

A sunburst graphic consisting of numerous black lines radiating from the center, set against a yellow background. The lines vary in length and angle, creating a starburst effect.

The Secret Sauce

7

INGREDIENTS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

JOE BOYD

This book is dedicated to my two families:

I am so thankful for my wife, Michelle, and
our boys; Dre, Koehn and Robin.

I am also thankful for a church family that
embodies both grace and fellowship.

*The
Secret
Sauce*

**7 INGREDIENTS TO
SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

JOE BOYD

THE SECRET SAUCE

7 Ingredients To Successful Relationships

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version ® (NIV) and New Living Translation ® (NLT).

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Time is the missing ingredient in
our recipes – and in our lives.

MICHAEL POLLAN



Introduction

WHAT AM I MISSING?

*There is only one thing worth
being concerned about.*

Luke 10:42

One of my favorite things to do is check out new restaurants that I hear about from friends or family in my community. I hear things like, "Oh, you've got to try these tacos. They are so amazing." or "They have this mind-blowing secret sauce." I love that. I love going to the restaurant, trying the food for myself, and discovering how delicious it really is. I like to try and recreate the sauce to have this remarkable taste experience at home. I stress the word attempt because I have not been very successful at this. It's not that I lack motivation. It's that I lack the ability.

It makes me a little crazy because my good friend from Houston, Texas, Todd Hoover, has this ability. Somehow, he can taste these amazing foods and a chemical explosion takes place in his taste buds that translates into what the secret

ingredients are. He has a pretty good idea of how much to add and how to put it together. He tinkers in his kitchen for an afternoon and voila! He creates this reproducible, amazing experience. I've seen him do it time and time again.

It makes me crazy because I don't have the same ability. I often walk away saying, "What am I missing?" Honestly, I have wondered if my taste buds are broken but that doesn't make sense since the food I eat tastes delicious. My ability to translate what I tasted and reproduce it again at home is the part that is missing. If I'm candid, this is not only true about food. It is also true about the relationships that I see and experience in my everyday life.

I see other people who seem to have outstanding relationships with their kids, and I wonder, what am I missing? Or, I see couples that seem to be as in love today as they were when they were dating. I ask myself, "What am I missing?" I look at other people and think they have their finances straight or they figured out this communication thing. I don't understand how all this works. I scratch my head and think, what am I missing?

I have come to realize that we think there is a secret sauce, and we are missing it. We don't know what the recipe is. Truthfully, we don't have the ability to make or reproduce what someone else has if we don't know the basic ingredients. We have never been trained and do not have the skills. When it comes to being successful in relationships, it is scarier and riskier than what I try cooking up in the kitchen. I immediately remember

what Proverbs says in the Bible, and it not only says it once, it says it twice! Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 16:25 says there is a way that seems right to man but only leads to death. I know that if Todd cooks it in the kitchen, it's going to be amazing, but if I try to cook the same thing, there's a chance somebody could go to the emergency room. In our lives we need to seek the One with the answers and the secret ingredients rather than trusting ourselves which could lead to destruction.

When I take it to the next level, I start to think, what am I missing? I start to pray and say, "God, what is it about these relationships that I don't really understand? What's the secret sauce?" See, God has empathy for us because he understands what it is like to have relationships. Even God lives in community as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God created us with the same desire for community and relationships. He wants us to have a relationship with Him and with others.

He created us in his image. We learn by following God's example. God says in Psalm 34:8, "taste and see that the Lord is good." The reason why we can trust God to guide us into having healthy relationships and discover the secret sauce of relationships is because God created people. God created marriages, families, children and friends. God created relationships. What's so amazing about God's secret sauce for relationships is that it's not even a secret.

Secrets are all around us. We live in a culture where the recipe

for Coca-Cola has successfully been held back for 125 years. We don't know how to make it, but we know it tastes great. The same is true about Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). No one really knows the 11 herbs and spices. It's a secret. They have companies that make different ingredients and then a computer mixes the secret recipe of these 11 herbs and spices. This ensures the perfect proportion, the perfect spiciness and the perfect flavor. It's hard to reproduce because they won't share their secret recipe.

We think how the world works is how God works, but it is not. God's recipe for relationships is not a secret and has always been available to us. He hasn't hidden it in the middle of 11 secret spices. The word of God has always been there to help and guide us. Proverbs 16:9 says, "the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

God knows the right proportions, the right time, the right temperatures, and all the right ingredients to have healthy and happy relationships. Now, what is God asking us to do? If we are going to learn how to reproduce these remarkable relationships, we are going to have to learn from the Creator. If we want to know the secret sauce, we need to know the One who created the sauce.

Jesus is the example to follow. Jesus is the master chef that creates the relationship recipes. All he calls us to do is to follow him and follow his steps. What happens if we don't do that? What happens when we try to do it on our own? Well,

we suffer consequences. When we think we know better than God, we don't just have a flop in the kitchen, we can have a flop in our relationships. Hosea 4:6 gives us this warning, "My people are destroyed by a lack of knowledge." If we don't understand who created relationships, we may not understand how relationships work or what healthy relationships even looks like. We reproduce who we are, not what we want. When we follow and learn from Jesus, we are following the One who created the secret sauce of relationships. He knows how to reproduce that in others successfully.

Can you imagine if we would trust God and follow His plan for relationships? Through His recipe, we would "taste and see that the Lord is good". When we follow God's recipe for the secret sauce of relationships, it can revolutionize our dating relationships, enhance our marriages, improve our parenting, help our finances, improve our communication, and give us the relational security that we desire.

When we follow Jesus, we can reproduce remarkable experiences in our relationships that we pass on from generation to generation. When we take the step to learn God's secret sauce of relationships, we will taste and see that the Lord is good.

“

Experience is the teacher
of all things.

JULIUS CAESAR



Ingredient #1

PERSPECTIVE & EXPERIENCE

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

It was the best of times and the worst of times. This is how the book, *Great Expectations*, begins. This is also how we experience our relationships when they have been neglected. Many couples complain that they are not happy and are looking for a way out, instead of working with what they have. What I have learned after 20 years of being a pastor, is that things are not as bad as we think. With the help of a trusted guide, any situation can dramatically improve.

One of the best parts about being a pastor is that you get to meet new and interesting people all the time. One of the people I met in Wichita, Kansas, who has revolutionized my life, is my friend Jason Febres.

Jason is an amazing Celebrity Chef! You read it! Chef Jason has

been on many of The Food Network shows, including Guy's Grocery Games and Cutthroat Kitchen. He was even on the NBC show Food Fighters as a celebrity chef.

I loved going to his restaurant, Taste & See, and enjoyed the many different dishes that he made. As a fusion chef, Jason has an international flair. He can mix ingredients to create a brand-new taste experience. I was amazed at how incredible his meals tasted and how explosive the flavors were when I would put them in my mouth. I knew that I wanted to learn from him as a master chef and successful industry leader.

I met with him and began to learn how he ran his restaurant and trained his team. Our relationship grew. Over the years, I had an opportunity to disciple him in his relationship with God, to help him grow in his prayer life, and to encourage him to become a stronger follower of Jesus.

Along the way, he has taught me a thing or two about being a chef. The problem is that I want to create the same amazing meals that Chef Jason can make, but I don't have the experience or the perspective. Quite honestly, I don't know my way around the kitchen and wonder if I have what it takes. When I look at what he does, I realize he has a passion for food and a passion for creativity. Do I have that? Wondering what I have or don't have, can do or can't do, gets me stuck. I think the same thing happens to people in relationships and they find themselves stuck too.

We live in a world where there are winners and losers in life. I wonder if some people are meant to be incredible chefs and others are supposed to taste and see? Can we really learn from the best? We can wonder about these things or we can look at some good news. The good news is that God believes that everyone can be transformed and that everyone can learn from His example. Through mentorship, we can learn from other people who have gained perspectives and had experiences that we have not yet had.

This perspective and experience creates a win-win situation. The fact is we don't have to do life the way we have always done it. If we struggle with relationships, we can learn from people who are really good at relationships. If we want to learn how to be a better chef, we can hang out with people who are really good at cooking like Jason Febres. If we want to learn how to do relationships God's way, we can spend more time with God. When we are learning how to do life, or relationships, or even cooking, we need to consider who we are learning from and who we are following.

John 10:10 says that, "Jesus has come, that we may have life and have it to the full." Many people want to learn from chef Jason because he's one of the best. When we recognize Jesus as the best, we will want to learn from Him. Following Him will allow us to have life to the full.

I knew I could learn from Chef Jason, so we began spend time together at my house. Not only did we talk food, we talked

through relational things in his life. We talked about Jesus and examples of discipleship. After some great conversation, Jason would go to the kitchen and teach me how to make something that I had never cooked before. It was amazing. He would take the same ingredients that I've always had in my kitchen and transform them to a whole new level.

He would cook burgers that tasted like they were from Baja California or pasta that would pop when you put it in your mouth. By spending time observing a chef with years and years of experience and following the way he did things, I learned how to be a better cook.

Jason discovered that by spending time with me, he could learn more about following Jesus because I had devoted my life to being a pastor and following Christ. Here's the point. God's plan is to learn from others with more experience. Paul taught us this in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he wrote, "And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ."

He's saying, follow me as I follow Christ. We'll learn how to follow Christ when we learn from those who are already following Him. God has a plan for us to gain experience by following the life of Jesus. The secret sauce of relationships is found in following the One who knows how to put all the ingredients together.

We all have the same amount of time in a day. We have the same opportunities to invest in healthy relationships.

Although, we don't always know how to put them together with the right portions, right timing, or right steps that produce the results that we are looking for. We can gain incredible wisdom and experience by learning from others.

In Proverbs 4:5, it says "We should gain experience, wisdom and understanding. Do not forget my words or turn away from them." Though we learn from God what we should do, we don't always follow the recipe to gain experience, wisdom and understanding. We forget God's words or turn our back on them.

On one occasion, Jason showed me how to cook a burger. He showed me all the ingredients to use and the right steps to prepare a great burger. A week later, I completely forget one or two steps and the result was disastrous. So, what did I have to do? Go back to the recipe, look at my notes, and follow the steps...step by step. What did I learn? We have to repeat things again and again.

Repetition doesn't make it perfect. It makes it permanent. So, we practice and practice and practice. But most importantly, we need to practice God's way. We need to learn from His plan (recipe) and His path (steps) if we want to see different results. The Bible tells us there are good and bad consequences when we do this. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise." That sounds so amazing. Then, the verse goes on to say "... but the companion of fools will suffer harm." That sounds not so amazing.

As a pastor, one of the things that I've noticed that when it comes to relationship advice, people don't consider the source or who they are learning from. Some guys will reach out to the people sitting at the end of a bar and ask them for advice on how to save their marriage or what to do if the relationship is struggling. Upon hearing the advice they never consider the source.

It's sadly easy to bypass thinking about who this person is who says, "Call it quits, move on, get a divorce". It's easy to not realize this person (sitting at the end of the bar) may have done the same thing. If we want to have healthy relationships, we need to get around leaders, mentors, or people who desire and pursue healthy relationships. It's not helpful to spend our time with people who have a perspective of "calling it quits" or have experiences of things not working out. We need people who have a perspective that reflects God's perspective of healthy relationships and who have experiences that even when it was tough, they never gave up. In fact, Proverbs 4:7 tells us what success looks like. "The beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have..."

Another version of Proverbs 4:7 says, "Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do." If it is the most important thing we can do, then we should pursue learning from the best about how to have healthy relationships. How do you do that? We learn about how to have godly relationships by spending time with people in small groups, listening to their experiences, learning from their wins, and from their

experiences that didn't go so well.

We can learn from other people's mistakes, but we can also learn by gaining advice from a mentor. Find somebody who is a stronger parent. Find someone who is a stronger spouse. Find somebody who is a strong leader and ask them to spend time investing in you. Ask them questions, ask them how they did it, ask them what they learned from their mistakes, and ask them for advice. Mentorship is about gaining wisdom. If you're struggling in an area, it's important to seek out advice.

Michael Jordan is arguably one of the best basketball players that ever lived, but even he didn't do it by himself. He had a coach. We need coaches in our lives to guide us through rough patches; to help us overcome obstacles; and to help elevate our game, our relationships and our experiences.

My friend Jason's restaurant was called Taste & See. He chose the name because he thought it reflected this perspective of God: that if you could taste and see, you would know that the Lord is good. He started a restaurant because he wanted to be a well-known chef. What he discovered by having an encounter with Jesus and getting discipleship along the way, was that the journey didn't just lead him to be a celebrity chef, it led him to be a fully devoted follower of Christ. God can do amazing things in relationships if you gain wisdom, get perspective and grow through the experiences of others.

SECRET SAUCE PERSPECTIVE & EXPERIENCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pastor Joe wanted to learn to cook so he connected with Chef Jason. He watched and observed and took notes when Jason prepared meals.

Who do you look to and want to learn from: to have healthier relationships? In leadership? In parenting? In following Christ Jesus?

Who can you pour into, mentor, disciple?

What practical steps can you take to gain wisdom and understanding in how to live as a Christ follower?

Who or what influences your perspective; why do you let them influence you?

What experiences have helped you grow and mature in your relationship with Jesus?

“

Money isn't everything, but it's
right up there with oxygen.

ZIG ZIGLAR



Ingredient #2

MONEY

*Let no debt remain outstanding except
the continuing debt to love on another.*

Romans 13:8

Money magnifies our character and quality of our relationships. It is easy to think that all of our problems would go away if we had more money. The truth is that the more money we have, the more it magnifies who we really are on the inside. If we are greedy, it will be obvious by our spending choices. If we are generous, it will be revealed by our giving. Money is not good or bad. It is a tool to exchange goods and services. How we spend the money that God entrusts to us is a belief statement about our priorities and values.

In this chapter, we are going to talk about the issue that is often the number one source of tension and fights in marriages. Know this, we are really fighting about unmet expectations, but money is probably one of the biggest stress factors in a marriage. In fact, Michelle and I quickly learned this when we first got married. Within the first few weeks of our marriage, I

got a job on staff at a church in Houston, Texas. Usually, it isn't a big ordeal to move a family from Kansas to Texas. However, when I accepted the job offer, there was a big hurricane that hit New Orleans, Louisiana. It displaced a quarter of a million people from New Orleans into Houston and created a housing crisis. The only housing we could afford was a 600 square foot apartment. Michelle still owned a house in Kansas that we couldn't sell without taking a loss. At the time, nobody wanted to buy a house in Cheney, Kansas. We needed a place to stay in Houston, but still had house payments in Kansas. This created some financial stress in our marriage. We were paying for two places to live while we lived in the smaller of the two places.

When we made the move, we realized another important thing. We had both been single for quite some time. We lived independent lives and developed habits that didn't change easily. We were responsible people with cars and bills. We had been paying our bills each month. Michelle paid bills by mail and I paid bills online. When we got married, we found out that companies mail and email copies of your bills simultaneously. I was more of a digital person. Michelle was more of an old school, paper, write the check sort of person. So, in the first month after we moved to Houston, without knowing it, we both paid the bills...the same bills by paper check and by digital check, which meant we didn't have a lot of money. I found out that whenever you overpay the power company, the gas company or the water company, they don't give you a refund. They give you something called a "credit."

FIRST, KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

This was a mess. We started our marriage together with an enormous amount of stress. We thought that we would start out great. We thought we would have plenty of money from our paychecks and our recent wedding; instead, we didn't have anything. We were eating ramen noodles and living like broke college students. It was really stressful. I quickly learned that it is essential that when we talk about finances, we need to be on the same page. The only way to be on the same page is knowing where you are.

Minneapolis has the Mall of America. It is one of the biggest malls in the whole country. As you walk through there are digital maps all over to show you “you are here” so that you can figure out where you're trying to go. Similarly, in relationships, especially when discussing marriage, it's important to establish “you are here.” Each person in a couple brings things into the relationship. I know you're thinking, “Man, I'm bringing all this hotness. I'm bringing the brains and the smarts and all the good stuff.” It's possible you're also bringing some debt you may have accrued through things you put on credit cards. You may have a mortgage. You probably spent a lot of money on your brain with education. You may have a car without money for fuel. You may have a lucrative job with expectations of how that money will be spent. None of this is necessarily bad. I'm simply saying that our financial realities determine the “you are here” location. When entering into a relationship, it's important to be on the same page so you know where you're starting.

Michelle and I started our relationship with college debt. We also had a car that was almost paid off. We communicated those things. Painting a clear financial picture in advance helps avoid tension and makes any financial situation a little bit better. It's equally important for married couples to maintain financial openness throughout the marriage. Finances determine future houses, retirement and overall quality of life.

When having financial discussions, it's imperative that we refrain from making the other person feel badly because money does not dictate the quality of the person.

SECOND, MAKE A PLAN

The second thing you need to do is have a budget. What a great way to get on the same page as a couple. Married couples live "as one" which means "one" financial picture too. In some ways, we save money by living as a couple. For example, you will only have one mortgage. In other ways, it is going to cost you more, Having a budget is always key.

When it comes to the budget, you need to ask yourselves some questions. First, where is God in this budget? I mean, are you returning anything to God? Second, where are your savings in the budget? Are you preparing now for the future? Beginning now is always the best decision because the thing you have on your side by starting today is time. Compound interest is your friend. If you save early and live on less, it will help you a lot in the long run.

Here is a personal example. When Michelle and I got married, we knew that at some point we were going to start a church, and we did! God led us to start a church. This church was one of the fastest-growing churches in the country. It helped start 10 other churches. God did great things through that, but we never would have been able to take that step if we still had debt. We had \$28,000 of debt that we needed to pay off and a house in another state from early in our marriage. Starting a church when you owe a bunch of money is a no go. We prayed a whole lot that God would show us the way. What were we going to do? Through all this stress, we made two priorities. One, we were going to tithe and put God first. Second, we were going to save.

We were living pretty thin. We lived in a 600 square foot apartment with two dogs. That's not a lot of room. We kept praying and saying, "God, what are you trying to teach us in this season?" And here's what God spoke to me, "You can live on a lot less than you think you can." We became very frugal, made wise financial decisions, kept Jesus in our budget and saved. We found inexpensive ways to have fun and go on dates and we kept paying for that house.

When the house finally sold, we didn't just go out and splurge on a lobster and steak dinner, though that would have been fun, we stayed consistent and we took the money from the house payment and applied it to our college debt. We paid down the college debt by sticking to our budget. Finally we were financially free to do anything that God was calling us to

do. Our early financial diligence and faithfulness to God's plan has really paid off for us. We were frugal and wise and this has allowed us to avoid the financial stress we see so many of our friends facing. I want to encourage you to be on budget with one another. Get on the same page and make wise decisions together.

THIRD, BE WISE

The last thing I want to say is that it is imperative to make good decisions with your money. People spend money all the time. We impulse buy. We buy treats. We do all sorts of things. One of the biggest mistakes I ever made was picking a hotel. Oh, I'll never forget it—the Green Carpet Inn. We were driving from Kansas to Texas to visit my parents. We decided to stop in Oklahoma City and find a place to stay for the night. I really didn't have a lot of money. I only had about a hundred dollars for the trip to Texas. That meant gas. That meant food. That meant everything.

I started looking around to find an inexpensive place to stay. And lo and behold, I found this hotel called "The Green Carpet Inn." When we pulled up, it looked pretty good. I walked in, and I thought, "Well, this is a little strange, but it's okay." I paid for the night. As I was walking out the door, I noticed a sign that said, "No refunds for any reason." and I definitely thought that was kind of weird. We walked upstairs to our room. We discovered the reason why this place was called "The Green Carpet Inn." It was clearly because of all the algae and fungus that was growing and dripping onto the floor by the

faulty, smelly air conditioner.

When we went in, Michelle was already kind of skittish. We had basically been married for just a minute. She walked over to the bed and pulled back the sheets. The sheets were kind of yellow and had a cigarette burn. Michelle immediately declared, “OH NO, we’re going to Walmart. I’m not sleeping on THIS bed.” And I thought, “OH NO, we don’t have that kind of money.” So off we went to Walmart to buy sheets. It all started adding up in my head and I realized we could have just stayed at a better place and not ever had to deal with this. Then I said it out loud and Michelle said, “Yeah, you should have thought of that.”

To make things even worse, in the middle of the night, it got cold, real cold. The place was a bit drafty. Michelle said, “Oh baby, I’m cold.” I said, “Hey, I’ll warm you up.” She goes, “Uh-no. We’re staying at the Green Carpet Inn. That’s gross.” So I called the front desk and requested an extra blanket. A few minutes later a very aged, frail man shuffled down the hallway looking like it took all his strength to move another step. He made it. He knocked at the door. I looked through the peephole to see this man with a blanket wrapped around his body, not a neatly folded blanket in his hands. As I opened the door, he removed the blanket, folded it and handed it to me. All I could think was that I needed to get past this one. We needed to get through the night. I couldn’t take another shot at my ego for this bad decision of staying in this place.

As I slowly turned around with this blanket and a smile, Michelle looked at me, and she emphatically said, “UH-UH! That is disgusting.” What a terrible night. I was quickly learning what it meant to make good financial decisions. Listen, life is going to cost you something. Don’t throw good money at bad. Don’t make impulse buys. We must always think before we spend money.

You are probably wondering, what are the things that we need to be wise about? You need to be wise about preparing for your future. For me, being wise involves buying reliable transportation. Think about where you’re living. Is it safe? Is it going to cost us more? Think about insurance: health insurance, home owners insurance, life insurance. Are you protecting your spouse? What would happen if something happened? We often don’t like to think about tragedy, but as a pastor, I’ve done hundreds and hundreds of weddings, and I’ve also done hundreds of funerals. The saddest ones are when somebody didn’t see it coming, and their spouse is left unprepared for the financial burdens that are ahead. Plan for your future.

Another way to plan is to be wise about investing and saving. Through better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health; you need to be ready for the future. By the way, nobody pays you in retirement. You have to save for your future. I really want to encourage you to do it sooner rather than later. Making those wise financial decisions is actually showing your spouse that you love them, not just today, but for as far into

the future as God allows.

Whether you've been married for 60+ years or are planning a wedding now, please take some time as a couple to work through the next section to make sure you're on the same page. Use the resources provided to come up with a budget or to adjust your existing one. Think through: How I will put God first? How am I going to save for our future? What kind of bills do we have? Don't get surprised. Be on the same page. When you take this step, you're going to be in a much better position to make investments in your future so that you don't find yourself sleeping in the cold at "The Green Carpet Inn."

EXAMPLE MONTHLY BUDGET

Month _____

Monthly income from all sources: _____

EXPENSE	BUDGET	ACTUAL
Tithing (10%)		
Savings (10%)		
Mortgage or Rent		
Insurance		
Gas and Electricity		
Water and Trash		
Internet and Phone		
Vehicles		
Gas		
Car Repairs/Oil Changes		
Groceries		
Eating Out		
Household Items		
Entertainment		
Clothing		
Credit Cards		

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUDGETING:

Are we trusting God by honoring the tithe first?

What are we saving for the future?

How can we live within our means?

Where can we save?

SECRET SAUCE MONEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are some of your financial wins and misses from years past? What impulse purchase did you make that causes you to cringe now? (I.E. Green Carpet Inn)

'The talk' can be uncomfortable, and we often avoid having it with our spouse or a financial planner. If you've had 'the talk', how has it helped you adjust spending and aided in debt reduction? What surprised you? What specific advice would you give your younger self if you knew then, what you know now about spending and saving for the future?

Where is God in the budget? Think about your weekly spending patterns, what small thing could you give up (go without) on a consistent basis and invest that money toward the salvation of others, to expand Jesus' Kingdom? If you're in a small group, consider sharing your responses and have a 6 - 10 week challenge: who can make it? Who needs encouragement? Everyone wins for each small step they take because every dollar invested in the Kingdom has eternal value!

“

*Love and respect
changes everything.*

BRYANT MCGILL



Ingredient #3

RELATIONAL SECURITY

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:33

"Did you hear that noise?"

"Was that the back door?"

"You need to go make sure there isn't a serial killer in our house."

"Why do I have to go risk my life?"

These are the types of conversations that define our need to feel safe in our relationships.

It is imperative for a couple to feel secure and certain in the relationship. It's the whole idea, "I love you, you love me, we're a happy family," right? The way this plays out in my family is with Michelle, my wife. My wife loves feeling safe and secure. I think my wife feels protected when she is around me because I am built like a linebacker. When we got married and started sleeping in the same bed, I soon realized that my side of the

bed was decided based on her need for security and safety. My side of the bed is always the closest to the door. If somebody breaks in to attack us, they are going to have to go through me first. That's true at home and away from home. I can't help but think, "Michelle, surely they're going to come through the window, which is on your side," but I never tell her that.

I realized how important security was for Michelle when we were watching a scary movie. We were watching this movie called, *The Strangers*. If you know anything about the movie, it was pretty creepy. These people are alone in this house, and these really random people start showing up with burlap-sack masks covering their heads. It's super, super creepy and super, super scary. As the movie went on, Michelle stopped and said, "Did you hear something?" I said, "I don't know. You want to go check it out?" Just joking. I walked through the house and checked that doors were locked and the windows were closed. Everything was fine.

That night, even though she was scared and didn't like the scary movie, she went to sleep. She was fine because I was sleeping on the side to protect her.

The next day, we got up and started our day. While she was in the bathroom taking a shower, the doorbell rang. A little backstory: at the time, I was a pastor at a church that we had started in Derby, Kansas. We wanted to have a mascot for our kids ministry. More specifically, I wanted a purple cow for the mascot, and I found the one I wanted. I found a manufacturer

in China to make this mascot costume. I had ordered it months in advance and forgot about it. Apparently, it takes a long time to make a purple cow and then have it shipped from China to America. Back to the story. I answered the doorbell and the postal person was standing there. He said, “Hey, I’ve got this box from China.” I had forgotten all about it! I took the box inside to open it up. I was so excited because the purple cow had finally arrived and my Chinese friends had done a fantastic job! I popped the big purple cow head on my head and walked into the bathroom where my wife was taking a shower. I said, “Hey Michelle!” forgetting that the night before we had watched a scary movie with people wearing masks. She saw me and freaked out! She screamed and fell over. She was so scared. She took a deep breath and said, “Man, it’s so good I am in the shower because I may have peed a little bit.” We laughed and laughed about that one.

Here’s my point: when it comes to relational security, one of the scariest things we can ever do is to surprise our spouse with a side of ourselves that they didn’t expect or sign up for. The best gift we can give to our spouse is a very clear picture of who we are. Upon entering into marriage, we see and think about the world differently than our spouse. When married, it is incredibly easy to begin walking in a different direction than our spouse. We’ve got to get and remain on the same page.

In fact, even the Bible talks about us getting on the same page. Men and women have different needs in a relationship. Those needs are love and respect. In fact, the Bible says in Ephesians

5:33, “...each man must love his wife as himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

This is so interesting. I have found through all of my years of counseling and talking with couples, there is often a breakdown of this particular scripture. See, God commands husbands to love their wives, and you would say, “Of course I love her. I married her; I want to be with her.” However, we don’t always love her the way that she needs to be loved or the way that God intended.

And likewise, the Bible is really clear that wives are to respect their husbands. You would say, “Of course, if I didn’t respect him, I wouldn’t have married him.” Women need love and men need respect. Sometimes, this gets mixed up because it’s easier to give our spouse what we want or need than it is to give them what they want or need.

God commands husbands to love their wives. For men, it is natural to respect, but not to love. God commands wives to respect their husbands. For women, it is natural to love, but not respect.

I have observed that there are tons and tons of cards that say, “I love you.” Cards are all about love. I’ve yet to find, though, a card that says, “I respect you.” One time as I was flying home to Kansas City. I was sitting on a plane next to one of the high-up executives at Hallmark, the card company, and I got into this discussion with him. I said, “Hey, I notice that there are

a lot of cards about romance and love, but there's not a lot of cards about respect," and I talked to him about the scripture. He said, "No, no, no, we tried that. We actually tried that; we made cards that said, 'I respect you.' The only problem was they didn't sell very well, and so we took them off the shelves." We live in a love-dominated culture that doesn't talk a lot about respect. This is an instance where it is important for us not to think culturally but to actually live biblically and follow what God says.

The question then becomes, how do we give relational security to the other person? Men are called to love their wives, and wives are called to respect their husbands. When we do this, we are meeting each other's needs and creating emotional security. Each person is cared for the way they were created to be cared for.

Not long after couples get married there is a point in the relationship where the honeymoon is over. This is when things start getting real. Conflicts can arise and most often come from the needs for love and respect. It can play out like this. A couple is arguing about something when his phone rings. It is one of the guys calling to invite him to shoot hoops. He, of course, happily says, "I'll be there." Then he hangs up the phone and says, "And here's another thing you always do..." Or maybe, it goes like this. A couple is arguing because the toilet seat was left up. This time her phone rings and she and her girlfriend talk about their weekend get together. Then she hangs up the phone and says, "And on top of the toilet seat

being left up...”

The phone call conversations reveal that we don't lack the ability to turn our emotional anger or frustration off. We lack the motivation to do it. We really can turn our emotions on and off and remain calm in the midst of a storm. We have to make the choice to do it. We have to be able to recognize when we're in a conflict or arguing with one another and lovingly and peacefully find resolution.

If I told you that you both love and respect one another, but you're not loving and respecting one another God's way you might feel confused. God calls us to provide for the needs of our spouse. If I said, "I want you both to write down your definition of love and to write down your definition of respect," I'd bet you dollars to doughnuts that the definitions would not be the same because men and women are wired differently. We see the world differently. We experience these two words differently. It is important for us to get on the same page with our definitions and provide for the needs of our spouse.

HOW TO REALLY LOVE A WOMAN

Let's look at how most women view love. Guys, please take some notes here. Pull out your phone and write some things down. Watch her nodding in agreement. This your cue to pay attention.

First, women tend to express love face-to-face. When women

get together, you'll find them facing one another as they drink coffee and chat. Whatever they are doing, they face one another. It's because women communicate not just verbally but also non-verbally.

Guys, this is why your spouse says to you, "What does that look mean?" It's because women are face-to-face creatures who consider every smirk, eye brow raise and nose inflection to be part of the conversation. Women feel loved through face-to-face conversation. Are you close to me? Are you connecting with me? Are you sitting down and looking at me and paying attention when I'm talking to you? Women like to share and be open with their feelings. Guys, don't come in, grunt, and sit down to watch ESPN. Consider your wife's need for connection. Women are looking for us to care, sit down, share how our day went, and talk about ideas. Sometimes your wife may just want to vent, she may not be looking for you to solve the problem. If you're not sure, ask her if there's anything you can do in the scenario. For example, if Jim from the office is making her mad, and you start thinking, I'm going to kill Jim. Bad idea. Instead, listen and say, "Oh yeah, honey, that sounds terrible. Is there anything I can do?" Most likely she simply wants to talk to get it out of her system.

Show love to your wife through non sexual physical touch. Ladies crave physical closeness, but often question whether or not the intentions are simple. Hug your wife. Hold her hand. Smile at her from across the room. Place your hand on her back when walking through a doorway. Touching your wife in

these ways expresses love.

Another priority is to let her know you are united with her and have her back. Always speak positively about her and your relationship when in public. If you disagree, that's fine, just save that for a private conversation. It shows that you are on the same page and unified in all that you do. This is especially important when you are with the in-laws at family holidays. It is also important as you are raising your children. Agree in public, communicate disagreements in private.

Next, how do you resolve issues? When you get angry or upset about something, are you quick to make peace with one another? It's important to say, "I'm sorry," and it's critical that you mean it, because women can tell the difference.

One final way to express love to your wife is to show her that you are committed and loyal to only her. When you are out and another woman walks by, do you do a double-take and check her out? Are you protecting your eyes? Do you only have eyes for your wife? This is important. It shows that you are committed and loyal. Remember to always build up her self-confidence and her self-esteem. Women live in a culture where they're constantly beaten down and told they don't measure up. Tell her how beautiful she is and how much you love her. It is important to speak that into her because that's a need that every woman has.

Ladies, take a moment to think about this section. Ask

yourself, does this really express love? If it does, I want you to take a moment and talk about the aspects that mean the most to you. Guys, this is your opportunity to take notes! Maybe building her self-esteem is high on her needs list and it expresses love. Or, maybe it's really, really critical for her that you are open and face-to-face in communicating. Whatever those are, you need to pay attention. You need to focus on learning who she is and how God made her. Step into the calling on your life to meet these relational needs of your bride. You will see your relationship flourish.

HOW TO REALLY LOVE A MAN

Now, let's look at how guys view love. We're going to talk about respect for a minute. Ladies, pay attention and consider this a guide on how you can more effectively meet his needs.

First, it's important to understand that guys are more shoulder-to-shoulder and less about face-to-face communication. Think about it for a minute. Every activity created for men in our culture is really a shoulder-to-shoulder experience. Sports stadiums have seats that are side by side. Guys can ride snow mobiles together for miles, barely share any words and think it was a great time all because they were shoulder-to-shoulder with their buddy.

Ladies did you know guys actually value friendship? They don't just love you, they want to like you, and they want you to like them. It's important to do things that are shoulder-to-shoulder activities. Do you do fun things together? Do you

have activities that you do that he enjoys? Are you shoulder-to-shoulder watching television shows together or fishing together or going out to do things together? Are you really friends?

Next, guys want to know, “Are you with me?” Do you listen to their dreams? Guys have dreams. They have things that are put inside them. They have goals and things they want to accomplish. Every guy wants a cheerleader in their life who is rooting for them. So, listen to his dreams, cheer him on and support him. It makes all the difference in the world to him.

Ladies, your husbands need encouraging words. If a man goes to work and is told that he doesn’t measure up, but comes home and is told how proud you are of him for how hard he works and is told great things you notice in him, then he can keep going to that same job for the next 40 years. Your encouragement and positivity about him matters. Likewise, if he goes to work, knocks it out of the park, gets all the accolades, honors and promotions, but comes home and doesn’t feel like you support him, then he will want to give up. It is so important to support that you cheer for him.

Next, recognize and honor his position and role in leading your family. God put husbands in a role where they are to lead and protect their family. Appreciation for leadership and honoring him, especially when you have kids speaks, life into him. It encourages the responsibility that God has given to him to protect you. The Bible says in Ephesians 5 that husbands

are to love their wives just as Christ loved the Church. What does that mean? Just like Jesus died for the Church, if you're going to marry a man that is worthy of being followed, then he would lay down his life for you. Recognizing this truth makes a difference.

Respect his decisions. Whenever he makes a decision, and you agree with it, it enhances the unity factor. Public disagreements or arguments destroy unity. Remember to have these conversations in private. Men feel energized when they feel their wife supports their decisions whether big or small. An example of this could be a husband deciding to help fold laundry. Upon inspection, the wife may feel the towels were not appropriately folded. Ladies, it doesn't matter how he folds the towels. Choose to receive his act of kindness (helping to fold towels) and do not correct him. This communicates love, kindness and respect to him. Speak to him in ways that build him up.

The last way men feel respected is when you initiate sex. Listen, guys are driven and attracted to you, but they don't want to feel like they're begging. When you initiate more often, it actually shows the respect they desire from you and fuels them emotionally.

Now, take a moment and think through these things. Gentlemen, consider which of these are most important to you and share them with your wife. Ladies, this is your opportunity to take to heart and put into practice what makes your husband

feel loved and respected.

A DAILY DOSE

If you don't feel really secure in your relationship, work on loving and respecting each other in the way that God has called us to. You will see things begin to change in a significantly positive way.

Build a daily rhythm. You may start your day with coffee, or breakfast, or a morning run and you've found a routine that you know is important and healthy. Do you know what else is healthy? Starting your day by expressing love and respect to one another. Make it a habit that happens every day.

Ladies, you may not know this, but studies show that if you hug and kiss your husband every day, he'll live two years longer than the average person. Guys, keep speaking those words of affirmation, show kindness and give kisses freely. These daily doses of love and respect help provide relational security.

Be sure to have a daily check-in. At the end of the day, ask things like, "How was your day? How are things going?" It is really, really critical for you to close the loop on the day. It helps you connect and understand one another.

Lastly, I would say never give up on the commitment to date whether it is weekly or every other week. Make a point to connect intentionally. This creates the security that you need in your relationship so there are no cracks in your foundation

and no uncertainty. When you date, we let our guard down and we see one another for who we really are, who God created us to be. When we truly see our spouse, we will have the best marriage possible.

SECRET SAUCE RELATIONAL SECURITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you define love? How do you define respect?

What's an important, even necessary way for your spouse to show love to you?

If you're not married, how do you need close friends or family members to express you're loved by them?

How do you let your spouse, or closest friends, or family know they are loved?

How does the way you show love align with your definition of love?

What daily actions do you do, that lets your spouse know they are respected?

If you're not married, how do you show respect to others in your life, close friends, family?

What does being respected by someone important to you (your spouse!) look like? How do you need them to show you they respect you?

Again, how does the way you show respect align with how you define respect?

What necessary conversation will you have with your spouse or others to share what you need along with asking how they need to be shown love and respect from you?

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Spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic it is gradual, progressive development that will take the rest of your life.

RICK WARREN



Ingredient #4

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

Psalm 92:12-14

Our relationship with others is a direct reflection of our relationship with God. I believe this is because God created every one of us. God created humanity. Right after He created Adam and Eve, the first two people, He created marriage. He knew that it wasn't good for us to be alone. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit model community for each of us and we too are expected to love one another as God first loved us. Our relationships can grow stagnant when we stop following Jesus in our daily lives. Our relationships with others are best when they come from the overflow of our daily walk with God.

This belief leads me to pursue mentorship from people with healthy and God-centered relationships. I can't think of a

better example than my favorite great aunt, Laney. Laney and Powell are one of my favorite couples. They loved one another very well and always showed love and respect. They were also an interesting couple, who had traveled all over the world. At one point in their career they lived in Japan. Laney embraced the culture which surprised some because she came from North Louisiana (think Duck Dynasty country!). Laney wore kimonos, she dyed her hair jet black, she loved life and she loved Powell. I loved hanging out with them!

Being with them was fun; it was a good picture of what a healthy marriage was like. As a college student, I visited Laney and Powell often. It was obvious as they aged that they faced some increasing health challenges. Powell got really sick and went to a hospital near my university. I visited them weekly and witnessed how Laney cared for Powell and how deeply he loved her. It was incredible to watch. Over the course of that semester, his health deteriorated. Ultimately, cancer claimed his life. The next time I saw Laney was at Powell's funeral.

When I walked into the church for the funeral, I noticed that the casket at the front of the church was covered with a big bouquet of roses. The pastor stood up and said the 64 perfect roses represented 64 perfect years of marriage. In that moment, it dawned on me that I know a lot of friends who had recently gotten married and it seemed like a 50/50 split on which couples were still married and which were not. I wondered how Laney and Powell made it together for 64 years. Some people don't even live that long much less remain

married to one another while keeping that loving feeling!

Not long after the funeral, I visited with Laney and said, “Laney, I want to know how on earth you and Powell have had such an amazing relationship. How did you have such a healthy marriage?” And she said, “Well, Joe, it was simple. It just wasn’t always easy. See, what we did was we had the right perspective on our relationship. You see, he was always my king and I was always his queen, but we always kept Jesus in between.” I said, “Oh, that’s incredible. That’s amazing.” I’m like, “Where did you get that?” And she said, “Well, actually, it’s in the Bible.” She quoted another scripture that often finds its way into a lot of marriage ceremonies when people are exchanging vows. It’s found in Ecclesiastes 4:12, and it says, “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” What that means is that a rope with three strands is stronger. Each of you is contributing to the strength, but intertwined throughout the middle is God.

In relationships, if you keep God in the middle of everything no matter what struggles you go through, no matter what challenges you’re going to face, you already have a two-third majority that it’s going to work out because God wants your marriage to work out more than you do. Love and respect are vital, but in every challenge God is the one that sustains us and moves us through.

See, the reality is we do live in a world where marriages don’t always make it, and many times it’s because couples didn’t take time to get pre-marriage counseling. Think about how much

work goes into securing a home: all the background work, forms and paperwork. We go to school for four years to get trained to do jobs. We even take a few moments before we take off on a plane to get some direction on what to do if there's turbulence or a crisis. Many times, though, people rush right into marriage without stopping and thinking about it. Many plans are made for the wedding day, but we don't plan for the marriage. God actually has a plan for marriages.

Harvard, one of our oldest and most respected educational institutions, conducted an incredible study on marriage and what causes couples to succeed and what ultimately causes couples to divorce. In this study, which they conducted with thousands of couples, they discovered that couples could do three simple things that massively increased the chance of a successful marriage. They found very specifically that if you do these three things, the chance of ever getting a divorce is one in 16,000. We never get odds like that anywhere, including Vegas, so taking note of these key things seems imperative. Now, I want to be very clear that Harvard did not conduct this as a religious study. They looked at the factors that influenced relationships and marriages in general across our population, and three things were identified as contributing to successful marriages.

The first thing is that couples with long-term successful relationships would attend church weekly together. It's so critical that we're in a relationship with God and a relationship with one another within a community of believers. Being in

church gets couples on the same page at the same time in the same book. It completely changes their focus and it causes them to be less selfish in their relationships.

The second thing that these couples would do is they each read a Bible verse a day. The study wasn't specific about which Bible verse and it wasn't specific that you both read the same one. The idea is that they were seeking direction from God through the Bible. It means that we submit to a higher authority, that we are constantly learning. We don't know it all. We need to do things that help shape us and mold us to be not who we want to be, but who God wants us to be, and ultimately, to be the person who is there to support, love and respect our spouse. It's a critical step.

The third key to a successful long-term marriage was that the couple would pray together daily. It's often highlighted how important communication is, as well as being on the same page. The question is: Are we communicating with God? When prayer is a part of a marriage, people can change because prayer has the power to change people. The Bible says that we need to confess our sins to one another and we need to pray with one another so that we may be healed. Do you know that prayer has the power to heal our relationships? It draws us closer together. It gets us connected with God and allows us to hear Him rather than ourselves.

When I think about Laney and Powell and I think about the fact that they had 64 perfect years of marriage represented by

those 64 perfect roses, I think about one of my deepest desires which is for every marriage to lovingly last. I want you to have the kind of joy that Laney and Powell had. I believe that if you put God first, you get into God's word, and you pray together, you will make it. I would encourage you to be a part of a local church. I think it's essential that you're connected with God and connected with the community.

You might be reading this and saying, "Yeah, I've attended church, but I don't really know this God." I want you to know I was that guy. I grew up in church, but I didn't know God. And I want you to know; you can know God today. God's not mad at you. He's mad about you. God's not here to punish and push us away, but he's calling us into a relationship with Him.

There are three simple steps that we can take that clarify our relationship with God. The first one is, admit that we need him. The truth is, the Bible says that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We've done selfish things. We've done things that have hurt people. We've even hurt ourselves. God says, "Listen, it's okay to not be okay. It's just not okay to stay that way."

The second thing is to believe Jesus and who He says He is. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin are death. Often times, we're never really living until we have a relationship with God. We need Jesus. The Bible tells us that He is the eternal gift and our salvation is found in Him. He's the way, the truth, and the life and we must put our faith and trust in Him.

The third is that you need to commit to the relationship. God is looking for us to commit to Him. He has already pursued us. He has already gone first. The Bible says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He is the One that is pursuing us, it's not the other way around. When we meet Him in that invitation, we find a God who loves us and forgives us, and a Savior that welcomes us into His family.

I encourage you if you've never taken these steps to take them now. We're not in a church. We're not in front of anybody else. You're probably in the privacy of your home, and you're just hanging out, so now is the perfect time to be certain about your relationship with God. If God is at the center of your life and the center of your marriage, it will change everything.

If you want to put God in the center of your life, say a prayer like this and know that your relationship with God has begun. "God, I admit that I have sin in my life. I've tried to do it by myself and that hasn't worked out. Jesus, I believe you. I believe that life without you is no life at all and that I don't want to be separated from you. I believe that your gift of salvation is eternal, that it lasts forever, and that it is a free gift that you are offering to me. I accept your gift. Be the Leader of my life. Thank you, God. Amen."

SECRET SAUCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A Harvard University study identified three key components of long-lasting marriages.

- Attending church together
- Each person read a Bible verse per day
- Pray together daily as a couple

If these aren't currently a part of your marriage which one would you begin to do and why?

Is one of these more challenging for you or your spouse?

How could reading one Bible verse a day contribute to long-lasting marriages?

If you could visit with Laney and Powell what would you want to tell them or ask them?

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The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw



Ingredient #5

COMMUNICATION

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Ephesians 4:29

"I don't want to hear it! Cancel my subscription...I am so over your issues! Who died and made you God?" Reckless words are a recipe for relational disaster. If we are not careful, we can talk ourselves out of relationships with people that we love. Too often, people make permanent decisions about temporary problems when they say things that they wish they had not spoken.

Depth in communication leads to depth in relationships. Communication is so critical to a healthy relationship. I learned this one year when someone in our church gave my wife and me an incredible opportunity. They knew our anniversary was coming up; they knew that we liked to get away and travel so they gave us access to their timeshare in

Branson, Missouri. Now, Branson, Missouri, is a beautiful place. It has this incredible lake called Table Rock. Even though our funds were limited, we managed to see the sights, eat a few nice meals and spend quality time together.

An exciting attraction in Branson, Missouri, is jet skiing on Table Rock Lake. We were conservative with our spending on the trip and decided to jet ski for our last adventure. The only problem was that we only had enough money to rent one jet ski. Based on my linebacker-sized physique, you might have doubts that another person could ride with me on a single jet ski. In this moment my sense of adventure overrode logic and I asked my bride of one year to jump on and hold onto me as tight as she could. I have heard people say that money can't buy happiness, but it can rent a jet ski and that surely put smiles on our faces.

Since this was my first time on a jet ski, I was driving it slowly when I heard Michelle say, "Come on! Let's go faster!" I cranked it up and we started blazing across this beautiful lake, but all of a sudden I started to get choked from behind. Michelle had grabbed me and was yanking on the back of my life jacket to the point that I couldn't breathe. I stopped the jet ski and asked, "What is going on? Why are you choking me?" She exclaimed, "I'm not. I'm bouncing because we're hitting the waves, and I'm holding on for dear life!" We compromised and as I avoided the waves, she stopped choking me from behind. As the day progressed, there was a point when Michelle asked, "When am I going to get to drive?" I didn't want to

give up control of the jet ski, but I decided this wasn't a battle worth fighting.

We tried this bizarre move in an attempt to switch spots, but it was obvious in the middle of the lake this approach wasn't going to work. In the middle of Table Rock Lake, there is an incredibly tiny island. We made our way over to the island to could trade spots on the jet ski. We launched back onto the water with Michelle at the helm and me holding onto my wife with a grip that could only be replicated by professional wrestlers. Michelle was putting along too slowly, so I said, "Hit it, Marge, let's go!" Michelle opened the throttle fully and my weight tipped us back thrusting me off the back of the jet ski and into the water. To put it mildly, it was embarrassing. So then I had to get back on the jet ski. The problem was that every time I would push back up so I could get back on, I kept tipping us over because there was an obvious weight to balance barrier I couldn't overcome.

After several attempts to get back on the jet ski, I accepted the fact that I was stuck in the water. With defeat and shame in my voice, I muttered, "Tow me in." Michelle starts towing me in, but again was going really slow. At this point, I was getting upset and aggravated about the whole situation. I said, "We don't have all day. Punch it!" She heard me loud and clear and gunned the jet ski. At this point it is worth noting that jet skis operate on a jet propulsion system. When she fired the jets, it completely blew my shorts off!

I was verbally freaking out because my pants were off, but I had caught them on one of my heels. She turned around and busted out laughing at me. Internally I was dying on the inside. I said, “Help me, help me.” She said, “Oh, oh, you’re blinding me with your shiney hiney.” The whole event was a real fiasco. When she stopped I had to grab my pants and put them back on. It then dawned on me as I looked down that when I flew off, my wedding ring had flown off in the water.

It just crushed me because that ring was custom-made. I had a custom-made ring for my wife, and she had a custom-made ring for me and my big sausage finger, and I lost it. It flew in the water, and I couldn’t figure out where it was. I was so bummed out at that moment that all I wanted to do was go home. And it just created this tension. And here’s the lesson that I learned in all of this. That you can lose your ring, but don’t lose your marriage. You got to stay committed to one another. All couples are going to fight. That’s a reality. If you haven’t fought yet, you may not entirely be ready to get married, honestly. The question is not whether or not you fight. It’s how you fight. And the question I’ve got for you is, are you going to fight in your marriage or are you going to fight for your marriage?

The ring I’m wearing now is actually the third ring that I’ve had, but I have the same, one wife. What I know is that you can lose a ring, but don’t lose your cool, don’t lose your marriage. Most importantly, stay consistent in your communication. I think that three things are essential for us to remember in

having healthy communication. The first one is this: being clear is being kind. See, we're used to thinking like a single person and we're used to thinking things through in our head. We've grown up with different families that have had 18 or 25 or 50 years to get to know us. When you decide that you're going to get married, though, this is a new person learning you and how you communicate.

You can't read each other's minds, so being clear in your communication is the kindest thing you can do. Think about how the other person is receiving the information you're communicating. The clearer you can be, the better it's ultimately going to go. The second thing to consider is that in relationships, there are always gaps. There are going to be moments in your relationship where things are not going to go as expected. For instance, maybe you make plans that you're going to meet one another for dinner, and your spouse is running late. This is a gap in the relationship. You can choose in this gap to believe the worst about the other person: you could think, "Oh, well, they're always staying late at work. They didn't care about my time or our relationship." Or, you can choose to believe the best about the person in this situation. Maybe they hit traffic. Perhaps something important came up. Giving them the benefit of the doubt is an important thing.

Ephesians gives us excellent advice. It says, "Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love." You see, the key is to bear with one another in love. This means that you don't think too much of yourself, you're

humble, but you give them the benefit of the doubt. I think it's crucial to be consistent and fill in the gap with trust. Why place trust? Your relationship matters and because you want them to give you the benefit of the doubt when it's you running behind. When it comes to our bride or groom, it's kind to communicate.

Everything communicates. Our body language communicates. Our words communicate. We have to remember: never give up. Never give up. We really lose when we stop communicating, when we go radio silent, and we're not letting the other person know what's going on. It's essential to listen, and I mean really listen to the other person. Nobody cares what we have to say until they know how much we care, and listening and paying attention to someone is so closely associated to loving them that most people don't even know the difference. So let's really take the time to listen to one another.

I would also say don't operate in absolutes. What do I mean by that? Well, be careful when you use words like "you never" or "you always". The funny thing is most couples don't get hysterical, they get historical. They keep bringing up all the junk of the past. We need to be very careful about absolutes. Nobody wants to live in a world that is rigid. Arguments will happen, but to jump to "you always do this." or "there was that one time" only fuels the fire and allows the argument to become hurtful. So quit fighting in your marriage and start fighting for your marriage. It is always important to quickly forgive one another. We need to hear when we have offended

someone. We need to respond with sincere apologies. I know I did this. It hurt you. That wasn't my intention. I'm sorry. Do you forgive me? The appropriate response if we are on the receiving end of the apology is always, "yes, I forgive you." Then drop it, let it go. Once you have made amends, makeup, leave the event in the past, learn from the lesson.

This is vital because peace is necessary. A happy and healthy relationship blossoms when honest communication takes place. Here is a cool thing I ask couples to do before I perform a wedding or when I'm sitting down with a couple for marriage counseling. We first talk about the need and importance to apply scripture to our lives. Then we read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which is called the love chapter. It's probably one of the most quoted verses that you're going to hear in wedding ceremonies and you're probably familiar with it. It says,

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts always hopes, and always perseveres."

Now, here is the assignment. Replace the word love with your name. Whenever you put your name in place of love in this passage, you need to think this through as a checklist. Am I really loving my spouse the way that God would expect me to love them? When it comes to my wife, I have to say, "Joe is patient, Joe is kind." And I stop, and I have to ask myself, am

I? Now I want you to take a moment and look at “God’s Love Test” at the end of this chapter.

There are blanks where you can fill in your name. Take it a step further and read it to one another. Now ask yourself this question, “Am I living up to these expectations that God has for me, for my spouse?” We must apply communication and be transparent with one another. Take it from a guy who has lost a couple of rings in his life. You can always lose a ring. It’s not that big of a thing. You don’t want to lose your cool and you don’t want to lose your marriage. Communication is the key to clarity, love, and showing your spouse that you care.

GOD'S LOVE TEST

First, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 out loud to see what love does in a relationship.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Now, reread 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 with your name in the place of "love" and see if there are areas to improve in your relationship.

_____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast, _____ is not proud. _____ does not dishonor others, _____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not easily angered, _____ keeps no record of wrongs. _____ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. _____ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

SECRET SAUCE COMMUNICATION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How is 'Being Clear is Being Kind' a truth when communicating? Why is it so important that we express ourselves clearly by stating what we need, feel, or think instead of assuming others 'just know'? How can they know, if they aren't told?

Think about areas in your relationships where you fill 'the gap' and make (or have made) assumptions about situations. How will you apply 'you could choose to believe the best about the person in (specific) situation'? What specific person, or on-going situation will you apply this to? How will believing the best about others improve your relationships and your outlook in life?

Whether you're married, in a relationship or single: read 1 Corinthians 4-7 and personalize it, using your name. Read it out loud. Do this every night and every morning until your next group meeting. When your group meets again share how your outlook and attitude toward others (and yourself) has changed.

Keep up the good work, fight the good fight!

“

If fear is the great enemy of
intimacy, love is its true friend.

HENRI NOUWEN



Ingredient #6

ROMANCE & INTIMACY

*And the man and his wife were both
naked and were not ashamed.*

Genesis 2:25

I am convinced that Satan works hard to tempt couples to have sex before they get married. I am also convinced that Satan works twice as hard to make sure married couples don't have sex. In the beginning things are simple, but add jobs, a mortgage and kids and things quickly get complicated. Romance and intimacy are like fire. In the fireplace it will keep your home warm, but if it gets out of bounds it can burn your house down. Sadly, couples will end their marriages because they say they ran out of love. Giving up on your marriage because you ran out love is like getting rid of your car because you ran out of gas. Relationships require our attention. Like stoking a fire, we need to care for the intimate needs of our spouse.

I will never forget one phone call from a man who was really struggling. It was undeniable that things had gone cold in their

marriage. This couple had lost that loving feeling. It obviously wasn't going well when he said, "Hey, Pastor Joe, I need to talk to you. I think I need to get a divorce." I asked, "Whoa, what is happening in your relationship?" "Things aren't going the way I expected." There it was... an unmet expectation. With a quiver in his voice, he confessed, "Things are not going well. It's been a long time since we have been physical. I wouldn't even call what we have a marriage. We're just two people living in a house, sharing bills, and we lost all feelings of love." In a moment of divine intervention, God prompted me to ask, "Hey, we live in Kansas, and you're a Kansas City Chiefs fan, right?" Without hesitation he said, "Yeah, I am." Then I asked, "How is their season going?" It is worth noting that this was the year before the Chiefs won the Superbowl. They had been in a 50 year slump. He said, "Well, they're not really having a very good season." I said, "Why not?" He responded, "My team can't complete the passes. They can't get first downs. Honestly the season has been a train wreck." Immediately, I asked, "Does that mean that you need a new team?" Without hesitation he said, "No way! I'm a Chiefs fan for life!" At that moment of clarity, I said, "So, you don't need a new team. You just need a new season."

We need a stronger commitment to our marriages than we have to our favorite sports teams. We don't need a new spouse when things go south. Just like sports teams, marriages need new seasons. When couples take their wedding vows to be committed to each other whether rich or poor, sick or well, better or worse, it reveals that couples will go through seasons

of ups and downs.

1 Corinthians 7:28 explains, “Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.” 20 years of pastoral counseling with married couples proves this reality to be true. Life is going to have ups and downs. There are going to be challenges. When newly married couples are celebrating the honeymoon period, they are enjoying a season of marital bliss. But, it is still a season.

Over time, things get in the way. Careers get in the way. Stress gets in the way. Kids get in the way. There seems to be an increasing list of challenges couples face that cause them to lose that loving feeling. Despite the challenges of marriage, I can testify that I am happily married on all fronts. My wife is hot and I love her. How do we maintain that loving feeling? We committed to some key ingredients that we learned from other couples who have been happily married and understood the recipe for relentless romance.

When I sit down and talk to couples who are in trouble, I often ask this question. “Can you tell me about your last date?” A common response is for one of them to say, “What’s that?” Or “It’s been years.” The problem is easy to assess at this point.

No matter the what stage your marriage is in, make a commitment to date your mate. Early in a relationship, dates are what you expect and what you do. Dating is how you got to know one another. Time together helped you find out what

you like and what you love about the other person. The same things that moved you from acquaintances to lovers are going to be the things that sustain you in the years to come. Dating your mate is vital.

My wife and I made a decision early on that we were going to date every week. I've told you some stories earlier, but here's another one. We were so broke when we got married that we couldn't spend the night out, but we decided we would do things together. We were living in Houston, Texas, a suburb called Pearland to be exact. Pearland had a dollar theater. We called it the Sticky Floor Theater because it was so bad that when we walked in our feet would stick to the floor. Financially, it was a great option. One day we went and watched this movie, and it really wasn't a very good film. My wife and I were the only two people in the back of the theater, but then there was this one lady way in front of us. When the movie was over, we got up to leave. The lady in front of us had absurdly cackled and laughed through the whole movie and was annoyingly comical. In fact, she was the best part of the whole movie. As we were leaving, she sat and continued to watch the credits like she was looking for her name or something. I thought that was really strange for this particular movie. As we were about to reach the door, I stopped. Michelle grabbed my arm and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Wait a minute. I'm watching this lady for a second." She said, "What?" Then looking at the lady I just went, "Cuh-caw, cuh-caw" as loud as possible. Michelle and I could see the silhouette of this lady. She immediately started turning like, "Who's that? Who's

there?” Michelle was freaking out in sheer humiliation and started nervous laughing. She grabbed me. We ran out of the theater and jumped in the car. We tried to drive away before somebody recognized us. Ee were pastors in the community and people knew us. We lived a public life. Michelle was like, “I can’t believe you did that.” We laughed, and we laughed, and we laughed.

The date didn’t stop there. I thought to myself, I’m going to up the ante. I saw a KFC and as I pulled up to the order screen, the guy says, “Welcome to KFC, may I take your order?” I replied, “Bagok!” At this point my precious wife was freaking out. One would expect the other guy to laugh or something; instead, he went, “Bagok?” So, I bagokked again, “BAGOK!” We then heard what could only be the rustling sound of the manager slapping the headset off some teenager, putting it on his head and saying, “Sorry for that confusion, sir, welcome to KFC. May I take your order?” I reacted with, “Bagok! Bagok! Bagok!” We reversed out of the drive-thru and drove away just laughing and laughing and laughing. Well, what’s my point? My point is that one should not get caught in the drive-thru making funny chicken noises. Still, more important than that, laugh together. Do things together. Create memorable moments where you can laugh because if you can laugh together as a couple and share fun experiences you will feel close together. You are in it together. Fun and laughter make deposits into your relational account. This opens the door to greater intimacy later. If couples can laugh together, grow together, and do life together, the ground work is laid for special moments together.

Friendship in a marriage makes romance so much better. Let's talk about a topic that often doesn't get discussed in the church. As a pastor, I preach on the topic of marriage and sex because I think it's a huge deal. As I stated before, I believe Satan works really, really hard to get unmarried people to have sex. And, I think that he works even harder to get married people not to have sex. It creates an incredible amount of emotional tension. I believe the real issue is our perspective on sex. Let's consider three ways that someone can look at sex.

The first one is a high school version. It is when we think that sex is something we can do. The problem with this version is, if sex is just something that we can do, it's really about activity and not about a person. You've probably heard teenage kids say, "Oh man, we were doing it." Well, if you are just doing it, that isn't very special. It's just an activity and not about the other person. This is a very selfish view of sex. It's not a view that God has for us. It's not a view that is going to sustain a marriage.

Another view of sex is that it is something that you have. "Hey, babe, you want to go have some sex?" That sounds innocent enough, but it can be misleading. It is misleading because if it is viewed as something you can have and something you can possess, and something you can control. The error in this version is sex becomes transactional instead of relational.

I've met with hundreds of couples and through thousands of hours of counseling heard the same words many times.

Someone says, “The only time that we have sex is when it’s a special occasion or my birthday.” Sex becomes a tradeoff: if you do ‘this’ for me, then I’ll do ‘this’ with you. And, the reason for sex is no longer healthy. This subtle change in our view of sex from relational into transactional is profound. It is a dangerous place to be.

What’s the third way to view sex? It is when we view sex as something we share. You see, this is the way that God presents sex. He doesn’t want us to withhold from one another.

In fact, God created sex. Sex is good. Sex is fun. Anything that you do together as a couple, that you both agree on, is fair game as long as it is solely with one another. If it is something that you share, sex becomes a way to gratify, encourage, and love the other person. You’re focusing your attention on their desires and needs; they’re focusing on your desires and needs, and it beautifully strengthens your marriage.

What happens when you go through a tough season? The first thing we look at is what the Bible says, “Do not withhold from one another unless for a season of prayer so that you won’t fall into temptation.” (1 Corinthians 7:5) What are some of the temptations that come up and that get in the way? Outside interests and outside parties can present huge temptations. If you’re married, you need to be careful with your friends of the opposite gender and you need to remain diligently aware of your temptations. Try not to be in situations where you are alone with the opposite gender. Your priority is to build trust and a life with your spouse.

From my years of counseling experience, I can tell you one of the greatest mistakes that couples make. It is that people think that they can look at things on the internet, like porn, and it won't affect them. They think it doesn't lead to temptations. This is absolutely not true. It does affect you over time. My dog, Sparkles, runs around our house and she is a great dog. I love Sparkles, but she doesn't always follow the plan. The plan is for her to eat out of her dish and drink out of her bowl. One time, in the middle of the night, I heard this lapping sound of water, and I found it weird. I stumbled into the bathroom and found that Sparkles drinking out of the toilet. Talk about disgusting. Now, did my dog get sick from the first time? No. However, if I continued to let Sparkles drink out of the toilet, she would become sick, It could create problems and possible destroy her health. Looking at porn is the same thing as drinking out of a toilet. The first time you think it's not a big deal. Over time, it can really create sickness, a wedge, and false expectations that can devastate your relationship. Ben Franklin said this about fires in Philadelphia, "An ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure." In other words, if you put guardrails in place upfront on these areas, you won't fall into temptation later.

Relationships often flounder and fall when there is not a regular and consistent sex life. One way you can make sure that porn or other third parties do not enter into the relationship is by having a red-hot relationship with your spouse.

Wives often times are not drawn away from a relationship

because of visual things. It is often because of emotional connections. Knowing this to be true, we need to be cautious with social media and who we are connecting with. Old flames from high school might need to be cut off. We need to constantly consider our pursuit of one another. Are we meeting each other's needs? A big one to consider here is foreplay. Long before you actually get to the moment in the bedroom, what is happening to connect emotionally? Creativity with what is happening throughout the day can build-up which allows for an emotional connection and this leads to anticipation.

I think it is important to hold the hand of your spouse. I think it is important to kiss each other every day. It is important to speak kind words and loving things. For my wife, Michelle, the thing that she loves more than anything is when I rub her back while we talk about the day. The human side of me gets tired sometimes and would rather watch TV and go to sleep. I know that doesn't sound very sexy. We had this moment one time in bed and...hold on, spoiler, this is not going to get weird... my dog Sparkles, you know the one that drinks from the toilet, came up and jumped up on the bed. She especially loves to do this when it's time to go to sleep. She always nuzzles next to me and wants me to pet her. I, of course, oblige and pet her. Then she will typically go and lay down on her spot in the corner where she has her little pillow, no big deal. So, on this particular night while I was petting Sparkles, my wife, said, "Well, I wish I was Sparkles. Why don't you ever give me back rubs like that?" I just looked at her, and I said, "Well if you

were naked and lying next to me and giving me attention, I would probably give you a back rub too.” We both busted out laughing. Then to make things even more fun, it dawned on me that our dog is named Sparkles. I mean, that’s practically a stripper name! So, I broke that down for Michelle. We laughed some more. The simple point is that we need to initiate more often. Like Sparkles, don’t be afraid to make a move.

Initiating and expressing your needs and desires to the person you married is necessary. You are there to love and care for one another. Moments of intimacy will carry you far in a relationship. All relationships go through rough patches, but it is crucial to find your way back to intimacy. You don’t need a new spouse. Divorce is not the option. New seasons can begin any day. Good things can become great things. No matter what happens in your relationship, with God and some diligence, you can always turn it around.

SECRET SAUCE ROMANCE AND INTIMACY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why is it important to let your spouse (or the other person in a relationship) know what you need and also, to ask them how you're doing regarding what their needs are (unmet expectations)?

What makes you have a good 'belly laugh' when you're on a date? What's the craziest thing you've done that comes close to Pastor Joe screeching "Bagok" into a fast-food order screen?

Reflect on when you meet your spouse. What do you remember about them? How long after you met them did you begin to date? What was your first date like?

If or when your relationship is in a difficult season who do (will) you get help from? What kind of things has been beneficial for your marriage or relationship (establishing regular date nights, talking about feelings and needs with one another, remembering to laugh again, get counseling, etc.)?

What guardrails do you think are important to have in relationships whether marriage or dating?

“

What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.

MOTHER TERESA



Ingredient #7

FAMILY

*After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fights for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.
Nehemiah 4:14*

I love homemade chocolate pie the way Grandma used to make it. My mom has a recipe for a chocolate pie that my grandma passed from generation to generation. Every time I have a piece of this pie, I think of my grandmother, and thank God I am part of this family! It would be a tragedy if we ever lost Grandma's chocolate pie recipe. Every once in a while, a family friend will have dinner with us and marvel at the pie we serve. They almost always ask for the recipe.

Families aren't perfect. We all pass down good and bad habits from generation to generation. Ultimately, we reproduce who we are when we model relationships with our kids. If we don't

have the secret sauce of parenting, we can always ask for the recipe.

God has the recipe for a healthy family. There are several vital ingredients that we can include practically and spiritually to build our families. Almost everyone fights with their family at some time, but God calls us not to fight with our families. He calls us to fight for our families.

When we look through the Old Testament, we discover this principle has been around since the beginning of the family. God knew that there was always an attack on the family. Right after God formed the family with Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, Satan started attacking this first family in Genesis 3 by twisting God's words and tricking Adam and Eve to follow their desires instead of following God's commands. When this first family stepped away from God's leadership, every family after has had to fight for their families by returning to God's recipe for the family.

Nehemiah is an excellent example of a leader that led families to seek God and start fighting for their families. Nehemiah saw that God's city, Jerusalem, had been destroyed, and the walls were down, leaving the city with no defense. The Bible tells us that he was broken-hearted when he answered God's call to rebuild the city walls. Nehemiah prayed about the plan. He had a clear set of steps, secured the necessary resources, and rallied God's people to rebuild the city.

The fantastic thing is that with God's help, they were able to rebuild the wall and provide protection around the city in just 52 days! Now here's why that's significant for us. No matter where you are with your family, there is hope. You may be in a family situation that feels broken and beyond repair. The story of Nehemiah demonstrates that when we are prepared to follow God's plan to rebuild anything, including our families, God can work quickly to restore hope and security for families.

We have an enemy named Satan that attacks us. Nehemiah had an enemy that was trying to attack the people in the city. And so, while he had people rebuilding their parts of the wall, he understood that there was a real threat. Nehemiah clarifies the need to fight for our families in light of the threats we face as families. In Nehemiah 4:13-14, we hear his rally cry for protecting our families.

"Therefore, I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears, and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

Not only were people working to rebuild the walls where their families lived, but Nehemiah challenged them to protect their progress as they rebuilt the wall. There are many things to fear as we lead our families, but God reveals three key ingredients

necessary in leading a healthy family as we build and protect our families.

PRAYER

Before we take a stand to fight for our family, we need to get on our knees and pray for our family. Prayer can change things. Prayer activates our faith, calls God into the fight and prepares us for the future.

The business of life tends to get in the way of our family prayers. One simple way to pray as a family is during our meals together. Whether that's at home around a table, in a restaurant, or a car going through a drive-thru, we need to pray because our kids need to see that prayer is a priority in our family life. We reproduce who we are, not what we want. When prayer becomes a central part of our lives, it becomes the base for our healthy family recipe. Prayer is an essential ingredient for fighting for our families. God leads us to pray.

INTENTIONALITY

If we are going to fight for our families, we need to be intentional with our kids. We're never going to raise spiritual champions on accident. We're not going to wake up one day and say, "I just can't believe all this worked out."

We need to be intentional about what we do because we live in a world that is consistently leading our kids to be like the world instead of following the example of Jesus. If we look at the number of advertisements our kids see in a day, we realize

that major companies have focused their time and resources to influence kids' choices strategically. Companies are intentional about leading our children to buy their products and live their lifestyle. But God calls us to be intentional about helping them grow and live a spiritual life that honors God. I think that's why it says in Deuteronomy 6:6-7,

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

We can't give our kids anything that we don't have. We need to be intentional and consistent with our kids. Consider how kids learn to ride a bike. No one gets on a bicycle and starts riding without some help and guidance. Practice doesn't make perfect. It makes it permanent. Deuteronomy 7 also says we need to talk to them when we sit in our house, when we walk by the way, when we lie down and when we rise. This passage means that as we go through life, we need to make critical investments of time and be intentional about these conversations. I find that it's vital as parents that we intentionally have time with the kids.

We need to have a time where we talk as a family. One of the ways we do this is by using our box of questions. We have a box filled with questions on cards, and we pull out those questions and have a discussion as a family. We pray before our meals. We intentionally take our kids with us when running an errand

or going across town because we want that windshield time. Other times we get a Coke with one of the kids after school and sit down and talk with them about the things going on in their lives.

Long trips can be great times to connect with our kids. I vividly remember one of our long trips from Derby, Kansas, to Omaha, Nebraska. I had to prepare for an upcoming message at church, so I sat in the middle of the minivan, and my wife, Michelle, drove as our 17-year-old son, Dre, sat in the front passenger seat. They began to talk, and they were intentional about spending time together. I was amazed at how much our teenager opened up about what was happening in his life. When we travel on family journeys, we always ask about their favorite part of this trip. Both Michelle and Dre said the best part of the journey was the windshield time during the long drive. Kids want to know that you love them and the way that they spell love is T I M E.

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the third ingredient we can use when we fight for our families. We need to lead our family to a place of protection. Nehemiah knew the walls provided protection and boundaries. Boundaries will help protect our kids from life altering consequences. In the same way we use fences to protect our kids from traffic dangers, healthy boundaries defend our families from unhealthy relationships and outcomes.

Security is a high priority among kids growing up today. At the time I'm writing this book, we have kids at home that are 3, 7, 11, and 12 years old. Every night one of our kids will ask if we've locked the doors before they go to bed. They're so concerned about the locked doors because they have a fear that somebody's going to come into the house when we're sleeping. It has become a natural routine for us to make sure that the garage is closed and that the front door is locked as we head to bed.

Some practical ways that we set boundaries include when and where our kids play. We also pay attention to who our kids spend time with in our neighborhood, at church, school and sports. We use parental controls on their electronic devices to set boundaries on what they watch and download and set limits on how long the devices can be used. We encourage our kids to spend time off devices and with other people to help build their relationship skills.

We give our kids daily responsibilities around the house to help build a healthy work ethic to prepare for life. If we didn't set expectations for our kids to take ownership to maintain our yard, home and cars they would easily take these things for granted and not take care of the family we are building together.

HOW DO WE HANDLE DISCIPLINE?

As parents, we have unique opportunities to leave impressions on our children, leading them to become all that God wants

them to be. I know some of us are probably thinking, "Yeah, if they act up, I'm going to leave an impression all right." How, though, should we discipline our children? I grew up in a family that spanked as a form of discipline. We parent foster kids, and foster parents are not allowed to spank kids they foster. I have learned that there are many other ways we can motivate and discipline children. Some of these include redirection, time-outs and loss of toys or privileges. We have personally learned that the more creative the consequence, the better the child will have learned the expectation.

Whatever your method of discipline as parents, it is important to be unified in your discipline approach and be consistent. When parents are not consistent, kids will test every crack in the foundation. Something I've learned as a parent is that the punishment must fit the crime. For instance, when our oldest son was in high school, he loved playing video games more than getting good grades. We set a standard of good grades in exchange for game time. Despite the clear expectation, as his time on video games increased, his grades slowly declined. I remember being calm and praying for God to help me parent our son in this area of his life. I prayed, "God, please, help me figure out how on earth we are going to help him understand the importance of school." In the middle of this struggle, between gaming and grades, he made a big mistake. He lied to us about some schoolwork. There's nothing worse than when your kid lies to you. It wasn't an enormous lie, but we wanted to make sure that small lies didn't become big lies, and that our kid would grow up to be a liar. That could ruin his life. What

did we do? We sat down and confronted the issue directly with our son. He admitted he lied to us. He said, "I know, I lied." But then he made a fascinating statement. He said, "It's not that big a deal. It was such a small lie." I said, "Hey, no problem. I know that you like video games, and I'm not going to take your PlayStation away from you. I'm just not going to do that." And you could see a look of relief on his face. In his head, he probably thought, "Dad finally gets it. He's not taking away my PlayStation. That's awesome." I said, "But here's what I need. I need the power cord for your PlayStation." He looked at me with total confusion. I said, "Hey, it's just a small thing. No big deal. Right?" That day he learned his lesson—no more lies. His grades came up and he started doing much better. I think it's essential that we ask God for help parenting our kids. I know that God gave me the idea to take his power cord. I am not that smart!

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE KIDS YET?

You may not have kids yet and think that there isn't anything to do before starting a family or having kids. Just remember God had Noah build the ark before the rain started.

Before you have kids, I would recommend getting involved in a local church if you don't currently have one. Do life with other people who are pursuing God because you will have a healthier family life when you're around other people seeking the same things. You will also have an opportunity to see how people raise their children and this will help you begin thinking about the kind of family you want. Maybe even begin serving at this

local church in the children's ministry. Kids are fun and there's no question your faith will grow. Finding a church will help provide the confidence necessary for your plans for the future. It is essential to know and trust the places our kids interact and grow with others. It is a big deal to be a part of a local church even before you start having kids.

WHERE ARE WE LEADING OUR FAMILIES?

One of the most incredible stories that I've heard recently is an old story about a successful attorney that lived in a major city that experienced a lot of snow during the winter months. He was a very successful attorney, but he struggled with alcohol. Every day, he would leave his home, his lovely wife and six kids, and make his way downtown. As he would walk to his office to do his work, he would stop and have a drink at a local pub along the way. This habit continued and became his pattern for years.

One morning, he got up, and it was snowing as he was walking to work. On this day, though, something was different. Before he got to the bar, he stopped, looked back and realized his six-year-old son snuck out of the house and had followed him to work that day. When he looked past his son, he realized his little boy was placing his little feet in his footprints that he had left in the snow. He looked up and he saw that he was standing right in front of the bar.

He ran to his son and scooped him up, taking him back to their house. He put him in the arms of his mother, and he

immediately went downstairs into the basement and he began to weep and cry. His footprints had led his son to the bar. In this critical moment, he had a life changing conversation with God. He admitted that he put alcohol before God and his family. He prayed, “I’ve made it a priority to do what I want, and today I discovered that I was leading my child to follow in my footsteps. God, I will not lead my children to alcohol, but I will take steps moving forward today to lead them to be close to you.”

Where are we leading our families? If our children follow our footsteps, where will they lead? I hope that we will show our children to follow in the footsteps that lead to God.

It seems obvious that we can pass down family recipes for holiday dishes from generation to generation. In that case, we can follow God’s recipe for a healthy family by modeling prayer, intentionality, and boundaries that prepare and protect our families. Let’s fight for our families.

SECRET SAUCE FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What style of discipline did you have as a child? If you could go back, what would you want your parents to know about different approaches they could have taken to help you change or redirect your behavior?

If you're a parent do you use that same style as you grew up with? What changes have you made?

What parenting style or style of correction have you seen other families use that you believe is beneficial and positive?

If you have more than one child, discuss the need for and the results of parenting each child according to their unique bend - around the topic of discipline.

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Page 16. Chef Jason & Joe Boyd picture, derbyinformer.com

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Pg 26. Chris Landsberger

Pg 40. Joe Boyd

Pg 56. unknown

Pg 66. <https://wanderthemap.com/tag/table-rock-lake/>

Pg 78. Joe Boyd

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WHAT AM I MISSING?

If you have ever tried and failed to recreate your favorite restaurant dish at home, you probably have wondered what are you missing. When we get out of the kitchen and jump into the world of relationships, we see social media posts of couples in love that seem too good to be true and again we ask, “What am I missing?”

God created relationships and wants to guide us through the secret sauce of relationships.

- Learn the 7 essential ingredients of healthy relationships.
- Learn the 3 simple things a Harvard study reveals will 99.9% divorce proof marriages.
- Discover the strengths and weaknesses of your relationship by taking God’s love test that is found in Scripture.

Now is the time to stop trying and start training for relational health.



Joe Boyd is the Lead Pastor of Grace Fellowship in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota and is on a mission to help everyone experience grace!

He is a small town guy with God sized dreams. Joe is a national conference speaker, been featured in two church leadership books, and most notably was on America’s Funniest Home Videos. Before coming

to Grace, Joe started one of the fastest growing churches in America and was recognized as a John Maxwell Top 100 Transformational leader.

Joe and his wife, Michelle, have been happily married for 15 years. They are passionate about adoption and love their boys, Dre, Koehn, and Robin.