

FamilySTYLE

Resourcing Christian Family Advocates

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"Oh, Mama!"

by Connie Cavanaugh

"I peered over to see how my poor husband was doing. This was, after all, a test to see if he would faint during delivery."

WHEN WE WERE EXPECTING OUR FIRST CHILD IN RURAL SASKATCHEWAN, MEN WEREN'T ALLOWED IN THE DELIVERY ROOM. I WANTED MY HUSBAND WITH ME, BUT WE HAD TO BE SURE HE COULD HANDLE IT.

To get delivery-room clearance, fathers had to view a childbirth film.

Women are part of the delivery process, like it or not.

Men, however, are a different matter. This film was a filter for queasy dads. If dad survived the film, he was in.

I read books and practiced breathing. I knew I was ready and confidently announced I wanted no pharmaceutical or surgical intervention. But I wasn't too sure about my husband. I offered to go along to the film in case he needed a hand to hold. We arrived at the public health office with two sacks of popcorn.

I was past eight months and needed assistance to rise from low couches. I lumbered in, and we sat on two straight-backed, wooded chairs in a room smaller than most bathrooms. The screen covered an entire wall; we had front row seats.

As the film began, the larger-than-life characters were right in our faces. I opened my popcorn and began to nibble, smugly wondering how the papa-to-be would react when things got dicey. Little did I realize the gore we would soon encounter. I'm certain the film, innocent-

ly titled "Having OUR Baby," was one of Hitchcock's final projects in his waning years. I peeked sideways. Hubby, also nibbling, showed no signs of discomfort.

The star was obviously a Swede—blond, cheerful, uninhibited. She arrived at the hospital with her little suitcase in one hand, her little husband in the other. Every few hours, we would revisit the beautiful blond to see how she was progressing. But in film time this took only minutes, giving the impression labor is a quick, painless affair.

Eventually the panting woman was wheeled into the delivery room looking fresh as a daisy.

I peered over to see how my poor husband was doing. This was, after all, a test to see if he would faint during delivery. He had an intense look of concentration on his face.

The Swede began to push, and the camera zoomed in on the action. I started to feel a little queasy. Then, without any warning whatsoever, the doctor asked the nurse for a needle. A close-up shot revealed a torture device the size of a javelin. The last thing I heard was the doctor asking for a scalpel. I felt betrayed. I was expecting childbirth, not surgery!

At that point the lights went out in Canada and Sweden. My husband caught me before I rolled off my chair. Popcorn scattered. "Nurse, help!" he cried. "I think my wife has fainted." The lights came on, and the film stopped. I was semiconscious when I heard the impossible request from the

nurse.

"Put your head between your knees," she said.

"Yeah, right!"

My husband tried to help, but there was no way this was going to happen. Unable to fold me in half, my husband bent my swollen torso as far forward as possible, about six inches, and steadied me.

A nurse escorted me to the waiting room and laid me out on the couch. Then my husband asked to see the rest of the film while I recovered! "We stopped just when things were getting exciting," he complained. I knew at that point my husband would be fine in the delivery room—but I might need help doing my part. ☺



Connie Cavanaugh is a Christian writer and speaker who is serious about her faith, but not so serious about herself. Thanks to her husband and three children, life in the Canadian Rockies offers up plenty of stories.

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What you need to know to launch a marriage enrichment group this winter.

Organize a sit-down meal or potluck for couples “interested in being a part of a marriage enrichment growth group.” Inform couples that they will not be obligated to join a group but will be given the opportunity to do so if they choose.

Someone will want to define the characteristics of a group. Perhaps an experienced couple can share, how marriage enrichment has impacted their lives.

Introduce your leader couple(s). If you have more than one leader couple, you will need to prepare a drawing to determine the groups. The leaders can draw the participants or vice versa.

Before the evening is over, allow the group(s) to meet for a

few minutes of orientation: discuss ground rules, work schedules, preferences for meeting time, and a general review of calendars.

Before adjournment, perhaps a general overview of the sessions would help couples understand the basic themes that will be covered during the season, and the ground rules that make the sessions safe.

Finally, couples must have the option of changing groups, before the season begins, under some legitimate but limited circumstances.

Typically, couples wanting to change, would be instructed to see the pastor, or the lay leadership for this consideration. ☺

DEVOTIONAL GUIDELINES THAT MAY WORK FOR YOU

Cut this out and tuck it in your Bible

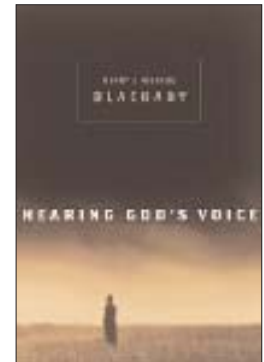
Come with a holy expectancy—remember God is calling you, and He will speak. Communicate with Him in your inner spirit. The sanctuary of His presence is within you.

1. *Listen to His Word.*
2. *Speak to Him in prayer.*
3. *Give Him your cares one by one.*
4. *Be still and listen to His Spirit.*
5. *Confess your wanting to be the exception.*
6. *Pray, “Never-the-less, not my will but Thine.”*
7. *Pray for those you love.*
8. *Pray for those who “bug” you or cause you pain.*
9. *Sing to yourself a chorus that touches your heart.*
10. *Go in peace. Remember Jesus is glad you came.*

Reflecting on Your Prayer Life

1. What was the last thing I know God said to me when I prayed?
2. What adjustments do I need to make in preparing to pray?
3. Do I allow enough time for God to speak to me?
4. How much do I listen to God speak?
5. Is there any un-confessed sin in my life that is affecting my prayer life?
6. When was the last time God said, “yes” to me?
7. How did I accept God’s answer when He said, “No?”
8. What am I doing to prepare for God’s answer when it comes?
9. Is my life truly available to God when He looks for intercessors?

Adapted from *Hearing God’s Voice* by Henry and Richard Blackaby as found in *Home Life* Aug 2003 page 47. This book helps you listen with a discerning ear for the voice of God, and to respond to His revelations of His will for you. To order, do a title or author search on < <http://www.lifeway.com> >.



Fathers are essential to a child's well-being, and heterosexual marriage is the social context in which responsible fathering is most likely to occur. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise!

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOU'RE IN A SPIRITUALLY MISMATCHED MARRIAGE!

PRAY FOR YOUR SPOUSE THAT GOD WOULD:

- Pull your spouse toward Him.
- Reveal the emptiness of life without Him.
- Help him/her see the need for forgiveness.
- Remove the confusion about the life He offers.
- Help him/her to grasp the meaning and importance of His work on the cross.
- Open his/her heart for His love and truth.

PRAY FOR YOURSELF THAT GOD WOULD:

- Help you live a consistent Christian life in front of your spouse.
- Make you authentic as you deal with life.
- Teach you how to cope in the relationship.
- Empower you to define the gospel.
- Grant you courage to eventually lead your spouse to Christ.

PRAY FOR YOUR MARRIAGE THAT GOD WOULD:

- Cause your relationship to grow in love and trust.
- Strengthen the bonds of your marriage.
- Protect your kids from the potential of conflict arising from the mismatch.
- Open the doors for spiritual conversation and guide that conversation in terms of frequency and content.

“ How did we get from being madly in love to resenting each other in less than two years?”

by Jim & Jeannette Pettitt

Brad and Melissa, a young Christian couple married only two years, sit in a marriage counselor's office wondering how and why they have arrived at this point so early in their marriage. As each relates their side of the story, they chronicle a slow move from being madly in love, to initial disappointment, to dissatisfaction, to smoldering resentment.

Their story is not so different from many couples caught in the terrible isolation of busyness of our modern culture. Soon after the wedding they moved from familiar surroundings to a new city, new jobs, and a very different social culture. Deeply in love with each other, in a strange place and busy with a new home and new jobs, they felt little need to look outside their own relationship for personal satisfaction.

Two years later they are questioning their love for each other and in the counselor's office. Brad and Melissa find themselves suffering from what relational experts call "lack of social support." It is the secret ingredient to marital satisfaction often left out of formulas found in the popular marital self-help books. Seldom the cause of marital breakups, it is one of the

main contributors to the breakdown of satisfaction couples feel regarding their spousal relationships.

Social support is the network of relationships we build outside our nuclear couple relationship. They act as pressure relief valves for our emotional experiences when we are unable to share them with our spouses. No marriage can be totally self-sustaining emotionally over the long haul. There are times when both spouses are needy and emotionally depleted (i.e. both have emotionally draining days at work) and have nothing left to give to each other. When those needs cannot be met time and time again, disappointment with each other finds its way into the relationship. If left unresolved, this disappointment can lead to anger and resentment. There may be intellectual understanding regarding the partner's inability to respond, but the emotional response of dissatisfaction doesn't go away. This is when we need that "relief valve."

How do we prepare our marriages for these inevitable times of difficulty?

There are several things we can do. **FIRST**, and perhaps foremost, we can cultivate relationships with other married couples. For those who find this difficult, it will have to be done purposefully and diligently. One of the best places to establish these relationships is in the church. Sunday School classes, small groups, interest groups (choir, Bible study, etc.) and worship services create a context in which relationships can flourish.

CAUGHT IN THE TERRIBLE ISOLATION OF BUSYNESS!

Such groups also provide advantages such as similar interests, age proximity, and agreement on spiritual, moral, ethical, and relational values. These advantages can be important in helping couples maintain their commitments to each other and to God.

SECOND, each partner should cultivate individual friendships outside the couple relationship. Some words of warning at this point would be in order. These should never be male/female relationships, and it is best if those individuals are also married and fellow Christians. Ignoring this advice is almost always a formula for disaster.

THIRD, there should be agreement that what is shared with friends will not be a betrayal of trust between husband and wife. It is one thing to vent general emotions and feelings. It is not acceptable to share information and knowledge that is private and belongs only between husband and wife.

FOURTH, these relationships should not take the place of the private times all couples need to spend together. A relationship cannot grow without plenty of private time together.

A couple's love for each other may not be in question, but their satisfaction with each other can be enhanced by expanding their circle of relationships with friends and extended family.

Finding a good balance of private time and time with others is one key to a fulfilling relationship. ©



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Jeannette has taught English in high school and at Olivet Nazarene University, and has been a masters level therapist for many years in the Kansas City area. They maintain a part-time marriage and family counseling practice together in Olathe, KS, and travel across the country facilitating district and local Marriage Enrichment retreats.

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IF YOU WANT TO SPARK A THOUGHTFUL CONVERSATION WITH YOUR FAMILY AT MEAL TIME WITH THE TV OFF, ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS LIKE THESE:

- What one thing would you like to change about our family? Why?
- What do you like best about your brother or sister? Why?
- What's one thing you've always wondered about me?
- When do you feel like God is really close to you?
- How do you feel when God is far away?
- What adjectives best describe your relationship with Christ right now?
- If, in your lifetime, you could solve one of humanity's biggest problems, which would you solve and why?
- When, in your lifetime, have you felt the happiest? Why?
- When was it that you felt the most discouraged? Why?
- Describe your favorite holiday? Why?



TRAINING YOUR CHILD FOR OBEDIENCE

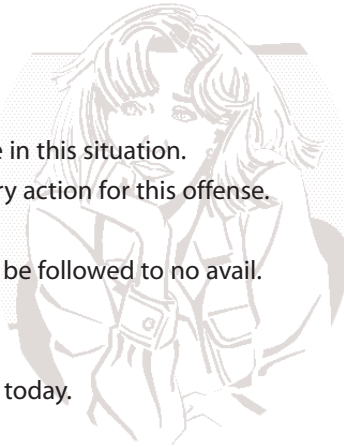
1. Obedience encompasses recognition of and submission to authority.
2. Set your family standards on pleasing God, not people.
3. In teaching obedience, actions come before understanding.
4. Avoid developing the habit of justifying your expectations.
5. Guard against the extremes of authoritarian or permissive attitudes.
6. Learn the difference between punishment and discipline.
7. Never forget you are raising your kids to a life of glorifying God.

When You've Reached Your Boiling Point

by Debra Kastner

When you sense a disciplinary situation getting out of hand with your kids, ask yourself whether the following statements are true or false at the moment. Focus on the true statements and get help from a trusted friend or pastor to avoid habitual behavior.

1. I am using my "mad voice."
2. I've been feeling really down today.
3. I'm mad and I'm not going to take it anymore.
4. I'm not prepared to administer specific discipline in this situation.
5. I haven't previously planned a specific disciplinary action for this offense.
6. My kids are getting on my nerves.
7. I've asked more than once for my instructions to be followed to no avail.
8. I'm raising my voice.
9. I need a break.
10. This isn't the first offense this kid has committed today.
11. These circumstances have put me on edge.

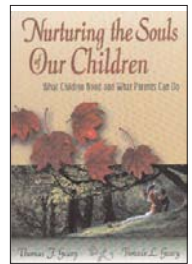


WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING television and a family member comes to talk to you, shut the set off completely, not just the sound.

Without the electronic interference, you will feel more in control and better balanced. With your full attention, you will have a better chance to nurture the souls of your family because you're more attuned to observing and understanding them.

Nurturing the soul accepts no half-hearted efforts, no distracted connections.

Adapted from *Nurturing the Souls of Our Children* by Thomas and Bonnie Geary. Smyth and Helwys, Publishers. <http://www.helwys.com>



The god that you make will not condemn the sin that you love!

Knowing the Difference Between Friends, Foes, and Fools

Questions to ask of your teenager:

1. Does this person profess to know Christ as Lord and Savior?
2. Does this person draw you nearer to Christ?
3. Is this person actively involved in church?
4. What kind of other friends does this person have?
5. Does this person try to involve you in questionable activities?
6. Does he show respect to his parents?
7. Does she have control of her tongue?
8. Is he reasonably self-controlled or does he fly off the handle?
9. What about trust? Is she trustworthy?

WHY SHOULD YOU EAT TOGETHER AS A FAMILY?

- ☞ IT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION.
- ☞ *It provides teachable moments for civility and manners. Where else will you teach your kids it's impolite to talk with a mouth full of food, or open their mouth when chewing, or smack lips and lick fingers like they were at some local Renaissance festival?*
- ☞ IT SAYS TO YOUR KIDS, "OUR FAMILY AND EACH PERSON IN IT IS IMPORTANT."
- ☞ *It develops meaningful family traditions.*
- ☞ IT OPENS THE DOOR FOR SPIRITUAL TALK THAT OTHERWISE JUST DOESN'T TAKE PLACE.
- ☞ *It implies that there's more to this world than junk food.*
- ☞ IT HELPS YOUR KIDS LEARN WHAT A KITCHEN LOOKS LIKE.
- ☞ *It gives great opportunity for your kids to learn something new. If they know how to use KaZaA they can operate a dishwasher.*

— Mother Daughter Journal —

Being divorced, I find that the weekends my daughter spends with her father are very difficult. At first, I felt a great loss but didn't want her to feel guilty if she saw me upset. Then the Lord gave me the idea of writing letters to her in a journal. I write that I miss her, remind her of things she has done that make me smile, talk about special times we've had together and things we plan to do, and draw pictures for her. I always write about God's unfailing love and remind her that He has a plan for her future.

Sometimes I read a portion to her when she needs to know how much I love her. I have reread it often to see where God has brought me in my faith. I plan to give the journal to her when she becomes an adult. I feel it will be as much a treasure for her as it was for me to write. —Jodie Williams

An Indictment:
Storytelling has become a lost art in many families. We have become so enmeshed in the stories of celebrities that our children know more about them than about their own parents and grandparents.

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