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LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Interview with Chris and Julie

Julie: "I was pretty desperate, I felt like I didn't see my husband anymore, and that what I was doing around the house wasn't valued"

Chris: "So I was doing things for my wife that I thought were helping her and she was misinterpreting that as if I was criticizing her efforts"

Richard: Simple misunderstandings can turn even the strongest relationship into a shaky one. Can it be made strong again? I'm Richard Fox and this is Messages of Hope. On today's program we're exploring the everyday stresses that can build up and damage even a strong relationship. And what we can do to make it strong again. My guests today are Chris and Julie. You guys first met on a houseboat and eventually got married in 1998. What was it that grabbed you about each other at that time?

Julie: I found it really easy to talk to Chris and I think it was fairly soon that I realised regardless of whatever else happened in life, I'd be his friend for life.

Chris: Julie was lots of fun but I guess the thing that I grew to like about her later on was just the way she loved people. People who other people didn't particularly love.

Richard: So you went on to get married, Chris was finishing a PHD, you had three children under 5 and were heavily involved in your church community. Life was busy! What would you say helped keep your relationship strong?

Julie: We used to have dates. We would have a date once a week and we employed a university student who would look after our kids. We'd just go out for a dessert or something like that on a Friday night and that was a regular event.

Chris: Sometimes we'd catch up on things we were going to do in the next week, sometimes we'd just sit there and be with each other. There was no real sort of plan.

Julie: I think that when you're at home and you've got little kids around you, you're seeing to urgent demands of them all the time. Even when you are together you're not really because you're answering to "mum" or "dad." Then when you get irritable or things don't go your way and you're only seeing the other person when you're dealing with the children, you don't get to communicate or understand what's making them think certain things or behave in particular ways. Going out on a date regularly allowed us to be able to relax in each others company and communicate better.

Richard: Now that all changed quite dramatically when you moved to Memphis in the USA where Chris had begun a job in medical research. What happened there?

Chris: My job was much more encompassing than I thought it would be and there were pressures that I wasn't prepared for. There were expectations of me to be there for long

hours and there was weekend work where I'd have to go in and check things. That meant that a lot of the time I was tired and Julie was tired because she had trouble sleeping while I was away.

Julie: It went pear shaped was probably a good description.

Chris: The intimacy disappeared a little bit because we weren't spending decent quality time together, whatever that is. It was just survival and in some ways just keeping your head above water.

Julie: Yeah, it was pretty rotten there for a while. I felt like he was working 17 hours out of every 24, seven days a week. I don't think he recalls that but that's what it certainly felt like.

Chris: It wasn't that long. (laughter) But what used to happen was I was very aware of Julie's situation and so I would spend my time at work and Julie would pick me up and we'd go home. Julie was exhausted after having the kids all day so then I would look after the kids and try and give her some free time. That was fine for her but for our relationship that pulled us apart a bit. I sort of vowed while I was over there not to work while the family were awake.

Julie: So we'd all go to bed and he would stay up working.

Chris: Then I would stay up and work till 1, 2, 3 sometimes 4am in the morning.

Richard: It sounds like you lost that intimacy that you had in the beginning. It seems to have had an affect on your perspective of the same events which was obviously quite different during this period.

Julie: It's like you had blinkers on at that stage and couldn't see the other person's perspective. We were just so tired. You'd see photos of me and I'd lost 3 dress sizes. It was just incredible the different lives we were living and how we had no understanding of each other.

Richard: Julie, you got to the point of desperation, what did you contemplate doing?

Julie: Well I phoned Qantas to find out how much it would cost to send a mother and three children back to Australia.

Richard: So what stopped you from leaving?

Julie: I remember having a conversation and holding hands and looking at each other and saying, well we can't afford to catch a plane, we can't afford to live in separate houses; we're stuck together. We're gonna have to work this through and I guess we had at that stage a choice of plodding through and being miserable or plodding thru and enjoying the rest of our lives together. I think it's a blessing that we're both tarred with a bit of stubbornness.

Richard: Earlier you talked about how it felt like you were living different lives and didn't understand each other. Can you give an example of how that played out?

Chris: So Julie would pick me up from work and I'd come home and I'd look after the kids and I loved it, I absolutely loved doing that. I did it for the kids and I also did it for Julie because I knew she'd been with them all day. And sometimes she wanted more than one syllable type conversations. But in doing that she basically had no-one to talk to. Once the kids had gone to bed and Julie would quite often go to bed early'ish. Then I would do a lot of the housework because Julie hadn't really had a chance to do that during the day. So I'd

wash floors and do dishes, vacuuming and clean stuff. I didn't touch any of the quilting though! (laughter).

Richard: So how did you feel about doing the housework?

Chris: My feeling was this was very helpful because Julie was tired from looking after the kids and I appreciated it. So this was something little I could do or my part as far as the running of the home would go. After I'd done all that then I'd start doing whatever work I needed to do to catch up.

Richard: So you weren't begrudging or frustrated by that?

Chris: Not at all. I actually didn't mind doing it and I actually felt that this was some way I could help her.

Richard: And Julie what was you're perspective?

Julie: My perspective (laughter). I grew up in a loving but really critical home so Chris to be doing all of this stuff afterwards and not spending time with me. Well, I was perceiving that as though he's doing that because I'm not doing it well enough, what's the point of me even trying and so I'd sulk and go off to bed and I remember having lots of migraine headaches. I'm not sure whether they were or if it was depression going on but a lot of that was a real poor self concept I guess and just not understanding that he was actually doing that because he loved me. So misinterpreting and the way I responded was I need some time with you by myself so ok I'll go have time by myself and demand it and grump about it and be thoroughly miserable. It wasn't very fair on Chris and I know that most women I know would've given anything for a husband like I had, I just wasn't real grateful at the time.

Richard: Now eventually your relationship did start to turn around and regain the intimacy that you once had. How did that come about?

Julie: I ended up stumbling across an article about the five love languages. In just 2 pages it was describing my life about a husband who used acts of service or doing things for his wife as a way of loving her. She wasn't able to appreciate that because the way she would want to show someone she loved them was by spending time with them. When I realised that, oh wow that's exactly us! Then I was able to recognise that what he was doing was actually things that showed he loved me. He didn't speak my language and I wasn't speaking his and we weren't understanding each other. But once I shared that with him it changed the dynamics in our house.

Chris: Just being aware of the different ways people show love to each other. In the five love languages there's acts of service, quality time, gifts, words of affirmation and physical touch. So people have a combination of those but often there'll be one that people really relate to or is strong in their life.

Richard: So how did this new knowledge play out in your relationship?

Julie: Well we discovered that the harder we were working at loving each other, because we were using the wrong love language, we were actually doing the exact opposite of what each other needed.

Chris: So for me, I could still do acts of service to help out but that's not what Julie was really after. Once she realised that was the way I was showing I loved her then she could appreciate that and I could appreciate that she just wanted some quality time so we could then say we have to have dates together, we need to find a baby sitter and we started doing

that. We got some of the youth from the church who were willing to babysit and who loved to earn a little bit of money. We didn't have to pay a lot. So we could have some time together.

Julie: I started cooking again, even if it was just an onion so it smelt like it was going to be good. (laughter) And all these other tricks I was leaning from the other ladies at church was good. Chris really responded to me being able to do it and when I recognised he was doing it out of love and not because I wasn't doing it good enough I was more than happy to be able to do things for him just to show that I loved him. I guess he appreciated that wasn't my natural thing to do so it meant more.

Richard: Thanks Chris and Julie for sharing your journey with us. It's so easy for us to lose that intimate connection with our partners, even though we still love each other. I especially appreciated hearing about the love languages and that it is never too late to reconnect. It gives us hope for our own relationships. God continue to bless you with his love and presence.

The stress of life can easily derail our relationships, but if we can stay connected with each other, and with God, we can find the balance we need to keep our relationships strong. For more about staying connected in the midst of stress go to messagesofhope.org.au. Or for a free booklet titled STRESSED BUT CONNECTED call 1800 353 350, that's 1800 353 350.

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