

**The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof;**



**the world and they that dwell therein.**

**Psalm 24:1**





## Twelve Steps to a Deeper Friendship With Your Spouse



Marriage, like any friendship, begins with areas of commonality, but the stresses of normal everyday life – children, work, finances, illness, caring for elderly parents – can tax the union and cause it to grow apart. Traditional marriage counseling is one way to deepen your friendship, but you can also engage in some simple practices.

Here are 12 suggestions to cultivate a stronger relationship with your spouse.; also included are quotes from average folks that have successfully built this kind of friendship:

1. Recognize that friendship building takes a lot of work – and time. Cut the fat out of your day.

*"We've made some significant concessions for the sake of our friendship. Phil lives close to his work so that he can come home for lunch as often as possible. The short commute has improved his mood and energy."*—Amy

2. Establish a time each week to spend quality time together – then guard that time with your lives!

3. Choose to spend time together rather than apart. This may mean sacrificing good things for a season such as small groups, ministry, or bonding time with guys or girls.

4. Explore the interests of your spouse be it art, music, cinema, reading, sports, gardening etc.. Find out what they are passionate

about and then join them. Often this takes a bit of sacrifice.

*"I intentionally study the things that are having an influence on my wife. If she takes up a new area of interest, or is reading a new book, than I need to do that as well."*—Bill

5. Take time to find common interests and then engage in them.

*"We've tried many things together over the past 35 years. We enjoy cooking and gardening, and for as long as I can remember we take time away from the kids to backpack. Part of the fun is doing research on hiking trails, camp sites, tents, and cooking stoves ... it's the planning together that has grown our friendship."*—John

6. Use conflict to sharpen and purify friendship.

*"I thought I was particularly fortunate because my husband and I rarely argued - we agreed on almost everything. The process of recovering from adultery revealed unhealthy communication on both our parts. Now we have more disagreements, but they come about because we're being honest with one another, which is helping us get to know each other more all the time."*—Andi



7. Nourish and care for one another. Be gentle with one another.

*"We lost our first child. We more than comforted one another. We held each other ... lifted one another up ... and we knew at a deep level that our best friend in the world was going through the same thing."*—Glenn

(Continued on page 3)

**8. Accountability and mutual respect, including in the areas of sexuality, finances, and relationships, should be priorities.**

*"My wife knows everything about my brokenness. I have gone to her first in difficult situations. There's a small circle of people who know me and know my depravity. My wife is in that circle. Having that transparency has given me strength, clarity, and tremendous freedom."* — George

**9. Establish daily habits, especially praying together.**



*"Praying together every morning not only sets the tone for our day, and releases the burdens on our hearts, but it puts us on the same page in so many areas. God meets us in the*

*midst of our friendship every morning."* —

Justine

**10. Affirm one another every day. Be intentional in communicating the other's strengths.**

*"My wife and I make it a habit to regularly communicate those things we admire or value in the other. This practice has strengthened our friendship."* — Al

**11. Be transparent with one another.**

*"One activity I suggest to married couples is, at some point during the day, identify an emotional reality to your spouse. Label that feeling in a self-disclosing way such as 'I'm angry, fearful, resentful.' We often limit our conversation to the reporting of events rather than communicating how we really feel."* — Bill

**12. Communication. Most experts agree that regular communication builds a friendship that weathers the storms of life.**

*"For us, communication, in part, is negotiating the rules that will make our relationship work*

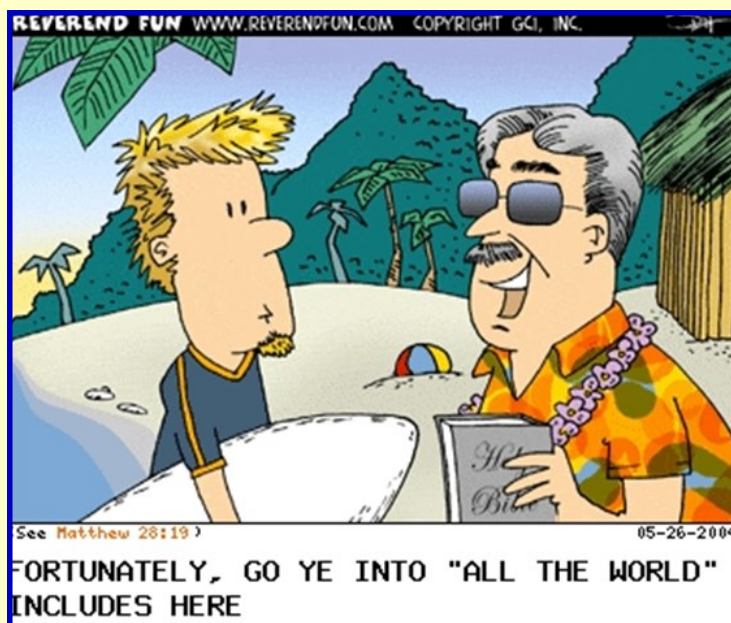
*better or flow more smoothly.*

*For example, just recently, I had the implicit assumption that my bike tools should be placed on the kitchen table. My wife, Annie, challenged this assumption, and conflict arose. By the end of our negotiation, we had made a new rule: bike tools do not ever go on the kitchen table.*

*It sounds silly, but her demand felt like a threat to how I operate, and therefore a threat to my personhood, my masculinity. In that encounter I had to learn that I was no less Jason, no less a man, no less a person, to concede to my wife's demands that certain spaces are set aside for certain purposes. My personhood goes beyond and deeper than that."* — Jason

Written by Alyson Weasley

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/sex-and-intimacy/the-role-of-friendship-in-marriage/twelve-steps-to-a-deeper-friendship-with-your-spouse>



An aging master grew tired of his apprentice's complaints. One morning, he sent him to get some salt. When the apprentice returned, the master told him to mix a handful of salt in a glass of water and then drink it.

"How does it taste?" the master asked.

"Bitter," said the apprentice.

The master chuckled and then asked the young man to take the same handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake and once the apprentice swirled his handful of salt in the water, the old man said, "Now drink from the lake."

As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the master asked, "How does it taste?"

"Fresh," remarked the apprentice.

"Do you taste the salt?" asked the master.

"No," said the young man. At this the master sat beside this serious young man, and explained softly,

"The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains exactly the same. However, the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container we put the pain in. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things. Stop being a glass. Become a lake."

#### Author Unknown

<http://www.verybestquotes.com/the-pain-of-life-is-pure-salt-inspirational-story/>

### September Activities for Catholic Families

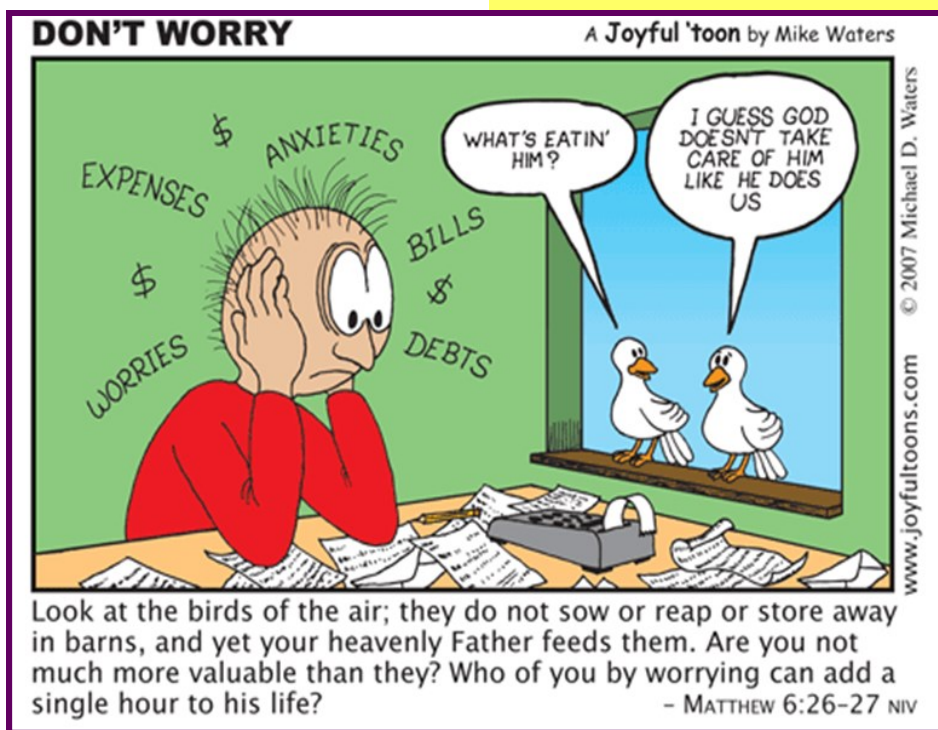
1. Grandparents Day is Sept. 7th. Help your children do something special with their grandparents or spend the day with them.
2. Decorate wooden, or even paper, letters spelling out MARY. Be as colorful and creative as you want to celebrate the Most Holy Name of Mary (September 12th).
4. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Pick out your favorite bread recipe and have your children help you make it.
5. Be a peacemaker. Do something nice for someone that you sometimes argue with. The feast day of St. Wenceslaus is Sept. 28th.
6. Saints can seem like people from long ago to children. Talk to them about

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta (when she lived and died), her work, and her writings. Her feast day is September 5th.

8. Look around your room, house, or pantry for items or food to donate to the less fortunate. The feast day of St. Vincent de Paul is Sept. 27th.

9. Learn a prayer or even short phrase (like "Ora Pro Nobis," which means "pray for us") in Latin. St. Jerome translated the Bible from Hebrew to Latin, and his feast day is Sept. 30th.

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## *The Enlightened Spouse -- How Self-Growth Can Wreck a Marriage*

There is an unprecedented focus on self-growth in our society. While becoming a more conscious individual would appear to be praiseworthy, it's not always the case, especially in a marriage. When spouses grow separately they often grow apart. Newly discovered self-revelations sometimes lead to new "discoveries" about the relationship and "realizations" that the marriage is no longer "healthy." Why is this case? How can working on oneself do more damage than good for a relationship? Does this mean that it is better not to focus on self-improvement? What if your spouse isn't interested in growing together? Should you remain stagnant?

The answer to these questions lies in defining healthy growth and successful relationships. Successful relationships are ones in which both partners are other-focused. While this does not mean that they are entirely selfless, it does mean making the relationship the priority and realizing that your spouse is not you. Your spouse is an entirely unique individual with his/her own feelings, perspective, and needs. Your job is to honor and hold space for that "other" as opposed to expecting and demanding that he/she think, feel, and behave like you.



One of the dangers of self-growth is that there is the risk of becoming self-absorbed. The ego takes over and the focus increasingly becomes all about me, my story, and my newfound self-awareness. You may notice yourself becoming judgmental and impatient with your spouse. You expect your spouse to be like you, to grow as fast as you, and become as conscious as you. If you feel like you clearly see the deeper root of your spouse's unhappiness in life or a particular area of his life in

Your spouse is an entirely unique individual with his/her own feelings, perspective, and needs.



which he finds himself stuck, you may get frustrated as to why he just doesn't get it or isn't even willing to explore.

As you begin to preach your enlightened ideas, you find them falling on deaf ears. Your spouse may become more reactive and your relationship may deteriorate. While it may be extremely frustrating when you feel like you have "the truth" and no one is buying, your job in marriage is not to be your spouse's therapist, coach, or guru. It won't work and is often counterproductive. Your job is to take out your ego and be a compassionate spouse.

Truly integrated self-growth is when one can make space for another person and view them without judgment. It is about knowing that only you can take responsibility for yourself, and that your job is not to change someone else but to offer unconditional love. (Even in situations when it may be appropriate to intervene, such as if you see your spouse in potential danger, it should be out of love and not judgment.) The byproduct of healthy self-growth is that your spouse will respond to your new changes in a positive way. As you take responsibility for the role you played in the relationship, your spouse will begin to react to you differently.

One of the reasons that self-growth does not always result in better marriages is that it does not take place in the context of relationship. It is much easier to work on oneself in a vacuum, than to have to do it in the

(Continued on page 6)



Couples that grow together in the context of their marriage are able to simultaneously work on their own issues as well their relationship issues, as the two are intertwined. If your spouse is unwilling to work on the relationship together, work on yourself to be the best you can be, and keep in mind that a barometer for your individual growth is an improved relationship. When you married, you committed to the relationship. It is not something to be discarded when you feel like you have outgrown it. If you become self-aware enough, you will realize that the frustrations you are experiencing with your spouse, are often those things that you need to work on to become a more complete person. Abandoning the marriage is an easy way out to avoid doing the real work.

context of a relationship with another person, whom you may not be able to change. That's why you could meet someone who has done work on himself but has a miserable marriage. While it seems dissonant, it's because it was not applied with his spouse who is likely pushing his buttons more than anyone else.

We do not live in a vacuum. We grow up getting hurt in relationships with others and the best way to heal those hurts is in relationship. We often find ourselves becoming retriggered and revisiting familiar wounds with our spouse. We can use our marriage as an opportunity to work through those issues and finally get it right. While the success of therapy or other healing modalities is partially due to the healing relationship that the therapist provides, it does not compare to the potential healing that the marital relationship can provide, in the context of effective couples work that focuses on the couple's relationship as the healing factor. As long as a couple is married, they have the potential to offer unconditional positive self-regard for each other. In contrast, a therapist, coach, or mentor, no matter how caring they are, is a relationship bound by the clock and compensation.

Self-growth is great as long as it doesn't hurt others in the process. While it is more powerful when couples grow together, one need not remain stagnant if your spouse is unwilling. However, be aware if your enlightenment makes you more judgmental instead of more understanding and compassionate.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-shlomo-slatkin/the-enlightened-spouse-how\\_b\\_4101313.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-shlomo-slatkin/the-enlightened-spouse-how_b_4101313.html)





"Are you *QUITE* sure you want to call him Warren, Mr. and Mrs. Peace?"

## BLESSING YOUR CHILDREN

by Dr. John Trent

As a counselor, I often see the benefits and the heartbreaking results of parental choices. Sometimes it's as if I hear the cry that Esau made when he found out his brother, Jacob, had taken his father's blessing: "Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!' Then Esau wept aloud" (Genesis 27:38). Esau's desperate plea for his father's approval can be heard in families today. Kids thirst for parental acceptance — they long for their mother and father to reinforce their worth.

Meeting your children's need for affirmation doesn't have to be difficult. One way is to do what I call "the blessing." This blessing has five distinct elements to build up your sons and daughters and help them understand their worth in your family and before God.

Those five elements are:

- appropriate and meaningful touch
- words of love and acceptance
- value placed on the child
- acknowledgement of a special future
- genuine commitment

### Interpreting it for your child

Although there are five elements to this blessing, each child is unique and will interpret those five elements differently. For my oldest daughter, who has an enthusiastic personality, *appropriate touch* meant a hug in the morning. My youngest daughter felt affirmed when my wife or I would sit next to her for an extended period of time, perhaps while reading a story to her.

Age is also an important factor in how a child receives a blessing. As your child grows, he or she may require a different type of affirmation. Part of showing children your approval and their value is figuring out how to affirm them in a way they can understand.

### Blessing preschoolers and kindergartners

Parents can sing a blessing to young children, even if their children don't understand all that's being said. When our girls were between the ages of 2 and 6, my wife and I would sing a song that we made especially for them. It started: "Good morning, good morning, how are you today? The Lord bless you and keep you throughout the day." The song was simple, but it helped our children start each day with words that

spoke of our love and God's love for them.

Young children are affirmed and their

hearts remain open to God when they hear words about their parents' and God's love for them daily.



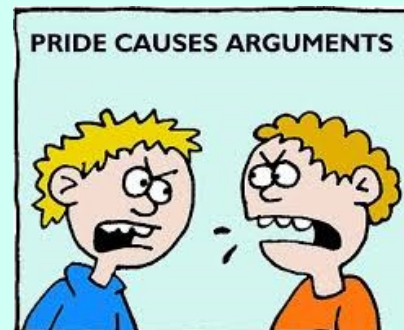
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## Pride vs. Humility in Marriage

A great hindrance to fellowship in a marriage is pride—self-confident, self-exalting, self-protecting pride. Pride is perhaps the most deceptive, pervasive, and multifaceted form of sin, and it plays a central role in virtually all sin. One way the foolishness of pride comes out in our communication is in our love for our own voice and opinions.

Consider this proverb, just one of many that ties our speech to wisdom and foolishness: “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion” (Proverbs 18:2). In contrast, humility yearns to learn, because it recognizes its deficiencies (Proverbs 12:15).



Check out the chart on pride vs. humility in marriage (modified from *Love that Lasts* by Gary and Betsy Ricucci, <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2011/02/pride-vs-humility-in-marriage/>)

### PRIDE VS HUMILITY

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Pride loves to talk, reveling in every self-exalting form of self-expression                      | Humility asks questions and loves dialogue  |
| Pride is quite content with what it already knows   | Humility has never found someone it couldn't learn something from.                    |
| Pride assumes I already understand everything I need to   | Humility assumes there is always more to learn about everything                       |
| Pride assumes I don't need help   | Humility assumes I need others  |
| Pride sinfully judges others by assuming they will respond negatively or unhelpfully if I am open | Humility would rather be open and vulnerable than closed and independent.             |
| Pride uses conversation as broadcast time.  | Humility uses conversation with a spouse to explore new worlds.                       |
| Pride doesn't need a spouse, just an audience.  | Humility puts energy and effort into listening  |
| Pride denies what the gospel reveals about our seriously sinful condition (Prov 10:19; Gal 5:17)  | Humility treats a spouse as a fellow traveler on the road to biblical wisdom.         |
|   | Humility that leads to intimacy takes an interest in one's spouse as a gift from God. |
|   | Humility believes what the gospel says about our desperate need for God and his grace |

#### Ways to show humility to your spouse

- Be selfless, putting your spouse first.
- Be consistent with small acts of service
- Welcome advice from your spouse on many topics and problems

- Be quick to admit when you are wrong
- Accept apologies and offer forgiveness quickly and freely
- Respond graciously when you are really right and your spouse is wrong



## Affirming school-age children

As our daughters grew older, my wife and I

looked for ways to continue blessing them. We found we could do this during the time it took to drive them to school.

First, we let our kids pick out a CD to listen to on the drive. Then every morning after listening to this song, my wife or I would park in front of their school, turn around, take their hands and pray over them and their day. We might pray for a child's friendship with someone or about a test that day. This individualized, quick prayer included *meaningful touch* and linked them with God's *special future* for them that day. Before they left the car, they knew our love went with them.



## Using words well with teens

For older children, the blessing can become even more powerful — particularly when you use all five elements as a reaction to a teen's struggles or challenges. That's what my mother did for me when I was a high school senior.

I'll never forget sitting at her old kitchen table with my head down, waiting for what I expected would come next: She would echo the words of others:

"Why can't you do as well as your brother? You're twins, right?" That day, my teacher said even more

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.

Jane Howard

than that with his actions.

He had held my senior

term paper as if it were covered in mold. Then he had rolled his eyes before handing it back to me. The rest of the class smirked and hooted. On it was a large D, underlined in red pen.

That wasn't my first D, but I'd worked really hard on that paper. And while I did skip my teacher's instruction to include footnotes, he made it clear that I was a loser. I waited for my mom to finish reading my paper.

Finally she spoke. "John, look at me."

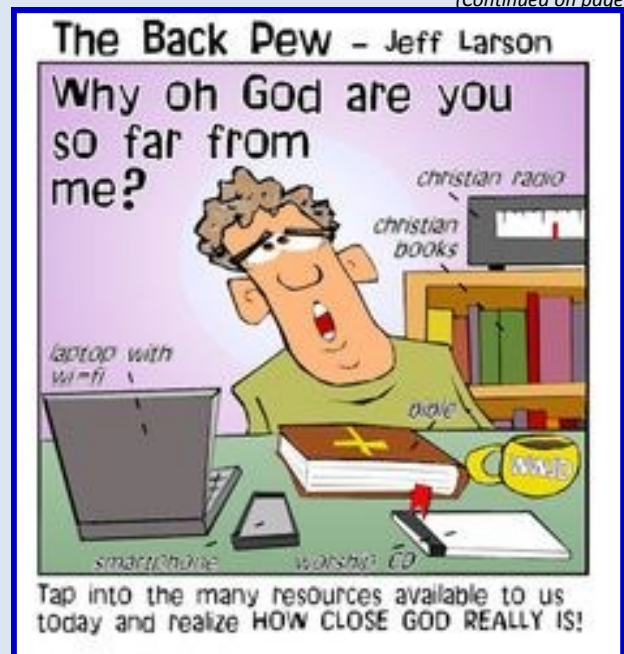
She had already read my twin brother's term paper — for which he had earned an A, as always.

"Look at me," she repeated.

I raised my head, just enough for my eyes to meet hers. When I did, she reached across the table and took my hand.

My mother was a rheumatoid arthritic, and her hands were twisted and bent. Her grip was incredibly soft, but once she held my hand, I couldn't pull away without hurting her and making her cry. I was stuck.

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I felt broken and ashamed.

She said, "John, you should have woken me up, and I could have helped you with the footnotes."

When I dropped my head again, she continued, "I don't care what your teacher said or wrote. You do such a good job of using words when you write that I wouldn't be surprised if God used your words someday to help people."

At that moment, she gave me a gift that continues to shape my life today. She used the five elements of the biblical blessing to let me know I had worth: *Meaningful touch* – With her grip, she said, "I love you. I believe in you."

*Words of love and acceptance* – My mother's words were direct, and even when what she said wasn't what I wanted to hear, she spoke with a

gentle kindness.

*Value placed on the child* – She saw the potential in me, and her words spoke of my value.

*Acknowledgement of a special future* – She pointed me toward a future where God might someday use my words to help others.

*Genuine commitment* – My mom wasn't perfect. She got tired and was frustrated with me at times, but I never doubted her love or commitment to me.

<http://www.thrivingfamily.com/features/magazine/2011/blessing-your-children.aspx>



Govern a family as you would  
cook a small fish – very gently.  
Chinese Proverb





# 5 Reasons To Take A Vacation With Your Spouse



Relationship a little stale?

It may be time for a getaway.

Work stresses that are brought home can cause relationship problems. But, can going on a vacation really strengthen your relationship? The answer is yes. Here are five reasons.

## 1. Vacations affect your mood ... positively.

Changing your physical environment and daily routine can greatly influence how you think and feel about yourself, your partner and the world around you. For example, owners of second homes report a felt shift in consciousness when arriving at their "getaway" place. They say they feel calmer, more centered and connected to an inner peacefulness that improves how they get along.

The same is true for couples on vacation. They are less defensive, more open, relaxed and connected. Experiencing this connection on vacation makes it easier to hold onto it back home.

## 2. Vacations highlight the "us" factor.

What do most couples crave? More free time and more undivided at-



tention devoted to one another. Vacations are where partners can focus exclusively on one another's needs in a special place, during a special time you have the opportunity to give each other the kind of up-close attention that creates true intimacy. Vacations are where couples can nurture one another emotionally, sexually, intellectually and spiritually.

## 3. Vacations

encourage playing together.



One of the fac-

tors that explains

why couples go from being "in love" soul mates to bickering roommates is benign neglect. They take one another and their relationship for granted. The same old routine becomes so entrenched that even playing together falls to the bottom of their to do list.

Vacations are all about playing together. Suddenly, what has been neglected now takes center stage. Playing and having fun together takes us away from problems, pressures and responsibilities. Our mood and spirit lighten and we are

more likely to see what most attracted us to one another in the beginning.

That's why playing together is a strong aphrodisiac

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**4. Vacations re-inforce family bonds.** If you are married with children, vacations can create a host of

logistical issues to solve. Keeping everyone happy can also be a challenge. With that said, family vacations can strengthen a relationship because they remind partners of what is truly important.

Material possessions come and go and so do most worries and problems. What endures are close, caring relationships. Most adults clearly remember their childhood family vacations as wonderful adventures where they felt safe and



loved. Celebrating a family vacation reminds partners how centrally important their relationship is. Vacations can also be a wakeup call to get back to treating one another as precious.

**5. Vacations help relationships grow.** In strong healthy relationships, partners feel that they are growing. Vacations that introduce us to new places or cultures (even within one's own country), that stretch our minds and challenge us physically, expand our sense of self in constructive ways. Sharing this kind of personal growth enriches the experience, bonding us closer together.

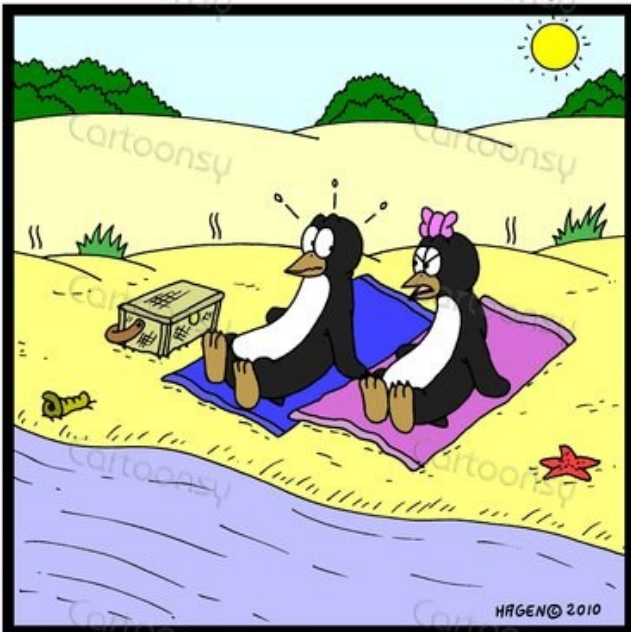
**Jo Ann Sheldon and Norma J. Heller**

<http://www.familytime.com/ShowArticle.aspx?>

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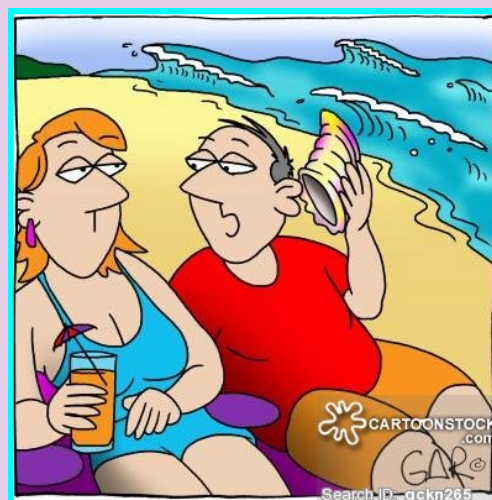
**It's a Jungle out there!**

by HAGEN



Too cold at home, too hot here:  
You can't stop complaining can you?

Hagen Cartoons: <http://www.hagencartoons.com>



"Hey, it's true, you really can  
hear the sea in these shells!"