FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

Bulletin

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Tough Questions from Kids

Why did God take Grandpa to heaven?

Appreciate Little Things

CARRY THEM IN YOUR HEART

BY JIM DALY

PAT HOLMES IS A GROWN MAN, BUT HE NEVER LEAVES HOME without his stuffed turtle. That's right. Every morning for 20 years, Pat has thrown his stuffed turtle into his briefcase and headed for his law practice.

That odd daily routine is not some kind of strange therapy. It's one of the ways he carries his daughter with him in his heart everywhere he goes. Pat's daughter gave him the turtle when she was four years old. She told him that he would never feel lonely as long as the turtle was with him because it meant she was with him. Pat has been happily shuttling the turtle to work and on business trips ever since.

How can you carry your children in your heart? There are lots of ways. Drawings taped to your refrigerator. A Sunday school art project. A plastic cup full of dandelions picked just for you. Even a stuffed turtle.

Just as your wedding ring connects you to your spouse, a gift from your child acts as a tether between your heart and theirs. The world feels brighter when you're surrounded by reminders of God's gift of family. As Pat says when people wonder about his stuffed animal: "When you have family, you have everything."

I couldn't agree more.

A MARITAL UNITY MYTH: 1 + 1 = 1

If you're like me when I was first married, marriage was represented by the math equation 1 + 1 = 1. It sounds wonderful. And on the surface, it seems to align with God's plan for husbands and wives to experience oneness. Jesus' teaching on marriage describes oneness as unity: "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Jesus uses the metaphor of "one flesh" to describe the spiritual, emotional and physical unity couples can experience only in marriage.

However, this metaphor can't be taken literally; otherwise, every married couple's goal would be to become conjoined twins!

This two-become-one model seems to promise fewer arguments, but as Jenni and I found, it produces more discord because one spouse's preferences, choices, ideas and personality may get attacked or even eliminated.

A healthy relationship requires the foundational building block of a biblical marriage: the healthy adult. And by "healthy" we mean a person capable of fully caring for his or her whole being—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual—who has also accepted full responsibility for the job.

Sounds simple, right? We wish it were, but sadly it's not. As Dr. Greg Smalley, vice president of marriage at Focus on the Family, and I have worked with struggling couples, we've noticed that both the understanding of true adulthood and the modeling of it are largely missing.

The good news is that becoming an adult is fundamentally about those two factors I mentioned: capability and responsibility. If you are able to care well for yourself and then take on the job, you qualify.

There's one more important element to becoming a fully functioning, healthy adult: recognizing that, by design, we are dependent upon God. We are flawed and imperfect people who need His help. The job of an effective adult is to responsibly care for ourselves while simultaneously depending on the Lord, our ultimate source of life, strength, wisdom and knowledge.

Through a commitment to personal responsibility and self-care, healthy individuals become capable of forging a strong marriage.

—Robert Paul and Greg Smalley

BURSTING NEGATIVE THOUGHT BUBBLES

We've all seen the cartoons and comics where a character's thoughts are revealed in cloud-shaped thought bubbles. Like those of many people, my thoughts can fill up with negative stuff, especially when I'm feeling worried or anxious.

How can we manage our thought bubbles and keep negative ones from constantly surfacing? Negative thoughts in us as parents can lead to negative thoughts in our children.

Researchers have determined that the average person has about 50,000 thoughts per day. And we all think about things and interpret them differently from the people around us. One influence is our complex personality differences. Those personality differences create our own unique filter from which we think about moments, situations and relationships.

One of the reasons our thought bubbles can become filled with negative messages is because our brains are poor at making predictions. Instead of producing accurate forecasts about the future that might include good outcomes, we often just project our worries onto the future. Emotions, especially, can have a dramatic impact on the shape our thought bubbles take. The better you corral your negative thought bubbles, the better you'll be able to model this for your children.

—*Danny Huerta*

CO-PARENTING WHEN YOUR PARTNER IS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Routines are what many people live by. They help autistic parents create a daily schedule for their children. Children usually respond well to routines because they provide stability and structure. Attention to detail takes on an entirely new meaning for many autistic parents. My husband thinks exclusively in detail and notices what others may not. This is great when the washing machine needs repairs or we need to make a list of equipment for an extracurricular activity.

Homework help is something many autistic parents can offer. My husband loves research, so he knows how to study, enjoys the learning process and is very curious. Many autistic parents can help their child complete a class project with great care, effort and possibly even enthusiasm.

Reliability is a marked attribute of many autistic parents. As long as a commitment is plugged into the routine, there's a strong chance they will stick to the plan. My husband doesn't shy away from standing for what is morally right, and this is a very good example for our children.

—*Nicole Mar*

FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

I knew my in-laws weren't Christians when we got married 10 months ago, but now I'm struggling. Do you have any advice on dealing with in-laws who aren't believers?

ANSWER:

If you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you probably long for your family and friends to have one too. If your in-laws haven't chosen to follow Christ, what should you do? How can you accomplish the difficult tasks of living out your faith, sharing with those you love and sustaining meaningful relationships with them?

Consider the following principles for responding in a God-honoring way to your in-laws who aren't Christians.

1. Pray for them. "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22, NIV). Hudson Taylor is credited with this statement: "When we work, we work. When we pray, God works." It's no small thing to put God to work in the lives of family members who aren't yet Christians. Keep bringing them before the Lord and asking Him for wisdom about how to touch their lives.

2. Beware of having a critical or judgmental attitude. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2, NIV). Judging the behavior of in-laws is one of the surest ways to push them away from God and church activities.

3. Be open and real about your own faith. "In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason from the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). Be clear and candid about your values and principles while caring deeply for and being respectful to your in-laws. It allows God to work in their hearts.

(Adapted from the *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, general editors Phillip J. Swihart and Wilford Wooten)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

ANSWER:

Eventually every person has to die. Sometimes people die when they are young, through accidents, diseases, or tragedies. No one wants a grandfather or grandmother to die but that's part of God's plan right now: We get old and our bodies die. If our grandparents believe in Jesus, then someday we will see them again.

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