

## Keeping Fun and Romance Alive

### Summary of

Figuring out Families Podcast with  
marriage counsellor Derek Boylen

In my area as a counsellor, we spend so much time fixing issues that we can easily forget that the whole purpose is meaningful, fulfilling relationships and that a meaningful, fulfilling relationship is more than just the absence of problems. There's a lot that goes into making those relationships rewarding, fulfilling and meaningful too.

The old adage always stands out for me. The woman gets married hoping her husband will change. The man gets married hoping that he never will. The reality is we are constantly changing and growing, though what that means is that there are always opportunities to discover new ways of connecting and finding meaning and fulfillment in our relationships.

When I ask couples what it takes to build a fulfilling, meaningful, lasting marriage, they often talk about the big guns of relationships: honesty, trust, loyalty, respect, those sorts of things. The important qualities that go into building a healthy, fulfilling relationship. When we think of things like fun, and humour and laughter they almost seem a bit silly, frivolous compared to those other qualities.

However, one of the things I have to say in my research with couples who have been married for very long periods of time, 55 or more years; one thing I can definitely tell you about those couples is that they don't say to me, "Oh Derek, it was all very serious. We paid our mortgage and we educated our children." I mean they had fun. They laughed. They had tickles. There were adventures. They went on picnics and they had pet names and little quirky things they would do



in their relationships. They had a marriage that was filled with fun and laughter and humour as well.

Keeping romance alive is a choice. It's a decision about recognising that love is a choice and to love is a choice. It's not just a feeling. When Karen and I stood at the altar on our wedding day, it was loving feelings that got us that far, feeling connected and close and wanting to make this forever. But on that day, we made a decision, a choice that we would love one another in good times and in bad and in sickness and in health. Those couples who really have the strong, lasting fulfilling marriages, they do actually make romance and they make fun and they make humour. They make an intentional choice in their relationships, even when they don't feel like it. They don't leave it to chance. It's an active choice.

When our kids were little some of our best date nights were to get the little ones to bed, order pizza, get a bottle of wine and sit on the lounge room floor and watch a movie together. Romance doesn't necessarily always look like a lot of money being spent. It can be discovered sometimes in really small ways as well.

### Strategies

There are a couple of things that are really healthy if the relationship is not working well. First, cultivate what William Dougherty (US researcher) refers to as loving rituals. A loving ritual is kind of like a routine, something they do over and over again in their daily lives. The difference between a ritual and a routine is that it's like a routine but it also has emotional significance (and) is emotionally important. But with a loving ritual it's like a routine but it happens regularly in a set sort of a way. But it also has emotional



meaning. These families who have strong loving connections, they have lots and lots of these rituals in day-to-day life that protect their relationships with one another. We can have those rituals at bedtime when we kiss one another; we can have those rituals when we greet one another at the end of the day when we first come home.

The other things couples can do is to really make time (for each another). If you want time you have to make time. You got to lock in date night, which might be the first Tuesday of every month and that's the night we go on a date. Locking in that time is really important and putting it in the diary. When we write things down, we become more committed to them.

It's important for couples to recognise the signs that there not getting enough time for one another as a couple in their relationship. Often when couples are not getting enough time together, there are certain warning signs that start to show up in their relationship. For Karen and I, some examples, we start to get irritable with one another. And irritable about nothing; little things like you left the knife on the kitchen bench instead of putting it in the dish washer. That's a sign for us that we're not really connecting. In a healthy marriage we don't do things for the other person because it's our turn, we do it for the other person because we love them.

You're going to meet couples throughout your life that just have amazing, beautiful marriages. And you should

get into the habit of asking them what their secret is. These days I don't hear a lot that's new, that I haven't heard before, but one person said something I'd never heard anywhere else and this was gold. She said from about the fifth year of their marriage, they started having what she refers to as the weekly interview. On a Sunday evening they sit down and for the last 25 years it's been the same two questions every single week. The first question, "When did you feel most loved by me this week?" and "How can I love you best in the coming week?"

I'd encourage couples to make that habit, a ritual and say, "Did I get it right this week and tell me when you really felt loved by me?"

Other rituals around physical connection, the importance of hugs. In families we communicate in more than just words and extend a loving touch in some way, an arm around the shoulder. In ways that no words can really capture. "I see you." "I love you." "You're important to me."



Figuring out Families  
**Keeping Fun and Romance Alive –**  
Focus Session with Derek Boylen

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## Figuring out Families Podcast

Derek Boylen, an experienced marriage and relationship counsellor and a lecturer in relationships at the University of Notre Dame. We have put together this most valuable podcast series which we are calling the Focus Sessions.

The series focusses on many aspects of family relationships and can help in strengthening your family. We hope you'll find the series beneficial and get some insights on issues you may face in your family.

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