



ONE

**Life after the Children Leave:
*Making the Most of It***

Gather

OPENING PRAYER

Breath of Life, you give us the power to love. In every age, you have proved your faithfulness and care for us. Your kindness and mercy teach us to treat one another with patience and compassion. Our faith convinces us to hope that love will conquer death and good will overcome every evil. Enliven that faith in our hearts today and always as we reflect on this new phase of our lives. May God bless us all with care for one another, hope beyond hope, and faith that moves mountains. Amen

Scriptural Reflection

(M)ake my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Phillippians 2: 2-4

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7



- When is love tested or strained?
- What qualities are most precious in a lover?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Since we researched and wrote our book *The Second Half of Marriage* (1996), we conducted an additional survey and found once again that the issues in marriage remain basically the same over the years. Issues and problems in marriage cause you neither success or failure; it is how you deal with them that makes a difference, especially in the empty nest... The top three issues of the empty nest—conflict, communication, and sex—are also among the major problem areas for younger couples. We observed no overall gender differences that were very strong. However, females tended to say communication was more of a problem than did males, and males tended to say that sex was more of a problem than females reported. (Are you surprised?)

At this stage of life, money issues are not rated as high as for younger couples, but health issues are rated higher. The fact that fun and recreation are rated so high (#5 of 10) indicates that perhaps couples are having trouble figuring out what to do together that's enjoyable for both or finding fun things that both will take time out for. For years the shared recreational activities may have centered on the children, and now they do not know how to have fun together.

Claudia and David Arp, et al.
Fighting for Your Empty Nest Marriage
Jossey-Bass, 2000

In the middle years, the committed couple conquers the temptation to settle on a plateau marked by monotonous routine and unchallenged by higher goals and father horizons. Instead they use their imaginations in creative ways to keep the romance alive and to form deeper intimacy and stronger spiritual bonds.

--William Roberts, "Commitment to the Ongoing Process of Marriage"
Family Perspectives Journal, National Association of Family Life Ministers
Winter 2001-2002



What people seem to want most of all in a mate is a best friend for life. But for too many couples, this desire for lifelong intimacy is more a hope than a reality. It's not that it is an unreasonable expectation to have your mate by your best friend, most couples start with a good taste of it. It's just that friendships need to be nurtured in ways that couples fail to realize until their friendship is all but gone.

Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain, Milt Bryan
A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage
Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1998

Couples often look back to their original commitment and smile at their naïve start. They think of where they've come from and appreciate strengths that pulled them through hard times and helped them enjoy the good times. After looking back, it's good to look forward, set goals for the marriage and recommit to a future together. Unfortunately, some couples come to this point in life and secretly wonder why there are still married or what they have in common now that the children are gone. Unless they talk about this openly and recommit to the marriage, their relationships may be estranged with an over-involvement in outside people and activities and avoidance of each other.

Phil Klever
Are We Having Fun Yet?: Working together to create a loving marriage
International Marriage Encounter, 1988

Observe

1. What are the major transitions you are presently facing?
2. What qualities do you most value in a friend?
3. What do you do just for fun?
4. Each person should draw a floor plan of the first home you shared with your spouse. Describe your drawing to the group, sharing some of your early hopes and dreams.



5. Ask two other middle years couples to name the challenges they face when their nest emptied (perhaps the nest is not empty!)

Judge

1. Rate the following issues, with number one being the most severe problem, which you think you are taking into the second half of your marriage:

Retirement Planning	
Sex	
Health	
Money	
Fun	
Recreation	
Aging Parents	
Conflict	
Children	
Communication	

2. What are the best aspects of your marriage?
3. How have your expectations of married life changed since you were a newly wed?
4. What do you want your marriage to look like when you are in your eighties?
5. How has your spouse been a friend to you over the years? Relate specific situations.
6. What negative habits or patterns do couples form, which need to change if marriage is to grow?

Act

1. Write a love letter to your spouse, telling the good qualities you see in him or her.



2. Plan a weekend away together to reconnect or attend a Marriage Encounter weekend.
3. Interview your partner about his or her life story, in the spirit of listening as a friend.
4. Commit to spending 10 minutes a day listening and talking together. See the 10-10 Technique for Active Listening below.
5. Explore one of the resources at the end of this chapter as a couple; or, as a group, sponsor a marriage enrichment program like REFOCCUS.

A Technique for Active Listening

1. One person talks for 10 minutes about a topic of their choosing:
i. e., an issue, an idea, wants and needs.
2. The other person listens.
3. The listener repeats (rephrases) issues...ideas...feelings.
Checks for accuracy
Comments on non-verbal signs
4. Reverse the process.

Look Ahead to Next Meeting

Where will you meet? What meeting will you take? What research is needed for good, informed discussion?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Suggested setting. Have each couple light and hold a candle as they recommit to their marriage. Wedding anniversary decorations and refreshments would be appropriate.

Renewing our Vows.

Lord God, we acknowledge your greatness and our continued need for your grace in our marriage. We thank you now for the gift you have given us in each other, this opportunity to love and be loved completely. We accept this beautiful challenge and ask you to bless us.

May our love encourage us to grow to be holier individuals, bringing out the best in each other. Following your example, Jesus, may we be quick to forgive, ready with a healing word or touch.

Teach us to speak to each other with charity and honesty. Help us avoid the temptation to take each other for granted.

Instead, remind us, day by day, to see each other as you see us. May we be as patient with each other as you are with us. May our love be generous, reaching out beyond ourselves to all we meet. We pray that they may meet you in us.

Let our life together be a light of hope to those who fear that a total commitment is not possible today. Faith gives us courage, for we believe that the love that comes from you is freeing and life-giving.

Lord, be a partner with us in our marriage; with your help it will be strong and enduring.

We rejoice that you have brought us together. May we always be one in you. Amen.



Resources for Couples

PREP Resources for a Loving Relationship Marriage enhancement workshops for couples, links to marriage sites, instructor training. www.prepinc.com

The National Marriage Project Source for latest statistics and discussion on marriage and divorce, from a Catholic perspective. <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>

Rooted in Love Resources for stronger marriages. Dr. James Healy, Director of Center for Family Ministry, Catholic Diocese of Joliet, IL. Excellent Audio CD, “When the Cake is Gone: How to Get Married and Stay Engaged.” Highlighting the various stages of Christian Marriage. www.rootedinlove.com

Marriage Savers Community organization working to strengthen marriage. www.marriagesavers.com

Smart Marriages Education about marriage, links, marriage quiz. www.smartmarriages.com

Marriage Encounter Links for local registrations. www.wwme.org

Stepfamily Association of America Offers a variety of educational resources for blended families. 800-735-0329 www.stepfam.org

REFOCCUS Five-part, self diagnostic tool that can help a couple determine where they are right now. Can be used by a married couple or a group of couples to take a look at their relationships again. Contact the Family Life Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Omaha, 402-551-9003.

Fighting for Your Empty Nest Marriage: Reinventing your relationship when the kids leave home. By Claudia and David



Christian Family Movement: Copyright ©2016

Arp, et al., Jossey-Bass, 2000. Tools for surmounting the challenges of the second half of marriage.

Insuring Marriage – 25 Proven Ways to Prevent Divorce
By Michael McManus, Zondevan Publishing House, 1994.

Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness: How Embracing the Virtues of Loyalty, Generosity and Courage Can Strengthen Your Relationship. Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D. Jossey-Bass, 2001.