

Parents Need Love, Too

By Leon Scott Baxter

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Don't let Valentine's Day be a scapegoat this year. Too many busy parents use it as a "Get out of Romance the Rest of the Year" card. And, yes, I'm talking about dads more than moms (but, some of you ladies also abuse the day... you know who you are).

Seeing that I dedicate a big portion of my life to love, romance and relationships, people often ask me if Valentine's Day is my favorite day of the year. And, I tell them, absolutely and unequivocally, "No". The day has special meaning to me personally (first day my future wife allowed me to get close enough to lay a kiss on her), but I think it's been too commercialized. The media tells us what's romantic: flowers, jewelry, perfume, chocolates, a dinner at a fancy restaurant. And, they set up the holiday as if it were invented exclusively for women, and a man's duty to romance her this one day out of the year. Wrong!

First, romance is about making your partner feel loved and cared for. If that happens to be red roses and a heart-shaped box of chocolates, jump right in with both feet, by all means. But, odds are you can make your partner feel loved by being creative and personal and traveling the path least taken (a concert, picnic lunch, day at the spa, tickets to "the game").

Second, Valentine's Day is not just for women. Allow me to explain why. If we listen to the media (the flowers, jewelry and perfume) we might get the feeling that it's her day. But, remember, February 14th is the day when you show your partner they are loved. Believe it or not, men want to be loved too, only thing is that might look different for a dad versus a mom. So, ladies, since the media doesn't tell you what to do for your man, you need to be creative. What does he do for fun? What are his hobbies? What does he do for entertainment? What could you do to completely floor him? Surprise him with tickets to Vegas? Buy him the boxed set of the first three seasons of *Lost*? Get him that surfboard he's been eying? Make him a coupon book good for intimate acts?

Finally, Valentine's Day is not the end! Look at it as the beginning. For so many, especially us dads, Valentine's Day is perceived as an obligation rather than an opportunity. We see it as a day we pull ourselves away from the kids, work, the gym, and our computers to make our partners satisfied romantically at least once a calendar year. We have to make dinner reservations, dress well, pay an arm and a leg for a dozen roses, shave, smell halfway decent, and God forbid, shower.

The reason why this is perceived as an obligation is because we feel what the media tells us isn't "us", but we are obligated to do it nonetheless, or we will be labeled a bad partner or an uncaring spouse (not to mention, a romantically challenged Neanderthal). Once we claim Valentine's Day for ourselves again, making it a personal celebration for our partners, it becomes something enjoyable to celebrate. Consider avoiding the crowds and

hitting the beach. Forget the \$80 bouquet of roses and buy novels for one another at Borders and read them together at Starbucks as you sip iced mochas.

Also, look at Valentine's Day as a reminder, a reminder to add love into your relationship and to sprinkle in romance often. Don't look at it as the one day you must feign romance because you are "supposed to". As our passion starts to dwindle, use February 14th as that boost back into romance that will keep you going until February, 2010.

Oh, and by the way...buy the Valentine's goodies on February 15th (everything's half-price), hold on to them for a few months, and bust them out when you're the kids are at Grandma's and your partner is least suspecting to be romanced. Knock their socks off!