

Time Well Spent

According to Bill Doherty, the best way to make time available for each other is to establish couple rituals. A ritual is defined by three key features:

1. It is repeated
2. It has a beginning and an end
3. It is emotionally meaningful. (This third feature is what distinguishes a ritual from a habit).

Couple rituals help build connection and intimacy - they create the critical space in a busy schedule for couples to focus on each other. When we're busy, we often don't have time to spend together let alone remember to schedule it! A couple ritual acts like a permanent diary date that keeps the romance alive.

Some couples have regular date nights or special anniversary traditions. The backbone of a couple's intimacy however is built on small, every day encounters: the Essential Daily Ritual (EDR). Just as our bodies need minimum daily vitamins, so also our relationship needs EDRs to keep our marriage healthy. This might be a daily coffee debrief, a sharing of highs and lows, a nightly snuggle before sleep, or a connect kiss and hug when rejoining at days end. Often these EDRs arise spontaneously and evolve naturally over time. Others are actively negotiated. Whatever way you establish your EDRs the most important thing is to have them.

This year, make St. Valentine's Day, last all year long... make a choice to spend more time together.

Create an Essential Daily Ritual (EDR) for couples!

Ground rules:

1. **No third parties:** it's not a couple ritual if the baby, your best friend or the TV is present.
2. **Bookend your ritual with a starting point and ending point.** An external trigger linked to a regular event works well for the starting point, such as at the end of dinner or immediately when you both get home. The endpoint ensures that the ritual doesn't become burdensome. So set a time limit (eg 15 mins) or link it to a spontaneous conclusion, like the time it takes to walk around the block.
3. **Keep it enjoyable.** The goal is emotional connection. Dealing with hurts or major decisions are important but don't let them intrude on your EDR. Schedule another time for these toughies.

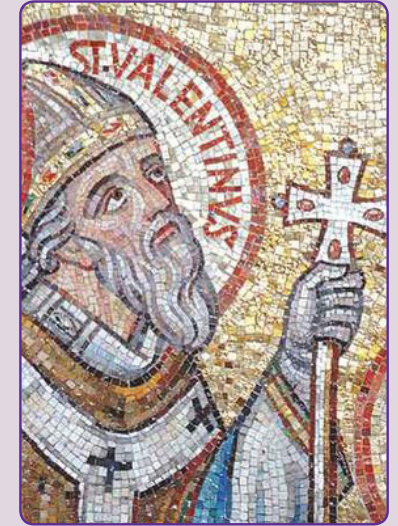


Be my Valen-time

Insufficient time together is one of the biggest contributors to relationship breakdown. Whether our relationship is flying or sinking, time together is like a balm, healing the bumps and bruises of life and encouraging feelings of affection and tenderness. And with St. Valentine's Day approaching, it's the perfect opportunity to give the gift of time.

According to family therapist Bill Doherty, when couples were surveyed about the most difficult part of maintaining a relationship, the number one item was a lack of time. Even those who listed communication as the culprit, when questioned further, they said the problem was insufficient time to communicate!

We'd all like more hours in the day. The challenge is to find ways to more efficiently manage the time we **do** have to meet the needs of the most important relationships in our life.



St. Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time of Emperor Claudius II. His association with marriage arises from the story that Claudius, urgent to recruit soldiers, decreed that all weddings be suspended so as to encourage more single, unattached men to serve in his armies. Seeing the anguish of the young couples forbidden to marry, St. Valentine allegedly performed secret weddings in defiance of the Emperor.

He was eventually arrested and imprisoned. While awaiting his execution, St. Valentine restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter. On the eve of his death, he penned her a farewell note signing it, "From your Valentine".

On February 14, 269 AD he was beheaded. He is the Patron Saint of engaged couples and married lovers.

ref: www.catholic.org/saints

The Time Drought

Modern relationships are plagued by busyness. While children certainly make a couple's time together scarce, even newly weds complain of a 'time drought' in their relationships. The busier couples get with activities outside their relationship, the more time-starved their marriage becomes. And the less their relationship is the central source of affirmation and meaning in their lives, the more detached spouses become from each other.

Tragically, when their relationships are time-starved, couples often end up arguing during the little time they do spend together. Of course arguing about the mundane issues is really a symptom of a deeper problem. When our emotional needs for intimacy, affection and companionship are not being met, we feel neglected, lonely and resentful. Innocent gestures are frequently misinterpreted: his dirty clothes left on the floor are a symbol of his lack of care; her 'not tonight dear' tiredness an expression of her indifference. Arguments flare more easily when relationships are time deprived making the precious time spent together stressful and unpleasant.

Overscheduled parents!

Being parents of five, it's easy for the kid's activities to take over our family life. We have made the decision to limit the kid's activities to a maximum of two and explained that we would not be attending every game or training session. It's still busy and we sometimes have to defend our decision when the kids want to take up a new interest, but we feel like we are in charge of our life and family, instead of being ruled by the training schedule of the coach. One of the unexpected benefits of our rule has been more time for our children to play with their siblings and develop self-entertaining skills. Net result: less stress and more time for relationship, including our marriage!

Take the Test! - Time Sheet Exercise

1. Make a list of all the things that are important to you in your life, like your spouse, family, health, faith etc. Give them a score:
A - Extremely Important | B - Very Important | C - Somewhat Important
2. Now make a Time Sheet of your typical day or week. Write down the different activities that you do and the approximate time spent on each (e.g. sleeping - 6 hours, grooming - 30 mins, work - 8 hours).
3. Evaluate your Time Sheet. How much time do you spend on the things that you ranked with an A compared to those with a B or C? How did your spouse fare in your Time Sheet?

Quantity is part of Quality

Many people justify the lack of time spent with their loved ones by saying "we have quality time". In truth, quality time is only effective with a foundation of **quantity** time - low intensity companionship which builds trust and openness. Quality time requires emotional vulnerability. This disposition can not be turned on and off at will; it is nurtured through leisurely quantity time spent together, often in routine activities like washing up, gardening or going for a walk. Just like food, quality doesn't help if there's simply not enough of it - we need a staple diet of Quantity Time to keep our relationship healthy.

Fortunately, we don't need to have enormous, uninterrupted slabs of time together in order to experience the benefits. Regular, brief get-togethers make a backbone of trust and connection and accumulate to build a solid foundation of quantity time. Small changes in our schedule or routine can make a huge difference. For example, scheduling a few extra minutes in the morning before leaving home for an unhurried good-bye kiss, phoning each other during the day and reconnecting at day's end with a long hug sets the tone for the day's interaction.

The Date Claimer

For years, organising a night out together with a travelling husband seemed like an impossibility. So we have begun a practice of 'date claiming'. Anytime one of us has a mundane chore to do like picking up one of the kids after a dance, we make it a 'date'. We have 'return the DVD' dates, 'fill up the car' dates, even 'weeding the lawn' dates. Rather than the typical 'divide and conquer' strategy that many busy couples adopt, we consciously choose to join each other in our individual chores whenever we can.

Give your marriage a tune up! Every marriage can benefit from one of the many couple retreats or enrichment experiences available.

Celebrate Love Seminar
www.celebratelove.com.au

Marriage Encounter
www.wwme.org.au

New Families Movement of the Focolare
www.focolare.org

Schöenstatt
www.schoenstatt.org.au

Teams – a Movement for Married Spirituality
www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au

Christian Family Movement
www.cfm.org

Couples for Christ
www.cfc-australia.org

Retrouvaille
www.retrouvaille.org

Renaissance of Marriage Conference
www.thepmrc.org/renaissance

Catholic Society for Marriage Education
www.csme.catholic.org.au

For Your Marriage - US Bishops
www.foryourmarriage.org

Busy, Busy!