

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Imagine trying to convince someone how much you care about them – how much you want to be their friend and support them. You want them to know that you enjoy their company, that you're committed to the relationship.

But then you refuse to make time for them in your schedule. Every time they suggest getting together, you have some excuse as to why it can't happen. No matter what words are coming out of your mouth, they'll eventually get the real message you're sending – right?

We all know that. Perhaps we've even experienced it in a friendship we wanted to pursue, one that never got off the ground because of a lack of interest from the other person.

Spending time together is a crucial ingredient for *any* relationship – of any kind. But you'd be surprised how many married couples lose sight of that. It's as though they seem to forget that whatever suffers from a lack of attention will eventually shrivel away. Quit watering the plants in your home or office, and they'll wither and die. Quit spending time with your spouse, and the same thing will happen to your relationship.

I've often said I can tell more about a person by looking at their calendar than almost anything else. Time is the one thing we all share in equal amounts. It doesn't matter if you're Bill Gates or a homeless person living on the streets – we all have the same 24 hours in the day. Can't buy more, won't get less. And how we choose to *spend* that time gives us – and our spouse – a clear picture of where our true priorities lay.

Working all the time? Chasing personal hobbies in every available moment of free time, activities that don't include your spouse? Always in front of the television, or your computer, or playing with your smartphone? You may not be saying it verbally, but make no mistake about it: You *are* communicating your priorities – loud and clear.

My friends know I'm a reformed workaholic. I've had to learn to anchor time with Terri into my schedule – on a daily basis, of course, but also by carving out time for regular “let's get away, just the two of us” trips. A couple of times a year, we go somewhere to relax, reconnect, have fun, and dream about our future together. It allows us to mutually say “because we value our marriage so much, we're going to spend the time it takes to make it stronger.”

Perhaps one of the best things you can do for your marriage is to plan a block of time where just the two of you go away together. Pick something you'll *both* enjoy. Which means, by the way, that if one of you is a huge baseball fan, and the other person “puts up with it because it's something Mark likes,” do *not* start planning a surprise getaway to see 13 Major League ballgames in 14 days. Do not do that. As in, that would be a huge rookie mistake – something only a young, dumb, newly married youth pastor could possibly dream up – and a lesson he learned quite well, very early in his marriage, thank you very much.

But *do* invest in getting away, and spending mutually enjoyable, quality time together. Because when it comes down to it, your spouse spells “love” T-I-M-E. There's no substitute for it.

And in the end, actions really *do* speak louder than words.

For Personal Reflection and Discussion with Others

1. How would you list your priorities, in order?

2. How might a stranger rearrange the order, if they had access to your calendar?

3. What would your spouse say your priorities are?

4. Read I Corinthians 13:4-7. What can we learn from that passage about keeping our focus and setting our priorities?

5. Why is it so difficult to keep our focus where it needs to be? What forces in the culture work against us in that regard? How could we address them more effectively?

6. What would a “just the two of you” getaway with your spouse look like?

7. What keeps you from making a commitment to that? What would need to change in order to make it happen?
