

Submitting Your Marriage to Holy Spirit's Perfect Blender

"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times,
always with the same person."

Mignon McLaughlin

On the day of our 10th wedding anniversary, we learned something, something powerful. But it took us 10 years to learn it, 10 years to see it. It happened while we were away on vacation.

To celebrate our tenth anniversary, Pam and I [Robert here] took a trip to the countryside of Pennsylvania and used a friend's cottage. It was such a fun and relaxing time. Away from it all. Quiet. Wilderness. Alone together. Off the grid. No agenda.

The lesson came one day during our anniversary week. We had decided to divide our day into two parts, one indoors and the other outdoors (By the way, since then, I have come to find out that Pam's "ideal" day on vacation is one that consists of three parts. I'll explain later.)

So, in the midst of Part One of one of our days on our anniversary getaway, we were doing something I almost always enjoy—relaxing in a quiet spot while reading a good book. Pam was lying on the bed in the bedroom reading, but through the door that opened to the living room, she could see me on the couch doing the same thing.

While soaking up whatever page of the novel I was reading at that time, all of a sudden I heard a huge laugh coming out of the next room. I dropped my book, looked up and said, "What in the world are you laughing about?"

Pamela was looking at me and just continued to laugh.

"I can't believe it!" she said.

"Can't believe what?" I asked.

"That we are doing this. I can't believe it."

"Doing what? Reading?"

"Yes! Exactly," she said. "I am actually relaxing, reading and, believe it or not, having a good time. You know, 10 years ago, there was no way I would have enjoyed doing this."

"Really?" I asked.

"Absolutely. No way I would have done this on my vacation."

"So, what changed?" I asked.

"Being married to you," she said, smiling.

"Is that a fact? So, is that a good thing?" I asked.

"I think it is. Yeah, I really think it is," she said. "But, remember ..."

"Oh, I know. I remember," I said. "The day isn't over yet."

Three or four hours later, we were out by a beautiful lake and walking along the shoreline. Pam loves to walk the shore of lakes, beaches and rivers and pull up rocks just to see what kind of ocean or lake life may exist underneath. Over the years, she has pulled out shells, clams, lobsters, crawfish—you name it, she has found it and, if there's a way to turn it into a pet, she has done so. Why, she has even had turtles confiscated at airports that she tried to "smuggle" from one state to another to add to her adventures.

A few minutes later, I pulled up a rock and found some other interesting creature to look at and talk about. When I did,

suddenly I started laughing. I just couldn't help it. It just hit me.

"What are you laughing about?" Pam asked.

"I can't believe it," I said.

"Can't believe what?" she asked.

"That we are doing this. I can't believe it," I returned.

"Doing what, wading in the water?" she asked.

"Yes! Exactly," I said. "I am actually out here looking under rocks with you and having a good time. There is no way I really would have enjoyed this so much 10 years ago."

"Really?" she asked.

"No way," I said.

"So, what changed you?" she asked.

Blending

One of the results of growing in your marriage is blending. Scripture says of marriage: "these two shall become one" (Gen. 2:24). In God's eyes, and in a spiritual sense, we believe that happens when a covenant is formed on the wedding day. But, in a practical living-it-out sense, this union occurs little by little as we learn to serve one another in love and honor each other in life. It is a merging of lives and a mingling of souls. It takes a vow and a moment to start a marriage; but it takes a lifetime to build one.

The result of balancing and bending in marriage is a harmony of influence and a legacy of love; this is the blending. The process includes times of appropriately *asserting* yourself and other times of graciously *submitting* yourself to your partner. It is a rhythm of relational response that does not generally come naturally but must be learned. It is as delicate a

process as learning how to dance together. However, the product is well worth the process: a deep and intimate marriage characterized by the blending of two souls.

Dan Montgomery describes a balanced soul as one that knows how to move almost rhythmically to what the need of the moment or the person in it calls for. He calls this pattern the Self-Compass. It basically teaches that there are four key areas of response from which we need to respond: 1. Strength, 2. Weakness, 3. Love and 4. Assertion. Each of these is important and vital. Here's how I describe them:

When you are responding to your spouse from the strength zone, your focus is on "What I have to offer." There are times that call on what we can bring to the table with confidence.

When you are responding to your spouse from the weakness zone, your focus is on "What I am lacking?" Then, there are times when we need to humbly acknowledge what we don't have to bring.

When you are responding to your spouse from the love zone, your focus is "What you need." In these moments, your emphasis is on some need your spouse may have that you can serve and support.

When you are responding to your spouse from the assertion zone, your focus is "What I want." These are those moments that calls for decisiveness and determination.

No one of these zones is more "spiritual" than the other. In fact, we see examples of Jesus operating in each of them in the Gospels.

When it comes to men and women, balancing is the potential you both bring to your relationship, bending is the commitment you make to your relationship, but blending is the glory God brings out in your relationship. It is what He makes out of it. Through seasons of stirring and through smoother ones, God

is at work in marriage bringing about a blend and growth toward oneness. {eoa}

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