

One of the Worst Things Parents Do: Putting the Marriage Last

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W.

Recently, I spoke to a wonderful group of mothers at a MAPS meeting (mothers and preschoolers). I spoke on the topic, "The 7 Worst Things Parents Do" by John and Linda Friel. When I approached the topic of "Putting the Marriage Last", I saw several smiles, some disheartened sighs, and some who were a bit teary. Then my memory of "those days" came rushing back--sleepless nights, constant supervision of every sticky hand and finger, always aware of even the "silent" moments!!! Not a second to think a thought--well maybe the beginning of one, but never to the end without an interruption. Oh, the need for time--time to be alone, and especially time for the MARRIAGE.

Our marriages are actually living organisms. The Bible says that "the two shall become one." This new identity, this oneness, needs time and attention. It can be compared to a flower--it needs well-drained soil, lots of sunshine, rain and pruning. There are times injury occurs and the flower needs time to heal and to be restored. The flower is living and growing. Without attention it will wither and die. At the same time, if the flower gets over watered, to the exclusion of the other plants in the garden, it will rot at the roots, and die.

This article focuses on those parents who learned from their parents to have a child-centered family and those who in reaction to their own neglect and abuse seek to be child-centered in order to compensate for the wrongs of the past. The result is often couples that become strangers to each other, but know their children very well. They may divorce when their children leave home, fearful of living with a stranger, and knowing that something is missing.

The drawbacks for the couple are obvious. The drawbacks for the children are often not so obvious to the parents. Parents think they are treating their children "special", allowing them to be privy to their private thoughts and dreams about life, or their fears and regrets. What does this do to the child? It burdens the child with adult emotions, with the adults need for friendship, with responsibility for the parent's well-being and can result in a sense of confusion about who the adult really is in the relationship. Children can move into adulthood with ambivalence and avoid relationships because a relationship would compete with the needs of the adults at home.

How does one better this situation? Consider taking time to talk to your spouse, even if it is only 10 minutes. Even if it is over a burger at McDonalds (without the kids)!

If you are afraid of how the conversation might go, you could consider getting some counseling to help get over the hump. Consider having a date night with your spouse.

Consider going away for one weekend a year just the two of you alone. Be prayerful about how to proceed. God promises He will answer our prayers.

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