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Make Valentine's Day Everyday

The perfect gift doesn't have a price tag. It's the little things that mean the most.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON

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Make a list of all the qualities of your spouse you love

love you" or even a "Did you sleep well, dear?" Just a quick peck on the cheek as he leaves—if you position yourself correctly by the door on his way out. Then you're off to drop off the kids and on to work—the daily drill—and you wonder, "Is this all there is to love? Is it just a commitment to share the load, raise kids, and if we're lucky, retire together? Whatever happened to being in love?" Don't let Valentine's Day be the only day of the year you get even a momentary hint for what being in love is like.

You can have Valentine's Day just about every day of the year. You can have that blissful feeling, you can take love to the highest power every day; all it takes is a little appreciation. Appreciation doesn't just mean, being grateful. Appreciation means to value something and be grateful for it. It's something we all do completely naturally and instinctively when we fall in love. You value your lover's smile, his hand holding yours, the way he listens to you, the way he scratches his head when thinking. You feel grateful for his very presence in your life and you tell him of your appreciation over and over.

Unfortunately, over time, our focus shifts. You pay more attention to what you don't value about your mate—annoying habits, different ways of doing things—than what you actually value. And when you don't value something, you aren't grateful for it. So you cease to bask in his presence, and only feel the love when he's doing something for you that you want or need. You voice your gratitude for those things, but forget to praise him for who he is, or just for his existence in your life.

Make a list of all those things you value about your mate, big and small. Whether it's how he makes the coffee on Sunday mornings, or how he carefully tucks the kids in at night, or how much he worries about doing the right thing, or wants to cheer you up when you're blue. Whatever it might be, write it down. Add to the list every day. Let your mate know, in words, how you value him: "I love how conscientious you are in making decisions, how you want to make sure you take everything into account." Or, "The way you scratch your head when you're thinking is so cute. It's like you're tickling your brains into action." Be sincere! But be expressive. Take every opportunity to let him know, not just that you love him, but why.

Valentine's Day is a wonderful day, and you look forward to it. Your mate is a sweetheart, and he remembers to bring you flowers and candy. You set a nice table, park the kids with your mom, light the candles and enjoy a romantic dinner together. You talk about how you met, reminisce your courting days, how you fell in love and sigh...

The next morning, you wake up and he's snoring, scruffy-cheeked against the pillow. By the time you've done last night's dishes and made coffee, he's out of the shower, dressed and completely absorbed in checking his e-mail. Not a shred of conversation, much less an "I

Yes, this takes some effort, and yes, you have to go first. And you may find yourself doing all the valuing for a while. But it's like priming a pump: The more you value and are grateful for your spouse, the more you openly, genuinely and thoroughly appreciate him, the more the love will grow and so will his valuing of you. You will have Valentine's Day not just on February 14th, but every day, and you will discover the wonder of taking love to its highest power.

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D. is a psychologist, consultant, speaker and author. Her most recent books are "The Power of Appreciation in Everyday Life (Insomniac Press, 2006) and "The Power of Appreciation in Business (MindLab Publishing, 2005). For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation-- at work, at home and in relationships. E-mail: nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com, website: www.noellenelson.com.