

How will being satisfied with our marriage now insure that we will be satisfied with our marriage later?

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## **Growing Back Together Again**

The Dallen's house was full of pots. There were pots on every conceivable flat surface. Tall straight ones and short, fat curvy pots covered in polka dots, glazed and unglazed, purposefully ugly ones and unexpectedly beautiful pots. The ones near the doorways inevitably had little knick-knacks in them, the loose change and twisty ties, or the receipts they did not think to throw away. There were even several that were full of blue buttons. Mr. Dallen, until very recently, had worked at the button factory and would bring home a few of the basic, four-hole, blue buttons every week or so. He would keep them in odd places around his room. But when he had bought his wife the studio and she had started to make pots, he just decided to gather them all together in a pot here and a pot there. And because there were so many pots, Mrs. Dallen never knew that any of them had any buttons in them.

The reason there were so many pots was because Mrs. Dallen had just become a ceramic artist. She was not very good, yet, and she did not really know if it was appropriate to try and sell her pots, whose purposes were primarily decorative. So, she placed them around the house, in anticipation of the day when she would know what to do with them.

Mr. Dallen did not mind. He had bought her the studio so she could make things with clay, something she had wanted to do for so long, but which children and expenses had kept from her. Now that the children were out of the house, and the property Mr. and Mrs. Dallen had bought in Texas early on in their marriage was full of oil, they both had the time and money to do the things that had eluded them for so long. So Mr. Dallen retired and furnished a complete, if somewhat smallish, ceramics studio for his wife on the back of their house.

As they were shopping for used kilns and ceramics wheels, (Mrs. Dallen was still frugal, even if they had become rich, and insisted on starting with used equipment) Mr. Dallen tried to think of what he would do with his free time, now that his wife was going to be a ceramic artist. He decided he should try and get into this new video game craze and try a few of those. He had seen the ones his son had played and thought maybe there was something a little tamer, more his pace. While his wife was discussing types of clay with a shopkeeper, he went to the electronics store and perused the game systems. He left

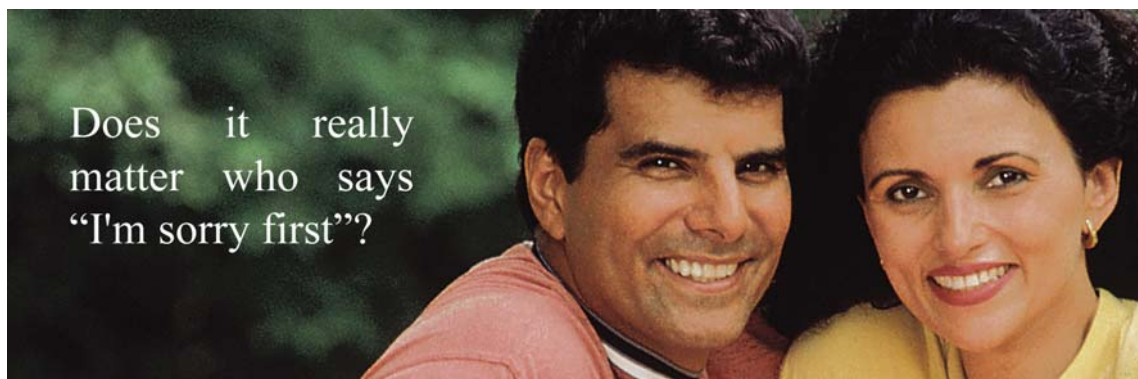
a half hour later with an older game system, one that would attach to his TV, and a few games, including Dr. Stickit's Stamp Collecting Challenge, and Chicken Hatcher. Mr. Dallen was pleased with his purchases.

Thus, Mr. and Mrs. Dallen entered into two separate retirements: Mr. Dallen with his video games and Mrs. Dallen with her studio. They made an effort to eat at least one meal together during the day, but Mrs. Dallen liked to get up early and Mr. Dallen liked to sleep in, so breakfast was out. In fact, Mrs. Dallen got up so early, and Mr. Dallen so late, that her lunch was only an hour after his "breakfast."

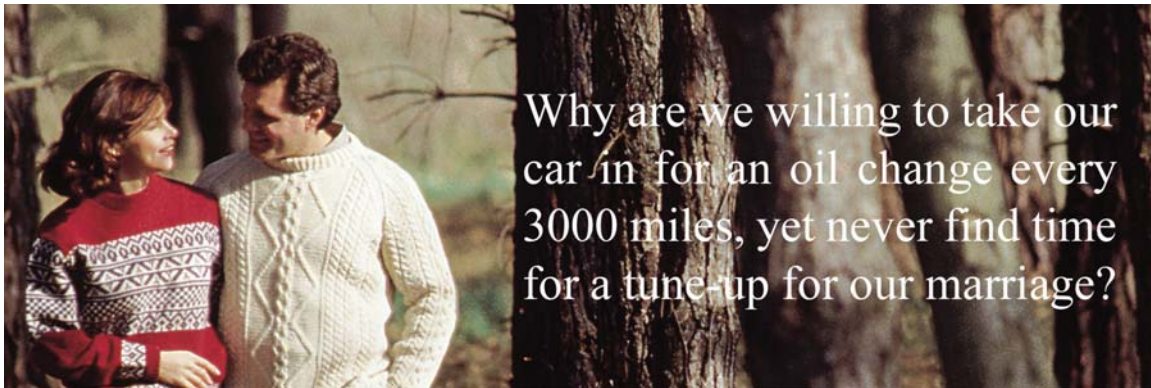
They did eat dinner together every weeknight. They watched their two favorite game shows and ate, only making comments about the game or certain contestants. They never talked about each others day or activities because they each figured they knew what their spouse was doing and any detail he or she could give would not be worth sharing with the other, only moderately interested partner. And so after that hour of dismal interaction, they went back to their respective parts of the house. Mrs. Dallen spent the time cleaning up the studio and preparing for the next morning before going to bed. Mr. Dallen stayed up for three more hours reading and watching his news show.

Neither of them noticed how predictable it all was, and neither of them noticed how far apart they had grown. Mr. and Mrs. Dallen each felt that they still loved their partner, but that that fact was just understood and they need not go out of their way to encourage affection or express their feelings. This was probably because they had been growing apart since the children were born. Mr. Dallen worked long hours at the button factory and Mrs. Dallen always had the children to take to school or soccer or piano. Time for themselves had been put on a shelf somewhere and forgotten about, as neither of them seemed to consider it a necessity. And this negligence to their relationship might have spiraled downward if someone had not brought it to Mr. Dallen's attention.

Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon had been neighbors of the Dallens for many years, before they retired and moved to a condominium in Florida. Mrs. Lisbon and Mrs. Dallen still kept in contact, as women do. Mrs. Lisbon would tell Mrs. Dallen about playing golf with Mr. Lisbon and how much fun it was and she had missed spending time with her sweetie. Mrs. Dallen would smile over the phone encouragingly and make "mhmmm"ing noises to show she was listening, even though she wasn't really. But Mrs. Lisbon wasn't a very skilled phone converser, and so she wouldn't notice Mrs. Dallen's lukewarm confirmations. Consequently, when Mrs. Lisbon mentioned that they would be coming back to town for a few days next week and would it be all right to stop in for a visit, Mrs.



Does it really  
matter who says  
"I'm sorry first"?



Dallen didn't even realize the request and gave her usual "mhmmm" noise. And Mrs. Lisbon, not really listening either, heard the affirmative response and planned the visit into their trip.

So a few weeks later Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon stopped by the house and a very surprised Mr. Dallen met them at the door.

"Well, look who it is" Mr. Dallen said, extending his hand, "Mrs. Dallen is out... buying glaze or something or other, but you can come in. Would you like something to drink?" Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon entered with the traditional "hello, good to see you" and settled in the front room, the only room not filled to the gills with ceramic creations.

After the initial questions about what brings you out here again, Mr. Lisbon asked about how the Dallens use all their free time.

"Well," Mr. Dallen began, "I've bought myself a game system and am having fun trying to figure out these video game things. I have one where I am a rare stamp collector and another where I raise chickens to sell. Other than that I do most of the same things I did before."

"I see, sounds good." Mr. Lisbon replied, "And how about your wife? Does she play too?"

"You mean Tabitha? No no, she works in her studio most of the day." Mr. Dallen told them.

"All day? What does she do in there?" Mrs. Lisbon asked.

"I guess she makes pots...I don't rightly know about all the little doodads she uses or anything..." Mr. Dallen finished lamely.

"Has she read any good books lately?"

"Ummm, not that I know of..."

Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon looked at each other awkwardly and asked to see some of her pieces in order to change the subject. They all made small talk for a few more minutes before they realized Mrs. Dallen wasn't coming home anytime soon and the Lisbons had to be going. They exchanged good-byes and left Mr. Dallen to deal with the realization that he didn't know his own wife.

Mr. Dallen immediately sat down with a legal pad and a pen and began to write what he did know. He knew her birthday was September 8<sup>th</sup> and she was 49 years old. She liked ceramics and getting up early. He was pretty sure she had hazel eyes and that her original hair color was a dark blondish kind of shade. After that, he was at a loss. He

couldn't remember her favorite color, if she had ever wanted pets, other hobbies she might have, or what kind of movies she liked. He was very distraught. How could this have happened? They had been so in love when they got married. While they were courting, they saw each other every minute they weren't working or asleep. They talked all the time about every possible subject, and now, not only did he not remember a lot of what he used to know about her, he didn't remember anything current about her either. "This is, indeed, quite the pickle", thought Mr. Dallen, "something must be done."

That evening when Mrs. Dallen came home from all her errands, Mr. Dallen was waiting outside the house in a shirt and tie. As she came up the walk, Mr. Dallen took her hand and kissed it and said, "Hello, my dear." Mrs. Dallen was completely taken aback and giggled as she hadn't for many years. "Why don't you go put on a nice dress," Mr. Dallen continued, "I'd like to take you on a date." Mrs. Dallen dropped her shopping bag inside the door and was ready in 10 minutes. At dinner, she tried to figure out what all this was about. Mr. Dallen did not explain about the Lisbons coming to visit or how embarrassed he was that he didn't know more about his wife, but he did say, "I want to get to know my sweetie again. Tell me things."

As the evening went on, they both drew in the words and actions of the other, remembering their early days together. Mr. Dallen noticed Mrs. Dallen's eyes are brown with golden circles in the middle and Mrs. Dallen remembered why she fell in love in the first place. They both realized that photography was something they were both interested in, and decided to take a class together about it. As dinner was wrapping up, Mr. Dallen leaned into his wife, taking her hand. "Please don't let it be so long before I get to know you again" he asked. "I won't if you won't" she told him, smiling. They both knew that they still wanted to be together and that while they would have to take time to be together, it was time well spent.



# Ounce of Prevention Worksheet

There is a story about a farmer who plowed his fields but never planted them. Reading this story and not implementing what you learned will get you the same result as the farmer who plowed but never planted.

Being married is a lot like going up a river in a canoe. You are either paddling together and progressing towards your destination, paddling against each other and going in circles or not paddling much at all and drifting backwards. Unfortunately in the river of marriage if we drift too long we will find ourselves in a set of rapids that can quickly take us over the falls of divorce.

Many couples find that they get into a comfortable routine and become satisfied with slowly drifting. It is only over time that they realize that they have been drifting apart. By the time they realize this many think that it is too late and that nothing can be done. In almost all cases this is simply not true. With enough time and effort almost every couple can not only grow closer together but once they have closed the distance will find that their marriage is stronger than ever before. The key though is time, effort and consistency.

The first step to getting back on track is finding extra time that you can use to spend with your spouse. Track how you spend your time each week. Select several of the items on the list that you are willing to sacrifice in order to spend more time with your spouse. The sacrifice may seem difficult in the beginning but the rewards for your marriage will far outweigh any costs.

The second step is to turn that extra time that you are sacrificing into quality time with your spouse. An obvious choice would be to set aside time for a weekly date. Brainstorm ideas with your spouse on quality dates that you can go on in the next few weeks. Another idea is to schedule time each day to reconnect by just talking. If you don't have children then eating meals together can be a great time. If you do have children then setting aside 10-15 minutes after dinner works as well. And don't get caught in the trap that you need to set aside large blocks of time. Giving a hug or a kiss that lasts for a minute or making a quick call just to say hi can make a lot of difference overtime.

Start making a list right now of what you can do to increase the quantity and quality of the time that you spend with your spouse every day and each week. Then brainstorm with your spouse other items you can add to the list.

The most important step is to not let anything or anyone prevent you from spending more quality time with your spouse. By making this small sacrifice now you can maintain a healthy and happy marriage that will bring you all of the benefits associated with healthy marriages.