



Christian Report

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Charting a Course For Christian Marriage

Continuing our Letter of Encouragement to Christian Military Couples

Time to get Herschel out of his recliner and see what “epistles” the letter carrier has left for us today. The flurry of Amazon, FedEx, and UPS trucks serving us during the holidays has abated. The mailbox and the front doorstep are back to normal. Nueske’s catalog still sits on Herschel’s desk.

In our last installment of this series on Christian marriage, we addressed the challenge of becoming more Christ-like as a married person. But today we’ll discuss the difficult topic of resolving the fundamental balance of power within marriage and family life. We are each in a lifelong “discussion” with God about our own degree of submission to His will and how much “in step” we are with His purpose for our lives.

With our “golden years” perspective on power issues in relationships, we are more and more persuaded that the strong personal attitude that “I am right; my ideas are the only ones that matter; my will must prevail” is reminiscent of the Genesis accounts of the urge of early mankind to want to go their own way – eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil before God intended, get their own way by violence if necessary, ignore the require-

ment to lead a righteous life, even build a tower to glorify mankind and not God. These are essentially the same attitudes that permeate relationships where no one is prepared “to give and inch”.

Using our previous example from our practice and these golden years insights, we would suggest that truly comfortable power sharing in marriage and family life evolves only after the youthful power struggles in a new marriage are largely resolved.

These power struggles can only begin to be resolved when both members of the marriage can truly say to themselves that their own opinion, perspective, or decisions might not necessarily be the best or only way to deal with a problem or an issue. The overall tone of humility in our text from 1st Corinthians



helps us see that when one can achieve this level of love with its accompanying honesty and humility, it leaves each spouse freer to choose the areas of leadership in the marriage and family for which each is more talented and skilled.

These power balance issues will be dynamic for military couples as members deploy for long periods of time and the spouse back home takes up the slack and develops new skills and abilities. Yes, we know; we are “preaching to the choir.” Military couples are told this over and over before deployments, but more basic than operational divisions of labor, is the development of the fundamental trust

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involved in sharing one's sense of independence and autonomy with a spouse.

The ups and downs couples encounter as they work out this trust accounts for a considerable level of marital stress, not because the spouses do not try



very hard to display this trust, but because we all start marriage inexperienced at sharing collaborative authority for the most intimate and important functions of our lives. Our families of origin teach us some of what we need to know. Roommate and barracks living will teach us more, but there remains a fundamental deeper level of voluntary surrender of one's autonomy to marriage and ultimately to the family that must be worked out with one's spouse. This is invariably a rocky process not because of the lack of good will, but simply the challenge of "melding" two personalities, one of which is female and one of which is male. It is interesting to know that differences in men and women's brains can be detected in the womb. We can be equal in our rights but, yet, different in our essences.

All of that said, we have five straight forward tips that can help in this process:

1. Check the uniform and rank at the door. One fateful day many years ago, we were having a tiff about something, and Herschel became frustrated and remarked authoritatively, "I'm a commander, I don't make mistakes!" It's a hilarious memory now, and to his credit, not too many minutes elapsed be-

fore he realized how silly he sounded. But the story illustrates that the military couple has at least one member, if not two, like ours, that have been indoctrinated into strong authoritarian and regimented systems and their associated leadership dynamics.

The marriage relationship is a great deal more collaborative and intimate. Hierarchical responsibilities in certain areas of married life must be negotiated lovingly between each other. This may come as a shock to our readers, but Herschel is in charge of the garage except for the washing machines, and Anne is in charge of her kitchen except for the dishwasher. "Commander Hughes" with drill sergeant precision organizes the loading of the dishwasher! And the grandkids have a good laugh about that when they are recruited into one of his "kitchen parties"! But they do it his way! Yes, we have chosen a fairly traditional distribution of labor in our family, but you may find a different pattern works better for you and your spouse.

2. Be compassionate when your spouse is less than perfect. Military leadership skills are superb at helping young men and women develop a strong work ethic, responsibility for others, and a sense of self sacrifice, all great skills, but within a marriage,



there needs to be an emotional equivalent of "WD-40" for those moments when we are not functioning at our best, when it takes us a while to remember we are not perfect and in total control of everything that is important to us. That just because our last performance evaluation in the military unit suggest-

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ed we “walk on water”, we DO NOT. Only Jesus did that, and Peter, briefly! Paul’s admonition to “not quench the spirit” in our excerpt from 1st Thessalonians is timeless.

3. Appreciate the need for different levels of compassion in blended families. Regarding that emotional WD-40, we recommend praying for the COSTCO size pallet of the stuff in dealing with step relationships because it is way too tempting for the stepparent to slip into an “umpire role” with stepchildren and

and become too harsh, and that backfires onto the marriage relationship. Our experience both personally and professionally is that the biological parent in blended families will nearly always have more of that emotional WD-40 for their own



child than the stepparent. Respecting and honoring that while still collaborating on resolving family discipline and other issues is essential.

4. Be liberal with compliments. Catch your spouse doing something “right”. One of our trainers many years ago remarked that the research indicated that we need ten positive reinforcers for every piece of negative feedback we get about our behavior for us to feel like we are in a good relationship. Now we know that most military supervisors, including ourselves, might have trouble hitting that 10:1 ratio, but if a ratio close to that exists, even if nonverbal, it contributes to a sense of belonging. We can do with less frequent positive feedback when it is poignant and meaningful. Here is a good military example. One of Herschel’s old buddies, a former Marine told him about this incident during his friend’s training at Quantico. After a 20-mile

march with his own pack plus the platoon radio, he was having trouble maintaining a jog during the final laps around the track. His Drill Instructor, without saying a word, jogged up beside him and slipped his hand under his pack, relieving him of some of its weight. They finished the jog around the track, thus finishing the march side by side together. Again, not a word was spoken – ever! His friend remarked with more emotion than Herschel had ever observed in him, “I’d have taken a bullet for that man!” It is equally strong when a husband

and wife can give that kind of support to one another when one is making the effort but falling a little short. Catch each other doing things right or even just in the direction of “right.” When you can trust your spouse to do that you have gone a

long way to develop the trust of shared leadership for the marriage and the family that gets you beyond the issue of “who has the power in the marriage”.

5. Relate the attitudes about control in the marriage with attitudes toward submission to God’s will. How we think about our personal power is not confined to our human relationships. Our spiritual growth is reflected in our personal relationships, and this is most pronounced in our ability to humble ourselves and collaborate with our loved ones especially our spouse. Kneeling in prayer before God on a regular basis helps, both through the content of our prayers and our actual physical posture, to keep a proper relationship of humility before God. Praying regularly. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven” is a powerful antidote to accu-

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mulating the attitudes that make collaborative problem resolution with a spouse difficult.



Hopefully, these five tips will be thought provoking and stimulate meaningful discussion. Leaving military rank and

privileges at the door, honoring the basic sex roles you negotiate for your marriage, family and home, remembering the need for emotional WD-40 (especially in step or blended family situations), catching each other doing things right – a lot, and kneeling in prayer humbly seeking God’s will! These are some of the building blocks of trust that we have found lead, in turn, to resolving power struggles.

See you next time when we continue to move forward through our other topics: risking emotional vulnerability, resolving daily conflicts, and enjoying the romance and passion of marriage. So, with all that said, where did that Nueske’s catalogue get off to?

Dr. Herschel Hughes, Jr., CDR, MSC, USNR (Ret.) and Dr. Anne S. Hughes, LCDR, USNR (Ret.) are CMF Local Reps who are engaged in CMF’s Marriage & Family and Combat Trauma Ministries. During different seasons of the year, they are able to adopt a vagabond lifestyle with their RV and enjoy traveling to different military ministry posts while continuing their own Bible teaching and ministry via video conference.

TAPS: In Memoriam

It is always with great sadness to us remaining here on earth to learn of the passing of our beloved friends and co-laborers in the Kingdom. Yet we rejoice as they have been promoted to their great reward, for as it is written “...no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him...” (1 Cor 2:9). Indeed, what is sorrow for us is not sorrow for them, and their homecoming is precious in the eyes of our Heavenly Father (Ps 116:15).

We often hear about the passing of our members far after the fact, so please bear with us when our announcements are not timely. Please also forgive us for not announcing the passing of one of your loved ones as this is a new feature of the Christian Report. Please call or send an email letting us know if we can inform our membership of the passing of your loved one.

SFC Fred Cline, USA (Ret) — March 5, 2023. Fred was a long-time member of CMF and is survived by his wife, Renate, and is interred at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, VA.

Mr. Jerry Fry — February 4, 2024. Jerry was a long-time member of CMF and the husband of Jeri Fry, CMF’s long-time Office Manager. Jerry and Jeri were friends to everyone they met. Jeri passed away during the pandemic on March 26, 2020. They are interred at the Olinger Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge, CO.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

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Mailing Address: PO Box 449
Veradale, WA 99037-0449
(800)798-7875
(303)761-1959
<https://www.CMFHQ.ORG>
office@CMFHQ.org

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