



Word had spread among the staff at the resort hotel that an incoming couple was celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. At check-in, the young woman at the counter smiled. “Happy anniversary,” she said. “We’ve given you an upgrade.”

“Well, thanks,” I said. “How did you know?” Then I saw her exchanging smiles with my wife, the Arranger, who had made a phone call I hadn’t known about. Bonnie could charm a rattlesnake, and the friendly folks at the resort had been happy to provide the upgrade she had asked about.

The upgrade was spectacular: a waterfront room looking across Mission Bay to San Diego. We left our luggage on the floor while we stepped out onto the balcony, the sun and the Pacific breeze on our faces. In less than ten minutes there was a knock at the door. Two employees stood in the doorway—a young woman with a tray of chocolate-dipped strawberries, and a young man with a bottle of champagne.

“Happy anniversary!” they said.

We passed on the champagne, but the strawberries were delicious.

A couple days later we were lolling around one of the swimming pools, too relaxed (okay, too *lazy*) to go back to our room and dress for lunch. There was a snack bar at the pool complex that served ice cream, drinks, sandwiches, and the like.

“You hungry?” I asked my bride of fifty years. I hoped she’d say yes, because I was quite hungry myself.

“Yes, I could use some food,” she murmured from her palm-shaded pool lounge.

“I’ll be right back,” I said.

I strolled over to the food hut and checked out the menu. Nachos with freshly mashed avocado sounded like a good idea, and I said so to the girl behind the counter.

She looked at me carefully. “Oh, you’re—is your wife with you?”

I pointed. “Right there.”

“We’ve been thinking about what we could do for you. Happy anniversary. Lunch is on us.”

“Fifty years,” said the young man working with her. “That’s what I want. How did you do it?”


“No secret, really,” I said. “We promised to stay together until one of us died. That hasn’t happened yet, so here we are, together. We’ve kept our word.”


“Good for you.” He paused. “You know, my generation has a problem with commitment.”

“‘Commitment’ is the key word,” I said. “You stand in front of your friends and family and make big promises, sacred vows, and then you keep them, even when you don’t feel like it.”

The next evening we were in the top-floor restaurant. “We can afford to eat here once,” I’d told Bonnie. We savored cool, crisp salads, warm bread, and perfectly broiled steaks. Across Mission Bay, lights began to wink on in the high-rise hotels of the San Diego waterfront.

I finished my steak and had the last two or three bites of Bonnie’s.





“We promised to stay together until one of us died. That hasn’t happened yet, so here we are, together. We’ve kept our word.”

The waiter made his way to our table. “Would you like a dessert menu?”

I looked at my wife. She sighed, meaning, “I wish—but no. I’m full.”

“I guess not,” I said. “The meal was wonderful, but we’re full.”

“You sure?” he asked. “Dessert is on us.” And there was only one thing to do about that.

“What are the choices?”

He began to recite the dessert menu. There was something, and something, and crème brûlée, and . . .

“You just said the magic word,” I said. “One order of crème brûlée. Two spoons.”

The custard arrived with a lit candle and “Happy Anniversary” written in flowing chocolate script.

The waiter grinned. “Written freehand by our pastry chef. Enjoy!”

The woman at the next table had been watching. “What’s going on?” she asked.

“It’s our anniversary,” I said. “Number fifty.” I blew out the candle and picked up my spoon.

“Really?” she said. “Fifty! I want that. How did you do it?”

Any other time I’d have been glad to talk. But it had been a long time since I’d had crème brûlée. My spoon was poised, ready to crack the caramelized sugar crust and scoop out the first mouthful. I tossed off a

kind of smart-aleck answer, hoping that would be enough.

“Just keep showing up for breakfast.”


She thought that over for a moment. “Okay. I’ll take that home with me. Thank you.”

Her response surprised me. Was “keep showing up for breakfast” more than a joke after all?

I’ve come to believe that it is, that it’s shorthand for a range of attitudes and behaviors that make enduring marriages—and other relationships and enterprises—possible.

For one thing, fifty years of shared breakfasts will not happen without a disposition to overlook faults and forgive offenses, real and imagined. “Get rid of all bitterness,” Paul told the believers in Ephesus. “Be ye kind one to another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Consider the elder brother in the story of the prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). The foolish younger son has realized his error, repented of his disrespect for both his earthly and Heavenly fathers, and has returned home in humility. The occasion brought such relief and joy that an impromptu party ensued, complete with a big dinner. For our purposes, let’s call it breakfast. Everyone at the estate was eating and celebrating.





All but one. The hardworking older brother, certain of his moral superiority, would rather skip the meal than forgive his younger brother's bad behavior. He's not about to share a table with that boy.

So once again the family is fractured. It doesn't really matter whether the elder son's indictment of his brother is true: "Your son squandered his inheritance with wild living and wild women." One man has asked forgiveness, and the other has refused it, seeming to believe that his refusal provides him a moral advantage over the sinner.

It does nothing of the kind. It does, however, make shared meals impossible. Big brother has stopped showing up for breakfast.

Married couples are bound to occasionally be at odds, to annoy one another, to strike sparks. Scripture acknowledges this and has an answer that makes showing up for breakfast possible: Don't go to bed angry (Ephesians 4:26).

This provides several possible ways to bring about resolution. One

is to let it go. Proverbs reminds us that it is to our credit to overlook a fault. Another is to be "easy to be intreated" (James 3:17). That is, accept apologies with generous grace. Make restoration easy. We are well advised to remember our own faults and offenses, to drop the stones and sticks we might be inclined to hurl at the person who yesterday sat across the table sharing toast and orange juice. It's possible that one of those sticks might turn out to be a boomerang. Better put it down.

Finally, remember that the Lord brought you together and binds you together. Bonnie and I were admonished at our wedding, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

Want to keep showing up for breakfast? Keep setting the table for three. ■

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