

# KEEP LOVE BURNING!

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## 10 Ways to Keep the Flame Alive

Whether it was several months or decades ago, do you remember those wedding vows? You stood humbly before Almighty God and gazed lovingly into the eyes of your spouse and exchanged these words, “In the name of God, I take thee to be my (husband or wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.”<sup>1</sup> Spiritual flames were flying high between the two of you, a ceremony of unity and love. Joy and celebration poured out of your heart, God had anointed this blessed covenant. But in many cases, Father Time has interceded and taken its toll, and now the flame is about to fizzle out. Something must be done to re-ignite the once burning desire to love each other as Christ loves the church.

**M**arriage, God’s first sacred covenant between a man and woman, is intended to instill equality and honor between two people as a faithful partnership. Unfortunately in times like these, there is a plethora of reasons why it’s difficult for clergy to honor marriage. Often keeping the flame alive (that loving feeling) becomes secondary, and the nurturing component starts to slowly fade away. As clergy and caregivers, we could all use some tips for keeping the fire in our marriage ablaze and inviting. With each day, developing and investing in a sacred and successful marriage takes time, energy, commitment, and discipline. Without being intentional about keeping the love alive, the ecstasy, exhilaration, and passion of the honeymoon naturally begin to subside. You come to experience a far deeper feeling of exhilaration and real love if you are intentional! Remember, it’s the “little things” that make marriage a real love affair. Following are ten little logs (tried and true) for the fire in your marriage that can keep a Christ-like love in your marriage. The key to a good marriage is placing at least one log on the fire daily so the flame will remain and grow!

**1. Learn to listen to one another!** Talking is sharing, but listening is caring. Sounds simple, but for many of us daily routines are extremely time-consuming and the church with all of its committee meetings, counseling sessions, pastoral care calls, funerals, and even weddings, has drawn us (if we are truly honest) from our love affair with our spouse. Humanity is God’s great masterpiece and the anatomy is formed with two ears and one

mouth. God’s intent was for us to be a listening people. Try the model of listening twice as much as you speak. As difficult as it is, take off your clergy vestments and put away the theological and psychological language, relax and enjoy being a listening and responsive spouse. Resist the temptation to want to solve the problem. Just listen and absorb with compassion where the possible frustration lurks in your spouse’s voice. Accept the words and affirm the person.

*Proverbs 19:20 “Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future.”*

**2. Start to date again!** Try to recapture that flame which was so evident the day the two of you became one and said with spiritual fervor, “I do!” Schedule a weekly date with your spouse (no children allowed), check out a movie and then do dinner, take a walk holding hands in the neighborhood, or just take a walk in the mall. Recapture the days when the two of you sat on the same side of the booth when in a restaurant, put your arm around him/her often, learn to laugh again, conduct yourselves like two lovebirds who are oblivious to the rest of the world. The key is not to focus on the activity, but to really enjoy one another’s company. Recall and reflect on the joyful experience of that wedding day, or even the dating days. Remember to consistently find time for a weekly date and don’t allow any one or any thing to cancel your God-appointed time together.

*Galatians 5:22 “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*

**3. Eat dinner at home!** This is a time for husband and wife (and children if there are any) to share and connect. Learn to relax, enjoy family fellowship, the food prepared, and the opportunity to hear from the family about what's happening. Turn off the television—it's distracting when sitting around the dinner table. Even if meetings are scheduled during the dinner hour, make an intentional effort to be home at least four days out of the week for dinner. Time invested in talking and listening at the dinner table is invaluable and it allows the family to see the importance of eating together!

*Acts 2:46* "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home, and ate their food with glad and generous hearts."

**4. Focus on what is right and not the who!** Communication continues to be a daily challenge in marriage. Learn to speak with clarity and honesty. Think about how your actions and words come across. When your spouse is talking, give him or her your undivided attention. Make eye contact, unfold your arms, and relax. When conflict arrives, and it will, try to understand the intent of the words, and not focus on the speaker of the words. Speak abundant life into your marriage!

*Proverbs 10:11* "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life."

**5. Get your hands dirty. Do some chores around the house!** One spouse cannot do all of the housework, even if she or he is a stay-at-home Mom (or Dad). Divide the chores and stay consistent in doing them. If you can't accomplish them on the assigned cleanup day, do them before you leave for that leadership retreat, church revival, or Board of Ordained Ministries retreat.

*Proverbs 16:3* "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established."

**6. Spoil your spouse often!** Make it a habit to spoil each other. Do the little things like calling your mate during a coffee break. Little acts of thoughtfulness can score lots of points (who's counting, right?) with your mate if they show love and concern. For example, in our home, when my wife uses the frying pan to fry chicken and create a full course meal, I will at least perform the cleanup detail, hand wash the dishes or load the dish water, put the dishes back in their proper places, and even sweep the floor.

*Romans 12:10* "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor."

**7. Give your spouse the day off!** On a regular basis or at least monthly, especially if there are small children involved, give your spouse complete freedom for the day. I sometimes get up early with the kids, prepare breakfast (or take them out), and take care of their every need. My wife can visit friends, shop a little, have lunch out, catch a movie, walk in the park, get a manicure/pedicure, and live it up. In the meantime, Dad is back home looking after the kids and gaining a greater appreciation for his wife and the mother of his children.

*Galatians 6:2* "Bear one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

**8. Come home bearing gifts!** All of us enjoy being remembered on our birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, Christmas, and other special holidays. We should also remember those "no occasions" or "just because I love you" times. Drop a note in the mail to your mate. Pick up a single flower and take it home. Call from time to time during the day and tell him or her, "I Love You."

*Acts 20:35* "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

**9. Kiss each other before leaving the house and upon your return.** Never leave the house without affirming your love for one another. But before any good-bye kiss, find a moment to hug and then depart with the ceremonial kiss. Trust me, it adds energy and vitality to each other's day. Instead of or in addition to your one-a-day vitamin, hug each other and seal it with a good-bye kiss.

*Song of Solomon 1:2* "Let him [her] kiss me with the kisses of his [her] mouth! For your love is better than wine."

**10. Praying together helps staying together.** Give prayer a high priority in your marriage. Ask each other before praying, "How can I pray for you today?" Then ask God to work in those specific areas that are most meaningful to your spouse that day. Affirm your spouse out loud before God in prayer. There is power in praying. It only takes a minute or two in the morning, longer at night if time permits, but be consistent. By God's grace, in doing this daily, God will make you feel like newlyweds in many respects—so excited to be with each other.

*Matthew 18:19* "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done, for you by my Father in heaven."

Remember no matter how great your marriage is, God wants it to be better. Since God tells us to "be transformed," that means there is always room for improvement (Romans 12:2). You don't need to break the bank. You don't need to spend any money at all. A quick note, a poem, or even a love letter will do wonders for your spouse. A sincere note or card will deepen the love felt for you, boost self-image, and give the marriage the encouragement that all marriages really do deserve.



*1 Corinthians 13:13* "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." □

<sup>1</sup>The United Methodist Book of Worship, p. 120

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