

TRUE LOVE DATES

5 Things Every Married Couple Should Do

By Debra Fileta, M.A., LPC

www.TrueLoveDates.com

"You've got to invest in your marriage."

If you're married, it's likely you've heard that phrase at least once. In fact, I was visiting a good friend recently and we were talking about our respective marriages when that topic came up.

The conversation we were having revolved around the idea that people are constantly telling young married couples to "invest in their marriage" without explaining what on earth that actually means.

While it sounds like a noble idea, the concept of "investing in your marriage" can seem so far away for many couples, particularly during the first decade of marriage. Think about all that is going on during those first few years of your marriage. If you're anything like us, most likely, you're raising young children,

sleep deprived, worn out from work, all the while trying to survive financially, make meals, and somehow keep the house from looking like a hurricane passed through it. And from what I've observed from older married couples, it doesn't get any easier as you get older. There are always new things pulling you in a hundred different directions.

It's hard to figure out how to find the time or energy to "invest" in one more thing during the busy seasons of life.

As a professional counselor, I know that offering blanket statements like telling people to *invest in their marriage*, can often discourage more than encourage. So, in a practical sense, what does it actually mean to invest in your marriage when life is crazy and beyond? Here are a few bite-sized things to consider doing on a weekly or daily basis as a way to invest in your marriage:

CONNECT SPIRITUALLY

One of the most beautiful aspects of marriage comes with the opportunity to emotionally and spiritually connect with another human being. Add to that, the gift of Christian marriage that gives us an opportunity to connect, not only with one another, but with a holy and almighty God. Oftentimes, believing couples tend to take their spiritual connection for granted, forgetting that some of the most intimate moments in marriage are when we're sharing our hearts, communicating what's in our spirit, and interacting about our relationship with God.

I can honestly tell you that some of the most intimate times I spend with my husband are the moments we sit, hand in hand, at the end of the day and just pray about whatever is going on in our lives. It's a simple act, yet has a supernatural outcome. Because a "cord of three strands is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 3:12).

NEXT STEPS: If you're looking for a really powerful way of investing in your marriage, consider setting 15 minutes aside weekly or even a 3-5 minutes daily to pray together and share about what God is doing in each of your lives. Most couples find that spending a few minutes to talk and pray at the start of the morning, or at the end of the night before bed, tend to be the most practical times to integrate spiritual connection. Another practical option is to choose a book of the Bible to read (together or separately) one chapter at a time, and talk through what you're learning and experiencing.

COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

Believe it or not, the average married couple spends very little time in meaningful conversation and communication. In gathering data for my book, [Choosing Marriage](#), I surveyed over 1,000 married people asking them to report the amount of time they spend each week in meaningful conversation. The results were ASTOUNDING, and I'm looking forward to sharing them with you in detail in [my new book](#). But the bottom line is that married couples are not spending enough time in meaningful conversation. It's also a known fact that communication gets less and

less commonplace with each year of marriage. I don't know about you, but hearing that saddens me, because there is so much joy in engaging in positive and meaningful conversation with your spouse.

In [Choosing Marriage](#) I explain that when it comes to communicating, it's important to realize that there are levels of conversation. Facts are the most superficial level, followed by opinions and ideas, followed by the deepest levels of sharing our feelings and emotions with one another, as well as our spiritual worlds as discussed above. These different levels can be uncomfortable for some people, depending on how they were raised or the kind of communication they've grown accustomed to.

Each level of conversation is an important part of healthy communication and has to be deliberately worked into conversation.

NEXT STEPS: If you want to do something small that will have a big impact on your marriage, set aside 10-20 minutes a day sitting face to face with your spouse, for the sole purpose of communicating. Don't let this be the time to discuss conflict or problems, but just a time to catch up and keep up with one another in positive conversation. [Consider asking open-ended questions like:](#) *What was the best part of your day today?* or *What's something I can do to help you out this week?* *What's your biggest goal for this coming year?* The goal of this time is to enjoy each other and encourage one another.

TOUCH OFTEN

One afternoon, long before my husband and I had our own children, I remember observing some friends - a married couple who had children. Between feeding their kids at meal times and keeping them entertained and occupied during our conversation, I noticed that they hardly ever had any physical contact with each other. No hand-holding. No snuggling on the couch. No arms around the shoulder. At the time, it didn't make much sense to me. Fast forward a few years and a few kids later, and I completely understand the struggle of trying to connect physically with your spouse, all while being pulled in a million different directions.

But even during seasons of life when it's hard to come by, physical touch is such an important part of investing in your marriage. Take inventory of your marriage, and find times (or even schedule times if you have to!) where you can be deliberate about holding hands, kissing often, making love, or even doing something as simple as touching your spouse's back as you pass them in the kitchen. Physical touch conveys to your spouse that: I notice you, I desire you, and I want to be near you. Talk about a great investment!

NEXT STEPS: Be deliberate in observing how much (or how little) you touch your spouse in romantic and affectionate ways over the next 24 hours. The following day, go out of your way to "out-do" yourself by taking extra opportunities (a kiss in passing, holding hands throughout the day, a back rub, etc.) to show your spouse love through the gift of physical affection.

CONFESS AND FORGIVE FREQUENTLY

As much as we talk about confession and forgiveness within the church, I sincerely believe that we often fail to apply it in the context of our marriages, because let's be honest, it's a hard task! In [Choosing Marriage](#), I dedicate an entire chapter to the concept of confession, and talk you through the details of five specific things you should confess to your spouse - and in all honesty - it was the **hardest** chapter to write in the entire book. The idea of being vulnerable and sharing your weaknesses and shortcomings with another person can be a really hard pill to swallow - but it is precisely what God calls us to do. The practice of letting down our pride in the act of confession opens the door for the opportunity to forgive, which is the sacred glue that holds marriages together.

The couples I see in my practice who are highly satisfied in marriage, are not the ones who have the least amount of disagreement, but the ones who have the most forgiveness. God has forgiven each one of us of so much, and those who live in that freedom are freed to forgive others. Invest in your marriage by taking the time to search your heart frequently, being honest with your spouse about the things you are longing to change and the areas you need to ask for forgiveness.

NEXT STEPS: Spend some time this week in personal prayer, asking God to reveal to you any area in your life in which you are in need of change, healing, or growth. Ask the Lord to reveal to you if there's any area in particular that you need to confess to

your spouse. Then take the next steps to be open and honest as you share your heart with one another about the areas you would like to grow, change, or ask for forgiveness. .

"GET AWAY" WEEKLY

They say that couples who "pray together stay together". There's no doubt in the power of prayer and connecting spiritually with your spouse as we discussed above. But I think it can *also* be said that couples who play together, have the most fun!

Life can get busy, and the stress of it all can make us lose sight of the fact that God wants us to enjoy one another and the life he's given us. Invest in your marriage by setting aside one time a week to either go out -- or stay in if you can't afford a weekly sitter -- and do something fun! Date nights don't have to be elaborate or expensive to be meaningful, because in the ebb and flow of real life, those type of dates can't be sustained for a lifetime. Learn to exchange *elaborate* for *meaningful*. Play a board game on the living room floor, go out for a fun dinner, take a hike, pack a picnic lunch, or even go on a scenic drive. [The possibilities are endless](#), and *what* you're doing matters so much less than *who* you're doing it with. Rekindle your love for one another, by rekindling your friendship.

NEXT STEPS: Discuss with your spouse what a “meaningful” date would look like for him/her. Consider taking turns each week to plan your “date night in” or “date night out”. Maybe even try out one of these [10 date night ideas with your spouse](#).

Investing in your marriage often means doing small things deliberately that will ultimately have a huge impact. Whether you've been married for 5 days, or 50 years, it's never too early or too late to start making a difference in your marriage.



Debra Fileta is a Licensed Professional

Counselor, national speaker, relationship expert, and author of the book [True Love Dates: Your Indispensable Guide to Finding the Love of Your Life](#),

where she writes candidly about dating,

relationships, and how to find true love. Her newest book, [Choosing Marriage](#), is set to be released in May 2018, but is [available for pre-order it today!](#)

You may also recognize her voice from her 200+ articles in magazines and publications all over the web! She's the creator of the [True Love Dates Blog](#), reaching millions of people with the message that healthy people make healthy relationships! Connect with her on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).