

MARRIAGE

SUMMER REFRESH

DATE

Even well into the years of marriage, 'dating' is essential. We mostly think of 'going on a date' as something you do when getting to know the other person before making a lifelong commitment. But spending time together, just the two of you is a foundation stone essential to the health and strength of your marriage relationship. And a date is simply spending intentional, 1:1 time together. So dating is forever!

Dates can look very different. They change from season to season and from couple to couple. You can go out or stay home, spend money or spend nothing, eat together or do an activity. There is no formula for a successful or fulfilling date. It will be unique to the two of you as you find places and activities that fill your tank and replenish your oneness.

A fun date to do occasionally is to use an intentional conversational starter or list of questions or prompts to get you talking about something specific or out of the ordinary. This summer, book a date for a coffee shop or a picnic in the park and try these, or you can find many other prompts online.

- The most challenging part of my morning is ...
- The best part of my morning is ...
- The most challenging part of my day (at home or work) is ...
- The best part of my day (at home or work) is ...
- The most challenging part of my night is ...
- The best part of my night is ...

GRATITUDE

You may have heard the saying 'vision leaks'. I actually think humans leak in general. And one of the first things to disappear from our minds is how much we are appreciated. We need constant reminding because, after all, we have an enemy who prowls around and takes cheap shots at dragging us down and diminishing our value.

Take a moment to text or write a card to your spouse expressing gratitude for who they are and what they do. Here are a few words to get you started.

...I get so caught up with all the things I have to do that I forget how much you have to do and be. Thank you for doing... Thank you for being...

PRAY

There is power in prayer. Time in prayer will cost you, but it is never time wasted.

How often do you pray for your marriage? For encouragement for your spouse? For your heart to increasingly reflect Jesus as a husband or wife?

If your answer is never, you can start today!

Pick a time of day that you already have a well-worn habit or regular activity. Do you pass the same landmark every day on your commute? Do you brush your teeth morning and night? Do you make a morning coffee or wind down with tea before bed?

Pick a regular time and commit to praying for your marriage, even just for one minute. This will be a transformational habit that you will celebrate in the year to come.

THE MIDDLE

'The Notebook', a 2004 movie directed by Nick Cassavetes tells the story of an elderly gentleman reading a notebook to an elderly woman with dementia. The notebook he is reading recounts their early days together as they fall in love. The movie's end (sorry for the spoiler if you haven't seen it!) shows the couple's final moments of life and they die in each other's arms, at peace and unified. Watching this, you are gripped with a sense that this is the kind of love you long for. This is what you hope your marriage will be. You see a relationship that starts with great fun and oodles of passion and ends with an unselfish and mature love.

But have you ever wondered why the writer only tells the two ends of this relationship? The honeymoon phase and the last days? Because in the middle, there is just life. Years upon years of the faithful every day.

Love can be easy at the beginning and the end. But it is in the long years in between that love is hard work and fought for. Love can be won or lost in these years.

You may be in the honeymoon phase right now. Enjoy it! These are some of the most golden years. Appreciate all that this phase brings and have fun. Or you may be in the middle right now. Building a career, raising a family, making countless decisions for your future and facing trials of many kinds. Rather than sighing and longing to be back a phase or two, lean in. Fine wine only has its reputation because the winemaker has the patience to let it mature.

Mature love, which is rich and sweet, can be around the corner. But it takes years of faithfulness and consistency to cultivate.

The middle can be wonderful. It feels ordinary, but God is at work. Take a moment to celebrate where you are now and what you are working towards.

FOR PARENTS

As part of The Street Church family, we have an opportunity to help each other enjoy some time alone together. Consider offering to take care of another couple's children to allow them to get out and about 'child free'.

It is a blessing to give the gift of time to another married couple. This gift strengthens the whole family!

You could also courageously ask others to take care of your children, so you can make time to intentionally invest in your marriage.

RHYTHMS

Every relationship has a rhythm, even for a couple who love spontaneity and freedom. There is something in familiarity that is both efficient as well as comforting. Your rhythm is a window into your values and what you believe is important. The easiest way to identify your rhythm is to look at your calendar and bank statement.

It is a healthy practice to reflect on this annually and to ask yourselves the question - Do our daily, seasonal and yearly rhythms paint a picture that reflects our values and what we hoped would be important?

You'll already know what you hope for in your marriage relationship and what you want your family to be. Taking a look into your rhythms helps you to see what you are doing to work towards this and what is missing. Regular evaluation means that you can tweak and adapt along the way. The aim is not to reach perfection but rather to use your rhythms to cultivate the marriage and family that you desire to build.