

Believe in Love

7 Part Blog series from 2012 by Melisa Nielsen

Part 1

I have been working on this series in my head for a long time. I will often have an interaction with a friend or family that I am working with and it will leaving me with a prompting to search, ponder and pray.

I decided to call this series "Believe in Love" because it encompasses more than just the dynamics between husbands and wives. I work with same sex couples, couples that live together and are not married and also with single parents - what I find, is that the issues are the same. The same dysfunction occurs and in turn the same beauty. My aim will be to talk to all families without making too many generalizations. Please don't take my word as gospel truth, seek confirmation on your own. Search, ponder and pray about your own relationships and your own connections.

This will not be an easy series for some. If you are struggling, it is likely that you will be upset with me at some point during this series. I want to say right now that it will never be my intent to make you sad or mad and if you do find yourself in that place, please step back and look deeper. If I strike a cord there might be a reason. Also, if I say something that just doesn't resonate with you, skip that part and come back another time.

I remember a major humbling I had about five years ago. I was teaching a class at a Waldorf conference for Rahima Baldwin Dancy. I forget the topic now but there was a discussion about rhythm and I discussed just what a blessing it was that my husband led the day with prayer for us all and how that carried everyone through. I thought the class responded well to my thoughts on having Dad lead the day. When I got home from the conference, I got a very angry email from one of the participants telling me that it wasn't her reality and how mad she was that I shared what a blessing it could be if more families did it because her husband would **never** be open to that. The email devastated me! She went on to tell me how the entire experience in my class made her so upset and she would never use my work again. Wow. It took me some time in prayer to recover from that a bit. I took on all of her poo and anger at HER situation. I went back to the class evaluations from the conference and searched for hers. It wasn't there. What was there though were 13 letters of praise from members that couldn't wait to go home and ask their husbands to lead the day... whether it be in prayer or in verse or just a gathering and those that couldn't make the timing work with their husbands were planning to find some other way to come together. I knew this was powerful work. Getting Dad involved would not be an easy task and it would likely conjure up a lot of hurt for some women, but it was blessed work.

Shortly after that interaction, our Beacon program began and later I wrote our book "108 Days: A Guide to Being a Beacon in our Modern World". This series is a primer to more work that is coming. Again, there will be times when I will probably say something that might make you wince... ask yourself why before tossing me an email about how mean I am! *wink*

Where do I get off? Rest assured, for those who are new to me and the work we do, I have not always been a happy person in a near perfect marriage. I spent 13 years figuring things out in my first marriage. I spent a lot of time trying to change him when in the end the only one that really changed was me. In the end, I got healthy and years later, he's still struggling. That is his walk though and even though it has been hard on our children, I have to believe that they knew when they chose him to be their father that it wouldn't be a rosy path. I believe we are all together before we come here... we know what we are getting into and even if I am wrong about that one, it is just life and we have to walk on in order to get through.

In this series, we are going to tackle the good, the bad and the ugly. We are going to talk about making good marriages even better, how to know if you should maybe talk to a lawyer, how to save it even if you are headed down the path of divorce, and how to recover once you have divorced. We are going to talk about getting Dad involved and keeping him there, how to love and honor each other more, how to have mind blowing sex (don't worry, it will be clean!) And how to parent TOGETHER. Ok, that is a lot to cover! There is more... the #1 thing that cements families is a spiritual connection. I know... some of you are rolling your eyes at me... trust me on this one. It does not matter if you are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim... Pagan...or somewhere in between... the bond is the Spirit. Without that bond, you can have great sex, work on raising a family... you can even look picture perfect, but without that bond you will always be missing that ultimate depth. How do I know? I walked it. I know. I told myself for years that it didn't matter when it did. People that are spiritually yoked will make better decisions and will always be thinking of one another. No matter what the faith is.

Part 2

This is NOT a volume for you to read with your kiddos around :) Maybe your partner though!

I know this won't be an easy series for some. Some weeks will likely be easier than others. I am not a therapist, just a woman that has walked more paths than I sometimes care to admit. It has taken me many years to get where I can say I am healthy, but that doesn't mean I don't have daily striving to do! I am continual work in progress, we all are. When we can be humble and know that we are not any better than our neighbor then we have a chance! A chance at being really healthy, emotionally and spiritually, while we live in this physical space.

In this section I want you to evaluate things. We have a lot to consider before we get to real work. It is always good to take stock, to stand back and try to get an unbiased look at the big picture. I think that even when we feel like we have a good marriage it is a wonderful exercise

to do. Having been on the dark side, I try to make this evaluation process something that I include in my regular meditations. My marriage is wonderful, but I can always take a good look at how I can work on myself, which in turn makes our hearts stronger as one.

Taking stock for the first time can seem a little overwhelming, especially if you have been together a long time. I want you to go all the way back to the beginning. This is especially hard if you are not in a good place with your partner right now. I want you to go all the way back. The day you met, think about what you were wearing, how you felt. Think about who you were then. How much have your personalities changed? Some were lucky enough to meet and marry someone to walk this path of alternative living with, others have changed and perhaps their partner is not on board.

When I met my ex, he was a hippie and I was pretty uptight... somewhere in 13 years we made a role reversal. Now he is super conservative and I am much more middle of the road. This caused a great deal of contention in our marriage. From the news we listened to all the way to the way we ate. It affected the way I wanted to raise and nurture our children. I was very much wanting everything natural and he felt like he made a lot of money why should we live like hippies. This taking stock business can be hard! I remember when I did it for the first time. I had taken a class based on a workshop from Carol Tuttle. She is a self-help guide and a Rapid Eye Therapist. My marriage was in big time trouble. We were not sleeping in the same room and we were in counseling. I took home her book (Remembering Wholeness) and started reading. I was working on a mental check list/evaluation and it didn't look good. I didn't want to be with him. She suggested having sex and that was the LAST thing I wanted to do with him. I was living each day angrier than the last. There was no meeting in the middle for me. I had tried and felt like either I was failing or I was just done. In looking back, I don't regret ending that marriage, it had to end for the phase of my life I am in now to come to fruition, BUT... I do often think about my part in things. When we are angry and we are working with a partner suffering from anger, mental illness or even spectrum issues, it can be so draining. Parenting with them can be even more draining. Intimacy can feel forced or just plain icky. These seeds don't grow overnight. There is no fast growing seed of contention, it is cultivated just like seeds of love, hope and faith are. If we cultivate contention then that is what grows in our garden. This exercise is meant to help you look at your garden.

A very wise woman told me once that a happy, nurtured marriage never has either party complaining to someone else. That means you don't call up your mom and vent about your husband. That doesn't mean that seeking help or guidance is the same as venting. There is a difference between "help me to navigate this" and "can you believe his nerve??" They are very different. So in your evaluation process, step back and ask yourself... when was the last time I vented about my husband to someone other than my husband. That is tough! I used to complain about my ex ALL THE TIME. It was easy to make that part of every conversation with my mother or my friends. Now granted, I had a lot to complain about, but I was going about it all wrong. I have a strict rule in my marriage now. **I don't say anything to ANYONE about Erik that I would not say directly to him. NOTHING.** That doesn't mean Erik is perfect, it just means that I love him enough for him to be the first person I complain to about something he did. In more than

nine years, I can count all of our fights on one hand and there has never been shouting. Now I like to yell... I am Italian... it is in my blood. I yell at my children more than I should, but never at my husband. I have walked that road, it isn't fun. I knew my first marriage had to be over when my little ones huddled together and sought comfort from my oldest who was 7 at the time. It was a pretty humbling moment.

In your evaluation... ask yourself HONESTLY, who starts the fights? Who fosters the contention? When was the last time you sat down together and had a heart to heart? How close are you? Can you tell your husband something that you would tell a close girl friend or your mother? If not, why? Has it always been that way? If not, when did it change?

Often I hear that things change when babies come along. As moms we are often sold on the attached way of parenting and sometimes we forget that made a commitment to our partner first. (unless of course you married because you got pregnant and that is a whole other topic, let me know if you want me to tackle that!) When you came together with your partner and decided to have children, the commitment was first to that partner. Adults understand that the partnership changes with children are born. At least healthy adults do. It is very important not to fall into a sibling relationship. It is important for that same open-honest communication to be fostered... again, cultivated while you are in the early years of parenting. Somewhere in here, the intimate relationship goes from give-give to take-take. Many are no longer coming together in a communion of giving ourselves over to a union of love - the spirituality can be extinguished from your love making if it isn't cultivated. If you have sex now just to keep the peace... just know that it isn't normal or healthy. You should have sex because you want to... because you seek that spiritual connection that you had in the beginning. (if you never had it, that is another topic altogether too and we can cover it, just ask) Being intimate is more than just a physical act... in fact the words sex and intimacy don't really even mean the same thing. While intimacy can include sex, it doesn't have to - the word itself imparts more connection than just the physical act. When was the last time you had intimate time and are you looking forward to it again? Now if you are like us then you may be constantly trying to find a quiet spot in the night when everyone is sleeping... in their own bed... or hiding to find space... or getting a cheap hotel, pizza... babysitter... find the time. It is so important to connect with each other. If you haven't connected in a while and you miss your partner, TELL THEM! Love notes, text messaging and whispers in the ear can heal a day of stress and frustration.

Realize in this intimacy equation that if you have a partner that is on the spectrum, their physical needs are sometimes different. I have given this a lot of thought and watched both my ex and my oldest son. There is a need for them to feel love through physical connection. A man (or woman) not raised to understand love and what it means to them on the spectrum can feel very rejected by not having their "sex quota" met. If you are struggling with this, know that you are not alone. It is continual work to help your partner know that you understand their love language and that you also have one. It can be very black and white for them so really work to understand each other's needs. Now if your partner is not willing to discuss that they are on the spectrum, but it is obvious to you, then you will have to phrase things differently. Go back to those loving feelings you had early in your relationship.

Remember this is just an evaluation. It will teach you a lot about yourself, what you are willing to put up with and how maybe you can help change any bad dynamics just through looking at things differently.

Now I had to tackle some icky. Destructive habits. These are things that rip a family apart if they aren't controlled. Porn. Alcohol. Drugs. Even excessive gaming. There are so many vices we have to sort through these days. Porn isn't a boys will be boys kind of thing. It is a real problem. I am not talking about watching a flick to tantalize you both or something fun you do together. I am talking about addiction. What starts out as something small can often turn into a problem and before you know it, there is a hole that wasn't once there. This is where being close is so important. Addiction, no matter what it is, is a problem. Someone that views porn daily, drinks daily or uses drugs daily has an issue. I am certainly not qualified to answer all the questions that arise from addiction except to know that it hurts families. I don't drink. Sure, my religion opposes it, but that is not why I don't drink. I don't drink because I spent 13 years married to someone that wouldn't stop drinking. Children see it. If you don't think they do, you are kidding yourself. Children know. I wanted to write about this because I believe that it affects more homeschooling families than one would think. I talk to hundreds of families a year and dozens of them struggle with these kinds of addictions. Get help. If your partner won't get help, then you get help. There is help out there. If you are struggling and want me to help you find help, email me. I will help you. This is serious business. It affects not just your marriage. It affects your children. It will for certain affect your connection to each other and to the Divine.

Part 3

Once you have taken stock, then some big decisions have to be made. I will say that I do believe ANY marriage can be saved. It takes two people to do it. If you are walking this road and your partner is toxic, remember that all you can do is work on yourself. You have to leave space for your partner to live out their agency and then you have to decide if that is ok with you. Everyone is different. Things that might not work for you, maybe completely acceptable to your neighbor or friend. Do not judge yourself on their standards. These decisions should take a lot of prayer and meditation. It isn't to be taken lightly. This part is about healing and getting back to being happy together. Remember **you can only be responsible for your own happiness**. You can't control your partner or make them happy.

So you have taken stock and you both have decided that you will be in trouble if things don't change. Remember that this is a journey together. You will both likely go at different speeds and will both likely have different issues come up. To heal and grow, you have to agree to tackle them together and treat each other with dignity as you are walking this together. Honesty is SO very important. Safety is also important. You need to feel like your relationship is a place where you can both be honest and feel safe. BOTH of you need this. If this area is a problem, you may really want to consider marriage counseling. While my suggestions work and they are good, my coaching should never be a replacement for marriage therapy if needed.

It helps to identify the areas where you both feel work should be done. Perhaps you are struggling with not getting enough time to yourself but maybe he works 80+ hours a week and just can't fit in time for you to be alone. Issues like these can become fight topics and lead to anger and frustration for both partners. It is a very real issue in homeschooling families and often leaves mom burned out and feeling like a failure. If you are both tackling the issue together, then you can begin to heal - sometimes just the slightest adjustment can make all the difference. Is there a way his schedule can be changed around, even just shifted here or there so you get more time? Even two hours a week makes a giant difference.

Maybe your struggles are much bigger are they financial and that causes you to fight? Or maybe they are meddling in-laws? Or substance abuse? No matter what they are, tackling them together is a big help. When you are both on board, that also means you will have to take on some of the responsibility for things being the way they are. Women will often hold on to things, letting them build, we do this and then like a balloon, we either explode or let all the air out at once. This isn't healthy on our part and it isn't a good model for our children. One thing that I learned in healing from my divorce, is that I had a part in things. Sure he was XYZ, but I was also PDQ. I allowed the situation to get to the place it was and I wasn't always nice and caring about our struggles. Accepting and OWNING my part allowed me to heal and also allowed me to begin the forgiveness process. Forgiving can be hard. The process isn't much different when you are living together than it is if you have divorced. Forgiveness MUST happen for true healing to occur.

Owning our part in things can be so hard. I often compare adult and child relationships. We are so much like the child we once were - especially if we never grew beyond that place of needing to be right. I have found that many adults are stuck somewhere between the 9 year change with a quest to be critical and right at all costs and the changes that happen when we are about 18 when our intellect is in full swing. I noticed within myself that marrying young kept me from fully stepping out of that place - don't take that to mean I think all that marry young are here, but many are. You know that you are in this place if you fight with your partner like you did with your siblings. This constant quest to be correct, holding a grudge and in turn distancing yourself from your partner. Punishing them rather than solving issues that come up.

When we can see these patterns within ourselves, then it is easier to extinguish and redeem them. Temperament work can help with this so much. Erik and I have temperament chats all the time. We know each other well and we are often discussing just how much one of our children is taking on the positive or negative aspects of their temperament. Working together with temperament can be a double edged sword, but it can also be a huge eye opener. It is not likely that you will get a 30 year old phlegmatic to stop seeking comfort in TV or video games, but helping them to understand that it is in their nature to want to have their hinny glued to the sofa may get them to seek more active, balance activities. Older teens and adults can set out to actively work on their temperament by being present in each situation and evaluating what their first impulse is and what a more balanced response could be. For instance, I have two fairly phlegmatic sons, 17yo and 8yo. It DRIVES ME BANANAS to see them with a game controller in their hand? Waldorf aside, that game controller within moderation should NOT bother me. That

bossy choleric in me wants to start questioning... how long have you been playing that? Can't you do something else? Wouldn't a board game be more fun? The sanguine in me wants to get them doing something that I think would be more fun. To balance myself, I have been working on stopping, asking Melisa... what bothers you about this? Is it that these two would play games all day if I let them? Is a loving reminder of the rules enough? Or do I need to drill them (not!) The choleric in me wants to control them but I know enough about temperament to remember that the phlegmatic will dig in their heels and then be super grouchy. It is all in how I approach them.

How do I use this with Erik? We both work together to help each other with triggers. If he sees the kids doing something that he knows will get me going, he will take it on first. As a phlegmatic himself, he can respond to the children in ways that I am sometimes struggling with. He can be super easy going and turn my mountain into a mole hill and then an ant hill before I even have a chance to open my mouth. Conversely, I can do the same if I see something that might set him off.

Sometimes we are looking at working with temperament in each other and with other adults. This can be tricky and sound manipulative, but it really isn't when your intent is pure. We have to remember that each temperament has a sweet spot. It is that spot that can turn that person and only those who really know them can do it. Let's remember that phlegmatics love comfort, peace, harmony... the basics of food, sex and calm are blissful things. Choleric like to be in charge, they like order, chaos frustrates them. Melancholics love to be needed, to see people be compassionate, they love to feel good but often they would say they are troubled. Sanguines can forget stuff quickly, they are great in a fight for this reason, but they are also loving, caring and adventurous.

So how do these temperaments work together? Often these base human nature parts of ours (our temperament) get in our way after years (of even months!) of being too comfortable and forgetting to inspire our partner. Maybe you are phlegmatic and your husband is choleric. Gosh that is a hard one... he wants order and you struggle to keep house. This is often a struggle with a melancholic/choleric pairing as well. There will have to be some meeting in the middle. If you are phlegmatic, you might just have to work on your own personal comfort level and change it to include a clean house while your husband might have to give a little on the level of clean - the amount of order, etc. You will both do well in the area of not having chaos, parent together so you can reduce this. If you are melancholic, your biggest challenge might be to help your choleric partner understand that you feel talked down to when they are bossy, you spend all day extending compassion to the children and it can be exhausting to then keep house too. Realize that your partner needs zero chaos as much as you need 100% compassion so work together on a parenting style that reflects both.

Sanguine and choleric pairings can be great because the choleric can spout off and the sanguine is quick to forgive and move on, but the struggle can be that the sanguine will often seem (or really is) disorganized. You are a great planner Sanguine Mom, but your follow through is only as good as the next fun thing you want to do. Work to balance his need for order and your need for flexibility. You can do anything if you work together.

No matter what your pairing, you can work together to bring out the best parts in your temperament and your partners.

As you work through the healing process, realize that you will have a fair amount of work to do on yourself. I recommend the work in our Beacon Files, joining us in our Thinking Feeling Willing program or even some of our free podcasts.

Healing begins with realizing there is work to be done together. It will not be easy.

Let's talk about forgiveness. Just like you, my path to wholeness will likely not ever be really complete until I leave this earthly existence. I am a work in progress. Each step that I take toward working on myself is a gift that I give myself, my partner and my children. About a year ago, I began to feel like I had another level of poo to shed. Old stuff wasn't coming back, but things were surfacing that I didn't think mattered before. In my morning prayers one winter day, it hit me. It literally nearly knocked me over. The energy of the experience was palpable. Forgiveness. At first it didn't make much sense to me, forgiveness had been my work for a long time. Surely I had let go of everything I needed to. I pondered the answer for a few days and it kept coming back. Like TP stuck to my shoe, I knew I had to get rid of it. I would have to explore it more. It was about a month since my middle son had gone to live with his father and I was wrestling with my part in it and just how much I was supposed to let go. I didn't feel like the forgiveness was to come from there. It kept coming back to my ex. His part in things that while I had let go, I couldn't really forgive completely. Our battle was an intensely personal, incredibly mean one that took almost all of my sanity and nearly every dime I had. I had a lot of forgiving and it came in stages. Often forgiveness comes in layers like an onion, bit by bit. Forgiving a partner that you have chosen to stay with, will have much the same process, it will likely take a while. Something will happen and the hair on your neck will stand up and your heart will harden. It is your job to work with that emotion toward forgiveness. Conversely the same is true if they are working to forgive you.

Forgiveness is an extremely spiritual undertaking and one that is very hard when we are also struggling with humility. The two go hand in hand and they are also never perfect. It is more than just forgiving the person and then walking away. We have to examine it a bit and really come to terms with it. For me, I had to have the help of my personal faith to be able to withstand the pain of working it over again. I remember the night I chose very well. It was a Thursday evening and I had early morning (4:30am) coaching calls the next morning. Everyone in my house was asleep and I was wrestling with the experience. It was late, close to midnight. I knew that the next morning I would need to parent and run a business, all on little sleep. I slid out of bed and onto my knees and I began to plead with God. As tears fell, I could feel the presence and warmth of the Spirit. I continued to plead for my own forgiveness, carrying the burden was much more than I could bare. I realized just how much I needed to let go. The process seemed to go on for hours.

Once complete, I crawled into bed. I slept the sleep of a thousand nights. I woke before my alarm refreshed and ready to meet the day and my family.

Never underestimate the power of forgiveness.

If your journey isn't about healing and your marriage is in a delicious place, please go hug your partner and thank them for standing in the light with you. Every day is a gift.

Part 4

I thought I would tackle a few emails that I have gotten as I have been writing this series. If you have something you want me to tackle then PLEASE email me melisa@waldorfessentials.com

Today we are going to tackle a couple delicate issues... 1. partnerships with children and marriages that came together because of a pregnancy; 2. marriages that have somehow gotten so far off track that you are not in the same library, let alone the same book or on the same page.

1. While pregnancy outside of marriage used to be a taboo topic in society, today this scenario is fairly common place. Worldwide, there are more and more couples consciously deciding to have children without marrying and those that come together after an unplanned pregnancy. This can pose some interesting challenges in relationships and sometimes legal wrangling as well.

It is not often that I meet and work with a mom that is not legally married to her partner when she doesn't see it as a goal or something she wants - while this isn't all of the unmarried moms, I would say that it does make up 90% of my unmarried coaching population. I also work with some same sex couples and in general I would say if they could marry, they would and do where possible.

When I started writing this the first time, I realized that I was writing too much about the fact that I am PRO marriage and not enough about the fact that pro marriage or not, things happen and that you have to make decisions based on those actions so I deleted it and started over.

Marriage or not, realize that as you parent together and hopefully have a deep abiding love for each other, that this will be a daily, sometimes minute by minute undertaking. You will have to be committed EVERYDAY, not just part of the time. So if you didn't plan to stay with this person before you got pregnant you may have a harder road ahead. Just like marriage, you will both have to be committed to the health and wellbeing of each other AND of the child or children you parent together. If you plan to part then don't think it will be easy sailing there either, it will be very much like a divorce in many ways. So all of that aside, I will take off my hat of "parenting teens old enough to have sex" and go back to my "life experience coaching."

So you are here. Maybe you have decided to stay together and you don't know if you are going to make it, but you are going to try. What now? Just like a married couple that planned a pregnancy in a perfect world, you will have to work to get on the same page and stay there. If you are not on the same path, you will have to work together to get there. If there is hurt in your past, you will have to do the same things that I mentioned in our last sections to forgive and move on in peace. With this in mind, let's move on to my #2 topic today.

2. Help! We are not on the same page! So either you have come together to try to raise children and you started out not on the same page or you have been married for a while and your interests and growth have been at different paces and you suddenly find yourself irritated by a partner that isn't on the same page. Both can be hard situations to move through. For me, I realized it later in my first marriage and then also worked to tame my frustrations with my ex as we tried to co-parent.

First, I just have to get this out of the way. As much as you think you are right and he is wrong, you can't act that way and have a healthy marriage or co-parenting relationship. You are absolutely entitled to your opinion and your feelings but you didn't have those children on your own so you have to accept that the other parent has some sort of say in how life will be. Even if what you are researching and learning about Waldorf, natural birthing, natural eating, special diets, etc. IS in fact the right path, you must take into account your partner. It is hard. I know what it is like to have an unsupportive partner. It bites.

So you aren't on the same page and you acknowledge that they have some right to also govern these children, what now? Well, all isn't lost. So often the dynamics of husband and wife, are the answer to this conflict. I will talk about divorced and co-parenting situations in a moment, for now let's assume that you deeply love your partner, you are working together each day to make a life together and you have mutual goals. Maybe he was raised to think boys knitting is not a great idea or helping with chores is bad or he wants to play Call of Duty with your 4 yo? All the spouting off to him about the awesome book you read or this awesome homeschool consultant you talked to, is not going to convince him. Step back and think about his love language, think about how you are talking to him. When I see something new that I want to implement, I test the waters first. Erik and I are completely honest with each other (go back to the last post if you are not in this spot yet) with that honesty comes responsibility. Responsibility on both parts to listen to each other. With a strong marriage, trust is so important, working together from a place of trust helps you get stuff done. If you discuss your new found diet that you want to try and he says no, find out why. Be nice. Often "no" is really a request for more information. "Honey, what is your objection?" sounds different than "well I am just doing it anyway!" Maybe his objection is that he is afraid he won't like the new diet or maybe he heard a horror story from someone at work about how their Waldorf educated child didn't read until they were ten or maybe his mom told him Waldorf was a cult - your job is to ask and LISTEN. In a marriage where you are working together, both of you have a deep desire to make the other happy, to have mutual happiness in your path of parenting and partnership. When you are working from this place then you can conquer anything. If you can't answer his objection, ask to table the conversation until later when

you have done more research. It is likely he will appreciate your strength and follow through. If you both pray, then ask him to pray about it before giving you an answer.

Maybe you have been at this marriage for a long time and while you don't want divorce, you know you just can't make waves or it will make your life harder. So now what? Well live your life then. Work to make YOU happy. Work on YOU. Just like I mentioned in the last part about not being able to force change, you can't sit and be unhappy either - work on you, enjoy your kids, evaluate if this is a situation you want to stay in. If this is you then pick your battles but be strong. Don't let yourself be abused. Seek help if you need it.

If you are divorced or heading down that path and you are trying to make changes... good luck. If you couldn't parent together when you were married then chances are it won't be smooth sailing now, but if you can be level headed, make a good case and work from a place of mutual trust then you may be in luck. If dietary changes are 100% necessary for your child and your ex won't play ball, do not hesitate to get some legal help, but if you really just don't want them to watch TV during their visits you may have to compromise. There aren't many things harder than compromising with someone we don't like so really work to be in a place of forgiveness. Too many times, while I was totally in the right - giving Coke to a 4yo! - it wasn't abuse under the law and I spent too much time stressing about it and not enough time letting it go so he wouldn't look for things to irritate me. If I could go back and tell myself anything post-divorce it would be to CHILL. It would be to let him make a fool of himself on his own and not take part in it. Of course not every co-parenting situation is like this and there are some really big hurdles in some cases, but try not to get so upset and if you need a pep talk, drop me a note. Remember that the only thing you can really do is keep things on the right path in your own home. You can't parent over there, don't try. Raise your kids right. Tell them the truth. Be strong for them. Pray for them. And go have fun. You won't do them any good if you don't get well rested while they are gone.

Part 5 ~ Spirit, the Bedroom and the Deep Stuff

We have talked about a lot in this series and as we start to put it to bed, I wanted to tackle two things that are extremely important. Some would say they are overrated, but I really don't think so. I tend to talk about things that many people shy away from - especially in homeschooling circles - God, Sex and being on the same page. Now if you don't believe in God, don't stop reading, I will attempt to address many facets of the big picture.

Many of you that have been with us for a long time, know that my own struggle with Deity plays a huge part in my life and how I face each day. If you want to read more about that, you can [HERE](#). I am not aiming to talk about which faith you should follow or who has better doctrine or if you call it God, Goddess, Source, Connection, Allah... we are *in general* talking about the same Light. Your own inner striving is what makes you who you are - especially those on this Waldorf path, you know that inner work is the key to your growth and in turn to helping your children along this path. Many women will express that this seems like a need... a passion... something

they HAVE to do, where their partners may not be in that same place. For many this is a source of great frustration, great angst and in many cases, divorce. In these lives we lead, we are growing at different rates and often, especially in a typical homeschooling dynamic, Dad is out earning and Mom is home learning. I am seeing many changes with that dynamic in the last few years in my coaching, but in general we still have a gap in many households with Dad and Mom struggling to be on the same page. This struggle starts small, but begins to move into every aspect of life, housekeeping, food preparation, child care and rearing, church life and sex life too. The farther Mom feels that she is from Dad, the less likely she is to want to cuddle up to him - even if she wants more babies. If Dad is off doing the lion's share of the earning then he may want to come home to a clean house, a cooked meal and then later some warmth between the sheets (or where ever you can find a spot where there are no sleeping children!) While it seems very 1950's, it is a dynamic that is easy to slip into. It isn't considered often that homeschooling is a job and that any special meal preparation is like getting a culinary degree. Often these decisions are made without discussing together the full impact of how it will affect the house as a whole. Soon Dad is frustrated at the messy house and Mom is frustrated that he isn't helping more and really all she wants is 20 minutes to think without being whined at. I see this happen over and over. Somehow the next step of talking it through often ends with Dad deciding that while Waldorf is great and homeschooling is good for the kids, it isn't good for the family as a whole and the kids need to go to school so the house is clean, the food is prepared and then of course Mom will be happy and want to get naked again. This discussion often ends with more hurt than help and Mom either resigns to keep homeschooling and just won't complain or she throws in the towel and tries to be happy about it.

This is not a healthy dynamic.

I wish there was a new line in the standard wedding vows... instead of loving and honoring... it should say "I agree to love, honor and *COMMUNICATE*."

Communication is a societal problem. It is a HUGE societal problem. I see it in the gross over simplifications in politics... all who are on assistance are lazy or all those Republicans hate the environment. It happens in our home... he never gives me the time I need or this house is always a mess.

When we fail to communicate, we fail each other.

How can these situations be smoother and how can we avoid them all together? First, it is good for us to be flexible. Great! You might be thinking, but you may have married a really inflexible man. All is not lost! You married him for a reason. I want you to take time to step back and really think about part 1 in this series. When you were taking stock, what were the good things about your partner that you loved? Recapturing that space will help you both. Look at temperament, there are flexible love languages in each temperament, take the time to find them and make a plan. How does your partner communicate best? Think about his role in work or

business, what does he love most about his job or field of work? This will give you some clues about his flexibility. If your partner is one that expects you will do all the research and then bring him the distilled version at dinner, do that, but make sure that your version highlights how everyone will have to be flexible. If your husband is choleric then you will have to sell him on how this will help him with leadership and how you will handle the division of tasks, let him know right up front that you will either need to hire out for XYZ or he will have to step up. You have to be assertive with the information. If your husband is melancholic, he may be very excited about how he can help more. My bet is the more you can include him, the more willing he will be to help. The phlegmatic is going to need extra incentive! He works all day and wants to come home and fall over. What will these changes mean for him? The sanguine Dad may be on board, but you will have to remind him regularly what he needs to do to help - he will likely love a chore chart so have it made before you sit down to chat.

This is all great if you are just starting down this road, but most of the moms I talk to have been on this road, didn't realize just how hard it would be and they need help... not tomorrow... they needed it last week, last month and probably last year and they are fed up, upset and holding Dad responsible. It is likely that there is some level of passive aggressive behavior going on from you, even if you are not fully conscious of it. When you sit down to chat, your conversation needs to go a little differently. You have to acknowledge the hard work he does and then begin to talk to him about all you have taken on... now Mom... DO NOT BE DEFENSIVE! It is likely that like many men, he is just clueless to how hard it is right now. If the pile you are under is huge, it might be best to bring it to him in chunks. He loves you. He doesn't want you to struggle, but you have to not make it his fault. You have to work on this together. It is likely that even if you have been telling him how exhausted you are, it isn't getting through. Remember that you love each other. You want to stand together through time and you want to have a fulfilling life of love - both physical and emotional. It didn't take you over night to get where you are. It will likely take time to fix anything that feels broken. Keep in mind, men like to fix things, we have to give them that space so bring them the issues and your concerns, do it lovingly. Mention that you want some date time to chat about how things are going. Express wanting to be on the same page and how important it is to you that his feelings be taken into account.

Special diets tend to be a sore spot in some homes - I have been there, it isn't always easy! When you start talking about food changing, it makes many men down right frightened. We tease that my father in law loves cruises because you can eat what you want when you want to 24 hours a day. Food is very important to most men. When we start talking about special diets many will bristle. You have to approach this with what it will solve. Will it solve little Willie's behavioral out bursts? Will it get rid of Suzie's eczema? Will he starve? This is the real question. Assure him that he will not starve. Assure him that you are working hard to bring food that will help everyone. Make the commitment that if you are expecting him to comply, that you will be impeccable about it too. If the diet is more for the children than the adults, then set aside a date time at least monthly and go out to eat what you love, TOGETHER. Point out changes, both good and bad, ask him to help. You have to take it from the "this is something weird my wife asked me to do" to the "Willie really needs this to heal his gut" place. Communicate.

Waldorf education and homeschooling. Listen, Waldorf is weird. It just is. It is also healing and awesome and wonderful and fantastic, but from the outsider looking in, it is weird. We delay academics, we don't use any modern implements for education like videos or computers. It is weird. Your husband has to go to work and listen to his co-workers talk about Jimmy's report card and Sally's ACT scores. Arm him. Arm your partner with the information he needs to be able to speak intelligently about Waldorf. Do not arm him with fairy tales and gnome stories. Arm him with nuts and bolts facts. A great site for that is waldorftoday.com. What is the long term benefit of his 5-year-old not learning to read today? Arm him. This will help him so much to be on the same page with you educationally. If you don't know the answers to these questions then you have a LOT more research to do. Communicate.

Money. I have watched so many marriages crumble because of money. Rarely is it the lack or surplus of money, it is the expectation of one thing when the other is true. When only one person is apprised of the financial situation, communication cannot occur. Even if one person pays the bills, still talk. Work on the budget together. It is responsible in today's world to know where you are with finances. It is okay if one person is better than the other in dealing with the actual writing of the check, but still talk. It is an easy conversation "honey, how are we doing with money this week?" Something so simple allows you to know what his stress might be and vice versa. Communicate.

God. Yep... I am at that part. This part is often made harder than it needs to be. If you are a devoted Christian and you fell in love with an atheist then I sure hope you had some discussions before making babies, but if not, all is not lost. For the most part, I do believe that all beliefs can live side by side. Religious or not, the Ten Commandments (or at least many of them) can stand as an ensign for your family. Most people don't think stealing or killing or adultery is okay. Find common ground. You don't have to be in exactly the same spiritual place to have a strong bond. This road is a process and we don't all progress at the same rate. Where you will be called to tolerance - as will he - is in matters of doctrine. If you belong to a faith that is heavy in the doctrine department and you are both on different sides of this doctrine then you need to work hard together to find common ground - I know it is there, ALL religion has commonality, find it! I stress this so much because if you were standing in a court of law (which I have been) defending your faith, you will be forced to find common ground. You have children together, cooperate. Communicate. Are there parts of your faith that are really dear and important to you but other parts that you cannot stress so much? Communicate. I often talk of having Dad lead prayer before he leaves for work or before bed if possible, discuss together what you are comfortable with. Maybe it is a common scripture verse or saying or meditation that you bring instead of a prayer or maybe you trade off. One thing that is immensely helpful is to have a family mission statement. This is helpful for all faiths, but especially helpful in households where things are a bit divided. Sit down together and decide what the most important parts of your faiths you want your children to have, write a mission statement bringing these pieces together. Recite it together daily. Watch it change the atmosphere and energy in your home.

Sex. Sex lives of married couples with children are often ranging from daily to almost nonexistent. I am very suspicious of reports that say the average person has sex three times a week or the

average couple only has sex once a month. I fully believe that when we are on the same page, then we want to be together. We want to enjoy the physical aspects of our relationship more. I have five children and there have been times when we have managed almost daily and times when it has only been once or twice in a month. Emotional health, physical health and overall marital health all play a factor in sexual health. There is no one silver bullet that will make it better. As you get closer and closer to being on the same page and communicating more, then you will want to be together.

If the thought of sex makes you uncomfortable then you have to ask yourself why. Are you really just too tired or is it deeper? I know that depression, medications and co-sleeping can all play a factor in a healthy sex life. Remember that you are a partnership, a couple, a dynamic duo! What can you do to communicate your needs more? If it is something during that act itself then again, communicate. If you are battling depression from postpartum, communicate. If you have always battled depression, communicate. If you are terrified that the 6yo in your room will wake up and see something they shouldn't... get creative! And communicate! If you find yourself making excuses for not having sex then something deeper is going on. While a normal sex life in a marriage may have ebb and flow, it rarely is a dry river bank!

If I could leave you with any lasting thought, it would be COMMUNICATE.

Part 6 ~ Holding the Space TOGETHER

Now that you are loving each other again and things are hopefully on a good track (maybe they were never off, if so, high five!) let's tackle how to consistently be on the same page and hold the space together.

Hopefully you are lovingly bringing ideas to your partner - this is SO important, this Waldorf road is a bit weird for most! The Waldorf path may seem a bit intuitive to you as the primary care giver, but it will likely meet some resistance from your partner, no matter how supportive they have been in your past quests. Waldorf sounds so very rigid and that is what often turns the dads off and has them shaking their heads, so before you bombard, think about what will be important to your husband. Will it be honoring the development of your child? Will it be the development of their artistic abilities? Will it be the strengthening of their academic skills over time? Will it be that Jennifer Anniston attended a Waldorf school? Or that George Lucas (father of Star Wars) sent his kids to a Waldorf school and helped with the building of such schools? What will be the piece to interest your partner? Start there! Remember that while you have found this really awesome thing and you want to share every teeny detail because it is so pretty and so wonderful... your partner will likely want to know the bottom line - at least in the beginning.

Once you are both thinking about development, then you need to have the tough discussions. The television, or lack thereof might be an issue. Tackle it together. My husband is the biggest Star Wars fan I ever met (like really, my SW Fan can beat your SW Fan in a face off of lore... I promise, I have seen him put others to shame) so early on we talked about how old Sam would be when he was allowed to watch the movies. These are movies that defined the childhood of MANY children in my generation (25-40+) and many of them saw them when they were really young. We talked about the themes of the movies and discussed what age would be appropriate for Sam to walk down the light saber path. It has worked out wonderfully and it has been interesting to watch Sam make judgments on the characters before seeing the movies. To date, he is 8, he has seen A New Hope and Empire Strikes Back. Riddled with the new knowledge that Vader is Luke's father... sadly he will have to wait a bit longer to find out just how the old trilogy ends and then even longer to find out how it all began. Guess what... he will survive. As he will that he hasn't seen Thor or Iron Man or any of the other favorites that Erik grew up with in comics. He has some figures and plays with them... which I will say was very HARD for me at first since I am a no plastics mom and my big boys will say things like "we were never allowed to have a Hulk figure!" Ahem, let's move on. Why do I share this? Have I become less Waldorf over the years? I don't think so - in fact I think I finally caught my stride on what is truly means to BE Waldorf. It isn't about the stuff. It is about the people. We have oodles of wooden toys that sit next to Storm Troopers and they are both played with. They often get played with together. Did you know that Storm Troopers like riding wool felt horses? While there are things that I just won't buy and just don't like having around, I try not to make it a situation for the Waldorf police and I try to handle it on my own. Life lessons. Lessons I had to learn on my own over time. Lessons like will The Cat in the Hat really pollute The Root Children if they sit on the same shelf. I promise... The Root Children are undamaged and Elsa Beskow is none the wiser.

I am all about making Waldorf less of a club for moms and more about making it a way of life for families.

It is a journey. It can be a journey of love and tolerance or it can be a journey of judgment and self-righteousness. What kind of journey will it be for you? Keep it real.

Talk about television. Talk about video games. Gaming is one of the biggest hurdles for many new to Waldorf. Guess what... we have a PS3 and a Wii. My kids play. I know, shocking. It doesn't have to be when you are aware. I would no more let my teenager play Call of Duty than I would my husband (not that he needs my permission, but he knows I would not go for that!) I do enjoy the Wii for the fitness aspect and for the family games we can play. Now that we are in sunny California it isn't seeing nearly the action it did in the dearly dark winter nights of Utah and Idaho. And the PS3 sees more episodes of Cake Boss and Downton Abbey than it does Lara Croft. Balance.

So where can we agree on holding the space if we are worried sick that Dad will pop on a show when we leave for the grocery store on Saturday morning? Where can we loosen up? What about when they go to Grandma's? Where do we allow the other in? Do we allow it?

- I do think it is very important to honor developmental stages. We have to remember that the 0-7's learn through imitation and also that the very young see EVERYTHING as real. Super Mario Bros... REAL. Spongebob...REAL. CSI...REAL. Of course it is said that no media in those early years is really preferred, but that is not the reality for everyone. In our house we have big kids and little kids and sometimes it is a really tough thing... who gets a turn? Keeping the big picture in mind is very helpful. If you can get Dad to play with kids in your absence rather than turn to an electronic device that is WONDERFUL. If it is a sticky subject and everyone is still learning then try to pick something that meets in the middle. There are plenty of TV shows that are slow paced for the under 7 crowd that will not have the same impact as 30 minutes of Spongebob. It is a good idea to keep these shows in your back pocket if TV at Grandma's house is an issue too.
- Work to help Dad know what to do instead of TV. He is new at this remember? You get to be home all day and you know what your child is asking for, he may not. Sometimes Dad has a hard time switching gears from bringing home the bacon to playing dolls... give it time and model it for him. Take a trip to the library each week and bring home a selection of books that your partner can read to your child, kids LOVE curling up with Daddy. Talk to him about playing dress up - most dads LOVE this too! Help them let out their inner child. If Dad wants to play Legos, try to forget that they are on your list of plastic toys to eliminate! (Which btw, I would not eliminate them.)
- Try to trust Dad. You are steward all the time Dad is at work, you have to let Dad create and cultivate a good relationship with your child, EVEN IF IT INCLUDES PLASTIC AND TV. Find a way.
- Many moms will ask about video games for this age (0-7) there are not many that I would be ok with. None for the under 5 set. Some of the Lego games are ok for the closer to 7s as even if they contain fighting, the Lego pieces just fall apart when struck. Some of the old arcade games like Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Mario, Atari, etc. are probably ok.
- Encourage a good old tromp through the woods on a snowy day or building a snow man or even a walk through a cemetery, try to get outside.
- As children grow, their needs change. The 7-14's learn through authority and so this can be a fun time for dads that have skills to impart to their children. Maybe Dad likes woodworking or engine repair or even baking! These are the things children did with their fathers before electronics took over the world. I think about Ralphie on A Christmas Story helping his dad change the tire or watching him fight with the furnace - these are things that are lost to many in our generation. My mom taught me to sew. I remember having a tiny 14 inch TV and that being almost painful to watch TV on so embroidery was much more enjoyable. These are the skills we can pass on.
- Our big kids learn through truth. They LOVE deep discussions. This is the time to talk about why you believe the way you do, to talk about social movements happening in your

town, to listen to them - even if they annoy you. These kids can do things - go on hikes, let them drive to the store, listen to their five year plan. Remember they are not adults but they are for sure adults in the making.

- Remember that we will hold the space differently from Dad. Different is not bad. We have to let our fences down a bit and see things from their point of view. Surely there is SOMETHING that Dad can do that isn't going to frustrate you. Remember that the Waldorf police are not around your corner.

When you go out to family together, you don't have to spend hours at your parents listening to the news while pretending to be interested in topics that aren't on your list of interests - you can engage at a smaller level, you can bring shows that you are okay with, you can be the one playing with kids on the floor or outside, you can initiate new family rituals. You can also remember that the "Tolerance" bumper sticker you have extends to your family and love them anyway. It is not always easy. I am not suggesting that you reduce your standards or compromise too much on something that frustrates you. I am suggesting that you set your boundaries and lovingly keep them. I am suggesting that you use less words and more actions. I am suggesting that you love each other. And I am also suggesting that if you can't attend a gathering without feeling icky that you just get brave and don't go. The world will not end because you didn't go. I promise. Even if your mother makes it seem like it will.

Part 7 ~ For all the singles

Saving the best for last? Maybe. Single mamas (and dads!) are very close to my heart. I am talking mostly to divorced parents and those that are choosing to parent alone. As Sam goes through the early elementary years, I am taken back to the time when my older kids were in those grades and how different our lives were. Being single has a completely different set of stress inducing frustrations. Even if you are living on one income while married, there is generally that second person that can step up to the parenting plate and help - not so in single parent land. Rather than this being a post on the nuts and bolts of single parent homeschooling, I would rather focus on how you can take care of yourself and get back to a place of love. Love has to be within us before it can be given to someone else.

With all the divorces in our culture, I can only say one thing for certain... they are all different. All of them carry most of the same elements. Sadly amicable situations are NOT the norm. The reality is that some co-parenting relationships are amicable for a time and volatile at others. Do your best. You can only work on you.

Working through your hurt and being ready to love again is extremely individual - we all heal at a different rate. The exercise I am about to suggest is going to seem fruitless if you are still hurting, but try it anyway.

The exercise.

Take some time to meditate on what you love about yourself. Think about all the things you want in a mate - go on, do it... some of the things may be qualities that your ex had, don't worry about it, and just write them down. Contemplate all the things your perfect mate would encompass. Once your list is done, just put it away. You don't have to read it regularly, you planted the seed.

I did this exercise weeks after my divorce was final and then I tucked my list away and forgot all about it. When Erik and I rented our first house together, I unpacked my books and there was the list. I had subconsciously attracted the mate that my soul desired. Everything on my list, save one thing was manifest in Erik. The one thing? He wasn't a vegetarian. God knew just what he was doing, I went back to eating meat about 18 months ago. Something that I thought was a big sticking point was really nothing at all in the grand scheme of things.

I worked to spend my single time loving me and getting emotionally healthy. It was exceptionally hard to get time alone when I was single. I kept crazy sleeping hours and I explored spiritual places that I didn't feel like I could when I was married to my former husband. I did a lot of growing as a woman and a mother during that time. You can too! Take the time to explore your thorny spots, your short comings and your talents. Make plans, enjoy solitary, drink deeply at the well of your children.

Make this matter! Be careful not to close yourself off to love - even if you don't think you deserve it or can handle it. Just make the space for it. Allow yourself to dream.

Believe in Love.