

Growing Through the Different Seasons of Married Life – July 2023

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email For July 2023

Growing:

Growing and Growing Together through the

Different Seasons, Stages and Issues

That Confront us on our Marriage Journey

Wow, now there's a mouthful for a title – I'm hoping it's grabbed your attention. I'm conscious of the fact that these emails go out to couples who have been married from less than a year, right through to close to 60 years, and, with that in mind, I'm wanting, this month, to chew over some aspects of this Journey called Marriage. For some of us, we look back over 40 – 50 plus years and realize how life has changed. I think back to a cold winter evening in Dunedin in June 1960, when I stood gobsmacked with my parents, and other neighbours, watching a television set come to life in the window of a local electrical store. And there are certainly others who can go back even further with some relish.

Just as life has changed through the years though, so does Marriage. In fact, it's not unusual to hear married couples talk about how life has changed and evolved, and how they have grown both individually and as a couple, through those changing periods of life. I don't know about you, but I've tended to find some – maybe many – of those changes have kind of snuck up on me. Most of those changes have enhanced and enriched my life. Some have taken a little time and effort to adjust to, while others hit us from left field with little or no warning, and required some help and counsel to navigate. But I know one thing – I'm so pleased I had such a wonderful, supportive life partner to navigate the journey with me. I wonder how much I would have learnt and grown from, in those moments and experiences, in the ebbs and flows of the journey, were it not for a wife sharing the journey of life and faith, rather than being together but living our own little worlds. I can't take this for granted.

All too often in sharing with couples, we've heard the comment that over the years they've grown apart. One of the keys to that kind of growth is simply that they were not intentional enough to recognize, to grow and change with the seasons.

We can't afford to ignore the seasons. By intentionally considering where we are at, what season we are in, or what season we may be close to moving into, we can do a lot to ensure the changing seasons bring so much enrichment to our marriage relationship, rather than cause distance and separation to grow.

By planning and facing the changes, we introduce healthy growth to our relationship, which in turn generally involves becoming more mature adults with greater wisdom and life experience. Such growth helps us to step confidently into each phase of life, with valuable lessons we've learned from each phase of the past. Growing throughout our lives also gives us the chance to impart those lessons to younger generations, including our own children (and maybe their kids, too).

So let's look at some things we can do to help us with the navigation proses.

COMMUNICATE

If you're communicating clearly and often about your inner workings – not just work, the day's chores, or your kids' activities – the two of you will feel more in the loop with one another. Personal growth often feels like a very solitary endeavour, but truly, by sharing our growth journeys with each other, we're able to be more empathic and understanding of and with one another, and it draws us closer together.

Check in with one another. Ask questions. Have deep, meaningful conversations about how your worldviews or mindsets have shifted over the years, and how they may still be shifting. Speak to one another kindly, but share with honesty and listen with curiosity.

SHARE NEW RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Here's one that sounds like it's really from left field, as it were. But, far from it. As your interests shift, finding a new activity – particularly recreationally - can be incredibly rewarding. Everyone goes through different times when their interests change. Rather than splitting off to do your own thing, for example, - which is what so often happens - consider doing something like a new sport or activity together.

New activities can really help in facilitating personal growth, so take that into account in addition to shifting interests. Take time to talk about what you'd like to do, whether that's taking a new workout class, starting a couples' game night, going kayaking or hiking, set up a frisbee golf course at your local park, or any number of other options that are out there. Focus on being creative and open—and of course, on having a good time together.

SHOW GRACE AND GRATITUDE

At times, personal growth can be painful. It can hurt to be in the process of growth, but it can also hurt to look back on past versions of yourselves. Hindsight is always 20/20, and in retrospect, looking back at the way we were in the past can be an unsettling experience, particularly if we struggled with character flaws or, at times, made life difficult for each other.

During times of reflection, focus on grace and gratitude. Have grace for yourselves and one another, looking at your past mistakes with self-forgiveness. And, hone in on gratitude, allowing yourselves to feel thankful for the life you have together, the lessons you've learned along the way, and the opportunities to keep learning in the future.

AVOID DRIFTING APART

If you want to grow together in your marriage, then we encourage you to deliberately focus on not drifting apart. Communicating openly and honestly, sharing activities, and focusing on gratitude and grace will take you far, helping you to stay bonded with one another as the seasons come and go.

One thing is for sure, life will be hectic and challenging at times, but if you can be intentional and plan together, you can grow together.

Have you and your spouse grown together throughout your relationship? Have you got any tips on how to stay connected? How about sharing them by return email, and we'd happily pass them on.

Blessings to you all as you digest this latest episode from the Marriage Ministries team.

Stan & Ronnie, John & Karen.