

Don't Forget The Marriage

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True or false? - Kids love to see you hold hands with your mate. The answer is often both. Kids will often react with a resounding "yuck", but inside they do enjoy knowing their parents are bonded and together in their lives. The reassurance brought about by a secure marriage is hard to overestimate. Appropriate tenderness and affection shown between marriage partners in front of the children helps model healthy expressions of love and companionship, which is important for future relationships.

Your marriage is the relationship you had and nurtured before the children came along. It will be there after they leave. Your marriage is your best retirement plan; it is, in a way, the start and finish of the family life cycle. Nothing but our relationship to God is more important to the family and to the process of rearing children. This companionship and social connectedness within a marriage is fundamental to happiness. We are social creatures, and we must know and be known in a human relationship in order to be at peace. This astounding fact is illustrated in Genesis 2:18 when, after creating the worlds, the ecosystem on earth, and Adam, God says the most amazing thing-- and He says this after his time with Adam in the "Pre-Fall" garden. God says, "It is not good that you are alone." How many of us as Christians would tell someone today that you're never alone with God? How many of us would say, "If you have no one in your life, just talk with God and He will be all you need." Actually, God Himself said that within the human condition, just simply communing with God does not halt a social isolation. What was God's solution? He made another human (Eve); someone like Adam, and yet, very different from him as well. This was God's solution to the "aloneness" Adam was experiencing before the "Fall", and even while he related to God.

Of course, I am not trying to draw any crazy theological conclusions from this. What I do want us to look at is that this emotional intimacy between two human beings appears to be necessary for fulfillment. Yes, God is the one who meets our needs. But He does it through earthly means such as food, shelter, water, and people. It is critical that we get much of our needs for social connectedness met through marriage. As we have our needs met, we can then be better equipped to do the demanding jobs of parenting and homeschooling our children. As we meet needs within the marriage, we are strengthening relational skills that we will continue to be needed long after the children have left home.

A young marriage can suffer significant loss in its ability to experience quality time. This loss often occurs as children are born, and also with budding careers and new family adjustments. Closeness within the marriage doesn't necessarily stop, but it does tend to

drift and get superseded by demands such as childcare, sleep, and daily job responsibilities. The excitement of the beginning relationship and newfound companionship can really suffer as a routine settles into the family. A man typically is pursuing school or a job, and full time moms are devoting themselves to the care of the children and organizing a home life. Other demanding scenarios find *both* spouses pursuing careers at breakneck speed, sometimes with unexpected pregnancies occurring. Critical maintenance tasks within the marriage are often secondary to the other necessities. Family stress from any one source makes it harder for couples to take the time for the necessary things to maintain the marriage/relationship. When people are mentally or physically drained, they often want to do something with a low demand and a high pamper factor. Watching television or going to the movies becomes more attractive as stress levels increase. Activities that carry *any* measure of responsibility feel taxing and unwanted. Even going out to dinner seems less attractive than simply sitting at home and eating dinner on the couch.

Men often are slower to react to emotional needs, and we are less likely to initiate quality interpersonal time, in favor of more production-oriented behaviors. We are more likely to be the last to see the necessary companionship needs, but rather we see them only when they are screaming (okay, pun intended) at us.

Did you ever think about the many people your marriage is affected by? Your parents (or parental figures) and even grandparents play a part in your idea of what marriages are (or aren't), and in terms of what skills and patterns you bring to your role. His or her family of origin equally impacts your spouse and the legacies left to them. These effects can be positive and enhancing, or they can make stable emotional intimacy difficult to maintain. They can even be negative motivators (e.g. "I'll never do what my parents did..."), though often we have internalized more of their behavior than we care to admit.

A few activities you can do to strengthen your marriage are:

- 1) Take 20-30 minutes one week to look through old photo albums with your mate, and ask them to recall as much as they can about key pictures from growing up. Play psychologist... find out what makes your significant other tick. Alternate next week to your own photos and remembering your early years.
- 2) Discuss with your spouse what their parents' and your parents' marriages are/were like. What were the good things, and what do you not want to repeat?
- 3) Discuss together what you like about one another. Explain two or three things you wish *you* could change to be a better mate. Tell your mate one thing they could do that would improve your closeness with them.
- 4) Engage in fun and silly activity with your spouse. Go to the go-cart track and race each other, have a pillow fight or play a board game. The point is to simply have fun and connect with each other.

5) Go out to a nice restaurant *after* dinner and order dessert, such as pie and coffee. Talk about anything except children and work.

6) Look over your wedding pictures together. On another night, let the kids look with you while you comment.

7) Develop the habit of taking a minimum of 10 minutes each evening (after the children are in bed) discussing the highs and lows of each other's day. Work up to talking for at least 20 minutes per night.

You may have other enjoyable and enriching activities to invigorate your marriage. Commit to doing at least one thing each week. Don't take your marriage for granted. And do your children a favor...love your spouse. By doing so, you'll ensure a future of happiness for you – and for them.

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