

GREAT DATES #3

BECOMING AN EXCELLENT ENCOURAGER

At Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church we want to start a trend. We want to encourage the couples in fellowship to start making their marriages a priority. We believe that even good marriages need regular time apart to maintain closeness. We also believe that this closeness in marriages can only bring good to all areas of our lives, our families, our church and our community. This is just the beginning, so watch out for things to come!!

Tonight, the topic is how to better encourage one another. Encouraging someone means that you come along side them in their endeavors and you give them positive feedback in various ways. It means I am on the side of this person I am married to and I have his or her back. Encouraging is the opposite of criticizing. It is building up rather than tearing down.

Webster's Dictionary defines encouragement as "instilling courage, spirit and hope in someone." It's root word comes from the French word "coeur" which translates as "heart." We get the word courage and encourage from this French word, "Heart." Synonyms may translate to boosting someone's confidence or to cheering someone up. As Christian's, it may mean reminding your spouse that our ultimate hope and strength come from God. When we are stressed, sometimes we lose sight of what we know is true and can use a gentle reminder.

Quite often, in marriages, it is easy to focus on what is wrong rather than on what is right and good, especially if we are working on some area of the relationship. Even when things are not perfect, we can choose to have a positive mindset about our spouse rather than a negative one. No spouse is perfect and every spouse has some deficits, including us! The hard or negative things, however, do not cancel out the positive things completely. Extending some grace toward the hard things and focusing on the good things can help draw you together again.

CAVEAT: Emotional, physical, verbal or sexual abuse is never okay and does not need to be treated with grace or overlooked. If you suspect these things are going on, consult a counselor to get another opinion about what is going on.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE EVENING:

Think of yourself as a mirror to your mate. When your spouse looks to you, what gets reflected back? Do you reflect acceptance and encouragement or do you reflect something else? We are not the only mirror our spouse has, but we are one of the most important ones. When your spouse looks into your face, what does he or she see? Tonight, put all else aside and focus on your spouse with gentleness, affirmation and appreciation.

1. Make a mental list of your spouse's good qualities or strengths.
2. Take turns telling each other what you think the other person's greatest strengths are. Maybe he or she has developed some new ones lately that you have not acknowledged.
3. Ask each other to share an area where encouragement would be nice. **DO NOT LOSE THE NICE MOOD OF THE EVENING BY DWELLING OR GETTING INTO HEAVY, NEGATIVE STUFF!** This is not the time for that. Just note it, don't analyze it. It may be at work, with the kids, with extended family, with friends, or just personally. Encouragement does not mean giving someone advice or taking something over and fixing it for the other person. It does mean cheering the other on while he or she works on the it. It means being interested in how the other is doing. It means listening. It means trying to think empathetically about what your spouse is going through and trying to see it through their eyes!?
4. Then begin to coach each other in how to be a better encourager. Have your spouse complete this sentence, "I feel encouraged when you....." If you have time, complete 5 sentences each and share them with each other.
5. During the next month, offer genuine praise, thanks, compliments, hugs, pats, smiles, etc., daily to each other. A good thought is to ask

yourself is, “What have I done for our marriage today?” Dr. John Gottman, a premier researcher into marriage, says that we need 5 positives to 1 negative in our marriages in order to keep them strong. That is a 5:1 ratio!!!

6. Last but not least, share one sincere thing about the other person that you are thankful for this year in 2008. If you like, write it out in a Thanksgiving card or letter. Be specific, not generic. Being thankful your spouse is a good parent to your kids is not specific enough. Say instead, “I am thankful for how you spend time with this child in this specific way.”
7. Whatever you do, laugh and enjoy your evening out together. You guys deserve it!!

BOOKS: Why Marriages Succeed or Fail by John Gottman, PhD
Attitudes of Gratitude in Love by M.J. Ryan
Building Your Mate’s Self-Esteem by Dennis & Barbara Rainey