

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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Community and Faith

When writing these newsletters, I tend to write about what is on my mind at the time. It just seems to work better that way. This month, unfortunately, grief and loss are at the forefront of my thoughts. On April 19th, my grandmother passed away at the age of 94. Five weeks later, on Memorial Day, my wife's grandfather (an Air Force veteran) passed away at the age of nearly 80. Needless to say, it has been a rough few weeks for our family. In the midst of these losses, we maintained our regular schedules as best we could, myself operating the counseling center and my wife taking care of our two-year-old daughter. I think we both learned that no matter how long our loved ones live, we are never ready to let them go. My grandmother's death has been a monumental loss for me personally, despite the knowledge that she lived an extremely long and productive life. The support and connection my wife and I received from our friends, family and church community has certainly made things easier. For me, it reinforces the importance of community and faith in our existence as individuals and as married couples. We have received countless phone calls, cards, letters, emails, texts, facebook posts, plants, flowers and even food. We are thankful for everything and for everyone.

So today I am going to remind you that your marriage does not need to operate in a vacuum. If you are not doing so already, see to it that you and your spouse connect and interact with family, friends and communities of faith. There are so many benefits of building a strong social support system for your marriage and for your family. Notice I say "building;" I say that because I believe folks with strong social connections make an effort to build these connections. They just don't stand idly by, waiting for people to come into their lives—they help, give back, contribute and stay involved in their community. When I was younger my mother would often tell me "a friend is someone who is there for you when you don't ask them to be." If you and your spouse will work at building more social and spiritual connections, your marriage should benefit from both the giving and the receiving. Social support is powerful. This is why twelve-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous have been such a successful means of recovery for thousands of people. These groups offer individuals a connection to both a higher power and a connection to others who are also suffering. And, I would argue, you don't have to necessarily be a "social butterfly" to build strong social connections. Even us introverts (yes, surprisingly enough I tend to be very introverted) can connect with others. It may just be less natural for you (or me) than someone else. In a small way I am modeling this social connection behavior for you by writing this newsletter. Those of you who subscribe to this newsletter make up a community of sorts, and today I am sharing with you a small measure of my grief. In times of personal crisis, I would encourage you to do the same, to the degree that you are comfortable doing so. And, you don't necessarily have to discuss the complexity or intimacy of your emotions, sometimes just sharing memories or discussing the weather can be just as helpful. A few years ago I received a phone call from one of my close friends; we talk regularly so it was not uncommon for him to call me. For about 15 to 20 minutes we discussed the usual low-key topics—it was as if nothing was wrong—until he told me that his grandfather had just passed away. When I asked my friend why he did not tell me when I first answered the phone, he told me that he just wanted to talk for a while and that he knew that I would make him laugh. Thanks be to God for friendship.

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