

MARRIAGE



I love a fresh start, don't you? With the simple turn of a calendar page, January invites the whole world to take a deep, cleansing breath ... and try again. Along with the party hats and piercing horns, ringing in the new year gives each of us another chance. Gratefully, we can leave our letdowns behind and look forward with anticipation to a brand new year.

That's what I most appreciate about spiritual parenting. Rather than staying stuck in the muck of our kids' past mistakes, course correction looks forward to an environment of healing and restoration.

As my husband, Mitch, and I strive for course correction in our parenting, the same philosophy holds true in our marriage. The first step, accepting the fact that our kids will fail, is true of any relationship, including that of a husband and wife. Mitch and I often fall short. We get off track. We say things we shouldn't. Or forget to say things we should. There is pain due to sin, and natural consequences follow.

I'm thankful that the second step of this environment also applies to marriage: Pain can be used as an opportunity for renewal. Building one another up isn't easy, especially in the midst of failure, but punishment only creates guilt and shame and then

doubt and insecurity. It's tempting to penalize a spouse by withholding affection or dwelling on anger. Agreeing to extend one another grace and respect, however, is key in producing healing and change.

The third step in course correction, setting a level path for our kids, is critical after conflict or disagreement in a marriage. Setting goals together keeps a relationship moving forward. Mitch and I usually make the typical January resolutions of weekly date nights or praying more as a couple, but the bigger, life-defining "let's still be married in 10 years" kinds of goals plot a solid course for our future.

The last phase of course correction is my favorite: celebration! A spirit of righteousness and peace is promised with the philosophy of spiritual parenting; what more could we want from our marriages as well? Taking the time to remember triumphs over obstacles and victories over failures makes for a deeper, more loving, more fulfilling life together.

The calendar page has turned; January has arrived with its promise of a new beginning. What joy to know that in Christ, the hope of forgiveness, healing, and restoration is ours every day of the year.

by Kathryn O'Brien