

# You May Be Married, but Are You Engaged?

While cleaning out a dresser drawer, I discovered an old stash of handwritten letters that my wife sent me when we were engaged to be married.

I found myself reading through them, picking up one after another, amazed at how expressive and detailed her letters were about our upcoming wedding. She was a thousand miles away from me. Her daily letters were the only real connection that we had, other than the occasional long distance phone calls. I realize this dates me, but there was a time when calling long distance was a budgetary decision.

As I read those letters my mind went back to the excitement of our engagement. We were young and naive, but we were also motivated with the hope of pursuing our dreams together. She was unreserved in sharing her love with me. Her sweet innocence and southern charm resonated in her words without being coy about her affections.

The time had flown by and I realized that I had taken a trip along memory lane for several minutes. To be honest, I wanted to call her and tell her how proud I am of her. I wanted her to know immediately that she has lived up to and surpassed all of my expectations of a wife. I wanted that girl that was so kind to me in those letters to know as a woman that she is the love of my life.

Then, I asked myself this question, “Now that you’ve been married for 29 years, are you still engaged?”

To engage means to bind oneself to do something, such as a pledge to marry. It also means to get and keep someone’s attention and interest; to bring together or interlock; to deal with—especially at length.

Few men will research and read good material and information on the subject. Most men's magazines are filled with articles on how to pick up women and the only attention that they teach men to give women is sexual. Many of the writers of these magazines are sophomoric in their advice, and frankly, must be novices and incompetent in relationships.

When I speak with men regarding authentic manhood, a common theme of our dialogue is marriage. I have found that although many of them want a great marriage, very few are actively pursuing ways to make it better. It seems that they put the onus on their wives to be the pursuer, rather than taking the lead and actively engaging their wives in the marriage.

### **Love Is Expressed in Action**

Consider how women have responded when asked to complete this sentence:

**"I wish my husband would love me by ..."**

- By listening to me.
- By taking my 'petty problems' seriously.
- By communicating more openly with me.
- By noticing me more—not just when he wants sex.
- By saying, "Thank you," for the things I do.
- By being interested in my life ... at least acting like he's interested.
- By showing affection when other people are around.
- By sharing his goals and values with me; talking his business over with me.
- By remembering me with little gifts or just planning an evening out.
- By taking me out without the kids more—maybe just for a ride.
- By including me in the things he does.
- By trying to understand me.
- By getting involved with things I enjoy doing.

- By just holding me in his arms and talking to me.
- By being tender and using kind, tender words.
- By helping in the discipline of the children.
- By saying little words of care, compliments, and appreciation.
- By accepting me just as I am.
- By spending more time with the family.
- By making me feel like a woman.

So, rather than taking the advice from the juvenile writers at men's magazines, I recommend that you read this list a few times. If a husband is this engaged with his wife, the nighttime celebration won't be an issue.

I unashamedly say that I want to be fully engaged in my marriage. I am not interested in just going through the motions and being comfortable with the status quo.

A few years ago my wife was walking by me with the supplies needed to tackle cleaning our home. At that moment I dropped everything—schedule, phone calls, etc.—grabbed some of the supplies and said, “I am taking care of the bathrooms and dusting.” I have made it a habit to do that every week.

It is, in fact, an action that says, “I love you.”

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