

# **Growing Through Our Differences**

## *Some Questions for a Maturing Relationship*

The following questions are designed to help you think through your relationship more clearly and to facilitate deeper communication. Individually, think about your relationship in light of the following categories. Note areas of particular strength or weakness. How are the two of you similar? How are you different? How do you deal with your differences? Make notes in the margin particularly about those areas that are difficult to talk about.

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### \_\_\_\_\_ **Communication**

How good are we at communicating with each other? How much time do we spend communicating? Do we understand each other in our communication? Do we enjoy talking about a variety of things? Do we listen to each other effectively? How deep is our conversation? ...reporting facts? ...relating ideas? ...making judgments? ...sharing feelings? ...risking total honesty? Are we growing in this area? What topics do we avoid in our communication?

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Companionship and Sharing**

Real love wants to share, give, reach out, care. Do I want the very best for this person? Does our relationship have the qualities of a good friendship? Am I willing to give up my own rights for the sake of the other? How do I express love the other even when I don't feel it? How do I express my need for the other?

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Respect**

About what am I proud of my spouse? How do we express respect for each other? Are there areas where I have lost respect for my spouse? Are there any characteristics that we consistently avoid talking about? How does my own insecurity and lack of respect for myself impact our relationship?

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Money**

What does money represent in my life? ...security? ...identity? ...useful tool? How do I make decisions about money? How is my approach different from that of my spouse? What patterns have we developed regarding money? How big an issue has money been in our relationship thus far? Where are the tensions? How do we each approach financial planning?

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Leadership and Decision-making**

How do we make decisions? Are we content with the patterns which have developed? Are we able to submit to one another? Are there areas where I wish that the other would lead more, or take more responsibility/initiative? Are there times when I feel "squeezed out" or ignored? How do we view roles and responsibilities in marriage?

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Dealing with Conflict**

Are we able to quarrel productively? What are our patterns when we fight? How do we each express anger? Are we able to forgive one another? Do either of us tend to hold grudges? Have I built any pockets of bitterness in our relationship?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Interests/Recreation

What interests do we share? How enthusiastic am I about the other's interests? Where do our interests diverge? Have we developed any new interests together? How do we have fun together? What helps the other to relax? What helps me to relax? How are we similar or different in this area? Are there tensions between us over our interests?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Expectations

What did I expect of marriage when we first married? What did I expect of my spouse? Of myself? What did he or she expect of me? Where have we encountered differing expectations? How do we deal with unmet expectations? What expectations are currently causing tension between us?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Emotions

How good are we at sharing our feelings with each other? What keeps us from greater emotional intimacy? How would we describe each other's temperament? How would I describe mine? How do we build each other emotionally? Where do we drain each other emotionally?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Trust and Consistency

Do I trust the other person? Do I trust our relationship in the context of others? Can I trust the other to tell the truth? Does the other person demonstrate the same personal characteristics when we are apart as when we are together? Where has our trust been compromised? How are we rebuilding trust?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Romance

What areas do I find most attractive in the other? How has our romance changed over the course of our relationship? How do I wish that my spouse would express love to me? How do I most often express love? What would we each describe as "a romantic moment"? How do we nurture our romance?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Sexuality

What have I learned about sexuality in our relationship? How important is sex to the other person? How do our attitudes about sex differ? What patterns have we developed which are healthy? Which patterns are unhealthy? How good are we at sharing our desires and needs with each other? What do I wish were different about our sexual behavior? How comfortable are we in talking about this area?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Life-style/Goals

How well do we understand each other's goals and dreams? Which goals do we share? How fully can I describe what kind of life the other person wants to have 3-5 years from now? What values do we each consider to be important in life-style decisions? How do we each reflect our priorities in the use of time and money? Where is there tension when we think of life-style and goals?

### \_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual growth

What are the dynamics of my life with Christ right now? In our relationship, what common spiritual experiences, understandings, backgrounds and/or commitments do we share? How are we different in our spiritual journeys and dynamics? What do I contribute to the other's life with Christ? What does the other contribute to my walk? How do I wish we functioned differently in this area of our life together?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Habits

Are we able to accept each other's habits? Are there significant areas of behavior which bother me about the other? Which of my habits are most irritating? In which areas have we most often found ourselves promising to change? Where have we been disappointed in each other?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Families

What have we learned about each other's family or families? What are the most striking characteristics of each of our family backgrounds? Where do our extended families create tension in our marriage? What do we each think is important in family life?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Vocational Understanding

How do I currently feel about my vocation/career? How do our vocations affect our relationship? What do I wish I knew/understood better about my spouse's vocation/career? How do our long-term goals mesh? How do they differ?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Friends

What do we each appreciate in friends? Does the other person like my friends? Do I like his/her friends? What role do our friends play in our life together? How do our friendships affect our relationship? How are we able to share our relationship and time together with others?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Children

What does having children mean to me? To my spouse? How do we differ in our ways of handling children? Where are we struggling?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Health

How do I cope with illness in myself and in others? How have health-related issues in our lives impacted our marriage? What life patterns related to physical health are important to each of us? What are our individual approaches to dealing with health, medical treatment, and our bodies in general?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Dealing with Change

What is the hardest part about change for me? How does my approach to change differ from that of my spouse? How would I rank each of us on an "adventure and risk" scale? How well do I handle unfulfilled expectations? What do I need from my spouse in times of change?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Serving others

Are there areas of service beyond our relationship? What are my primary areas of service? What are my spouse's primary areas of service? Where do our areas of service overlap? How do we help each other to care for others? What common goals do we share beyond our relationship? In what areas of our stewardship are each of us strongest and weakest: time, talents, skills, care, money, etc.? How do we want to grow in this area?

## \_\_\_\_\_ Commitment

How seriously do we take commitment? To each other? To others? How would I describe my commitment to our relationship? In what ways do I think the other person's commitment is different from mine? What is the hardest trial which we have endured together? What did I learn about the other through that time? Where do we need to make commitments to others? To God? To the church?