

Let's Stop Playing Games Beyond Understanding –To Unity (While We Can)

Reprinted from the English and Welsh Family Spirit

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(Excerpted from 1982 July-August *Worldwide Family Spirit* magazine)

A couple of days ago we received a phone call asking us to pray for a lady we'd never met who had only a few more hours to live. As I hung up the phone, I thought to myself "One of these days that'll be me asking for prayer. So that maybe somehow or another, God will grant Denie and me one more extra hour, one more day, one more week".

And later on that evening, the record player was on and one of the lines from the song that was playing really tore me up. It went "And these few precious days I'll spend with you, these precious days I'll spend with you". The tears came to my eyes not for the lady and her husband, but for Denie and me.

Because in reality, that's all we really do have, "these few precious days", and most of the time I sure don't treat them as though they and Denie were precious. I waste the opportunities we have and someday I know I will give just about anything short of my immortal soul to have some of them back again.

And so that night just about the time we were laying in each others arms making love, the lady died and I think in a way both of us sensed that. I've tried to talk about it. We tried to put into words the awareness we had that rarely are we properly appreciative of how we should treasure our lovemaking and each other and not take it or each other for granted. But we couldn't seem to say it all - so we just ended up holding each other very tightly and crying a little.

It's such a horrible shame that quite often those kinds of words that truly express how deeply we love one another only come when it's too late for the other person to hear them.

Each time Denie has to go away on an extended business trip we each get a small taste of what it is going to be like to sleep alone in a bed that once was such a cozy refuge for two. We get a taste of what it's going to be like to not have someone near who wants to know what your feelings are on all the little things We get a taste of what it's like to live out your mask to the hilt 16 to 18 hours a day because there isn't someone you trust enough to be completely candid and real with - who you know loves you, warts and all.

We've each had those moments when that cold fear of maybe something horrible happening to the other one sweeps over us and we end up praying "Oh God - keep him/her safe and just bring them home", and you'd think that after all of that, we'd wake up and start living our lives together as the precious, time-running out gift that they are. But we haven't. We still believe that it's never going to happen to us.

Last night we made love again, but the tenderness was not quite so acute - nor the news quite so recent. How often I forget that the clock is ticking. How many times I've walked right up to the threshold of a beautiful, painfully close moment of intimacy with Dee - then backed away from it.

How many times all the pieces have been in place - two beautiful loveletters written and read, a quiet house, the kids asleep, the atmosphere perfect, the feelings alive - and I gave only a halfhearted attempt at experiencing my wife through her feelings.

Unity is so elusive, especially when I'm not going after it with much enthusiasm. They told us about unity of feelings as the ultimate goal of dialogue on our Weekend. They asked us to recall our three closest moments and then gave us the tool to create moments just as close if we worked at it, and we did - especially in the early days.

We not only believed it was possible - we proved it to ourselves. Not often, mind you. But often enough to realize that it is possible to pursue Dee's feeling with such commitment that I can truly feel it inside myself - to be so close to Dee that I know exactly what it's like to be her at that moment. To love her so much that nothing is more important to me at that moment than to see the world through her eyes and feel it as she does.

I came home from our Weekend determined to make that crescendo kind of closeness our goal for each and every dialogue. For months I pursued that with a vengeance - working as hard as I knew how to experience Dee fully. For the first few weeks she held back. She kept telling me there was a "bag of snakes" inside her that I didn't want to know about.

I kept after her until she started to reveal some of what she thought were "uglies" because she slowly became convinced that I really wanted to know. But they weren't uglies at all - they were very real fears and doubts about herself buried deep behind her mask. She began to let me share in them. Up until that time, she had spent a lifetime never believing that anyone, including me, really wanted her to feel loved.

Then one day we made it. Or at least I think we did. We worked so hard at reaching unity of feelings that our oneness became an incredible, almost painful moment that neither of us will ever forget. It's probably the closest I've come to a religious experience: the presence of Our Father in that room with us - part of us - was tangible. There are no words to describe that incredible experience. We've never been closer - and the glow from that blending of our souls lasted for weeks. The memory will last forever.

We've come close to that a few times since then when we've cared enough to work for it, but not so much in recent years. We just haven't worked to pursue each other with every fiber that's in us. We've forgotten the ultimate goal of dialogue and settled for using it to better our understanding of ourselves and each other rather than to better our experience of each other.

I don't know how to define unity or intimacy on a practical basis, if I'm honest. I can talk a lot of good-sounding words. But for a lot of reasons this question has been bugging me for weeks, and the more I look at it, the more I realize I am afraid of unity and intimacy with Denie. The more I look - the more I see all the ways I back away when an intimate opportunity presents itself.

One way is by writing Denie "loving letters instead of love letters" because I'm afraid that the "love letters" will create feelings of sexual arousal in Denie and I'll lose my control over that aspect of our lives. My thanks to a dear friend named Mary for that insight. I can also see where I carry that downplaying of my hunger for Denie one step further, especially in our dialogue prayer.

Recently I've found myself being unable to describe accurately in our dialogue very deep and painful feelings of hurt and longing. I'd get to a certain point and then reach a mental blank. I knew there was more there but I just couldn't seem to get at it.

After looking at myself, I realized that in these areas I had stopped trusting Denie beyond a certain point. That certain point being where the feeling would start to truly come alive in me and become so obvious to Denie that I couldn't bluff my way out of it. The reasons why I stopped believing in him are really kind of irrelevant right now. What is important for me to deal with is the fact that I'm sometimes not as open to Denie as I once was.

At least before and shortly after our Weekend, I knew the specifics of what I was afraid to tell Denie. There are times now when I get so bound up; I'm not even willing to acknowledge the feelings to myself. That isn't exactly what you'd call progress. And more importantly it's the biggest hurdle I can see to us fully appreciating our right nows as these few precious days".

Sitting down to think about unity of feelings has been good for us. It's caused us to recall what it takes to experience that unity for ourselves. It takes determination and absolute commitment. I have to want it enough to go after my lady with every ounce of commitment that's in me. To set myself aside completely, and to become an empty vessel ready to be filled up by her, to die to myself.

I have to make full use of my imagination and creativity to conjure up images of Dee's description of what her feeling is like and know the right kinds of questions to ask.

It takes the most intense form of listening possible, and it takes both of us working as hard as we can. We get nowhere when one of us wants to experience the other's feeling, but the other doesn't want to share it fully.

But the reality of our dialogues in recent months have been far short of the ideal. We seem to settle for understanding and trust starts to fade when we don't work very hard at experiencing each other. Long ago we discovered that we have a three minute barrier. Using some of our favorite questions, we can get to the point of understanding what the other person's feeling is like in about three minutes, like "Can you think of a time when I felt like this?" or "How would you act it out if you could?" or "What increases your feeling?" or "How do I act when I feel like this?" - all help us to get to a fundamental level of understanding, and the problem is that once we get to this level of understanding, we tend to quit or lapse into a chat. The fact is it takes a tremendous amount of energy, concentration, and pure determination to dialogue for a full ten minutes. Ten minutes is a long, long time when we are focusing our full attention on trying to absorb one another completely. At one point, we timed our dialogues - and that's how we discovered the three minute barrier. Yet that intimacy we tell ourselves we're after comes only when I know Dee loves me enough to want to experience my feeling even after she understands it - whatever the feeling is. When I see the effort and the hunger in her when we punch right through that three minute barrier I end up knowing I am being pursued, wanted, and desirable to her even if we never succeed in tasting the feeling. The closeness comes on the journey not just at the destination.

That lady's death has had a good affect on us. We're trying harder to experience each other. We're reminding ourselves that all it takes is a decision and a little willpower, and what spurs us on is the knowledge that God gives me the gift of caressing her cheek today - He has allowed me to try to touch her soul today - but he doesn't guarantee that gift for tomorrow.