



## **MAKING LOVE ON A BUDGET**

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It's Saturday night and Jim and I have a babysitter. I suppose we should check to see what movies are showing. This is the time for our weekly date. (A few years ago we realized that unless we actually scheduled time together to nurture our relationship with the same priority that we make work appointments, it too often slipped through the cracks of our busy lives.)

But wait a minute; if we pay the babysitter, we won't have enough money left for a movie, much less the inflated costs of popcorn and pop. Even more importantly, we remind each other that our purpose for this time together is to reconnect with each other. Staring at a screen would take the focus away from each other. Sure, sometimes there are top-notch movies that have sparked some excellent conversation afterwards, but tonight, the choices were mostly horror movies, inane comedies, or low budget sex films. Oh yes, we could rent a video and play it at home where the drinks are cheap, but we already had the babysitter and were anxious to get out of the house and away from the children. Situations like the above have prompted us to explore other kinds of "dates" and I'd like to share some of our more successful ones with you. Although our budget isn't always this tight, I'll focus on free or inexpensive dates since most people are pretty familiar with the traditional dinner out or going to a play.

### Outside Dates:

1. Go to a local park or place of nature. Bring a blanket and a snack. In greater Cincinnati we are blessed with spots along the Ohio River. Watch the lights along the river and talk.
2. Early evening bike rides. If a bike trail is convenient it makes the riding more pleasant and less work.
3. Twilight hikes in the woods with a good flashlight or a nature guide.
4. Watch a fall high school band competition and reminisce about our own high school days.

### Inside:

1. Dress up. Go to one of the expensive downtown hotels with a nice lobby. Relax, chat, maybe have a drink and pretend that you're registered there.
2. Go to the airport, train or bus station. Sit where you can watch passengers arrive. Watch loved one's reunite and mysterious people go on their way. Make up stories about the passengers you see and why they've come to your area. This is not as easy since 9-11 but why not add a prayer especially for those who look like the purpose of their travel might be a crisis or unhappy occasion.
3. Usher at a local theater. See some great shows for the price of a flashlight and a little extra time.
4. Go window-shopping downtown or at one of the malls.

Most of the above activities work best when combined with an ice cream cone, frozen yogurt, or hot mulled cider. Of course sometimes, the lack of babysitters, money, or just too many nights out already that week, make staying home the date of choice. To make at-home dates work with kids, we've tended to start them very late, after the younger children are in bed and the older ones are out. (We've rearranged our bedroom to have a place of escape if the older

ones don't take our hints about going out.) To stay awake we often give each other time for a nap earlier in the evening. Here are our favorites.

1. Play scrabble (or other board games or cards for two). This has worked best with candlelight and a special snack. *Note:* Be sure you are of relatively equal ability and the rules are mutually acceptable or this can backfire. Trust me, I know.
2. Late night candlelight dinner for two.
3. Anything in front of the fireplace with popcorn. (Sharing topic: Each write down 5 to 10 favorite times we've had together over our marriage. Reminisce.)
4. Rent a classic, nostalgic video like Casablanca.
5. Roll up the rug, get some tapes of 50's-60's rock and roll (or your favorite pre-marriage dance style) and dance till you collapse.
6. Invite good friends over to play Trivial Pursuit, Risk, etc.

So that one spouse doesn't feel the full burden of initiating and being creative, we alternate responsibility for planning these dates. What creative dates have enlivened *your* marriage without breaking the bank?