

# Marriage Minute

October 10, 2015

## **Fan the Flames**

What about your spouse are you thankful for today? Tell her. What qualities in your spouse encourage you? Tell him. Being thankful is one of the quickest ways to enhance our joy in life, and that joy strengthens our ability to love our spouses and families. As follow-up to last week's thoughts on putting our faith into action by thanking the Lord for our spouses, let's continue to honor the Lord and energize our relationships by identifying at least one quality in our spouse that we are thankful for each day this week. In Philippians 1:3-8 we can observe how Paul was filled with joy as he expressed thanks to the Lord for specific qualities of the Philippians. Similarly, identifying and expressing thankfulness to the Lord and to our spouses for specific qualities we appreciate will fuel the excitement in our relationships. This thankfulness honors the Lord while fanning the flames of love for our spouses.

**Challenge for the Week:** Observe your spouse this week and reflect on the qualities you most appreciate about them. Notice the small things your spouse does that make your life just a little bit better. Then, look them in the eyes and fan the flames of love in your relationship as you thank them for something specific each day this week.

# Marriage Minute

October 3, 2015

## **Thankful for God's Faithfulness**

How long have you been married? What unique events brought you and your spouse together? What role has the Lord played in your relationship? How do you see God's hand in your life and in your marriage? Pastor Marty spoke last week during the 40th Anniversary Service about recognizing and being thankful for the Lord's faithfulness to Burke Community Church over these many years. But Marty's message was not just about God's faithfulness to us. Marty's theme was that "God's faithfulness plus our faith equals abundant living." In other words, we have a responsibility to exercise our faith in the Lord's provision. Just like the young man who offered his five loaves of bread and two fish to Jesus in John 6:1-14, we are to put our faith into action. What would this message look like applied to our marriages and families? For those who are married, God has graciously provided us a life partner. In response, the Lord exhorts us as husbands and wives to intentionally love and honor our spouse with the kind of sacrificial love that endures forever (Ephesians 5:21-33). One way to put our faith into action is to acknowledge God's faithfulness to us by providing a spouse to fill our need for companionship and to express our deep thankfulness to Him in prayer.

**Challenge for the Week:** Take time to remember God's faithfulness to you by going before the Lord in prayer each day to thank Him for your spouse and your family. As you reflect upon God's faithfulness to you this week, write a love letter to your spouse thanking them for being one of God's most precious blessings in your life.

# Marriage Minute

September 19, 2015

## **Good to Great: Where is Your Treasure?**

Do you want your marriage to go from good to great? Put the accelerator to great in your marriage by spending 20 consecutive minutes a day talking to your spouse. Sounds easy? Maybe. But, it may not be so easy because time is such a limited resource and valuable treasure in the context of the busy northern Virginia lifestyle. So, where do you place your treasured time? Giving your time to your spouse demonstrates you care and builds closeness and trust in your relationship. Research shows that 10 minutes of active communication with your spouse each day fosters a good marriage, but 20 minutes of quality interaction a day cultivates a great marriage. Make a special effort to invest your time in quality conversation with your spouse this week "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21).

**Challenge for the Week:** Make it a priority to spend 20 minutes in active, quality conversation with your spouse at least three days this week. Ask your spouse to tell you about their accomplishments and challenges from the day. Listen, empathize, and seek to understand your mate during this time. Share how thankful you are to share your life with them.

# Marriage Minute

September 12, 2015

## **Remote Control verses Self Control**

The invention of the remote control for the television was a creation of wonderful convenience. When not satisfied with what is on the TV, we press the control button to change the channel. If we do not like the new channel, we simply change it again until we find something we do like. However, this concept does not work when it comes to our marriage relationships. There is no remote control to change the personality or behavior of our spouses! While it is normal that sometimes our differences become an irritant, we should not try to change or control our mates. God's design for how we love our spouses is to demonstrate self-control, not spouse-control. We are to put into practice love and self-control generated in us by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 describes the Fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Instead of trying to control our mates, we should apply these behaviors in marriage, seeking to better control ourselves and how we respond to our spouses. Some of the unique qualities that attracted you to your spouse will occasionally cause friction. When that happens, choose to be responsible for how you respond to your spouse. Choose to honor, not change, your spouse. Remember, God did not give us a spirit of mate-control, but He does give us one of self-control.

**Challenge for the Week:** Honor your mate by making a list of the positive traits that attracted you to your spouse. Make time to share one of those qualities with your spouse each day this week to reaffirm your love and attraction to them as one of God's beautiful creations.

# Marriage Minute

September 5, 2015

## The Game of KerPlunk

When I was a kid I enjoyed playing the game of KerPlunk with my friends, but I never play this game with my wife! KerPlunk has a transparent plastic tube filled with dozens of marbles resting on a web of pixy sticks (like giant tooth picks) that are placed through small holes in the middle of the tube. Players take turns removing one stick at a time seeking to minimize the number of marbles that fall. Making risky choices in KerPlunk is thrilling because players never know for sure how many marbles will fall through the weakened web as they remove each stick. However, making risky choices is neither thrilling nor wise when it comes to the context of marriage. Spouses make choices everyday that either preserve their marriage or put it at risk. Each risky decision is like pulling out a pixy stick from underneath the marbles. The danger is that a spouse cannot know which risky choice may be the one that causes the relationship to fail. A particular risky choice may not result in visible damage, but it weakens the relationship. Just like removing one stick from the web holding up the marbles, each risky choice weakens the bond in a relationship. Proverbs 4:23 states “above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Be intentional to guard your heart for your spouse by avoiding risky choices. When faced with a risky decision, choose the relationship over the risk. Do not play KerPlunk with your marriage!

**Challenge for the Week:** Guard your heart by calling your spouse at least once each day this week. During each call, first remind your spouse of one reason why you chose to marry him/her, and then share one reason why you still choose to stay married today.

# Marriage Minute

August 29, 2015

## **We Have Opportunities**

My wife told me this morning, “we do not have differences in our relationship; we have opportunities.” Ha, that sounds a little like a propaganda statement from a Hallmark card. She does have a nice collection of cards for backup when we forget a birthday or special occasion, but I wonder where she really got this idea about opportunities. Maybe she was reading from Genesis 2:24 which teaches us that the man is to be united with his wife so much so that the two, though different, become as one. Or, perhaps she was reading from Ephesians 5 which expands this teaching, explaining that husband and wife are to be united in oneness just as Christians are one in the Body of Christ. Paul reveals in Ephesians 4 that each of us has unique gifts and strengths to be used for the glory of the Lord and for building up of one another towards a deeper relationship with Christ. Just as each of us has different gifts for the fullness and unity of the Church, so our differences are tools to build and strengthen our marriages. Sometimes it may seem like our differences are a source of irritation, but we should remember that God designed our differences to draw us towards greater oneness, not push us towards isolation. I think my wife is right after all. Our differences are not roadblocks to oneness; they are bridges towards greater unity. Our differences truly are God given opportunities for us to learn to love one another more deeply and more fully each day.

**Challenge for the Week:** Make a list of at least ten different qualities between you and your spouse. Then, enjoy a special date with your spouse this week to celebrate your relationship, affirm your love for one another, and acknowledge your differences as opportunities to strengthen your connection, enrich your relationship, and draw you closer to the Lord.

# Marriage Minute

August 22, 2015

## To Talk or Not To Talk

“To talk or not to talk; that is the question.” This statement is modeled from a gravely serious moment in Hamlet, one of Shakespeare’s masterpieces, but it implies an essential need in our marriage relationships. Good communication is critical to the health of our marriages, so we must choose “to talk.” H. Norman Wright, experienced marriage and family therapist and best selling author, teaches couples who are preparing for marriage that “communication is to love what blood is to life.” While that may sound overstated, his point is good communication is a central quality needed to maintain a healthy married life. Effective communication helps build understanding and unity in marriage and fosters a sense of safety and security in our relationships. Since men and women generally have different communication styles, we must learn to communicate well to give our spouses a chance at understanding us. For example, if I talk to my wife like I do my buddies, it should not surprise me that I sometimes confuse her! A good first step towards building understanding and good communication habits is to be intentional in connecting with our spouses. Sometimes we may not feel like it, but we should answer, “yes” when considering the question of whether “to talk or not to talk” to our spouses because good communication is essential to healthy marriages.

**Challenge for the Week:** Invest in your marriage this week by finding a few minutes each day to talk with your spouse about their experience that day. Start by sharing answers to the question, “what was one good thing that happened to you today?”

# Marriage Minute

August 15, 2015

## Remembering the Favorite Things

“When the dog bites; when the bee stings; when I’m feeling sad; I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don’t feel so bad!” is how Maria encourages the children in this cherished song from the Sound of Music. In the same way, remembering our “favorite things” can encourage our marriages. Did you know that maintaining a heart of gratitude with a focus on the positive is one of the quickest ways to bring joy to our hearts? Being thankful fosters a joyful spirit and generates a renewed ability to love our spouses and families well. Solomon teaches us in Proverbs 17:22 that “a joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” Wow, our attitudes can actually have a healing affect on our condition. Maintaining a heart of gratitude in life is a way to breathe refreshment into our souls and into our marriages. When we avoid dwelling on the common stresses of marriage and instead reflect on all that we appreciate in our spouses, we will experience a renewed energy and refreshed attraction towards our spouse. We should all keep a fresh dose of medicine in our marriages by making it a practice to remember the “favorite things” about our spouses and regularly express our appreciation to them.

**Challenge for the Week:** Reflect on the qualities in your spouse that you are most thankful for and send them a short text, note, or email each day this week thanking your spouse for how they bless you.

# Marriage Minute

August 08, 2015

## **First Dates and Great Dates**

I remember my feelings of excitement when I first started dating my spouse. My energy and enthusiasm were high. I felt like I could not get enough time around her. I would anxiously look forward to our next moments together and would clear my schedule for the next date while dreaming of the days to come. Perhaps many of us remember those same anxious and excited feelings when we were first drawn towards our spouse. Yet, after being married a while, we may drift from anticipating that special time together. We may even get so distracted by the busyness of life that we stop dating and ultimately stop pursuing our spouse all together. But that is not God's design for marriage. Ephesians 5:21-33 charges each of us to continually treasure and cherish our spouse. One way to do that is to create special times to enjoy and connect with one another. That is the basis for continuing to date our spouse now. Building Intimate Marriages, a Christian marriage enrichment organization, advocates that couples cultivate a tradition of at least two fun dates a month to enrich their marriages. These dates are special times to have fun and enjoy one another, not times to solve problems or discuss challenges. So, enrich your relationship by recapturing the excitement of your first dates in the form of great dates with your spouse today.

**Challenge for the Week:** Take the initiative, plan ahead, and go have a fun date with your spouse this week. Then, continue to energize your relationship by establishing a tradition of regular "great dates" with your spouse.

# Marriage Minute

August 01, 2015

## **Celebrate Your Differences**

Why do you always do that? Can't you pick your clothes up off the floor every once in a while? What is it about you? Why do you always want to talk about your feelings? You spend too much money. We never go out with other people. Why are you so detail oriented? Can't you just relax! Wow, I wonder if you have ever heard any of those comments from your spouse. I know my wife and I have made many similar statements about the other numerous times. Sometimes, as a result of conflict over differences like the issues above, we can question our relationship and our feelings towards our spouse. However, it should not surprise us that our spouse is different from us. Just like fingerprints, no two personalities are the same. Yet, the truth is that God made each person as a beautiful creation in His image, and He delights in us with uncountable precious thoughts (Psalm 139:13-18). It is often these differences that attract us to one another before marriage and then annoy us within marriage. But, it does not need to be that way. Your spouse is a unique and beautiful creation, designed by our Heavenly Father. Romans 12:10 instructs us to be devoted in our love to others by "outdo(ing) one another in showing honor." How much more each of us, as part of our marriages, should honor our spouse by celebrating their differences as a complement to our own qualities. Do not try to change your spouse – their personality is how God made them. Instead, find and celebrate their differences!

**Challenge for the week:** Honor your spouse this week by noticing and complementing your spouse for the unique qualities that make them who they are as one of God's beautiful and precious creations.

# Marriage Minute

July 25, 2015

## **Vitamin C for Your Marriage**

Most problems in marriage are not caused by big issues but by daily misunderstandings and unintended hurts. All marriages go through normal cycles of ups and downs, and sometimes couples do have significant struggles, but we can resolve most conflict with a small change in perspective and a little better communication. Research shows the overwhelming majority of spouses deeply loves and wants the best for their mate. This is true even of couples experiencing the most difficult struggles. The treasure of knowing that your spouse wants the best for you, even in the midst of conflict, is immensely valuable because that charges your marriage with positive energy. It is similar to how Vitamin C supports the growth and repair of tissues in all parts of your body, and it serves as a powerful antioxidant to block damage caused by free radicals. Just as Vitamin C is essential to your body, so believing that your spouse wants the best for you is essential to a vitalized marriage. When you chose to believe your spouse loves you and cares about your needs, your whole perspective on conflict in marriage changes. You are no longer drawn to assume the worst intentions of your spouse, but instead can look for a deeper understanding of their behavior with the underlying assurance that they did not intend to hurt you. Believing your spouse wants the best for you is a powerful tool for relationship success, and as you practice this belief, your marriage will enjoy a shot of fresh energy and closeness. Fight the “free radicals” out of your marriage by choosing to believe the best in your spouse, because it is near certainty that they love you and want the best for you.

**Challenge for the week:** Inject some Vitamin C in your marriage this week by choosing to believe your spouse loves you and values your relationship. The next time there is an offense, remember this as you seek to lovingly resolve the conflict knowing that your spouse wants the best for you.

# Marriage Minute

July 18, 2015

## **You're a Hard Habit to Break**

"I'm addicted to you babe; you're a hard habit to break" is the hook in the popular Chicago song from 1984 about a man who is grieving the loss of his relationship. There has been a common belief that people can make or break a habit in 21 days according to observations by a plastic surgeon in a 1960 book. However, a more rigorous academic study published in 2009 found that, depending on circumstances, most people could form a new habit in an average of 66 days. Generally, more than two months is necessary to lock in a new behavior. The Marriage Minute has suggested small activities to enrich your marriage over the last month. We pray you find these suggestions helpful as an opportunity to build a habit to intentionally appreciate your spouse each day. Shaunti Feldhahn, an experienced relationship expert, published an entire book documenting how little things make such a big difference in the happiness and satisfaction of marriage. Consider using some of these short Marriage Minute suggestions to build a habit of doing little things each day that demonstrate you deeply care about your spouse. The positive impact on your relationship may be more than you anticipate!

**Challenge for this week:** Continue to do one "little thing" (ie, leave a sticky note, send an "I love you" text, do the "One Minute Challenge", etc) each day to demonstrate that you appreciate and love your spouse. Continue to do this, and make these daily actions that express love to your spouse a hard habit to break!

# Marriage Minute

July 12, 2015

## **I Love You Because...**

Have you ever noticed a child receiving a genuine compliment from a loving parent? Recall their disposition and how the child perks up with a proud smile. Their whole countenance may brighten with a rightly timed word of encouragement. We should be the first in line to provide that type of encouragement and love to our spouses. God designed our marriage relationships to be a reflection of the love described in First Corinthians 13 – the same kind of love He shows for us. We are to cherish our spouses with a love that is patient, kind, and self-less. Sometimes we can get worn down a little through the normal challenges we face in a marriage to a person who is inherently different from us. Though we may face occasional discouragement, “love never fails,” and kind words can help us remember the enduring love we have for our spouses. Let’s take time to remember why we fell in love with our spouses this week, and then take a moment to encourage your spouse by sharing some of the reasons why you still love them.

**Challenge for this week:** Send a short text message to your spouse each day this week that starts with “I love you because....” Complete the statement with a specific quality for which you appreciate your spouse, and give them a hug the next time you see them in person!

# Marriage Minute

July 05, 2015

## **Sticky Love**

Don't you enjoy receiving a card in the mail from a dear friend when you least expect it? This week, we challenge you to be that dear friend by providing short "sticky notes" expressing love to your spouse. Did you know that many attribute the development of the little yellow Post-It note to the inventor's love for God? Art Fry stumbled across the idea for the sticky note in the early 1970s while looking for a secure way to place a bookmark in his hymnal. Now we can hardly find an office environment without those little yellow stickys in use everywhere to capture and communicate our thoughts. Since God's love for us is evident in all creation (Rom 1:20), how about if we use the history of the sticky note to remind us of God's great love for us each time we see one of those little yellow notes around the office or home. Furthermore, let's utilize these notes in our homes to bring a steady reminder of our love and appreciation for our spouse because "how delightful is a timely word!" (Prov 15:23)

**Challenge for this week:** Leave a small yellow sticky "love note" for your spouse in a special place for them to find each day this week. Have fun doing this little project to encourage and appreciate your spouse!

# Marriage Minute

June 28, 2015

## **Better than Wine: The One Minute Challenge**

Have you ever noticed how a dog affectionately welcomes his owner home with excited barking, tail wagging, and lots of slobbery kisses? Their excitement is remarkably consistent. Now, we are not dogs, but maybe we can capture a lesson from their enthusiasm and devotion. Do you display the same type of warm affection and excitement when you greet your spouse – not the barking and tail wagging, but perhaps the kisses? Think about how special is it to see a dear friend or relative after a long time of separation, like when family members welcome home a Soldier after an overseas deployment. The family hugs and smiles and stands close to one another. These actions generate feelings of safety and connection. The couple in the Song of Solomon showed great excitement for one another, and Scripture records their love as “better than wine” (Song 1:2). We can intentionally demonstrate that kind of sweet love for our spouse by making it a habit to find and warmly greet them as our first action upon arriving home at the end of each day.

**Challenge for this week:** Each day this week, find your spouse as soon as both of you are home for the day. Spend your first minute focused on each other by hugging, kissing, and sharing how nice it is to see your spouse again. Show genuine enthusiasm and do not get farther than one foot apart during this time! Encourage others by letting us know how this “One Minute Challenge” impacted your relationship this week.

# Marriage Minute

June 20, 2015

## **The Challenge: Be Kind**

It's easy to focus on things that frustrate us, isn't it? When my favorite football team loses, I can get so aggravated thinking about it that I am still upset the next day. That's how it works - what we think about affects how we feel. In marriage, what we think about our spouse influences how we feel towards them. The next time your thoughts go towards something critical about your spouse, try to find the positive in them instead. When we focus on the good qualities in our mate, we naturally develop a more positive and nurturing connection. Marriage is a team sport. You are in this together with your spouse, so take time to build up your teammate with positive words. Your kind words will promote healthy feelings towards your spouse for "the words of the wise bring healing" (Prov 12:18).

**Challenge for the week:** Make it a point to notice their good qualities and provide at least one genuine compliment to your spouse each day this week. Let us know how this activity enriches your relationship. We want to hear your feedback!