

P.S.

HENRY IS 21. He works 7.30 till 5 as a management accountant, and has to travel abroad regularly on business. He has few hobbies and a quiet social life, and would be considered a quiet, somewhat fastidious, 'intellectual' type. The exception to this is football, about which he is passionate. He has a Portsmouth season ticket. He was brought up in a well-to-do non-Christadelphian family in which few expenses were spared. He was baptised two years ago and is becoming a keen Bible student with a deep faith; however, he sometimes finds attending meetings to be claustrophobic.

Of course, Henry doesn't really exist (as far as I know). But let us continue to indulge for a moment in the idle speculation that he does. And let us imagine further that he is married to Henrietta.

Henrietta is 34. She works three days a week in an advertising agency. On the days she works she tends to start late and work until late into the evening. She is a 'life and soul of the party' type; she loves to go out, and also to have people round, but she is somewhat disorganised, and not all that practical. She was brought up in a Christadelphian family which had little money, and she was taught that riches were a great danger. She would like to start a family, and feels that the clock is ticking.

We can imagine some of the issues that Henry and Henrietta may face in their marriage; it doesn't take a huge amount of insight or intuition. But let's go through the exercise nevertheless. After all, it's safer talking about someone else's marriage than our own!

We might include:

- their different working patterns, and managing the interface between home and work
- his occasional discomfort with meetings and the Christadelphian social scene
- his passion for football (it's so pointless!)
- their attitude to finances and material possessions
- the Christadelphian versus non-Christadelphian upbringing and the corollary assumptions
- their age difference and her desire to start a family sooner rather than later
- her tendency to be a bit disorganised
- the way their extrovert/introvert character-types affect their social life.

None of these is insurmountable. They can all be worked through, and we may even be able

Henry and Henrietta

to offer them advice as to how they might do so. They are going to need to understand and show respect to each other. They are going to have to care about where the other one is coming from, and what will make them feel comfortable and happy. "Submitting one to another", in Paul's terminology, is going to be key.

This all comes home when one turns the question on oneself: 'Well if it's all so easy to spot where the difficulties might lie and what can be done about them, why don't I try doing it more in my own marriage?' That might be rather a painful question, because we might find that there are certain issues which come up again and again as sources of conflict and disagreement, just as there would seem to be for Henry and Henrietta. It's easy to be wise about someone else's relationship or about marriage in the abstract, but sometimes we can refuse to spot what is staring us in the face (and what might be handled relatively easily with a few steps of submission and understanding) at home. We can be too close to notice and deal with the underlying issues behind whatever friction there might be.

It's also true—and this is quite an interesting point—that some of our couple's differences may well be part of the reason why they were attracted to each other in the first place. The very strength of complementing characters, which held such potential for cementing them together, also has within it the capacity to divide if they are not wise. Differences can be either complementary or divisive, depending on how they are handled.

If we are at all self-aware in our relationships we will know that there are issues of background, attitude, trait and habit that have the potential to crop up repeatedly and cause friction. We might be as obvious and as predictable as Henry and Henrietta in our own relationships. But this is also a tremendous opportunity. There is no better opportunity for learning and demonstrating the love of Christ than within marriage. It is in these aspects—in these very differences and sources of potential conflict—that God can teach us what it means to submit one to another. He can teach us that submission and understanding are a power far greater than insisting on one's own way. If it's true that we can spot the issues coming, then it's also true that we ought to be able to spot the opportunities to show the love of Christ.

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