

LOOKING AFTER YOU!

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

We are about to facilitate a marriage session at church on the subject of maintaining a healthy marriage through the various stages – from newly weds, through being young parents, parents of teens, empty nesters and finally grandparents. I am taking this opportunity to share some of our thoughts with you.

As soon as we become parents we know our responsibility is to provide a loving, caring, disciplined environment for our kids. But do we ever think of how important it is to look after our marriage during the whole parenting process?

We didn't start our family for three years after we were married, and probably, like most parents, we just assumed that since we already had a strong marriage that it would take care of itself. It had to. After all, we were in 'reaction' mode just doing whatever it took to feed, clothe and keep our kids happy. It feels like a never-ending cycle of broken sleep, loads of washing, caring for sick babies, going shopping, to coffee group, daycare and school. The more babies, the more work and the less time there is for one another.

Looking after marriage requires effort and there just doesn't seem to be any energy left for that! However, by getting into the habit of putting the kids first all the time, we forget to carve out time for our own rejuvenation. Marriage can't stand being ignored for years.

So how do you look after yourselves during the parenting years? The first thing is to create a well managed, happy home so you have time to spend with your spouse. To accomplish this you need well-defined family values and routines that your family upholds. You need to stand together and not become divided or one of you be a weak link. Plan together for time away from your children. Yes, they will survive without you! Go on dates regularly – movies, out to dinner or out for a drive. Don't drop everything to always do what the kids want. Have them come with you to events you like. Our children fitted into our lives, not the other way around. We were into singing and recording and they came, too. It gave our daughter the opportunity to discover her wonderful singing ability, and our son took up the guitar and completed a Recording Industry major.

Stay interesting, fit and vibrant. Encourage one another to reach your potential. I worked to put my husband through University and he helped look after the children while I studied for my Bachelor's Degree. We helped one another obtain jobs we both loved to do and, by being happy and satisfied within ourselves, we were also happy with one another.

There is life after children and the empty nest period is the best time of your lives. It is a time when you are usually more financially secure, make wiser decisions, are better planners and, most of all, you have the uninterrupted time to enjoy one another's company.

We now have time to enjoy our children and their families. Our daughter has been married for 11 years without children. She and her husband have just adopted a little boy from Korea who is now 13 months old. Not only is she a new mother at 35 years-of-age, but also she is now 20 weeks pregnant. It has been very interesting watching them manage their time and now it is our turn to give them some time off to look after their marriage. When we go to New Zealand our son and his wife book us in for a weekend to look after the grandchildren so they can have some quality time, too.

Nobody is going to look after your marriage but you. Neglect sneaks up on you with the distraction of family and work. You literally have to be proactive by creating opportunities to be together. When you walk up the aisle it doesn't occur to you that you will ever split up. To stay together and be happy empty nesters, you need to nourish your marriage through all its stages.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.