



WORTH FIGHTING FOR. #2: CULTIVATE

Text: Song of Solomon 1:1-2:15

Breakaway Executive Director Timothy Ateek

Marriage is awesome. But marriage is work. All relationships, including marriage, are going to require intentionality in order to cultivate a healthy relationship and keep the fire burning strong.

1. **Read Song of Solomon 1:1-3.** T.A. talked about how we “smell” like who or what we spend time with. We should want our reputation or character to smell like Jesus. What habits or practices do you have that help you smell more like Jesus?

2. **Read Song of Solomon 1:4.**
 - a. Why is it essential to have godly men or women who are actively speaking into your life?

 - b. How can your group be a source of those sorts of encouraging and accountability-providing relationships?

3. **Read Song of Solomon 1:5-2:14.** What have you done this week to demonstrate your love for your spouse or another person of significance in your life?

4. **Read Song of Solomon 2:15.** T.A. talked about the metaphorical foxes that ruin a vineyard and how we need to look for those foxes in our own relationships. What are some foxes that may be sneaking around your vineyard?

5. **Read 1 John 4:7-21.**
 - a. How did Jesus show you the sort of love that T.A. challenged us to show our spouses?

 - b. Why is it essential to remember that “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19)?

Challenge: What is a specific rhythms or habits will you implement in order to cultivate the most important relationships in your life?

Prayer: If you are married, set aside a couple of minutes each day for the next month to pray through these 30 Days of Marriage Prayers by Tony Evans.

<https://go.tonyevans.org/hubfs/pdf/30DaysMarriagePrayers-Ebook.pdf>

STUDY DEEPER

10 Ways to Grow Your Marriage While Having Young Kids

My wife, Esther, and I live in a small parsonage next to our church. So does Isaiah. So does Naomi.

With biblical names like these, you'd think Isaiah and Naomi would be the ideal roommates. But we've noticed that Isaiah (who just turned 3) can be pretty moody, and Naomi (who just turned 1) has a powerful set of vocal chords.

I love being a parent, and we have awesome kids. They give me so much joy. But it's not always easy. Having kids permanently changes marriage. You try to have a conversation, and you're constantly interrupted; you plan time to connect and you're completely exhausted; you try to plan a date night and then realize how expensive a babysitter is. You get the idea.

Lately, I've been thinking about something my mom once said: being a parent, for all the strains it can put on your marriage, also allows your marriage to grow deeper and richer. It's like going into battle with someone, coming home, and then realizing what good friends you've become because you were in the trenches together. So I'm learning to see this challenging season as an opportunity for our marriage, not merely a phase to endure.

After my walk with Christ, nothing should take a higher priority in my life than cultivating intimacy and friendship with my wife—not even being a dad. In fact, I know I can't be the dad God calls me to be unless my marriage is strong. Here are some strategies we've reflected on that might be helpful to other young parents in a similar season of life.

Ten Strategies for Growth

1. Kiss/hug/flatter your spouse intentionally throughout the day.

Let this be the first thing you do when you get home each day. I get mobbed by my kids at the front door, who want to wrestle. I want to give them attention, but I also want them to see that Esther is a priority that nothing can displace. Little daily installments of touch, affirmation, and attention go a long way.

2. Shell out the money for babysitters and vacation, as much as you can.

It's expensive, but it's a worthy investment. When planning a date night, I often think, Can we afford this? But when we do it, I always think, I'm glad we did this—we needed it. It's so important to have times of laughter, recreation, and play with your spouse. The old saying is corny but true: "Families that play together stay together."

3. Go on walks.

This has been a game-changer for us because our kids are actually quiet in the stroller. We get exercise and sustained conversation, both of which can easily get crowded out when life is busy. If walking doesn't work, perhaps you can pursue another hobby together. For example, if your gym offers childcare and you feel comfortable with it, drop the kids off and work out together.

4. Have creative date nights.

We've developed our own weekly "date night" at home that typically involves putting the kids to bed early, reading a chapter of my grandmother's book on marriage, talking about life, and playing a board game. Having a "date night in" saves money and reduces the tyranny of constant TV in the evening.

5. Text throughout the day.

I don't like the way technology is always distracting me from the present, but if there's one person with whom I want to be in a continuous text dialogue, it's my wife. It's a little thing that helps further our friendship, jokes, and fun. It shows I'm thinking about her. It's a way to communicate that cannot be interrupted by a crying baby.

6. Plan times to be intimate together.

Sometimes parents of young kids have difficulty finding time for intimacy. Don't be afraid to plan this into your weekly schedule. Planned sex is better than no sex, and it's a way to show commitment to this area of your marriage during a busy season.

7. Carve out space to read the Bible and pray together.

Failing to do devotions together is such a missed opportunity. Your spouse probably knows you better than anyone else does, and thus is the best person to sharpen you spiritually.

8. Take interest in your spouse's daily life.

It's easier to drift apart when you're disconnected from what's occupying your spouse throughout the day. If they work, ask them lots of questions about what's happening in the office, and be their biggest advocate and supporter. If they stay home, help them out with the chores so that you know and appreciate all they do around the house.

9. Cultivate compassion for your spouse's greatest weakness.

Being a parent can bring to the surface your spouse's deepest fears, sins, and failures. It's easy to despise those things, particularly to the extent they're different from your own struggles. Here are a few ways to fight that judgment:

- Remember and grieve your own sin.
- Ask the Lord for special tenderness and compassion.
- Don't needle your spouse with sarcasm.
- Speak respectfully to your friends about your spouse, rather than complaining about them.
- Exhibit tons of patience and gentleness when discussing their weaknesses (if you need to discuss them at all).

10. Pursue your spouse's heart.

What are they interested in these days? What's on their Facebook wall? What are their fears about the next 18 months? What songs do they currently like? Study them. Cultivate "inside jokes" together. Keep secrets with them, not from them (that builds intimacy over the years). Make it your lifelong goal to romance them as much as you did when you were dating, in each season of marriage.

Satan and our culture bombard us with the lie that affairs are more exciting than fidelity. One aspect of our gospel witness is to incarnate the real truth—that absolute, binding commitment is the pathway to real joy. Whatever is exciting in any romantic relationship, whatever intimacy your heart craves, whatever strength you have to offer another person—the goal of marriage is to pour all of that into one person for the rest of your life. This is God's strategy, and it's the most fulfilling way to live. May we cultivate marriages that point to the beauty and reality of Christ in our lives.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-ways-to-grow-your-marriage-while-having-young-kids/>