

Wednesday is Time Together

Brigham Young University-- Idaho
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"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person."
-- Mignon McLaughlin



Wednesday

- Today I will focus on spending time with my spouse
- Today, I will plan a meaningful activity for my spouse and I to do together—today!
- Today, I will make quiet time for me and my spouse to be alone

Marriage is the #1 Cause of Divorce

"The biggest threat to good marriage is everyday living." (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 125).



Single Biggest Contributor to the Breakdown of Relationships

"Since the publication of my book, *Divorce Busting*, I have been regularly interviewed by reporters about what makes marriages work. They ask, "Michele, why do you think so many marriages are ending in divorce? What is at the root of all of this?" Although the writers expect a complicated psychological response, to me, it's very simple.

"I'm convinced that the single biggest contributor to the breakdown in relationships today is the fact that couples aren't spending enough time together. They aren't making their relationships a number one priority. The relationship gets put on the back burner. Everything else seems more important - careers, children, hobbies, community involvement, and personal pursuits. And when relationships aren't attended to as they should be, trouble sets in.

Marriage is not the Priority

"People who don't prioritize their relationships tell me that they often end up fighting during the little time they do have together. They argue about day to day issues; unpaid bills, uncleaned houses, unruly children. And it's no wonder. It's difficult to do what needs to be done to keep life moving in a productive direction, let alone try to coordinate your efforts with your partner's when you're under a time crunch. But the truth is, arguing about "who's doing what around the house," is really just a symptom of deeper problems - isolation, loneliness and resentment. You argue about the mundane issues when your emotional needs aren't being met. The coke can left in the living room becomes a symbol of a lack of caring for you.

The Good News

"But there's good news in all of this. Time together can be the great healer. Even if it's awkward at first, when two people commit to investing energy and time in their love life, only good things can come from it. When people put their relationships first, they feel appreciated and important. They feel loved. Spending time with your partner tells him or her in no uncertain terms, "You matter to me." Time together gives people opportunities to collect new memories, do activities they enjoy, to laugh at each other's jokes, to renew their love" (Michelle Weiner-Davis, *Divorce Busting*, Internet Transcript).

If Not Purposeful, We Lose!

"Because in this era, if we are not intentional, we will become an automatic pilot couple. What I mean is that the natural flow of marriage relationships in contemporary life, with our crammed schedules, endless tasks, kids to care for, and ever-present television and other media is towards less focus on the couple relationship over time, and therefore towards less connection, less spark, and less intimacy. This is not being dysfunctional, this is being normal" (William H. Doherty, *Intentional Marriage: Your Rituals Will Set You Free*, Fourth Annual Smart Marriage Conference, Denver, Colorado, 1 July 2000, 2).

Satan's Tactics

"Lucifer works hard to undermine our innate tendency to nurture and care for others. He wants us to become separated from each other. Voice messaging and pagers are efficient, but they don't replace a listening ear and a caring heart. If the adversary can cause us to focus more on our differences than on our similarities, if he can keep us so busy running from one commitment to another that we no longer have time for each other, he has made great strides towards neutralizing the strength and influence that we have. We need each other. We need each other's testimonies and strength, each other's confidence and support, understanding and compassion

Satan's Tactics

"Lucifer would have us so busy—with the details swirling around family, friends, careers, and every soccer league in town—that there's no time to actually *live* the gospel. No time to fast and pray, to immerse ourselves in the scriptures, to worship in the temple—all the things we need to do to "study for our mortal test. In other words, he wants us to be a little more concerned with the world than with the gospel, a little more interested in life today than in life forever. Regret is what happens when we figure out too late what was really important" (Sheri Dew, *No Doubt About It* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001], 97-98, 100).

Pitfalls of Busyness

Busyness corrupts your conversations. "We recently received an email from our friend... who told us that he and his wife, in managing their household of three children, feel more like air traffic controllers than husband and wife. He said they barely have time to talk because they spend so much time juggling schedules and taxiing kids to and fro. Their conversations consist primarily of sentences like 'Next Tuesday is an early dismissal day for the kids so one of us needs to be home and then take Dominic to soccer practice'.... Busyness deludes us into thinking that we're conversing when we are actually just trying to make it through the hectic speed of our day" (Les & Leslie Parrott, *Your Time Starved Marriage: How to Stay Connected at the Speed of Life* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006], 35).

Pitfalls of Busyness

Busyness depletes your love life: 'Devoting a little of yourself to everything,' said Michael LeBoef, 'means committing a great deal of yourself to nothing.' It's true. When you are scattered too thin, when you are trying to stretch time beyond its limits, you end up with a zero balance in your love bank. The quality of your love life can't help but suffer when you are too busy" (Les & Leslie Parrott, *Your Time Starved Marriage: How to Stay Connected at the Speed of Life* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006], 36).

Pitfalls of Busyness

Busyness steals your fun: "Busyness is a fun killer. There's no way around it. If you're exhausted from just trying to keep the hamster wheel of life turning, you're never going to enjoy the ride. Think of some of the crazy things you did when you were a dating couple. You were all about fun in those days. Laughter was your third companion on every date. So what happened? You know. Busyness pushed fun out of the commuter car" (Les & Leslie Parrott, *Your Time Starved Marriage: How to Stay Connected at the Speed of Life* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006], 36).

Pitfalls of Busyness

Busyness erodes your soul. Perhaps the most corrosive by-product of busyness for a couple is the inevitable erosion of their inner resources. If you are busy enough, long enough, you will become spiritually bankrupt. God will feel absent. Why? Because at the center of every couple's shared lives, underneath the layers of everydayness, an emptiness gradually settles in for even the most committed couples whose spirits have not been nourished. Busyness slowly and steadily wears away spiritual contentment and depletes our relationship of inspiration" (Les & Leslie Parrott, *Your Time Starved Marriage: How to Stay Connected at the Speed of Life* [Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006], 36-37).

The Need for Rituals to Reconnect

"Rituals are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant. This is the classical, anthropological definition. Rituals can be everyday interactions, or they could be once a year, but they're repeated. They're also coordinated. You have to know what is expected of you in a ritual; you can't have a meal ritual together if you don't know when to show up for it, and you can't dance together if you don't know what kind of dance you are going to do.... Rituals are not only repeated and coordinated, they are significant. A ritual is something that has positive emotional meaning to both parties" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 126).

Rituals vs. Routine

That lack of significance is what distinguishes a ritual from a routine. "A marriage routine is something you do over and over in a coordinated way, but that does not have much emotional meaning. You can have dinner as a couple every night, while one of you watches television and the other reads the paper. This is probably a routine because it lacks emotional significance" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 126).

Connection Rituals

Connection rituals are "rituals of everyday life in which the spouses share time and attention with each other. They are often low key as opposed to intense, comforting as opposed to sparkling. **Connection rituals are at the base of the pyramid of marriage, right above commitment**" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 126).



Examples of Connection Rituals

1. Checking in on the phone each day as a couple. I know another couple who text message each other daily. Remember, it's only a ritual if both couples know that it's connection time.
2. Goodbye's in the morning, greetings in the evening, and going to eat and talk
3. Some couples always express love for each other. One couple says "I love you" every morning before he leaves for work. They never know if they will see each other again.
4. Working together in the yard or on a home improvement project.
5. Watching your favorite TV show together

Greeting Rituals



Talk Rituals

"Every marital advice book stresses the importance of taking time to communicate. **But if a married couple with children has fifteen minutes of uninterrupted, nonlogical, nonproblem-solving talk every day, I would put them in the top five percent of all married couples in the land. It's an extraordinary achievement. When I say that to my undergraduate students who are not yet married, they can't believe it.** When we are courting and falling in love we have oodles of time to talk... it's talk that propels most of us to fall in love and want to get married. **After we get married... we still have time to talk, but even then our time is starting to erode because of the TV, the Internet, the newspaper, and general household management. If we then have kids, time to talk takes a big dive.** You're not going to have time for personal talk, if you have children, unless you ritualize it. Mumbling at 11 o'clock at night when you are exhausted does not count as a talk ritual" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 129-130; emphasis added).

For Parents Only

"Earlier I mentioned a talk ritual that Leah and I came up with when our youngest child was four. After dinner, we would clean up, give the kids dessert, start the coffee, and then send the children off to play. We taught them to leave us in peace while we had our coffee, so that we could talk. We asked them not to interrupt us unless the house is burning or something equivalent, in which case they can always call 911 and then interrupt us. This ritual gave us about 15 minutes every day to talk as a couple. We do it to this day, even though the children are gone (mostly)" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 130).

Keep Your Courtship Alive

"Keep your courtship alive. Make time to do things together—just the two of you. As important as it is to be with the children as a family, you need regular weekly time alone together. Scheduling it will let your children know that you feel that your marriage is so important that you need to nurture it. That takes commitment, planning, and scheduling" (Joe J. Christensen, *Ensign*, May 1995, 65).

A Most Common Mistake

Unfortunately, one of the most common mistakes that many couples make soon after their marriage is that they quit courting each other. Don't! Regular dating will keep a marriage relationship alive and growing. Such times together don't have to be expensive or extravagant. A walk around the block while sharing thoughts and feelings will do wonders for a marriage. Go swing together at the park. Have a picnic in the back yard. Buy a "kiddie-cone" instead of a more expensive one. Split a milkshake. The point is, spouses can be together and renewing their relationship without having to save for it. This is an important aspect of keeping the marriage alive

Friday Night Lights!

Along this line, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared the following experience. While he was a Ph.D. student at Yale University, he and his wife, Pat, decided that Friday nights would be their date night, no matter what. This was not an easy task. Besides being a full-time graduate student, Elder Holland was running the Institute program and serving in the Stake Presidency. Meanwhile, Pat was being a mother to their two young children, and serving as Relief Society President. Whatever studying and writing and working and "stake presidencing" Elder Holland did, he did Saturday through Friday until 5:00 p.m. And whatever "relief societizing" and baby tending and laundering, and everything else a young mother does, Pat did from Saturday through Friday until 5:00 p.m. Listen to Elder Holland:

Friday Night Lights

"But on that one night for a few hours we would be together. We would step off the merry-go-round. We would take a deep breath or two and remind ourselves of how much we loved each other, why we were doing all of this in the first place, and that surely there must be a light at the end of the tunnel somewhere.

"I do not remember those dates ever amounting to much. I literally cannot remember ever going to dinner, but we must have. We certainly must have at least gotten a pizza occasionally. I just don't remember it. What I do remember is walking in the Yale-New Haven Arboretum, which was just across the street from our student housing. I remember long walks there holding hands and dreaming dreams of what life might be like when things were less demanding. Down at the end of the street was a Dairy Queen where we would usually end up for a cone or, on really good nights, a root beer float.

Friday Night Lights

"Modest as my big-time spending was, Pat has said a hundred times that those Friday nights got her through those years. She said, 'I looked forward to them and I counted on them. I knew that however many nights you were studying or working or away on Church assignments, I still had Friday night to count on. [And, of course, we always had Monday.] No, 'the dates,' she said, weren't much as social extravaganzas go [that's an understatement], but they were mine and I felt in control of both my own life and my husband's for at least a few hours each week. It got me through some very demanding times.'

Friday Night Lights



"A drugstore psychologist once said that people need three things to be emotionally healthy: someone to love, significant things to do, and something pleasant to look forward to. Brethren, make sure your wife has something pleasant, something genuinely fun, to look forward to regularly' (Jeffrey R. Holland, "Our Consuming Mission," *A Evening With a General Authority*, 5 February 1999 [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City, 1999], 2-3).

Group Counseling 101

At this time, I would like those of you who are married, or have been married, to reflect for a moment on your own marital rituals of connection, intimacy, and community--big or small, daily or yearly. Here's the plan. I'm going to give you a moment of silence to reflect and come up with a favorite ritual you can share with our group!

Examples from Smart Marriage Conference

"Well, Annabel just wanted me to share with you that we fell into a beautiful ritual in the last year and a half. We decided to take up ballroom dancing every Wednesday night for an hour and a half. And so she just shared with me that when I'm out of town it ain't the same."

Examples from Smart Marriage Conference

"We were married on the 22nd of August, and we celebrate each month our monthly wedding anniversary on the 22nd. We do something special. It's not necessarily a big thing; this past month or this month, in June, we were married 430 months. Always tell that to couples at Pre-Cana or at Engaged Encounter and let them try to figure out what that is in years. It keeps them thinking. But it isn't necessarily a real great thing? I mean it is a great thing between the two of us, but it might be going out to dinner, it might be a phone call during the day to say "I love you," it might mean leaving a note in the morning, it might mean stopping off at Wal-Mart or Kmart and picking up a new potato peeler or wooden spoon, but the thought is that 'I love you' and it's a special day, and we try to keep it alive, and do so each month."

Examples from Smart Marriage Conference

"We have for 25 years written a daily love letter to each other. We haven't missed a day, even when Joe had open heart surgery. And we have 18-19,000 of them in a closet and the kids are going to read them when we're gone. We don't do it at XYZ time every day; but we do it. We don't go to bed without having written that love letter and talked about it" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 134).

Everyday Ways to Take Back Your Marriage:

- Establish a set time every day to talk— just to check in, with no discussion of money, children, or chores.
- Create a greeting ritual that marks the moment and has meaning for the two of you
- If you've stopped going to bed together regularly, start again
- Leave an affectionate note for your spouse that has no practical purpose
- Start dating again. Go out on a spontaneous date or plan one right now.
- Spend more quiet time together without the television on
- Move the television out of your bedroom
- Notice something you like about your spouse and share it

Take Back Your Marriage!

- If you have kids, do leave them at home. You and your spouse need time alone. The best thing you can do for your kids is make your marriage work.
- Don't waste time trying to figure out whose fault it is that you haven't been spending time together. It really doesn't matter.
- Don't let angry feelings get in the way of making plans with your partner. Research shows that the fastest way to change how you feel is by taking action. Doing something enjoyable together will make you and your partner feel more loving. As a result, you may even be able to resolve heated topics more easily in the future.
- Don't think you have to go to a tropical island to make time together meaningful. You don't have to spend a lot of money to show your love for your partner. Go for a walk around the block. Read a novel together. Set aside ten minutes each day to talk. Ride a bike. Be creative.

Becoming One in Marriage

"We believe that when a man and woman are united as husband and wife, and they love each other, their hearts and feelings are one, that love is as enduring as eternity itself, and that when death overtakes them it will neither extinguish nor cool that love, but that it will brighten and kindle it to a purer flame, and that it will endure through eternity"
(George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:320).



A Lesson from A Prophet



Elder Hugh B. Brown served in the First Presidency, as an Apostle, and in many other important church responsibilities during his lifetime. And yet, it was perhaps his service to his wife and hers to him that was most impressive about this man. In his first address after being called to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Brown said, "I would be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge that Zina Card Brown, my beloved wife, is more responsible for my being here today that I" [*An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, 1988, p. ix].

A Lesson from a Prophet



"The Brown's daughter, Mary Firmage, related: "Up until mother's stroke they go through a ritual daily... He'd kiss her goodbye and then they would walk to the front porch together. Daddy would go down three steps, and then turn around and ask, 'Did I kiss you good-bye?' Mother would answer, 'Why, no, you didn't.' Daddy would kiss her again."

"As he walked to the car, Mother would run into the dining room, where she would blow kisses to him from the window. While daddy was backing the car out of the drive, Mother would run back to the porch where she'd wave a handkerchief until he drove out of sight. Just before the car turned the corner, Daddy would blink the brake lights three times, his code for "I love you" (*Church News*, 26 October 1974, 5).