

# Making St. Valentine's Day a year-round commitment

**By Bill Dodds**

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I wasn't surprised this year when the Valentine's Day candy was on store shelves only days after the Christmas candy had been there.

I suppose I could mutter tsk-tsk, but the truth is I'm part of the problem: a consumer who loves to consume chocolate. So just about any excuse to buy some now is a good excuse.

Yes, chocolate and flowers are traditional Valentine's Day gifts - or St. Valentine's Day gift, but no bags of M&M's or Hershey's Kisses feature any reference to sainthood - and they're good options. In most cases. But not the only option. Often, not even the best option.

What are some better ways to mark the occasion, to tell family members and friends "I love you"? A few suggestions:

- Commit not-so-random acts of kindness. Be friendly, generous and considerate to those closest to you. To those, too often, who are easy to overlook and underappreciate. Yes, some kindness is spontaneous, but some takes a little thought. A little planning. Perhaps more than a little effort.

- Listen. This suggestion seems so obvious and so simple, but it can be so easy to think "just not now." There are times - inconvenient times - when your loved one wants to talk about something, but you're tired, distracted or pretty sure you covered all of this last week, right?

It can help to keep in mind sometimes a person talks because he or she needs to talk, perhaps has to go over what was talked about not very long ago. And it doesn't mean your spouse, family member or friend wants you to offer an opinion or a solution. What your loved one wants is for you to listen.

I'm reminded of times when my late wife would come home from work and say, "I want to tell you what happened at the office today, but I don't want you to offer solutions." It took me a few times to learn she was serious about that. And to keep my "I can fix that!" attitude in check.

- Hug. Enough said.

- Recognize and let that loved one use his or her God-given talents. This can be tough, especially as sons and daughters grow older. Discover those gifts and interests. Begin to develop them and then strive to make a living using them.

Perhaps you come from a long line of teachers and she wants to ... go into business. Or maybe you've had a government job - solid pay scale, good benefits - and he's leaning toward a career in music.

It isn't just the gift holder who, at times, has to take a leap of faith. It's also those who love him or her.

- Chocolates and flowers. Yes. OK. But maybe something more tailored to what your loved one loves. A special kind of chocolate. A variety of flower that brings back happy memories.

Not just dinner out and movie, but dinner at a place he or she prefers. (Or at a new place when your first choice would be the old tried-and-true.) And a movie that he or she would give two thumbs-up, but you would rate it ... (Can a person give half a thumb?)

And, of course:

- Pray for and with each other. Often.

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