

## **Preparing for the Upcoming Holiday Season – Nov. 2023**

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email for Nov. 2023

Greetings once again from the Marriage Ministries Team.

I'm sending this month's email a little early this month, because the topic I want to address is one that even the most seasoned of couples would say, has caught them out at some time or other during their marriage journey. The Topic: "Preparing Yourself for The Upcoming Holiday Season", or endeavouring to help yourselves to not come unstuck during this year's holiday season!!!

Some of you are probably already thinking, and preparing your 'To Do' lists: Decorating, baking, shopping, cleaning, inviting, packing, traveling – whether you do it all or just a little, it can be a hectic time, that takes an awful lot of effort and energy every year. And just because of all that goes into this time of the year for every family, before you know it, we're in the middle of December, and we've been caught out again. Know the feeling??? We've certainly had a few of those over the years, I can tell you!

So, here's a suggestion: consider using what follows as a catalyst for you both to have some conversations that will hopefully help you manage this crazy season! Yes, it's probably another thing to get done, BUT, by taking a little time now to prepare yourselves, hopefully, you will give yourselves a strong foundation to lean on during what can be a relationship-straining time. Here are six ways to prep your marriage for a more harmonious holiday season.

### **1. Make sure your communication is in top-form:**

All too often we add huge pressure to the season, often feeling stressed out, regularly worrying about meeting all the family obligations, and struggling to deal with difficult emotions, when, a little open communication and forward planning with each other, could have gone a long way. Talking together openly about where your head is at, what you're struggling with, or where you could use some extra help, fosters connection while lightening the load for both of you. Taking some time in the next few weeks to talk through the next 6 or 8 weeks, particularly about how you might let each other know when you might be struggling, or getting overwhelmed, will lighten the load considerably, and help set that strong foundation.

### **2. Get aligned on your priorities:**

The holiday season can bring lots of conflicting demands and distractions. Taking time to think, and then talk through, what is most important for each of you, can help you keep things in perspective. You might settle on one or two separate priorities, but don't forget to consider what matters most to you as a couple and as a family unit. Maybe you want to focus on spending quality time with family and less on attending all the peripheral parties this year, or incorporate volunteering into your holidays in some way. Whatever's in your ideas list, having a conversation about these things ahead of time, ensures you're on the same page and are working towards the same goal. At the same time, this discussion might also shed some light on where you may need to compromise. Which leads to...

### **3. Be willing to meet in the middle:**

If you find some of your priorities are conflicting or misaligned, you'll need to be open to compromise. Having good open conversation early, will ensure you don't come unstuck when these

issues arise in the midst of the rush and bustle later. Whether it's whose family you'll celebrate with, or whether you should host a New Year's Eve party, try to problem-solve as a team early. And agree to check in with each other regularly to see that your plans are working, creating space for each other to adjust, to change and to process any negative emotions that may be hovering around.

#### **4. Have the money talk:**

Between gifts, travel, special activities, and the like, it's natural for conflict to brew up, especially if you're not on the same page. So, take time for a specific conversation about where the financial limits are this year. Plan early to be on the same page, and thereby take one of the biggest stress factors out of this year's equation.

#### **5. Establish boundaries:**

You've likely discovered that the holidays bring lots of external pressure and obligations to celebrate in certain ways, and do all the things that '*everyone else*' seems to be doing. You can try to please everyone and do it all, but you may end up feeling burnt out and like you didn't even get to enjoy the holidays. Establishing boundaries now, helps protect the energy, time, resources, and priorities of your family, and your marriage. Boundaries might look like limiting the time spent at a relative's house, saying no to some invitations, or opting out of certain activities. Work together to figure out what feels right for you and your family. You may also want to make a plan together now, for how you can stick to your boundaries in the moment when you're feeling pressure or temptation to break them. Discuss where you're comfortable stretching them, where you're not, and how you can support each other throughout.

#### **6. Commit to enjoying the little moments:**

Often the holidays can seem like it's all about doing things, going places, and fitting it all in. It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle. Don't forget to [be present](#) and enjoy the quieter moments of connection with your spouse and family. Whether it's cozy evenings at home watching your favourite holiday movies, or a hand-in-hand walk around the neighbourhood to look at the holiday lights, remember that these things can be just as important and meaningful as the big plans and activities. Talk about how you can help each other keep this mentality at the forefront.

Prepping your marriage for the holiday season is really just a way to make sure you give yourselves every opportunity to stay connected and on the same page through-out what can be a tension-filled time. Being able to lean on this preparation without falling into conflict will surely enable you to make the best of this holiday season, even when things get inevitably crazy.

We so trust, as always, that this email helps.

Blessings from the team. Stan & Ronnie, John & Karen.

(Adapted from an article from Prepare/Enrich)