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8-2005

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Recommended Citation

Murray, Susan E., "Missing the Point" (2005). *Lake Union Herald*. 664.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/664>

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MISSING the POINT

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Some of you have been there. We were there nearly 30 years ago. We went there again in May. It was a moving experience! On a wind-swept spot on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, we visited Kitty Hawk and were reminded of the incredible accomplishments of Orville and Wilbur Wright.

Their first successful flight took place there in December 1903. They excitedly telegraphed their sister, Katherine, "We have actually flown 120 feet. We will be home for Christmas." She took their telegram to the local newspaper office where the editor read the telegram and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He missed the point!

Do you find yourself "missing the point" in your marriage, as a parent, or as a member of your family? Do you find yourself focusing more on the negative details of your life than on the overall positive picture of your spouse, child, or other family members?

One of the best ways to "get to the point" of successful relationships is to focus more on the positives than the negatives. In this hurry-up world of countless challenges and priorities, it is easy to miss an important point—showing affection and appreciation towards those we say we love.

I invite you to consider these ideas for building affection and appreciation in your relationships so you won't miss the point:

Take time—for talking, relaxing, and listening. It's been said that the way children spell LOVE is TIME.

Look—for ways to meet your loved ones' needs for attention, support, appreciation, and comfort.

Focus—on ways you can bring joy. In what ways do they like affection (a hug, wink, tender smile, or holding hands)? What are their love languages (time, gifts, appreciation)?

Review—what you've been doing. How is it working? We often give the kind of affection we like; when something isn't working, we keep trying harder doing the same thing. I often say, "It's never too late to start doing things differently."

Consider—how you can be more lovingly available to those you love. Can they confide in you or do they see you to be critical or uninterested?

Reassure—your loved ones of your desire for closeness and of your commitment to meet their needs. Speak words of appreciation and affection to the place they have in your life.

Listen—to your loved ones' ideas, dreams, interests, fears, joys, hopes, and plans.

Initiate—affection through your touch, spoken words, and written words.

Plan—some unexpected times when you can show your loved ones how much you cherish and need one another. We each desire to be needed.

When there are clues that we are "missing the point," we can shift our focus. God is ready and able to help us be instruments of His grace to meet the acceptance, affection, and appreciation needs of those whom we love.

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.

*Some thoughts adapted from David and Teresa Ferguson's, *More than Married: Ten Keys to Intimacy for a Lasting Marriage*, J. Countryman, 2000.

