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Susan and her husband Jim have been married 37 years, have four young adult children, and live in Covington, Kentucky. Susan is a freelance speaker and writer on marriage, parenting, and spirituality. She travels widely, giving workshops to groups across the USA and a number of foreign countries.

She is a lay Marianist and as such also does workshops on community building and Marian spirituality. Susan and Jim are also avid contra dancers. (No, this isn't a South American revolutionary dance but rather a form of folk dancing.) For more information about Susan, or to sign up for her free weekly Marriage Moments or Parenting Pointers, go to www.SusanVogt.net.

Growing Closer

Quick tips to make your relationship sizzle.

By Susan Vogt

Sacrifice during Lent

1. *"In sickness and in health..."* How do you deal with illness? Do you like to be coddled or ignored? What does your spouse want from you during times of illness?
2. What sacrifice has your marriage called you to make for your beloved? Moving, putting your life on hold, changing an annoying habit? Can you die (just a little) to your own needs this week to give life to your spouse or children? And can you do it generously, not in a begrudging way?
3. *"...Until death do us part."* This part of the wedding vow is sobering and most couples don't focus on it for long. Good Friday, however, reminds us of the reality of death. Have you and your spouse shared your feelings and fears about death with each other?

Rise again at Easter

4. Celebrate new life at Easter! Are you waiting to have a child, caring for children or aging parents, or resting from the rigors of childrearing? May Christ's resurrection give you new life and energy for others.
5. *"When my Grandma got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my Grandpa does it for her now all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."* (Rebecca—8 years old) What creative act of kindness could you do for your spouse today? Push beyond any inconvenience to show your love.
6. *"In a committed, loving, covenantal relationship, sex is sacramental ...a privileged vehicle of grace...opening both persons to becoming life-giving, gracious, and blessing adults."* (Father Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*) How would you say your sexual relationship makes you a better person in the rest of your life?

Resolve to improve

7. My most recent self-improvement project has been to tame my tongue. I've not yet learned to do this to my satisfaction, but I have learned that it's hard to change and I can only focus on one day at a time. A small change—not speaking ill of anyone today, not even your spouse in jest—is a start.
8. Society and churches run on both money and volunteers. Generosity is a virtue but it's possible to become a missing spouse to a "good cause." Are you spending enough or too much time volunteering? For an honest answer, ask your spouse to answer for you. Can you try joint volunteer

projects:

9. Self-nurturing hobbies are healthy but can bleed into selfishness when *my* needs become more important than those of my spouse. Do I put any deeply held values like faith, fidelity, or family responsibilities at risk to pursue recreation? Do I need to negotiate limits?

The dance of marriage

10. Who married you? *"It is the spouses who give their consent to each other by a solemn promise...As baptized Christians, they are ministers of the sacrament of matrimony in the church."* (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 1981) Resolve to be a worthy minister to your spouse today.

11. Marriage is like a dance in which there is leading and following. Although roles can reverse, both partners have to be sensitive to the signals of the other and balance their own needs with those of their partner. Are you more of a leader or a follower? Balance and swing!

12. *"A psychiatrist asks a lot of expensive questions your wife asks for nothing."* (Joey Adams) As annoying as a challenging question from a spouse can be, it might lead to a deep truth or understanding.