

A Man's Guide to Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day Secret: Guys, "Last minute" says "not that important." She will probably never say that—maybe never even think it exactly that way. But "last minute" says, "I didn't care enough to give any forethought."

Classic Issue

Legend says that a Christian named Valentine (or Valentinus) was imprisoned, where he fell in love with the jailer's daughter. Just before his execution he wrote her a love letter and signed it, "From your Valentine."

The English popularized Valentine's Day in the 1700s. Americans picked up on this and began exchanging handmade valentines. Printed valentines first appeared in America around 1840. Valentine's Day is the second largest day for greeting cards (after Christmas), and women purchase 85 percent of all valentine cards (, retrieved December 10, 2003).

Valentine's Day is a day for lovers. My mom and dad were married on Valentine's Day. My wife and I were married on the Saturday closest to Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day presents a perfect opportunity to invest in your marriage. Here's a plan to make Valentine's Day special for you and your wife. First, though, let's review some reasons why it's worth investing the effort ...

A Different Way to Think About Marriage

Family systems thinker Edwin Friedman wrote how successful a marriage can be. He said, "In reality, no human marriage gets a rating of more than 70 percent" (Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 1985, p. 69).

In other words, even the most successful marriage will only be

symptom-free about 70 percent of the time. Patsy, my wife, and I both think we have a great marriage. We talked this 70 percent thing over, and it makes sense to us. You could think, *Is that as good as it gets?* But a better thought would be, *Wow, maybe my marriage is better than I thought!* If you will dwell on this 70 percent number, I think in time you will be encouraged by it.

Why just 70 percent? It's the flesh. We see each other through the veil of our sinful natures. It takes grace to make a marriage work. No person is ideal. Our wives can be controlling, neglectful, strong-willed, pouters, unexpressive, unappreciative, and on and on. So can we. That's why Valentine's Day can be such a helpful, healing time ... a time to raise the stakes for your marriage and help it become what God has called it to be.

The Big Picture on Marriage

Here are some remarks adapted from the introduction of my book for wives, *Understanding Your Man in the Mirror*:

1. Marriage is a good thing. Marriage blesses. Marriage is that mysterious, spiritual fusion of two lives headed in two directions into one flesh.

2. All relationships are difficult, especially marriage. Florence Littauer has said, "We are attracted to marry each other's strengths, and then go home to live with each other's weaknesses." Two people rubbing against each other are bound to create some friction. Love is the glue that holds us together, and the oil that keeps us from rubbing each other the wrong way.

3. Virtually all men believe that they are, or have been, a difficult husband to live with. Most likely, many regrets haunt your husband. He knows he has been difficult. Yet, he wants to make up the years he robbed from you.

4. Most men have it in their hearts to do the right thing.

Based on hundreds of surveys and thousands of interviews, I would say the overwhelming conclusion is this: Most men really do want to do the right thing. Men deeply love their wives. Along the way they have bought into a few ideas that knocked them off balance, but their hearts are good.

Where Are You Today?

Take this self-test about where your marriage stands today:

I believe marriage is a good thing.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

My marriage is difficult.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

My marriage is difficult because I have been difficult to live with.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

I want to do better and make my marriage right.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

I'm encouraged that "no human marriage gets a rating of more than 70 percent."

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

My marriage needs my immediate attention.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

I need to be the one to take responsibility for investing in my marriage.

☐ Completely ☐ Mostly ☐ Somewhat Disagree

The Emotional Bank Account

The most powerful marriage concept I've run across is "The Emotional Bank Account." Every wife has an Emotional Bank Account into which we make deposits and from which we make withdrawals. Basically, every time we interact with our wives, whether verbal or non-verbal, we are either making a deposit or a withdrawal.

For example, you've had a rough day. You come home, slam door, expel loud grunt simulating a large zoo animal, plop down in chair, turn on TV, bury nose in paper ... Is this a deposit or a withdrawal from your wife's Emotional Bank Account? Okay, you get the picture.

Now let's say the following morning you feel terrible for being such a bum the night before, so you take your wife coffee in bed. That would be a deposit, right? So you see how this works.

One more example. Non-verbal communication counts. Say your child had a spat with another child in the neighborhood. Your wife has been working the situation all afternoon. After dinner she wants to talk. You cross your arms, frown, and stare out the window. See how this works?

Here's the big idea: After a few years, a lot of wives end up empty. Their Emotional Bank Accounts have been depleted. Why? Too many withdrawals, not enough deposits. This is not merely a cute idea, but it is the Continental Divide between those marriages that make it and those that don't. Remember, above I mentioned that wives and husbands can be controlling, neglectful, strong-willed, pouters, unexpressive, or unappreciative. Withdrawals like that, without a plan to make deposits, will eventually destroy a marriage.

Valentine's Day presents an opportunity to a) make a mega-deposit and b) renew yourself to be a "depositer" into her account.

The 7-Step Mega Deposit

Here's a seven-step suggestion to make this Valentine's Day a mega deposit into your wife's Emotional Bank Account:

Step 1: The Ask. At least 10 days before Valentine's Day, ask your wife for a Valentine's date. It's important to ask well in advance so it doesn't seem "last minute" to her. Make it special: write a handwritten note, make a poster, hire a

skywriter, get a banner made, a note in a bottle, use your imagination! If you didn't do it this year, please work on it for 2014!

Step 2: The List. At least 7 days before Valentine's Day, start a list of all the things you appreciate about your wife. Be creative!

Step 3: The Note. At least 3 days before the big date, send your wife a handwritten note telling her how much you are looking forward to your special date.

Step 4: The Flowers. On the big day, send her flowers with a mushy note.

Step 5: The Date. Pick a romantic restaurant (be sure to make a reservation in advance). Go up a notch on your normal price range. After dinner pull out your list of things you appreciate and tell her each item, slowly, with embellishment. Give her a Valentine's card you make or purchase.

Step 6: The Gift. Chocolate is a traditional favorite, but keep your antenna up for hints. Maybe your wife would like some Starbucks coffee, a gift certificate to her favorite bookstore, or some warm pajamas.

Step 7: The Follow Up. The day after your date, write your wife another handwritten note telling how much you enjoyed your date and why.

Pat Morley is the Founder and CEO of *Man in the Mirror*. After building one of Florida's 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded *Man in the Mirror*, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of *The Man in the Mirror*, *No Man Left Behind*, *Dad in the Mirror*, and *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*.

Visit for the original article.