



New Beginnings Marriage Ministry

Living Joyfully and United as One

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one." Matthew 19:5-6a

Random Acts of Kindness toward Your Spouse... All Year Long

By Kristen Clark

Most of us practice random acts of kindness toward our spouse on major holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. But we forget to extend that courtesy to our beloved throughout the year and on other less eventful days. In some cases, we expect love to take care of itself; with the passing of time and familiarity, and amidst this world's earthly distractions, we forget that love needs tending to if it is to remain in bloom.

The operative word here is *practice*. I recommend we take the opportunity to practice on a regular basis small and simple gestures that show support, encouragement and love toward our spouse. Some of us have fallen into a routine where such acts are far and few between (if not non-existent altogether). This is an opportunity to reverse that trend and get back to the behavior that caught our loved one's attention in the first place.

If you're game, join me in practicing random acts of kindness once a week for the next twelve months. Review my proposed "Random Acts of Kindness", starting on the next page, and use the last page in this document to help in your effort: simply print and cut the list of suggested Random Acts, fold each one separately, and toss them into a bowl or decorative box. Each week, pull a random act from the stash and perform that act sometime during the week. Return the random act to the stash and shake the bowl or decorative box for the following week's draw. This allows for each random act to be completed more than once during the year.

Feel free to be flexible and creative in how you approach my suggested acts, as they are merely that - suggestions. I recommend you keep it simple, affordable and manageable. Remember, the end goal is for your spouse to feel appreciated and loved in your effort to live joyfully and united as one.

Good luck!

RANDOM ACT: Recognize in writing something your spouse did that you appreciated, and place that written recognition where your loved one will find it unexpectedly.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Keep your recognition timely.** Recognizing your spouse for something he or she did last month won't be as impactful as recognizing your spouse for something performed in the last day or so. Timing is key here.
- **Keep your recognition specific.** Articulate the exact activity your spouse did and explain why you appreciated it. Specificity is helpful in this exercise.
- **Don't recognize the same activity twice.** Acknowledge a different activity each time. The closer you look, the more activities you will find worthy of your gratitude and appreciation.
- **Keep your recognition manageable.** Your recognition can be as simple as a hand-written yellow post-it note stuck to the bathroom mirror, or as elaborate as a hand-crafted card placed beside a chocolate truffle. Do what fits your resources, but keep your recognition sincere.

Mother Teresa is known for having said, *"Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless."* The idea here is to leave endless echoes of your appreciation for your spouse and in doing so, tend to your love so that it remains in bloom year round.

RANDOM ACT: Do your spouse a favor when he or she isn't looking.

Here are three suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Do a favor that you can manage on your own.** It's not a treat to your spouse if you have to ask for his or her help, and especially with something that he or she was already planning to do; that defeats the purpose. Instead, choose an activity that you can manage on your own, and during a time when your loved one won't notice.
- **Keep your favor a surprise.** Don't let your spouse know that you plan to do a favor, that you are in the middle of doing a favor, or that you have just finished doing a favor. Let your beloved enjoy the element of surprise and discover the favor for him or her self.
- **Choose a different favor each time.** Don't confuse your spouse by letting him or her think you are interested in doing a particular favor on a regular basis or you run the risk of it becoming your new chore. Do something different each time, but do something that is truly considered a favor.

Aristotle once wrote, *"It is the characteristic of the magnanimous man to ask no favor but to be ready to do the kindness to others."* The idea here is to do kindness to your spouse before he or she asks, and show your generous spirit in the process. The blessing will belong to you both.

RANDOM ACT: Give your spouse the gift of your undivided attention.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Focus on your spouse.** This exercise isn't about you. Make time to tend to your mate and meet his or her needs for affection, intimate conversation and deep companionship. Let your spouse come first in this effort and set your needs aside.

- **Set aside time that is convenient for your spouse.** Whether your spouse needs a great deal of your attention, or only a small amount, make sure that time is convenient for him or her. Just because it's convenient for you doesn't make it so for your partner. Be considerate on this point.
- **Limit all distractions.** If possible, remove anything that might divert your collective attention elsewhere. Turn off cell phones, TV and talk radio; send the kids off to play outside. Where possible, minimize all distraction and ensure that your attention toward your spouse is focused and intentional.
- **Keep silent in the process.** Don't feel obligated to solve your mate's problems or offer advice. Refrain from completing his or her sentences, turning the topic to something you want or need to discuss, or using this time to bring up a family crisis. Your role in this activity is simply to listen to your beloved and provide emotional support.

Paul Tillich is known for having said *"The first duty of love is to listen."* I would add to this wisdom the sentiment in Ecclesiastes 3:1,7 which reminds us that *"There is a time for everything; a time to be silent and a time to speak."*

RANDOM ACT: Treat your spouse as a most honored and royal guest.

Here are three suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Keep it simple.** It is often the smallest detail that results in the most lasting impression. Little gestures go a long way, such as a turned down bed and a chocolate mint left on a pillow. Focus on little things and show your spouse how special he or she is to you.
- **Be on your best behavior.** Be extra thoughtful in terms of your attitude and mood, and bless your spouse with an extra smile and hug after a long day. Why save your best behavior only for guests?
- **Use what you already have.** There's no need to spend extra money on little details; you probably have plenty of supplies on hand. Break out your fine china, use your delicate crystal, and pull out your choice linens. In other words, spoil your mate and use those things you usually save for special occasions.

Psalm 23:5 (Contemporary English Version) says, *"You treat me to a feast, while my enemies watch. You honor me as your guest, and you fill my cup until it overflows."* This is a great description of how the Lord treats us as His treasured possession. In His eyes, we are highly valued and special. Maybe it's time we treat our spouse likewise.

RANDOM ACT: Pray for your spouse and thank God for his or her presence in your life.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Listen intently.** Listen carefully to your spouse and try to understand what he or she truly needs or desires. This will help you more effectively pray on his or her behalf; it is impossible to know someone's needs when you don't take the time to understand their situation.
- **Ask if needed.** Let your spouse know that you are praying for him or her, and ask if there is anything specific he or she would like you to cover. You might be surprised at what preoccupies your beloved's mind.
- **Be specific.** Set aside sufficient time and articulate in detail your prayer for your spouse. This is for your benefit; God may already know what your spouse needs, but showing God that YOU know

what your spouse needs is significant and will allow the Spirit to equip you in meeting those needs when appropriate.

- **Pray with confidence.** Ask boldly for anything your spouse needs. Don't be timid or insecure in your request, but pray with the assurance that God hears and answers all prayers.

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5:16

RANDOM ACT: Offer a sincere and intentional *thank you* to your spouse.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Offer a handwritten note.** If saying *thank you* outloud has become uncomfortable, then start by writing a simple thank you note. It doesn't need to be an elaborate, lengthy display of appreciation; a simple *thank you* on a yellow sticky note left on the bathroom counter will do the trick.
- **Make sure your spouse hears you.** Mumbling under your breath defeats the purpose here, so if you offer a *thank you* verbally, make sure it's loud and clear and that your spouse heard you. You'll be able to tell pretty quickly if he or she heard you or not. If not, then say it again.
- **Feel free to let others hear you.** Saying *thank you* in front of the kids or other family members sets a great example and validates your spouse in front of others. A public *atta boy* (or girl) works wonders for a spouse's esteem and builds confidence in the relationship.
- **Be specific.** Make sure your spouse knows what he or she is being thanked for. It's important that your beloved understand the action taken that has resulted in your appreciation; he or she may be surprised to learn what simple act has gotten your attention.

Saying *thank you* doesn't need to be difficult, it simply needs to be practiced. It is the little courtesies like these that often fade over time and become absent when needed most. In saying *thank you*, we acknowledge our spouse's efforts and show our appreciation. In saying *thank you*, we validate his or her worth and show our love.

RANDOM ACT: Surprise your spouse with his or her favorite food item.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Appeal to his or her favorites.** This is your opportunity to cater to your spouse. Treat your beloved to a treat, snack, or full-fledged meal, but offer a morsel that he or she will love! If you happen to share a fondness for a particular food item, then consider that a gift for you both. However, don't avoid items your spouse loves just because you don't feel the same way toward them; this exercise isn't about you or your taste-buds.
- **Remember, healthy foods can be treats, too!** Don't limit your offering to only those food items high in calories and with little nutritional value. Treats can also be healthy and include colorful fruits and vegetables, fiber-rich grain foods, and specialty beans or nuts.
- **Don't forget the convenience of store-bought.** Your spouse's favorite food item doesn't have to be made by your hands to be special. Your calendar and availability might limit your offer to something provided by a quick trip to the grocery or specialty food store, and that's okay. As long as you offer something that falls in his or her definition of *favorite*; how it's prepared won't necessarily matter.

- **Make sure your surprise comes with a servant's heart.** *"A smiling face is half the meal"* (Latvian Proverb), and a sure-fire way to undermine your effort is to offer any favorite food item with an air of frustration or inconvenience. As Proverbs 17:1 reads, *"A meal of bread and water in contented peace is better than a banquet spiced with quarrels"*.

1 John 3:18 says, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." What better deed than to show your love by delighting your spouse's tummy? I can't think of any.

RANDOM ACT: Brag about your spouse to someone else.

Here are three suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Take notice.** Take stock of what your spouse is good at and make a mental note. In taking inventory of all your spouse has to offer, you should find yourself amazed at who he or she is. Focus on your spouse's good points and remember them.
- **Shout to the world.** Tell everyone what you have observed about your spouse and why you think your spouse is the best. Post a comment on your Facebook page, send an email to your friends, tell your mother over the phone; take advantage of every opportunity to brag about your spouse and shout it from every street corner.
- **Let your spouse hear your shout!** Words of encouragement or praise can mend or strengthen any relationship, and especially when heard loudly and clearly. Don't be afraid to give your spouse his or her due credit in a way that he or she can hear, understand and appreciate.

We live in a world where hurtful words are often the norm. Fortunately, encouraging words can make a big difference and bragging about our spouse is one random act of kindness that works miracles. As Blaise Pascal once said, *"Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much"*.

RANDOM ACT: Have fun with your spouse.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Play outdoors.** Spend time together having fun outside in the fresh air. Plan a picnic, a game of frisby or washing the car. Any of these can be an exercise in fun if you're willing to go with the flow and enjoy time spent with each other.
- **Dance in your livingroom.** Fun doesn't have to be expensive or require purchased tickets. A fun atmosphere can be created quickly with upbeat music, a few candles, easy-to-make snacks and lots of laughter.
- **Do something different.** Take time out of your week to do something you don't usually make time for. Learn a new card game together. Watch a sunset. Cuddle up under a blanket and watch a scary movie together. Take an evening stroll together and just talk.
- **Focus on the Fun.** Avoid the temptation to fill your time together with heavy discussions about difficult topics or important decisions. Schedule a different time for those conversations and keep this time together good-hearted and light.

Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is time for every season - a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. That means there is a time for having fun. Marriage should be fun. Having

fun helps people relax and slow down; it helps spouses bond and relate to each other on a deeper level. Having fun reduces tension and couples who play together stay together a lot longer.

RANDOM ACT: Compliment your spouse.

Here are four suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Be Sincere.** Make sure your compliment is honest and genuine. Avoid cliches and simple flattery, and practice true admiration of your spouse's positive attributes.
- **Comment on Appearance.** Men and women both need to feel attractive to their spouse, and verbal affirmation about one's appearance can do wonders in building confidence and self esteem. Remind your spouse what physically attracted you to him or her in the first place.
- **Look Beneath the Surface.** Search your beloved deeply and compliment a characteristic that others might miss at first glance. Identify those non-physical attributes that are honorable, and tell your spouse about those too.
- **Keep it Simple.** Start your sentences with words like "You are", "You have", or "You do". Be specific and then be quiet. Don't minimize the impact of your compliment by belaboring the point or overemphasizing his or her strength.

Psalm 139 reminds us that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and compliments can be a great tool for reminding our help-mate of this very fact. God knew well what He was doing when he made your beloved. With a simple compliment you can remind your spouse of this divine truth, and continue developing a deeper and more meaningful marriage union.

RANDOM ACT: Surrender to your spouse; do things his or her way.

Here are three suggestions to help you in your effort:

- **Give in to the battle.** Let your spouse win one for a change. Be willing to do what your spouse wants to do the way he or she wants to do it, without an argument and without trying to influence the outcome. Allow your spouse to make a decision and agree to follow along with a happy heart.
- **Remember the value of mutual respect.** Avoid criticising your partner's way of doing things and be open to new ideas and approaches. Treat his or her ideas with consideration by listening to them and giving them your full attention.
- **Avoid negotiation tactics in the process.** Refrain from manipulating the situation in order to do things your way. Be agreeable and restrain from negotiating, explaining and effecting the end result. Remember, "Yes" is a complete sentence.

Philippians 2:1-4 reminds me that relationships are about agreeing with each other, loving each other, and being deep-spirited friends; that sometimes I have to give in and let go in order to build trust and mutual respect in my marriage. Giving in where "give and take" are rarely practiced is a terrific act of kindness, and the results should be long lasting.

Weekly Random Acts of Kindness

1. Print this page
2. Cut table below, separating the random acts
3. Fold each act individually
4. Stash acts in a box or decorative vase
5. Draw one act per week
6. Replace act, shake and draw again the following week

Recognize in writing something your spouse did that you appreciated.
Do your spouse a favor when he or she isn't looking.
Give your spouse the gift of your undivided attention.
Treat your spouse as a most honored and royal guest.
Pray for your spouse and thank God for his or her presence in your life.
Offer a sincere and intentional "thank you" to your spouse.
Surprise your spouse with his or her favorite food item.
Brag about your spouse to someone else.
Have fun with your spouse.
Compliment your spouse.
Surrender to your spouse; do things his or her way.