



Working through Disagreements

He says I'm inflexible. I say he's aggravating. Are we both right?

By Crystal Sullivan

I'll be the first to admit that I am no fan of suffering.

Instinctively, I shy away from the very things that have made my marriage to Kevin better, such as learning to practice patience and humility. But after twenty-three years of marriage, I can attest to the fact that whether I like it or not, Kevin and I have had to put up with a certain amount of undesirable situations, which in the long haul have made us better people and has made our marriage even stronger. When did this happen? A couple of hundred times over the course of our marriage! Some examples:

Parenting Disputes

One day while at a baseball tailgate party, Kevin and I had an argument about whether the children were old enough to go into the park to get the players' autographs. A priest with whom we served in a marriage ministry was with us and witnessed the entire argument, and the resulting silent ride home. That in itself was a humiliation.

After three days of silent impasse, Kevin and I finally broke down and talked. We agreed that while we are passionately interested in raising our children the *right* way, we each thought the other completely *wrong* in their approach to parenting. The growth from this suffering was that we had to agree to honor the love that the other brought to parenting, rather than the style in which it was shown. We recognized that we both loved our kids, and would have to trust in the other's methods.

That was difficult for me to do; mostly because I considered myself a relationship guru. Even acknowledging that Kevin might be right when it came to parenting decisions was painful. I learned humility and acceptance. He learned patience, mostly because I had been a "parenting know-it-all." We both learned respect for the other. And we grew into a parenting *team*.

Planning disputes

Occasionally Kevin and I are asked to speak at marriage enrichment events. Together we decide on the topic, then I write the talk, create the accompanying handout materials, and make all the arrangements with the on-site representative. On the day we are to speak, things always start to break bad.

As Kevin reviews the material, he'll inevitably suggest some changes that will alter our talk and require a change in the presentation and handouts. With hands on hips, I say "No, I have everything done!" to which he replies, "But don't you want it to be as good as it can be?" to which I reply, "Arggggh!" I feel unappreciated and angry at his procrastination. Kevin is feeling annoyed, saying "What's the big deal? There are hours to go before we have to present this material." He thinks I'm inflexible. I think he's aggravating. We are both right. I wince, he sighs, together we spend the next three hours scurrying to make the changes, we rehearse the talk in the car, and when it is all over, we laugh about what a great team we are. Until next time!

Crystal Sullivan is the editor of First Years and Forever, the monthly newsletter of the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. She and Kevin have been married for twenty-four years and are actively involved in ministry to both engaged and married couples. They are the parents of two adult children.

Over the years, Kevin and I have had to learn how to put our egos to the side for the sake of our marital relationship. Is suffering ever fun? No. Is it necessary? As Catholics, we have to answer "Yes." Though Christ was God, he humbled himself and became a man, approaching everyone with love, respect, and forgiveness. Christ even allowed his body to be crucified so that we would be able to live with him in eternity. So if Christ suffered for the greater good, we should be willing to suffer as well. At least a little bit.

Maybe I better go prepare for another talk.