I ran into Dennis and Terry at the Mother’s Finest concert at Cox Capital Theater. My wife and I were out acting like kids and having a grand time. Anyway, these old friends were giving me a hard time about this Coupling article. They told me to ease up; I’m setting the bar too high.

Then at church on Sunday, a kind lady said my wife was lucky to have such a sensitive and thoughtful husband. HA! My wife says I use her ideas, embellish them, and I misremember things, too.

The truth is I am not perfect. (Neither is she, but don’t tell her I said that!) I am a pretty ordinary husband and father. I put the wrong things in the dryer, forget things at Kroger, and have given some pretty lame gifts.

But my heart is in the right place and I try. My wife will tell you she tries harder and that’s probably true.

Ideas for Coupling come from a lot of places. Of course my reading and studies influence me. Working with people in difficult times is what I do, so we’re always considering problems and solutions. And of course there is the experiential. That is a big word that means I’ve learned a lot the hard way.

My point is that no partner is perfect. No relationship is perfect. Don’t set yourself up by judging your relationship against someone else’s. Don’t judge how you feel by how somebody else looks, judging your insides by their outsides. This is not fair to you or them.

The secret to happy coupling boils down to grace. I bet you thought I was going to say forgiveness or communication. I may say one of those in a later article and be just as fervent then, but for now the word is grace. Grace is the position of letting someone off the hook when they don’t deserve to be let off. Grace is a gift given without expectation. Grace allows the other to be exactly who they are.

Grace is a way of talking about forgiveness but on a deeper level. This is very difficult for young couples to understand. Stay together a few decades and you’ll know what I’m talking about. But I’ll try to explain.

Forgiveness is about letting go of an error or an oversight. Grace does not even see the oversight and allows the imperfection of “how they are” accepting the peculiarities and predilections. This position of being graceful in your relationship requires humility. That means being in touch with the ground of your own being, your own imperfections.

None of us are perfect nor should we require ourselves or anyone else to be.

So, as I ask my wife to accept my imperfections, I also have to accept her imperfections.

We can always ask for our needs to be met in our coupling. We can also work on ourselves to become better people. That is the obvious byproduct of healthy coupling. But graceful acceptance and humility are important traits to your relationship building.

By the way, like Mary Poppins, my wife is ‘practically perfect in every way!’