

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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Who Are You?

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Who Are You?

Abstract

"While knowing *who* we are in marriage is important, it's even more important to remember *whose* we are."

Posting about managing marital expectations from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/who-are-you/>

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Who Are You?

 inallthings.org/who-are-you/

Erin Olson

December 21, 2017



“Who is this person I’m married to?”

“I don’t know who he/she is anymore.”

“You’re not the person I thought I married.”

Maybe you have heard people use these phrases as they talk about their spouse and problems in their marriage. Or maybe you have used some similar phrases yourself as you’re scratching your head at your spouse’s most recent behavior or comment. Do we ever truly know who we marry? Do we ever know who we are fully or who we are going to become?

We millennials and Gen-Xers tend to be a little obsessed with figuring out who we are. Personality quizzes and tests like the Myers-Briggs, StrengthsFinder, and the Enneagram (and there are others) allow us to answer some questions and find our four-letter combination or our top five strength areas (and corresponding areas of weakness). We want to know about who we are and what makes us tick.

But, how important is it really to know ourselves? Does knowing our strengths and weaknesses give us insight into what we need and want in a relationship? Or is it just navel gazing?

Does knowing yourself become more important when you consider yourself in relationship with someone else?

I would argue that knowing yourself is very important when it comes to your relationship with your spouse. Whether you go into marriage at a young age with very little insight into who you are or whether you marry later with a strong sense of who you are or what you want, who you are when you enter marriage is very likely to change as you grow and mature both individually and as a couple.

God created us to be in relationship with one another—we need each other, and don't survive long without social contact. We all have common basic needs when it comes to how we feel in relation to the "others" in our lives, specifically those closest to us, including our friends and family members. Christian therapists Mark & Debbie Laaser in their book, *Seven Desires*, identify desires that they believe are common to all people and which, if left unmet, can lead to problems with intimacy and interpersonal relationships. Human behavior, according to the Laasers, is not specifically about the behavior itself, but is more about deeper issues that cause the behaviors. Similar to an iceberg, what we see displayed in problem behaviors is often caused by underlying feelings, perceptions, meanings, and core beliefs. The seven desires are *to be heard and understood, to be affirmed, to be blessed, to be safe, to be touched, to be chosen, and to be included*. Knowing ourselves and how these needs have either been met or left unmet in our lives can be key in determining what lies "under the water" of our own personal icebergs, that which might be affecting our behavior.

In his classic book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman identifies five ways that we all give and receive love. At the end of the book is a brief self-assessment that can help you (and your spouse) discover what behaviors help you feel most loved. The five love languages are *acts of service, words of affirmation, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch*. For me, simple (or sometimes big) acts of service (like making the bed or doing the laundry) go a long way in telling me you love me, but my husband needs words of affirmation and physical touch in order to feel loved. By being aware of our own preferred love languages while also working to communicate in the love language best understood and felt by our spouse, we live together more peacefully.

Love is a choice, and choosing to demonstrate love in ways that will be most appreciated by our significant others is a significant way we can live that choice every day.

While knowing ourselves and our needs/desires (and love languages) are all important, it is also important to go into marriage expecting and being prepared for the change that will inevitably come to both you and to your spouse throughout the course of your marriage. Going back to the statements quoted at the beginning of this article, people will often say at the end of a marriage that they feel like they are married to a stranger. Knowing yourself can certainly help you manage and understand your needs, wants, and expectations, but the key is the knowledge that all of those things will likely change multiple times throughout the course of your marriage. Marriage can be a sanctifying experience, and we should not expect to stay the same through it. In an article published in *Christianity Today* in the early 80's, Christian ethicist Lewis Smedes writes, "When I married my wife, I had hardly a smidgen of sense for what I was getting myself into with her. How could I know how much she would change over 25 years? How could I know how much I would change? My wife has lived with at least five different men since we were wed—and each of the five has been me."

Ultimately, each of us are children of a Heavenly Father who wants to be at the center of our marriages. So, while knowing *who* we are in marriage is important, it's even more important to remember *whose* we are. While we are all broken and sinful individuals, our identities are in Christ, and staying grounded in that reality can help keep us grounded in our relationships.

Here are some practical ways to stay in touch with who you are as an individual, as a married person, and also as a child of God:

- Keep God at the center of your marriage. Pray often together. Pray for one another. Emulate the Fruits of the Spirit in your day-to-day interactions with your spouse.
- Communicate with each other. When you are knee-deep in parenting, work, or just life, it can be easy for you and your spouse to pass like ships in the night, simply nodding or grunting to each other in a sleep-deprived, overly caffeinated stupor. Instead, talk to each other. Let them know you love them and want to know what they are thinking and feeling.
- Take time for yourself and each other. Sometimes, we are so busy that we run from one thing to another with little time for quiet and solitude. We lose track of who we are and we forget we once had hopes, dreams, and needs. Find what feeds you, your spouse, and your marriage, and make those things a priority.
- Learn your and your spouse's love language(s). Identify how you can communicate with him/her using their preferred love language, and let them know how they can use yours.
- Examine your own behavior and consider how it might be due to some unmet needs and desires. Also, and maybe more importantly, consider the needs and desires of your spouse. How is their behavior potentially speaking to a deeper feeling or message?

Knowing ourselves can help us build stronger relationships with our spouses—and when conflict arises, it can also help us figure out from where it's coming. Each of us has been created by God with specific strengths and weaknesses, and being aware of both is not being self-centered—rather, it can be helpful in navigating our marriages and other interpersonal relationships.

“Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord” (Psalm 139: 1-4).