences men and women encounter in their marriages.

Males and Females are different.

In the beginning, God created two distinctly different types of human beings. The Bible says he made us male and female. Men and women are different from one another in more ways than just the obvious biological features. Men and women think differently, their emotions respond differently, and they have different expectations in relationships.

One man noticed this difference whenever his wife would share a problem with him. Being a man, he assumed that his wife wanted him to “fix” the problem. Men like to fix problems and to find solutions. So he told his wife how she could have avoided the problem in the first place. Then he told her the steps she should take to get out of her current dilemma. He concluded by giving her a few scriptures to support his comments.

However, he quickly discovered that his wife wasn’t expecting him to solve her problem. Instead, she wanted him to just listen to her and comfort her. She wanted him to understand her pain and distress. She was looking for his empathy and support. When he tried to “fix” the problem instead, his wife’s response was, “You just don’t understand!”

Later he observed how his wife’s female friends responded differently when she shared the same problem with them. They didn’t give her any advice. They didn’t tell her where she was wrong or how she should change her attitude. Instead they just listen attentively and expressed understanding and empathy. Their response was typical of how women empathize. His response was typical of how men analyze.

Different Personalities

You and your spouse have different personalities and those differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in your relationship. For example, you might be very direct and confrontational. You believe in speaking the truth in love and in expressing your feelings openly and honestly. You face issues directly and you don’t believe in avoiding conflict.

Your spouse, on the other hand, might be more indirect and compromising. He is not comfortable confronting issues directly and is much more willing to avoid unpleasant conflicts in order to maintain peace. He is concerned that if you both express your feelings honestly, that one of you will get hurt and your relationship will suffer. He is much more tactful and diplomatic in dealing with conflicts. He would much rather compromise on an issue than to cause a breakdown in the relationship.

Different families of Origin

You and your spouse grew up in different families. Your family, for example, might have been very connected with each other and enjoyed spending time together. When your family gathered

you had open and lively discussions with one another. You also might have come from a family that made decisions in a respectful and democratic manner. Everyone's opinion was valued and major decisions were made, only after there was a consensus among all the family members. No one imposed their will over the will of other members of the family.

Your spouse, on the other hand might have grown up in a family that was very disconnected and isolated from one another. They rarely got together, as a family, and they did not enjoy being together when they did. Her father made the decisions in her family. He was a very controlling, authoritarian figure and did not allow other members of the family to participate in the decision-making process. He considered his word to be law and any questioning of his decision was viewed as rebellion. Different family backgrounds can contribute to the misunderstandings and conflicts that married couples encounter.

Different personal histories

You and your spouse have different personal histories. You, for example, might have grown up in a family that was healthy, stable and godly. You have never known poverty and you have been spared of any personal tragedies. Your parents loved each other and stayed together for their entire lives. You were never abused as a child and you don't know what its like to be rejected and deeply wounded by someone else.

Your spouse, on the other hand might have experienced a lot of pain and heartache in her life. Her family was filled with violence and dysfunction. Her parents divorced when she was very young and she grew up without a father figure in her life. Her family struggled financially and she has suffered a lot of personal tragedy. She grew up being rejected by her dad and has struggled for years feeling like she didn't fit into her family. These different personal histories can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in your marriage.

Different family traditions

Each family has its own unique set of traditions and celebrations. You and your spouse have different understandings on how to celebrate holidays and special days such as birthdays and anniversaries. You, for example, might have grown up in a family that believed that elaborate birthday parties and birthday presents were great for children, but not appropriate for adults. Once a member in your family reached a certain age, he would no longer receive presents. Instead, he would just get cards from the rest of the members of the family.

Your spouse, on the other hand, might have grown up in a family where birthdays were celebrated in extravagant ways, even after a person became an adult. She expects to receive presents and to have a big party on her birthday even when she is thirty-seven years old!

You can imagine the disappointment your wife will experience the first time she has a birthday after you are married. Her expectation is that you will surprise her with a big party and a special present. She will be looking forward with anticipation for this very special day in her life. You, on the other hand, will be planning to give her a nice card with a short note expressing how much you love her and how special she is to you. When all she receives from you is a card, she can't believe that you could be so insensitive! You can't understand her disappointment, because no one in your family expects any presents or parties after they became adults. Different family

traditions can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings.

Violet and I grew up in families that had very different family rules and family traditions. These differences were the source of several misunderstandings and tensions, especially early on in our marriage. Saturday morning, for example, was always a point of tension. When I thought of Saturday I looked forward to a relaxing, leisurely day. My job did not require me to go to work on Saturdays so I looked forward to relaxing and sleeping longer in the morning.

Violet, however, grew up in a family that viewed Saturday as the family workday. Saturday was the day to prepare for a day of rest on Sunday. In her family everyone was expected to work together on Saturday in order to complete the household chores. So, Violet rose early in the morning and began to clean the house, do the laundry, and prepare the meals for Sunday. I, however, was not helping her like she expected. Instead, I was still in the bedroom trying to sleep while she was working hard by herself.

Violet resented my not helping with all the chores that needed to be done. She couldn't understand why I was so unwilling to do my part. To her it appeared that I was lazy and irresponsible. In her family, everyone got up early on Saturday and worked together. That was the family tradition in her home.

I, on the other hand, couldn't understand why Violet got up so early and was working so hard on Saturday. Saturday was a day to relax! That was the family tradition in my home. Finally, after months of frustration and misunderstanding, we were able to discuss this issue and discover the root of our problem. We came from families that had different expectations about what should be done on Saturday. Once we realized what the problem was, we were able to find a solution that was acceptable to both of us.

Get Understanding!

Understanding takes the longest, as we discovered in our chapters on the four pillars for unity. And yet, it is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. The book of Proverbs tells us that understanding is more valuable than silver. We are instructed to do everything we can to obtain understanding. Understanding will bring blessing and riches into our lives.

Proverbs 4:7 says "Though it costs you all you have, get understanding."

Proverbs 16:16 tells us "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!"

Proverbs 16:22 says that "Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it."

In I Peter 3:7, husbands are encouraged to "live with their wives in an understanding way...and to grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

One of the greatest challenges in a marriage is to understand and accept the spouse God has blessed you with. Many marital conflicts arise because husbands and wives simply do not recognize that their spouse responds to life differently than they do.

Married people often fall into several traps over this issue of being different. One trap is to seek to change your spouse so that he will conform to your way of doing things. One husband said that when he was first married, he thought the goal in communication was to get his wife to think like he did, to feel the way he felt and to do things the way he did them. Unity in marriage, however, is not built on uniformity. I Corinthians, chapter 12 shows us the beautiful balance between diversity and unity. There is one body, but there are many members. Each member is unique and yet all the members are one. The same is true in marriage.

Another trap that couples fall into is to compare themselves with each other. II Corinthians 10:12 tells us that we are foolish to measure ourselves by ourselves. It is a fruitless and meaningless activity. Such comparisons will lead us into either thinking we are better than our spouse, or that she is superior to us. The first case leads us into pride and the second case leads us into jealousy and discouragement.

Another trap couples fall into is to view their differences as evidence that something is wrong in their marriage. They point to their differences as evidence that they married the wrong person. They view their differences as a sign of division and they assume that one of them is right and the other is wrong. However, differences in marriage partners do not automatically imply one is right and the other is wrong. God intended marriage partners to compliment one another and to balance areas of weakness in each other's lives.

Let's turn our attention to some of these specific areas where you and your spouse may be different. These areas of diversity are not gender-based, even though some of them are often identified as either a male or a female characteristic. For the sake of our discussion, it is not important whether or not a particular characteristic is more common in males than in females. The important thing is to recognize that there is a difference between you and your spouse. Recognizing and identifying these differences is the first step toward greater understanding.

1. "Emotional feeler" or a "factual thinker"

You might respond to life as an "emotional feeler". You live your life through your emotions. When you speak, you share what you are feeling. When you hear something your feelings are stirred and you have an emotional experience.

Your spouse, on the other hand, might respond to life as a "factual thinker". When he speaks he speaks from his mind and he says what he thinks. As a result, the two of you can observe the same event and hear identical input, but you respond in very different ways. You will have an emotional experience while your spouse will only hear information. You might say, "Wow! Did you hear THAT! That was amazing!" Your spouse, sitting right next to you, calmly says, "Sure, I heard what he said. I have it all written down right here." He took good notes while you responded emotionally.

2. Logical or Intuitive

You may make decisions based on logic and objective data. Your primary focus is on collecting accurate information. Your spouse, however, may be more intuitive and base her decisions on subjective impressions.

In our marriage, Violet is more intuitively gifted than I am. For example, there were times when we would visit one of the ministry centers that were part of our ministry. As we would be driving up the driveway, Violet would turn to me and say something like this, “I sense there is something not right at this place!”

To my way of thinking there was no logical reason to make such a statement. As a result, I would often dismiss my wife’s observations. Such statements just did not make sense to me. We had not even parked the car yet! We hadn’t talked to anyone! There was no factual basis for such a statement.

However, after parking the car and getting settled, I would begin to collect information regarding the spiritual condition at that ministry center. I held staff meetings, leadership meetings, and individual meetings with staff members. Sometimes I spent three days interviewing people and hearing their input. Finally, at the end of those three days, I would come back to my wife and say, “Guess what! Something is not right at this place!”

How did she know this was true even before we arrived at the place? Where did that information come from? She had an intuitive capacity to connect with information and to make decisions differently than I did. I made decisions based on logic and objective information. Violet, however, made decisions based on intuitive perceptions. One way is not superior to the other. They are different but equally valid.

This issue affected our approach to child-raising also. Violet would approach me and say, “Jonathan, our son is going through something and I think you need to talk to him.” My response would be, “I just saw him this morning and he looked fine to me.” I only observed the outward and obvious behavior of my son. My wife, however, was aware of something deeper and less obvious.

Violet’s intuitive abilities are similar to the ability of a radar screen to detect objects that are not visible to the natural eye. A radar screen can pick up aircraft or missiles that are hundreds of kilometers away. She can detect something going on in a person’s heart long before it became obvious to me. I would look up with my natural eye and see the blue sky and think, “It’s a beautiful day. Everything is fine.” But my wife would pick up a small signal on her “radar screen” and she knew that everything was not fine. Something was coming in our direction that needed attention.

Violet does always know what the problem is or even what should be done about it when she initially receives the intuitive impression. She does know, however, that, whatever it is, it cannot be ignored. It is at this point that our gifts compliment each other. I am able to take the information my wife gives me and find out what the problem is. I can often pinpoint the issue and then come up with an effective response. I need her intuitive input and she needs my objective analysis.

3. Personal or Impersonal

You may take things very personally and when there is tension in your relationship, your first

question, is, “What have I done wrong?” Your spouse, on the other hand may not take things personally. His first question, when there is tension in your relationship is not, “What have I done wrong?” His question is, “Why did **you** do it?” You are vulnerable to accept the blame for any problem in your marriage while your spouse is vulnerable to project the blame on to you.

Let’s say, for example, that a wife personalizes issues and she is married to a husband who does not personalize issues. The two of them can sit in the same revival service and have very different responses. The wife personalizes the message and applies it into her life. She senses the conviction of the Holy Spirit and responds to the altar call with deep conviction and emotion, believing the message was directed specifically toward her.

Her husband, on the other hand, does not see how the message applies to his own life. He hears the same words, but he doesn’t sense the same conviction that his wife does. He is unmoved and, instead thinks, “I wish my neighbor had come to the meeting. This would have been a good message for him to hear!” He sees how the message would be helpful for his neighbor, but he doesn’t see how it applies to his own life.

Several years ago, I was the director of a live-in Christian community consisting of about forty-five residents. One day a woman in the community approached me and told me that one of the faucets in the kitchen was leaking and that it needed to be fixed. I promised her that I would take care of it as soon as possible. Two weeks later she gently reminded me that the faucet had still not been fixed and that the leak was getting worse. I thanked her for reminding me and again, I promised that it would be taken care of shortly.

Several more weeks went by, however, and the faucet had still not been fixed. Again, this woman brought this issue to me. Only this time she was extremely upset over the fact that she had mentioned this repeatedly and nothing had been done about it. This leaky faucet had gotten to her spirit and she was angry about it. She accused me of being irresponsible, of being a poor leader and of not keeping my promises. The issue was no longer a leaky faucet; the issue was my failings and character flaws.

My first reaction to her attack on my character was not one of repentance and humility. I initially couldn’t see my own problem. Instead I focused on the reactions of this woman. I thought to myself, “Wow, she has got a problem! The Lord is really dealing with her!” “She is rebellious, disrespectful and is coming against God’s anointed authority!”

Furthermore I thought, “She should just release this leaky faucet to the Lord and learn to trust Him, even if it never gets fixed!” In fact, I rationalized my own actions and excused my failures by thinking that it was actually a good thing that I hadn’t fixed the faucet. If I had fixed it right away, these attitudes would have never surfaced in this woman’s heart. It was obvious to me that the Lord was using the unfixed faucet to deal with her bad attitudes! I was totally blind to my own needs in this situation.

My response is typical of someone who has difficulty personalizing issues in his own life. Someone like me can easily see another person’s faults but have difficulty seeing my own. Eventually, the Lord showed me that if I had fixed the faucet when it was first brought to my

attention, things would have never built up for this woman in the way they did. Was she responsible for her attitudes and responses? Certainly! But I had added to the pressures in her life by my irresponsible actions.

This experience opened my eyes to a common pattern I saw in the lives of several couples I was counseling. Often the wife in these marriages was genuinely trying to honor her husband, but her husband was not acting in a responsible way. The wife would repeatedly bring a concern to the attention of her husband, but nothing was ever done about it. In some cases it was a financial issue, in other cases it was the issue of child discipline. The wife would come to her husband with a respectful and submissive attitude and voice her concern. She didn't attack her husband or get angry with him.

However, instead of responding to his wife's concern, her husband would either forget about the issue, or just never get around to taking any action. The wife ended up bearing greater and greater pressure over this unresolved issue. She would see the household bills not being paid. She would see their child's behavior getting worse and worse. Friends and neighbors would complain to her about their child's unruly behavior. People would call and tell her that something needed to be done with their child.

Finally, in desperation, she would explode and express her anger to her husband. She would "attack" him and vent all of her pent-up frustrations. After such an outburst, however, she would feel terrible and would condemn herself for being such a poor wife. She would feel like she was a poor mother, a poor woman and a bad Christian example. She would immediately seek the Lord's forgiveness and then the forgiveness of her husband.

She would acknowledge her sin to him and ask forgiveness for being disrespectful. She would ask for prayer to be a more "submissive" and "meek" wife. Her husband would forgive her and pray that she would overcome "her problem." Unfortunately, throughout this process, neither one of them recognized his contribution to the problem. The focus was always on her lack of "submission" and on her bad attitudes.

I realized that, in order for these couples to grow and overcome their problems, the husband needed to accept responsibility for his actions. There was an imbalance in these marriages due to the fact that the wife accepted all the responsibility while the husband avoided responsibility.

4. Attention to Details

You and your spouse may be very different in your attention to detail. You, for example, may be very interested in details and you want specific information from your husband. Your husband, however, might be bored by details and gets irritated when asked to provide specific information. He thinks in broad, general terms and not in specific detail. He comes home after his day at the office and you ask him, "How was your day?" His response is, "It was fine!" That's all he has to say about twelve hours of his life! He has nothing more to say!

If he in turn, asks how your day went, your response is, "At 6:05 the baby woke up and started to cry. I went into the bedroom, picked him up, changed his diaper and put on his blue outfit. It was in the bottom drawer of the dresser. I started feeding him and then the phone rang. It was our

neighbor lady, the one that lives in the white house just across the street from the park. One of her sisters is coming to town on Friday and she wanted to know if we could get together on Saturday for lunch.”

You haven’t gotten past 6:15 a.m. yet, because of all the details you included in your story. Your husband, however, was not expecting you to cover every minute of your day. He only wanted to know in a general way how your day went! You were expecting more details from him and he was expecting fewer details from you.

My wife loves details. So when I travel on a speaking assignment and return home, my wife wants to know what happened on the trip. She is interested in a complete report of my travels. She wants to know how many people attended the meetings, what topic did I speak on, and how did the people respond to the messages? She is interested in where I stayed, what kind of food I ate, and what was the weather like? I have a hard time remembering all these details.

So, now when I travel, I take notes and pictures. Upon my return home I take time to share what had happened while we were apart. I love my wife and I know she wants to share in my life. Sharing all these details is a way of loving my wife and including her in my life. She is able to participate in the trip with me, even though she is at home. She, on the other hand, realizes that I am not interested in every small detail that happened while I was gone. I really don’t care what she had for dinner on Tuesday night. So, she limits what she shares with me and focuses on the most important events.

5. Forgetting or Recalling Past Events

One of you may approach life like a filing cabinet while your spouse approaches life like a computer or a tape recorder. When something happens in your life, you open the filing cabinet, place the event inside, shut the drawer and forget about it. You go on to the next event in life and put the previous one behind you. In fact, if you are asked later to recall what happened, you have a difficult time remembering it because it was filed away and forgotten.

Your spouse, on the other hand, may have a very vivid recall capacity. If the right buttons are pushed, everything is played on the recorder or it comes up on the computer screen. She can tell you what you said, the look on your face, the tone of your voice and where you were standing when you said it! And it happened 25 years ago! You on the other hand, are looking through your filing cabinet and you can’t find it anywhere. “Are you sure I said that?” you ask with disbelief. “O yes,” she declares with crystal clarity. “It was in 1983, at your mother’s house. The sun was shining and you were standing next to the window in the living room when you said it!”

This difference in recalling past events can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings in your marriage. It might appear to you that your spouse never forgets anything. She is always bringing up things from your past. You believe that she needs to learn that true forgiveness involves forgetting and letting go of things. Your spouse, however, feels that you conveniently forget things, because you are unwilling to face unpleasant issues. It’s hard for her to believe that you could forget something so important. She remembers the event so vividly that it seems impossible to her that you can’t remember it.

6. The Importance of Roots and Stability

You may have a great love of adventure and are always looking forward to the next challenge in life. You have a visionary outlook and your eyes are always looking toward the horizon. Your spouse, on the other hand, may be much more focused on the immediate surroundings and be more strongly connected to the home.

Your concern is for the one hundred and ninety nations that you haven't visited yet, while your spouse's concern is for the hole in the bathroom wall that has not been repaired for over two years. She wants to know when it is going to get fixed. Your attitude is, "Why fix it? Jesus is coming soon and it will all go up in smoke anyway! There are still four thousand unreached people groups that haven't heard the gospel!"

Your spouse views the home as an extension of herself. If her home is out of order, she feels out of order. If her home is messy, she feels messy. For her, it is important that the family environment is stable and in order. You on the other hand, are much more detached from the home and don't place a very high value on investing time and resources into your home.

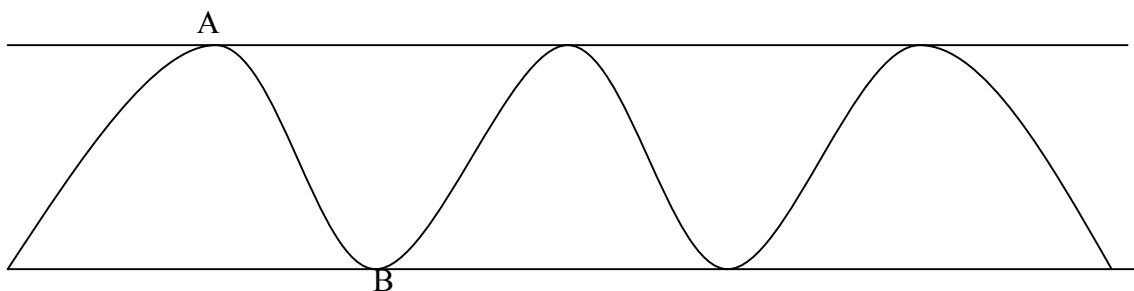
Because your spouse is so connected to her home, she will want to bring more of it with her when she travels. She wants to recreate her home environment wherever she goes. So, she will bring pictures, candles, and various mementos to remind her of home.

7. Mood Fluctuations

You and your spouse can be very different in your mood fluctuations. You may be always coming out of something or going into something. Your spouse, however, is steady and consistent. Your life is full of exhilaratingly high peaks of joy followed by deep valleys of despondency. Your spouse, on the other hand, goes through life with so little fluctuation that you sometimes wonder if he is still alive. You only see an occasional bump on an otherwise, straight line.

The diagram below illustrates this sharp contrast in mood fluctuation. For the sake of illustration, I will assume that the wife has the high mood fluctuations and that the husband has almost none.

Wife's mood fluctuations



Husband's mood fluctuations

As you observe, the wife experiences great fluctuations in her life while her husband experiences almost no variation at all. One morning they get up and she is at the top of the cycle. (Point A on the diagram) She greets her husband with “I am so in love with you, I can’t believe it! You are God’s gift to me! I don’t know what I did to deserve such a wonderful husband like you! I am so blessed with our children. They love the Lord and are so respectful. I just love that new church we have been going to. People are so godly and caring. That new pastor is such an anointed preacher.” Her husband responds in a non-emotional, even tone of voice, “That’s wonderful dear, I’m glad you’re having a good day.” He says goodbye and departs for work.

Later in the day he decides to call home and say hello to his wife. He calls home but doesn’t realize that her mood has changed since he last talked with her. She is now at the bottom of one of her mood swings. (Point B on the diagram) He greets her with, “Hello honey, it’s me!” She angrily blurts out, “I don’t know why I ever married you! You make me so mad! My mother warned me this would happen if I married you!”

She continues with her outburst, saying “Our children are driving me crazy! They are so rebellious and disrespectful. I don’t know what to do with them! Furthermore, I can’t stand the pastor in our church anymore and I think that the people there are all hypocrites and gossips. I am never going back there again!” He checks the phone number to see if he dialed the correct number! The voice sounds familiar, but the comments are so different from what he heard earlier in the day that he can’t believe his ears.

He is confused and frustrated by his wife’s unpredictable changes of mood. He wants her to be more consistent and to make up her mind. “Which is it?” he demands. “Do you love me or do you hate me?” She, on the other hand, wishes he would show more emotion. She wonders if he ever feels the emotions she does. She needs assurance from him that he still loves her, especially when she is at the bottom of her mood fluctuation.

This is one reason why a wife will often ask her husband, “Do you love me?” Sometimes she feels deeply loved by her husband, but at other times, she feels very uncertain and needs to be reassured. He can’t understand why she would ask such a question. In his mind, he thinks, “Of course, I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you. I never said I didn’t love you. So why would you question my love?” His love is steady, unwavering and lacking emotional expression.

8. Sharing Your Feelings

You may be able to share your feelings freely and openly. You know what is happening inside your heart and you are not afraid to talk about intimate and personal issues. Your spouse, however, may be more guarded and finds intimate sharing awkward. He may struggle identifying what is going on inside his heart. Even if you ask him directly, he may not be able to tell you what he is feeling.

I am fascinated by my wife's ability to share freely about her emotions. She fully understands what is happening inside her heart. She knows when she is depressed and she can even distinguish between different levels of depression. She knows when the depression started and the reason it is still there. Her ability to share so freely and intimately about her emotional condition never ceases to amaze me.

I, on the other hand, am quite different in this area. I struggle with understanding what is going on inside me. Even when I am aware of what is happening, I have difficulty sharing it with her. At times she says to me, "Larry, you look depressed. Are you depressed?" "I don't know," I respond. "Maybe I am. I'll go pray about it!" When I say to my wife, "Yes, I think I am depressed," her next question is, "Why are you depressed?" I honestly don't know. She finds that hard to believe because she is so aware of her own emotional state. My wife and I are typical of many couples, where one can easily share their feelings while the other can't.

9. Decisive or Indecisive

You may be decisive, impulsive, and ready to "go for it" with very little thought or reflection. Your spouse, on the other hand, may be cautious, deliberative and indecisive. You want to move forward and realize that if you don't act now, the opportunity will be lost. Your spouse wants to think about the decision and consider all the options before committing himself. He would rather miss the opportunity than to make a wrong decision.

Several years ago my wife and I were looking for a used car to purchase. We finally found one that was a possibility in the city where my parents lived. We went to see the car and my wife was very excited about this vehicle. It was in good condition, it had low mileage, and the price was within the range we could afford. She wanted to immediately sign the papers and purchase the car. I, however, had some reservations and didn't feel comfortable making such a hasty decision. Violet felt that if we didn't commit ourselves right away, someone else would buy it and we would miss the opportunity.

She was frustrated by a pattern that had emerged in our decision-making over the years. She would see something on sale and would want to buy it. But I would be reluctant to decide so quickly. I wanted more time to evaluate the decision and to pray about it. By the time I was ready to move forward, the sale had passed and we had missed our opportunity. She felt like we missed many great opportunities in our marriage because of my indecisiveness. She thought regarding this car, "Here again, was going to be another missed opportunity".

After a time of discussion and prayer, she reluctantly agreed to give me some more time to think and pray about the decision. In her heart, however, she thought, "Goodbye car, someone else will buy it." Three days after returning home I decided to call the owner to see if the car was still available. He informed me that it was no longer for sale. I asked if someone else had purchased it. "No, he said, "someone took it for a test drive for a few kilometers and the motor broke down. It needs some extensive repairs before I can sell it." When I told my wife this news, she was so grateful that we had not purchased the car. If we had bought it when my wife wanted to, it would have most likely broken down on our way home. We had been spared from making a huge mistake that would have cost us hundreds of dollars.

This incident gave my wife a new appreciation for me and for the balance that I bring into her life. She began to view my thoughtful decision-making as blessing instead of as a frustration. I helped her avoid unwise and impulsive decisions. Her decisiveness, on the other hand, has been a great blessing to me. She has encouraged me to move forward many times when I would have been reluctant. Without her balance in my life I would have missed out on many great opportunities that the Lord was setting before me. We are a great compliment to each other in this area of life.

10. Romantic or Practical

You may be a romantic person while your spouse is a practical person. You dream of intimate, romantic times together, as a couple. For you it would be very special to share an intimate dinner together at a quaint, little restaurant. You can imagine soft music being played by a charming, local musician. The dimmed lights and the softly glowing candle lights all add to the excitement of the evening. Your spouse, however, may not appreciate the setting as much as you. He may be only thinking of how expensive the menu is.

11. Time Management

You and your spouse may have different perspectives on managing time. You may be very punctual, predictable, and orderly. Your spouse, on the other hand, may be very unpredictable, spontaneous and flexible. When the two of you agree to meet at a certain time, you are there five minutes ahead of time. Your spouse, however, always arrives late. You place a great value on punctuality so you are very conscious of time. Your spouse places greater value on people and flexibility, so being on time is not as important to her.

You may keep time with a stopwatch. So when you say I will meet you at eleven o'clock on Friday, you will be there ahead of time. Your spouse, however, may keep time with a calendar. When they hear, "eleven o'clock on Friday" they only hear "Friday." To them, as long as they arrive on Friday it counts.

For you, your favorite scripture verse might be I Corinthians 14:40, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." Your spouse's favorite scripture verse, however, might be John 3:8, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

I like things orderly and I like to be on time. I married a woman who is like the wind that blows wherever it pleases. This difference has caused us a lot of conflict in the past. I valued being on time, while my wife was more sensitive to people and to what was happening in a situation. She was much more willing to adjust her schedule if the situation demanded it. I was more rigid and unwilling to change a prearranged plan.

There is a need to balance these two perspectives. One is not right and the other wrong. It is important to be on time, but it is also important, not to be bound by time. Sometimes it is more important to be flexible because the Holy Spirit is doing something unique. If we allow time to rule our lives instead of the Holy Spirit, that unique moment can be lost. Over the years, we have balanced each other out in this area, as we have gained greater understanding of how to handle this difference.

12. Shopping

You and your spouse may approach shopping very differently. For many women when they here the word shopping they think of a relaxing day at the shopping center. This is especially true for American women, but it is true for women in other nations. To these women shopping is viewed as a recreational outing. So when they hear the word, “shopping,” They hear, “shoppiiiiiiiiiiiiing!” They anticipate an unhurried and leisurely event. Part of the joy of shopping is just looking at things and getting out of the house for a few hours. It doesn’t really matter that much if they don’t purchase anything. The shopping experience is more important than what they buy.

However, for most men, when they hear the word shopping, they don’t think in terms of a recreational outing. They hear the word “hunting.” The goal for a man is to find the item he is looking for as quickly as possible and then return home. Shopping is a mission, not a recreational activity. For a man it is very frustrating to spend hours at the shopping center and not purchase anything. He can’t understand how his wife can come home with nothing and then say, “I had a good time!” To him, it is a waste of time.

Concluding Responses

Here are six responses to overcome the differences in your marriage.

1. Understand One Another

First of all, seek to understand each other. Your goal is not to agree with one another or to change one another. Rather, your goal is to understand your spouse and to recognize that he or she is different from you.

2. Accept One Another

Secondly, as you gain understanding of one another, you need to accept each other unconditionally. Don’t wait for your spouse to change before accepting them. Acceptance comes before change. Many couples make the mistake of withholding their acceptance from one another until they see sufficient change. Remember, the fact that your spouse is different from you does not mean that something is wrong with them.

3. Receive One Another

Thirdly, receive one another as a gift from God. God gives good gifts and your spouse is the perfect gift for you. He or she is not perfect, but he or she is the perfect complement to your life. Don’t reject God’s gift to you. Welcome your spouse with open arms.

4. Recommit Yourselves To One Another

Fourthly, recommit your lives to one another. When the two of you stood at the altar and committed your lives to one another, you really didn’t know each other very well. In some ways you committed yourself to a fantasy. You said yes to what you thought each other person was like. After several years of marriage you discovered what each other were actually like.

Renewing your wedding vows at this point in your marriage sends a powerful message to your spouse that you are committed to him or her in spite of any faults and weaknesses.

5. Celebrate Your Differences

Fifthly, celebrate your God-given differences. This is the joy of marriage. You are both fearfully and wonderfully made. You are gloriously different!

6. Work Together As A Team

Sixthly, God wants you and your spouse to compliment one another and to work together as a team. Your individual strengths can offset each other's weaknesses. Your lives and personalities can be a balance to one another. Your differences do not need to divide you. They can unite you as you work together as a team. Here are three statements married couples should regularly express to each other:

1. You are God's gift to me!
2. We are wonderfully different from each other!
3. We compliment each other and make a great team!

Application Prayer

Father, I acknowledge that my spouse and I are different in so many ways. Forgive me for the times I have rejected him or her because of these differences. I repent of trying to change my partner instead of accepting him or her.

Forgive me for the ways I have judged my partner and have not always appreciated the qualities in his or her life that are different from me. I accept the fact that being different is okay. I commit myself to living with my partner in an understanding way.

I acknowledge that my partner is a perfect gift from you. You gave me someone who is a balance and a compliment to me. Help us to work together as a team and to grow in our life together. Show us how we can compliment each other's weaknesses through our strengths.

I pray that our differences will not cause disunity between us, but rather that they will cause us to grow closer to one another. In Jesus Name! Amen.