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# Christian *family*

ESPAÑOL  
A LA ESPALDA

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## On the Cover

The *McCain* family  
on developing a  
positive family  
attitude.

**p.6** *Multicultural Marriages and God*

**p.8** *Making Your House a Home*

**p.13** *“Your Word I Have Hidden in My Heart...”*

and more ➤



*marriage.*

# MULTICULTURAL MARRIAGES *and* GOD

by Olga Pahom

*I* was watching as the clock was ticking. It was just a few minutes before 6 p.m. and we were not out of the house yet. In fact, my husband had not even started getting ready. “We are going to be late,” I thought. As I grew more nervous about our tardiness, my husband was puzzled about why I was so fidgety. We were living in Mexico and this was one of our earliest realizations that our cultural expectations about time were different.

Such moments are not unique to Moldovan-Mexican marriages like ours. Spouses in other multicultural marriages have to negotiate many differences on a daily basis: What language(s) will we speak and teach our children? How will we handle different cultural expectations about men’s and women’s roles, conflict, parenting, discipline, birthday celebrations, holidays?

All marriages deal with some of these issues, but they are amplified when more than one culture is involved. Dealing with differences can be hard and exhausting, but it also has the potential to draw us closer together. Over the last ten years of marriage, we learned many things about God and cross-cultural relationships. If I were asked what makes our multicultural marriage thrive, I would share these five practices:

### ***1. Seek and serve God together.***

After being married for a while, we came to realize that we are more similar than different. Deep inside every human heart there is a desire to belong, to love, to be loved, and to know God. He is before and above all cultures, and He can breathe life into families of all backgrounds when we turn to Him. Seeking and serving God together as we strive to imitate Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2) has helped us draw closer both to Him and to each other.

### ***2. Communicate honestly and kindly.***

Cultural expectations vary when it comes to communication. Some cultures value factual information and are more direct while others place a high value on politeness and are more indirect. The Bible has quite a bit to say about using our words in ways that are both honest and encouraging to others, and honoring to God (Proverbs 12:18,25; 15:1; 25:11; Ephesians 4:15,29; Philippians 4:5; James 1:26).

### ***3. Listen to understand, not to reply.***

We can often fall into the trap of listening to our spouses just so that we can reply and convince them that we are right. This is not true listening. Listening to understand means being open, humble, and patient, not defensive or prideful. Opening our heart and our ears to our spouse will help us build a better relationship with them and with God (Proverbs 1:5; 15:31; 19:20; James 1:19).

### ***4. Forgive and forgive (and then forgive).***

No close relationship can survive without forgiveness, especially marriage. Yes, we will hurt each other with our words and actions, but it is important to release our spouses from the wrong they may have committed against us. This does not mean not talking about our concerns and feelings (see points 2 and 3), but it means that once we released them in forgiveness, we need to stop thinking they owe us something (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 18:21-22).

### ***5. Have fun learning about each other's culture.***

Finally, the differences do not have to always be stressful. Many of them make our lives richer and more enjoyable: we like watching our children learn three languages from a young age; we enjoy Moldovan, Mexican, and American meals on a regular basis; and we love traveling and learning about each other and about the God Who created our world with all its delightful colors, flavors, sights, languages, and people.

In the end, multicultural marriages are both hard and beautiful, and they point us to a God Who brings people together for good and holy purposes, and despite our differences, makes His dwelling in our midst. ■