THE

Love Dare
This forty day journey cannot be taken lightly. It is a challenging and often difficult process, but an incredibly fulfilling one. To take this dare requires a resolute mind and a steadfast determination. It is not meant to be sampled or briefly tested, and those who quit early will forfeit the greatest benefits. If you will commit to a day at a time for forty days, the results could change your life, and your marriage.

Consider it a dare, from others who have done it before you.
The Scriptures say that God designed and created marriage as a good thing. It is a beautiful, priceless gift. He uses marriage to help us eliminate loneliness, multiply our effectiveness, establish families, raise children, enjoy life, and bless us with relational intimacy. But beyond this, marriage also shows us our need to grow and deal with our own issues and self-centeredness through the help of a lifelong partner. If we are teachable, we will learn to do the one thing that is most important in marriage—to love. This powerful union provides the path for you to learn how to love another imperfect person unconditionally. It is wonderful. It is difficult. It is life changing.

This book is about love. It’s about learning and daring to live a life filled with loving relationships. And this journey begins with the person that is closest to you: your spouse. May God bless you as you begin this adventure.

But be sure of this: it will take courage. If you accept this dare, you must take the view that instead of following your heart, you are choosing to lead it. The world says to follow your heart, but if you are not leading it, then someone or something else is. The Bible says that “the heart is deceitful above all things,” and it will pursue that which feels right at the moment.

We dare you to think differently, and to choose to lead your heart toward that which is best in the long run. This is a key to lasting, fulfilling relationships.

This journey is not a process of trying to change your spouse to be the person you want them to be. You’ve no doubt already discovered that efforts to change your husband or wife have ended in failure and frustration. Rather, this is a journey of exploring and demonstrating genuine love, even when your desire is dry and your motives are low. The truth is, love is a decision and not just a feeling. It is selfless, sacrificial, and
transformational. When love is truly demonstrated as it was intended, your relationship is more likely to change for the better.

Each day of this journey will contain three very important elements:

**First**, a unique aspect of love will be discussed. Read each of these carefully and be open to a new understanding of what it means to genuinely love someone.

**Secondly**, you will be given a specific dare to do for your spouse. Some will be easy and some very challenging. But take each dare seriously, and be creative and courageous enough to attempt it. Don't be discouraged if outside situations prevent you from accomplishing a specific dare. Just pick back up as soon as it is within your ability and proceed with the journey.

**Lastly**, you will be given journal space to log what you are learning, doing, and how your spouse is responding. It is important that you take advantage of this space to capture what is happening to both you and your mate during the journey. These notes will record your progress and should become priceless to you in the future.

Remember, you have the responsibility to protect and guide your heart. Don't give up and don't get discouraged. Resolve to lead your heart and to make it through to the end. Learning to truly love is one of the most important things you will ever do.

**Now these three remain:**

**faith, hope, and love.**

**But the greatest of these is love**

*1 Corinthians 13:13* HCSB
If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3
Love works. It is life’s most powerful motivator, and has far greater depth and meaning than most people realize. It always does what is best for others, and can empower us to face the greatest of problems. We are born with a lifelong thirst for love. Our hearts desperately need it like our lungs need oxygen. Love changes our motivation for living. Relationships become meaningful with it. No marriage is successful without it.

Love is built on two pillars that best define what it is. Those pillars are patience and kindness. All other characteristics of love are extensions of these two attributes. And that’s where your dare will begin. With patience.

Love will inspire you to become a patient person. When you choose to be patient, you respond in a positive way to a negative situation. You are slow to anger. You have a long fuse instead of a quick temper. Rather than being restless and demanding, love helps you settle down and begin extending mercy to those around you. Patience brings an internal calm during an external storm.

No one likes to be around an impatient person. It causes you to overreact in angry, foolish, and regrettable ways. The irony of anger toward a wrongful action is that it spawns new wrongs of its own. Anger almost never makes things better. In fact, it usually generates additional problems.

But patience stops problems in their tracks. More than biting your lip,
more than clapping a hand over your mouth, patience is a deep breath. It clears the air. It stops foolishness from whipping its scorpion tail all over the room. It is a choice to control your emotions rather than allowing your emotions to control you, and shows discretion instead of returning evil for evil.

If your spouse offends you, do you quickly retaliate or stay under control? Do you find that anger is your emotional default when treated unfairly? If so, you are spreading poison rather than medicine.

Anger is usually caused when the strong desire for something is mixed with disappointment or grief. You don’t get what you want and you start heating up inside. It is often an emotional reaction that flows out of our own selfishness, foolishness, or evil motives.

Patience, however, makes us wise. It doesn’t rush to judgment but listens to what the other person is saying. Patience stands in the doorway where anger is clawing to burst in, but waits to see the whole picture before passing judgment. The Bible says, “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly” (Proverbs 14:29).

As sure as a lack of patience will turn your home into a war zone, the practice of patience will foster peace and quiet. “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute” (Proverbs 15:18). Statements like these from the book of Proverbs are clear principles with timeless relevance. Patience is where love meets wisdom. And every marriage needs that combination to stay healthy.

Patience helps you give your spouse permission to be human. It understands that everyone fails. When a mistake is made, it chooses to give them more time than they deserve to correct it. It gives you the ability to hold on during the tough times in your relationship rather than bailing out under the pressure.
But can your spouse count on having a patient wife or husband to deal with? Can she know that locking her keys in the car will be met by your understanding rather than a demeaning lecture that makes her feel like a child? Can he know that cheering during the last seconds of a football game won’t invite a loud-mouthed laundry list of ways he should be spending his time? It turns out that few people are as hard to live with as an impatient person.

What would the tone and volume of your home be like if you tried this biblical approach: “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another”? (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

Few of us do patience very well, and none of us do it naturally. But a wise man or woman will pursue it as an essential ingredient to their marriage relationship. That’s a good starting point to demonstrate true love.

This journey is a process, and the first thing you must resolve to possess is patience. Think of it as a marathon, not a sprint. But it’s a race worth running.
The first part of this dare is fairly simple. Although love is communicated in a number of ways, our words often reflect the condition of our heart. For the next day, resolve to demonstrate patience and to say nothing negative to your spouse at all. If the temptation arises, choose not to say anything. It’s better to hold your tongue that to say something you’ll regret.

___ Check here when you’ve completed today’s dare.

Did anything happen today to cause anger toward your mate? Were you tempted to think disapproving thoughts and to let them come out in words? Was your spouse surprised by the things you didn’t say?
Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. (James 1:19)
Day 2

Love is kind

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. —Ephesians 4:32

Kindness is love in action. If patience is how love reacts in order to minimize a negative circumstance, kindness is how love acts to maximize a positive circumstance. Patience avoids a problem; kindness creates a blessing. One is preventive, the other proactive. These two sides of love are the cornerstones on which many of the other attributes we will discuss are built.

Love makes you kind. And kindness makes you likeable. When you’re kind, people want to be around you. They see you as being good to them and good for them.

The Bible keys in on the importance of kindness: “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:3–4). Kind people simply find favor wherever they go. Even at home. But “kindness” can feel a little generic when you try defining it, much less living it. So let’s break kindness down into four basic core ingredients:

Gentleness. When you’re operating from kindness, you’re careful how you treat your spouse, never being unnecessarily harsh. You’re sensitive. Tender. Even if you need to say hard things, you’ll bend over backwards to make your rebuke or challenge as easy to hear as possible. You speak the truth in love.

Helpfulness. Being kind means you meet the needs of the moment. If it's
housework, you get busy. A listening ear? You give it. Kindness graces a wife with the ability to serve her husband without worrying about her rights. Kindness makes a husband curious to discover what his wife needs, then motivates him to be the one who steps up and ensures those needs are met—even if his are put on hold.

Willingness. Kindness inspires you to be agreeable. Instead of being obstinate, reluctant, or stubborn, you choose to cooperate, to be flexible. Rather than complaining and making excuses, you look for reasons to compromise and accommodate. A kind husband ends thousands of potential arguments by his willingness to listen first rather than demand his way.

Initiative. Kindness thinks ahead, then takes the first step. It doesn’t sit around waiting to be prompted or coerced before getting off the couch. The kind husband or wife will be the one who greets first, smiles first, serves first, and forgives first. They don’t require the other to get his or her act together before showing love. When acting from kindness, you see the need, then make your move. First.

Jesus creatively described the kindness of love in His parable of the Good Samaritan, found in the Bible—Luke, chapter 10. A Jewish man attacked by robbers is left for dead on a remote road. Two religious leaders, respected among their people, walk by without choosing to stop. Too busy. Too important. Too fond of clean hands. But a common man of another race—the hated Samaritans, whose dislike for the Jews was both bitter and mutual—sees this stranger in need and is moved with compassion. Crossing all cultural boundaries and risking ridicule, he stops to help the man. Bandaging his wounds and putting him on his own donkey, he carries him to safety and pays all his medical expenses out of his own pocket.

Where years of racism had caused strife and division, one

Wasn't kindness one of the key things that drew you and your spouse together in the first place? When you married, weren't you expecting to enjoy his or her kindness for the rest of your life? Didn't your mate feel the same way about you? Even though the years can take the edge off that desire, your enjoy-ment in marriage is still linked to the daily level of kindness expressed.

The Bible describes a woman whose husband and children bless and praise her. Among her noble attributes are these: “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (Proverbs 31:26). How about you? How would your husband or wife describe you on the kindness meter? How harsh are you? How gentle and helpful? Do you wait to be asked, or do you take the initiative to help? Don't wait for your spouse to be kind first.

It is difficult to demonstrate love when you feel little to no motivation. But love in its truest sense is not based on feelings. Rather, love determines to show thoughtful actions even when there seems to be no reward. You will never learn to love until you learn to demonstrate kindness.
In addition to saying nothing negative to your spouse again today, do at least one unexpected gesture as an act of kindness.

___ Check here when you’ve completed today’s dare.

What discoveries about love did you make today? What specifically did you do in this dare? How did you show kindness, and how did your spouse respond?
We live in a world that is enamored with “self.” The culture around us teaches us to focus on our appearance, feelings, and personal desires as the top priority. The goal, it seems, is to chase the highest level of happiness possible. However, the danger from this kind of thinking becomes painfully apparent once inside a marriage relationship.

If there were ever a word that basically means the opposite of love, it is selfishness. Unfortunately, it is something that is ingrained into every person from birth. You can see it in the way young children act, and often in the way adults mistreat one another. In fact, almost every sinful action ever committed can be traced back to a selfish motive. It is a trait we hate in other people but justify in ourselves. Yet you can’t point out the many ways your spouse is selfish without admitting you can be selfish too. That would be hypocritical.

Why do we have such low standards for ourselves but high expectations for our mate? The answer is a painful pill to swallow. We are all selfish.

When a husband puts his interests, desires, and priorities in front of his wife, that’s a sign of selfishness. When a wife constantly complains about the time and energy she spends meeting the needs of her husband, that’s a sign of selfishness. But love does not “seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Loving couples—the ones who are enjoying the full purpose for
The Love Dare Day 3: Love Is Not Selfish

The Love Dare Day 3: Love Is Not Selfish

marriage—are bent on taking good care of the other flawed human they get to share life with. That's because true love looks for ways to say “yes.”

An ironic aspect of selfishness is that even generous actions can be selfish if the motive is to gain bragging rights or receive a reward. If you do something to deceitfully manipulate your husband or wife, you are still being selfish. The bottom line is that you either make decisions out of love for others, or love for yourself.

Love is never satisfied except in the welfare of others. You can't be acting out of real love and selfishness at the same time. Choosing to love your mate will cause you to say “no” to what you want so you can say “yes” to what they need. That's putting the happiness of your partner above your own. It doesn't mean you can never experience happiness, but you don't negate the happiness of your spouse so you can enjoy it yourself.

Love also leads to inner joy. When you prioritize the well-being of your mate, there is a resulting fulfillment that cannot be duplicated by selfish actions. This is a benefit that God created and reserves for those who genuinely demonstrate love. The truth is, when you relinquish your rights for the sake of your mate, you get a chance to lose yourself to the greater purpose of marriage.

Nobody knows you as well as your spouse. And that means no one will be quicker to recognize a change when you deliberately start sacrificing your wants and wishes to make sure his or her needs are met. If you find it hard to sacrifice your own desires to benefit your spouse, then you may have a deeper problem with selfishness than you want to admit.

Ask yourself these questions:

• Do I truly want what’s best for my husband or wife?
• Do I want them to feel loved by me?
• Do they believe that I have their best interests in mind?
• Do they see me as looking out for myself first, or them first?

Whether you like it or not, you have a reputation in the eyes of those around you, especially in the eyes of your spouse. But is it a loving reputation? Remember, your partner also has the challenge of loving a selfish person. So determine to be the first to demonstrate real love to them, with your eyes wide open. And when all is said and done, you'll both be more fulfilled.

“Do nothing from selfish or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).
TODAY’S DARE

Whatever you put your time, energy, and money into will become more important to you. It’s hard to care for something you are not investing in. Along with restraining from negative comments, buy your spouse something that says, “I was thinking of you today.”

___ Check here when you’ve completed today’s dare.

What did you choose as the gift for your spouse? What happened when you gave it to them? What was their response?
The Love Dare Day 3: Love Is Not Selfish
Day 4

Love is thoughtful

How precious also are Your thoughts to me. . . .
How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them,
they would outnumber the sand. —Psalm 139:17–18

Love thinks. It’s not a mindless feeling that rides on waves of emotion and falls asleep mentally. It keeps busy in thought, knowing that loving thoughts precede loving actions.

When you first fell in love, being thoughtful came quite naturally. You spent hours dreaming of what your loved one looked like, wondering what he or she was doing, rehearsing impressive things to say, then enjoying sweet memories of the time you spent together. You honestly confessed, “I can’t stop thinking about you.”

But for most couples, things begin to change after marriage. The wife finally has her man; the husband has his trophy. The hunt is over and the pursuing done. Sparks of romance slowly burn into grey embers, and the motivation for thoughtfulness cools. We drift into focusing on our job, our friends, our problems, our personal desires, ourselves. After a while, we unintentionally begin to ignore the needs of our mate.

But the fact that marriage has added another person to our universe does not change. Therefore, if our thinking doesn’t mature enough to constantly include this person, we catch ourselves being surprised rather than being romantic.

“Today’s our anniversary?”
“Why didn’t you include me in that decision?”
“Haven’t you thought about anyone but yourself in the last week?”
If you don't learn to be thoughtful, you end up regretting missed opportunities to demonstrate love. Thoughtlessness is a silent enemy to a loving relationship.

Let's be honest. Men struggle with thoughtfulness more than women. A man can focus like a laser on one thing and forget the rest of the world. Whereas this can benefit him in that one arena, it can make him overlook other things that need his attention.

A woman, on the other hand, is more multi-conscious, able to maintain an amazing awareness of many factors at once. She can talk on the phone, cook, know where the kids are in the house, and wonder why her husband isn't helping... all simultaneously. Adding to this, a woman also thinks relationally. When she works on something, she is cognizant of all the people who are somehow connected to it.

Both of these tendencies are examples of how God designed women to be complete their men. As God said at Creation, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). But these differences also create opportunities for misunderstanding.

Men, for example, tend to think in headlines and say exactly what they mean. Not much is needed to understand the message. His words are more literal and shouldn't be overanalyzed. But women think and speak between the lines. They tend to hint. A man often has to listen for what is implied if he wants to get the full meaning.

If a couple doesn't understand this about one another, the fallout can result in endless disagreements. He's frustrated wondering why she speaks in riddles and doesn't just come out and say things. She's frustrated wondering why he's so inconsiderate and doesn't add two and two together and just figure it out.

A woman deeply longs for her husband to be thoughtful.
It is a key to helping her feel loved. When she speaks, a wise man will listen like a detective to discover the unspoken needs and desires her words imply. If, however, she always has to put the pieces together for him, it steals the opportunity for him to demonstrate that he loves her.

This also explains why women will get upset with their husbands without telling them why. In her mind she’s thinking, “I shouldn’t have to spell it out for him. He should be able to look at the situation and see what’s going on here.” At the same time, he’s grieved because he can’t read her mind and wonders why he’s being punished for a crime he didn’t know he committed.

Love requires thoughtfulness—on both sides—the kind that builds bridges through the constructive combination of patience, kindness, and selflessness. Love teaches us how to meet in the middle, to respect and appreciate how our spouse uniquely thinks.

A husband should listen to his wife and learn to be considerate of her unspoken messages. A wife should learn to communicate truthfully and not say one thing while meaning another.

But too often we become angry and frustrated instead, following the destructive pattern of “ready, shoot, aim.” We speak harshly now and determine later if we should have said it. But the thoughtful nature of love teaches us to engage our minds before engaging our lips. Love thinks before speaking. It filters words through a grid of truth and kindness.

When was the last time you spent a few minutes thinking about how you could better understand and demonstrate love to your spouse? What immediate need can you meet? What’s the next event (anniversary, birthday, holiday) you could be preparing for? Great marriages come from great thinking. “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).
Contact your spouse sometime during the business of the day. Have no agenda other than asking how he or she is doing and if there is anything you might could do for them.

___ Check here when you've completed today's dare.

What did you learn about yourself or your spouse by doing this today? How could this become a more natural, routine, and genuinely helpful part of your lifestyle?
Day 5
Love is not rude

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him. —Proverbs 27:14

Nothing irritates others as quickly as being rude. Rudeness is unnecessarily saying or doing things that are unpleasant for another person to be around. To be rude is to act unbecoming, embarrassing, or irritating. In marriage, this could be a foul mouth, poor table manners, or a habit of making sarcastic quips. However you look at it, no one enjoys being around a rude person. Rude behavior may seem insignificant to the person doing it but unpleasant to those on the receiving end.

As always, love has something to say about this. When a man is driven by love, he intentionally behaves in a way that’s more pleasant for his wife to be around. If she desires to love him, she purposefully avoids things that frustrate him or cause him discomfort.

The bottom line is that genuine love minds its manners.

Embracing this one concept could add some fresh air to your marriage. Good manners express to your wife or husband, “I value you enough to exercise some self-control around you. I want to be a person who’s a pleasure to be with.” When you allow love to change your behavior—even in little ways—you restore an atmosphere of honor to your relationship. People who practice good etiquette tend to raise the respect level of the environment around them.

For the most part, the etiquette we tend to use at home is much different than the one we employ with friends, or even with total
strangers. We may be barking or pouting around the house, but if the front door chimes, we open it all smiling and kind. But if we dare to love, we'll also want to give our best to our own. If we don't let love motivate us to make needed changes in our behavior, the quality of our marriage relationship will suffer for it.

Women tend to be much better at certain types of manners than men, though they can be rude in other ways. King Solomon said, “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife” (Proverbs 25:24 NIV). But men especially need to learn this important lesson. The Bible says, “It is well with the man who is gracious” (Psalm 112:5). A man of discretion will find out what is appropriate, then adjust his behavior accordingly.

There are two main reasons why people are rude: ignorance and selfishness. Neither, of course, is a good thing. A child is born ignorant of etiquette, needing lots of help and training. As adults, we display our ignorance at another level. We know the rules, but we can be blind to how we break them or be too self-centered to care. In fact, we may not realize how unpleasant we can be to live with.

Test yourself with these questions: How does your spouse feel about the way you speak and act around them? How does your behavior affect your mate's sense of worth? Would your husband or wife say you're a blessing, or that you're condescending and embarrassing?

If you're thinking your spouse—not you—is the one who needs work in this area, you're likely suffering from a bad case of ignorance, with a secondary condition of selfishness. Remember, love is not rude but lifts us to a higher standard.

Do you wish your spouse would quit doing the things that bother you? Then it's time to stop doing the things that bother them. Will you be thoughtful and loving enough to discover
and avoid the behavior that causes life to be unpleasant for your mate? Will you dare to be delightful?

Here are three guiding principles when it comes to etiquette:

1. **Guard the Golden Rule.** Treat your mate the same way you want to be treated (Luke 6:31).
2. **No double standards.** Be as considerate to your spouse as you are to strangers and coworkers.
3. **Honor requests.** Consider what your husband or wife already asked you to do or not do. If in doubt, then ask.
Ask your spouse to tell you three things that cause him or her to be uncomfortable or irritated with you. You must do so without attacking them or justifying your behavior. This is from their perspective only.

___ Check here when you’ve completed today’s dare.

What things did your spouse point out about you that need your attention? How did you handle hearing it? What do you plan to do to improve these areas?
The Love Dare Day 5: Love Is Not Rude
Other Marriage Resources Available from B&H:

Better Love Now: Making Your Marriage a Lifelong Love Affair
by Tommy Nelson with David Delk
Retail Price: $19.99
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Now You’re Speaking My Language: Honest Communication and Deeper Intimacy for a Stronger Marriage
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