

L Love
in Action

Loving our Families

First Time For Everything Date

Words
To
Grow On



For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.
-2 Timothy 1:7

You don't have to have money to keep romance alive in a marriage. But you do have to be thoughtful.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, spend some time in prayer together. Thank God for the variety of people and situations He's put in your path. Thank Him for His blessings and mercies, which are new every morning. In the spirit of this date theme, ask Him to: »show you areas of your life in which you're in danger of falling into a rut;
»give you the creativity and courage to try new things to escape or avoid a rut;
»help you keep your relationship fresh and exciting;
»help you maintain an adventurous spirit in your Christian walk.

Dig Deep The Christian life is all about newness and freshness. The Bible tells us "that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The last thing a new person needs is to get stuck in an old rut. If you want to be inspired to live more adventurously, read the following scripture passages:

»Psalm 92:12-14

»Luke 5:36-39

»Lamentations 3:22-23

»Colossians 3:10

Set the Scene God created us with a capacity to enjoy a wide variety of experiences. Too often, though, we limit ourselves by "sticking to what we know." We hang out in the places where we feel most comfortable - with the people who make us feel comfortable. We talk about the things we know. We wear a groove in our comfort zone that over time becomes a rut. If that sounds familiar to you, then this is where you reverse the trend and pull out of that rut. On this date, nothing will feel familiar or comfortable because everything you do will be a first for you.

Make it Happen The best way to approach this date is to consider your natural instincts - and then do the opposite. Here are some things you'll need to think about.

1. Change your venue.

Find a nearby town or an area of the city that neither of you has ever stepped foot in. Start your date there.

2. Expand your palate.

What's the most eclectic (yet affordable) restaurant in the area? What's the strangest thing on its menu? Start your ordering there. From appetizers to desserts. The only rule is this: don't eat anything that's crossed your palate before.

3. Explore a new form of entertainment.

Ever been to a jazz club? A Roller Derby match? Open mic night at a comedy club? A high school play? A patch of ground just beyond the airport runway where you can sit and watch planes take off and land?

4. Keep the conversation fresh.

If most of your date-night conversations involve your jobs or the kids, this is the night to declare those topics off-limits. Anything you've never discussed before is fair game.

Finish Strong Before you end your First Time for Everything Date, spend a few minutes talking about the experience and what you'll take away from it. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»What was the best part of the date?

»Was your conversation better, or just different, because you avoided your regular conversation topics?

»Would you want to do a First Time for Everything Date again sometime, or was this one time enough?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is receiving gifts, this would be a great date to surprise the person you love the most with something truly unique. It doesn't have to be expensive or even necessarily useful. Just make sure it's something different from any other gift they have ever received.

The Get Lost Date

Words
to
Grow On



I can never
escape from
your Spirit! I
can never
get away
from your
presence!
-Psalm 139:7

At the end of time, when all
history culminates in the final
pages of the Bible, what will
we find God doing?
Spending time with His
children. Making His home
with them. Being together.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, read David's words in Psalm 139:7 aloud together: "I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!" Spend some time in prayer, thanking God that what was true for David is true for you, too. Ask God to:

- »give you safe travels to and from your destination;
- »bless your efforts to bond with each other;
- »help you develop a deeper appreciation for His continuous presence.

Dig Deep Want to check out some more passages that talk about God's continuous presence in the lives of those who serve Him? Try these:

»Exodus 33:14

»Psalm 16:11

»Psalm 140:13

»Joshua 1:9

»Psalm 51:11

Set the Scene Celebrate God's constant presence with an unusual day out. We call it the "Get Lost Date," but it's really more of a "Random Destination Date." Rather than heading for a familiar restaurant, coffee shop, or park, take a road less traveled toward a destination you know nothing about. Select a route on a whim, and make an adventure of getting "lost" together. As you make your way toward an unfamiliar destination, celebrate God's nearness.

Make it Happen Giving someone instructions on how to get lost seems like an oxymoron. Yet the more creativity you put into the date, the more you'll both enjoy it. One option is to print out a map of your state (or of your country, if you'd prefer to stay closer to home). Close your eyes and mark a point on the map with a pencil. Make that your destination.

Another option is to make up a set of random directions. When you hit the road, try to follow the directions as closely as you can. See where you end up.

Once you reach your destination, explore the surroundings. Walk around. Take in the sights. If you're in a populated area, interact with the locals. See if you can learn something new. Obviously we can't recommend something as radical as getting lost without following up with some obligatory safety precautions.

»Follow the spirit - but not necessarily the letter - of the rules. If your first coordinates lead you to some risky terrain or a dangerous area, alter them. Trust your instincts. If a place doesn't feel right, go somewhere else.

»Make sure your car is up to the task. Check your gas, tires, and fluids before you get lost. If weather conditions are bad, save this idea for another day.

»Pack a first-aid kit along with an ample supply of food, water, and blankets.

Finish Strong Before you end your First Time for Everything Date, spend a few minutes talking about the experience and what you'll take away from it. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»Were you fearful or apprehensive at all during this date? If so, how did it feel knowing we were together? How does it feel knowing God is always with us?

»Was there anything that surprised you during this date?

»Was there an interesting person we met today who you'll always remember?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is quality time, make sure your excursion is filled with it. Share with each other times when you felt lost—physically, spiritually, or emotionally. What were the triggers? How did you deal with your feelings? How did the people around you react? How did God make His presence felt during that time? What did you take away from the experience?

The Sunrise Date

Words
to
Grow On



The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.
-Lamentations 3:22–23

I am amazed by how many individuals mess up every new day with yesterday.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your Sunrise Date, spend some time in prayer as a couple. Thank God for the coming new day—and for His mercies and blessings that will come with it. Thank Him for letting you greet the new day with your amazing friend. Ask Him to: »bless your early-morning time together; »help you recognize His mercies and blessings throughout the day; »help you help others recognize and appreciate the opportunities that a new day brings.

Dig Deep If you'd like to read more passages that fit the theme of the Sunrise Date, try these:

»Judges 21:4

»Psalm 118:24

»Luke 1:78

»Malachi 1:11

»Mark 1:35

Set the Scene You don't have to be a morning person to appreciate the beauty and significance of a sunrise. Every dawn brings with it a fresh supply of mercies and blessings from God. On this Sunrise Date, you and your spouse will be witnesses to the new day as it breaks. You'll greet the arrival of dawn, marvel at God's astonishing creation, celebrate His goodness in providing a new day, and enjoy each other's company in a romantic setting.

Mind Your Language If your significant other's primary love language is gifts, create a memento of your Sunrise Date. As dawn is breaking, take a picture together with the sunrise clearly visible behind you. Print the photo, find the perfect frame for it, and present it to your date, along with a note that says something like, "The sunrise is only the second most amazing thing in this photo. Thank you for greeting a new day with me."

Make it Happen Granted, all you really need for this date is the largest object in the solar system. But if you want to make the date truly memorable, there are a few things you can do.

- »Scout locations for the best vista you can find. If you're a morning person, check out a few sunrises by yourself in advance of your date. Try to find the best location in your area to view the sunrise. For example, you might look for a nature setting that offers an unobstructed view of the eastern horizon.
- »Know your meteorology. You can find the times for sunrise and sunset at most weather-forecasting sites. (Or, if you're seriously old school, you can consult your personal copy of *The Farmer's Almanac*.) Once you know the time of the sunrise, you can plan your date accordingly.
- »Adjust your sleep schedule. Make sure you both get plenty of rest the night before your Sunrise Date. This is especially important if one (or both) of you is not a morning person. The last thing you want to do is arrive tired and cranky for your date.
- »Don't show up empty-handed. Bring along some coffee and doughnuts, coffee and bagels and cream cheese, coffee and pastries, coffee, or perhaps your favorite fast-food breakfast sandwiches. Just don't forget the coffee. For maximum effect, pack a basket (complete with plates, napkins, utensils, and anything else you might need) and enjoy a picnic breakfast together while you watch the sun rise.
- »Approach the date with a Psalm 118:24 attitude. The verse says, *"This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it."* Reflect that spirit in your interaction with each other. Talk about the sacredness of the new day - and how you can show your joy and gladness for it.

Finish Strong Before you end your Sunrise Date, spend a few minutes talking with each other about the experience and what you'll take away from it. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion.

- »Why is it so easy to lose sight of the potential that every new day brings?
- »What does God want us to do with this day?
- »How can we help each other maintain a Psalm 118:24 attitude? sometime, or was this one time enough?

The Water Date

Words
to
Grow On



But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.

-John 4:14

If you are thirsty for a glass of water, and [someone] offers you a seat to rest upon - it's nice, but it doesn't quench your thirst. Similarly, acts of encouragement or demonstrations of appreciation in ways that are not meaningful to a [person] may be appreciated as a nice gesture, but one's deeper need for appreciation remains unmet. -Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your Water Date, spend some time in prayer as a couple. Praise God for the beauty of His creation, especially as it pertains to water. Thank Him for the role water plays in our daily lives. Ask God to: »keep you safe during your Water Date; »bless your time together so that you will bring honor to Him; »help you develop a renewed appreciation for the living water Jesus offers.

Dig Deep The Bible contains several passages that talk about water. Here's a small sampling:

»Exodus 14:21-22

»Psalm 23:1-2

»Isaiah 43:2

»John 3:5

»Revelation 22:1

Set the Scene Water plays a key role in Scripture - as the focus of Days 2 and 3 of creation (Genesis 1:6-13), as the means by which God destroyed almost all life on the planet (Genesis 7:1-24), as the route of escape for the Israelites leaving Egypt (Exodus 14:15-28), as a platform for Jesus' miracles (Matthew 8:23-27; 14:22-33), and as the method of baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). Jesus even referred to Himself as the source of living water (John 7:37-38). Why not make water the key element of a special date? You can enjoy the pleasure of God's liquid creation while you talk about how God has used water in His dealings with people.

Make it Happen Water covers more than 70 percent of the planet. Unless you're a desert nomad, you likely have access to a body of water, even if it's just a pond or a creek. Obviously, the kind of date you plan and prepare for will depend on the type of water available to you. If you live near an ocean, pack for a day at the beach. Bring reading material, comfortable chairs, shovels and pails for building sand castles, and the right footwear for a nice long walk on the beach. If you live near a river, lake, or reservoir, you might pack fishing equipment or a picnic lunch. If you live near a pond or small creek, you might plan for a hike or nature walk - anything that puts you near the water. Along with your physical preparation, you'll need to do some biblical preparation. During your date, you'll want to steer your conversation toward stories in the Bible that feature water. In order to do that naturally, you'll need to familiarize yourself with those stories. Several examples (and their corresponding passages) are listed in the "Set the Scene" section, including:

»Creation »The Flood »The Israelites Crossing the Red Sea
»Jesus Calming the Storm at Sea »Jesus Walking on the Surface of the Water »Jesus' Baptism

Talk about how you picture those incidents and what it must have been like to witness them. Let your date be filled with a sense of awe and amazement at God's might.

Finish Strong Before you end your Water Date, spend a few minutes talking about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

- »Why is water such an amazing part of God's creation?
- »What does water tell us about God?
- »What difference is Jesus' living water making in our lives?
- »How can we use the memories of this date - and our discussion of God's might - the next time we face a crisis?

Mind Your Language If your significant other's primary language is not English, make sure you pack two separate bags for the trip - one for you and one for your date. Do your best to think of all the things you both could possibly need for your Water Date: a change of clothes, a favorite fishing hat, or snacks.

The Double Date

Words
to
Grow On



Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."
-1 Corinthians 15:33

Intimacy is the word used to describe a close relationship. Intimacy is also one of our deepest emotional needs. It is the language of friendship.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your Double Date, spend some time in prayer together. Start by praising God for bringing people into your lives who genuinely care about you. Thank Him for the opportunity to go out with your friends. Ask Him to »help you steer the conversation in a way that pleases Him; »strike a good balance between listening and talking; »deal patiently with the other couple's petty annoyances and idiosyncrasies - and help them patiently deal with yours.

Dig Deep The following passages shed light on the importance of maintaining friendships.

»Proverbs 12:26

»Proverbs 13:20

»Proverbs 22:24-25

»Luke 6:31

»Romans 12:10

Set the Scene Spending time with good friends - reliving past glories, sharing jokes, talking about anything and everything - is one of life's greatest pleasures. Incorporating those friendships into your marriage, though, can be a tricky proposition. Many couples opt for the individual route. She hangs with her friends; he hangs with his. But there's a better option. Wise couples learn to build friendships together with other couples. One of the best ways to do that is by double dating. Friendships are built in a relaxed, casual atmosphere - free from distractions and interruptions. A double date can provide just such an atmosphere.

Mind Your Language If your significant other's primary love language is words of affirmation, look for opportunities during your Double Date to sing their praises. For example, if the conversation leads to how marriage or dating has changed you, you could talk about how your sweetheart has helped you »slow down; »look at things from a different perspective; »laugh more; feel good about yourself.

Make it Happen If you've already thought of a couple you'd like to spend some time with, take the initiative by inviting them out. If not, brainstorm some potential candidates at church, at work, in the neighborhood, or elsewhere. Obviously the details of your evening will vary according to your interests and the options available to you. Here are some tips that can tilt the odds of enjoying a memorable Double Date in your favor.

1. **Do a little preparation.** Before your date, talk about the couple you'll be going out with. Share what you know about their family, careers, background, interests, and hobbies. Look for common ground to build on. Identify potential conversation starters - as well as topics to avoid. A little preparation can go a long way toward reducing awkward silences.

2. **Avoid controversial topics.** You know how it is. One statement can ignite a debate that torches your entire evening. Some people are extremely passionate about their beliefs - and vehement about defending them. Among longtime friends, that's not necessarily a problem. Over time, you learn how to agree to disagree - or how to defuse a tense situation with a joke. With people you don't know well, you may not have those options. Your best bet then is to avoid hot-button topics - at least until you get to know each other better.

3. **Avoid pairing off.** Keep in mind that a double date isn't the time for "girl talk" or "guy talk." For one thing, one of you may not be as comfortable as the other with the person he or she is paired with, which may lead to awkwardness and annoyance. For another, a double date is a time for you both, as a couple, to form friendships together. As much as possible, make sure your conversations are group efforts.

4. **Don't forget your date.** A double date is still a date. The fact that other people are with you shouldn't change anything between you and your honey. Show your partner the love, affection, attention, and respect you would show if it were just the two of you.

Finish Strong After your Double Date, when you're alone, talk about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»What can we tell about the other couple, based on our time together?

»What can they tell about us?

»Could they see Christ in us? If so, how?

The Picnic Date

*Words
To
Grow On*



But Jesus often
withdrew to
the wilderness
for prayer.
-Luke 5:16

Finding a time and a
place may be difficult in
our fast-paced world,
but the heart that
longs for God will make
time for Him.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before you dig into your picnic food, spend some time in prayer together. Thank God for: »His provisions; »the beauty of His creation; »the opportunity to enjoy time with each other in a relaxed setting. Ask God to bless your time and help you both come away from your Picnic Date with recharged batteries and a renewed appreciation for His creation.

Dig Deep Here are some additional passages you can use for your Picnic Date.

»Mark 1:12–13

»Mark 1:35

»Luke 5:16

»Luke 6:12–13

»Luke 11:1–2

Set the Scene Forget the clichés you've seen in movies or cartoons. This Picnic Date is about more than eating baked beans and potato salad from flimsy paper plates. The Picnic Date is about getting away from the noisy interruptions of everyday life and retreating to a place of quiet solitude. It's about following Jesus' example. Jesus regularly retreated to a quiet place to pray (see the passages in "Dig Deep"). The solitude refreshed and recharged Him. Imagine what a quiet retreat could do for you and your significant other.

Make it Happen A well-packed basket can mean the difference between a good Picnic Date and a great one. Toward that end, this date would be the perfect time to remember some of each other's favorite food and drink items - even the ones that may have been mentioned only once or twice. When you unpack a can of his favorite (hard-to-find) peach soda, you'll set an ideal tone for the date. Make sure you cover other bases as well. Did you pack the necessary condiments? How about plates, utensils, and napkins? Mosquito spray? The more contingencies you plan for, the better your chances of success. Look for a picnic site that's fairly isolated - a place that will help you feel removed from the pressures and distractions of everyday life. Spend time communing with God and each other in nature. Observe and interact with your surroundings. Depending on the location and time of year, you might: »observe an anthill. It's a picnic; there have to be ants nearby. Watch them go about their business; »take up birdwatching. Bring two sets of binoculars and see how many different varieties of birds you can spot (or hear); »collect leaves. Bring along a guidebook from the library on trees and leaves and see how many different types you can identify. As part of your effort to disconnect from the demands and diversions of everyday life, declare certain topics off-limits. Instead, focus on the sights all around you. Talk about the everyday wonders of creation - the seemingly unimportant things that get overlooked amid the seemingly important things in life.

Finish Strong After the picnic, spend a little time talking about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»Why is quiet and solitude important in our Christian walk?

»Why is it important in our relationship?

»What are we willing to sacrifice in order to spend more time together in quiet, secluded settings?

Mind Your Language If you're married and your spouse's primary love language is Physical Touch, look for opportunities to make meaningful contact throughout your Picnic Date. For example: »Sit back against a tree; invite your spouse to sit next to you and put her head on your shoulder. Gently stroke her hair while you enjoy the beauty of God's creation together. »Ask him to give you a piggyback ride across a shallow stream. »Take a hike hand in hand. Better yet, do all of the above. Make sure your significant other returns from your date reenergized, recharged, and with a full love tank.

The Jigsaw Puzzle Date

Words To Grow On



How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!
-Psalm 147:5

Quality time does not mean we must spend our moments gazing into each other's eyes. It may mean doing something together that we both enjoy. The particular activity is secondary, only a means to creating the sense of togetherness. The important thing is not the activity itself but the emotions that are created between both.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your Jigsaw Puzzle Date, spend some time in prayer together. Married couples can thank God for combining the individual pieces of your two lives and joining them together to create a unified whole. Ask Him to help you:
»come up with some memorably effective discussion starters;
»guide your conversation so you'll be able to learn more about each other;
»work as a team toward a common goal: completing the puzzle.

Dig Deep Want to check out some more passages that talk about God's ability to see the "big picture"? Try these:
»1 Samuel 2:3 »Job 28:24 »Job 37:16
»Isaiah 55:9 »1 John 3:19-20

Set the Scene The words Jigsaw Puzzle Date by themselves may not conjure up visions of romance and excitement. But when you add words like "next to a warm fireplace" or "with your favorite romantic music playing in the background," the possibilities become a little clearer. Piecing together a jigsaw puzzle lends itself both to engaging conversations and comfortable silences. If you come prepared with a few discussion-starter ideas, you may be surprised where your conversation takes you.

Make it Happen The more effort you put into your Jigsaw Puzzle Date, the more you and your significant other will get out of it. Here are a few tips to consider:

- 1. Create a great atmosphere.** Whether it's a snowy evening by the fire or a summer weekend afternoon, try to set the mood by having your favorite romantic music playing in the background. Plan some yummy snacks to help put your date over the top.
- 2. Learn from each other as you work together.** Do you have differing methods for working puzzles? If so, talk about them. Does your puzzle-working style reveal something about you - say, that you have a strong preference for organization and orderliness? Talk about that, too. See how much you can learn about each other before the puzzle is done.
- 3. Be prepared to keep the conversation flowing.** Before the date, brainstorm a few topics or questions you can use as needed to guide your conversation. For example, you might ask, "Was there ever a time when you felt that your life was in pieces - and that you couldn't see the big picture to put things back together again?" Be prepared with your own example to break the ice. That might encourage your significant other to share more freely. If you need to use note cards as prompts, don't be embarrassed. Your date will be flattered that you put such effort into the evening.
- 4. Don't let the puzzle get in the way of a good evening.** There's no dating law that says you have to finish the puzzle. If the conversation gets good, or if you're married and the romantic fireside setting gets the best of you both, don't hesitate to abandon the puzzle.

Finish Strong Before you end your Jigsaw Puzzle Date, spend a few minutes talking about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

- »What are some of the "puzzle pieces" each of us brought to our relationship? ("Puzzle pieces" may include skills, expectations, needs, and various forms of personal baggage.)
- »What's been the biggest challenge in making those pieces fit together?
- »How does it make you feel to know that God sees the completed picture of our relationship and knows exactly how our pieces fit together?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is receiving gifts, create a customized puzzle - using their favorite picture of the two of you - for your date. After you complete the puzzle, glue the pieces together and find a suitable frame for the picture. Your significant other will have a memento of your Jigsaw Puzzle Date to display.

The Candlelight Date

Words To Grow On



There are three things that amaze me - no, four things that I don't understand: how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman.
-Proverbs 30:18-19

Because it is God's best for you, the journey toward intimacy is well worth the commitment.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, spend some time in prayer as a couple. Thank God for the arc of your relationship - how He has allowed it to deepen over time. Thank Him that you're able to share romance and intimacy with each other. Ask God to help you: »set and maintain the proper mood for your Candlelight Date; »eliminate distractions for the duration of your date; »find the right words to express yourself to each other in a meaningful way.

Dig Deep Here are some additional passages you can use for your Candlelight Date.
»Proverbs 5:19 »Song of Songs 1:2 »Song of Songs 4:10
»Song of Songs 8:7 »Ephesians 5:25

Set the Scene Romance comes easily to couples in the early stages of a relationship. They think nothing of professing their love in the purplest of prose or planning elaborate gestures to convey their feelings. As relationships mature, however, the business of planning a life together takes center stage. Romance often becomes a relic of the past - a luxury for people with more time on their hands and fewer things competing for their attention. Romance ends up a casualty of "real-life practicalities." The Candlelight Date offers you a chance to reclaim romance in your relationship. The candlelight itself is key, because it physically and symbolically illuminates only the two of you; everything else is left in darkness for the duration of your date.

Make it Happen Candlelight is an absolute essential for this date. Its symbolic and mood-setting elements are key. Beyond that, though, everything is negotiable. What do you want to do during your Candlelight Date? »Eating dinner is an obvious option - but not just any dinner will do. Think romance. What are the most romantic meal ideas you can come up with - or find online? You can embrace romantic clichés, or you can transcend them. Either way, you'll need to do careful advance planning to make sure you have every base covered. »Beyond the meal, you'll need to consider your attire for the date - and then pull out all the stops. The sport jacket and tie that she said you looked so handsome in? Put 'em on. The dress that makes you feel self-conscious but makes his eyes pop out? Perfect for this occasion. »Your topics of conversation should continue the romantic vibe. If you're married or engaged, share about the first time you realized your spouse was "the one." Talk about your honeymoon. At some point during your date, talk about the candlelight. If the light represents Christ, how can you make sure you stay close to it, as individuals and as a couple? What happens if you get too far away from it? How can you figuratively take that light with you wherever you go?

Finish Strong After your Candlelight Date, spend a little time talking about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

- »What are some specific things we can do to keep romance alive in our relationship - even in the grind of everyday life?
- »What are some specific things we can do to keep Christ's light at the center of our relationship?
- »What are some specific things we can do to take the light to others?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is words of affirmation, you can send the romance level of your date through the roof with a carefully worded greeting card. If you find one that says absolutely everything you want to say to your significant other, get it. If not, buy a blank card and write your own romantic message. Don't be shy. Don't be self-conscious. Tell your date what you love about them and how they make you feel - something that will make your date smile. Send a message your loved one will go over and over again, whenever they need a pick-me-up.

The Culinary Date

Words
to
Grow On



A bowl of vegetables with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate.

-Proverbs 15:17

Divorce is the result of a lack of preparation for marriage and the failure to learn the skills of working together as teammates in an intimate relationship.

-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your Culinary Date, spend some time in prayer together. Thank God for the abundance of His blessings. Thank Him for supplying your needs every day. Ask Him to help you:

- »maintain a spirit of gratitude for what you've been given and what you have access to;
- »bless and watch over those who don't know where their next meal is coming from;
- »bless your efforts to work as a team - during the Culinary Date and beyond.

Dig Deep Here are a few more Bible passages that fit the food and teamwork themes of the Culinary Date.

»Psalm 104:14-15

»Proverbs 27:17

»Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

»Isaiah 1:19

»1 Corinthians 12:20-25

Set the Scene If you are both foodies, you likely won't need much prompting to give the Culinary Date a shot. If, however, one of you is a stranger to the kitchen, you may be a little reluctant. In that case, whoever is more experienced may need to serve as a mentor of sorts to the other. As long as that mentoring is given and received with a good attitude, you shouldn't have a problem. You'll find that cooking together involves no small amount of cooperation and teamwork. The Culinary Date should give you a pretty good idea of how well the two of you work together.

Make it Happen You can take your Culinary Date in one of a couple different directions. The first option is to prepare and enjoy a meal together. Obviously, the meal should require a little more effort than opening a jar of tomato sauce and a box of angel hair pasta. Beyond that, though, you can decide how complicated or time intensive you want your meal preparation to be. After you've decided on a menu lineup - appetizers, main dish, side dishes, and dessert - come up with a plan of attack. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

1. **Do the shopping together.** There will be no solo ventures where this meal is concerned. Every step along the way should be taken together. That means a joint trip to the grocery store to get everything you'll need.

2. **Work as a team until the job is done.** This is not a place for the more kitchen-savvy of the two of you to do all the substantial work while the other person is relegated to table-setting duty. Both of you should be equally responsible for the meal's success. That may require more than a dollop of patience and cooperation, but since when are those bad things?

3. **Do the cleanup work together.** Remember, the date doesn't end when the food is consumed. Cleanup time is a great time for conversation. For example, you might talk about how your relationship - and, if you're married, your household—would be affected if you started doing more daily tasks together. Your second option is to enroll in a one-day cooking class together. You can find information online regarding classes that are offered in your area. Once you know your options, you can choose a class that looks interesting to both of you.

Finish Strong Before you end your Culinary Date, talk about the experience as a couple. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»What qualities did God see in us when He decided that we would make a good team? »What are some of the challenges we face when it comes to working together? »How could we put our teamwork to use in a volunteer ministry setting?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is acts of service, you can make a huge impression by preparing one special item just for your date. Choose one of your date's favorite dishes and locate the recipe. If it's a childhood favorite, you might check with his or her family to find the recipe. Don't change plans to cook the rest of the meal together, but consider preparing this dish ahead of time and bringing it out just before you sit down to eat your special meal.

The Apple Picking Date

*Words
To
Grow On*



Let each generation
tell its children of
your mighty acts;
let them proclaim
your power.
-Psalm 145:4

Taking advice
requires humility and
shows wisdom.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, spend some time in prayer with each other. Thank God for the plan in His Word that calls for one generation to mentor the next. Thank Him for the people who have served as mentors in your lives. Ask Him to:
»lead you to a couple who are willing and able to serve as mentors;
»bless your time together on your Apple-Picking Date;
»help you influence the lives of your mentors as much as they are influencing yours.

Dig Deep Want to check out some more passages that talk about the importance of mentoring? Try these:
»Psalm 71:18 »Proverbs 27:17 »2 Timothy 2:2
»Titus 2:3-5 »1 Peter 5:1-5

Set the Scene Apple-picking is a fine activity, but the real purpose of this date is to spend time with a couple who've been married for years - marriage mentors, if you will. If picking apples is something you'd all enjoy, head for your local orchard. If not, choose a different activity. As long as the four of you are able to spend time together in a relaxed setting, talking and getting to know each other, it doesn't really matter what you do. Spending the day with the right couple can have a remarkable effect on your relationship. You may discover that the quirks of your relationship are not quite as unique as you thought - or that the problems that seem insurmountable now can, in fact, be overcome. The ideal mentoring couple will help you learn from their successes as well as their failures.

Make it Happen If apple-picking is what you choose to do, you'll need to find the closest orchard and get all the information you need to plan your date. And then you'll need to focus on the important stuff. **1. Find the right mentors.** This is the key to the whole endeavor. The right mentors could make a real difference in your lives. The wrong ones could make for a very long day at the orchard. Choose wisely - and with a lot of prayer. The obvious place to start your search is at church. You're looking for a spiritually mature couple who have been married much longer than you have. They may not necessarily view themselves as mentors, but they have enough life experience to have amassed some wisdom along the way. If their personalities mesh with yours, all the better. If you know such a couple, approach them with the idea of an "Apple-Picking Date" (or whatever you choose to do) - that is, an opportunity for you to pick their brains and be mentored by them regarding marriage and family. If you don't know of such a couple, ask your pastor or a church leader for input. **2. Brainstorm some questions ahead of time.** You don't want things to get awkward - or to be at a loss for conversation. So come up with a list of topics and issues that you'd like to get some input on. You might want to share your list with the mentoring couple before the date so they have a chance to prepare. **3. Keep things light.** Remember, it's a date, not a counseling session. Laugh. Have fun. Learn while you enjoy yourselves.

Finish Strong Before you end your Apple-Picking Date, spend a few minutes talking to your spouse about the experience - and what you'll take away from it. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

»Why is it important for us to learn from other people's God-given wisdom?

»What's the most important lesson we'll take away from this date?

»How can we serve as mentors to others?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary language is words of affirmation, be sure to talk your date up every opportunity you get during your Apple-Picking Date. Share some of the qualities and gifts your date brings to your relationship. Talk about what you've learned from him or her and how it's influenced your life. Without overdoing it, you want to make sure your loved one comes away from your Apple-Picking Date feeling affirmed and loved.

The Hiking Date

*Words
to
Grow On*



Trust in the Lord
with all your heart;
do not depend on
your own
understanding.
Seek his will in all
you do, and he will
show you which
path to take. "
-Proverbs 3:5-6

Scripture calls us to
live righteously by
choosing the right
path, and obeying the
rules of God, because
we believe they are
designed for our well
being. When we walk
in righteousness, we
experience peace.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, spend some time in prayer as a couple. Thank God for the beauty of His creation - and for the opportunity to enjoy it during your Hiking Date. Ask Him to:
»protect you during your hike and keep you safe from harm;
»open your eyes to aspects of His creation that you've never noticed before;
»guide your discussion with each other in a way that you both come away from the date with a deeper appreciation of nature - and a deeper appreciation of your life journey together.

Dig Deep You can find dozens of Bible passages that fit the theme of this date verses that talk about walking with the Lord, keeping your paths straight, enjoying God's creation, and more. Here are a few to get you started:
»Deuteronomy 5:33 »Psalm 119:105 »Psalm 119:133
»2 Corinthians 5:7 »Ephesians 2:10

Set the Scene Like many other dates in this book, the Hiking Date can have bigger implications than its title or description indicates. On one level, you can enjoy some time together in an outdoor setting. You can admire the scenery. You can get a good work-out. You can explore places you've never been before. On another level, you can use the elements of this date as a jumping-off point for an interesting discussion about your relationship - one that perhaps will open a discussion of future hopes and dreams, or even shift the direction of your relationship.

Make it Happen Planning your Hiking Date should be easy. Here are a few tips to get you started and on your way. »Choose a good spot. Make sure the area you choose allows hikers. Getting arrested for trespassing would put a serious crimp in your hiking plans! Make sure the trail and terrain are suitable for you and your significant other's skill, health, and activity levels. »Think in terms of destination. Is there a place either of you has wanted to see? Is there a mountain you want to climb or a park or lake you want to visit? If so, plan your hike with that destination in mind. »Watch the forecast. If the weather looks iffy, make sure you have a backup plan. Don't try to press on in unfavorable conditions. »Pack well. Each of you will need hiking shoes, two pairs of thick socks, a hat, weather-appropriate clothing, a flashlight, a full water bottle or two, a compass, a map of the area, first-aid supplies, plenty of food, and a sturdy backpack to hold it all. »Leave a trail of figurative breadcrumbs. Make sure more than one person (not including your date!) knows where you'll be hiking; what direction you'll be heading; what time you expect to return. If something were to happen, it's good to know that people know where to look for you.

Finish Strong Before you end your Hiking Date, spend a few minutes talking with each other about the experience. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:
»In hiking terms, what has our journey as a couple been like?
»Where have we gotten lost - or at least momentarily turned around - along the way?
»Where do you think God's path will ultimately lead us?

Mind Your Language If your date's primary love language is acts of service, you can fill his tank by preparing his backpack for him. The more "personal" touches you include in your act of service, the more meaningful your gesture will be. For example, don't just pack any water bottle; pack his favorite water bottle - the one with the logo of his beloved team on it or the one that came in the gift bag when he ran the half-marathon. When it comes to packing food, make sure some of her favorite snacks are represented.

The Playground Date

*Words
To
Grow On*



Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.
-Proverbs 22:6

Your childhood, pleasant or painful, is your childhood and stands as history.
-Gary Chapman

Take it to God Before your date, spend some time in prayer together. Thank God for the good memories you have from your childhood. Thank Him for bringing you through the rough patches to make you the person you are today. Ask God to help you: »recall memories, good and bad, of childhood; »give you the courage to be transparent about your childhood experiences; »help you both be able to comfort each other if your discussion stirs up unpleasant memories; »develop a deeper appreciation for Him - and for each other.

Dig Deep In addition to the words of Proverbs 22:6, the Bible has quite a bit to say about childhood and the transition to adulthood. Here are a few passages to start with:
»Deuteronomy 4:9 »Deuteronomy 6:6-9 »Proverbs 29:17
»Ephesians 6:4 »2 Timothy 3:14-15

Set the Scene The author of Proverbs 22:6 understood that our experiences in childhood often determine the way we turn out as adults. If you and your date want to understand each other better, find out more about your childhoods. What better way is there to do that than to spend some time together on a school playground? The playground setting may help spark memories - some good, some bad - that lead to potential clues about how you became the people you are today.

Make it Happen Uptight adults need not embark on this date. When you hit the playground, it's time to be a kid again. To help make that transition, bring along a basketball, a playground ball (for kickball, foursquare, dodgeball, or ball tag), a jump rope, sidewalk chalk, or any other recess accessory you can think of. And then ... do what kids do. Chase each other around the monkey bars. Race to the top of the jungle gym. See how long you can hold hands while swinging. And while you're doing those things, talk. Talk about your playground experiences as kids. Show each other where you would have been found during recess at your school. »Would you have been in the middle of an irrationally competitive kickball game, arguing every call that didn't go your way? »Would you have been trying your best to look good, look cool, or be seen with the right people? »Would you have been jumping off the swings from dangerous heights? »Would you have been enduring the embarrassment of being chosen nearly last for football teams, just for the chance to play? »Would you have been walking around by yourself or with a friend? »Would you have been the one bullied or the one who was bullying others? A little transparency on your part will go a long way toward helping your date understand you better. Make sure to encourage openness and transparency by showing genuine interest in what your loved one says, withholding judgment about any less-than-flattering things that are revealed.

Finish Strong Before you end your Playground Date, spend a few minutes talking about the experience and what you'll take away from it. Use the following questions as needed to guide your discussion:

- »Did the memories that were stirred up from your childhood bring you comfort or pain?
- »If they were painful, how can I help you move toward healing?
- »How can we continue to remind each other that we are children of God who are intentionally created and very loved?

Mind Your Language How many childhood romances began at recess? Many people had their first kiss on a school playground. If your date's primary love language is physical touch, look for a way to re-create that adolescent rite of passage - this time with considerably more experience, considerably less self-consciousness, and, most importantly, no braces to worry about. If there are other people around, look for little nooks and secluded areas where you can steal a kiss or two.

L Love

Languages



Love Language: Physical Touch

⌘ When you communicate with them use non-verbal use of body language and touch to show love.

⌘ Some actions that will express your love to them in their love language would be hugs, kisses, and cuddling.



Love Language: Receiving Gifts

- ⌘ When you communicate with them make sure you are making your spouse a priority.
- ⌘ An action that will express your love to them in their love language would be to give thoughtful gifts and gestures. Also, express gratitude when receiving gifts.



Love Language: Quality Time

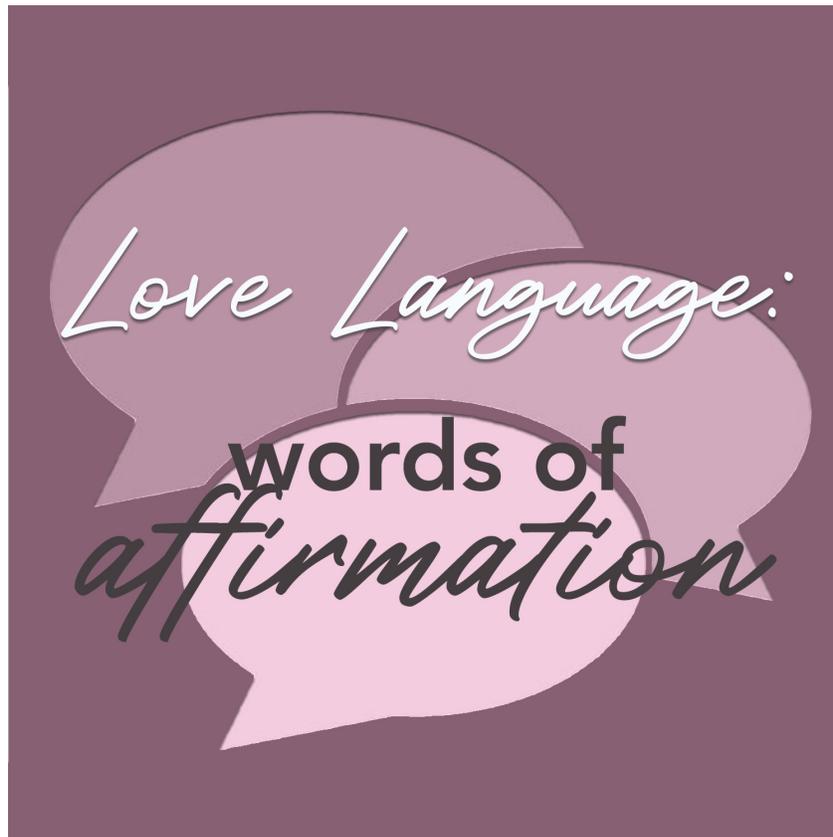
⌘ When you communicate with them make sure you find some time that is uninterrupted and have focused conversations. Remember one on one time is important.

⌘ An action that will express your love to them in their love language would be to create special moments with them. You can take walks and do small things with them. It doesn't have to be big!



Love Language: Acts of Service

- ⌘ When you communicate with them make sure you let them know you are wanting to help them do things. Lightening their load is important.
- ⌘ An action that will express your love to them in their love language would be to make them breakfast or dinner. You can go out of your way to help with chores.



Love Language: Words of Affirmation

- ⌘ When you communicate with them encourage them, affirm them, and appreciate and listen actively.
- ⌘ An action that will express your love to them in their love language would be to send them an unexpected note, text or card.