

TWO EXPERIENCES, ONE CONVERSATION

A Free Companion Worksheet from the Married but Feeling Alone Series

Companion Reflection: [Part 4 - When Being Right Matters More Than Understanding – September 26, 2026](#)

When a Conversation Becomes a Disagreement

We may begin a conversation with our spouse hoping to explain something important, only to find ourselves arguing about what happened, what was intended, or whose perspective is correct.

Perhaps we feel that our spouse has misunderstood us, so we begin explaining our intentions. Our spouse may feel that we are dismissing their experience, so they repeat their concern more forcefully. Before long, neither of us feels heard.

Sometimes defensiveness arises because we are uncomfortable acknowledging that we may have hurt someone. At other times, we may feel the need to defend ourselves because we are being unfairly accused or criticized.

Understanding our spouse does not require us to agree with everything they say, accept responsibility for something we did not do, or remain in a conversation that has become disrespectful.

This worksheet invites us to revisit one manageable disagreement, distinguish what we were trying to communicate from what we know about our spouse's experience, and identify a question that could help us understand one another more clearly.

We can complete it on our own. We do not need our spouse's participation to reflect on our responses.

A Scripture to Consider

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." —Proverbs 18:13 (ESV)

This proverb cautions against responding before we have listened. As we complete this exercise, we can ask God to help us recognize what we understand, what we may have misunderstood, and what we still need to learn.

Part 1 Revisit One Conversation

Think about a recent disagreement with your spouse that you feel comfortable examining. Choose a conversation that was difficult but manageable, rather than one involving threats, intimidation, or serious harm.

What was the conversation about? Describe the subject in one or two sentences.

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What did I say or do that I remember most clearly?

What did my spouse say or do that I remember most clearly?

At what point did I begin to feel misunderstood, criticized, hurt, or defensive?

How did I respond when that feeling arose?

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Part 2 Recognize Two Different Experiences

Two people can participate in the same conversation and come away with different experiences of what happened. We know what we were thinking and trying to communicate. We may have some understanding of our spouse's experience, especially if they explained it to us, but we cannot know everything they were thinking or feeling without asking.

Use the two columns below to distinguish your experience from what your spouse actually communicated.

My experience	What my spouse communicated
What I was trying to express:	What my spouse said they were trying to express:
What I was feeling:	What my spouse said they were feeling:
What I wanted my spouse to understand:	What my spouse said they wanted me to understand:

What did I write in my spouse's column that I know because they told me?

What did I write that may be my interpretation rather than something they actually said?

If you are unsure what your spouse meant or felt, it is appropriate to leave part of their column blank. You do not need to fill in the gaps with assumptions.

Part 3 Separate Intention From Impact

Our intentions matter, but they do not always determine how our words or actions affect another person.

For example, we may intend to make a lighthearted joke while our spouse experiences the comment as embarrassing. Our spouse may intend to express loneliness while we experience their words as criticism.

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Understanding the difference between intention and impact can help us discuss what happened without assuming that one person's experience cancels out the other's.

What was my intention during the conversation? What was I hoping to accomplish or communicate?

What impact did my words or actions appear to have on my spouse? What did they actually tell me about that impact?

Is there something I can acknowledge about my own words or actions, even if my intention was different from the impact?

Is there something about my experience that I would still like my spouse to understand?

We can acknowledge that our spouse felt hurt without agreeing with every conclusion they reached about our intentions. Likewise, we can explain our intentions while remaining open to understanding the effect of our actions.

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Part 4 Identify What Remains Unclear

Look back at your answers. Notice where you and your spouse may have been responding to different concerns.

Perhaps you were explaining why you did something while your spouse was trying to describe how it affected them.

Perhaps you were asking for help while your spouse thought you were criticizing their efforts.

Or perhaps you have discovered that you do not yet understand what your spouse was trying to communicate.

One thing I understand more clearly about my own response is:

One thing I do not yet understand about my spouse's experience is:

One question I could ask to understand their experience more clearly is:

For example: "When you said you felt unsupported, what were you hoping I would understand?"

If we return to this conversation, what would help me explain my own experience respectfully while making room for my spouse's perspective?

You do not need to reopen the disagreement immediately. If either of you is overwhelmed, it may be better to choose another time when you can both engage respectfully.

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What I Want to Carry Forward

One thing I learned about how I respond when I feel misunderstood is:

One thing I want to remember when my spouse and I see a situation differently is:

My prayer as I consider this step:

Explore the Companion Reflection

This worksheet can be completed on its own. For a deeper exploration of how defensiveness and the desire to justify ourselves can interfere with emotional connection, read [When Being Right Matters More Than Understanding – September 26, 2026](#), part of the Married but Feeling Alone Reflection series.

You may complete this worksheet individually. If you and your spouse choose to discuss your answers, each person can describe their own experience rather than deciding what the other person meant. The purpose is to make room for greater understanding—not to determine a winner, require agreement, or excuse disrespectful behavior.