

FOR BETTER OR WORSE VOL.4

WISDOM TO HELP YOU BUILD STRONG AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

HEALTHY FAMILY

Adapted from Jeff Manion, in Dream Big, Think Small

All you have to do for family relationships to erode is nothing. Relationships slide downhill by gravitational force in the routine wear and tear of life. How are family members prioritized in your busy life? Schedule downtime together, an occasional weekend away, a weekly date night with your spouse, or breakfast with one of your children. Create time to sit and eat and laugh. Invest in each other long before stress fractures are visible. Seek help early, before someone is ready to call it quits.

ROLES, LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORTING YOUR PARTNER...

By Dan Evans from Rachelheldevans.com

Recently, my mom made note of how proud she was that I'm able to support Rachel in her successful career, something she said that "many men couldn't do." When viewed in the context of [that particular season], I acted as the hierarchical leader of our relationship, but at the same time, I continued to play a supporting role in Rachel's career. At first, I didn't know how to respond to my Mom's compliment other than, "Thanks Mom." But after processing it a bit, trying to resolve my cognitive dissonance, it hit me:

Our roles aren't static. Our roles change depending on context.

At its core, (yearlong projects aside), **my relationship with Rachel isn't a hierarchy; it's a partnership.** What kind of person doesn't want success for their partner? A weak, insecure, person. What kind of man doesn't want success for his wife? A weak, insecure man.

I'm not supporting Rachel like a passive piling supports a dock. I'm supporting her like the Saturn V supported Apollo 11. I want her to succeed in her pursuits, and will do everything in my power to make it happen. And she wants the same for me.

When I'm working on a film project, who's taking the supporting role and feeding everyone? Rachel. When I took a year to buy, renovate and sell an investment property, who supported me throughout? Rachel. When Rachel's working to finish a writing project by deadline, who's supporting her by keeping the house clean and the laundry done? Me. Our life decisions are made in tandem. We're the ones leading our lives. We aren't battling over who's leading who.

To be "a leader" is meaningless without context.

A leader of what?

Too many of us have succumbed to the idea that "leaders" are a specific type of people or that "leadership" is a character quality to be obtained like political capital - the more the better. But I view leadership differently. Leadership isn't a goal. Leadership is a role

that comes and goes. Wisdom and strength are what we should pursue. Not leadership.

In the context of roles, wisdom is discerning when to lead, and strength comes from consistently practicing wisdom. **Leadership is a role that changes hands depending on context.** In that light, it's important to learn how to lead, not because you want to be "a leader", but because when wisdom and strength have placed you in a position of leadership, you don't want to screw it up.

What do you think? What does "leadership" look like in your marriage and relationships? What about "support"? Are they static positions you hold or versatile roles that you play?

MAINTAINING YOUR MARRIAGE WHEN YOU BECOME PARENTS

Adapted from Gary Thomas for Focusonthefamily.ca

Frequently, couples struggle to keep their marriage alive after they become parents. There is no question that having a baby greatly changes the dynamics between a husband and wife. After all, a child means more work. Who does the work? More work means expending more energy. Whose energy? A child means spending more money. Which money – the money we have been using for restaurants and entertainment?

Raising children should be a joint venture that requires communication, understanding, love and a willingness to compromise. Couples who have not developed these attitudes and skills before the baby arrives will not find them automatically emerging upon the arrival of their child. I sometimes ask couples, "What was your marriage like before the baby came?" I receive answers like: "Well, we were struggling." Don't expect a baby to create a good marriage – that is not the responsibility of a child. Children do not create problems in a marriage; they only reveal them.

Even couples who have a healthy marriage before babies come along tend to experience struggles as they adjust to being married with children. They spend so much time being "good parents" that they let their relationship grow stale. This staleness does not happen overnight and often is not the result of open conflict. Rather, the slow erosion of intimacy is caused by a lack of quality time, expressions of love and heartfelt communication. In these marriages, the road to restoration may prove to be much shorter because the couple started with a good relationship that has diminished.

Either way, God ordained marriage and encouraged couples to "be fruitful and multiply" – so there must be a way to have a healthy marriage *and* be good parents. Let me suggest some positive things you can do to strengthen your marriage after you have children:

- Begin by making marriage a priority. Recognize that a loving marriage is one of the greatest gifts you can give your children – as well as yourself. So, why not begin by deciding to put your marriage on the front burner?

- Start a conversation with your spouse, acknowledging that you miss time together and would like to make your relationship a priority in spite of the new demands and stressors. Ask, "How can I help?" You just might find that your spouse welcomes the idea of making marriage a priority. Your husband or wife is likely as weary or frustrated as you are with the present situation.
- Make a list of five things that you think would improve your marriage at this stage of parenting. Evaluate these five options by placing the word *realistic*, *unrealistic* or *maybe* beside each word on your list. Talk about your lists with each other, and then see if you can agree on at least one thing from each list that you will attempt to do this week.
- Read the following statements and check the ones that express your current feelings:
 - I don't feel that the division of labour in our relationship is equitable.
 - I wish we could spend more time together.
 - I think our sexual relationship could be improved.
 - I wish we could find a way not to argue over money.
 - I feel like I don't get enough time alone.
 - I wish we could find more unity. Our ideas are so different.
 - I feel like we don't talk because we are afraid of getting into arguments without coming to a healthy resolution.

Now discuss the statements that expressed your feelings and pick one issue from each of your lists to work on. This might mean you need to have an open conversation about what you can change to make things better. It might mean agreeing that each of you will talk with one other couple and ask how they have handled a similar situation. It might lead to attending a class on marriage at your church.¹

If you don't make progress, consider seeing a Christian counsellor who has experience in helping couples deal with similar marital struggles.²

There's no doubt that babies change marriages. And although taking time to focus on your marriage isn't easy, it's essential. Healthy marriages are possible – just remember that they're not a natural consequence of having kids.

Praying for your Marriage this week:

"Gracious God, I need your refilling so badly in my life. Life drains me. People drain me. To serve faithfully with love and passion, I need you to restore my soul. Please refill my life so that I can graciously love others the way Jesus loves. I don't want to live a passionless life. Help me to support, encourage, build- up, and strengthen my spouse. Help me to be an example of Your love. I ask for your wisdom, with thankfulness for all you provide"

Adapted from Jeff Manion

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

The Message By Eugene Peterson (Note: We thought this was a neat paraphrase on the Mutual Submission passage from last weeks message!)

“Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.

Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church – a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They’re really doing themselves a favor – since they’re already “one” in marriage.

No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That’s how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don’t pretend

to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.”