

## **MORE THAN JUST LIVING TOGETHER PART 2:**

### Introduction

*1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV*

*(11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child; I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*

American is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest unreached people group in the world behind India and China. Within our borders the largest groups of un-churched are white, middle aged, high school graduates who are married with children and are men living in the south, south west. They are men just like you and I.

Men are looking for answers.

Answers to their eternal destiny.

Answers on how to stay married to the love of their life.

Answers on how not to mess up like they did last year, last month, last week.

Answers on how to see their little girls and boys grow up right!!  
Not perverted or tainted by the world, lust, and sin.

### **Three men**

Every man has three men to deal with:  
The man he wants other people to think he is.  
The man he thinks he is.  
And the man he really is.

Who a man is in his manhood determines what he is in every other aspect of life.

## **Embrace it, don't run from it!**

Some political lobby groups have tried to marginalize manhood and fathering to devalue it.

But the value of a father to his family cannot be denied.

A father is someone who animates his family by the spirit that's within him.

If you're a Dad, you're animating your children. You are involved in giving them a life force, reproducing yourself after your own kind.

You didn't simply donate some DNA at conception.

You are constantly animating your children, enabling your family.

Whatever you are, that's what will be passed on to your children.

It's the onus of every man who is a father. You can't run away from it. If you do, you'll simply animate your children with the abandonment and rejection that's in your spirit.

The most awe inspiring and weighty revelation that a man can ever have is that he can either scar or bless those that he loves the most.

Now I understand that my audience is mixed today.

I understand that 50% of the people in my church are women

But I ask for patience and I ask for you ladies to give me this one service this year, here are my reasons:

## **First**

The greatest gift I believe I can give my wife and give my kids is to become the man that I am called to be. This enables and empowers and releases them to become everything that they are called to be.

If I can raise men of honor, men of valor, men who will passionately love their families, then I have made the greatest contribution to our society that I believe a man can make.

## **Second**

When a man acts like a child it forces his wife to act like his mother.  
*Mothers basically do two things for their children.  
Correct them and make decisions for them.*

*The issue arises when a man acts like a child and forces his wife to act like his mother, you can't make love to your mother!  
A woman takes great glory in childbearing and motherhood.  
But there is no glory for her in raising her husband as she would a child.*

*When a boy becomes a man he is to put away childhood things.*

## **Third**

Because of the impact of a father.

Have you noticed there's virtually no material out there on how to be a mother?

It seems that Moms just click into the role.

Moms just seem to know when to hold you, when to cuddle you, what to say and what not to say.

But dads! Many of us find it difficult, if not impossible, to click with our kids.

That distance between fathers and their children is all too common.

Adults often come to the point in their life when they go on a search to find or discover who their father really is.

Sometimes it happens after a time of wandering, or it comes out of a need for the security and reassurance only a father can give.

There is a terrible impact on the life of a child when a dad is not around.

A father is like a compass for a child.

A compass does two things:  
It shows you where you are headed.  
It gives you your orientation in the world.

You take a father out of the life of a child and the child loses a great sense of where they are and who they may become.

A child gets its nurturing and security from its mother, but its identity and strength from its father.

**Our first task in defining manhood is to redefine the role of a father.**

Some of you are sitting there and saying, *“well this isn’t for me, this isn’t relevant to me, and I don’t have kids”*.

Everything about you as a man is derived from your father.

Be it your heavenly Father or your earthly father.

A man takes his image of God from his father.

If his father was absent, abusive or neglectful, that is how he will see God out side of divine revelation.

Today we don’t have an issue of crime, of pornography, of drug abuse, and an issue of fatherlessness.

We have a generation of boys raised by women who do not know what it is to be men, husbands, and fathers.

God the Father’s final creative achievement was the creation of the first earthly son.

As men, you cannot define yourself outside of knowing what it is to be a son.

You cannot define yourself outside of knowing what it is to be a man.

Gordon Dalbly from NARTH, (The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) relates a story, he says:

*“A Catholic priest I know tells of a nun who worked in a men's prison. One day, a prisoner asked her to buy him a Mother's Day card for his mother. She did, and the word traveled like wildfire around the prison. Deluged with requests she called Hallmark Cards, who obliged with huge boxes of Mother's Day cards as a donation. The warden arranged for each inmate to draw a number, and they lined up through the cell blocks to get their cards.*

*Weeks later, the nun was looking ahead on her calendar and decided to call Hallmark again and ask for as many Father's Day cards she could get in order to avoid another rush. As Father's Day approached, the warden announced free cards were again available at the chapel. To the nun's surprise, not a single prisoner ever asked her for a Father's Day card”.*

The father-wound is most often a wound of absence, emotional as well as physical. As such, it's harder to recognize than others.

You can kill a living organism in two ways.

With a plant, for example, you can cut it down, smash it, or beat it up. Or, you can just leave it alone and not water it.

Live requires input.

Abandonment kills.

When Dad doesn't embrace, encourage, guide, and protect a child, but in particular a young boy, he grows up thinking, "Dad doesn't value me. I must not be worth much". He doesn't feel like a real man, confident that he belongs in the world, with both a destiny and the power at hand to fulfill it. He feels tremendous shame and anger at being abandoned in his deepest need.

## The impact of fatherlessness

*Malachi 4:5-6 ESV*

*(5) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*

*(6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."*

For at least two generations, the role of husband and father has been greatly devalued. The media, society, and even governments have denounced the role of fathers and men in general in our communities.

Have you ever looked out on the scope of our society and felt like it has been touched with a curse?

Have you every looked out and with a sense of hopelessness and wonder what we are going to do?

What will happen to our children when we are gone?

I have.

I am here to tell you that the answer lies within this room.

*In one generation we have seen the world plummet into moral decline. So in one generation we can*

*See the world rise.*

*In one generation the world has wallowed in perversion.*

*So in one generation we can see it embrace purity.*

*In one generation the family unit has been shattered.*

*So in one generation marriage can be restored.*

*In one generation males have moved from macho to jello.*

*So in one generation males can become men.*

*And raise princes and princess to rule and reign in righteousness.*

Nearly 22 percent of American children live in a fatherless home.

Those kids make up 63 percent of all youth suicides.

70 % of all juveniles sentenced to state-operated institutions.

71 % of all high school dropouts.

75 % of all young chemical-abuse patients.

80 % of all drug users.

80 % of anger-driven rapists.

85 % of all behavioral disorders.

85 % of youths in prison.

and 90 % of all homeless and runaway children.

That's a lot of statistics. They are all available in my book "Helping Guys Become Men, Husbands, and Fathers".

Let's break it down. If there's no Dad in the house, or he is a non-participating member, the children are:

5 times more likely to commit suicide

9 times more likely to end up in a state-operated institution

9 times more likely to drop out of high school

10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances

14 times more likely to commit rape (this statistic applies to boys)

20 times more likely to have behavioral disorders

20 times more likely to end up in prison

32 times more likely to run away.

The effect of fatherlessness is a compelling reality, and it is statistically frightening.

The impact on society is not going to go away.

The statement "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" does not appear to be true.

We can see from the statistics that it is the father who frames the generation.

When I say fatherlessness, I am not just talking of a man who is absent from the home, I am talking about a man who is not present in the home.

Josh McDowell conducted a survey sometime ago looking at the effects of fathers on families. Josh looked at the emotional wholeness of children in two different types of families: two-parent families with passive, uninvolved dads; and families with an actively involved *single* parent.

Josh found out that children with a passive dad are actually worse off than having a single parent who is actively involved!

Hear me guys.

For all the statistics about the impact of fatherlessness, if a father is just going to be a spectator in his child's life, it's actually detrimental! Children need you actively involved in their lives.

### **Fathers are not an optional extra**

Most men think their wives are the primary parent. It's just not the case, dads aren't optional extras.

We're vital, absolutely vital, in the process of raising kids. We're vital lovers and vital care givers. We supply things that are totally different to what children get from their mothers.

Yet, I don't think a lot of guys see the value in who they are and what they do.

As a dad you create your children's world! You make their world happen for them. If their world is inspiring, joyful, fun, light and filled with excitement, then Dad is playing a major role in establishing that. If it's a miserable, horrible, rotten place, then in a large part the responsibility for that comes down to Dad.

## Three aspects of a mans life

*(John 15:13 ESV)*

*“Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends”.*

As men we are called to walk a straight and often narrow path. We are called to be leaders in every aspect of our lives, yet in the purest sense, owners of nothing.

Adam was not the owner of the earth.

The earth is the Lords and the fullness there of.

Adam was called to steward all that God created and all that God gave him.

The planet, the animals, and his family.

Three aspects to the stewardship of a man’s life:

The Giving

The Doing

The Being

### **Manhood: the giving—correction, protection, and direction:**

Above all, there are three things a father should give to his family: correction, protection and direction.

You think about this, this is the very essence of God the Father.

This is the very essence of HIS promise to Adam, His promise to the Children of Israel.

The very names of God show this about Him

Jehovah Jireh – our provider

Jehovah Nissi – our banner, the one who fights for us

Jehovah Ro’I – the Lord is my Sheppard – the God who cares for me.

So it is with God, so it is with a man, because manhood and Christ-likeness are synonymous.

I believe this is what the role of the church is supposed to be.  
To bring direction, correction and protection to people.  
When a man does not step up and give these things to his family,  
other forces step in and become the strongest influences in the lives  
of the ones he loves.

That's why street gangs are so prevalent in cities.

Gangs give kids the three things a Dad is supposed to provide:  
A gang delivers correction, protection and direction to young people.  
It provides parameters, security and a sense of belonging.  
Everything that a child is supposed to get from his family, in  
particular, his father.  
Most gang members come from homes where there is a mother, but  
no father.  
The issue isn't socio-economic, political, or cultural.  
It's all about families and fathers.  
If society wants to address the issue of gangs, legislation isn't the  
answer. Fathering is.  
If a Dad isn't giving a sense of value and a sense of leadership, then  
someone else will.

## **A Father**

A "father" doesn't necessarily have to be a child's biological parent.

A father takes the time to sit down and bring correction to the  
attitudes and actions of a child.  
He takes responsibility to ensure that they are heading in the right  
direction to fulfill their own personal destiny.  
The man I consider one of the greatest fathers in all history is Joseph  
the step father of Jesus.  
A man who raised the son of another man, to walk into HIS destiny  
with complete authority.  
Protection isn't the macho concept of beating up the bad guys.  
It might be as simple as protecting someone from the wrong  
influences, or steering them from destructive relationships and  
helping them make productive ones.

It's not even an age thing.

It's perfectly possible for you to father someone who is older than you, to father someone who does not live in your house.

You just have to have an attitude whereby you desire to reach out to someone, to love them and care for them; a desire to see them go on to greatness.

I long for a church full of men who hover of the sons and daughters that are not their own and provide a safe and loving environment for everyone who comes in the door.

A safe haven from the perversion and betrayal of the world:

A place where battered women can have their faith restored in God and men.

Where betrayed men can learn to love again.

Where broken children can become whole.

This is why I actively encourage our fathers to get involved with the children's ministry, because we have kids from fatherless homes.

I want our men to be models to some of these young boys, and the young boys who will come here, what it is to be men, husbands and fathers.

I want to help them get the best picture of secure, masculine Christianity that they can get if their own father is not present.

I want our young men from two parent families to see how other adults interact with other children, and men interact with each other.

I can't tell you how proud I was of our fathers for bringing their sons to 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday.

Every young man over the age of 13 is welcome at 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday.

It is a time for them to start to be introduced into the arena of adult men and shown how to interact and communicate.

Fatherhood is as much about attitude as biology.

In fact, some of the worst dads I have met have been biological fathers living in the family home. They're not active in any way in shaping or forming a family life.

They are ghosts, shadows of the men they should be.

Shadows of the men they want to be.

Shadows of the men their kids need them to be, and their wives want

them to be.

They're wisps that blow in and out of the family home without tangibly touching anybody else's life.

### **Manhood: the doing- believe, dream, and support:**

There are three things a father is supposed **to do** for his family:

- Believe in them.
- Dream with them.
- Support them.

I think our homes should be dream factories.

Family is a place where anything can happen! Octopuses can be lime green, elephants are yellow with four ears, little boys are Superman and little girls are Wonder Woman.

Often, at school, a child is told what they cannot do.

Many people's entire lives are limited by the negativity they experienced at school.

Most people never achieve their dreams, and a lot of them go on to impose their negative world view on the people around them.

Well, our job as fathers is the complete opposite.

In my family, in my team at the office, and in this church, I see it as my role to speak to the greatness in people.

We should be telling our children what they *can* do: *"Yes! You can be a brain surgeon, a member of a rock band, a business woman, a preacher, a fashion model and a world-renowned author!"*(All in the same breath, as the moods change).

Homes have to be an environment for dreams.

It is a father who creates that environment.

Fathers have a great capacity to sow faith into their kids. You need to believe in your kids!

Now speaking to someone's greatness does not necessarily make you the most popular person.  
Sometimes when you speak to their greatness, you have to address their weakness.

A Dad should believe in his kids, in his wife, in whatever they want to do.

Life will temper their passion, you should fuel it!

Believe and support whatever they want to try.

But if they want to try it, coach them in their best attempts to achieve it.

### **Manhood: The being— stewardship, leadership, and relationship:**

A father brings three things out of his being and offers them freely to his family: stewardship, leadership and relationship.

A man is responsible for the **stewardship** of all areas in his life.  
If a man cannot be accountable and productive with the little and non-eternal issues such as money, how can he be entrusted with much?  
The bible teaches us that financial stewardship is a precursor to spiritual authority.

As a man you have to take responsibility for the stewardship over the finances, the relationships, and the people in your life.

I said stewardship.

I said responsibility.

Not function.

My wife may handle the family book keeping, but I am responsible for getting a second job, or moving to a smaller house, or spending all night praying if the money doesn't come in.

I am constantly talking with Beccy about our relationship with our kids and with each other.

We discuss how we can enhance it and be better parents.

We have constant dialogue.

## **A father brings leadership.**

Now I am not talking about draconian stand over tactics.

Guys let me put it simply to you, I have never meet a woman, talked to or counseled a woman, who ever had a issue of submitting to a man who loved her as Christ loved the church. A man, who would give himself for her, wanted the best and would work for the best, in her life and the life of their kids.

A father sets the direction of the family, in consultation with his best friend and life partner, and then he is responsible for ensuring that they meet their goals.

This is not something you can opt out of, for if you don't set the family's direction, it won't really have one.

Nature abhors a vacuum.

If you don't give leadership and you abdicate your responsibility, someone else will have to fill it.

Your wife will have to carry the burden alone.

Television, movies, and your children's school friends will become the strongest influences in their lives.

## **Finally, a man is responsible for stewarding relationships.**

Does that seem odd, knowing that women are naturally far more relational than men?

Yes, women are naturally more emotional and relational, but men need to take responsibility for this, because we set the tone of the family.

Does your wife have good girl friends?

Is she making friends at church?

Does she have people she can pray with?

Go to the movies with?

Hang out with?

We can make wonderful relationships happen in our family, simply by deciding that's the way it's going to be.

It's the power of choice. It's the power of a God-given position of responsibility and authority.

**Here are ten final thoughts for the day:**

**1. YOUR FAMILY OWNS YOU!**

I've been talking about the power of a man and the power of a father, but power is always tied to purpose.

Fathers have a choice: putting their power to positive impact or to negative purpose.

With great power comes great responsibility.

Your God owns you.

Your children own you.

Your wife owns you.

You as a man are called to steward everything, but you don't own anything.

You've been given a wonderful gift from God. It's called your manhood.

It is called your family.

We will be held accountable for how we look after that gift.

On Judgment Day a man is not only judged on the conduct of his own life, but also on the conduct of his wife and children.

*Ephesians 5:25-27 ESV*

*(25) Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*

*(26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,*

*(27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Are you with me?

I'm saying that our family gets to own us. We get to steward them.

That makes us the leader of all, the owner of none.

We are stewards of God's earth, that was the plan at creation, that is still the plan today.

I was once verbally attacked by a woman because she took offense at the term "my wife, Beccy". She said it made Beccy sound like my property.

I turned to her as calmly as I could and said, "let me put it to you simply lady: my wife owns me and I own my wife. She is my Property, I am hers"!

My life is lived serving Beccy, and her life is lived serving me.

This is not just how marriage was designed; it's the only way a marriage can succeed!

The only way two can become one flesh, is if we lose half of ourselves.

I get rid of the worst of me and she gets rid of the worst of her.

*Leaving the best of each other*, two selfless people living to love and serve each other.

Does that sound impossible?

Outside of Christ I am convinced it is.

But with Christ, all things are possible.

This should be our end goal, and it takes a lifetime to achieve.

Why marriages collapse is because two broken people get married and spend the years lusting and getting, not loving and giving.

I'm not saying a guy does not have a life of his own or that he can't do sports, watch the game, or work passionately at his career.

But what I do want to do is bring back a balance.

Our family is *our life*; it is an extension of us, not something separate from us. It is not something we occasionally attend to, but something we continually live for.

It is the proving ground for our tomorrow.

How we steward our intimate relationships lays the foundation for future success

**I don't believe in this false hierarchy of:**

God  
Then family  
Then church  
Then career  
Then Hobbies  
Then fitness  
Then...blah blah blah!

Life isn't lived in compartments, like little eggs in a container.

It is piled in a bowl together like an omelet.

It is all mixed up.

Some weeks there is more family than work, some weeks more work than family, some weeks more church than work or family.

What is the big deal?

Suck it up, get it done, enjoy it, then next week turns up.

You have enough time to do what you love to do; the key is loving what you do. If you don't love God, and don't love His church, then church will be a chore for you.

If you don't love and enjoy your wife and kids, then they will be a chore for you.

## 2. REAL GUYS LOVE THEIR WIVES

Every time you interact with your spouse, you are modeling marriage to your children. How you treat your wife, the mother of your daughter, is the way your daughter will grow up expecting to be treated by her husband.

Kiss their mother publicly, praise their mother publicly, esteem their mother publicly, so they will always speak well of you and their mother in private.

One passage of scripture that continues to challenge people in the area of marriage is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

(Ephesians 5:22)

*"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord".*

The reason this causes so much trouble is that people, both men and women, neglect what follows:

(Ephesians 5:25)

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church".*

Christ was a servant leader. Husbands must be the same for their wives.

If you love your wife, you'll treat her better than you treat yourself. Christ was ready to die for his Church and a husband should be prepared to die for his wife. Christ presented the Church blameless and without blemish. It's a husband's job to help his wife fulfill and attain everything she's supposed to become. You have to be preoccupied with her dreams, wishes, and desires. A man's role is to be a servant to his wife.

But there was never an issue about Christ being a weak leader. Christ was not a walkover. There was never a question about Christ being a real man. Nor was Christ abusive. He was a perfect servant, a perfect leader, a perfect man. Your job is to be a man who serves the woman he leads.

I have never met a balanced, well-adjusted woman who had a problem with that kind of relationship. Anything with two heads is a monster. Families aren't democracies. There is and always will be a leader in every situation.

The love of a serving, leading man will transform your wife into a loving, serving woman. The outflow of your commitment to love your wife will transform your kids' world too.

### **3. CHILDREN LOVE IT WHEN YOU LOVE THEIR MOM**

"Ugh!" That's what kids often say when they see Mom and Dad being affectionate.

But they do really want to see that. If they've seen Mom and Dad argue, they want to see them make up. If the disagreement was public, the making up should be public too, so that the children can see the act of reconciliation as well as the act of tension.

Loving your wife or focusing your attention on her is not an act of child neglect or rejection. Loving your wife is the best way to love your children. Ensuring that your marriage is healthy, strong and long-lived is the most important thing you can do for your children.

In fact, I'd go so far as to say that the best time you can spend for your child, is alone on a date with your wife! If you're not getting the love renewal with your wife, if you're not filling up each other's emotional tanks, if you're not having sex for the reason behind the sex (the intimate connection of soul and spirit), then there's no glue. If there's no glue, your marriage will be shaky and so will your children.

#### 4. DON'T STOP DATING

There's a great book called *The Sensible Single Man's Guide to Women* which took the results of women's surveys and wrote them up in a very entertaining way.

It turns out that women would rather enjoy a picnic than a romantic dinner. They would rather enjoy sitting down with you in a quiet spot where it's just the two of you with time to talk.

My wife and I like going to the movies. We go, we hold hands, and we have an ice-cream and popcorn. It costs 30 bucks, compared with 150 at a restaurant. It's what we liked to do before we got married and it's what we still like to do.

Extravagant dating has its place though. Once a year we'll blow 500 or 600 dollars on a very expensive restaurant and a nice hotel room. That's a lot of money, I know, but factored out over a year, it's only 10 dollars a week for a very important investment in our relationship. It's all about setting time aside for your wife, to let her know she's the center of your world. Flowers do it too, but not just because you've had an argument. Send a card. Leave a note. Do something totally unexpected for no reason at all. Give her a journal to write her favorite thoughts down in, or a bulb of tulips for next spring.

In all these ways it's important to communicate your love for your children's co-producer. I'm talking about making the strategic effort to send her the kind of message women respond to very strongly, "I'm preoccupied, honey. I'm preoccupied with *you!* All day long!"

Don't stop dating just because you're married with children.

## **5. PHYSICALLY AFFECTIONATE**

I think your children need to see you being physically intimate with your wife. Now, unless you're being willfully perverse, I think you know what I mean by that, and what I don't mean by that.

Society has tended to reduce physical intimacy to sexual contact, but that's because the only models we see of physical contact through the media are sexual. If that's all that's being modeled, that's all our kids will come to respect. They won't respect other people's boundaries and they'll have no concept of the whole spectrum of physical affection.

Give your children something more wholesome on which to model their view of physical affection. They need to see you're quite comfortable holding hands with their mother, kissing their mother, cuddling their mother. That is a very positive thing for children to see.

## **6. SEEDS OF LOVE, NOT BITTERNESS**

A few years ago, a friend and his wife separated. Individually they are two of the nicest people in the world. In fact, as a couple they were probably the most promising Christian ministers in our part of Australia. The tragedy is they just reached the point where they literally hated each other.

How did they get to this point where divorce was the only option because their relationship was broken beyond repair? They said it started with small things, seeds of bitterness, insidious comments to each other, all the way along in their marriage. They got to the point where they were overgrown with bitterness. And they felt there was no way back for them

That's how it works in marriage, with the bad things and with the good.

They start out as small seeds and grow into good things or bad things.

## **7. LEVELING OUT LIFE**

We tend to see our life as a collection of emotional highs or lows. As a result, we become focused on whatever particular high or low we're living in right now.

What we should be aware of, though, is that these highs and lows build up to a collective thing called life. Sure, we may be in a trough, but let's fill our trough with emotional feel-goods. That will level everything out a bit

## **8. THE POWER OF "REMEMBER WHEN..."**

"Remember when..." is very powerful because it evokes a whole range of emotional attachments that are more than just memories.

Those emotional associations create a very positive feeling.

"Wow, yeah, I remember that summer!"— It's a memory that triggers off a whole range of emotional responses.

Those emotional responses can actually help you through a bad time. Instead of being victim to a particular bad moment, "Remember when..." can give your family fuel to make it through tough times. We've even started doing that with the kids: "You know, remember when we did this" and "remember when we did that." It reinforces the high-light times.

I have a photo of my little sister out camping with Mom and Dad. It's just one of those photos that floats in my heart, in my being. She's in her swimsuit and I've tied her to a tree. I'm poking her in the belly with a big, long stick. Apparently there was a kookaburra there that used to swoop down just after dinner. So I'd tied my sister to a tree and was putting sausages on her head, trying to get the kookaburra to swoop down and pick them off her head. Mom and Dad caught me doing it, took a photo and then addressed the issue! But I have this picture of that holiday, which was a highlight of my childhood. When I look at this picture I get a range of very positive emotions about what that particular phase in my life was about.

## **9. RELATIONSHIP FIRST AID**

By now you must have picked up how much I love being married to Beccy. The truth is, though, our marriage was far from delightful in the first 12 months. I remember getting to the end of our first year and thinking: “This sucks.” In fact, she would pray I would run off with someone else; I would dream about her dying!

One night we went to the drawer and got out our wedding album. We laughed. We cried. We remembered what our honeymoon was like. “This is where we had lobster.” We remembered where we stayed and what happened to the car when I forgot to put the cap back on the oil, and the whole engine bay was filled with the black molasses of engine oil.

We went through all those things and we ended up starting to re-emphasize the good bits. In our day-to-day lives we had fallen into the habit of dwelling on the negative, but getting the photos out brought back the good stuff about being together.

## **10. CREATE A RELATIONSHIP FIRST AID KIT**

I talked about our wedding album, but the ingredients of a relationship first aid kit are probably all over your home. Photo albums are good. Videos are great. Shells from a beach trip, maybe. Something tangible you can hold and say, “Remember when we did this” and everybody goes, “Yeah.” We have a family video of the kids doing their “first” things: first walk, first ice-cream, and first bike ride.

Preserve those moments in your life by creating a relationship first aid kit, a box of memorabilia. So when you’re in the bad times, get the kit out and start going through it. That helps change the tenor of how you’re relating. Instead of the problems, these triggers make you remember why you got married. You remember you married your best friend. You’d never met anyone like her. You remember your honeymoon... this date... that outing. So you end up sitting around as a family talking about “Remember when...” and having a wonderful time.

A relationship first aid kit goes very well with a candlelight dinner. Put

the kids to bed early. Buy fish, chips or pizza (or something you liked to eat while dating, before you could afford the fancy dinners).

Start talking. “Remember when we did this, honey?” Sometimes wives can get a bit cynical about this sort of thing, particularly if you haven’t done it before. But stick at it, keep things light, get her laughing, and let the power of “Remember when...”do its work.

Then, when she does start to open up and laugh about things, look into her eyes. Remember that this is the young girl you married — before the kids, before the mortgage, before the bills, before the challenges. This is the love of your life, your center, your compass.

Remember when...