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52 creative ideas to
make your marriage fun



Little Book of
Great Dates

DR. GREG & ERIN SMALLEY







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ERIN SMALLEY



Little Book of Great Dates



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The Little Book of Great Dates

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Introduction



Think about some of those good times you and your spouse spent together prior to tying the knot. Can you remember the excitement? The sense of discovery? Can you recall what it felt like to learn about his or her favorite childhood memories? To talk about the experiences—both good and bad—that made each of you who you were at the time? To spend time laughing, talking, praying, and sharing your dreams, only to realize, at the end of the process, that you had fallen in love? What a magnificent experience!

“Yes, but that was then and this is now,” you might be saying. “We’re married! We don’t need to pursue each other anymore. It’s a done deal. We learned all we needed to learn about each other during the seasons of dating and engagement, and now it’s full steam ahead. We’re one flesh, baby! And besides, who has time to go gallivanting around town like a couple of college kids? There are more than

a few other things competing for our attention at the moment, not the least of which is raising our kids to respect God, and pursuing gainful employment, and . . .”

Unfortunately, that mind-set rarely leads to a happy marriage. And if we're honest, in God's design for marriage, couples aren't supposed to take a break from emotional intimacy. You may add new titles to your lives as the years go by—"parent," "manager," "homemaker," and so on. But through it all, you still retain the titles you were given by the pastor when you were first married: husband and wife! You have added additional titles and roles as the years have passed, but you still are, and always will remain, husband and wife.

RECLAIMING COUPLE TIME

Perhaps you've had two or three kids by now. You love them more than life itself. You wouldn't trade them for anything. And yet sometimes, you look back on your years of dating, both prior to and after marriage, and you wonder what happened. You miss hav-

ing “couple time”—the opportunity to relax, connect, and just focus on each other without distraction.

We know personally how difficult it is to make date nights a regular part of marriage. One time, I (Greg) was trying to get Erin out of the house for our date night. Our four-year-old daughter, Annie, didn't want Mommy to leave. She was crying and had literally wrapped her arms and legs around Erin's leg. I knew that I needed to quickly intervene, or we wouldn't be going out. But before I could say anything to Annie, our ten-year-old son, Garrison, jumped in.

“It's okay,” Garrison gently spoke to Annie. “We need to let Mom and Dad go out. This is how they keep their marriage strong.” Erin and I were flabbergasted. Annie released Erin and then asked Garrison, “But what do they do on their date?”

You could instantly tell that Annie had stumped him. He thought about it for a few seconds and then responded, “I'm really not sure. But I think that it ends in kissing.”

That's my boy!

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

The point of the previous story is that we've worked hard to teach our kids that Mom and Dad "must" spend time together without them to keep our marriage strong.

This is not to brag. It's only to say that it's hard—*incredibly* hard, sometimes—for us to make the time necessary to invest in our husband-wife relationship, with no distractions. The professional and ministerial work of studying marriage and helping others build stronger marriages doesn't leave us much room to invest quality time in our own! Yet we make it happen. And we firmly believe you should, too!

In our counseling experiences, we've seen too many couples who try to coast through the childrearing and career years without making time to deepen and nurture their own marriages. It's a recipe for disaster.

Those couples who don't date may achieve financial stability, and they might even successfully raise their kids and navigate them through school. But they reach the empty-nest years and realize that they're strangers living

under the same roof. By then, it's incredibly difficult to reverse the damage wrought by decades of essentially ignoring each other and clinging to the false assumption that they can pick up at fifty-five exactly where they left off at twenty-five.

DATE NIGHTS DONE RIGHT

We're not suggesting that simply cramming a date night into your already overcrowded schedule is going to prevent you from experiencing the unfortunate scenario we just described. But a commitment to date nights done right can definitely play a significant part in an overall plan to be *intentional* about investing in the health of your marriage.

Here are the five important dos and don'ts to keep in mind as you think about planning your dates together and endeavor to make them as fun, enjoyable, and meaningful as possible:

1. **Don't administrate your marriage**—Don't talk about finances, household responsibilities, child discipline issues, or other administrative aspects of your marriage

while on your date. The purpose of a date is to have fun and enjoy each other.

2. **Stay current**—Be curious about your spouse. Ask questions. Update your knowledge and deepen your understanding of each other.
3. **Try new and exciting activities**—Couples who engage in unique activities that they don't usually do experience an increase in marital satisfaction. New activities stimulate the same parts of the brain that were ignited when you were first dating and help recreate the chemical surges of early courtship.
4. **Reminisce**—Talking about special moments or memorable events allows you to celebrate how far you've come as a couple and renews hope as you anticipate future good times together.
5. **Select dating activities that communicate intimacy to both of you**—For men, intimacy is built on a shared activity; for women, a shared activity is a backdrop to deep conversation.

GO FORTH AND DATE

Now that you have the basics down of what makes a great date, the only thing left to do is go out and put them into practice! This little book will provide you with some very specific date ideas to take you through an entire year of dating—or more, depending on your dating frequency.

Keep in mind, this isn't the final word on marital dating. It's only a tool to motivate you and get you thinking about how to foster intimacy and connection in your marriage through regular, intentional dating. But it won't work unless you apply your own creativity and ideas to the dating process. Use your collective imaginations, but don't overthink or overcomplicate the process. As long as you're enjoying yourselves, connecting, and developing deeper intimacy, you're on the right track.

So without further ado, get ready to dive in and experience the Excitement of marital dating. It's fun, it's meaningful, and it has the potential to revolutionize your relationship! We wish you God's richest blessings as you embark on this journey together.



Now it's time to get down to brass tacks. You may appreciate knowing *why* marital dating is so important, but your primary interest is in *how* to make it happen.

You need ideas. You need inspiration. You came to the right place!

Each of the following dates will include some suggested activities as well as topics of conversation and questions for you to ask each other during the course of the date. Keep in mind that all of the activities, questions, and conversation topics are merely suggestions; they aren't hard-and-fast rules. We encourage you to think creatively and inject your own thoughts and ideas into your dates! The important thing is that your activities and discussions are consistently fun and interesting, allowing you to relax, enjoy each other's company, and connect.

Before every date, whether you're following one of the templates in this book or creating a date of your own, remember to always act as if you're trying to get a second date! Some-

times in marriage we forget that we need to pursue and woo our spouses. It doesn't matter whether you've been married for two weeks or twenty-five years, you still need to put your best foot forward when it comes to marital dating. So dress up a bit. Be polite and open doors. Compliment each other. Be affectionate, hold hands, cuddle, and steal kisses. And remember to protect your date night from conflict by cutting off any arguments and agreeing to talk about issues at a later time.

To make dating a habit—a regular event—we encourage you to commit to at least one date per month. Be sure to put your dates on the calendar so that you can schedule around them! If you're not intentional about setting aside the time, it likely won't happen. If your schedules and budget allow you to go on more than one date per month, so much the better.

I A N E W Y E A R ' S D A T E

*The object of a new year is not that
we should have a new year. It is that
we should have a new soul.*

—G. K. Chesterton

LET'S FACE IT, IN TODAY'S world the idea of New Year's resolutions is often met with a fair amount of cynicism. Resolutions were made to be broken, right? Whether it's losing weight or starting an exercise program or reading the Bible more, most people start with the best of intentions, only to discover by mid-February (if they even make it that long) that they've gotten completely off track.

But what if you could work on a resolution in partnership with someone else? That's the beauty of a marriage-related New Year's resolution! In resolving to invest in your marriage, to have a monthly date night, or to set other positive goals for your relationship, you automatically have someone in your corner who is pursuing the same goals and will encourage you in your resolution. Why? Because having a stronger marriage is something couples work on *together*. It's a resolution that can be accomplished only as a *team*.



ACTIVITY: *With the idea of new goals and new beginnings fresh in your minds, consider making this a morning date. Rather than going out for dinner, go out for breakfast and talk about setting positive goals for your marriage while you're both fresh and wide awake. If you're typically not a morning person, be sure breakfast is accompanied by lots of coffee or a similarly caffeinated beverage! If breakfast isn't your thing, think about doing another morning activity together, such as working out, playing racquetball, or going for a hike.*



QUESTIONS: *Either during your activity or afterward, discuss the following Questions: What are some positive goals we can set for our marriage over the next six months? The next year? How can we work together to achieve these goals? Is there a specific area you feel God wants us to work on together, as a team, to make our marriage the best it can be?*



2 W E ' R E A T E A M !

*Coming together is a beginning,
staying together is progress, and
working together is success.*

—Henry Ford

THE BEST TEAMS ARE PASSIONATE about their goals. If you're going to be part of a Super Bowl championship team, you need to do more than just wear the uniform. You need to be committed to your team's success. Individual players don't win games; *teams* win games. The same is true in marriage. Being married means doing more than just wearing a wedding ring. Rather, you wear the ring as a symbol of the commitment you made before God and humankind to be united. In every sense of the word, a husband and wife are a *team*.

The Bible reminds us that “the body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). And so it is with your marriage. Each of you brings your own personality, experiences, and viewpoints to the table, but at the end of the day, you work together as a single unit. That's the beauty of marital teamwork!



ACTIVITY: *Here's a chance to have some real fun working as a team! Think of some invigorating, team-based activities that you and your spouse can work on together. Although date night should typically be reserved for couple time, this might be an occasion to get some other friends involved. Here are just a few possibilities:*

- *Go to a karaoke club and sing a duet together. Wow the crowd as you belt out your favorite torch song!*
- *Take some ballroom dancing lessons, or if you'd rather just wing it, go find a place that offers ballroom dancing and cut a rug together.*
- *Host a game night with some other married couples. Rather than resorting to the typical guys-versus-gals model, play games in which each married couple works together as a team.*



QUESTIONS: *What are some famous teams you admire? (Note: We're not just talking sports teams here.) What about these famous teams is inspiring? What makes them work well together? What are some practical steps we can take to ensure that we're always working as a team?*



3 THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING MORE TO LEARN

The cure for boredom is curiosity.

There is no cure for curiosity.

—Dorothy Parker

THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW to learn about your spouse. Always. No matter how long you've been married, no matter how much you think you know about the person you married, you haven't even scratched the surface.

The goal in marriage, then, is not to learn everything there is to learn about your spouse. We've already established that it isn't possible. It's important, however, to continually be a *student* of your spouse. This is a lifelong process. You may never know everything there is to know, but it's important to update your knowledge at every opportunity. That same sense of discovery you had during your time of premarital dating is possible now. You just need to remain curious!



ACTIVITY: During this date, what you say—what you discuss—may be more important than the activity itself. So feel free to engage in a typical dating activity, such as going out for a nice dinner

or playing a round of miniature golf or just taking a romantic walk in the park.

On the other hand, you may consider creating an activity that stimulates your curiosity. For example, you could plan your date around the famous ice-breaker game Two Truths and a Lie. Each of you writes down three statements about yourself, two of which are true and one of which isn't. Then during your date, exchange your statements and see if your spouse can figure out which statement about you isn't true.

Of course, under normal circumstances we wouldn't advocate that you and your spouse lie to each other! If the thought of "lying" in this way, even in the name of good fun, is uncomfortable to you, simply create a quiz about yourself that your spouse can answer during the date. You'd be surprised how challenging such an activity can be, even with seemingly obvious questions like "What is my favorite food?" "What is my favorite movie?" or "What is my favorite color?" See how many questions your spouse can answer before he or she gets tripped up!



QUESTIONS: *After completing the Two Truths and a Lie game or taking your quiz, discuss the following Questions: What one thing did you learn about me tonight that you didn't know before? What are some practical steps we can take to stay current with each other? What does it mean for us to be students of each other?*

