



FAMILY LIFE – JUST PLAYIN’ AROUND

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“Okay, Dad, lie down on your stomach, arms behind your back, feet crossed. Dacian, you lay on his feet, Heidi you sit on his neck, I’ll be on his back, and we’ll let Aaron sit on his head. Now try to get up, Dad.”

Thus begins another round of family wrestling in our household. I (Jim) try to attain a standing position while our four children do anything they can to keep me down. This is quite a trick when the oldest is almost my size and the youngest is only one and a half. It requires a rather unusual balance of brute force and gentleness. A real challenge!

These periodic wrestling matches on our living room floor have been an important reminder to me of a critical part of marriage and family life that is too often missing – a sense of playfulness. Perhaps playfulness is missing in some families because the opposite is also true – a strong, growing marriage and family life requires much work and effort. In fact, a basic message we convey to engaged couples is that satisfying marriages don’t just happen, but are the result of continuing care and nurturing by each partner. We’ve come to see, however, that a sense of play is an essential ingredient in the work of building a marriage or family, too.

By nature both Susan and I tend to emphasize the serious and responsible side of life. For us, therefore, it’s important to have more times when we take ourselves *less* seriously. We all need to allow the child in us to have free reign from time to time, and probably more often than we think.

In our attempts to cultivate more playfulness, we’ve found the following helpful:

- Try to laugh at some of our family problems rather than “work out” every issue. A stick of margarine left on the kitchen counter on a warm day results in a soupy mess. It can be an occasion for laughter or anger. Often the anger isn’t worth it.
- Have each member of the family share a favorite joke at dinner periodically.
- Let the kids romp in the leaf piles in the fall. Better yet, romp with them. Sure, it means some re-raking, but it’s worth it.
- Give in to spontaneous urges every now and then. It could be a pillow fight, a tickling free for all, or an un-planned game of hide-n-seek.
- As husband and wife, appreciate that an important part of our sexual relating should be playful. The sexual vitality of many marriages wanes because the two partners allow it to become patterned and routine. Sexual intimacy is serious, but it should also be fun.

One measure of family and marital well-being is how many smiles and how much laughter we share. That’s a bit simplistic measure, yet from our experience there’s a profound truth in it.