

Sow Kindness in Your Marriage

An offer to help, a smile and a kind word will reduce the heat of everyday responsibilities

The first command God gave mankind was to be fruitful and multiply (see Gen. 1:28). But fruitfulness involves more than merely growing physical fruit.

As a Christian, the Spirit of God has already been planted within you, now it's your job to cultivate the seed of His nature. And it is not going to be an easy thing to do all the time.

The farmer's seeds must push through a layer of dirt in order to reach the sunlight. That dirt outweighs that little seed, and it will have to struggle hard to break through. In the same manner, God's Spirit has to push through the dirt we call our flesh.

Our flesh may be innately selfish, rude and indulgent. The Spirit of God inside of us is none of those things. Thus, there is resistance; there is conflict. And in marriage, these can pose numerous problems in the way we communicate with our spouse.

Take the case of James, who comes home after a rough workday. The computer program he'd worked on around the clock for weeks wasn't running. After a tense meeting with his concerned boss, James headed home exhausted.

When he opened the door to greet his pregnant wife, he was confronted with the words, "I hope you won't work all hours of the day when the baby is born!" Without saying a word, James watched his wife set out the meal she had prepared hours earlier. He knew he was desperately in need of something, but couldn't put his finger on it.

Then there is Charlotte, a homeschooling mother of four, who also had a tough day. Shortly after her husband left for work, one child developed a fever combined with nausea.

After a stressful day of serving as both impromptu nurse and schoolteacher, Charlotte was preparing dinner when her husband entered and said with a smile, "This house looks like a disaster area. What did you do today?" Not returning the smile, Charlotte became defensive as she set the table. She also needed something, but felt too overwhelmed to express it.

What James and Charlotte needed was an act of kindness. James needed a hug and a "Boy, I'm glad to see you, you hard-working man." Charlotte needed her husband to notice her overwhelmed state and come to her aid.

Every spouse needs kindness daily. Many of us feel that life is like an overworked, fast-moving engine. In mechanical terms, an engine receives a constant supply of motor oil to prevent friction and overheating. Likewise, random and intentional acts of kindness lubricate marriage relationships, easing life's friction.

An offer to help, a smile and a kind word will reduce the heat of everyday responsibilities. Knowing that someone cares enough to notice and say thank you makes the day-to-day routine a little easier to handle.

Kindness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and when it's displayed, it can make anyone feel special. Think about the last act of kindness your spouse did for you, and how it made you feel. The fruit of kindness is sweet to the soul.

You've Got It In You – Through the Spirit of God, the power of kindness dwells within you, ready to be released. Any act of kindness you show to your spouse plants a seed that will eventually grow into a fruit-bearing tree of kindness. Will you reap a plentiful harvest because of your continual planting and nurturing, or will your harvest be small?

In Colorado where I live, huge trees grow right through rocks and boulders. It's amazing that the power of a tiny seed is greater than the power of the large surrounding rocks. Similarly, your decision to exhibit the fruit of kindness is not hindered by the attitude of your spouse. Even the strongest will cannot weaken the power of the seed.

In marriage, you have been given the strength to be kind in order to fortify the spirit, soul and person of your husband. He, in turn, will grow because of your encouragement. King David, one of the greatest Bible characters and a friend of God, referred not to God's power or wisdom, but rather to His gentleness as the thing that made Him great (see 2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35).

In essence, kindness is shown when one person chooses to use his or her strength in a gentle manner toward another. Take note of the following ways in which kindness can be expressed in your interaction with your mate:

Spoken kindness. The first seeds of kindness we can sow in the heart of our spouse are in the thoughtful words we speak. Often, out of laziness or familiarity, we begin to be gruff, sarcastic, or demeaning in our responses to normal questions. Our answers seem sharp instead of seasoned with grace. We should respond as though every question our spouse asks is an intelligent one. We should take time to listen fully and give a sincere answer.

Spoken kindness is expressed also in the tone of speech we employ. It's possible to never say a wrong thing yet communicate an unkind attitude when we speak. Next to God, you are the loudest and most consistent voice your spouse hears. It's your choice to use a kind voice that supports and encourages your spouse, or a gruff voice that discourages, degrades and minimizes.

Speaking thoughtful, gentle words to your spouse in front of

your friends and your children is yet another expression of spoken kindness. Always thank your spouse when he or she is serving you in some manner. But instead of just saying, "Thanks, Honey," be specific. Saying "Thank you, Honey, for getting the butter; that was kind of you," communicates that you actually notice your spouse's acts of kindness.

The words you speak and the kind way in which they are spoken will soon become the heart of your everyday lifestyle. As your heart becomes kind, so your words will also, and your spouse's heart will be motivated by your example to do the same.

A kind touch. Sometimes a touch can communicate kindness more loudly than words. Holding your spouse's hand, gently caressing his back or even giving him a private foot massage can express volumes of kindness.

There is a kind of touching that is expressly meant to communicate kindness without any hint of sexuality or need for reciprocation. This soothing, unselfish, gentle type of touch is a great way to plant kindness in your spouse's heart. Although verbal expressions may be deflected or discounted, a touch is rarely rejected.

The expression of "teamfulness." I use the word "teamfulness" as a means of defining the way a husband and wife operate in unity. They anticipate each other's actions and, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each other, capitalize on these strengths for the good of the team.

Here is how teamfulness works: When you see the laundry, you do the laundry because you're part of the team. If you see a situation that must be dealt with regarding one of your children, you handle it without passing it on to your spouse. You know your husband's schedule, and you cover for him without an attitude.

In the same way, your spouse-the other team member-is so in

touch with your world that often he sees a need before you do. In this way your spouse throws you the ball, so to speak, and you both score.

Kindness is something you can offer your spouse freely every day. It should be both intentional and spontaneous.

Intentional kindness means purposefully releasing the kindness you possess on a regular basis. Along these lines, one piece of advice I offer husbands is to give their wives a night away from home once a week. This should be a time for her to spend as she chooses. I explain to them that their wives need time to relax or play, when she does not have to be a mom, a wife, a cook, the clean-up crew and the leader of bedtime rituals.

Similarly, a wife can plan intentional acts of kindness for her husband based on his interests. Some wives who are gifted cooks may want to select one day a week to prepare a gourmet meal for the family.

We also need to recognize the importance of spontaneous kindness. Don't become so mechanical in your plans that you fail to capitalize on those great daily opportunities that arise to be kind to your mate.

My wife, Lisa, is regularly kind to me. When I come home on a warm day, I first like to spend about 15 minutes on the hammock in our backyard. It's magical the way both my soul and body become relaxed and refreshed. Lisa usually protects this time, so I am not interrupted. This is a much appreciated, spontaneous act of kindness she gives to me.

Commit to Kindness – Just as a seed in the natural realm contains the nature of the fruit it will become, so, too, within that seed of the Spirit planted in you is the very DNA of God: His heart, His mind, His will and His nature. The seed in you desires to be respectful and kind.

The first step in making kindness a greater reality in your

home is to break previous agreements you may have made with unkindness. Confess your sins against God and your spouse. Seek forgiveness for any actions, attitudes or beliefs that have fueled unkind habits in your marriage. And in the name of Jesus, break any spirit, soul or body agreements with meanness. Eliminate all traces of it from your behavior and speech.

Make an official declaration of your decision to uproot old habits and create new beliefs and attitudes. Prayer will help you establish a great foundation for your new resolve to be kind, and the Holy Spirit will strengthen you to carry out your commitment. Be intentional toward your mate, but also respond to those surprising opportunities to practice kindness that come along every single day.

You and I have a lot of farming to do. Oh, yes, it's work. And yes, it's daily. Some parts of the field will be easy to plow, and some will be harder.

But imagine the increased fruitfulness in your marriage, and in the lives of your children and grandchildren. Feel the hand of Jesus on your shoulder, and see the smile on His face when He will say to you, "Well done!"

So get ready to plow. There is plentiful harvest of eternal joy ahead of you.

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