

Dealing with the Five Most Common Ways Couples Disagree About Money

By Bethany and Scott Palmer and Jim Burns

Most of us have had the occasional heart-to-heart talk with our spouse over family finances. It probably comes as no surprise, then, that arguing about money is one of the most common arguments married couples experience. However, when a married couple continually argues over money, it puts a tremendous strain on their relationship, regardless of how much or how little money is coming into the home. Bethany and Scott Palmer are both financial professionals who've written a great book, [*Cents & Sensibility*](#), dealing with how couples can learn to agree about money. I highly recommend it! Not long ago, I had the opportunity to speak with the Palmers for our broadcast, *HomeWord with Jim Burns*. In our conversation, we talked about dealing with the five most common ways couples disagree about money, and what they can do to embark on the road to agreement.

Before we discuss these common ways couples disagree about money, it's important to know what I learned from the Palmers: each of us has a money *personality type*. According to the Palmers, we all have a *primary* money personality and a *secondary* money personality. Here are the money personalities that they have identified. (While you read these over, see if you can tell which one is your primary and which is your secondary money personality.)

1. Saver (*loves to save money*)
2. Spender (*loves to spend money*)
3. Risk-Taker (*comfortable taking risks to make money*)
4. Security-Seeker (*conservative with money, not into taking risks*)
5. Debtor (*comfortable using credit*)
6. Flyer (*doesn't pay much attention to finances*)

The Palmers say that for married couples, much of the disagreement over money arises from a clash between conflicting money personalities. With that in mind, let's take a look at the five most common ways couples disagree about money.

Common Disagreements

1. Savers Versus Spenders. Arguments often arise because Savers might appear as the responsible partner, while the Spender might appear irresponsible because he or she spends the family's resources. But, this is not necessarily the case. A Saver, for example, can be miserly while a Spender can appropriately use the family's finances to enjoy and make use of assets. There isn't a right or wrong money personality. There are strengths and weaknesses to both the Saver's and Spender's money personality.

2. Dueling Over Debt. Many couples find themselves overextended with credit card debt. Usually, this problem results from having different perspectives on how to use credit. It's easy to get into debt, but getting out is a long, often difficult, process. One thing is certain: debt puts an incredible amount of pressure on a couple. So, it's no surprise that disagreements arise.

3. Risk-takers Versus Security Seekers. Another common source of disagreement about money comes from the differing perspectives on how to approach earning more money. For example, one spouse is a Risk-taker (aggressive and assertive, willing to risk money to make money) while the other spouse is a Security-seeker (conservative and cautious regarding the use of money). When these perspectives are different in spouses, it means that each spouse has a different tolerance level for taking risks with money. One spouse may say, "Go for it!" while the other spouse may say, "Hold your horses. We need to think this through."

4. Exasperating Expectations. Couples bring all kinds of differing expectations to their marriages – and differing expectations in regard to money is no different. There may be differences in expectations regarding how much to save, how to use credit, how much money to give to charitable organizations, what finances to set aside for retirement, college funds, or taking care of elderly parents. Additionally, couples may differ on some other basic expectations, such as how much income each spouse will contribute, who will take care of the family finances, and the amount of money spouses are free to spend without consulting each other. Needless to say, where expectations differ, disagreements are often the result.

5. Flying Blind. Some spouses, and even some couples, "fly blind" when it comes to finances. They have little or no interest in keeping track of finances or simply don't want to deal with them. When this happens, the family finances can become muddled and end up in disarray, leading to disagreements between spouses.

How to Move Toward Agreement

Regardless of your money personality, moving towards agreement is key to a healthier family financial picture and a happier marriage. Here are some simple steps to get you and your spouse on the road to agreement.

- **Seek Understanding.** Identify your own primary and secondary money personality. Then, identify your spouse's primary and secondary money personality. It's amazing what improvement can come from simply understanding yourself and your spouse. Then, be sure to give your spouse, as the Palmers call it, "space and grace." Allow your spouse to be the person God has created him or her to be. This doesn't mean avoiding money issues or not confronting extreme behaviors, but it *does* mean that we need to make sure we aren't trying to change our spouses into carbon copies of us.

- **Communicate.** Disagreements over money can cause couples to withdraw and avoid talking about financial issues. So, it doesn't matter what the state of your finances are, start talking together! Admit your own mistakes and move on. If emotions run high on a

money issue, don't press immediately. Give some space, and talk about it when feelings have calmed down. It's never too late to start talking!

• **Compromise and Balance.** None of us gets everything we want in life, in marriage, or in family finances. That's okay. Learn to compromise and seek balance with your spouse. Opposing money personalities, with a little work, can actually complement one another, and make for a healthier, happier marriage. For example, if you are a Saver, and your spouse is a Spender, and you have adequate financial resources, set aside a piece of your budget that allows your Spender some freedom to spend. Or if you are a Spender, and your spouse is a Saver, make sure that you are willing to compromise and see that your spouse's need to save is adequately addressed.

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