

# Marriage Partnership

Quarterly Series

ARTICLE

## Loaded Question

*Asking it could make your marriage dynamite!*

By Eva Marie Everson, for the study, "The Importance of Compromise"

With one question I opened Pandora's Box.

"What, if anything," I asked my husband, "could I change about me to make you happier?"

It wasn't that we were unhappy or that I perceived he was unhappy. But after nearly 25 years together, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that while we may adjust to certain "things" about our spouses, we'd be happier if those things could change.



Hubby cut a sideward glance at me. "What?"

I smiled lovingly as I repeated the question. Surely, I thought, this isn't too difficult a question to answer.

"You're kidding me, right?"

"No," I replied. "I'm serious."

He thought for a few moments. "Nothing."

I frowned. "Are you lying?"

"Yes."

"I'm serious. It has to be something changeable, though. Just name one thing—"

"Just one?" He looked at me then, the twinkle in his eyes indicating there are a host of things he'd like to see changed. Ah, the truth comes out.

"One," I affirmed.

"Okay," he said. "I'm sick of seeing you wear those overall shorts every day."

*My cute little overalls?* I thought. Perfect for sitting at the computer and typing all day? "And with what, pray tell, shall I replace them? I'm not comfortable sitting in jeans all day," I argued. "Surely you don't expect me to dress as though I'm heading for a downtown office."



© 2006 • CHRISTIANITY TODAY INTERNATIONAL

Visit [SmallGroups.com](http://SmallGroups.com) and [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

“No. Just something besides those overalls.”

I huffed. I loved my overalls! Still, I had asked—and this was something that was changeable. Suddenly I brightened. “This calls for shopping!” I declared.

It also called for compromise. I offered a simple solution:

I would wear the overall shorts while working (I own several pair, by the way), but would change into something a little more “fetching” when my husband returned home from work.

A few weeks later, I discovered an ironic thing had taken place. Previously, when my husband returned home from work, he’d take a shower and slip into something just perfect for bumming around. But with my change came his change; he became more attentive to his appearance for me. Rather than putting on some old shorts and a holey t-shirt, he put on a sports shirt and a pair of his dress shorts I’d pressed and hung in his closet. We’ve become quite the fashion statement in the privacy of our home, reminiscent of the days when we’d dated and were attempting to impress each other. And we found our marriage heading toward a new level—a better level—a level of mutual compromise and greater intimacy.

And all it took was a change of clothes!

### **Issuing the challenge**

Several weeks later, while dining with some of our couple friends, my husband and I mentioned the question I’d asked and the changes that had come about. One couple, Ron and Dana, looked at each other with mischief in their eyes. “Honey,” Ron said to his wife, “what would you like to see changed?”

“It has to be changeable,” I interjected, excited to see another couple getting into the swing of things. “It can’t be something like his mother, the color of his eyes, or his height. Nothing like that.”

Dana thought for a moment, studying her husband. “I wish you’d listen to what I say from start to finish.”

“That’s fixable,” I spoke up. “Why is that significant to you?”

“Because it says I’m important to him,” Dana answered. “I’d feel more appreciated and understood.”

I felt like a marriage counselor. “Ron,” I asked, “what do you say? Can you do that?”

“Sure,” Ron said. Now it was Ron’s turn. At first he struggled, saying he loved Dana so much, he couldn’t imagine anything about her he’d like to see changed. But as soon as I turned toward the next couple, he interrupted, “Well—sometimes I wish she



wouldn't have so many little projects. It drives me crazy looking at all the stacks of stuff lying around the house."

Dana sighed. "It's called laundry, Ron," she informed him.

We all laughed. "But is it fixable?" I asked.

"Sure," Dana said. "I just didn't know it was so important."

Soon the other couples piped in. Some of the answers had us nearly rolling on the floor in amusement. One husband said he wouldn't mind his wife not giving him such a list of "to do" things, to which she replied, "But you look so lost without something to do!" When our laughter subsided, he added, "That's because I'm not sure how much time I have before you give me something to do."

Other requests were more poignant. "I wish," one wife said, "he'd follow through on what he says so I'll feel as though I matter."

### **Why ask the question?**

In Romans 12:18 the apostle Paul writes: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

About two years ago my lower back began to bother me. After a visit to the doctor, the end result was this: according to my physician, my middle had gotten a little fluffy (which is why I love those overall shorts so much!). This was putting strain on my spine, which pretty much holds me together. (This, too, is changeable. I'm now walking three miles a day to reduce the fluff.)

The middle of things is awfully important, and so it is with the verse in Romans. "As far as it depends on you."

It's so easy to get comfortable with the "little irritations." They're like paper cuts. At first they sting and we're constantly aware of them. Eventually, however, we manage to continue doing whatever it is we do without noticing or even feeling the little slice in our flesh. But the cut remains, and infection can easily set in.

Infection isn't good; it leads to destruction of the body as a whole.

A friend of mine shared with me that when she and her husband were sitting in an airport (she was wearing her trademark jeans and t-shirt; he was dressed more sporty), he pointed to a well-dressed woman and said, "Now that's the way I'd like to see you dress."

My friend tells me she was floored. She had no idea that her cute little jeans weren't pleasing to him. Why? Because he'd never told her—and she'd never thought to ask.



### **Should you try this at home ...**

We've all seen the ads that read: Do Not Try This At Home. So you may think that about asking your spouse that little question. You may wonder, What would my spouse say if I asked the question, "What can I change—that's changeable—that would make you happier? My hairstyle? My choice of clothing? My keeping the toilet seat up or my attempt to control every free moment?"

Don't just sit there. Ask! But remember, this isn't an invitation to throw darts. This is an opportunity to grow more intimate as a couple, because in showing that you care about the "little things," you're telling your spouse that he or she is important.

It's also not a chance for you to say what you'd like to see changed. (My husband didn't ask me for months what he could change, and the one thing I requested didn't get changed—but I can live with that.)

This is an opportunity, a chance for things to be better "as far as it depends on you."

*—Eva Marie Everson is a speaker and author of such books as True Love: Engaging Stories of Real Life Proposals and One True Vow: Love Stories of Faith & Commitment (both Barbour Publishing).*

"Loaded Questions," by Eva Marie Everson, MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, Summer 2004

