

Parenthood (24): Maintaining the Marriage

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The task of parenting can be so demanding that little or no investment is made to maintain the marriage. A pattern of marital neglect often begins early when the children are young and dependent upon parents for everything. In fact, it may even seem *right* to sacrifice time and activities together “for the sake of the children.”

I have personally known some parents who refused to do anything without their children. I don’t know if it was due to guilt or an over-developed sense of responsibility, but the children had to be with them every step of the way. This is a recipe for disaster. Over the course of time, emotional needs of the husband and wife are not met, romance fades, conversation is reduced to the “nuts-and-bolts” issues of daily life. Routines are followed and the family structure maintained, but the heart and soul of the marriage has died. Suddenly (or so it seems), the children are gone and two strangers find themselves living together in the same house.

Focusing on a common, outside goal is not a substitute for a husband and wife sharing *themselves* with each other. We must remember that our mates come first; it is the marriage which God calls “one flesh.” This relationship must be jealously guarded and maintained. Children will not receive the nurturing, example and teaching they need if their parents lack a rich marital relationship.

Husbands and wives need time alone – and often. Not just an anniversary dinner or birthday celebration but some sort of regular break from the grind.

This may involve but doesn’t require spending money. Dinner at a nice restaurant may be just the right tonic but so may a walk together, games with friends or visiting an ailing Christian. Some may think they can no longer afford to indulge themselves with their mate; the truth is, we *cannot afford not to*.

I remember asking my mother when I was five or six who she loved the most: me or Daddy. Boy was I shocked when she said, “I love your Daddy the most because he came first.” At the time it hurt my feelings, but now I understand what she meant. Yes, it is hard to measure love, and we love in different ways. But we need to make clear to our mates that they mean more to us than anything or anyone else in the world. This will help, not harm, our children.