The holidays are here and that got me thinking about who’s in the family and who’s not. Can you honor your parents and in-laws and still protect quality time with the your nuclear family?

In-laws can be a challenge, but lately I’ve been thinking about the other part of the deal. What are the qualities I want in the people who will join my family through marriage. Is there a man good enough for my daughters? Is there a woman who will love and care for my son?

But hold on, maybe I’m asking the wrong questions. Am I ready to let go of my children as they leave their mother and I and cleave to another? We spend so much time, energy and love raising these children that it can be difficult to accept they are not our own, indeed they belong to themselves. When we can give them away, they can give themselves to another. What a challenge!

Then again there’s the whole situation about sons and daughters. For some reason mothers get to keep their daughters, but fathers have to give them away. Of course, no mother wants to give her son away. Could any ‘girl’ ever love and care for him as much as she? Though, somehow the other mother gets to keep her daughter as you give away your precious son. Wow, I’m confused.

We had a challenge with my mother. She holds on to everything and wasn’t ready to let me go, just because I got married. I succeeded in breaking away (as far as I have) when we were having our first child. My mother was sure she knew what name we needed to use for him.

I had to set a boundary and clarify that my family and our child was just that, ours. She understood, and we picked his name.

Can you imagine you are delivering your first child and the mother in law is enticing your husband, her son out of the delivery room with coffee and apple pie? This is a real tug of war for loyalty!

Jason told me the story of his early dating of his now, new wife. They were both past their first divorce and considered themselves adults. As they returned from a vacation, his soon to be mother in law was haranguing his girlfriend about her behavior; she was late, the children were difficult, what was she going to do?

The girlfriend had not yet learned to set a healthy boundary but his years in Al-Anon had prepared him for such a moment. After asking for the phone, he told her she would not talk to his girlfriend that way because she was ruining their good time. It was a good start to what is now a growing relationship for all.

Some will argue this point, but I believe your first allegiance belongs to your spouse not your mother or father. This sacred relationship needs to be protected and honored, even defended.

All of this may be conjecture since none of mine are married, yet. Good luck to those future sons and daughters in law. And good luck with those holiday gatherings!