

Marriage Rituals Bring Connection

As a counselor and marriage educator I come across many couples who spend very little quality time together. Couple time is being crowded out by the demands of jobs, children, household chores and outside activities. This one factor is taking a huge toll on the quality of marriages.

We fall in love through rituals of connection and intimacy – courtship rituals like romantic dinners, long talks, riding bicycles or going skiing, going for walks, exchanging gifts, talking every night on the telephone. We mostly do these rituals alone as a couple. We look forward to these times of connection and intimacy.

Couples make the time to be together during courtship. But once married and children come along, their quality time dwindles to almost nothing. While marriage is a SOLID COMMITMENT to be honored as a vow before God, the quality of the relationship is contingent on each spouse making meaningful deposits in the other's emotional bank account. Any strong marital bond can deteriorate without emotional and sexual intimacy.

What is the solution to this widespread issue? **One thing I recommend is to make your marriage “intentional.” You can do that by creating “rituals” in your marriage.**

Dr. William Doherty, Professor and Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Minnesota, has written and spoken on this subject over the last few years. I concur with him that developing these marriage rituals adds means and substance to a marriage. First, let's define what a marriage ritual is. **Rituals are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated and significant. A ritual is something that has positive emotional meaning to both parties.**

Almost anything can turn into a ritual of connection, if the focus is on the relationship. Dr. Doherty says, “We have tended to focus on communication and conflict skills, which of course are crucial; but my view is that often it's the rituals of connection and intimacy and community that provide the foundation upon which we build when we try to engage conflict management skills. To switch metaphors, the rituals put the water in the well, the water we draw on during times of conflict and struggle.” I find this to be so true!

To be a ritual it must be repeated, coordinated and significant to both of you. A marriage ritual is a shared activity that you do on a repeated basis (from daily to yearly) that has meaning for you as a couple. It can be small or big, splashy or simple, as long as it is a regular part of your life that helps you stay connected as a couple.

Neil and I have developed some rituals over the years that bring deep meaning and connection to us. We pray together several times a week. During this time of prayer together, we share what we sense God is speaking to us from HIS word and by the Spirit.

Another bonding ritual for us is taking drives together. This we do about once a week. We enjoy quiet rides throughout the hillsides of Harford County while listening to beautiful music. We hold hands and talk some, but mostly just enjoy the scenery. We always come home feeling a little more connected and relaxed.

The emotional connection and pattern that happens with marriage rituals are powerful. They help glue you together and keep you through the tough times. Creating rituals allows intimate encounters to become safer and more likely to occur.

So, I challenge you to begin to create some meaningful rituals. These shared times will create wonderful memories to look back on, while drawing you and your spouse even closer together.

Norma G. Tilton
Pastor
Marriage Educator & Counselor
Our Father's Heart, Inc.
www.ourfathersheartministry.com

President
www.marriageworksmd.org
servlead@comcast.net