

Valentine's Day for Dads

My life, like yours, is busy, even chaotic at times as the New Year begins. It seems we just get through Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and then where did Valentine's Day appear?! Oh, my! I have to find her another "special card or gift" so soon?! There are so many pressures on holidays and time issues. I bet I would find you with many other men the day before Valentine's Day in one of the local drug stores looking for some kind of card that says "I love you!" Your wife, on the other hand, has helped the kids with their valentine's box and cards for school and your wife is ahead of the game. I am not trying to "give you a guilt trip" for waiting till the last minute...hum? Well, maybe I am. So, let me understand this: the most important people in your world and you're running to the drugstore to grab a card of some kind the day before that special "love day"? Not a pretty sight!

Well, I have to admit, I have been caught in that "ugly picture" and I have looked back and really regretted my actions. Guys, I am not giving the ladies a "free pass" on this one but I know in my life, I have a few regrets about how I demonstrated love and commitment to my wife throughout the years. Some of those years were great and I was proud of how I honored her but some maybe a little lame. I wonder if my wife might agree.

Let me give you something to think about for Valentine's Day and how you can demonstrate the model of an "effective father" in loving your children and your children's mother.

Valentine's Day with your Children

The first thing I have to re-think for myself is the commercial association of Valentine's Day. My mental picture of love letters, cards, and flowers, and the romantic dinner date for the evening is not the only way to see it happening for me. Let me be honest with you. What I say when I travel and speak about Fatherhood is this: Every day can be a Valentine's Day. So, how do you make it different?

You're in luck for 2009 as this special day is on a week-end and it gives you some flexibility to do something "different." Now, I am NOT saying give up on the cards and the candy but that might be a "cheap or fast" way to honor your wife and to demonstrate to your children how to love her and them.

OK, here is one good idea: Try a "Daddy Date." You can hand write invitations for your wife and children and map out the activities on the invitation:

- A special dinner prepared by Dad featuring their favorite meal
- A dessert menu featuring fresh home-baked cookies which you all baked together (Just read the instructions on the packet!)
- Your own hand-made Valentine card with personal special wishes from you as the husband and Daddy. You may ask about doing that for her? Trust

me when I say that when she sees and hears how much you love her children,
it sends her into heaven

- A choice of (1) activity that you could all agree upon: bowling vs. movie

What should you expect? Maybe a few burned cookies but a great time. You will find out that the meal and all the activities will bring you closer together as a family. Your wife will be blown away when she sees you demonstrate and verbalize the love for her and her children.

Guys, the most important teaching fact in Valentine's Day is to demonstrate to your kids how you honor, love, cherish, admire and live life for their mother and for them. Yes, the cards and the special valentine's box of candy are great and by all means "go for it." However, this day is more about teaching your kids how to love the very ones you live for and who give purpose to your life. It is about demonstrating to young boys how they should love their wives and to young girls what to expect from a perspective husband. It is a day, not only of love to your sweetheart, but one of the greatest days to demonstrate and express that love to your children.

Ok, I can hear the question. What about you, Mr. Clark? I have done it all. I have left special notes in her purse, in her car, (and elsewhere!), flowers of every sort delivered to her job, special dinners, and the list goes on. By the way, I love doing all these things as frequently as I can but never as a routine or for "making up times." It is always unexpected but well intended and anxiously anticipated of how I can daily tell her my love for her. This year, well, it is a puppy. I got "dogged into that one!" Long story but I admit, I am excited to go pick up "Gabi" on Valentine's Day. What about my kids? I have to admit, I really did a poor job while they were younger but I love doing it now. I am regretfully sorry for admitting to you that my wife bought most of the cards and I hurriedly signed them on Valentine's Day or the night before when she told me to "quickly sign them before I took off to work. Familiar? For the past few years, my wife and I go together and shop for our two sons and daughter-in-law for Valentine's Day. I initiate it perhaps more than her... not always. It is my priority. I love to cook banana nut bread and chocolate chip cookies and mail them (myself) throughout the year. How old are they? Well, one is 28 years old and the other is 32 years old. I think this year "we" bought those "Pez pop up funny character candy dispensers, chocolates (we know is their favorite), cherry valentine's suckers and cards that took us way too long to pick out! Oh, we mailed them together with a note not to open till Valentine's Day. My two sons and daughter-in-law will once again know without a question that I went on a special shopping date for them with their mom and we didn't have to over-night express mail it to them to keep from missing the day. They know I love them and I will forever demonstrate that love. They will, in turn, demonstrate their love for the ones they call their own. I love them and they will never question if their daddy loves them and I know they will do that for their wives and children. Why? They will see and hear from me a consistent and predictive behavior.

Now, let's be really clear about something with this article. I am no saint who authors a fatherhood column. I write with a lot of pain and regrets that I “missed out” with opportunities to love and demonstrate love. I find myself too many times trying to “unpack” past hurts and disappointments in my life, my family and my marriage. My message for you is to “do it right the first time” rather than spend many years as an adult man walking around with hurts and pains that you could perhaps minimize by aligning your fatherhood priorities. In all things, listen, listen and love, love. Happy Valentine’s Day!