

How to Find the Right Mate—and Build a Marriage That Lasts

Thirty years ago this week, I stood at a church altar in Gainesville, Fla., and pledged my life to Deborah Delk. We didn't have a lot of money since I was working for a Christian campus ministry, but Deborah didn't care that all our worldly possessions could fit easily in my 1980 Honda Civic. She loved me, I loved her, and we knew Jesus had brought us together. That's really all we needed to start life together.

Our marriage has never been perfect (we had our first argument after we got back from our honeymoon), but we learned to keep Jesus in the center of our relationship. He is the reason our marriage has been able to withstand 30 years of storms and challenges. And when my younger friends ask me for advice on how to find the right mate, I share from my experience.

Here are 10 things you should do if you want to find the right person to marry:

1. Keep Jesus first in your life. Some Christians want marriage so bad, they make it an idol. You must yield your desires to God. I waited until I was 25 to marry Deborah, and I told God many times that I would remain single if that's what He planned for me. I wanted to get married, but I knew Jesus must be my priority. I held on to Psalm 37:4: "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart" (NASB). That verse ended up on the cover of our wedding invitation.

2. Expect God to bless you with a wonderful mate. Some people worry that if they submit to God's choice for them, He will make them marry a person they are not attracted to. That's crazy! Your Father wants to bless you. The person He brings

into your life will not be perfect (neither are you!), but you will be content if you wait on His choice for you.

3. Be led by the Holy Spirit. I don't believe there's only one way to find a mate. Some people meet each other at church; others meet online through services like eHarmony or . I even know men in India whose marriages were arranged by their parents! But the key is to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you in the process. As a young man, I was inspired by the story of Isaac and Rebekah in the Bible, and I expected God to show me who my wife would be. He ended up doing just that. I knew Deborah would be my wife before we went on our first date.

4. Wait on God's timing. I know guys who made the mistake of falling in love before they realized they were with the wrong girl. Slow down! Marriage is the most important decision you'll ever make. Look at all your options and apply discernment. If you are impatient in the area of marriage, you will seriously regret it later.

5. Look for a person who is spiritually compatible with you. Hopefully you already know you shouldn't marry an unbeliever. But you can't just marry any Christian! There are plenty of people with questionable morals and shaky faith sitting in church pews and trolling Christian dating sites. Beware of imposters, and run as fast as you can from Satan's decoys. Keep your standards high. If you settle for less by marrying a lukewarm Christian, you will end up dragging them around for the rest of your life. Marry someone who will challenge you to stay hot for God!

6. Look for confirmation. After dating for a while, you may feel you have found the right person, but don't make a snap decision. Ask God to confirm your choice. You can also ask mentors and pastors to pray with you for guidance. If you have found the right person, the Lord will give you a green light. But if spiritual people who love you are warning you to avoid the person you are dating, don't reject their advice. God may

be trying to spare you from a relationship disaster.

7. Make sure you are ready for marriage. Even after you have found the right person, don't assume it's time to call a wedding planner. Count the cost first. Do you have some unresolved anger issues? Get some counseling. Can the two of you afford to be married and pay your bills on your combined salaries? Do you need to pay off some debts first? Be practical. Love is great, but it does not pay the rent.

8. When the time is right, turn on the charm. God created romance. When you know you are in love with the right person, the two of you can celebrate with that special moment of engagement. Whether it involves roses, chocolates, fancy dinners or walks on the beach, you can make a memory that the two of you can share for decades. Romance will strengthen the bond you share.

9. Keep your clothes on and your feet on the floor until the wedding. The worst way to spoil an engagement is to get involved in premarital sex. As soon as you are engaged, discuss with your future spouse how you are going to respect sexual boundaries until you say your vows to each other. My wife and I stayed pure throughout our engagement, so when we stood at the altar to seal our union, we did it with a clear conscience. Don't let lust rob you of that blessing. People who have sex before their weddings don't trust each other afterward.

10. Enroll in a premarital counseling class. Many ministers will not marry a couple unless they agree to premarital counseling. Find out if your church offers a marriage preparation class or if an older couple you trust can meet with you regularly to discuss issues such as communication, finances, sex, family planning and basic marriage principles. Don't assume you know how to be married. You need all the advice you can get!

Remember: A successful marriage is not just two people. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." The most enduring marriages are made of a husband, a wife ... and Jesus. If you invite Him to hold your marriage together from the beginning, I believe it will endure.

J. Lee Grady *is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter at @leeegrady. He and Deborah plan to enjoy an anniversary trip to Hawaii in a few weeks.*