

10 GREAT DATES

Connecting Faith, Love & Marriage

PETER & HEATHER
LARSON

AND

DAVID & CLAUDIA
ARP



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This book is written to create a legacy
of spiritual growth in marriages,
starting with our own families,
children, and grandchildren.

May God richly bless your lives and your marriage.

Other Resources from David & Claudia Arp

- 10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage*
(book/DVD curriculum)
- 10 Great Dates Before You Say “I Do”* (book/DVD curriculum)
- 10 Great Dates for Empty Nesters*
- 52 Fantastic Dates for You and Your Mate*
- The Second Half of Marriage* (book/DVD curriculum)
- Answering the 8 Cries of the Spirited Child*
- Empty Nesting* (with Scott Stanley, Howard Markman,
and Susan Blumberg)
- Loving Your Relatives*
- The Connected Family*
- Family Moments*
- Marriage Moments*
- No Time for Sex*
- Quiet Whispers from God’s Heart for Couples*
- Suddenly They’re 13!*
- PEP Groups for Parents* (DVD curriculum)

Other Resources from Peter & Heather Larson

- The Couple Checkup* (with David H. Olson and Amy Olson-Sigg)
- 10 Great Dates Before You Say “I Do”* (DVD curriculum)
- PREPARE to Last* (DVD curriculum with David
H. Olson and Jeff & Debbie McElroy)
- PREPARE/ENRICH: Customized Version*
(inventory/assessment with David H. Olson)
- Couple Checkup* (inventory/assessment with David H. Olson)

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Each Spouse

Welcome to Your Great Dates

Welcome to your own 10 Great Dates. For years we've been helping couples build their relationship through the habit of dating. Now we're adding a new dimension to our Great Dates. We want to introduce you to 10 Great Dates especially crafted to help you connect faith, love, and marriage in ways that result in a deeper spiritual connection—all in the fun, guilt-free, safe format of Great Dates.

If you are feeling a bit apprehensive or skeptical, that's okay. We understand. Perhaps you have tried unsuccessfully to connect spiritually. If so, you are not alone. Others have had similar experiences. We encourage you to relax. You can trust us. This unique approach to growing together spiritually will help you find that deeper spiritual connection you are longing for, and it can even help you overcome the “it just doesn't work for us” syndrome.

“It Just Doesn't Work for Us!”

Whether young or old, newlywed or married thirty-plus years, religious or not, couples talk to us about their desire to experience

spiritual intimacy, but many struggle with knowing how to integrate their faith with their marriage. We often hear comments like,

“We tried to grow together spiritually, but it just didn’t work for us.”

“We know we should pray together, but it’s just not easy to do.”

“We want to have devotions as a couple, but past attempts have resulted only in frustration and disappointment.”

“I want us to be closer to God, but how can I get my spouse to talk with me about our faith or other spiritual topics?”

“Life is just too busy. We really don’t have the time to connect spiritually. I leave for work before my wife gets up, and in the evening, I’m just too tired for deeper conversations about faith.”

“We’d definitely like to develop more spiritual intimacy, but we don’t know where or how to start.”

Do you identify with any of these comments? Have you experienced similar frustrations? We have. We understand. Years ago, when God became real in our lives and we grew closer to our heavenly Father, we wanted to experience growing closer to each other spiritually, but our own efforts were unsuccessful. We tried. Oh, how we tried!

For instance, we (the Arps) knew we should be having devotions as a couple, so each January we made a resolution to take at least a few minutes each day to read through a yearlong devotional book together. We would start January 1, thinking, *This is the year we will really do it!* But by January 15, we were already a week behind. Before long, we stopped even trying. It was just easier to pursue growing spiritually individually than to try to have devotions as a couple.

We knew we should pray together, but one of us was more verbal than the other—not a good scenario for couple prayers.

Soon we joined the ranks of couples who also found it difficult to relate to each other in the spiritual realm.

We (the Larsons) came from families where spirituality was mainly an individual experience with God. We didn't have a model of what connecting spiritually with each other could look like. Our earliest attempts were only when we were desperate for God's help. Then it was more of an SOS for God to show up in our marriage.

If you can identify with our experiences, then these Great Dates are designed especially for you. It's time to give up the "we shoulds," let go of past disappointments, and join us on fun dates that can jump-start spiritual growth and put new excitement and energy into this very important aspect of your relationship.

All you need to do is to find a spot on your calendar for your ten dates. If ten dates sounds too daunting, another option is to do five dates, take a break, and then do five more. Find the plan that works best for you. Then relax and enjoy your dates. We've taken care of all the details and will be your guide on your couple spiritual pilgrimage.

Extend Grace From the Start

Most couples are at different places on their spiritual journeys, but it doesn't have to be stressful—if we're willing to accept diversity in the expression of our faith. A spiritual journey isn't stagnant; otherwise it's not a journey. Growing together spiritually gives you an opportunity to encourage each other in your faith. So for couples who are at different "scenic overlooks" in your spiritual pilgrimage, we offer the following suggestions as you begin your dates:

- *Don't force or coerce your spouse to attend or do something with you that you know he or she will not enjoy.* God does

not force us to do things against our will—so let him be your model.

- *Be teachable and willing to learn.* Whatever road you take, be willing to learn from others. Someday you may look back with amusement, acknowledging you were not as smart as you thought you were. With being teachable comes the need to grow and change, so watch out for closed-mindedness and rigidity. Be open for God's Spirit to teach, lead, guide, and enlighten you.
- *Realize that one of the privileges and joys of a marriage is only having to relate one-to-one.* You don't have to settle theological or denominational issues or settle disputes among countries or even factions in your church or group. A little diversity can spice up a relationship.
- *Be positive and patient.* God stands at the door and knocks. He waits like a gentleman for us to open the door. He doesn't bang it down. Likewise, we can invite our spouse to join us on this journey, pray for him or her to desire to grow together spiritually, and then be patient as we allow God to make the changes.

Your Dating Coaches

In the following pages we will be your date coaches. No matter where you are in life, married without kids, or with a full house like the Larsons, or empty nesters like the Arps, there is something here for every couple.

You'll find that these dates are fun, safe, and easy to do. If you've experienced any of our other 10 Great Dates, you have a head start. If not, don't worry, we've taken the work out of the dates and designed them so that wherever you are on your faith journey—even if you're at different places—you can start connecting together spiritually right away.

Welcome to Your Great Dates

We want you to think about each date as a couple's devotional but without the pressure and obligation often associated with attempting to have devotions with your spouse. They are not intended to be guilt-producing. Instead, you will have the opportunity in a relaxed setting to move closer to each other and to God. Our dating topics are centered on spiritual concepts that can be applied to your marriage relationship. We'll help you look at biblical passages through a "marriage filter." For instance, when looking at the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, how would that relate to marriage? Maybe one of us needs to offer to wash the dishes after dinner tonight or look for other ways to choose humility and serve our spouse. With each date we'll also give a few easy-to-do devotional suggestions (that we refer to as Post-Date Spiritual Discovery times) for those who want to connect spiritually between dates.

Your 10 Great Dates

Now it's your turn. Although you are welcome to skip around from topic to topic, we have organized the chapters to build on one another. Diving in on praying together may be easier when you have taken the time to create a foundation of love and understanding of where each of you are on your spiritual journey. Here is a more detailed description of the topics ahead.

Date 1: Connecting Faith and Love

On this date, you'll talk about how connecting faith in your marriage can help you build a more loving, growing relationship. You'll share your own unique experiences that impact where you are today on your spiritual quest. Appreciating and understanding your past will help you forge a closer relationship in the future with each other and with God.

Date 2: Appreciating Your Differences

If you want to grow together spiritually, you will need to be able to appreciate and accept the ways you are different from each other. You must also be willing to forgive each other. No relationship has a greater potential for anger than the marriage relationship. How you manage your differences and disappointments with each other will affect your spiritual intimacy, so on this date you'll talk about two key core values: acceptance and forgiveness.

Date 3: Experiencing God Together

Where and when do you feel the closest to God? We are different and our differences influence where and how we worship and feel close to God. On this date, you'll talk about factors that bring you together spiritually as you worship God together.

Date 4: Getting Into the Word

Reading the Bible together can foster spiritual intimacy, but some couples find this experience rather threatening. If one is more of a pusher, and the other one more passive, it's easy to feel either coerced and manipulated or frustrated and dissatisfied. To get into the Word together will require making sure it is not a competitive experience. On this date, we will give you some simple tools to help you grow spiritually through studying the Bible together.

Date 5: Loving Your Closest Neighbor

So who is your closest neighbor? If you're married, it's your partner—the one you've chosen to share life with at its deepest and most intimate level! How are you doing with loving your partner? Are you able to give each other unconditional love during the hard times? Do you naturally look for and accentuate

the positive? On this date, you'll talk about how to love and encourage your spouse.

Date 6: Talking Together With God

Praying together can be threatening and uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to be. Date 6 will help you see how prayer can promote spiritual closeness. You'll talk about how to overcome some of the obstacles to praying as a couple and practical ways to develop a meaningful prayer life together.

Date 7: Building Your Marriage on a Strong Foundation

In the beginning, God created marriage, and it was very good. In Genesis 2:24, he gave us three fundamental principles that help us have a strong foundation for our marriage. On this date, you'll talk about the importance of what the Bible calls leaving, cleaving, and becoming one.

Date 8: Facing the Storms of Life Together

Struggles in life will either pull you together or push you apart. Can you think of a hard time that you experienced as a couple that brought you closer together spiritually? This date will help you talk about how to stay close and face the storms of life together.

Date 9: Guarding Your Hearts Under God's Canopy

If you want to stay close spiritually, you need to guard your heart. There are over nine hundred verses in the Bible that contain the word *heart*, including Proverbs 4:43, which tells us to "guard our heart." In the Jewish wedding tradition, the canopy signifies God's protective covering for the bridal pair. On this date, you'll look at what it means to have God's sacred canopy over your marriage and how to guard your heart.

Date 10: Making Your Marriage a Lighthouse

In Genesis 1:26–27, we read that God created man male and female, in his image. It’s amazing, but as a husband and wife we have the potential to reflect God’s image—to be a lighthouse to marriages around us. Date 10 encourages you to talk about how you can continue to draw close spiritually and how your marriage can be a lighthouse to those around you.

Your Personal Dating Guide

Following each chapter is your own personal dating guide. We’ve taken care of the details so you can concentrate on connecting spiritually with each other. You will find a pre-date guide with suggestions for how to prepare for each date, ideas for where to go, how to approach each date, and how to benefit from the dating exercises, which are in the back of the book. We have provided duplicate copies of the exercises, and the pages are designed to make them easy to take on your date.

While it is desirable for both of you to read the corresponding chapter before the date and fill out the exercise, we realize sometimes this just won’t happen. So with each Dating Guide we have included a brief chapter summary.

While our 10 Great Dates are designed to help one couple at a time, they are also appropriate for small-group studies. We have an easy-to-use leader’s guide available at www.10greatdates.org as a free download. If you know you need the accountability of being committed to others, recruit other couples to join you on this faith adventure.

The Dating Format

So how do these dates work? It’s quite simple. First, read the corresponding chapter before each date. If only one reads the

chapter, that person can take the lead in planning the date and guiding the conversation.

Second, go on your date, bringing along your copies of that particular date's exercise. (Remember, the exercises are found in the back of the book.) In a relaxed atmosphere, away from interruptions, you will have the opportunity to talk through the short exercises that will help you grow closer spiritually. The practical application during the date in an atmosphere of fun is the secret of having great dates! Plus, we are hoping your date night will be a habit you will continue. You can reap the benefits of your Great Dates long past these initial ten.

Launching Your Great Dates

The following steps will help you begin your dating experience on a positive note.

1. Agree to go on these Great Dates. It really doesn't matter who found the book or whose idea it was, going on your ten dates will help you take a closer look at how you can develop spiritual intimacy.
2. Schedule your dates and get them on your calendar.
3. Have a strategy for possible interruptions. Despite the best planning, you may have to change your plans. When this happens, reschedule your date for the same week and persevere. Hang in there and value your time together. Don't let other things crowd out time for dating and focusing on each other.
4. Anticipate each date. Let the other know you are looking forward to being together. Be clever. Send text messages, leave sticky notes around, and give hints that you expect a great date.
5. Before the date, read through the chapter and note key topics to discuss. If you take time to complete the short

Welcome to Your Great Dates

exercise before the date, you will have more time for intimate conversations. But you can also do the exercise on the date.

6. Follow our simple guide for each date and stay on topic. Don't use date time to deal with other issues and problems.
7. Stay positive! It's hard to be negative when you are holding hands.
8. Get started and have fun!

Make a Commitment



Our Great Dates will only make a difference if you do them. Like most anything worthwhile, building spiritual intimacy takes time. Good intentions aren't enough. A written commitment can help carry you through. Use the commitment form that follows to record your promise to each other.

You will be glad you took the time to connect faith and love in your marriage. Remember, yesterday is past, and tomorrow is in the future. Today is the only gift of time you've been given; that's why it's called "the present." So give each other the present of 10 Great Dates!

Making a Commitment

I agree to invest time in connecting spiritually by going on 10 Great Dates.

Officially Signed:

Date _____

Our first date is scheduled for _____



Your Dating Plan

Write in when you are going to have each date!

Date 1: Connecting Faith and Love

is scheduled for _____

Date 2: Appreciating Your Differences

is scheduled for _____

Date 3: Experiencing God Together

is scheduled for _____

Date 4: Getting Into the Word

is scheduled for _____

Date 5: Loving Your Closest Neighbor

is scheduled for _____

Date 6: Talking Together With God

is scheduled for _____

Date 7: Building Your Marriage on a Strong Foundation

is scheduled for _____

Date 8: Facing the Storms of Life Together

is scheduled for _____

Date 9: Guarding Your Hearts Under God's Canopy

is scheduled for _____

Date 10: Making Your Marriage a Lighthouse

is scheduled for _____

Your Dating Ground Rules



To get the most out of each date:

- *Read the corresponding chapter and/or chapter summary.* If you have not filled out the exercise, do so before you begin your discussion.
- *Stay positive!* This is not the time to tell your spouse what he or she has done wrong.
- *Be future-focused.* Focus on what you want your relationship to be like in the future. Don't concentrate on past failures. (It's okay to remember past successes.)
- *Talk about your relationship.* Do not talk about your job, children, or in-laws, unless it's part of the topic of the date.
- *Give a gift of love.* Some topics will interest you more than others. On the less exciting ones, give a gift of love: Participate enthusiastically!
- *Don't force it.* If you get on a negative track, stop that discussion. Move on to another topic you both feel good about.
- *If you get stuck, ask for help.* If during your dates an issue comes up that you can't handle together, talk to your pastor, mentor couple, or counselor.
- *Use good communication skills.* Be prepared for some surprises and new insights about each other. They can open new opportunities for growth and spiritual intimacy in your relationship. Following are tips for sharing your answers:

1. Be honest, yet never unkind.
2. Start your sentences with "I." Talking about yourself will help create an open environment where your spouse will feel safe and less defensive.

Welcome to Your Great Dates

3. Resist attacking the other or defending yourself.
 4. Be specific and positive.
- *Have fun!* Also, think about *why* you are dating. It is to enrich your relationship and grow together spiritually.
 - *Between each date, do the suggested devotional either together or individually.* Remember: You are developing healthy habits that will enrich your life together long after your 10 Great Dates are completed.



1

Connecting Faith and Love

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

Hebrews 10:25 (NIV1984)

Welcome to Date 1. On this date, you will have the opportunity to consider the role faith plays in your life individually and as a couple. You may find that connecting spiritually will also bring you closer to each other in other areas of life. For instance, research suggests that spiritual intimacy can even benefit your love life! In a national sample of over 24,000 married couples who took the ENRICH inventory, those with a high level of spiritual agreement were two times more satisfied with their sexual relationship than couples with a low level of spiritual compatibility.¹

Not only does current research show the benefits of a spiritual dimension in marriage, it's also evident in writings from ages past. Consider this description of a spiritually intimate marriage by Tertullian in the second century:

How beautiful is the marriage of two Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow, one in the religion they practice. . . . Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in spirit. They pray together; instructing one another, encouraging one another, strengthening one another.²

While this is a beautiful picture of a spiritually intimate marriage, we have to admit that we're not quite to this point. In fact, we have a long way to go. Still, we want to share a bit of our journey with you in hopes that it will encourage you in your own spiritual pilgrimage.

Peter and Heather's Story

I (Peter) didn't even know we could or should embark on a journey of connecting together spiritually. Despite the fact that I was a graduate student in a seminary when we got married, I was focused on my psychology degree, and thought our relationship was fine just the way it was. We went to church most Sundays, prayed before meals, and both believed in God. This is why I was a bit confused and intimidated when Heather began suggesting we could do more.

In our first year of marriage, Heather told me she wanted to pray together on a regular basis. I nipped that idea in the bud. I calmly explained to my new wife that my prayer life and relationship with God was very personal. Wasn't it enough that we worshiped together on Sunday mornings? Looking back, I just wasn't ready for that level of vulnerability in my spiritual life.

Next, Heather suggested we get more involved with a small group through church. This too was an uphill battle. I was the classic example of a stealth church attendee, preferring to fly under the radar. Just a few smiles and head nods was all it took, and I could do my weekly appearance quickly and

painlessly without wasting half my Sunday talking to people I barely knew.

This had always been my approach to church. Even though I grew up attending the church my parents took us to, I never felt a part of it and didn't connect with other kids in the youth group. I was used to attending church more as a requirement of Christian life, not because I really wanted to be there.

I (Heather), on the other hand, grew up very active in my church—from youth choir and service groups to summer camps. I spent half the week at church and enjoyed a variety of leadership roles too. I was comfortable praying and sharing devotions with others.

I assumed Peter would want to bring spiritual activities like prayer and devotions into our marriage. I remember his response when I suggested we pray together at night. I felt surprised at his lack of interest and hurt that he didn't want to connect with me spiritually the way I expected.

Dave and Claudia's Story

Our first attempts to connect spiritually didn't work out well either. We had been married for several years before we started on our faith journey together. We wanted God to help us be the best partners and parents we could be, but we weren't sure how to go about it. A bit of history.

I (Dave) began my spiritual journey in high school through the influence of my grandmother and a Sunday school teacher who explained to me how I could invite Jesus Christ into my life. As a teenager, I remember reading my Bible, and I was very involved in my youth group in my church. For my high school years, I had what I would describe as a close relationship with God. Then when I went to college, I put my Bible on a shelf and began to drift away from God. It wasn't until several years later,

after we were married and after the birth of our first baby, that I began to remember my spiritual heritage and became interested again in growing in my faith.

I (Claudia) grew up in the church and loved God, but I didn't know much about Jesus. It wasn't until after our first son was born that I understood who Jesus Christ was and his significance in my faith journey. We were living in Atlanta when Martie, a good friend from college days, asked me to go to a women's Bible study with her. I was fascinated with the ladies I met and the things I heard as I kept attending this class. Before long, I began to understand how much God loved me and what an amazing gift he provided through his Son, Jesus. Wow! Did my life change! Of course, I wanted to share my newfound faith with Dave, whom I assumed was not a Christian. I won't give you the details, but this was not a pretty time in our marriage.

Dave Remembers

When Claudia became a Christian, her newfound "spirituality" made me uncomfortable. I saw her life changing but didn't appreciate her subtle and not-so-subtle attempts to get me on board spiritually. I'd done that in high school, and I resented her insinuations that I wasn't a Christian. But through a couple of business friends who reached out to me, I came to the point of rededicating my life to Christ. So that should have been the time we would get it together spiritually as a couple, right? Wrong!

Claudia Remembers

Our relationship did improve, but we didn't know the first thing about how to travel this spiritual journey together. We got involved in a church and had several friends who kept inviting us to a couple's small-group Bible study. I was dying to go, while

Dave was doing everything not to go. He later told me he felt I knew more about all of this than he did, which made the idea of talking about God with other couples to be very threatening. I was persistent, though, and finally he agreed to go.

I was thrilled! I knew if I could just get Dave to the group, he would love it and we would be on our way to growing together in our faith. I loved that evening's study, especially sitting there with my husband. For me, it was similar to the women's Bible study I attended, and I couldn't wait to get home and hear how much Dave liked it. Instead, I remember him saying, "Claudia, some people need this sort of thing. I don't! So don't ever ask me to go to something like this again."

I was crushed. *How could he not like it?* I was disappointed in him—and in God. In retrospect, it wasn't that Dave and I didn't want to connect spiritually—we just didn't know how to jump-start it. Forcing him to do it my way definitely wasn't the answer!

Years later, as we look back on our faith journey together, we wish we had had the wisdom to take a different path—one in which we would have given each other the grace to grow at our own individual pace. I wish I had not felt obligated to continually take Dave's "spiritual temperature" and instead simply trusted God to work in his life. He didn't need me to be his own private "holy spirit" to nudge him along the path.

What's Your Story?

After talking with many couples, we know our stories are not unique. Unfortunately, what often happens after an unsuccessful attempt (like our Bible study experience) is that couples stop trying to connect on a spiritual level. Their relationship with Christ becomes compartmentalized as a "private matter." Sure, they may attend church together and serve others and support

Christian endeavors together, but they don't truly relate to each other on a spiritual level. They may even pray together occasionally, but over time they settle in at a safe distance and have less than a spiritually intimate relationship.

Your Spiritual Memory Lanes

On your first date, we want you to look back at your own spiritual journeys and share them with each other. If we had done this early on, we might have bypassed some misunderstandings and hard times!

Think about your earliest awareness of God. Did you grow up in a churchgoing family? Were your parents Christians? Did you trust Christ as a child, or were you an adult when you understood how to become a Christian? If one of you grew up in a Christian home and the other became a Christian as an adult, you each have a unique perspective of God's love and grace to share with each other. Or if you aren't sure where you are on your journey, consider these dates as a wonderful opportunity to learn more about God and how spiritual intimacy can bring you closer together as a couple. If you aren't at the same place spiritually, it will benefit your relationship if you are able to better understand your partner's thoughts and beliefs.

How do your unique experiences and personality reflect where you are today on your spiritual quest? For instance, even though I (Dave) had been a Christian since high school, I never participated in a small-group Bible study. That first one with Claudia made me so uncomfortable. Even today I'm not a "groupie." More recently, when we moved to Virginia, it took us three years to join a small-group study, mainly because of my resistance. But this time Claudia didn't push me. She waited until I was ready. Then we started praying we would find a group where we would fit. One Sunday after church we ran into a friend who is

on staff at our church and asked her if she knew a group that we might relate to well. She made a couple of phone calls, and before we knew it, God had answered our prayer.

Any new situation can cause apprehension, but this time we *both* wanted to go and take that step of faith together. And how glad we are that we did! We both enjoy our small-group Bible study, but it's because we chose it together. We both feel safe in the group because we have gotten to know and have built trust with the other couples. What if one of us had not felt comfortable? If one was uncomfortable, we would have kept looking for a group. We had agreed that either of us had veto power, so we could both feel safe in trying it out.

We share our more current experience with you for a few reasons. First, to let you know we can change. I (Claudia) am no longer Dave's "holy spirit," and Dave doesn't automatically resist my suggestions as a knee-jerk reaction. Together, we recognize our unique differences and how they play out in the spiritual realm. While I may be the one who feels the greater need for being in a small group, Dave is the one who is more sensitive to the needs of others and is often the motivator in giving to others. His generous spirit and attitude encourages me to give even when I would naturally resist initiating this type of outreach.

We too (the Larsons) have come a long way since we first began our spiritual journey. After nearly twenty years of marriage and three children, I (Peter) am much more open to participating in a small group, openly discussing my faith, and even praying together with Heather. I've come to understand my initial resistance as a basic fear of being that vulnerable and intimate with my wife. For me, it took a combination of time, maturity, and God's leading in my life to understand the powerful benefits of connecting our faith in our marriage. I'm thankful that Heather didn't pressure or push me too hard in

the beginning. Instead, she patiently and prayerfully brought her request to God and let him work in my life. You'll hear more about this process in the upcoming dates!

Appreciating Your Past—Anticipating Your Future

We hope you're getting our point. Different isn't negative. Growing together spiritually is not a competition. Our experiences are different. We don't have to be at the same place on our individual journeys, but we do want to journey together. So we hope that on this first date you will enjoy getting to know each other a bit better as you share your spiritual journeys together and talk about your future path!

Now it's time for your first Great Date! Use the following simple dating guide and enjoy your trip down your own spiritual memory lanes and celebrate connecting your faith, your love, and your marriage.



Connecting Faith and Love

Date 1 will help you understand your spiritual journey and identify where you are today and how you want to travel on this spiritual pathway as a couple.

Pre-Date Preparation

- Read chapter 1, “Connecting Faith and Love.”
- Find your copy of the Date 1 Exercise (in the back of the book) and make any notes you like. Looking over the exercise before your date gives time for reflection. Also, if one of you is more verbal than the other, writing out some notes will give you time to formulate your thoughts.
- Make reservations at a favorite restaurant. The one making the reservations may want to let the place be a surprise.
- Think about what you will wear. Dress in a way you think the other will like. Remember, this is a date!

Date-Night Tips

- Plan to use the whole evening.
- During a leisurely dinner, talk through the questions in the Date 1 Exercise.
- Enjoy talking about your individual spiritual journeys—where you are today and how you want to continue your journey together as a couple. (Don’t worry if you don’t get all the way through the exercises. Your conversation can be continued at another time.)

Chapter Summary

Each of our spiritual journeys up to this point is just that, a journey, with ups and downs. This may be your first step in starting a spiritual journey together, or you may have made some attempts in the past. The Larsons each had different expectations of how their spiritual life should look in marriage. Heather wanted to be open and active in her spiritual life, while Peter was looking for a more personal and private experience. The Arps' spiritual journey began with a bit of a tug-of-war. Claudia was excited about her new faith, and she wanted Dave to have the same enthusiasm she did. Dave resisted her attempts to join small groups where he would have to be more open about his spiritual journey. Years later, both couples share that their relationships have grown to a new level of intimacy and love as a result of connecting faith and love in their marriage.

Now you will have a chance to reflect on your spiritual journeys. Appreciating and understanding your past will help you forge a closer relationship in the future with each other and with God. You can build a more loving relationship as you share your own unique experiences that have an impact on where you are today on your spiritual quest. One caution: Growing together spiritually is not a competition. Our experiences will be different. We don't have to be at the same place on our individual journeys, but we would like to journey together. So we hope that on this first date you will enjoy getting to know each other a bit better as you share your spiritual journeys together and talk about your future path!



Connecting Faith and Love

Sometime after each date, we suggest a spiritual discovery time together. Try to set aside about fifteen minutes of uninterrupted time when you can seek the Lord as a couple. If you are not feeling ready to do this devotion as a couple, you can try it individually. Here is a suggested guide, or you can choose one from your favorite devotional book or another source.

1. Pray—Open with a simple prayer such as:

God, we invite you to lead us on our faith journey together. We commit ourselves to you and to each other as we seek your truth in our lives.

2. Read—Genesis 1:26–31
3. Discuss—It’s a wonderful mystery to us, but somehow when we build our marriage based on his Word and live out the principles Jesus taught, we have the potential to reflect God’s image to others. Wow! That blows us away. However, we have to admit that often we fall short of reflecting his image to others even though the potential is there!
 - How is marriage a reflection of God’s image?
 - How might your marriage change this week if you embraced the truth that God is the author of your marriage and has pronounced it “good”?

