

## Creating Intimacy and Friendship in Marriage

By Debra Evans

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? Author Sheldon Vanauken warns:



There is such a thing as a creeping separateness. What do young people who are freshly married do? They can't rest when they're apart. They want to be together all the time. But they develop separate interests, especially if they have separate jobs and some separate friends. So they drift apart. Pretty soon they have little in common except, maybe, the children. So the stage is set for one of them to fall in love with someone else. Later they'll say the reason for the divorce was that he/she fell in love with someone else, but it wasn't that at all. It was because they let themselves grow 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.