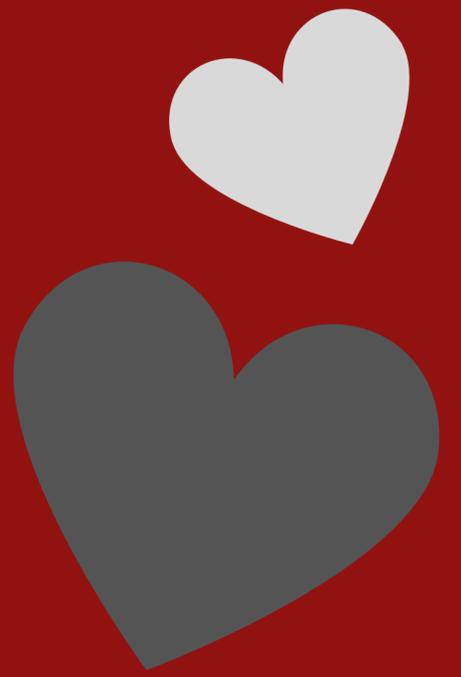




28 days
& ways

to



do & be
big love



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CONCLUSION



Love is patient. Love is kind. Yeah, sure. But loving? Loving is granite-hard. It's falling in love that's so easy. And falling out of love can be even easier to do. But loving? Loving big, loving often, and loving well takes action.

Love is a never-ending endeavor.

Three years ago, the love my husband and I share was put to the ultimate test. We've battled back from the brink of failure to shore up our love and work to make our marriage impenetrable.

We've learned the hard way that love isn't a feeling; that's longing and lust. Love isn't expressing attraction; that's affection. Love is action. Love is work.

We "do" love now and this has made all the difference. We effort to "be" love now. For we've been the opposite of love; indifference. And the state of affairs that being indifferent to each other lead to nearly claimed our marriage.

Never has love let my husband and me down.

We've let each other all the way down, but love hasn't.

Because love is action, and thus takes energy, it's easy to drift away from the doing of it when we find ourselves tired, unmotivated, distanced, or complacent. Not to mention being selfish, feeling let down or taken for granted, and on and on.

All of the above is normal, in any kind of relationship. When we drift away from doing love, we just need to recognize that we have and double back, ASAP, and begin to do love again.

Could you use some encouragement, some little nudges to be the change you wish to see in your relationship with your spouse or your partner? How about with your child or your parent, your co-worker or your friend? Many of the following ways to do and be love will work wonders for those relationships as well.

On each of the next 28 days, I'll offer you one quick-to-read, everyday kinda way to do and be big love. No grand gestures, nothing too hard or expensive, nothing you can't do with the resources you already have.

Cheers to four weeks to more free-flowing love!

And hey, it's so very lovely—you wanting to do and be **BIG LOVE**.



Use your phones only for love.

And the necessary tidbits of daily logistics. But resist hashing out hurts via texting. Do hash out the hurts, but only once you're face to face.

This way of doing love was the first homework our marriage counselor assigned us.

It turns our phones into love machines and harnesses their power for good.

When we have conflict to work through, it's so much easier to really hear each other when we've the benefit of observing body language, hearing tone of voice, and being able to look each other in the eye.

And we're much less likely to say things we might regret and can't take back if we air our grievances in person.

Example texts:

~ *Hi, honey. Can't wait to cook together and dance with you in the kitchen tonight.*



~ *Hey, babe. Can't remember. Am I to pick up the kids today or are you?*

~ *You really hurt my feelings yesterday and I'm so frustrated with you.*

~ *I can't believe you forgot again! This makes me feel like I'm not important to you.*



You get the gist here, yes? Use those phones for love!



**When speaking of the person you love while with others,
let only kindness leave your lips.**

**When talking to your love in the presence of people,
let only grace pepper your words.**

I've two lovely friends who've been married for over three decades.
And they're exceptionally talented at marriage.

Their relationship presents as a gorgeous waltz through the world.
Or a fun, freestyle jive, depending on what they're in the mood for.

A handful of years ago, an acquaintance posted an anniversary salute to
these oh-so-good-at-marriage mutual friends of ours, on Facebook.

She had this to say (ish):

***"What's remarkable about you two is, in all the years I've known
you, I've never heard either of you say anything unkind to each
other. Never once have I heard either of you talk down to or chide
one another."***

At quick survey, I realized I could say the same of this couple.
Sadly, I couldn't claim likewise for me and my husband.

My friends' practice of speaking only love to each other in public
instantly struck me as a beyond beautiful and wholly admirable way to
continually honor the one you love. I'm certain this habit plays a big part
in my friends' big love for each other.

They're the gold standard, providing a gorgeous example for us all.
They offer a splendid, unspoken invitation for us to follow suit
and speak only props to our spouses in public.



Hold hands.

Holding each other's hand is an oft-overlooked, tender to the bone form of physical touch and intimacy.

When done even for just a few seconds, this practice works to sweetly restore the connection between you and your partner.

And it can be done anywhere, anytime.

The PDA police always let this one go.

Hold hands, and though you may only maintain the grasp for a few seconds, you'll carry those love-charged seconds with you the rest of the day. Hold hands, and doing so may end up prompting a long and lingering look deep into each other's eyes.

Holding hands may even lead to a kiss, a warm hug, or a romp in the bedroom! Or even more exquisite—if time is limited but desire's been sparked—the tantalizing ache of anticipation of all of the above.

Think you don't have sufficient opportunity for holding hands?

Car rides make for excellent chances to hold hands.

When sitting next to each other in the bleachers, hold hands.

While on the couch, Netflixing, scoot closer and hold hands.

When waiting together for an appointment to start, hold hands.

At night as you ease between the sheets, at the very least, reach over and hold hands.

Are you shaking your head at me because you're currently feeling distanced, offended, disappointed, let down or downright ragey towards your spouse and you DON'T FEEL LIKE HOLDING HANDS?

You know what will help with that? *Holding hands!*



Write a note to your spouse and hide it for them to find.

Somewhere sneaky or silly.

Tape it to the pickle jar or stuff it inside a pair of their socks.

Leave it in on the dashboard in their car.

Switch it out with their bookmark.

Place it inside one of their shoes or stash it in their coat pocket.

Start with a sticky note size piece of paper and if the winds of love deign to pick up your thoughts and carry them along for you, start again on a bigger piece.

No need to wax on if the mood isn't striking you though—short can still be sweet. Just write one thing you appreciate about the person you love and hide it somewhere for them to find unexpectedly.

What a zing the discovery of your hand-written note will send to your partner's heart. Oh, how their spirits will soar at reading your words.

The power to express love is crazy strong in this practice.

Writing a short love note is a small but mighty act.

It's a mini-massage for your loved one's heart.

It's an immeasurable mood lifter, for *BOTH* of you.

It's proof you think about them when they're not around and you care enough to let them know.

This practice has the potential to become one of your favorite ways to give and receive love together.



Tell each other thank you more often.

You may think you're good here, at saying thank you to your spouse. That, in fact, "Thanks" is an automatic utterance from your lips. A nicety ingrained in you since you were wee.

But sometimes we fall short in expressing our gratitude for all we do for each other. Because sometimes we devolve into simply expecting each other to do their part, carry their fair share of the load, go to work every day, or handle a thousand things.

Often, we take it for granted our spouse will and should take care of this and that, show up and participate in the thing, take the high road, be available, put up with our flaws, and take what we dish out.

Truth is, each of us is prone to taking the other for granted, eventually. Saying, "Thank you," and truly meaning it stops this propensity cold. Even more so when we thank our spouse for something they don't even realize it's nice to be thanked for. Because they've long since come to just expect these things of themselves, as well.

Thank you for working so hard for us day in and day out.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to do that for me.

Thank you for making me that sandwich.

Thank you for giving me the grace and space to be who I am.

Thank you for letting me sleep in.

Thank you for not keeping score.

Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for forgiving me.

Thank you for letting me have the last cookie.

Thank you for cleaning the gutters, because I did not want to do that!

Go on. Your turn now. Thank you for . . .



Get some skin in the game.

When our daughter was born two months prematurely, my husband and I were taught the benefits and importance of having plenty of skin-to-skin contact with her.

We're talking improved heart and lung function, stabilized body temperature, regulation of blood sugar, exposure to good bacteria, and pain relief. As well as less crying, better communication and transition, more successful feeding, and faster bonding with your baby.

The research stuck with us, as did the real world experience of skin-to-skin contact fanning the flames of life within our baby girl. It truly helped increase her ability to add weight to her 4 lb. frame, outgrow apnea and recover from a cerebral hemorrhage.

Erik and I extrapolated that if it was good for our baby girl, then it must be good for the two of us, as well. We've been giving each other some skin ever since.

Don't worry, we won't do this in front of you, but when we're alone and we go in for a hug, we pull up our shirts and make it a skin-to-skin embrace. Then we laugh heartily at the recollection of where we learned to do this and why. And because we think ourselves supremely funny for appropriating this practice as our own.

When in the hot tub, we'll get close and get some skin.

When snuggling in bed, we'll shed pajamas and press up tight against each other.

When showering together, yep, skin-to-skin goes down in there, too.

Whenever we can take a moment to get some skin in the game, we do. Because we know exactly how powerful this practice is. **Do you?**



Laugh together.

I'm convinced that laughing together and often leads to a better quality of love for couples. Especially after one particularly laughter-filled weekend for my husband and me.

Somehow, Erik and I managed to laugh together the whole weekend through. We started joking around with each other and fostering funny on Friday night and we just never stopped.

Owing to days of non-stop laughter, come Monday morning, our weekend had taken on a magical and mystical quality.

We both LOVE to laugh. But sadly, neither of us is particularly funny.

So we have to outsource our comedy. We're pretty good at sniffing out mirth like a couple of truffle pigs, though. As well as riffing off it after we find it. We can make a little bit of funny go a long way.

There are endless ways to laugh together.

We like to tease each other and regale each other with jokes we've heard. We love to people-watch while adding in some snarky commentary. Our absolute fav is an inside joke. We can retell these to each other forever plus a day and laugh hard every single time.

**Find ways to laugh with the one you love, frequently,
and you'll feel your love expand.**

**Find what works to elicit laughter for you and yours and never
ever stop doing it.**



Begin or end your day together—or both!

When we wake, it's so easy to jump right into the demands of the day. We reach for our phones to check email, texts, or social media. We turn on morning news and talk shows, open newspapers, sign permission slips, make the lunches and, before we know it, we're racing to scurry out the door.

Do you and your spouse look into each other's eyes even one time?

Do you kiss sweetly and greet each other good morning?

Do you chat about what the day might bring?

Do you share a prayer or a tender moment of any kind?

Or do you just whiz right by each other like two speeding trains on two opposing tracks?

The same scenario can play out when it's time to call it quits on the day. We're spent. Done. Some days, we've nothing left. And so we're prone to closing up shop for the day in much the same disconnected way we started it. Then we wake up the next day to do it all over again and pretty soon, we're miles apart from our spouse. Even while sitting right next to each other.

Taking just a few minutes to focus on each other when you first wake up sets a completely different tone for the day.

If mornings won't work for you as a couple, logistics-wise, try spending a few minutes connecting together in thought, deed, or prayer at night—last thing, just before you close your eyes.

If prayer isn't your thing, tell each other the highlight and lowlight of your day. Or talk about what your tomorrows may have in store. However you choose to do it, shifting your very first or very last focal point of the day to your spouse—*onto who really matters and off of what doesn't*—makes for a lovely difference in your togetherness.



That thing you did? Own it!

That spiteful, insensitive, hurtful, passive-aggressive, regretful in any kind of way thing you did—own it and apologize for it. Even though you don't want to, even though humility is hard, even though you're embarrassed and ashamed. Tell the person you love you're sorry.

Sometimes, I can be less than zero fun to be married to. Often, I'm the reason we struggle. My actions, my words, and my behavior can all be so sucky. And sometimes I think I'm justified, that I'm merely responding to my husband and his slights the way he deserves for me to. *I talk myself into believing it's his fault I react the way I do.*

If only he was more of this or less of that, then I could be less of this and more of that. But not until he changes will I change. However dysfunction can possibly play out, I've been there, done that. Dysfunction Junction is an unpleasant, beast of a hub that's been difficult for me to avoid passing through.

But I do know better. I know how I treat my husband is my choice, no matter what, in any situation or scenario. And sometimes I choose badly. We both do each other wrong at times and this is never going to change. Because life. Because kids. Because pressures. Because selfishness. Because tired, depleted, emotional, and too distant from God.

So get good at owning your sh!t. Get great at recognizing when you stop choosing love and grace and you start reaching for bitter and begrudging instead. Our marriages are never going to have perfect records of spotless behavior. But we can get darn near perfect at extending the olive branch of heartfelt apology to our partner when we know we owe them one.

That apology though, it needs to be sincere. It can't espouse even a smidge of, *"But you had it coming, because..."* For then you'll just have to apologize for your crappy apology. Start with a good one and be done.



Praise your partner's efforts—resist focusing on the results.

I encountered this wisdom when our kids were smallish and we asked them to do chores. The advice I heard and nodded my head to was to praise their efforts at the task and resist focusing on the outcome. And for sure don't criticize them over it. I mean, c'mon, how well can we really expect an 8 year-old to fold sheets or load the dishwasher?

Hint: not well at all.

The premise is that if we expect perfection and criticize our kids when they don't achieve it, they'll lose their helpful spirits real quick-like. In the long run, it's more important to acknowledge that they put the work in, they tried, they gave it their best shot, than it is to have a dishwasher loaded to it's max in a way that actually gets the dishes clean. **IT IS!**

Anyhoo, I extrapolated from there and figure we can apply this way of thinking and reacting to our spouse as well. When our partner goes to the grocery store and returns with the wrong brand—they still went to the grocery store so you wouldn't have to. When they wash your favorite hand-wash-only sweater with a load of towels and now it basically is a towel—they still did some laundry and tried to ease your load. When they cook a bland, tasteless dinner—you know what I'm gonna say next.

We're all just a bunch of wonkity wack-a-doos, trying to do life well and right, and we don't always get 'er done according to one another's exact specifications. But when we try, when we get up off the couch, take time out of our day, make something our spouse needs a priority, or try to level the scales of burden—that's all pretty darn praiseworthy.

Don't ya think?



Let an offense go unnoticed.

I mean, there's just going to be so many ways we'll slight each other before it's all said and done.

Treating each and every offense like a five round cage fight exacts a heavy toll on the health our relationships.

Pick a mistake, a letdown, an annoyance, a hurt, a yuck of any kind and just let it go.

Decide not to react to your partner's quirk or error.

Resist the urge to nag them about stopping this or starting that.

Don't be a rubbernecker to their misstep.

Work hard not to criticize, critique, or express distaste.

Today's reading is light because this is a heavy task to manage.

It's terribly challenging to be annoyed and not express it.

To be taken for granted and not call it out.

To be offended and not disclose it.

But I know you can do it! *If you really want to.*

And I know your marriage will be happier for it.



Unschedule yourself and reallocate that reclaimed time to your spouse.

How's that calendar lookin'? It's a beast, right?

Give it a look-see and try hard to find at least one thing to which you can say, "Nope, huh-uh, sorry but no-can-do anymore."

We are doers, we are helpers, we are community members, and volunteers. We are employees, parents, coaches and advisors.

We are responsible for so many things that it's easy to get caught up in all the doing. For often, we try to find our worth via what we do.

Before we know it, we've taken on too much and we can't sustain it all. At that point, we care less about our worthiness and more about how strung out and depleted we are from all the doing, giving, and going, going, going. Our most precious relationships can't sustain the strain either.

What's one thing you can bow out of and send your regrets to in place of yourself so that you can spend more time with your partner?

Are there two or even three events you can send to the guillotine?

Can you just imagine all that extra time with the one you love?

How that time will serve to reconnect you with each other and shore up your love?

Don't just imagine it. Make it happen!



Listen; without simply waiting to speak.

Really hear your spouse, whatever it is they're trying to say.

Really listen.

Not by simply waiting until their lips stop moving and they stop making sounds and it's your turn to speak again.

That's not listening, that's waiting.

Really hear your partner when they talk to you. Then demonstrate you did by relaying to them what you heard them say.

Be their mirror.

Reflect their words back to them in your voice so they'll know they were truly heard. Really listened to.

That's likely what they really want and need. *Just to be heard.*

If they end up wanting more from you—advice or direction, or for you to fix it, they'll ask you for it.



**When you settle down together for the evening,
leave your electronic devices in a different room.**

Once the day's logistics and activities are a wrap, cozy on up with each other sans phones, tablets, laptops, etc.

When our devices are near, it's just too darn tempting to keep checking or responding to them just one more time.

And then just one little more time.

And then just one teensy-weensy more time.

We feed ourselves a stinky line of BS when we tell ourselves we can resist checking our feeds or reacting to an alert tone.

We're Pavlov's dogs here, people. We need help.

Help yourself out and leave those devices in another room so you can spend some uninterrupted, quality time with your beloved.

In another's words—

"Put your a\$\$ (not your phone) where your heart wants to be."

**~ Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*
(and Jodie Utter)**



Don't miss that bid for affection.

My husband and I learned this concept in couples counseling.

Bidding for affection or attention is when you or your spouse try to let one another know you're looking to be shown some love. Without coming right out and stating it plainly.

Bids for love are as varied as snowflakes in how they present, so you'll need to learn to recognize what they look like coming from your person.

Is your partner attempting to express they'd like you to listen to them, spend time with them, or touch them?

Are they demonstrating a need for you to relate to them, help them, pray for them, or carry some of their load?

Asking for help or for love can be so hard. So hard that, often, we just won't do it. Instead, we'll hint around or "bid" for love with unspoken, usually less effective forms of communication.

So while we may be looking for love in all the right places, we might be asking for love in all the wrong ways.

Watch for these bids to come in from your partner.

Accept as many of their bids as possible and work to supply them with what they need from you.

Honor their way of asking for your love when they just can't get the words out.



Be a creeper.

The next time you're with the person you love,
take a good l o n g look at them.

Stare hard at them for quite a while.

Then imagine this is the last time you're ever going to see them.

THE VERY LAST TIME.

EVER.

Now do and be big love for them accordingly.

For that's what you'd focus on if you knew your time
with them was up, isn't it?

So live and love that way with your person today. The next day, too.
And let everything truly unimportant in comparison simply fall away.

When our time with our person really is up someday,
we'll wish so badly we'd done that.

Let's do it now and keep those ruinous regrets at bay.



Take a stroll down memory lane with the one you love.

Nothing brings you back around to warm and fuzzy like remembering the good old days together.

Talk about that special trip you took, the way your favorite inside joke came to be, or that baby that came too early but is now thriving and how your birth plan went exactly not according to plan.

Reminisce over how you met, your first date, or the time you both had the flu at the same time (*it's funny now, right?*).

Recall the concert you still can't believe you got to attend, the day at the lake, the hike up the mountain, or that over-the-top delicious meal you still salivate over.

Sit down with a photo album or two, watch an old home movie, pull out old letters and cards you wrote to one another and get cozy with those memories.

No matter what's going on in current events inside your home or your marriage, take a breather from it all by reflecting on the good stuff. Doing so will take you away like Calgon for a bit. It may even help you skip right past whatever's tripping you up in real time.

Things were good, really good once, weren't they?

And they can be that way again.



Go ahead and let the sun go down on your anger.

Stay with me here. It's unconventional, I know. This strains against the commonly upheld notion that couples should work out the issues that rise up to ire us, before we go to sleep.

That advice doesn't work for me and my husband.

Some of our worst arguments, turned Def-Con 5 situations, have happened BECAUSE we carried them into the wee hours of the morning—in attempt to hash it all out before bedtime.

Taking the night to calm down, sleep, get some distance from the issue and regroup before you roll up your sleeves and get back to work on the problem is a form of love in action. Even if unconventional.

It says to your partner, "I'm beyond tired and feeling a little crazy right now because we're not making any progress in this fight. So far, we've only dug in deeper on our own sides and so now we're also fighting about how we fight and somehow about things that happened six years ago, too. I'm pushing right up against my breaking point which means I'm about to say or do something I'll regret immensely. So please, let's sleep on this for tonight and begin again tomorrow."

That says I love you way more than striving to adhere to a piece of advice that you've come to realize, time and again, doesn't work for you. Advice that, in fact, only ever makes things worse.

Honor your individual strengths, weaknesses, capabilities and limits when it comes to getting past struggle and back to love.

Find *your* groove in how to best deal with your grievances.
Don't try to fit into someone else's.



Make plans together, even if you can't execute those plans immediately.

What's your thing together?

Do you share a love for traveling, standup comedy, camping, taking in a movie, mountain biking? Do you both love a decadent dinner out, dancing, concert-going, boating, birdwatching? Which activities make up part of your couplehood?

Whatever the answer, start making some plans to do your thing together. Even if it's not the right season and you can't get boots on the ground to conduct your activity of choice due to weather, finances, illness, or any other reason. At least begin planning for it to go down once all barriers can be removed.

Just having something on the calendar to look forward to makes such a difference in our outlook on life and love.

If you're in a rut and feeling stagnant, get out the calendar and the computer and plan your next adventure. Take some time to peruse some websites together, gather some recommendations, or check in with friends who might like to join you to double the fun.

Combat feeling unexcited, uninspired, and so full of blah that you struggle to shake your antsy and your ill-at-ease. Combat all this by making plans to smile and relax together. Plan ahead to change the scenery and chase joy. Plot to put some miles on the car visiting an old haunt or discovering a new one.

Make a plan, any plan at all. Putting plans on the books is a huge boost to morale in marriage. A little extra nudge to get out of bed every day and to keep going through the motions until they turn into more.



Ask your partner what you can do for them.

My husband will do absolutely anything I ask him to when I need help, sometimes even happily!

But having to ask gets so old.

What I really want is for him to notice my heavy load all by his damn self and ask what he can carry for me.

Hearing this kind of inquiry from your spouse feels even better than receiving their help does.

It says, "I see you struggling. I want to help you. Tell me how."

Asking how you can help your spouse, instead of waiting to be asked to pitch in, is big love in action even before the actual action.

And it's so very appreciated.

So channel JFK in this regard and ask not what your spouse can do for you, but rather, what you can do for your spouse.

And ask often.



Get dirty together.

Put some sand between your toes.

Kick some trail dust up onto your calves.

Get some dirt underneath your fingernails.

Work up a sweat playing in the snow.

Setting feet in nature is a salve for so many wounds. You breathe easier, your outlook turns brighter, your connection to the earth grows stronger, and your body feels reinvigorated.

Walking barefoot on the grass, dipping your toes in the water, leaning up against a tree, letting the sun kiss your foreheads—that's the good stuff, people.

If you listen closely, you can hear your soul begging you for some nature.

Get some!

Together.



Tell your partner you see them.

We take each other for granted at times. This is just the way of it.

So it's of the utmost importance to recognize when we've slipped into this apathetic way of responding to each other and right the ship—*ASAP!*

Tell your partner you noticed. You saw. You valued. You appreciated. You admired. You thanked God for what they've done for you and for what they continue to do.

Tell them you were blessed. You were buoyed. You were elevated. You were gifted by them and how they've given of themselves. Be specific about how you've benefited from their actions.

We've all got roles and responsibilities, commitments and task lists. We handle these things day in and day out like a boss, most of the time. But it's still nice—essential even—to be told your effort and your energy, your diligence and your stick-to-it-ive-ness are seen and appreciated.

Among employees, being verbally recognized for hard work and contribution ranks higher than receiving perks—including pay raises and benefits—in job satisfaction.

Since ain't nobody gettin' a pay raise or any new bennies for being a spouse or a parent, recognition is really the only thing left on the table to boost and buoy your partner's heart with.

Tell them you SEE them.

And you LOVE what you see.



Love your spouse like that other person wants to.

Gosh, that was hard to write.

I heard something eons ago that stuck with me. Mostly because I ignored it's validity until it happened to me and now I know just how true it is.

Wanna hear it?

Here it goes. . .

~ *Appreciate yourself, or no one else will.*

~ *Appreciate your spouse, or someone else will.*

In short summary of a long, sad story, I expected my husband to be able to withstand me shutting down on him and merely going through the motions of being a couple. I expected him to be able to handle me giving up on having a happy marriage with him. I expected him to be able to deal with us living more like roommates than like husband and wife. But he didn't meet my expectations.

I don't excuse the choice he eventually made in response. I don't shoulder any of the blame for his actions. But neither do I excuse my behavior or shirk any of the ownership of my contribution to the weakening of our marriage.

We made it back from the brink of failure and in it all, I learned to love him like he needs to be loved, for no reason, and without conditions.

Very much like I know others will want to love him if I don't.

Sheesh, that was hard to write.



Go for the gold in love.

Be the first to love again when love has gone idle in your relationship.

"The first to apologize is the bravest.

The first to forgive is the strongest.

The first to forget is the happiest."

~ Unknown

One of you has to be the first to begin again in love.

Let it be you.



Dig up some buried treasure—tell each other new stories.

Sometimes it feels like we already know all there is to know about each other and there's nothing left to learn. Don't fall for that. I've heard most of my husband's stories several times over. Sometimes my eyes roll back into my head at his seemingly endless re-telling of his tales. But a while back, I heard him tell a story I'd yet to hear and I couldn't believe my ears. I don't know all there is to know about him after all. What a grand discovery!

I bet you still have things to learn about your spouse, too.

To reciprocate, I told him about the time when we were still fairly newly wed and I was driving home alone late at night. I was headed over the mountain pass and back to our town when explosive diarrhea suddenly paid me a visit. *Right there in the car.*

I'd no time to gain passage to a toilet. As a result, I drove the rest of the way home in mortified disbelief about what had just happened. And boundless relief over being alone in the car. Miraculously, when I got home he was still at work. Thus I was spared (*as was he*) from having to come clean about why I needed to rush to the bathroom to get clean.

In the 20 years since that happened, there's been so much sh!t that's gone down between us it seemed high time this sh!tshow of a story of mine was introduced into the rotation. What's a little more sh!t at this point?

We've all been in deep sh!t before. Up sh!t creek without a paddle. Or driving home with our sh!t running down our leg and into our shoe. Our stories of sh!t hitting the fan may differ, but they're all the same in that they're just plain sh!tty.

Surprising your spouse with one of your long lost stories is the sh!t. Give it a try.



**Love your person the way they need you to—
otherwise, it doesn't really count.**

What makes your spouse feel loved will often be very different from what makes you feel loved. You might need to be touched and experience physical intimacy to feel loved. Your partner might need you to encourage them with kind, heartfelt words in order to truly feel cared for.

If y'all haven't taken a love language quiz to determine your preferred ways of being loved and then communicated them to each other, then no wonder loving has been challenging for you!

But you're not alone. Those of us that determined our love languages long ago and know full well how we should be loving our spouse aren't necessarily better off than you. Because sometimes, in the chaos of life or in hurt feelings and disconnection, we fall away from loving each other the right ways.

What's your preferred way of being loved? What's his or hers?

Are you speaking those languages to each other?

Do you need a refresher course? Some immersion?

You can find the 5 Love Languages quiz online, along with descriptions for each language. They've updated these quizzes and there's one for your kids to take now, as well. There are quizzes for three different age groups that will allow you to discover the way your kids love to be loved, too!

The concept of love languages is a great one to teach your kids about, early on. They'll benefit from the knowledge their whole lives through.

As will their relationships.



Fight right.

When you fight as a couple, fight for the right things.

Fight FOR each other and your relationship, as opposed to with each other and against one another.

Use that spunk, spirit, and tenacity to dig in and stand your ground for the success of your union.

Fighting takes so much energy.

So if the two of you are going to fight, use your energy wisely and fight for love, forgiveness, and healing.

Fight for compromise, grace, mercy, and the longevity of your marriage.

Definitely disagree, squabble, and muddle through all the inevitable ick that exists in any relationship. Work it all out. But when it comes to actually fighting, reserve the fight for what really matters—*your marriage*.

FIGHT with everything you've got.

FIGHT right up until the end, however it may come, for big, lasting love.



Give each other your first and your best.

I don't know what this looks like for you, but for us it looks like deliberately spending time alone together.

Just the two of us—talking, touching, planning, hashing out issues, reminiscing, and what-if-ing. Erik and I are blessed with some fabulous friends whom we're tempted to give our time to in great quantities. But if we did, our friends would be getting our first and our best.

For us, giving each other our first and our best looks like learning to ride the wave of parenting in a way that mitigates crashing and burning on the reef. It looks like letting our kids know we love them fiercely and we're committed to parenting them well—right after we love and care for each other.

For in the absence of continually nurturing our marriage, we know firsthand how quickly it can deteriorate into a toxic state that can harm our kids. That's why our children deserve for us to focus on our marriage first and foremost.

For us, giving each other our first and our best looks like saying no to insidious, soul-sucking distractions like our phones, too much Netflix, or too many drinks. And no to toxic interference from relatives who continually offer up drama and turmoil. No to unhealthy interactions that put additional stress on our marriage rather than strengthen it.

For us, giving each other our first and our best looks like loving each other with action. It looks like taking action for each other *because* it costs us our time and energy, not in spite of that. *For us*, to give of our first and best is saying, "Here you go, honey, this is what I have and it's all for you. Take what you need and everyone else gets what's leftover."

Not the other way around.



That's a wrap on 28 days and ways to do and be big love!

Only, nope, it's not.

Not even close.

Big, epic, lasting love takes diligence.
It takes repetition. Renewal. Reinvigoration.
Over and over and over again.

So, go on, scroll back up to day one, loves.
And begin to love your partner with action,
in big little ways, all over again.

Written with love for you and your marriage by: Jodie Utter

If you're new to our marriage story and would like to read more,
it's all on my blog. I invite you to click the logo below to meet me there.



www.utterimperfection.com

