

Simple Ways for You to Encourage Your Wife

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I would write that 100 times, but I think you get the message and I'd probably lose most of you at No. 17. That's the average number of times you'll read the same thing. (Of course, I just made that up.)

But I want it clear up front, I'm not a perfect husband.

I have learned a few things and I do want to be a better husband. I know, for example, part of my happiness is found in Cheryl being happy. I love my wife enough to want her to be happy. I think most husbands would agree with this statement. If not, its time to get outside help for the marriage.

Obviously, I can't control all the things which happen in a day for her. I can't stop people from being rude to her as she drives to work. I can't keep the co-worker who is having a bad day from taking her bad day out on Cheryl. I can't stop the pressures and stress Cheryl will encounter by being a pastor's wife or by being a friend, mother, daughter or sister.

All I can control is the way I respond to Cheryl and the things I do to encourage her happiness. I do believe—as I read Scripture—just as I strategically think for my ministry, I should strategically think how to encourage my wife. It's part of loving my wife as Christ loves the church.

Obviously a wife wants to know she's loved, that you believe in her and respect her, and that we are committed long-term to the relationship. But, what are some practical ways to show

this on a continual basis? Allow me to offer a few suggestions.

Here are seven ways I try to encourage Cheryl:

1. Send flowers—when they aren't expected. This seems so trivial, but I honestly have to remind myself to do this. Flowers on a special occasion are nice, but I have found the ones she enjoys the most are sent on the days she's not looking for flowers. This could be something besides flowers if your wife isn't into flowers much, but I've also discovered many of the practical-minded women who say they don't want flowers actually love receiving them occasionally.

2. Reserve a day—just for her. I try to do this every Saturday. I let few things interrupt this day and none without consulting with Cheryl first. You may not be able to do this once a week and it may not be for a full day, but it should be consistent enough she can anticipate it. I think it's great if these are placed on the calendar and trump other interruptions. (There are always emergencies, but as much as possible keep them. Plus, some things we claim as emergencies could actually be delegated to someone else.) During the times when life is most stressful and you are pulled in different directions, these reserved times give her something to look forward to and remind her you'll be able to "catch up" soon.

3. Give a gift that keeps on giving. This idea is brilliant, I must admit. I love to give a gift which takes a while to receive. When the boys were at home and getting away was more difficult, I would give Cheryl a trip for Christmas every year. We would take the trip in May. I would usually pick a location, request brochures and give them to her as her "big" gift at Christmas. We had months to plan for it, which built positive emotions leading up to the trip and then anticipating the next Christmas trip. (Plus, many of these expenses were paid outside the Christmas spending frenzy, which helped our budget.) We are more flexible with our schedule since the boys

have moved out, but I still try to keep something planned ahead for Cheryl to look forward to in the future. These are huge boosts on otherwise cloudy days.

4. Be a responsive listener. I realize whenever Cheryl says something there is usually a deeper meaning, so I try to listen for the deeper meaning. I try to understand her thought process. Girls, guys really do talk in simpler facts, which makes it more difficult for us to understand subtleties sometimes. Instead of dismissing what Cheryl said, because it wasn't clear or assuming I know what she's saying, I ask questions for clarification when needed.

5. Give her details. OK, I know, this one can hurt—and I'm not the best at it. Again, I'm not the perfect husband here. Do I need to write that again? I try allowing Cheryl to ask me questions and I try to tell her when I've told her everything I know. I realize details are more important to her than to me. This may be opposite for you and your spouse. Cheryl is very accommodating here—knowing I don't like details. We plan times together where she knows I'm more likely to talk—such as our morning or evening walks. I have to remember though—just because details aren't important to me doesn't mean they aren't to her.

6. Listen without fixing. This is my toughest, but just in the last couple week I did this. I hope she caught it. She had a list of things on her mind she was struggling with and I didn't say a word until she got through all of them. And it was hard. I am a fixer. I fix problems every day. Give me a problem and I'll be quick to race to a solution. I realize many times, however, Cheryl simply wants my ear and not my expert insight.

7. Brag to others about her. Let your wife hear you bragging about her to other people. She's wonderful, right? Let her know you recognize it. Of course, this should be genuine, but I know Cheryl appreciates hearing me affirm her to others. And

Cheryl is wonderful. You heard it here first. It's funny sometimes, because people who haven't picked Cheryl out in the crowd on Sunday or met her yet, will ask—"Are you 'the Cheryl'?" They've heard me talk about her enough they want to know who she is.

Guys, your list will be different from mine, because your wife is different. Some of them will be the same. The point of this post is to encourage you to think strategically about how you can encourage your wife.

Ladies, feel free to help us be men. Most of us really do want you to feel encouraged. So is there anything you would add to my list that would encourage you? {eo}

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