

7 Practical Keys to Understanding Your Wife—Even When It Feels Impossible

In marriage it is very important that both husband and wife have the skill of really understanding each other. If you were given a skill to help you consistently understand each other year after year, decade after decade, you could be a better spouse. I want to help you develop this skill so you can practice growing in your understanding of your spouse, till death do you part.

To begin, I am going to state a very simple definition of understanding, and then give you a simple way to experience whether or not *you* truly understand the definition.

Understanding: “to stand under”

What I love about this definition, over all the academic versions, is that 100 percent of the focus is on where you are in the process, not where your spouse.

You have heard the saying, “It is better to understand than to be understood.” There is real truth to that. If you and I grow in the skill of understanding, we open up all kinds of opportunities to have a great marriage.

1. Hearing Their Heart

Listening to someone’s heart goes beyond listening to the words he or she is saying. The person desiring to be understood is usually experiencing a challenge with emotion, discomfort, or pain. This desire to be understood automatically puts the communication at a different point than just general.

Hearing your spouse’s heart allows him or her to be heard

first, without judgment, interruption, solution, or change of topic. If you feel you are present and hearing all about your spouse without drifting into thinking about you or talking about you—no other channels are operating—you are probably hearing your spouse's heart.

2. Feelings

Emotions are a very tricky part of the understanding process. Most of us have no training in identifying or communicating our feelings or hearing the feelings of others. Emotions or feelings are *not* thoughts about something or someone, but rather how someone feels. Feelings are not facts or truth. You can feel fat and factually not be overweight. When you are in an emotional reality, it is separate from anything else. You are feeling what you are feeling—that is it. The feeling is not moral, right, or wrong; it is just what you are feeling at the time.

The spouse will not be understood if the other one tries to put that his or her feelings into a logical or moral formula. This will only frustrate the spouse who desires to be understood, and he or she might escalate.

Rather than avoid the messy, unpredictable world of feelings, I want you to go into your spouse's world and—like a GPS—find out exactly where your spouse is emotionally. Practically, this works by asking him or her, “How did that cause you to feel?” or, “What were you feeling?”

3. Validating

Validating is the very core of the understanding process. This is when your spouse feels that you have actually heard him or her. This stage is the point in the process when your spouse feels you are holding his or her weight.

Validating is simply saying, “This is where you are,” or, “I see you.” Validating is essential for your spouse (or anyone)

to be understood. Validating says, "You're valuable," and, "Where you are right now is permissible" without judgment and with some empathy for where he or she is at the moment. My experience with clients, male or female, is that when they are validated there is no escalation, and calmness enters them and their relationship.

4. Take Responsibility

This step is only needed if you were the one causing the issue, challenge, or pain. *If* you caused all or some of the pain or issues at hand, you will want to take full responsibility for your part.

To take responsibility requires some humility. As servants of God and our spouse, we will absolutely make mistakes. These mistakes can hurt those around us. When we make mistakes (not if we make mistakes) that harm our spouses, we must take full responsibility. By doing so, things can get smoother more quickly rather than over a long time.

5. Ask Them What They Desire from You

Once your spouse feels validated and you have taken responsibility, the understanding process is not over. The next step is to stay fully intent on whom your spouse is and to ask him or her what he or she desires from you.

Some challenges that your spouse faces simply need to be met with understanding. There are some circumstances where they might ask something of you. In these cases, even simply offering to be of service is meaningful in many cases.

6. If Reasonable, Do It

When you ask your spouse if they desire something from you (i.e., a hug, kiss or even setting up a consequence), if his or her request is reasonable, go ahead and follow through. Reasonable is what is important here. You cannot self-soothe

your spouse or in every situation be able to accomplish the unreasonable.

If someone is asking from the heart, it is usually reasonable. If, however, someone is trying to punish or demean you or seems otherwise unreasonable, you can defer this to a pastor or an accountability couple. Doing a reasonable thing, if needed, can also validate that you heard your spouse. Serving them in this way in a healthy relationship can be positive.

7. Practice, Practice, Practice

The understanding skill I just shared must be practiced 14 to 21 times before you are usually qualified to actually use it in your marriage. If you do not practice this skill when your spouse desires to be understood, you will be unable to skillfully be there for them, and you will experience the same old results for years.

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