

Complementary Couples

Have you ever heard the phrase “opposites attract”? This often seems to be the case with dating and married couples. Consider: one half of a couple tends to be more reserved while the other is more outgoing. One is more task-oriented while the other is laid back. One is a saver while one is a spender. The generally accepted explanation for this phenomenon is that we are attracted to features that we do not possess because they tend to balance us out. Although this is usually fine when couples begin their lives together, it often becomes a source of contention later on in the relationship. It is not uncommon to hear things like “We don’t have anything in common”, “We are so opposite from each other”, or “I’m not sure why I married someone so different than me”. Sometimes couples are not able to articulate their feelings of being incompatible; they just know they seem to butt heads over the same issues again and again. It is at that point where it may be good for the couple to take a step back and reflect. Are we truly incompatible or are we simply complementary?

In couples with complementary characteristics, irritations can be reevaluated and appreciated. For example, the task-oriented spouse may experience frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed as jobs around the house pile up. Conversely, the laid back spouse may feel stressed and resentful that she is being pressured to do more chores instead of relaxing or enjoying her favorite hobby. Both people are actually bringing valuable skills to the table. The task-oriented partner is encouraging the completion of essential responsibilities – paying the bills, painting the house, having the cars tuned up etc. Without him, very little would get done which would only complicate the already pressing issues. Without the laid back partner, however, there would be no room for rest or fun for the duo. In this case, each can learn from the other and bring balance to the relationship. Perhaps they could negotiate a schedule that includes time for the mundane, yet necessary jobs while also including time for activities that make life enjoyable. In a twosome where one person is a spender and one a saver, again we see the opportunity for each to learn from the other. The saver is usually able to build financial security for the family while the spender prevents the family from becoming too rigid, unable to enjoy the little things in life. How do spenders and savers live in harmony? Again, through negotiation. Perhaps the couple can come together on a budget that includes an avenue for savings as well as an allowance for personal spending. Or maybe they can agree on a financial schedule that rewards various levels of saving with a fun activity or purchase.

No matter what side of any issue a partner may be on, it is important to see how the other person is contributing positively to the relationship. When we learn to value the differences in our partner, we may find that traits which were once sources of frustration become qualities for which we are grateful.

“And over all these virtues, put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.”
Colossians 3:14

