

The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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When I Grow Too Old to Dream

Keeping Marriage Alive in the Golden Years (2)

by Norman and Ann Bales

When he was 15 years old Paul McCartney wrote a song called "When I'm 64." He asked,

*Will you still need me,
Will you still feed me,
When I'm sixty-four?*

The teenager's question is one that deserves careful thought among people who are living together as husband and wife during the final years of their lives.

McCartney's song, written a year before we married, encourages us to reflect on the nature of expectations. If we're going to think constructively about our marriage expectations now, it's important for us to remember what we expected when we married each other fifty years ago.

If we were totally honest, we'd probably have to admit that we had different expectations when we got married. It wouldn't serve any useful purpose to compile a list of things we expected and com-

pare that to a list of shattered dreams. You can make yourself pretty miserable playing the negative memory tracks over and over again. Suffice it to say that we were probably like most newly married couples when it came to hopes and dreams. There were those dreams that we articulated, but there were also some that we didn't.

Most of us enter marriage hoping our partners will provide something that's currently lacking in our lives. Maybe we can't say exactly what's missing, but we know there's something about us that seems incomplete. We hope the person we choose to marry will enable us to overcome our deficiencies. In other words we marry with the assumption that a new spouse is going to make us happy.

We never stop to think about the fact that the person who agrees to marry us hopes for exactly the same thing. Somewhere along the line we come to the realization that our expectations were unrealistic. Then we have a choice. We can either end the marriage and begin a search for the next person who will meet our expectations, or we can recognize that marriage is a relationship between two people who are imperfect, and who will always be that way. We have an op-

portunity to develop some important character traits like self-denial, devotion, and thoughtfulness. We'll probably never completely overcome all our blemishes, but we can set about to work through the heartaches and disappointment to make our marriage the best it can be. As a matter of fact, that is one of life's most respectable challenges.

By the time you reach our age, you know that the happy-ever-after marriage between a fair young maiden and handsome young prince, isn't likely to happen. But if you've learned to be more of a giver than a taker you'll also understand that "til death do us part" does not sentence us to live a lifetime of misery. It's important to remember that God is our partner. Jesus said so. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6 KJV). God knew what he was doing. There's a reason that he is a partner in our relationship. He's looking out for our best interests.

So what does that have to do with marriage in the Golden Years? When we were younger, we were told that if we desired to age gracefully we needed to live gracefully as younger persons. We were warned, "Old people are just like they were as younger

people, only more so." Now there's a scary thought for you, but often it seems that way. So what do we expect of each other as we approach the final years of our marriage?

As 15 year old Paul McCartney anticipated married life at age 64, he wondered if he would be fed and needed. Life has a way of changing things when we age. Our personal appearance changes. Our bodies begin to wear out. Long term friends and loved ones die. Your social calendar is planned around your medical appointments.

When people start marriage with the intention of sharing responsibilities on a fifty-fifty basis. They usually find it doesn't work, and it's impossible in old age. How could a fifty-fifty relationship possibly exist between two partners when one of them suffers from dementia? So what should we expect? We should expect things to be unequal, and if you're the partner who's blessed with better health for a longer period of time, it necessarily follows that you will be expected to give more. The guiding principle of a marriage relationship in old age is found in the words of Jesus, "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for a friend (John 15:13)." What do the two of us expect to happen in our marriage in the remaining years of our lives? We expect to be friends. The questions are not, "Will I be fed?" and "Will I be needed?" The question is, "Will I feed?" and "Will I meet needs?" It probably won't make a good song, but it's a good way for elderly people to man-

age marriage. That's the way to keep love alive when you grow too old to dream.

Coping With the Holidays

Paul's admonition, "rejoice evermore," (1 Thessalonians 5:16) includes special days that are sometimes hard to enjoy. If you have experienced a loss, especially recently, it is very possible that these days are more stressful and less "fun" than they used to be. Consider some suggestions for coping with loss, especially during holidays.

"Does Anyone Understand My Grief?"—Randy Becton

1. Expect this time to be hard.
2. Be easy on yourself . . . Don't expect of yourself superhuman strength.
3. Summon emotional and spiritual support, and good mental health principals.
4. Don't be afraid to enjoy something or somebody . . . On your timetable.
5. Draw on your faith and tell God exactly how you feel.
6. Be gentle with your counselors . . . Give them needed but undeserved kindness.

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7. Do something out of love for someone else.
8. Try not to withdraw . . . Let friends include you.
9. Let past memories flood you . . . It will be painful . . . It will be genuinely human.
10. Draw strength and hope from your faith . . . There is a God who cares.
11. Visit the graveside and talk . . . Or look at picture albums and talk . . . And cry . . . It's okay.
12. Remember that you are normal . . . Don't make the mistake of putting a timetable on grief . . . God, who is our refuge and strength, will get you there. —from handout by **John Dale**

Thanks in Everything

Alexander Whyte, the Scottish preacher, always began his prayers with an expression of gratitude. One cold, miserable day, his people wondered what he would say. He prayed, "We thank thee, O Lord, that it is not always like this." —via **Austinville Messenger**



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