

Love Really Youth, Romance, and Faith

Youth love to say the word love. “I love my phone.” “I love my BFF.” “I love my parents.” “I love my dog.” “I love Minecraft.” You may also have heard them say: “I think I love him.” “He said he loved me.” “I think we love each other.” Our adult lens leads us to doubt: “You can’t love her; you’re only 15!” But we try to stay calm, to respond with a measured tone and cautious hope. Our heart’s desire is that our youth do know and experience love in their lives. Love is an important part of life and our faith, and romantic love is explored, wondered about, and framed in adolescence. Our youth are looking at and evaluating relationships all the time, and they apply their understanding of romantic love to their lives. As an adult, I have discovered the messiness and brokenness of love but also know its beauty and its power to change lives. How do we walk with our youth as they seek balance in relationships and explore romantic love? How do we set them up to make good decisions about relationships now and in the future?

Here are some ideas to prompt discussion about love among your youth group.

Love as People of Faith

The Bible speaks about love and relationships. How does our faith influence the kind of people we choose to date and how we act in a relationship? Do you think God cares about which people we date? Do you think God cares about how you treat one another in a relationship?

Read Romans 12:9–13, where Paul addresses the church in Rome about the marks of a Christian.

- What does Paul emphasize here about how Christians are to love and act in relationships?
- What do you think “mutual affection” means? What would make a relationship not mutual? How can we work to make relationships mutual?
- Why is it important to “rejoice in hope” and “be patient in suffering” in a relationship?
- How is helping others and extending hospitality to strangers a unique mark of Christian love? Do you think these qualities are important in a romantic relationship? Do you think they could make a romantic relationship stronger?
- What is missing from Paul’s list that you would add as important for a relationship?

It's Fun, But Is It Real?

- **Promposals**—Watch this news clip on the promposal trend: abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/promposals-creative-23308577.¹
 - Take time, first, to frame your discussion of promposals as open to all perspectives. Some youth have surely taken part in the fad, while others have felt left out. Consider reading the following article with the group or with adult leaders to prepare for the discussion: cnn.com/2014/05/01/living/promposal-pressure-proms.²
 - Discuss what the youth like about them and what don't they like. Discuss what's fun about them. Discuss the pressure it places on the asker and the one being asked. Discuss how it compares to real-life dating and relationships now and after high school. Are the expectations real?
- ***The Fault in Our Stars***—Watch a clip from *The Fault in Our Stars*: youtube.com/watch?v=OOWBIDuBQzQ.³
 - Discuss what in this book or movie felt real. Discuss how youth have seen love like this in our world, and how love is not always like this. Discuss how *The Fault in Our Stars* depicts love and how love is really in our lives.
 - One idea to pair with this discussion is to invite some married or partnered couples from the congregation to share the story of their first date or their engagement. Choose a variety of folks in order to reflect the diversity of real-life love.
- **My bae on #MCM or #WCW**: Man Crush Mondays or Woman Crush Wednesdays are days for posting a photo of your weekly crush on social media. *Bae* is a term of endearment, used like *baby*, as the caption of many Instagram photos with friends or boy/girlfriends.
 - Discuss the people whose photos you post on #MCM or #WCW or name your bae. Are they crushes, friends, or people you admire? Discuss who might be left out. Discuss when it's fun to take a photo with friends and when it is not. Ask youth to consider how it feels when you want only some friends in a photo, excluding others nearby. Discuss how posting photos is a mark of friendship but how some photos hurt people's feelings and why. Discuss photo-invite etiquette and how to keep it classy.

1. "Promposals' Get Creative," ABC News, April 13, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/promposals-creative-23308577.

2. Emanuella Grinberg, "Promposal' Pressure Is Intense for Teens," CNN Living, May 1, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, cnn.com/2014/05/01/living/promposal-pressure-proms.

3. "*The Fault in Our Stars* | 'Grenade' Clip [HD] | 20th Century FOX," YouTube, May 29, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, youtube.com/watch?v=OOWBIDuBQzQ.

Evaluation Tool for Relationships

First, as a whole group

- Using a board or large paper with three prewritten columns (MUSTS, MAYBES, NEVERS), have the whole group brainstorm what are the MUSTS, MAYBES, and NEVERS for a romantic relationship.
- Do the same again, but for a friend relationship.

Next, in small groups

- Group one will create a tool for evaluating romantic relationships. Have them list 5–10 questions from the brainstorm about MUST, MAYBES, and NEVERS to help develop questions for the evaluation tool. Once it is ready, write the questions on a large piece of paper for all to see.
- Group two is to do the same, but for a friend relationship.

Then, as a whole group

- Share both tools. Debrief what everyone likes, what they may disagree with, and what is missing using these evaluation tools.
- Use the tools to evaluate famous relationships from culture and the Bible (clearly, we won't know the whole story of these couples and friends, so just work from what you know). Here are some suggestions.

Romantic Relationships

- Beyoncé and Jay-Z
- Victoria and David Beckham
- Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi
- Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson
- Kim Kardashian and Kanye West
- Kate Middleton and Prince William
- Elton John and David Furnish
- Michelle and Barack Obama
- Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis
- Mary and Joseph (see Luke 1–2 and Matt. 1–2)
- Sarah and Abraham (see Gen. 12–23)

Friend Relationships

- Justin Timberlake and Jimmy Fallon
- Tina Fey and Amy Poehler
- Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez
- Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly
- David and Jonathan (see 1 Sam. 18–20)
- Ruth and Naomi (see Ruth 1)

Personal Reflection

- Give youth quiet time and a journal sheet. Have them pick a relationship or two from their own lives and use the tools to evaluate these relationships.

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