

Your next date may be your first or your 500th,
but you can make it the best date possible.

B4UD8 shows you how.

Whether you're
dating or waiting,
there are seven things
you need to know.

A RETREAT GUIDE

Wouldn't it be nice if every teenager postponed dating until college? Just think: No more messy-breakups creating awkward tension at youth group. No more drama from the girl who's always trying to capture some guy's attention. No more lame excuses from the guy who skips church so he can "hang out" with his girlfriend. Sounds nice, doesn't it?

Of course, unless you're prepared to lock students up in convents and monasteries for the next few years, chances are that some of them will start to date. So why not equip them with some godly advice? *Hayley and Michael DiMarco* provide just what you need in **B4UD8**, a handy little guide to teen dating. Joining common sense and biblical wisdom, they present seven principles to help teens survive the dating world.



Sound intriguing? Then grab some copies of the book, pass them out to your kids, and host a **B4UD8** retreat that will really get them talking! We've filled this downloadable retreat guide with activities, discussion starters, and tips to make a memorable weekend. So go ahead and start planning a weekend of fun that will help your teens discover how to date God's way.

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EVENT OVERVIEW

The *B4UD8* retreat has been designed as a weekend event that begins early Friday evening and ends at noon on Sunday. It includes a combination of large group sessions, fun activities, small group time, and personal quiet times that will allow your students to reflect on what they're learning. You can follow our suggested Event Schedule, or feel free to adapt these timeframes to suit your group's particular needs.

You'll notice that we've included some large chunks of free time in the schedule. That's intentional: We don't want your students to feel like they're still in school! Bring along some games and movies so your group can relax and "recharge" between the group sessions. Want a more organized approach? Try some of the "Free Time Activities" we've included in this guide. We've cooked up some great ideas for free time fun that fits the dating theme!

BEFORE THE EVENT

Distribute *B4UD8* to your students at least one week before the retreat. To make the most of your weekend, we recommend that students read the book before they come on Friday night. But if your crew suffers from the disorder of Low Reading Motivation, try one of these ideas to get their noses into the book:

- Host a couple of "*B4UD8*" reading meetings at your house in the weeks leading up to the event. Treat students to some pizza, and then turn on some relaxing tunes while they spread out and read the book.
- If you are studying with a youth group, designate the meeting prior to your retreat as a "Story Time." Create some comfortable space for students to sit (we prefer couches to those nasty old carpet squares), hand out copies of the book, and have students take turns reading aloud. You probably won't get through the whole thing, but at least you can get them started.
- Use technology to your advantage: Use social network sites such as Ifuse.com and Facebook.com to send out reading reminders leading up to your event.

Also, familiarize yourself with this retreat guide and read through each session's material checklists carefully so you can gather necessary items beforehand. Pay special attention to the discussion questions and consider personal anecdotes or insights you might want to share. You don't want to do all the talking—but it's helpful to have some ideas in mind in case the conversation needs a jump start.

EVENT SCHEDULE

Friday Night

Supper

Group Session One: Dating With Purpose (1-1.5 hours)

Free Time

Saturday Morning

Breakfast

Personal Time: Temple Maintenance (30 minutes)

Group Session Two: Dating Isn't Marriage . . . So Have a Life! (1-1.5 hours)

Saturday Afternoon

Lunch

Free Time

Saturday Evening

Group Session Three: Red Flags and Breakups (1-1.5 hours)

Free time

Sunday Morning

Small Group Time: American Idols (30-45 minutes)

Group Worship

GO FOR IT

Okay, the veteran youth leaders out there probably have no fear when it comes to packing up a group of teenagers and heading out for a weekend retreat. If that's you: Get out of here. You're ready to roll! But for those of you who are experiencing excess perspiration at the very thought of leading teens, here are a few pointers to help you lead successful discussions at your retreat:

- Be yourself. As you lead group discussions, thank students for sharing their thoughts and opinions, but don't feel that you need to agree with every one. Be honest about the lessons you've learned in your own experiences—even if they may not be what your students want to hear!
- Dig deeper. Don't settle for simple responses: Ask students follow-up questions such as "Why do you feel that way?" "What do you mean when you say _____?"
- Silence never killed anybody. Count to 10 before you say anything further: Someone else may just decide to break the awkward silence before you do!
- Help the shy ones. Invite quiet students to talk by saying something like "Lisa, I'm curious what you think about this too" or "Sara, I'd love to hear what you have to say about that."
- Listen. Listen. Listen. Try asking "mirror" questions that challenge students to clarify what you've heard. For example, say "What I hear you saying is this. Is that what you mean?"

- Don't force your opinion. Encourage students to think through their own perspectives, even if they differ from yours. It's best to share your thoughts briefly and just give them time to think on it.
- Get God on the team. Pray for the students before and after your event. And be open to the Spirit's leading: God may take you in an unexpected direction, so don't get too hung up on "the plan."

HELP IS ON THE WAY!

From meals and sleeping arrangements to the question of how you're going to fit 14 kids into a 12-passenger van, we know there are dozens of details that go into retreat planning. So don't be afraid to recruit help. Don't have time to buy groceries for the weekend? There's probably a mom who'd be willing to help. Not sure where to get drivers for your group? I'll bet you know a couple of retired guys who'd love an excuse to hit the road for a weekend! When you let people know about your needs, you might be surprised at how many people are willing to lend a hand.

If you'd like a little help with dating resources or you're just looking for some encouragement and support, check out these great online resources:

- ***Ifuse.com*** – Connect with other adults who are leading a teen retreat to share questions and encouragement. Encourage your students to join too, and you can keep your dating discussions rolling online!
- ***B4UD8.com*** – Here's where you can go for all the dating insights we couldn't squeeze into the book. Or pick up a hilarious story from our online dating confessional to share with your crew! It's also a great spot to refer your students if they have more questions than you feel equipped to handle.

Friday Night

Group Session One

—Date With A Purpose

Opening Activity: *Worst Date Ever*

Supplies Needed: *paper, pens*

Opening Activity: *The Perfect Match*

Supplies Needed: *paper, pens, copy of this activity page*

Before this session, make a copy of this page and cut out the four profiles listed below:

Profile A: Miss Marriage-Minded

She's already got the dream wedding planned. She just needs to find the groom. So she's in it for real: Every date is a potential mate. And she craves commitment.

Profile B: Mr. Player

He really wants to date that special girl... until he moves on to the next special girl...and the next... you get the idea. This guy sees dating as a game and he wants to win every time.

Profile C: Buffet Princess

She's flirty and pretty. And she likes guys, a lot. So really, why should she have to settle for just one at a time? She likes to try a little of this and a little of that when it comes to dating. She has no problem going out with more than one guy at a time.

Profile D: Good Time Guy

He's dating for fun. Sure, he wants to get married someday. But he's not ready for anything serious yet. For now, he just likes getting to know different girls and finding out what works in a relationship.

Split your crew into four groups, giving each some paper, a pen, and one of the profiles. Ask them to read their profiles and then write a description of the "perfect match" from the perspective of their profile person. They may want to include details such as: ideal date activities, characteristics they look for in a boyfriend/girlfriend, length of relationship, and commitment level.

When they finish, have the group take turns reading their profile and the descriptions they wrote. Ask the following questions as you go:

- What are the most common dating "profiles" you see among teens your age?
- Do you think any of your profiles would be a good match for each other? Why or why not?
- What profile combination would make for the worst relationship? Why?

- If you had to date one of these profiles, which one would you choose?
- How would you describe your ideal boyfriend/girlfriend?

Discussion Questions for Session One:

1. The authors suggest that “most people date by accident” (p. 9). Do you agree with them? Why or why not?

- *What can go wrong when you jump into a relationship without a game plan?*
- *What kind of game plan should you have so that you won't be dating “by accident”?*

2. How did you feel about the description of life before “dating” on p. 9-10? What do you think it felt like to marry someone that your parents picked out for you? To marry someone you weren't in love with?

- *What would be the biggest drawbacks of marrying someone without dating them?*
- *Do you think there would be any advantages to a system that wasn't based on dating?*

3. Do you agree with the authors that in modern dating “happiness became the number one motivator for marriage instead of survival and multiplication”? Why or why not?

- *Do you think the shift to dating for “love” or “romance” has made it easier or harder to find a spouse?*
- *Has dating for “love” made marriages better or worse? Why?*

4. Do you think there's just one “right” way for everyone to date? Why or why not?

- *Which dating styles might lead to the most confusion, mistakes, or heartache?*
- *Which dating styles might make it easiest for you to stay focused on God through the process?*

5. Discuss this quote: “An informed person making choices for themselves is much more likely to follow through on those choices than a person who is being told what to do” (p. 23). How does this apply to dating?

- *Do you feel like you've had any dating views forced on you by parents, religious leaders, or other adults? If so, what are those views?*
- *Do you think teens ever have dating views forced on them by other teens? Why or why not?*

6. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of dating for fun?

- *What is the “fun” part of a dating relationship?*
- *The authors say this about dating for fun: “The more you date, the more you break up. And the more you break up, the better you get at leaving someone. In other words, it's kinda like practicing divorce.” Do you agree? Why or why not?*

7. In what ways are dating to be popular and dating to conquer both self-centered dating methods?

- *Do you agree that it's impossible to follow Christ while dating these ways? Why or why not?*

8. Do you think it's a good idea for teens to date with the purpose of finding someone to marry? Why or why not?

- *Discuss this quote: “The trouble comes in when you aren't old enough to be married or to even think about being married. . . .OK, you can be thinking about it, but you shouldn't be on the dating market if this is your purpose and you aren't ready to get married.”*
- *At what point do you think someone is old enough to start dating with the purpose of finding a husband/wife?*

9. If you decide to give up dating until you're ready to marry, what should you do if you meet someone you think could be the one for you?

- *Is it possible to have a healthy, "non-dating" relationship with someone who's mutually attracted to you? If so, what does that look like?*

10. Do you think there's a good purpose for dating at your age? Why or why not?

- *Aside from dating, how would you describe your purpose in life?*
- *How can you make sure your dating style fits in with your overall purpose in life?*

11. How does dating with a purpose protect your heart?

- *Should you date someone if they don't agree with you on the purpose of dating? Why or why not?*

12. At this point, which dating purpose and style makes the most sense for you?

- *Why might it be a good idea to ask a parent or other adult mentor for advice on your dating style?*

Saturday Morning

Individual Time

Start Saturday morning with an energizing breakfast. When students finish their meal, hand out copies of the "Temple Maintenance" and ask them to find a quiet place for their individual quiet time. You might want to gather with the other adult leaders during this time to pray for your students. Ask God to open their hearts during this special time of reflection.

Temple Maintenance

First things first. We're kinda assuming you already read Chapter 3 of *B4UD8*, so if you haven't finished it yet, go ahead and take the time to read it. Now hopefully you caught the big idea there: You are God's temple! How does that make you feel? Does it change how you view your body? Your sense of self-image? Jot down your thoughts here:

God loves you—just for you! You don't need a person on your arm to make you valuable! And if you do want to find a "special someone" someday, you should start by making yourself special and taking good care of the Temple. So spend the next few minutes on some "Temple Maintenance." Read over these questions and jot down your thoughts. Ask God to show you where you need to make some renovations and improvements:

The Exterior

Health

- Are you eating a healthy diet?
- Do you have any problems with overeating/junkfood binges?
- Do you ever eat too little or starve yourself?
- Do you exercise regularly?

Appearance

- What does your clothing style say about you? Does it say what you want it to say?
- Does your appearance show that you care about yourself? Do you make an effort to look attractive?
- Do you obsess about clothes? Spend too much money on clothes?
- Do you obsess about any other aspects of your appearance?
- What's the one thing you would most like to improve on the exterior of your Temple? What steps do you need to take to achieve that?

The Interior

Heart

- Have you let any unhealthy ideas about love into your heart?
- Do you tend to give too much of your heart away to your crush or your gf/bf?
- Does your heart really trust God?
- Is the main goal of your heart to find God and please him? Or is it to find and please someone else?

Mind

- Who or what do you spend most of your time thinking about?
- Are those healthy things to be thinking about?
- Do you ever think about doing things you know are wrong? If so, what?
- What sinful thoughts do you struggle with the most?
- How often do you use your mind to think about God and his desires for your life?

Spirit

- Do you take regular time to be alone and refresh yourself, spiritually?
- How often do you pray? Read your Bible?
- How often do you meet with other Christians who encourage your spirit?
- What's the one thing you would most like to improve in the interior of your Temple? What steps do you need to take to achieve that?

Saturday - Late Morning

Group Session Two—Dating Isn't Marriage . . . So Have a Life!

Opening Activity: *Dating or Mating?*

Supplies Needed: sheets of white paper (one per group member), pens/markers

Give each student a sheet of paper. Ask them to label one side “Dating” and the other side “Mating.” Read through the following list and ask students to vote on whether they think the activity sounds like a healthy, “dating” couple, or like a couple who’s acting as if they’re already married (“mating”). Have students reveal their votes at the same time by holding up the appropriate side of their paper. If there’s disagreement among the votes, ask a student from each side to explain why they voted as they did.

- Jess calls Jake on Thursday night to ask if he’s okay with her going out with her girlfriends instead of coming to his basketball game like she usually does on Friday nights.
- Kylie and Nick buy a goldfish together: They name him Pete.
- Taylor and his girlfriend attend a Bible study together at his church.
- Jade calls her boyfriend’s mom to find out his favorite cake flavor. She wants to surprise him with a homemade birthday cake tomorrow.
- Mitch asks his girlfriend to be in one of his senior picture poses.
- Liz’s dad is an alcoholic, but it’s a family secret she’s not supposed to talk about. The only person she talks to about her family problems is her boyfriend, Sam.
- Mike buys a dozen red roses for Lisa on Valentine’s Day.
- Kate lost her job a few weeks ago, so her boyfriend has been giving her money to keep her car filled with gas.
- Sometimes Dan goes along with his girlfriend when she visits her grandma at the nursing home.
- Noel and her boyfriend volunteer together at an after-school program tutoring little kids.
- Nate asks his girlfriend not to try out for her school play because the final performance is scheduled for the same night as his school’s winter formal.

After you finish voting on the list, discuss these follow-up questions:

- Ware some things teen couples do that qualify as “acting married”?
- List some special things dating couples can do together without acting like a married couple.
- How do you feel when you’re around people who act like an old married couple?
- Should an ideal dating relationship look the same as an ideal marriage? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions for Session Two:

1. What would you say are the key differences between dating and marriage?
 - *Why do you think some couples confuse dating and marriage?*
 - *What are the pitfalls of treating your dating relationship like a marriage?*
2. Discuss this quote: "When a couple plays house they risk more than sexual junk, they risk getting really good at divorce" (p. 69). What are some similarities between a dating breakup and divorce?
 - *How does "playing house" while you date make a breakup more painful?*
3. What are the dangers of getting your boyfriend/girlfriend overly involved with your family?
 - *What are some healthy ways to handle each other's families?*
 - *What are some unhealthy ways that couples get involved with each other's families?*
4. What is "emotional virginity"? (Check out p. 71 if you need some help with this.)
 - *"Emotional oneness is meant for marriage" (p. 71). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?*
 - *Why do you think people feel compelled to share their deepest secrets with each other while they're dating?*
5. Why are Bible study and prayer risky activities for a dating couple to do alone?
 - *How can you figure out your boyfriend/girlfriend's spiritual maturity if you don't study the Bible or pray together?*
 - *At what point in a relationship do you think it's okay to start praying together?*
6. Why is it a bad idea to start asking permission from each other while you're dating?
 - *Do you agree that asking permission "gives the impression that you are owned by the other person, or managed by them" (p.75)? Why or why not?*
 - *What's the difference between being considerate of your boyfriend/girlfriend's feelings versus asking their permission to do things?*
7. What should you do if you've already gotten too serious with someone you're dating, either physically, spiritually, or emotionally?
 - *Do you think it ever works to "backtrack" in the areas where you've gotten too close to your boyfriend/girlfriend? Why or why not?*
 - *Would it ever be necessary to break up with someone because you've gotten too close? Why or why not?*
8. Agree or disagree: "There is no way that another person can be or should be your everything." (p. 83).
 - *What happens when you try to make a guy or girl your "everything"?*
 - *Is it fair to expect another person to "fulfill" you? Why or why not?*
9. Why do you think it's so hard for teens to avoid putting all their time and attention into their dating relationship?
 - *What are the underlying fears that cause boyfriends/girlfriends to spend so much time together?*
 - *Do you think spending all their time together actually addresses those fears?*
10. What are some sexually tempting situations that dating couples find themselves in?
 - *What are some practical steps you could take to avoid being in tempting places?*
 - *How can friends and family be a help when it comes to avoiding sexual temptation?*

11. Why is it important to keep spending time with your friends, even when you're dating?

- *What message do you send to your friends and family when you spend all your time with your boyfriend/girlfriend?*
- *How could spending too much time with your boyfriend/girlfriend suffocate a relationship?*

13. What are some signs that you've gotten too obsessed with your boyfriend or girlfriend?

14. What are some practical ways to "have a life" while you're dating?

- *How does "letting them miss you" actually make you more desirable to your boyfriend/girlfriend?*
- *Do you think it's a bad sign if your boyfriend/girlfriend doesn't want you to have a life of your own? Why or why not?*

Saturday Afternoon/Evening

Free Time Activity Ideas

Grill Session

Combine good food with good fun in this activity that lets guys and girls grill each other with their most pressing questions! Start by dividing the guys and girls into two separate groups. Ask each group to write down some questions they have for the opposite sex. (Why do girls go to the bathroom in groups? And what are guys trying to prove by punching each other all the time?) Encourage them to be open—and respectful—in the way they ask their questions.

Give groups about 10-15 minutes to create their list. Then swap the lists and ask your guys and girl groups to discuss their questions from the opposite sex. As they decide on good answers, they should choose a spokesperson for each question. (Encourage them to select a different spokesperson for each question, so several students can have a voice.)

While your groups are coming up with questions and answers, get the grill out and cook up some hamburgers or hotdogs for your crew. Throw in some salads, chips, and soda to complete your grillfest. Then invite everyone to grab some food before you bring the guys and girls back together. As you eat, have the guys and girls take turns "grilling" each other with questions and listening to the spokespersons' responses.

Dream Date Cookie Contest

Buy several tubes of sugar cookie dough and form it into large balls of dough. Give a ball of dough to each student and invite them to create a cookie design of their dream guy or girl. Offer various cookie cutters and knives they can use to create the shape/design they want.

While the cookies bake, lay out a table with assorted cookie decorations (small candies, sprinkles, colored sugars, frosting, etc.). Ask each student to fill out a cookie contest "entry form" that lists the name of their cookie date, as well as their cookie's top three personality traits. (Encourage some creativity and fun with this!) When the cookies are finished baking, students can use the supplies to decorate their cookies.

Place all the cookies in a line so you can judge the winner. Don't forget to take a picture of all these dream dates! And of course, let everyone enjoy eating their cookie creations when the competition is over.

Couple Panel

Before the retreat, seek out four or five married couples who'd be willing to come and answer questions about their dating history and marriage. Try to seek couples across a broad age range and different stages of married life (newlyweds, married with children, empty nesters, retirees). Give the couples a copy of the questions below so they'll feel more confident and prepared with their answers:

- Did you guys date other people before you met each other?
- Did you learn any important lessons during your dating history?
- How did you meet each other?
- When and how did you start dating?
- What was your dating time like? What kinds of activities did you do for dates?
- Is there anything you would change about the time you spent dating? If so, what?
- When did you decide to get married? How did you know that this was "the one"?
- Do you think the time you spent dating prepared you well for marriage? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the best part about being married?
- What is the hardest part about being married?
- What dating advice would you give to a teenager who wants to get married someday?

Conduct the couple panel like an interview, asking each couple to respond to the questions above and giving students an opportunity to ask follow-up questions if they'd like.

Saturday Night

Group Session Three

—Red Flags and Breakups

Opening Activity: *Online Dating Profiles*

Supplies Needed: *paper, pens, markers*

Split your group into pairs for this activity, and hand them some paper, a pen, and some markers. Tell them to create an online dating profile for a fictitious person who is using UnHarmony.com to look for a boyfriend/girlfriend. Their profiles should include:

- picture and/or physical description
- general information (age, job, hometown, etc.)
- hobbies/interests
- what they're looking for in a relationship
- any other information they want to include.

Here's the hitch: Tell them to fill their profile with as many "red flags" as possible. When they're finished, this person's profile should make readers want to run in the opposite direction! Give the teams about 5-10 minutes to create their profiles before regrouping and sharing them with each other. Mix in these follow-up questions as you go:

- What are some behaviors or personality traits that you absolutely would not tolerate in a dating relationship?
- What red flags do you see most often in teen relationships?
- Do you think it's easier to spot red flags before you're in a relationship or while you're in a relationship? Why?
- Why do you think some people are attracted to "the bad boy" or the "bad girl"? What's the appeal there?

Discussion Questions for Session Three:

1. Why do you think some people choose to ignore red flags in a relationship?
 - *Is being in love with someone a good enough reason to stay together despite red flags? Why or why not?*
2. What should you do if you spot a red flag in your relationship?
 - *How can you make sure that it's really a red flag, and not just your boyfriend/girlfriend having a bad day?*
 - *Do you think it's possible to change someone's red flags while you're dating them? Why or why not?*
3. What role can your friends and family play when it comes to spotting flags in a relationship?
 - *Do you usually ask for your friends' and family's opinion on the people you date? Why or why not?*
 - *Why is it so important to have an outside opinion on your dating relationship?*
4. Is it okay to date a non-believer if you're just dating for fun and don't plan to get serious? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree with the list of yellow flags listed on p. 110-114?
 - *Would you add any yellow flags to this list?*
 - *What yellow flags seem to show up the most often in teen dating relationships?*
6. When it comes to yellow flags, the DiMarcos say "Don't be a dork and ruin your chance for happiness by ignoring yellow flags just because they don't seem too bad . . . Check them out and at least slow things down. It won't ruin the relationship if it's a good relationship" (p. 114).
 - *Do you think yellow flags can be more dangerous than red flags? Why?*
 - *How will analyzing yellow flags make a good relationship stronger?*
7. What are some reasons why a breakup could be better than staying together?
 - *Do you agree that rejection is inevitable if you're going to be on the dating scene? Why or why not?*
 - *Would you ever want to be with someone who doesn't want to be with you?*
8. How does the fear of rejection sometimes lead people to do stupid things?
 - *Could the fear of rejection ruin a good relationship? If so, how?*
 - *How could the fear of rejection become a self-fulfilling prophecy?*
9. Discuss this quote: "Most girls don't judge you when you ask and strike out. They don't dislike you any more after you ask than before. But they can get hurt and confused when you are too afraid to ask them at all" (p. 125).
 - *Girls: Do you agree with that statement?*
 - *Guys: What makes it hard for a guy to ask a girl out?*
10. What can you do to show that you're interested in them?
 - *What kinds of things are "overkill" when it comes to showing interest in someone?*
 - *Is it okay to flirt with people you only like as a friend? Why or why not?*

11. What causes some people to become obsessed with a certain guy or girl?

- *What do people act like when they're obsessed?*
- *How is obsession dangerous for someone's soul?*

12. What should you do if you sense that one of your friends is interested in you but you don't return the feelings?

- *Can guys and girls be "just friends"? Why or why not?*
- *Is it fair to keep a friendship with someone going when you know they want something more? Why or why not?*

13. What are some good ways to break up with someone?

- *What should you not do when you are breaking up with someone?*

14. What should you do when someone breaks up with you? How do you handle that situation in a healthy way?

- *What are some things you should not do if someone breaks up with you?*

15. If you really trust that God can work all things for good, how will this affect your perspective on being rejected by someone you like?

Sunday Morning

Small Time

After a good breakfast, split your group into same-gender groups of 5-6 students each. If possible, assign an adult youth sponsor to lead each group. Hand out copies of the "American Idols" handout to each student and then encourage each small group to find a private place where they can have a meaningful discussion.

American Idols

Hopefully you've read chapter 7 of *B4UD8* by now. (If not, take a minute to look it over right now. We'll wait.) So let's get started with a brief recap of some definitions, shall we? Keep these in mind as your group discusses the questions below.

Idol = anything that is a rival to God

Idolatry = an excessive devotion to anything other than God

Now if you want to talk about "rivals to God," take a look at the ancient Romans. They had a god for everything from seeds and sheep to marriage and metals. They prayed to them. Made sacrifices to them. Held festivals for them. They even did a bunch of weird sexual stuff for them. I'd call that "excessive devotion"—how about you? Check out these Roman gods:

Venus – Goddess of Beauty

Bacchus – God of the Vine, Wine, Merriment

Aesculapias – God of Health

Voluptas – Goddess of Pleasure

Mercury – God of Trade, Commerce and Market

Minerva – Goddess of Learning, the Arts, Sciences

Vesta – Goddess of Home and Hearth

Cupid – God of Love

Hmm . . . that's weird. It seems like maybe those "ancient" gods aren't really so ancient. I mean, don't you think some people still show "excessive devotion" to these things?

- *Q: Do you agree that idolatry is still a problem today? Why or why not?*
- *Q. What are some ways that you see people "worshipping" each of these gods today? (Look over the above list and try to come up with at least one idea for each of the gods.)*
- *Q: Which of these gods do you think teens are most likely to worship?*
- *Q: What are some other things that teens might show "excessive devotion" toward?*

Let's take a closer look at that Cupid character. He's that pudgy guy who shoots arrows into people's hearts and makes them fall in love. And we'd argue that a lot of people still worship this guy in one way or another;

- *Q. In what way does our culture make an idol out of Love or Romance?*
- *Q. Do you think a romantic relationship can fulfill someone? Is it fair to expect another person to fulfill you? Why or why not?*
- *Q. Do you think that idolizing a person can ruin your relationship with them? If so, how?*
- *Q. How can you tell if you've made an idol out of the person you are dating or crushing on?*
- *Q. How do dating obsessions/idols mess with your relationship to God?*

Okay. So hopefully you'll agree with us that idolizing Love is a bad idea. And really, all idols make a mess out of your life and your relationship to God. So let's wrap up this small group time with a little personal reflection:

Question for You: What are the idols in your life? What person or thing tends to distract you from God's plan? What do you obsess about? What do you trust in instead of trusting God?

Write down the name of that idol here: _____.
(You won't have to show this to anyone. It's just between you and God. So be real.)

Sunday Morning

Closing Worship Session

Supplies Needed: *Index cards, pens, trash can or fire pit, worship music on CD (or played by live musicians), two or three large squares of red fabric, scissors*

Finish out your retreat with a special time of worship. As students gather, hand them an index card and a pen. When everyone's ready to start, lead them through this simple activity:

- Ask them to remember the idol they named at the end of their small group session, "American Idols."
- Tell them to write the name of that idol on their index card.
- Now ask them to think about the specific ways they have worshiped that idol in the past. (actions they've taken, thoughts they've obsessed about, worries they wouldn't let go of, etc.) They should jot down a few of these thoughts on their index card as well.
- Read this quote from the book: "You have to keep yourself occupied with God, your first love, and then every other love will fall into line" (p. 160).
- Say something like this: "Do you want to fall in love? Do you want someone special in your life who can fulfill you? Who will always be there for you? Who will make you feel like you've never felt before? If you want that kind of love, then you need to start with a God who is love. You have to let go of the idols that you've put in his place. And you have to make Him your everything. Are you ready to return to your first love?"
- Start playing worship music.
- Lay the red fabric squares at the front or center of the room. Ask your adult sponsors to stand by these fabric squares and explain that these fabric pieces will be used as prayer shawls, visually representing God's love. Encourage students to confess their sin to the person who will be praying for them—they can be as vague or specific as they wish. But remind them how important it is to share their struggles with other believers.
- Invite students to come forward during your worship time to lay down their idols. When students come up to lay down their idols, they can tear their index card into pieces and dump it in the trash, or—if you have a fire—they can toss their card into the flames and watch it burn away.
- After each student destroys their idol, they should walk to the prayer shawls. There, one of the adult sponsors will cover the student's head with the prayer shawl and pray over that student—asking God to help them give up their idol and fully experience His love.
- Invite students to join in singing the praise songs throughout this activity.

When your worship time is complete, take out the scissors and cut your "prayer shawls" into smaller pieces. Give a piece to each student and ask them to put it somewhere where they'll see it everyday and be reminded of their "first love."

Close your worship session and retreat with a final prayer.