



## Canada—Going Digital

by Jayna Richardson

When the Coronavirus hit, FamilyLife Canada was forced to cancel four Weekend Getaways. They grieved over the six hundred couples who would not be able to experience these special events to strengthen their relationships. But God had other plans—and those plans allowed the team to reach more than 3,000 couples instead!

Through new digital tools such as *The Help and Hope @ Home* online mini-conference, the *Great Marriages Don't Just Happen* webinar series, and new podcasts, the FamilyLife team has been able to build into families and, in some cases, restore relationships that were on the brink of destruction.

“The ongoing pandemic has been disorienting and put extra strain on a lot of marriages and families,” said FamilyLife staff Brent Trickett. “But it’s also brought a huge opportunity to bring stability and strength by helping couples right where

they’re at—in their homes—with practical tools to process their worries and to love each other well in this season.”

Nicole and Dennis Van Ee of Osler, Saskatchewan, shared, “Listening to the webinars together opened up opportunities to talk through struggles that were simmering under the surface. In one of the webinars the hosts explained how forest fires can smolder underground for months, or almost a year, only to be reignited by a spark. We have felt that happen in our marriage. The hosts had such wisdom in explaining how to scan our lives for hotspots and then to extinguish those through open and honest communication.”

FamilyLife Canada director Neil Josephson said, “These webinars have guided couples into deeper intimacy by providing tools to navigate the stress of

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## UK: Couples Talk

By Christine Daniel (FL UK Director)

We're all well aware of the massive global challenges as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The "lockdown" in our country meant we had to cancel our spring/summer programme of live events, our [A Day Together](#) seminars, which we typically hold across the country in partnership with local churches. This couldn't have come at a worse time because the experience of lockdown is tough on relationships; we're created for connection but not 24/7, so the need was and is great. But the situation has also led to innovation, and in the UK we have been experimenting with an online event delivered via Zoom, "Couples Talk," which has proved tremendously successful.



FamilyLife UK is very much a movement of people, who have experienced transformation of their relationships and seek to pass that on, to be what we call "ripples." Allison and Junior Angel (yes, it's their real name and they are pretty special!) are a volunteer couple with us making ripples in Manchester. When the restrictions started, they immediately said that they wanted to help couples

survive lockdown with their marriages intact. We were keen to empower them to use their entrepreneurial skills.

On April 3, they teamed up with Odette Clayton (FamilyLife's Manchester and the Northwest Coordinator) and her husband Mark to host an informal event via Zoom. They were joined online by 14 other couples to explore how lockdown was affecting them and to encourage one another.

Everyone said they wanted more. So, we organised another, and then another.

On April 30 and May 25, the Angels hosted more Couples Talk sessions, this time interviewing us about our favourite subject: conflict. It's not really our favourite topic (!) but it has been one where God has given us a lot of experience; we had our first major argument on our honeymoon. Three months into marriage we almost split up and again hit crises at 7 and at 23 years.

In April there were 72 Zoom screens and 60 in May. Many joined to watch without video, and many were visible on screen, participating actively via the chat function. During the evenings we wove together stories, principles, and testimony, ending with a time for questions.

Feedback from the evenings was incredibly positive:

*"We really enjoyed the session last night and it was good to hear your honesty about not having the perfect marriage but having the tools to navigate the issues when they arise."*

*"It's been great. Our big takeaway is communication, creating a safe space to*

*talk together. It's never a win/lose situation—it's growing together."*

Then on 22 June we switched things around again and Mark and I hosted Couples Talk, interviewing another couple from the FamilyLife UK movement: Etienne and Karen Van der Poll. The couple came close to divorce after they moved from South Africa to the UK in 2000. Their family life was rocked following a tragic accident two years ago, which once again tested their marriage. But Karen and Etienne are coming through that exceptionally challenging period with an even stronger marriage, resilience, and gratitude for what they have. It was an exceptionally powerful evening.

Here's a comment from a young couple who attended that evening:

*"I joined in to listen to Karen and Etienne's story with around 70 others, all in our little Zoom boxes, either with video on or off (absolutely no pressure there!), intently listening to what this inspiring couple had to say. And what they said...wow... it was raw, jaw dropping, amazing! It was such an honour to hear from this couple who had and are still overcoming some extreme obstacles and experiences in their lives."*

We're planning an autumn programme of Couples Talk events and want to keep it fresh with a variety of topics, different couples to interview, and rotating hosts. Covid-19 is here to stay and we are keen to continue learning and growing to help other couples build strong marriages and point people to Christ.

Note: Some events may be delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19.

**Europe (Eastern)**

Croatia . . . . .	Oct 2-4, 2020 . . . . .	Weekend to Remember . . . . .	Primosten
Croatia (FL Slovenia team) .	Oct 23-25, 2020 . . . . .	Unforgettable Moments for Us . . . . .	Malinska
Croatia (FL Slovenia team) .	Nov 13-15, 2020 . . . . .	Through the Desert . . . . .	Crikvenica
Croatia (FL Slovenia team) .	Nov 20-22, 2020 . . . . .	Through the Desert . . . . .	Crikvenica
Croatia (FL Slovenia team) .	Nov 27-29, 2020 . . . . .	Through the Desert . . . . .	Crikvenica
Croatia (FL Slovenia team) .	Dec 11-13, 2020 . . . . .	Through the Desert . . . . .	Malinska
Slovenia . . . . .	Oct 2-4, 2020 . . . . .	Unforgettable Moments for Us . . . . .	Rogla

**Europe (Western)**

Germany . . . . .	Sep 24, 2020 . . . . .	FamilyLife seminar . . . . .	Burgstädt
Switzerland . . . . .	Sep 4, 2020 . . . . .	Parenting course . . . . .	
Switzerland . . . . .	Sep 11, 2020 . . . . .	Marriage course . . . . .	
Switzerland . . . . .	Sep 18, 2020 . . . . .	Prepare/Enrich . . . . .	Zurich
Switzerland . . . . .	Oct 24-25, 2020 . . . . .	Marriage seminar . . . . .	Zurich
UK . . . . .	Sep 12, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Liverpool
UK . . . . .	Oct 3, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Norfolk
UK . . . . .	Nov 7, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Manchester
UK . . . . .	Nov 21, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Manchester

**Middle East and North Africa**

Due to sensitive nature of these countries, please contact [global@familylife.com](mailto:global@familylife.com) for further information.

**North America**

United States—Phone 1-800-358-6329 or [www.familylife.com](http://www.familylife.com) for a complete listing of conferences.

Canada . . . . .	Oct 2-4, 2020 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Penticton, BC
Canada . . . . .	Nov 6-8, 2020 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Blue Mountain, ON
Canada . . . . .	Nov 20-22, 2020 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Jasper, AB
Canada . . . . .	Nov 20-22, 2020 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Whistler, BC
Canada . . . . .	Feb 12-14, 2021 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Victoria, BC
Canada . . . . .	Mar 5-7, 2021 . . . . .	Weekend Getaway . . . . .	Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON

**Asia**

Singapore . . . . .	Sep 5-6, 2020 . . . . .	Art of Marriage . . . . .
Singapore . . . . .	Nov 21-22, 2020 . . . . .	Art of Marriage . . . . .

**Oceania**

Australia . . . . .	Sep 12, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Cranbourne
New Zealand . . . . .	Aug 15, 2020 . . . . .	A Day Together . . . . .	Tauranga
New Zealand . . . . .	Sep 25-27, 2020 . . . . .	WTR . . . . .	Auckland
New Zealand . . . . .	Oct 16-18, 2020 . . . . .	WTR . . . . .	Hanmer Springs

**All Countries**

Oct 1-2, 2020 . . . . .	Summit on Stepfamily livestream . . . . .	<a href="http://summitonstepfamilies.com/">http://summitonstepfamilies.com/</a>
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**Quotes from a Spanish Art of Parenting event:**

*“I found rest in understanding that God loves my children more than I do.”*

*“What touched me a lot was understanding that our children don’t belong to us. Our part is to prepare and send them out and always pray for them and teach them.”*

*“It is never too late, and we should not give up.”*

## New Resource: FamilyLife Couples Studies

FamilyLife's Couples Studies will help you make three lifelong connections:

- An unbreakable bond to each other as husband and wife,
- Deep and supportive friendships with other couples, and
- A growing knowledge of God, who loves you more than you can imagine.

### The Gospel and Your Marriage

What do the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ have to do with marriage? How does believing in the gospel make your marriage stronger? Join your spouse and a small group of friends in this six-week study to find out!

The gospel is a love enabler. Because we are loved, we can love. If, then, it is "Christian marriage" that we desire—to love our spouses in a way that mirrors the gospel—we must understand that the power to do so does not come from within ourselves. It comes only and always from Christ. We CAN love in serving, sacrificing, forgiving ways, because... that is how Christ loves us. <https://shop.familylife.com/p-5799-the-gospel-and-your-marriage.aspx>

### Your Marriage Has a Mission

Be inspired to see your marriage as a God-given opportunity to affect the world around you by the way you love and relate to each other as husband and wife. Marriage is about the two of you and Christ. And the world. Your marriage has a mission! <https://shop.familylife.com/p-5803-your-marriage-has-a-mission.aspx>



### The Power of Humility in Your Marriage

Pride is easier, but humility is better.

Pride divides; humility connects. Pride demands; humility serves. Pride boasts; humility encourages. Imagine a home where humility prevails...now imagine your home being that home!

In Christ we have the greatest example of humility the world has ever seen. He, who had unlimited power, who commanded legions of angels, wrapped a towel around his waist, filled a bowl with water, and washed the disciples' feet as an example for us. Our hope for a gospel-centered, humble marriage begins and ends with Christ. <https://shop.familylife.com/p-5801-the-power-of-humility-in-your-marriage.aspx>

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these challenging days more united as a team. They've become part of at-home date nights and sparked some really good conversations . . . conversations that continue to bring hope and encouragement to marriages across Canada and even beyond."

The attendees agree. Feedback has come in from couples across Canada and even from participants outside the country:

"The Saturday webinars have helped put stability into our lives in these changing times. We look forward to sharing a coffee together Saturday mornings on our patio

while we get insights and helpful tools for our marriage."

"Thanks for starting the conversation for us in this area. We talked for over two hours after the webinar was over! We look forward to the next webinar!"

"Thanks for sharing your story of the darkest time of your marriage and God's redemption. I was so challenged and encouraged from your speaking this morning."

One couple used the *Great Marriages Don't Just Happen* webinar as a special part of celebrating their 24<sup>th</sup> wedding

anniversary at home (complete with chocolate-dipped strawberries!)

The FamilyLife Canada team is encouraged to see what God is doing in these challenging times. They're continuing to train marriage mentors and launch new digital tools like online workshops, podcasts, and video series—all to continue the good work of strengthening the marriages and families of their churches and communities.

More about FamilyLife Canada's digital strategies and resources can be found at <https://www.familylifecanada.com/live/>.



## Liberia—Embracing the Unexpected

By Jayna Richardson

When Wolobah Taylor, FamilyLife leader in Liberia, reached out to the FamilyLife Global department for advice on how to do small-group ministry in the midst of COVID-19 restrictions, international representative Chuck Eckerson responded with some reluctance that they might want to consider Zoom. Why the reluctance? Eckerson knew that Liberians are very social and might not be open to meeting virtually. Furthermore, the challenges and expense of internet in Liberia posed an additional obstacle. That's why what happened next came as such a surprise.

Taylor and his wife, Vanessa, were very eager to give virtual small groups a try. After some coaching and instruction, they began an online FamilyLife group with five couples the following week. It went great—and in fact, Taylor said that in some ways the Zoom meeting was better than a live meeting because husbands were more willing to participate, and couples didn't have to worry about finding childcare.

The group went so well that the Taylors began a second online small group with five more couples . . . and then a third!

The enthusiasm for online small groups then began spreading to other countries—including 1,000 miles away in Togo. Taylor began coaching FamilyLife Togo leaders Managuèlè and Colette BAFEI to use Zoom for FamilyLife ministry. They participated online with one of the Taylors' groups to get a sense of how this could work. Because Togo is a French- and Ewe-speaking country,



Managuèlè translated the English conversation for his wife throughout the meeting, making this perhaps the first international, multilingual virtual small group ever!

Meeting online in Africa isn't without challenges—internet can be unreliable, and data charges are pay-as-you-go and fairly costly, so groups are limited to only five couples and a one-hour time limit for each session. But these meetings are also removing factors such as travel time/distance or the expectation of a major time commitment, which is allowing more business leaders and professionals to attend.

The Taylors also have a desire to see small groups multiply throughout their country beyond their own abilities. Toward this end, they're encouraging group members to take turns leading the weekly sessions. This allows them to practice and gain confidence for leading their own groups someday, thereby spreading the reach of the ministry

and the biblical message of hope for families.

Chuck and Kathy Eckerson, who are FamilyLife representatives living in the US, recently sat in on one of the online small groups and were pleased to see several couples they had trained back in 2017 and some new faces as well. All are participating enthusiastically, gaining experience leading, and learning how to use FamilyLife small groups for discipleship and ministry multiplication. Only God knows the lives they will go on to touch as they eventually launch their own small groups.

Although the success of online small groups in Africa may be unexpected, God is not taken by surprise. "God does not have a stay-at-home order. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not under lockdown. He is meeting people right now, all around the globe, in very close and personal ways," says Eckerson.

God is on the move in extraordinary ways—in Liberia and beyond!

## Portugal—Adapting in Uncertain Times

by Jayna Richardson

Junia Barbosa is a wife, mom, nurse midwife, and the national director for FamilyLife Portugal. As busy as she is, she had to make time to learn new ways of doing ministry online during the pandemic. As she's reflected on the past few months and the changing landscape of ministry, she's seen that God has used this time of crisis to bring about positive changes.

FamilyLife Portugal has a mission to see healthy families impacted by the presence of God in their lives so they can shine that light to everyone around them. But the way FamilyLife Portugal is accomplishing that mission is evolving in these days of COVID-19—and it turns out, that's not a bad thing.

When the pandemic first hit, Junia says she took time to make sure her own family was settled and secure, as well the rest of the team, then the team began looking for ways to use the crisis as an opportunity to reach more people. As they sought the will of God, they began experimenting with online premarriage and marriage courses,

online small groups, blogs, podcasts, and social media.

"It was a kickstart that pushed us forward to this online world," she says.

During this time of pandemic, families have been looking for help more than ever. Being at home together 24/7 has forced people to face conflict and trouble that they normally would ignore or run away from. They're looking online for advice and resources—and they're finding FamilyLife.

Although ministry online isn't the same as a live event, the potential for reaching a broader and more diverse audience is significant.

"We realized that people that usually would not take the step to go to an event or to church feel comfortable joining something online," says Junia.

Even non-Christians are engaging with the ministry, sharing FamilyLife articles and joining online marriage groups. One marriage group in Portugal announced it was going to begin an online study, and within a couple of

days, forty couples had signed up. Families truly are hungry for help and hope.

Is online ministry the new normal for the future of FamilyLife? While Junia admits she can't predict the future, she doesn't see online ministry as a total replacement for in-person ministry.

"We are humans, and humans need to be close to each other and have community," she says. But she sees these online initiatives as something that can complement the ministry to make it stronger and help FamilyLife to reach more families.

For now, Junia is continuing to adapt to the changing world and the needs of couples, learn from other FamilyLife ministries around the world, and ask for God's wisdom daily. As FamilyLife Portugal continues to practice being flexible and creative in uncertain times, we look forward to seeing how God uses them to reach more and more people with the unshakeable truth of the gospel.

