# Stressed Out? You Might Need Sleep

Feeling irritable lately? You might need more sleep.

Snapping at your kids or spouse, stewing in checkout lines, shouting at road hogs . . . cultural negativity abounds. A recent National Sleep Foundation (NSF) poll suggests links between sleep deficiencies and negative attitudes and behavior.

Over one-third of respondents said they are sleepy during daytime at least a few days monthly. Those who slept under six hours on weeknights reported tiredness, stress and sadness more than eight-hour sleepers did. In general, sleepy people reported more dissatisfaction and anger while better sleepers said they were “full of energy,” “relaxed” and “happy.”

The NSF detects what may be a possible trend toward declining sleep and claims that as many as 47 million sleepy adults may be at risk for injury, health problems, even overeating. NSF Executive Director Richard L. Gelula notes that, “Some of the problems we face as a society—from road rage to obesity — may be linked to lack of sleep or poor sleep.”

I’ll bet that’s why just recently, two inconsiderate drivers blew their horns at me in sticky traffic situations. At least I thought they were inconsiderate. In retrospect, I probably could have been more careful. Their angry horns brought feelings of surprise, shock, tension and a bit of anger. Perhaps we all needed more sleep.

Fatigue can hamper coping and make life seem gloomy. But emotional stress can also hamper sleep. The NSF found this especially true after September 11. The aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington saw reported sleep problems rise. Respondents claimed stress or anxiety as

chief causes, citing fear, depression and nightmares as well.

Sleeplessness influences stress, and anxiety influences sleeplessness. How to break the vicious circle?

Admitting your sleep needs can be a start. NSF spokesman and University of Minnesota neurology professor Mark Mahowald, MD, told WebMD that some see sleep deprivation as a "badge of honor." "We never brag about how much sleep we get," he notes. "We only brag when we get too little sleep."

NSF president James Walsh recommends scheduling "worry time" during the day to consider troublesome issues and plan to resolve them. Then when worries shout for your attention at bedtime, knowing you already have an action plan can bring comfort.

Developing inner stability can enhance personal peace. One ancient Jewish king thought he had it all. Wealth, power and pleasures were his to enjoy. But in the end it all brought him pain. As he reflected on his life, he concluded that strengthening spiritual roots was essential to contentment.

"The reverence of the Lord leads to life," he wrote, "So that one may sleep satisfied." He felt that faith even had implications for work:

"Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones."

Workaholics take heed: Get more sleep. Your family and coworkers may thank you. You might become happier, safer, saner, even thinner. And consider that—just maybe—knowing and following the One who makes life possible might help bring you pleasant dreams.

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# The Second Half of Marriage

*When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. Kerby Anderson looks at the book* The Second Half of Marriage *by David and Claudia Arp and describes the eight challenges of second-half marriages.*

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. In this article we are going to be looking at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* (Zondervan, 1998) by David and Claudia Arp. Suddenly marriages that were child-centered once again become couple-centered. Many marriages do not survive the transition. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, while divorce generally declined, divorces among couples married thirty years or more increased significantly.

In their book, the Arps describe eight themes within a second-half marriage. One is the need to transition from a child-focused marriage to a more partner-centered marriage. Without children as buffers, couples face the challenge of redefining their marriage. Either it becomes more intimate or it slowly disintegrates. A husband married for nineteen years said, “I’m fearful that when our children leave home, we will go our separate ways, because our priorities and interests are so different.”

Couples must learn how to communicate and effectively deal with conflict and anger. Couples often lose the ability to communicate in marriage because there is such an urgent focus on the kids and their needs and problems. One wife said, “The

greatest stress in my marriage is lack of communication—just being able to converse at the end of the day. I always feel as if I'm competing with the computer, the newspaper, or CNN news."

Couples in the second half of marriage must also learn to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. Your parents may have placed certain expectations on you and your marriage that you are still feeling in midlife. A wife married thirty-one years said, "Whatever I do for my parents, I can never meet all of their expectations. Yet I keep trying. I'd have to say unmet expectations are the hardest to deal with. I need to add that my expectations are the hardest to deal with."

Reconnecting with your adult children is also a challenge. As children leave the nest, they leave behind certain requirements and expectations. Our relationship with them changes, and couples in the second half of marriage must reconnect with children who are now adults on a different level. Often we must learn to resist giving advice unless it is requested. And even when we give advice, we should mentally prepare ourselves for the possibility that our grown children may not act on it.

Here we will be looking at these eight themes of second half marriages and discuss the challenges of each of them. We will view them from the kaleidoscope of over five hundred survey responses used by the Arps in writing their book. We pray that this look at second half marriages will help strengthen your marriage no matter how long you have been married.

## Expectations and Companionship

The first challenge is to learn to let go of past marital disappointment, forgive each other, and commit to making the rest of your marriage the best. All of us go into marriage with certain dreams and expectations. Some of these will never

be realized. Are you willing to let go of unmet expectations and unrealistic dreams? You may never build your dream house or go on that exotic vacation. Are you willing to let it go? Can you accept those extra pounds or that gray hair or even no hair at all? Giving up lost dreams and dealing with each other's imperfections is a positive step toward forgiving past hurts and moving on in your marriage.

A wife married for twenty-five years said, "After twenty years of marriage, I finally realized my husband will never be home at 5 p.m. While this is disappointing to me, I simply had to let that expectation go." Another wife said, "During times of testing and disappointment, we kept working on our relationship. We learned how to forgive each other and how to work things out. We are committed to our marriage and we never give up. That's our secret."

The second challenge is to create a marriage that is partner-focused rather than child-focused. When children leave the nest, couples often move from a child-focused marriage to an activity-focused marriage. Community or church activities may now take up the time and energy formerly devoted to children. As valuable as these activities might be, they still serve as buffers to a mutual, partnership marriage. In the second half of marriage, couples need to redefine their roles and functions. What previously worked may no longer be relevant. Marriage can be more personal and more fulfilling as you focus on the couple's relationship rather than the children.

A wife married for thirty-three years said, "It's important to build a good relationship with your spouse so that when the children leave, you have the underlying joy of focusing on each other and not on your adult children."

Key to this is to develop what is called a "companionship marriage." This has been defined as a socially registered commitment between a man and a woman where they seek to know themselves and each other as far as they are capable of being

known. It also involves mutual affection and affirmation where they help each other grow and change in order to become the loving and creative persons they are capable of becoming.

These then are the first two of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Next we will look at two more challenges.

## Communication and Conflict

The third challenge is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, and concerns. Communication is the lifeblood of a good marriage. But what do you do when the communication patterns that seemed to work in the first half of marriage seem inadequate for the second half? When children are gone, there are more spaces of silence, and there is often less to say to each other. Couples may wonder how they made it this far only to end up as quiet strangers in front of each other. Couples in the second half of marriage need to develop intimate and honest communication that focuses on their needs, wants, and dreams at midlife.

A wife married for eighteen years said, “My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won’t communicate or have anything in common. I’m afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention, or ever touches me.” Another wife said, “The greatest frustration for me in my marriage is simply not being understood.”

The fourth challenge is to use anger and conflict in a creative way to build your relationship. Anger and conflict are part of any marriage. Mature couples need to learn how to process anger. Marriage must become a safe place to express your concerns in the context of a loving relationship. This challenge is critical because often the real problem isn’t the facts but the strong negative feelings we harbor. Once those feelings are dealt with, it’s easier to move on and resolve the conflict.

A wife of eighteen years said, “We had the divorce papers ready to sign a couple of times a number of years ago, but both times we looked at each other and said, ‘But I haven’t stopped loving you.’ Even when we couldn’t agree on virtually anything else, we have always agreed on that. Nothing we’ve been through was bad enough to kill the love we have for each other.”

Often the key to dealing with anger is to objectively state the problem and then begin to set forward the solutions. In the process, the couple can also identify what is at stake and what each partner has invested. Finding a solution to the problem is easier when both partners are committed to each other and committed to a mutually satisfying solution. Sometimes this will involve compromise and in other cases, it will involve showing love to your partner by accepting his or her perspective.

These then are the first four of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. In the next section we will look at two more challenges.

## Friendship and Romance

The fifth challenge is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. In the second half of marriage, we can deepen our friendship and become close companions. When we are in a long-term marriage, we become more familiar and comfortable with each other. When we acknowledge that we aren’t perfect, we can relax and enjoy each other. What are you doing to build your friendship with your spouse? Are you working to expand your boundaries and prevent boredom? Are you trying to put more fun back into your marriage? Fun and friendship are two key ingredients in the second half of marriage.

One wife married for twenty years said, “This year has been a time of growth for us as a couple. It started with lots of stress—overcommitment and relationship problems—but God helped

us through it. We just celebrated our twentieth anniversary with a romantic getaway. We've become best friends again. Hope can be restored!"

In their book, the Arps provide some concrete tips for making the second half more enjoyable. First, take care of yourself. Sometimes our back muscles can give us a midlife wake-up call, so exercise and physical therapy should become a way of life. Second, pace yourself. Third, build relationships and maintain them. This is the time of life to beef up your friendships and develop a support system. Fourth, stretch your boundaries. Fifth, stay involved with life. Sixth, hang in there. When you are discouraged, don't throw your life away.

The sixth challenge is to renew romance and restore a pleasurable, sexual relationship. Contrary to popular belief, interest in sex does not have to diminish as we grow older. Actually the research done by the Arps tends to indicate that sexual satisfaction increases rather than decreases with the number of years married. Couples in the second half of marriage need to do three things: protect privacy, cherish the love relationship, and renew romance. These are important priorities.

The Arps list six secrets to rekindle romance. These are: be affectionate, be a listener, be adventuresome, be playful, be in shape, and be a little wacky. As we grow older, the pace of life changes and there is a greater need to stay in shape by eating well, working out, and watching our weight. This is not only good for your marriage. It is good for your health.

These then are the first six of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Let's look at the last two challenges.

## Adapted Relationships and Spiritual Growth

The seventh challenge is to adjust to changing roles with

aging parents and adult children. As children leave the nest, we release them into adulthood. But it is also important to reconnect with them on an adult level. At the same time, you need to balance relationships with your own parents. This will be difficult, especially if your parents did not successfully meet this challenge in their marriage. Whatever your situation, your relationship with your adult children and your elderly parents will affect your marriage. Accepting the circumstances can be key in building a strong second half of marriage. You can't go back and change your family history, but you can make wise choices for the future based upon past circumstances.

The drain of family commitments can take its toll on a second half marriage. One wife of twenty-eight years said, "For me, the emotional drain of trying to be everything to everybody is affecting my relationship with my husband. There is no energy left at the end of the day for me to invest in our marriage."

The challenge of rearing children and sending them into a world also affects one of the other challenges we have discussed: the challenge of communication. One husband of thirty years said, "We don't have an empty nest yet, although two out of three are gone. We've tried to push our children out of the nest but leave the lines of communication open to advise and assist when needed."

The final challenge is to evaluate where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer to each other and to God, and together serve others. Our faith in God should make a difference in our marriage. The relationship of a husband and wife to God provides the foundation for a good marriage that will be tested by the changing circumstances of the second half of marriage. Couples should evaluate their spiritual pilgrimage and seek to grow closer spiritually to each other and to God.

A husband married for thirty-two years said, "The best aspects

of our marriage are companionship, our faith in God, and our love for each other. We try to add to the other's happiness by surprising each other with little gifts, a hug, a kiss, or giving a compliment—or just being thoughtful."

We trust that this has been helpful to you as you seek to strengthen your marriage and grow closer to God. We believe you will grow closer to each other as you grow closer to God. May God bless you.

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# The Wonderful Rise of Masculinity

October 2001

Recently, I was sitting at an airport terminal waiting to board a plane when a man dropped into the seat next to mine. He nodded to me and said, "How're you doing?" I looked at him and said, "Well, that depends on whether you're a bad guy or a hero. Those are your two choices." He smiled; he understood. As we boarded, everybody on that plane was looking at everybody else, scanning their faces, wondering the same thing—are you a bad guy or a hero?

One of the best things to come out of the Sept. 11 attack on America is that masculinity has been restored to its rightful place of honor. After a generation of merciless male-bashing in the wake of feminism's contempt of men, it's a good and fine thing to be a man again, and I for one love it. It seems that men are walking taller and more proudly, more confident in themselves. Young men flooded to the armed forces, ready to

defend their country and grateful to be able to DO SOMETHING about such a heinous attack on America.

We have been reminded what true heroes look like: not sports figures, not entertainers, but the men of Flight 93 who controlled their fear to overtake terrorists and crash a plane into a field instead of a building. True heroes look like the firefighters who ran up the stairwells of doomed, burning buildings to rescue people going down. True heroes look like the police officers who helped people get away from the World Trade Center as they deliberately put themselves in harm's way. And now that we remember what a true hero is, we're seeing long overdue displays of gratitude for the public servants who risk their lives so the rest of us can be safe. Recently a local elementary school invited firemen to a school assembly where they had festooned the auditorium with banners, balloons and posters thanking them for their service. When the group of men entered the room, the kids went absolutely wild with cheers and applause. You'd have thought it was an N'Sync concert!

I'm thankful for the perspective my husband provided on this: he observed that men are able to be men because women are letting them. It seems that unless we women show men the respect and honor due them in their masculinity, they won't fight for it and many will retreat into a most unmanly passivity. But in the attacks on our country, many women have lost our sense of security and we're more in touch with how much we need to be protected. Thank the Lord for His plan that men be strong and self-sacrificing as they rise to the occasion in protecting us! Masculinity is a beautiful strength. God knew what He was doing when He made men men. It's one more way He's bringing glory to Himself in the aftermath of 9/11.

# “It’s Not Your Fault!”

There’s a great scene in the fantasy movie “Disney’s The Kid” where a middle-aged man, played by Bruce Willis, meets up with his little boy self. The two of them go to their childhood home where the boy learns the horrific news that his mother will die soon, and his father blames him. The grown-up version of the boy knows that he carried the terrible burden of guilt and shame about his mother’s death for years. He kneels down, looks his little-boy self full in the face, and assures him, “It’s not your fault,” lifting the burden from the little boy before he ever has to carry it. These four words, “It’s not your fault,” are truly one of the most powerful gifts an adult can give a child. This is a powerful truth that children need to hear and they can’t tell themselves; only an adult can give them this “special revelation.”

Children are naturally self-centered and they think everything that happens to them is connected to them and their choices or their character. Of course that’s not true. Stuff just happens, but a child can’t know that. A little girl’s parents divorce and her world falls apart. She thinks, if I had obeyed more, if I were prettier or more talented, my daddy would still be here. She needs for both parents to say, “This is about us. It’s not your fault.”

A beloved grandparent dies. Or a pet dies, and a child blames himself. He needs to be told that it’s not his fault, and no matter what he thought—like not wanting to visit with his grandpa one afternoon—or what he did—like forgetting to feed the cat—he doesn’t have the power to make those kinds of things happen, and it’s not his fault.

My friend’s son has Tourette’s syndrome, and we were talking

one day about how to help him handle it. I suggested she make sure he knew he wasn't responsible for it, and she assured me, "Oh, he already knows that." But that night, as she was tucking him into bed, she said, "You know this isn't your fault, don't you?" His eyes got big and it was like a huge weight rolled off his shoulders. With great relief in his voice, he asked, "*It ISN'T???*" My friend had thought he already understood, but we can't ever assume kids own that truth until we give it to them.

And if children don't know that bad things are not their fault, they can take on guilt that weighs heavily on them for years. Others react by wrapping themselves in shame. For example, when a girl is sexually abused, she feels dirty and broken, like damaged goods. She needs to be told, "It's not your fault." Even when those broken little girls are grown-ups, the little girl inside still needs for someone to tell her, "It's not your fault."

Has a bad thing—or something a child perceives as bad—happened to a child you know? Give them the gift they can't give themselves, the truth that will set them free. Tell them it's not their fault.

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# Marriage Test

*Is your marriage in the danger zone? How would you know? This article provides a marriage test to help you evaluate your marriage and see if you might need to obtain information or counsel about improving your marriage.*

A few years ago I addressed the issue in an article titled,

"Why Marriages Fail." The material came from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage*, and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like *20/20.* There is also a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*.

## Marriage Test

I want to extend that discussion by providing a test you can apply to your marriage. It is loosely based on a questionnaire developed by Howard Markman at the Center for Marital and Family Studies. There are fifteen questions you answer by giving your marriage points. At the end you total the points to see how your marriage is doing. If your total is positive, you are doing well. If it is negative, then you may need to do some work and perhaps seek counseling.

The first three questions have to do with your background. Many of us come into a marriage without considering our previous family and marital backgrounds. The truth is that we are not blank slates when we get married. Our background does have an influence on our marriage.

The first question is about cohabitation. Living together before marriage could signal a lack of commitment. In fact, numerous studies show that living together can have a detrimental effect on a marriage. Often poor communication patterns are developed in such a living arrangement that carry over into marriage. Here's how you score the first question. If you moved in before the wedding give your marriage a 1. If you waited until after marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The second question involves your parents' marriage. Poor communication and conflict-management skills can be inherited

from parents. If your parents had a poor marriage, give your marriage a 1. If they had a strong marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The third question involves a previous marriage that ended in divorce. It turns out that one of the best predictors for divorce is a previous divorce. Divorcing once could mean a willingness to divorce again. If you had a previous marriage, give your marriage a 1. If this is your first marriage, give it a +1.

## Religion and Finances

The fourth question involves religion which can be the source of strength or strain in a marriage. Religion provides support for marriage and usually discourages divorce. But practicing separate ones can add strain. If you don’t practice religion, give yourself a 2. If you practice different religions, give yourself a 1. If you both attend church regularly, give yourselves a +2.

Question five concerns finances. Money is the number one cause of fights in a marriage. Frequently these differences can lead to marital disharmony or disruption. If you and your spouse fight about money, give your marriage a 1. If you generally agree about spending, give your marriage a +1.

The sixth question also involves finances. In particular it deals with income. Some men aren’t comfortable when the wife is the family breadwinner. If the wife earns more in your marriage, give yourself a 1. If the husband earns more, give yourself a +1.

The seventh question is about your current age. Simply put, older couples are less likely to divorce. If your current age is under 30, give yourself a 1. If you are over 40, then give yourself a +1. If you are over 60, give yourself a +2.

The eighth question is about the length of your marriage. The

longer you are married, the less likely you are to split. If you are married less than five years, give yourself a 1. If you have been married five to ten years, give yourself a +1. If have been married more than ten years, give yourself a +2.

Well, that’s the first eight questions. As you can see these questions focus on all sorts of issues that engaged couples rarely consider, but can be significant indicators of marital success. Keep track of your score and see how your marriage is doing. Although this is not an exhaustive questionnaire, the answers to these questions give you a quick look at how your marriage is doing.

## Support and Family

The ninth question concerns support for your marriage. A lack of support from family or friends for your marriage creates tension and can cause a couple to question their relationship. Was your family supportive of this marriage? Did your friends support your choice in a marriage partner or were they concerned about your choice? If family and friends disapproved, give your marriage a 1. If family and friends approved, give your marriage a +1.

The tenth question revolves around changes in the family. Family additions or changes can impact a marriage. Having a baby, adjusting to an empty nest, or moving Grandma in adds stress. If you have had a recent family change, give your marriage 1. If there have been no big changes, then give your marriage a +1.

The eleventh question deals with conflicting attitudes. Opposing views on key issues in a marriage can cause division. Differences about commitment, beliefs, or expectations are just a few issues that can affect a marriage. If you mostly disagree with each other, give yourself a 2. If you are split about half-and-half, give yourself a 0. If you mostly agree, give yourself a +2.

The twelfth question concerns confidence. Feeling assured that relationships will survive anything can help couples through. If you are doubtful the marriage will last, give your marriage a 2. If you are pretty confident, give your marriage a 0. If you think your marriage will never fail, give yourself a +2.

## Marital Communication

The thirteenth question involves marital communication. It's best if a couple can talk openly about problems without fighting or withdrawing. If you always fight rather than talk about problems, then give yourself a 2. If you sometimes fight, give yourself a 0. If you mostly talk rather than fight, give yourself a +2.

The fourteenth question deals with happiness. Feeling fulfilled in marriage is critical. If you are unhappy in the relationship, give yourself a 3. If you are not consistently happy, give yourself a 0. If you are happy in a relationship, give yourself a +3.

The fifteenth question deals with sex. Being unsatisfied with frequency or quality can create tension in a marriage. If you are unsatisfied with your sex life, give your marriage a 1. If you are satisfied, give yourself a +1.

Well, that's the test. If you have kept track of your answers to these questions, you should have a score. If your score is positive, especially if it is +5 or higher then your marriage is doing well. If your score is negative, then you may want to work on your marriage. That might mean reading a book on marriage, attending a marriage conference, or seek out counseling. That might be helpful even if you had a positive score, but it would be essential if you did not have a positive score.

As I mentioned previously in the article on "Why Marriages Fail," you should not be discouraged by a negative score. The

research does show which marriages might have trouble, but that does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13). So let’s talk about what we can do.

## Steps to Change

We have been talking about marriage and helped you to evaluate your marriage by taking a marriage test. The first few questions dealt with our marital background. Specifically the questions focused on cohabitation, your parents’ marriage, and previous divorce. We do not come into a marriage as a blank slate. Our previous experiences do influence the way we interact with our spouse. Obviously, we can change our behavior but we have to make a concerted effort to do so or else we will fall back into patterns that may adversely affect our marriage.

Many of our other questions dealt with the current status of your marriage. This included such issues as religious background, finances, age, the length of your marriage, support for your marriage, changes in your family, conflicting attitudes, confidence, marital communication, happiness, and sexual satisfaction. Again, many of these factors can be changed with a desire and plan to do so. But if we do not change our behavior then we will fall back into patterns that could be detrimental to our marriage.

I hope you will take the time to act on the results of this test. Most of us go through life and go through our marriages on auto- pilot. We set the controls and then fall back into a pattern that is the result of our background and current circumstances. Perhaps this marriage test will encourage you to work on your marriage. Perhaps this test will show your spouse that there are some issues you need to address.

The sad social statistics about divorce show that many

marriages fall apart for lack of adequate attention. Every year a million couples end up in divorce court. Yet if you asked them if that would be how their marriage would end, very few would have predicted it on their wedding day.

Most people get married because they want their marriage to work. Unfortunately, many of those marriages fail. Some fail because of poor marital communication. If you identify that as a problem, then I encourage you to read my article on "Why Marriages Fail." If you want to identify other potential problems, I encourage you to take this test with your spouse and then talk about the results. I pray that you will use this test to alert you and your spouse to any danger signs and then begin to change your habits and actions so that your marriage will be successful.

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# What About Dr. Laura's Views on Gays?

Are you wondering why I omitted any mention of Dr. Laura's position on homosexuality [in my article "Why Dr. Laura is (Usually) Right")?

There's a reason.

When I first wrote this article three years ago, Dr. Laura's perspective on homosexuality was changing, and I hoped that her views would become more and more biblical. I didn't want something I was hoping would change, to be part of a static web document. I am glad to say her views *have* changed. . . and she has been persecuted for it.

Several years ago, she listened to the rhetoric and followed the party line, proclaiming that people are born gay. Some researchers tried (unsuccessfully) for a decade to prove a genetic component, if not a cause, for homosexuality. Apparently believing this explanation for same-gender attraction, she said that she thought something goes wrong somewhere along the way, producing unnatural homosexual desires. She got blasted for calling homosexuals "biological errors," which was a twisting of what she actually said. On the StopDrLaura.com web site one can listen to her "famous 'error' quote":

> *"What I did say is that when an individual is not so drawn to a member of the opposite sex, in biology that's some kind of error."*

There is a huge difference between saying that some kind of error has produced unnatural desires in a person, and that the person who holds those desires ***is*** *a biological error*. It's interesting to me that she was just taking the genetic-basis-for-homosexuality theory to a logical conclusion, but she got nailed for her political incorrectness. That's because it is currently unacceptable to suggest that there is anything unnatural about homosexuality. From a purely biological standpoint, however, individuals cannot reproduce without sexual intercourse with members of the opposite sex, so she is merely being consistent with the reigning scientific paradigm.

From what I have heard her say on her program, it appears she recognizes that there is a moral element to homosexual behavior, at least conceding that for gays and lesbians who call themselves religious, any homosexual activity is sin. She has also been criticized by the gay and lesbian community because she believes children need both a mother and a father, so gay or lesbian couples should not adopt babies or young children because it is making a deliberate choice to deprive a child of one or the other. (Although she has supported gay

couples adopting older children who wouldn't be in a family otherwise.)

I grieve for the heat Dr. Laura has taken because of her pro-biblical, non-PC stance. And I have to say I'm proud of her.

*Sue Bohlin*
*August 2001*

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# Cherishing Our Children's Gender

A wise friend of mine recently took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, "Parker, let's look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads." When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, "So how was your walk?" and Parker said, "Mommy's glad that I'm a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads."

Parker's mommy is a wise lady because she is supporting and cherishing her child's gender. That little guy is proud to be a boy and glad that he's a different gender from his mother. And you know what? As he grows up, he most probably won't struggle with homosexuality. One of the best-kept secrets in our culture is the good news that homosexuality can often be prevented through healthy relationships.

Homosexuality is really about gender identity confusion. Boys aren't comfortable being boys, and girls aren't comfortable being girls, and they grow up not fitting in because they have trouble accepting the way God made them. One of a child's basic needs is to feel loved and accepted and, well, CELEBRATED for who they are! This includes the fact that God chose little girls to be female and He decided that little boys would be male. As parents, we need to support God's wise choice of gender for our kids. They need to hear us say, "I'm so glad you're a boy! Boys are so neat." Little girls need to be celebrated for their femininity because girls are so special. Every child deserves to know that the gender that they are is a good, good thing, and we're so glad God made them that way.

One of the best ways we as parents can celebrate our child's gender is to understand and support the differences between boys and girls. Affirm your kids in their maleness and their femaleness. Boys' tendency to be active and physical isn't a pathological problem; we need to channel it with grace, not shame it! Yes, girls are sooooo verbal and emotional—but those aren't design flaws, they're designed!

It's important for dads to support their son's masculinity even if he's not the stereotypical jock. God makes some boys to be artistic and sensitive because we need them! Can you imagine what King David must have been like as a young boy, out in the field playing instruments and composing songs and poetry? Boys like David need their dads to say, "I'm so proud of who you are, son." And girls really need their daddies to love and accept them and celebrate their femaleness. It's one thing for your mother to say you're a pretty princess, but a girl believes it when her father tells her.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the security of knowing that when God made them, He "did good"—even if they like yucky things like toads and frogs.

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# Supernatural Parenting

*Sue Bohlin points out that we can be supernatural parents when we are relying on a supernatural God for direction and strength. It is important that we include parenting as an integral part of our Christian worldview. Applying a biblical perspective is crucial to imparting the truth needed for our children to live truly successful lives.*

There are certain universal truths in parenting.

• If you hook a dog leash over a ceiling fan, the motor is not strong enough to rotate a 42 pound boy wearing Pound Puppy underwear and a Superman cape. It is strong enough, however, to spread paint on all four walls of a twenty by twenty foot room.

• If you use a waterbed as home plate while wearing baseball shoes it does not leak—it explodes. A king size waterbed holds enough water to fill a 2000 square foot house four inches deep.

• The spin cycle on the washing machine does not make earth worms dizzy. It will, however, make cats dizzy.

• Cats throw up twice their body weight when dizzy.

Dr. Dobson says that parenting isn't for cowards. It ain't such a hot job for mere mortals, either. What a daunting task—being completely responsible for an infant who cannot do a single thing for himself except make a lot of noise and a lot of dirty diapers! Teaching them to walk. And talk. And act like civilized human beings. Even more importantly, their

eternal destiny is in our hands, and we have the awesome opportunity to show them what God is like, and to lead them to saving faith in Christ!

Praise God, as believers we're not limited to our own strength and power. Christ died for us, to give His life to us, to live HIS life THROUGH us. We can parent with the same supernatural energy that raised Christ from the dead. We can parent with the same infinite supply of wisdom and patience that Jesus had. We can let Him parent through us—we can be supernatural parents!

The Bible says that Christ is our life. What does that mean when you're about to change your fourteenth diaper today? "Lord Jesus, I don't have the stomach or the strength to do this, so You change this diaper through me. Here are my hands—use them—here's my face—show love to my baby by smiling through me."

"I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." What does that mean when you've been giving, giving, giving all day and you're on empty? "Lord, I'm empty and weak and out of resources. You be strong in my weakness. I will do this in Your strength because I don't have any left."

"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." How do we live that out in parenting kids who would rather snarl at us than look at us, who have swallowed the junior-high-culture's dictum that the only good parent is a dead parent? "Lord Jesus, Thank You for giving me this child. I choose to remember she is a gift and not a punishment. I don't have what it takes to be kind today, Lord. You be kind in me. I cannot love this child today, Lord, so You channel Your perfect love through me. I am Your willing vessel but I'm fresh out of unconditional love and acceptance. So You be a loving and wise parent through me."

You can be a supernatural parent. Even without a Superman cape.

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# Forgiveness Can Be Good for Your Health

Got lingering anger, stress or high blood pressure? You may need to forgive someone (or to be forgiven yourself).

That's the conclusion of an increasing number of social scientists. Religion has long held that forgiveness is an important component of a fruitful life. A recent *Christianity Today* article outlined secular research that also supports its personal and societal benefits.

Thirty years ago, Kansas psychologist Dr. Glenn Mack Harndon searched in vain to find studies on forgiveness in the academic digest Psychological Abstracts. Today there exist an International Forgiveness Institute and a ten-million-dollar "Campaign for Forgiveness Research" (Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu are among the ringleaders). The John Templeton Foundation awards grants in the field.

Harndon says forgiveness "releases the offender from prolonged anger, rage and stress that have been linked to physiological problems, such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, hypertension, cancer and other psychosomatic illnesses."

He's big on this theme. When I ran into him in Washington, DC, recently, he spoke enthusiastically about attending an international gathering in Jordan that saw forgiveness between

traditional individual enemies like Northern Irish and Irish Republicans, Israelis and Palestinians.

University of Wisconsin psychologist Robert Enright and his colleagues discovered that “forgiveness education” may have helped college students who felt their parental love reservoirs were low to develop “improved psychological health.” Self-esteem and hope increased while anxiety decreased.

Daily life brings many sources of conflict: spouses, parents, children, employers, former employers, bullies, enemies, racial and ethnic bigots. If offense leads to resentment and resentment grows to bitterness, then anger, explosion and violence can result. If parties forgive each other, then healing, reconciliation and restoration can follow.

I shall always remember Norton and Bo. Norton, an African-American, was bitter toward whites. Bo, who was white, called himself a “Christian” but seemed a hypocrite for his disdain for blacks. One day in an Atlanta civil rights event in the late 1960s, Bo and his buddies assaulted Norton by clobbering him with sandbags. Animosity ran deep.

Several months later, my roommate spoke with Norton about faith and knowing God personally. Norton placed his faith in Jesus and believed he was forgiven. He experienced what Paul, a first-century believer, described in the New Testament: “…Those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!”

Meanwhile, Bo began to realize his hypocrisy and placed God back in the “drivers seat” of his life. Three years after the assault, Nort and Bo unsuspectingly encountered each other at a conference on the Georgia coast. Initial tension melted into transparency and forgiveness. By week’s end they were publicly expressing their love for each other as brothers.

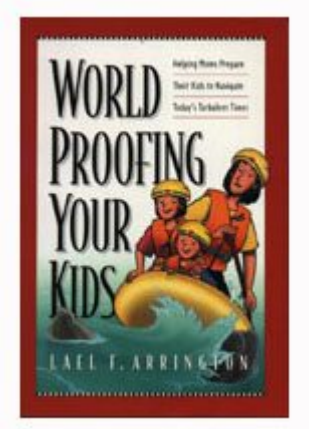
Earlier this year, Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel sang Germany's praises for observing remembrance for Holocaust victims. But he urged the German parliament to go farther, to seek forgiveness for the Third Reich's behavior. "We desperately want to have hope for the new century," he declared. Recently German President Johannes Rau asked the Israeli Knesset for forgiveness for the Holocaust and pledged to fight anti-Semitism in Europe.

Forgiveness can be contagious. It can make an important difference in families, neighborhoods, workplaces and nations. A good relationship takes two good forgivers.

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# Worldproofing Our Kids




Lael Arrington has written a truly wonderful and exceptionally helpful book, *Worldproofing Your Kids*,{1} subtitled "Helping Moms Prepare Their Kids to Navigate Today's Turbulent Times." While she ostensibly wrote it for moms, any Christian parent who cares about helping his or her child develop a Christian worldview will enjoy it . . . and probably learn a thing or two (or three) in the process.

Lael has raised five questions that Christian parents would be

wise to keep in mind, so we can relate them to what happens in our kids' world and in the world at large. In teachable moments, we can help our kids to think through and then *own* their answers to these questions:

1. *Who makes the rules?*
2. *How do we know what is true?*
3. *Where did we come from?*
4. *What are we supposed to be doing here?*
5. *Where are we going?*

The first question truly is foundational, not just to the other questions but to a basic Christian worldview: Who makes the rules?

## Who Makes the Rules?

As a nation, we used to believe that God makes the rules, and through special revelation He told us what they are. But there has been a shift in the culture, and now there are a great many people who "do not believe that moral truth is universal and final. They do not believe in special revelation from God that lays down what is morally right and wrong for all people for all time. They believe that . . . ultimately, *man makes the rules*."{2}

We need to talk with our children about the consequences of each answer. When man makes the rules, when "everyone does what is right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25), there are dreadful consequences. Sometimes the strong and powerful lord it over the weak and defenseless. Sometimes, when man makes the rules, everything breaks down into chaos. In *Worldproofing Your Kids*, Lael Arrington provides some wonderful activities to help develop the elements of a Christian worldview. For example, she suggests we watch a video of *Alice in Wonderland*

with our kids, and she provides some excellent discussion questions to bring out the consequences of what happens when anybody and everybody can make the rules.

The bottom line to communicate to our kids is that much of the pain and suffering in this life is the result of making our own rules and violating God's.

But when we agree that God has the right to make the rules, and we follow them, life works the way it was designed. That's because there are good reasons for the rules. We need to give our kids the "whys" behind God's commands. In his book *Right from Wrong,*{3} Josh McDowell explains that God's loving heart makes rules designed to do two things: *protect* and *provide* for us. Our kids need to talk with us about *why* God doesn't want us to have sex before marriage—because purity protects our hearts and bodies, and purity provides a better sexual relationship within marriage. We need to talk to our kids about *why* God tells us not to cheat and lie: because He is truth, and He knows that honesty and truth telling protects us from the pain of lies and provides for a peace filled life.

The goal is not just to teach our kids that God makes the rules, but to choose to submit to those rules because it's the right thing to do . . . and because it will make life work better.

## How Do We Know What Is True?

Truth has taken a beating.

The Christian view of truth is a belief in truth that is true for all people at all times: absolute truth. The western world used to believe that all truth was God's truth. After the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which produced the byword "Man is the measure of all things," truth became secular. People believed that there is a body of real truth "out there" that can discovered through our reason. God was no longer a

part of it.

Now we've moved to the postmodern view of truth. There is no such thing as "true truth," nothing that is true for all people at all times. Truth is now what I make it. Truth is whatever works for me. I create truth based on my feelings and experience.

So when we say things like "The only way to heaven is by trusting Jesus Christ," we get responses like, "You narrow minded bigot!" and "That may be true for you, but it's not true for me." And the classic postmodern response to just about anything: "Whatever!"

How do we help our kids know what is true?

First, we start with the foundational truth of our lives: God's Word. Remember, it's not just a body of truth, it is *alive* and *active* (Heb. 4:12). We teach them the Bible's strongest truth claims: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1); people are infinitely valuable (Isa. 43:4); we have a sin problem and we need a savior (Rom. 3:22-24); Jesus claims to be God (Mark 14:62, among others {4}). Our kids need to know the truth before they can spot a lie.

Second, we teach them not to be afraid of criticism from those who do not believe in truth. Those who trumpet a postmodern worldview don't *live* by it, because it doesn't match the real world we live in. People who sneer at Christians for insisting that there is such a thing as absolute truth still stop at red lights, and they expect everybody else to do the same. They may say they decide what is true for them, but they don't try to pay for their groceries with a one-dollar bill and insist that, for them, it's worth a hundred dollars.

Third, we can strengthen our kids' confidence in the truth by teaching them logic. Begin with the simplest rule of logic: A does not equal non-A. Two opposite ideas cannot both be true.

One can be true, they can both be false, but they can't both be true. Teach them to recognize red herrings, ad hominem arguments, and begging the question. Get Philip Johnson's terrific book, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*,{5} which has a great chapter called "Tuning Up Your Baloney Detector." He covers several false arguments.

Make it a game: "Spot the lie." Help them identify songs, movies, TV shows, advertisements, and articles that contain errors in logic or which go against biblical truth. Encourage them to recognize when people make up private meaning for words. Postmodern people who believe they can create their own truth say things like "Well, that depends on what the meaning of the word *is* is."

Truth matters to God, because He is truth. We need to teach our kids that it should matter to us as well.

## Where Did We Come From?

I especially appreciated the way Arrington explained the importance of addressing the worldview question, "Where did we come from?" and the closely related question, "Who are we?" She points out that the way we answer these questions will also determine how we deal with the issues of animal rights, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia.

The "Where did we come from?" question isn't about sex and the stork; it's about creation and evolution. There are really only two basic answers. Either God made us, or we are an accident of the universe, the unplanned product of matter plus chance plus time.

If God made us, then we are infinitely valuable and intrinsically significant because God personally called each of us into existence. And not only are we valuable and loved, but every other human on the planet is equally valuable and loved. If evolution is true—defining evolution as the

mindless, impersonal chance process that produces the stuff of the universe—then there is no point to our existence. We have no value because there is no value giver. Honest evolutionists recognize this: Cornell professor William Provine has said, "If evolution is true then there is no such thing as life after death, there is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning for life; there is no free will."{6}

We come hard wired from the factory with a longing for transcendence, desperately wanting to be a part of a larger story where we are beloved and pursued. We long to know that there is meaning to the world and to our lives. We come equipped with an innate sense of fairness and justice, concepts that have no meaning in a world without a God who is absolutely just and moral.

As parents, we need to tap into these basic longings to teach our children that only the creation story adequately explains our legitimate thirst for relationship and for significance, for fairness and for transcendence. Then we can explain how the creation story (and I define story as "the way things happened," not "wishful thinking") also helps us understand other issues. We can teach our kids that it is not murder to use the flesh of animals for food and the skin of animals for clothing because animals are not like humans; only human beings are made in the image of God. We need to be good stewards of the animals that God made, but not elevate them to the same level as mankind—or devaluate man to the level of animals.

With an understanding that the creation story makes human life sacred and holy, we can teach our kids why it is wrong to kill babies before they are born (abortion), and after they are born (infanticide). We can teach them why it is equally wrong to kill the sick and the infirm when it is inconvenient for us (euthanasia).

Lael writes, "The common thread between evolution, abortion,

infanticide, and euthanasia is the devaluing of human life and the way our culture has responded with options for disposal."{7}

## What Are We Supposed to be Doing Here?

This section of Lael Arrington's book is called "Work, Leisure, and the Richer Life: I'm tired of paddling! Are we there yet? I'm bored!"

If we were to get an honest answer to the questions, "What are you supposed to be doing here? What's your purpose in life?," many high school and college students would probably say, "To have as good a time as possible." Our culture has raised the expectation that everything is supposed to be fun and entertaining. When my mother managed the layaway department of a Wal-Mart a few years ago, she said it was frustrating to deal with the young employees. They came in feeling entitled to a paycheck but didn't want to work for it. Work wasn't "fun."

One of the greatest gifts we as parents can give our children is to cast a vision for their part in the larger story of life, one that involves a planning and purpose for their life, a calling from God to play their specially designed part. Our innate longing for transcendence means that we need to teach our children that they are a specially chosen part of the cosmic story of creation, fall, and redemption.

First, we need to teach by word and example that work has dignity and value. Work isn't part of the curse; it is part of God's perfect design for us. God gave Adam and Eve the responsibility of stewarding the garden before the Fall (Gen. 2). Part of our purpose in life is to be a difference maker, and work is part of how we do that. Whether one's work is to be a student, a fast food counter person, a house cleaner, a computer programmer, a mechanic, an administrator, or the

really super important roles of mother or father, we are called to make a difference in the world and in God's kingdom.

Second, we can be a cheerleader for our children's God given gifts and talents. We need to be students of our children so that we can understand and appreciate the unique package that God put together. It helps to explore the various personality styles to help our kids grow in understanding of themselves and others. John Trent has written a book for children using animal motifs called *The Treasure Tree.*{8} Tim LaHaye{9} and Ken Voges{10} have explored the temperaments in slightly different ways, but they're both very helpful.

As we discern how our children are gifted with natural talents and abilities, we need to acknowledge those gifts and encourage our kids to develop them. If our children have trusted Christ as Savior, they have received a whole new set of spiritual gifts for us to be on the alert for. Of course, we need to have a working knowledge of the gifts and learn how to spot them. God gives personality gifts, talent and ability gifts, and spiritual gifts to equip our children for whatever He has planned for their lives. What a privilege we have as parents to help them discover that they are called to a special place of service with a special set of equipment to do whatever it is God has called them to!

## Where Are We Going?

The last part of the book *Worldproofing Your Kids* deals with citizenship—especially our heavenly citizenship. Another way to inspire confidence that the Christian worldview is true is to celebrate the fact that the best part of life is still ahead.

If we want our kids to recognize the larger, cosmic story of creation, fall, and redemption, then we need to point them continually to their future (Lord willing) in heaven, where we

will finally experience real life, real riches, and real intimacy with God. We need to remind them that their choices on earth, for good and for bad, are determining their future in heaven. This is an important part of our roles as parents, of course—to teach them the wisdom that comes from considering both the long term and short term consequences of their choices.

Lael Arrington urges us to take our children to biblical passages and good books that give them a glimpse of where we are going. Help them catch the vision of what C. S. Lewis was describing:

"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."{11}

And speaking of C. S. Lewis, please do yourself and your children the favor of reading *The Chronicles of Narnia,* which is a series of books for children of all ages which will capture their hearts for the world to come and make them fall in love with the Lord Jesus.

Lael writes, "Perhaps we are now qualifying for what degree of power and authority we will be granted when we reign with Christ. The New Testament assures us that those who endure, those who serve now, will reign later (2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 5:10, 22:5). We can challenge our [children], 'Are we making daily decisions to serve, to develop our gifts and talents so we will be best prepared to reign with Christ?'"{12}

I love the story of the godly old woman who knew she was about to die. When discussing her funeral plans with her pastor she told him she wanted to be buried with her Bible in one hand and a fork in the other.

She explained, "At those really nice get-togethers, when the

meal was almost finished, a server or maybe the hostess would come by to collect the dirty dishes. I can hear the words now. Sometimes, at the best ones, somebody would lean over my shoulder and whisper, 'You can keep your fork.' And do you know what that meant? Dessert was coming!

"It didn't mean a cup of Jell-O or pudding or even a dish of ice cream. You don't need a fork for that. It meant the good stuff, like chocolate cake or cherry pie! When they told me I could keep my fork, I knew the best was yet to come!

"That's exactly what I want people to talk about at my funeral. Oh, they can talk about all the good times we had together. That would be nice.

"But when they walk by my casket and look at my pretty blue dress, I want them to turn to one another and say, 'Why the fork?'

"That's what I want you to say. I want you to tell them that I kept my fork because the best is yet to come."{13}

*The author gratefully acknowledges the generous assistance of Lael Arrington in the preparation of this article.*

**Notes**

1. Lael Arrington, *Worldproofing Your Kids* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997).
2. Ibid, 42.
3. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Right From Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Word Books, 1994).
4. See also the Probe article "Jesus' Claims to be God" on the Probe Web site (www.probe.org).
5. Phillip E. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
6. William Provine and Philip Johnson, "Darwinism: Science or Naturalistic Philosophy?" (videotape of debate held at Stanford University, April 30, 1994). Available from Access

Research Network (www.arn.org).
7. Arrington, 179.
8. John Trent, *The Treasure Tree,* rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998).
9. Tim LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Temperament* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).
10. Ken Voges and Ron Braund (contributor), *Understanding How Others Misunderstand You* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).
11. C. S. Lewis, *A Weight of Glory* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1949), 1-2.
12. Lael Arrington, personal correspondence with the author, February 26, 2000.
13. Jack Canfield, ed., *A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Edison, NJ: Health Communications, Inc., 1996).

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