

Maintenance Matters

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The Marriage Box

Most people get married believing a myth – that marriage is a beautiful box full of all the things they have longed for: companionship, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, friendship. The truth is that marriage, at the start, is an empty box. You must put something in before you can take anything out.

There is no love in marriage: love is in people, and people put it into marriage.

There is no romance in marriage; people have to infuse it into their marriages.

A couple must learn the art and form the habit of giving, loving, serving, praising – keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will be empty.

– J. Allan Peterson

Marriages need more than commitment to survive and thrive. They need to be taken care of. Taking care of our relationships is a lot like taking care of our cars: With our cars, we have to remember to fill up the gas tank so we're not running on empty. We rotate the tires once in a while and check the air pressure. We keep a few things in the trunk to prepare for emergencies. We have an annual inspection to make sure everything is okay.

Just like our cars need regular maintenance to keep them running smoothly and problem-free, so do our marriages. We need to prepare for emergencies, and reflect regularly to make sure everything is okay. And what is the gas that keeps a marriage running? The gas in marriage is our daily loving actions. We need to be nice to each other.

Happy, stable couples show their love for each other on a regular basis with many acts of kindness each day. They feed their marriages daily with compliments, talk, touch, and service. Most of us know this, but also experience how hard it can be to move from thoughts to actions, both in our spiritual lives and in our relationships. We know what we should do, but sometimes it's hard to get past our own needs to actually do it.

Real love, however, has little to do with how we're feeling, and everything to do with our personal discipline and capacity for loving. We can choose to do things within our relationships that keep us moving in the direction of growth and love.

On-going, consistent relationship maintenance matters. Life is full of challenges and surprises. But even when we feel tired, discouraged, or sick, we still need to invest in our relationships in order to prevent relationship erosion. When the loving feelings get dim, it's because we have stopped investing in our relationships. When we get lazy in our responses and reactions, the fabric of our marriage weakens.

Relationships erode without consistent effort, just like plants die when we neglect to water them. The good feelings diminish unless we intentionally nurture them, and when they do, the nastier stuff rises to the top and takes over.

There's really no way around it—we need to act in loving ways to keep the loving feelings. So, ask yourself: "What have I done for my partner today?" And remember, maintenance matters.

This article is adapted from Debby's book, *Small Steps to Bigger Love*, which is available through HSA Publications and on Amazon. It includes a study guide for small group use. Debby is also available for couple coaching and workshops and can be contacted at coachgullery@gmail.com or at debbygullery.com.