

hours. Don't simply take my word for the value of this exercise; try it yourself, and watch what happens!



EXERCISES FOR HABIT #3: APPRECIATE DAILY

Welcome to the third round of exercises. If your marriage was a cellphone, these exercises would be the booster that increases your joy signal.

Appreciation transforms your marriage by training your brain to focus on and amplify the good things in your environment, life, and relationships. The lack of appreciation leads to discontentment, criticism, and resentment. Appreciation activates the relational engine in your brain so that you can be your best relational self with your beloved.

Activating an “appreciation file” in the brain not only turns on our relational circuits, it allows our brain the opportunity to release “feel good” chemicals with the hormones dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin—as well as endorphins, which make us feel alive. Our brain responds as though *we are living the moment all over again* when we “pull up,” activate, and remember an appreciation memory. We amplify joy as we remember, feel, and share the special moment with our beloved. Also, we boost oxytocin levels when we *add touch into the*

equation, so here is an opportunity to open a joy file and reap the reward.

Triple Your Joy 15 MIN

Here is your opportunity to practice the exercise that transformed my marriage and led to some really good sleep.

1. While holding hands or cuddling, take turns practicing the following steps. Be sure you both practice the first step before moving on. Include *daily examples* for each appreciation step if possible.

Appreciation from my day: Share three highlights from your day.

Appreciation for my beloved: Share three things you appreciate about your spouse.

Appreciation for God (or your topic of choice):

Share three things you appreciate about this

topic.  10 MIN

2. Discuss what you notice after practicing appreciation.  5 MIN

3. Close with several minutes of quiet cuddling and resting together.  2 MIN

Remember the Joy 15 MIN

1. Take some time to cuddle or hold hands and reminisce about special trips and shared mo-

ments together over the course of your married life. Be sure to include:

Your thoughts and feelings at the time.

The factors that made these moments special for you. ⌚ 8 MIN

2. Express some qualities you enjoy about your spouse so your spouse can hear. ⌚ 4 MIN
3. Close with several minutes of quiet cuddling and resting together. ⌚ 3 MIN

Go out for Joy ⌚ 15 MIN

Go out and do something fun that is relational and interactive. This needs to be an activity you both enjoy, and you need to be able to see and hear your spouse. You can go bowling, have a picnic, eat dinner at a new restaurant, go ice-skating, go bird watching, take an evening stroll through the park, go hiking, visit a flower nursery, sit at a coffee shop, etc.

During your outing, do all that you can to enjoy each other's presence, hold hands as much as possible, smile, laugh, and have fun.

1. Make it a point to review historic joy moments while planning future joy opportunities.
Historic joy is reviewing special moments where you felt loved and cared for by your spouse.

EXAMPLE: *When you brought me coffee this morning while I was running late, I felt loved and cared for.*

Future joy is thinking of and planning ways to continue increasing relational joy in your marriage.

EXAMPLE: *I would like us to end our days by sharing appreciation and to have a date night every other week.* ⌚ 8 MIN

2. Discuss what was special about this exercise, then close your evening with quiet cuddling and resting. ⌚ 7 MIN

1. Start by sharing a few highlights from your day. This warms up your brain's relational circuits. ⌚ 3 MIN
2. Take turns feeding each other a meal, snack, or dessert. Yes, this may feel awkward, but have fun and laugh. While you feed each other, express what you enjoy about each other, including how you feel your spouse "feeds you" spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, and relationally. ⌚ 8 MIN
3. Once you finish this interaction, talk about what you noticed from the experience. ⌚ 2 MIN
4. Close with quiet cuddling and resting together. ⌚ 2 MIN

Write Your Joy ⌚ 15 MIN

As Marcus said earlier, composing a love letter can be a meaningful activity that you will cherish for years to come. This heartfelt exchange provides an opportunity to express your heart and share your love the old-fashioned way. You will need paper and pen for this exercise.

1. Take a moment to think about what you love about your spouse, then write your spouse a love letter. While this doesn't have to be volumes of books, it does need to be longer than three sentences. Take the necessary time to complete this task. ⌚ 8 MIN

2. When finished, take turns reading your love letter to your spouse. ⌚ 6 MIN
3. Discuss what you enjoyed about this exercise, then close with quiet cuddling and resting. ⌚ 3 MIN

Run for Joy ⌚ 15 MIN

Our nervous system cycles between high energy and low energy states. Some of us tend to be high-energy responders who prefer activity, motion, and movement. We pursue activities that get our adrenaline pumping. Some of us are low-energy responders who prefer restful and soothing activities. We like our quiet time with a cup of tea and soft music. It helps to identify the preferences of our nervous system so we can plan activities that best match the needs and styles in our marriage.

One way to better gauge and identify our preferences is by looking at our response to feeling shame. Low-energy responders tend to *beat themselves up* when they feel ashamed: "I can't do anything right! I am such a fool!" High-energy responders, however, tend to *beat other people up* when they feel shame: "You can't do anything right! You are such a fool!" While we may relate to both reactions, we all

- tend to lean toward one style. Low-energy responders can be quick to blame themselves while high-energy responders can be quick to blame other people. Now let's practice the exercise to see what best fits you and your spouse.
1. Discuss your preferences to see if you lean more toward high-energy activities such as walks, runs, bike rides, hiking, and fast-paced exercise, or low-energy activities such as sitting in a quiet place with soft music, playing chess, or reading a book. For example, if you had the option of choosing an early morning walk or sitting in a chair watching the sunset, which would you prefer? ⌚ 3 MIN
 2. Put your thoughts to the test with the following experiment. Take a few minutes to try a high-energy activity such as doing jumping jacks, stretching exercises, sit-ups, walking, or riding bikes around your neighborhood. While you move, discuss some of your favorite shared memories such as vacations, trips, birthdays, holidays, etc. ⌚ 4 MIN
 3. Next, make yourselves comfortable on a couch or a recliner while you play soft music in the background. Continue to reminisce more of your favorite shared memories. These interactions do not need to be long. ⌚ 4 MIN

4. Discuss this exercise and share what you notice. How can you use this information in your marriage? ⌚ 2 MIN
5. Close with quiet cuddling and resting together. ⌚ 2 MIN