

CHERISHING DAYS*

Your love will either live or die. What kills love? Love dies when you spend little or no time together and when you stop sharing activities that are mutually enjoyable. Love is created or destroyed by pairing or failing to pair the partner with pleasurable activities over a period of time. Attempting to control the other, as well as excessive anger, will also kill love. Love dies from failure on the part of both individuals to reinforce appropriate behavior in each other. Smiling, caressing, complimenting, showing compassion, and spending time together are behaviors in marriage that may not be reinforced. If they are not, they may disappear. If your partner stops doing things that you like, your love feelings may disappear.

Many couples feel they have tried to demonstrate love and meet the needs of their spouses but keep missing the mark. To eliminate misunderstanding and mind reading, it is far better to share with one another your needs, wants, and desires in a specific yet nondemanding manner. When you seek to learn your partner's wishes in order to meet them as best you can, you are implementing the model of servanthood as portrayed in the Scripture.

One of the most effective ways of meeting each other's love needs and wants is to launch into the "Cherishing Days" exercise. Sound interesting? It can be very interesting, and it is easy to implement. Each partner makes a list of small cherishing behaviors that he or she would enjoy receiving from the other. These requested behaviors should have four characteristics:

1. They must be specific and positive. For example, a wife would like her husband to sit next to her on the couch as they watch the news after dinner. She has made a positive request for a desired behavior instead of complaining, "You ignore me and are preoccupied with the TV".
2. The small cherishing behaviors must not be concerned with past conflicts or old demands.
3. The positive behaviors must be such that they can be accomplished on an everyday basis.
4. The behaviors must be achievable—they do not require excessive time or expense.

Think back to the most satisfying times of your courtship and marriage to discover ideas for your list. Some of the behaviors you think of may seem trivial or somewhat embarrassing to you. It's perfectly all right. Include them on your list as long as they reflect valid personal wants or needs.

Once your list of 15 to 20 cherishing behaviors is completed, exchange lists with your partner and discuss the cherishing behaviors you are requesting from each other. Be sure to tell your spouse *how* you would like each behavior performed for you. For example, if you request a back rub at bedtime, specify light skin rub or deep muscle massage, with lotion or without, and so on. As you discuss your written requests, feel free to add others to the list as you think of them.

After your discussion, declare the next seven days to be "Cherishing Days." Make a commitment to put your partner's list into practice. Try to accomplish as many of the cherishing behaviors on the list as possible each day. Focus your attention and energies on what you do for your spouse, not what he/she does for you. At the end of seven days you may evaluate whether you will continue the exercise for another week.

Why does this encourage love and romance so well? Because the list of positive behaviors that you exchange consists of requested, discussed, and agreed upon acts of love. The guesswork of "What shall I do for him/her? Will he/she like it?" is eliminated. Also, the commitment is short term-you are only responsible for seven days. And the behaviors are purposely simple and easily achievable. The margin of failure is greatly reduced.

Another important factor in the success of this exercise is the commitment of each individual to the "I must change first" principle. You are not keeping score of your spouse's efforts. You are too busy concentrating on accomplishing his/her list. And with each behavior comes a positive response, which encourages the giver to continue. As each person gives and receives positive loving acts, the bond of love will grow stronger.

Most couples decide to continue the exercise after completing the seven-day commitment. They find that the positives of filling each others' wants and needs eliminate the negatives of love-recessive behavior patterns. The "Cherishing Days" exercise is a practical, simple application of scriptural admonitions to kindness, love, edification, and more.

Here is a sample list of cherishing behaviors that many people have found helpful.

- Greet me with a hug and kiss before we get out of bed in the morning.
- When you're out walking, bring back a flower or a leaf.
- Look at me and smile.
- Call me during the day and tell me something pleasant.
- Turn off the lights and light a candle when we have dinner.
- Put on a favorite record and come sit next to me and hold my hand.
- Ask me how I spent my day.
- Wash my back in the tub or shower.
- Pick me up at work or at the bus stop as a surprise.
- Put a surprise note in my lunch or article of clothing.
- Tell me how much you enjoy having breakfast with me.
- Tell the children (in front of me) that I'm a good parent.
- When we sit together, put your arm around me.
- Have coffee with me in the morning before we wake the children so we can have a five-minute talk together.
- Take me on a date and make all the arrangements.
- Hold me at night before we go to sleep.
- Ask my opinion about world affairs or the sermon at church.
- For no special reason hug me and say you love me.
- Greet me with a smile when we first see each other at the end of the day.
- Use endearing words with me sometime.
- When we are out, wink or blow a kiss to me.

This list is just a sample. Add your own ideas.

[*After You Say I Do, by H. Norman Wright, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, p27]