

Receive Straight “A’s” on Your Relationship!

With **Valentine’s Day** coming up, most of us are a little more focused on our relationship with our spouse and what we can do to show our love and appreciation for what they do to make us feel loved. We buy flowers, write special words in cards, or plan a special meal or night out together. Those are all great and I encourage you to do them, but it is too easy sometimes to think that now I don’t have to do anything more until our wedding anniversary or your spouse’s birthday! From a man’s perspective, that might seem like a reasonable path to take, but I can tell you from experience, that is **not** OK from a woman’s perspective!

I want to take a look at four “A” words that we can all do with our spouse that will enrich and enhance your relationship all year long. The first two “A” words are **Acceptance** and **Approval**. *One of our five basic love needs is to be seen, heard, known, and understood.* We don’t grow out of that need when we become an adult. You might be thinking that, “Hey, we live together and I see, hear, and know him or her better than anyone else does!” But as I have found out with Sue, just being in the same room or house together does not count as being seen, heard, and understood. I need to spend quality time giving Sue my full attention, making eye contact, responding and interacting to what she is saying, and letting her know that she is the most special person in my life. I have slowly given up on trying to change Sue and have begun accepting her just as she is. As I have backed off of all my demands and expectations, I have found that not only is our life together much more peaceful and fun, but that she has begun to change in ways that I like on her own! Just a note for all the ladies reading this, acceptance and approval are a ***big deal*** to men too!

The third “A” word on my list is **Attune**. This is a relatively new word for me, but I like what it does in helping me connect with another person or my wife. I looked the word up and it means, “to bring into harmony, become receptive to or aware of, bring into a relationship of mutual understanding.” As I was thinking about how to explain what attuning with your spouse might look like, I remembered some statements like, “walk in someone else’s shoes for a while,” or “try to see things from their perspective,” or “how would I be if I was married to someone like me?” In addition to these, we need to consider what may have happened earlier in the day or even the possibility that their actions or emotions are connected to something from their past. It might even be connected to something that is going on in them physically or in their thoughts at that time. It goes back to that need to be known and be understood. Through our words, body language, and actions we can let them know that we have compassion for where they are at and that they have a place in our heart.

And the last “A” word that I want you to consider is **Affirm**. This can be especially important if your spouse struggles with low self-esteem, lack of confidence, or self-hatred. It can also be helpful in all those “first time” events that happen in a marriage, like your first week or so of marriage, your first child, or buying a new car or house. I can remember when we brought our first son home and Sue handed this tiny little baby to me. I had never been around or taken care of a baby before, and I needed a lot of affirmation and instructions on what to do! Another big time we all need to be affirmed is when something difficult or tragic happens to us or our spouse. It could be an accident, loss of a job, a death of a loved one, or a mistake that we made that caused some big problems. There have been numerous times when I have made mistakes and

started to beat up on myself, and Sue has had to come alongside of me and affirm me. We also need to affirm our spouse's emotions and feelings as being valid and real to them. This is one of those areas where I still need a lot of work because I don't feel very comfortable around Sue when she is expressing her feelings and emotion. It's also very important to affirm each other in our commitment to our covenant marriage and our love for each other, especially when things are not going so well or there has been a big disagreement over some issue. **Sometimes you don't need to use words, but just hold each other and allow your love to flow into your spouse. Those "One-minute Hugs" are powerful!!**

One way Sue and I affirm our commitment is to say confessions about our marriage out loud together. **Here's one you might want to say together on this Valentine's Day:**

"We are ever ready to believe the best of each other. Our love for each other never fails – never comes to an end. I am an understanding and compassionate spouse. My mate feels no judgment or rejection from me. We invest in our relationship daily. We are becoming more understanding of one another. We are on our way to being happier than any time in our marriage.

I am filled with compassion and that I let that force of compassion flow from my heart to my spouse. I am the strongest source of blessing and encouragement in my spouse's life. I deliberately think of ways I can be a blessing to him (or her), and I speak words of blessing that will bring the strength and encouragement my spouse needs from me.

We are co-rulers in life and God has called us together to make an impact on this world. Together we make a powerful team and together we are achieving great things. Every day I am dying to the flesh and becoming less selfish and self-centered. I choose today to love my spouse and show attentive care towards my spouse."

Dialogue Questions

(Answer each question by writing a letter to your spouse. Then exchange letters and talk about what your spouse wrote.)

1. What are the two most memorable Valentine's Days with you and how does that make me feel when I think about them.
2. If I could spend Valentine's Day anywhere in the world with you, where would that be and why would I want to go there? How does that make me feel just thinking about that?

Fun Date Night

Find a new recipe on the internet together; go shopping for the ingredients together; and then fix a special meal together complete with candles, wine or sparkling grape juice. Turn the lights down low, put some romantic music on, and have fun enjoying each other!

Happy Valentine's Day!