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My uncle, Robert Lee Chapman, worked at Brosnan yard all of his life. He would take us down there from time to time to fish and see the trains being built. My title for these articles, “Coupling” is in part based on seeing those boxcars and tankers put together with thunderous collisions and bangs. When a locomotive would pull out of the yard or stop, you could hear the slack being taken out with a string of loud clunks going down the line.

The strength in each of those individual couplings of cars is the strength we want to have in our marriages. Train cars do two things; they carry their own load and keep connected to the rest of the train on the strength of coupling. The load is delivered and the train rolls together because the coupling holds.

Uncle Robert Lee was a strong, dedicated man. He landed at Normandy on D-Day and said he walked, rode a bike, or drove a truck all the way to Berlin. He and my Aunt Mary had been married 53 years when he passed into the nearer presence of the Lord. When it came to strength and dedication, he hung in there like a locomotive. That was some strong coupling.

I had the pleasure to spend this past weekend with some dear friends with a special needs child. Emily is 25 and enjoys work and going to school. Her multiplications are giving her trouble but she’s got adding and ‘take aways’ covered. Their humor, honesty, and infectious joy do more than warm the heart.

The mother tells me that “Em” keeps the two of them grounded and focused on the important things as they love and care for their daughter. Their coupling is strengthened in the joy of their challenges.

But it doesn’t stop there. Emily keeps the extended family tied together, too. Everyone take their turns spending time and enjoying her company. Love of Emily ties together the couple and the whole family.

But wait there’s more! Not only does she pull together her family, she unites her community as a whole. She has her own supper club. The whole neighborhood is linked together in their common appreciation for this gift from God.

How strong is your bond? Will it carry the weight of a train? Can you pull a neighborhood together?

Stress can either be an excuse or an opportunity to hunker down, focus, and get the job done. Relationships are never all wine and roses. The world will send us struggles. How we respond is our choice.

I’ve given some examples of how challenges can forge the steel of strong coupling. The question is how will you respond to your challenges? The simplest advice is to take responsibility and forgive the faults and weaknesses of the other.

Finally, a key ingredient of a strong bond is to have a purpose beyond your own strength. Mrs. Betty Smith told me that a love of God found in shared purpose and sacrifice will bring the two of you through a lot of trials.