

RELATIONSHIP: Appreciating His Desire For Shoulder-to-Shoulder Friendship

11. What Is Going On in This Story?*

In front of Stu, Missy told the marriage counselor, “I don’t accept Stu’s stupid invitations. He says, ‘Let’s go to the athletic club to walk and lift weights together.’ Or, ‘Hey, let’s go watch the basketball game.’ Or, ‘I thought about buying a tandem bike.’ But I refuse these requests. We need to work on our relationship. Communication is everything. If our relationship is going to make it, we need to be talking. Instead, he wants to play.”

How are Missy and Stu defining differently how they feel they should work on their relationship? Are they both right?

12. When Do Men Really Open Up?

Some educators believe boys should not go to school until age ten since up to that time they learn best outside, doing activities, and listening to stories. But get this. Jesus the Master Teacher had twelve men, spending most of his time outside, doing activities, and telling parables. Every man knows his best buddies are those he likes doing activities with shoulder-to-shoulder. Over time, they open up. They don’t need to talk a lot, but when together they are energized. Deborah Tannen’s research shows that men tend to sit shoulder-to-shoulder and periodically share their thoughts. Women on the other hand need to be face-to-face to talk.

Are men wrong? In her research the two sixteen-year-old boys opened up more than the other men and the women. However, they said very little yet were extremely transparent.

Most men open up after doing activities together, without much talking. What is the application of this to your marriage? Men, share how you relate to this.

13. Shoulder-to-Shoulder Friendship

Song of Solomon 5:16 says, “He is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend.” Women, think back to your courtship. Do you remember expressing your desire to be with him as your forever friend?

Midweek Devotional

Your Spouse Has Needs Only You Can Fill

Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. Have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

—Philippians 2:4–5 GW

You may have heard more than one sermon on today's key verse, usually applied to life in the church with fellow believers. But have you thought about how it applies to your marriage? What better place not to be concerned with only your own agenda; but to be at least equally concerned about your spouse's interests, concerns, hopes, and dreams. Why? What should be your incentive? Love and respect? Yes, but even more fundamental is that you "have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had" (Philippians 2:5).

Of course, this means putting your own needs aside, at least for the moment. It means sacrificing for the sake of the one you decided to spend your life with. Sarah is a great example of doing just that. It is not Sarah's first choice to endure the stress of getting us to the airport and then take another long ride to a faraway city for the next Love & Respect Conference. But Sarah puts her interests aside for the sake of the ministry, for which I am far more thankful than I can express on paper or even in person. To say, "She is invaluable," would be a gross understatement.

And what about Emerson? What is his sacrifice? My obvious main interests in life are studying, writing, and preparing material. One of Sarah's interests (perhaps it is her main interest) is engaging in the well-documented Pinkie pastime of talking, particularly with me. Over the years I have learned to put aside my studying and writing to hear her concerns several times a week, if not daily.

Sarah will tell you that I have truly given of myself to allow her to talk. I have not shut down, saying, "I am the way I am. Deal with it!" (I admit I have had the thought a few times, but God is good, and He has protected me from myself, not to mention my sweet little wife.)

The point of today's key verse is clear: don't just be concerned about your own agenda; think about the interests of others—especially your spouse (see Philippians 2:4). So far, so good, but is there some motivation that would help us do this, besides the fear of feeling guilty if we don't come through? We find a very big clue in verse 5: "Have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had." As the rest of what is called the "kenosis passage" points out, Jesus "emptied himself," putting aside His deity to live among us and meet our deepest need—salvation from our sin (see Philippians 2:6–11).

As you and your spouse seek to imitate your Savior and Lord within marriage, you quickly learn that you both have needs only the other can meet. Could that mean functioning outside your comfort zone and even feeling inadequate? Possibly, but your incentive is that your spouse needs you, no one else. That is not an imposition, it's a compliment worthy of praise to the heavenly Father, because such moments allow you to imitate Jesus and thereby honor Him. Such moments chip away your un-Christlike features as you "let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes" (Ephesians 4:23 NLT).

So the next time you have an opportunity to look to the needs or concerns of your spouse when it is, quite frankly, inconvenient or even a bit painful for you, think about how your new attitude in Christ is helping sand off the rough edges of selfishness. Your spouse has a need only you can fill. Instead of bringing up a lot of reasons why you can't do it, or the things your spouse might do instead, see the situation for what it is. Say to yourself, or even aloud, "Thanks, honey, thanks for the compliment!"

Prayer: Thank the Lord for His invitation to have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had, and for the ways He helps sand away the rough edges of self-interest as you both have opportunities to meet each other's needs for love and respect. Ask Him for the wisdom and humility to always see your spouse's needs as a compliment, not a cause for your complaints. (Also look outside the family, to work, church, and other situations where you can put the needs of others ahead of your own and have your actions come full-circle in various ways.)

Action: During the coming week, practice responding to each other's requests and needs by saying, "Thanks for the compliment." As a reminder to do this, put Post-it notes in strategic places saying, "Have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

For more "husband-friendly devotionals that wives truly love," see Emerson's book The Love & Respect Experience (Thomas Nelson, 2011).