



Year 1 Topic 1

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## KNOWING THE REAL ME

### *The Extrovert-Introvert Marriage*

After a few years of marriage, the traits that originally attracted us became irritants. Valerie was the life of the party; I didn't even want to attend. When I needed time alone, she felt left out. Her need to talk was idle chatter to me, and she craved the compliments that were so difficult for me to give. In little ways-and some big ones-we got on each other's nerves. We found ourselves drifting apart.

There was a simple explanation for our problem. Valerie was an extrovert and I was an introvert. Our opposite personality types gave us entirely different approaches to life. Learning to understand each other's unique needs, we were able to smooth the rough spots in our marriage. We actually came to see our differences as assets that could enhance us as a couple.

No one knows why people are extroverts or introverts. "Though commonly used, the terms 'introvert' and 'extrovert' are often misunderstood" says Dr. Marshall Voris, a Dallas marriage and family therapist who has counseled hundreds of extrovert- introvert couples. They are basic personality types that affect many areas of our lives and the way we relate to others.

During courtship, opposite types help enkindle infatuation because each finds the other's traits desirable. The introvert hopes the extrovert will help him or her become more outgoing, while the extrovert is enamored with the other's interior life. After marriage, different ways of doing things often breed tension.

What are extrovert-introvert couples like? How can people so different have a harmonious marriage?

### Different worlds

Extroverts are at home in the concrete world of people and things. They like to be around others and interact naturally with them. Their minds search for knowledge and facts. Introverts live with ideas and look for the deeper meaning of things. To them, facts are only incidental.

Living in the everyday world comes naturally to extroverts. Valerie deals easily with store clerks, bureaucracies, and doctors. She can hold her own in a rapid-fire discussion where I am completely left out. At a social function, words flow for her while I'm groping for something to say after "hello".

Introverts quickly become overwhelmed with stimulus from the outside world because they tend to ruminate on each idea that comes to mind. As an introverted friend says, "I wish I could stop the world long enough to get caught up." I would rather have an intense discussion with one person than make small talk with everyone at a party.

People are extroverted or introverted in varying degrees. Their behavior isn't always consistent. A person may show extroverted characteristics in one situation and introverted traits in another. However, one of the personality types usually dominates.

There are other pairs of personality types - sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, and perceiving-judging - that affect the way a couple relates. Individual backgrounds also play a part. Shirley Good, marriage and family therapist at Delos Clinic in Dallas, says that among all these factors, introversion and

extroversion are key. They determine how a person sees the world and the behaviors they engender are obvious. She is not surprised that the clash between extrovert and introvert personalities causes so much friction in marriages.

### Points of tension

My inner world, which Valerie referred to as a reflective pool when we were engaged, became a problem in itself. Dr. Voris says there is a part of the introvert that can never be fully communicated to the extrovert. At first, the extrovert may find this intriguing but as time goes on, the extrovert frequently sees the other person as emotionally absent and often imagines he or she is up to no good.

Communication is another area where extroverts and introverts clash. We were no exception.

New York psychologist Mary D' Arcy prepares married couples for service as overseas missionaries. She explains that before expressing feelings, the introvert needs to work through them internally. The extrovert wants to bounce them off someone and get a response.

When the feeling is anger, the extrovert's raw emotions can bowl over the introvert. Valerie's expressions of anger devastated me until I realized her emotions were no more intense than mine, only louder.

Even small talk causes friction in the marriage since extroverts love to chat and introverts hate it. One introverted husband said his extroverted wife "can lie in bed for twenty minutes talking about how tired she is. If she's so tired, why doesn't she shut up and go to sleep?"

Although I was grateful Valerie could guide me through situations that would otherwise be painfully awkward for me, our social life became one more point of conflict. Valerie couldn't understand why I didn't share her enthusiasm for entertaining. "Introverts have a need for privacy and to set boundaries on their space, while extroverts want to throw the doors open to everyone," say Ms. D' Arcy. It wasn't that I didn't like her family and friends. Too much contact with people simply left me emotionally drained.

Our biggest clashes came over spending time together. A typical extrovert, Valerie needs to be around people and she expects me to be with her when we're at home. If I spend too much time in my study or workshop, she becomes upset. When I don't get enough time alone, I get uncomfortable and irritable.

### Head off trouble

Although there is equal likelihood of either spouse being an extrovert or an introvert, Dr. Voris has found that problems more frequently arise when the husband is the introvert and the wife the extrovert. Because of traditional gender stereotypes, extroverted husbands and introverted wives meet their own and society's expectations. "Even so," says Dr. Vons, "sparks can fly in any extrovert-introvert marriage, and couples should know how to handle them."

When Valerie and I sought help in dealing with our differences, a psychologist gave us the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test which revealed our personality types. Understanding the cause of our conflicts helped us make our differences work for us.

### Build on the differences

We found we could each assume roles that complement the strengths and weaknesses of the other. Valerie became our marriage's interface with the outside world. She planned our social life and broke the ice for us when we were in a group. I helped Valerie become more reflective and attentive to interior needs. My penchant for deliberation balanced her tendency to act first, think later.

Although she will never understand it, Valerie tries to trust my inner world. I've learned to let her in on what I'm thinking and doing to help her feel connected to me.

In many areas, we had to yield to the other's needs. For example, Valerie lets me have time alone, and I go out of my way to spend time with her. We have regular dates.

Most important of all, we learned to accept each other's style

as perfectly valid. God made each of us as we are. It's okay to be an extrovert - chatting and making friends everywhere. It's okay to be an introvert - quiet and reflective. Not only does God love us the way we are, he gave us our complementary types to be helpmates to each other.

The traits that attracted us to each other when we first met can still put vitality in our marriage if we allow them to. "Remember, the Golden Rule doesn't apply here," says Dr. Voris. Treating my spouse as I want to be treated doesn't work for an extrovert-introvert couple. We each have to respect the other's special needs.

Through the experience of many mistakes and often having to ask forgiveness, we learned some guidelines that can help an extrovert-introvert couple make their opposing personality types work to their advantage.

- Respect each other's point of view, realizing that you and your spouse will look differently at any situation. There is no right or wrong here; both viewpoints are legitimate.
- Evaluate your individual strengths and weaknesses to see what strong points you bring to the marriage and how your spouse balances your weaknesses.
- Never assume you know what's going on with your spouse.
- Seek ways of doing things together (working, recreating, praying, etc) that are comfortable for both.
- Take an interest in each other's topics of conversation and also respect silence.
- Celebrate the tension that different viewpoints cause. That tension can enhance your creativity as a couple, giving you alternatives you never knew you had.
- When any issue arises, the extrovert should give the introvert time to think about it. The introvert should commit to discussing it at some definite point in the future.
- Keep talking. Discussion of any matter should continue

until you are each sure you know what the other is talking about and how important it is.

- Together, discover ways of living to give the introvert needed time to be alone and to take care of the extrovert's need to relate to others.

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April 1991 Marriage & Family