

Being Intentional

When deliberate actions trump spontaneous reactions

“I don’t want my husband to have to think about doing loving and romantic things for me – I want him to do them ‘naturally.’” As a wife spoke these words in one of our counseling sessions, we glanced over at her husband. His glazed eyes reflected the sense of helplessness that we knew he felt at that moment.

Elvira and I have somewhat of a strange marriage – I am a diehard romanticist, she is not. I showed up for our first date with a red rose in hand, I gave her a beautiful hand-picked string of pearls on our fifth anniversary, and this summer I celebrated the 30th anniversary of the day that we met. I guess all of those family trips to the drive-in movies to watch Elvis Presley in the 1960’s paid off to some degree in forming my view of romance. Unfortunately, those things were not Elvira’s primary love language. So I had to learn to be more intentional – more deliberate – in doing the things that appealed to her heart rather than the things that came naturally to me.

Couples *do not* seek coaching or counseling because they are joyfully overwhelmed by having all of their needs met by their spouse. Instead, we usually see two people who love one another, but have no clue how to co-labor with God to express that love to their husband or wife. We often slip into patterns of communications and interactions with our wives that are viewed as confrontational or irritating. Those patterns were developed over a lifetime of experiences – most of which occurred before you ever laid eyes on your wife. Those natural, spontaneous reactions may have worked in your family of origin or during various stages of your earlier life, but they may not be working well with your wife. Both of you have likely developed unhealthy ways of responding to one another that may now define most of your daily marital interactions.

Changing habits requires work. Once you have determined what your wife really needs you will have to develop new habits. That takes intention and deliberate choices. At first they may seem contrived and “unnatural.” Your wife may even express her skepticism that your changes are free of ulterior motives, “So what’s going on? What do *you* want?” Be patient and hang in there. As your responses to your wife truly come from your desire to meet her spiritual, emotional and physical needs, you will be astounded by the results.

“But I’m just not a romantic, feely-touchy type of guy...” Trust me...contrary to conventional wisdom, most women have very uncomplicated desires. Start by simply asking her, “What can I do to make you feel more loved?” Her responses will give you a clue. Pick one or two and start being *intentional* about doing them. She’ll be thrilled.