

Creating Friendship and Intimacy in Marriage

A complimentary resource for *Blessing Your Husband* by Debra Evans

Companionship

When you hear the word *companion*, what does the term signify to you? Given the dictionary's definition of a companion as "somebody who accompanies you, spends time with you, or is a friend," do you currently see you and your husband companionably drawing together or separately drifting apart?

In Genesis 2:18, we hear these words echo across the centuries, still vitally relevant to our relationships today: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" Consider that the Hebrew word for helper is *ezer* — remarkably, the same word used in Psalm 118:7: "The LORD is with me; he is my helper (*ezer*)." Keeping this idea in mind reinforces the essential role we play within our sacred partnership. The blessing of friendship and tenderness in marriage honors this unchanging truth: **A wife's loving companionship was designed by God to meet her husband's number one relationship need.**

Evaluate your level of intimacy with your husband, then consider whether you might have been neglecting your husband's needs for affection, comfort, and camaraderie. Ask your husband what he would like to experience with you in this area. Talk about your observations with each other. Reflect on times you have felt closest to your husband — what made the difference? What are your expectations concerning your husband's friendship today? Is spending time with him fulfilling or disappointing? Why?

Have you had a night or weekend away alone together in the past year? What about the possibility of setting up regularly scheduled dates so you can spend time giving one another your undivided attention? If your husband seems less energized about this idea than you are, go back to the drawing board: Keep praying, asking for God's guidance and wisdom about how your marriage friendship can best be strengthened and renewed right now.

Whether you prefer a special night out that involves dressing up and making reservations at an exclusive restaurant, or an evening of fishing in a canoe, spending time together is what counts. Getting out alone, away from the dishes, the laundry, the bills, and the kids — even for a brief time — can do your relationship a world of good. It may seem like a big effort at first, especially if you're not used to spending a few hours a week away from work and family responsibilities. But I encourage you to make this effort. As your bond is

renewed by your commitment to regularly schedule time alone together, your entire relationship will likely be refreshed.

Don't be discouraged if you meet with some resistance from your husband at first. Plenty of couples struggle with their "what I want to do tonight" differences. Outside the bedroom, it isn't always easy to find common ground in which to plant the seeds of marital intimacy and friendship. Even so, be patient; please don't give up. In time, you likely will reap a colorful harvest.

Discovery in Our Differences

At this point you may be wondering whether the effort will be worth it. While I can't make any absolute promises, I can speak from my own three-decades-plus experience. Here's why: My husband and I began our married life together without any shared hobbies and with many divergent interests. He wanted to go to baseball games; I preferred going to the ballet. I was an avid reader; he spent most of his free time playing basketball or the guitar. He rarely stepped foot inside the house if the sun was shining; I thrived indoors, regardless of the weather. And so on and so forth.

After we celebrated our first anniversary, I wondered if we had enough in common to make our marriage work. Initially, our mutual attraction to one another had been enough. Clearly, we needed something more to strengthen and deepen our bond.

Even though I was uncertain about the outcome, I began praying. I asked God to strengthen our marriage and opened my heart to His leading in the daily details of our married life together. Though I am still learning (and praying), I can now look back over the years and see a beautiful theme emerging: In learning to respect and even appreciate one another's differences, my husband and I no longer feel threatened by those parts of ourselves that are "apart," or different, from each other.

Because both of us have repeatedly been willing to go outside our dissimilar comfort zones — he occasionally attending the ballet or "chick flick" with me; I going to see baseball/football/basketball/hockey games with him, for example — our well-weathered companionship has become more interesting and richly textured, allowing us both to grow together as a couple and as individuals. The blessing of friendship — the willingness to prefer my husband's companionship above all others — has helped me be more tender toward the man I now know better and appreciate more than anyone else in the world.

A High-Yield Investment

Marital friendship thrives with the companionship, shelter, and support we give our husband. Like a garden, it must be wisely tended, watered, weeded, and harvested. Done well, these responsibilities require a generous investment of time, effort, and energy. Jesus affirmed, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Husbands know when their wives treasure them. They see it in our eyes, hear it in our voices, feel it in our touch. When we honor our husbands with our time, attention, and presence, we give them the opportunity to understand why their feelings, passions, life experiences, and well-being matter to us. Above all, we invite them to trust that our love for them is non-negotiable.

Think back to a time when a friend gave you the gift of her time, attention, and comfort. How did you feel? What did she do or say that was especially meaningful to you? Can you explain the qualities you most appreciated about her?

Over the years, meeting your husband's God-made need for physical, emotional, and spiritual connection with you will require a certain amount of flexibility, patience, and understanding. It isn't always feasible to get away together, life challenges can temporarily preclude your regular time together. In such situations, make use of supplementary strategies as a means of nourishing your bond. When you're apart, liberally use phone calls, e-mail, and letters to remain close across the miles. "I am fully, totally married to my wife," says Bob, married for thirty years. "When I am alone, physically or emotionally, I am uncomfortable. A part of me is 'missing.' My wife knows this, and we have always concentrated on maintaining a connection. When we pray, I know that her hand is reaching to touch mine. When we lie down to sleep, even after one of those episodes where we don't see each other's side of a controversy, we find our feet gliding through the sheets to touch gently. All is well, and we can go to sleep."

The blessing of friendship and tenderness is a priceless gift. Husbands who have received it from their wives say that nothing else compares with the kind of intimate companionship only their wives supply. Wives who have given it smile with satisfaction when asked to describe what they like most about their relationship with their husband. It is a friendship worth nourishing and cultivating.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

1. What kind of “creeping separateness” are you and your husband most susceptible to? What steps can you take toward one another to close the gap? Ask a close friend to help you with some creative problem solving if you have to work around obstacles like unusual work hours and sleeping patterns, careers that require travel, and other demands.

2. Complete these thoughts in your journal: *From my husband's point of view, a close companion would be... Something we haven't done together for a long time that we once enjoyed is... When my husband and I are close, I feel...*

3. Do you notice a difference in your husband when your companionship is in a healthy place versus when you are drifting? In what ways? In what ways are you personally different when the two of you are close?