



#HaveTHATConversationNOW!

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For almost all of us, this lockdown feels unending. But in truth, the day is coming (sooner for some, unfortunately, longer for others) when the door to your home will legally and practically crack open. Shortly after that, those same people you have spent so much time with, will very likely never be this close, for this long, again.

Which means you need to HAVE THAT CONVERSATION NOW. What do I mean by that?

We've all read heartbreaking articles of how people are dying alone fighting this terrible plague. Wishing so much they had loved ones nearby to share words they are unable to say. Thankfully, for most of us, we've been sheltering in place, staying safe, with people we love. But in this incredible time of forced "togetherness," there are three conversations you need to have. Before sports, work, school (yes, school outside your home will start again) and life take these people in your life away, please make the most of this opportunity to...

1. Have that "You have my Blessing" conversation your loved one needs – to empower them as they step back outside into a world full of challenges.

Why is a "blessing" such a big deal? And what is it anyway? Many people, perhaps even those you are sheltering-in-place with right now, have waited all their life to hear from you that they have your blessing. Without exaggeration, there may never be a better, more important time than right now, for you to give it to each of your loved ones. "Blessing" someone means

you find a private place inside (even if it's a closet) or outside (if you're free to go outside) and sit down, face-to-face, with your child, your spouse, or that closest friend you're sheltering with. Yes, a "blessing" should include the words, "I want you to know that I love you." But it's much more than that.

That child (or spouse or friend) you're sitting with will soon be heading out into what will be a terribly challenging time in our country. Certainly unlike any other in our lifetimes. Most of us have fought the Virus by mitigation. All of us will face a very different struggle to rebuild, and in many cases, regain jobs and lives.

Along with those crucial "I love you" words, the "Blessing" is taking the time to share some character traits YOU see in that person's life. Those unique, God-given strengths that you believe can help carry through the tough days ahead, when that door to your home opens. Strengths that you can see, even if they can't, that can help them get through this next season of challenge.

Giving them your Blessing is also a time for you to verbalize a special future for them. Yes, even after all the loss and pain and challenge we've gone through – and still face. A special future lies ahead. And your child or spouse needs you to echo the words that they WILL have a "future and a hope." That they have strengths that they can use to build up, encourage, and bless others outside your door.

And your Blessing needs to end with you taking their hand or putting your hand on their shoulder. Yes, as freaked out as we all are about any kind of touch right now, it's OK to put your hand on a child or spouse's shoulder you've been sheltering with for weeks. To tell them that no matter what, you are genuinely committed to them. You will be there for them. Pray for them. Believe in them. As long as you have breath and life. And reminding that even then, they have a God who will never leave them nor forsake them. Ever. During each tough and prayerfully happy day ahead.

That's a picture of what it means to have that "Blessing" conversation. It doesn't have to be written down (but it's OK to take notes or write it down and read it to them if that helps). You giving them your Blessing is not a formula or magic potion. But years from now,

watch how you having taken the time, during this extraordinary time, to express your love, point out their strengths, commit to be there for them no matter what, and commit them to God's love when you can't, can be one of the most important conversations you and they will ever have. Something they may well remember all their lives. What you said to them. And where. And when during this pandemic. Maybe even what you were wearing when you said it to them. A Blessing conversation that needs to happen now...

2. You may need to have the "I'm sorry" conversation – To "untie" those emotional knots

Second, before they walk (make that run) outside and get lost in outside relationships, business dealings, plane trips and transition plans. Make sure that they're not heading into that rebuilding life "tied up in knots."

Guess what the word "forgiveness" means in Greek? "To untie the knot." There are some of us who know for a fact that we've hurt someone under our roof - or that we've hurt a former close friend or relative. Which can indeed tie that person in an emotional knot, and keep us "knotted up" inside as well.

There has never been a better time for that "I'm sorry" conversation with someone you know, in your heart of hearts, you need to do this with. Which doesn't mean you have to go back to a grade school friend you barely slighted and haven't talked to in decades. But don't let this time pass if you need to say something about those tough words or uncaring actions.

I remember my "I'm sorry" conversation with my father. He left when I was two months old. I never met him again until I was in high school. After I met him, I wished I hadn't. Frankly, I used to hate my father. Then I became a Christian. After that I just intensely disliked him. But then I realized something. I was the one who was all tied up in emotional knots over our relationship. I was losing sleep at night because I was so knotted up in anger towards him.

So I thought and prayed hard about it. Make that tough call. Ended up sitting down with him. I told him I was sorry for being so angry with him, for so long. Not because (and this is crucial) I was expecting him to do the same with me. You can't MAKE another person issue an apology or ask for forgiveness. But I could take care of my own knots. Or knots I'd caused.

I took the responsibility to do what I knew I needed to do. My father's only response to me before he left was, *"Well... if you need that, that's fine."* That was it. He walked away unchanged. My life has never been the same. I took responsibility what I had done and needed to do. I didn't excuse his actions. No one, including God, asks you to pretend bad things didn't happen. But I can choose – and you can choose too if needed – to have that "I'm sorry" conversations with someone. Saying you're sorry if you know it's needed. Putting down the pride. Untying your heart and life when you do – no matter how they respond. But prayerfully, untying some knots in their life as well.

3. Have that "What is THAT ONE thing when this is all over?" conversation – because more of the same never brings change.

At StrongFamilies.com, we call it the 2 Degree Difference. How small things can begin to change everything. Meaning, pick a night when it's clear that things are going to change and your world is going to open up. Have the family sit down at the table. Yes, you can do this individually. But it can be an unforgettable thing if you look around the table at everyone while you're doing this. (i.e., Think Photo op when it's over).

After everyone is sitting down, you're going to go around and share TWO things.

I'd suggest having the most talkative person in the family go first. That uses their strength at talking. But it also gives the more reflective people in your family time to think through their answer. And while it may seem a little strange, whoever is talking, have that person hold a salt shaker. And make the rule that the only one who can talk is the one holding the salt shaker.

HERE'S THE FIRST THING:

Each person shares, "What is ONE THING I am really looking forward to when things get back to at least semi-normal and we're back doing life?"

After everyone has gone around, sharing and passing the salt shaker to the next person.

HERE'S THE SECOND THING:

Starting with the person who shared first, then going around the table, have everyone share one positive strength they see in that person. Something they've seen in living in such close quarters with them. Much like you did in your Blessing. Something that you could see them using to face the challenging days just ahead.

Three conversations. You pick which one you need to have. (Or all three). With a family member, or if time drags on a bit, with a close friend you need to “bless” and thank for changing and impacting your life. Or that person who you need to “untie” a knot with as well. Don't kid yourself. Those doors to your home won't stay closed forever. Your opportunity to #HAVETHATCONVERSATIONNOW can have a life-changing, forever impact on a loved one's heart and future.