

Chapter 1

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT



Imagine throwing yourself into a river in an effort to learn how to swim. If you haven't learned what a breaststroke or backstroke is, how to float, and other basics of how to swim, you'll be swept away with the current. Like swimming, if you know "the basics" of what you are looking for in a dating or potential marriage partner, you won't sink at the first wave (or un-matched gentleman who comes your way). We'll look at gauging what basics you are specifically looking for so you can more easily navigate and wade through the waters of dating.

I've heard it said that finding someone to marry is not finding what you need, but finding what you want. And that is because you shouldn't *need* a husband. Know who you are without a man first. If you are confident in who you are, then a man won't feel the need to have to complete you, because that's a lot of pressure. Just as you wouldn't want the stress of a man feeling dependent on you to complete him, a man also wouldn't want you to need him to feel whole. Instead, two independent people coming together can complement each other in a beautiful and healthy way. Would you want to feel the weight of having a man who needs you to complete

him because he would be completely lost without you, or would you want a man who is so confident in who he is in Christ that it fosters that confidence inside you?



For me, the process of knowing what I wanted in a man started with knowing who I was first. And who I was didn’t take shape immediately. It was a process. In my time of singleness, I grew closer to the Lord and turned to Him for my needs. And it was through that turning that I realized He was the only One who can and should handle the weight of all my needs. Putting that on a human isn’t fair.

It was also during this time of putting my trust in the Lord that I discovered who I was. I realized that I wasn’t the shy, insecure girl I had been as a schoolgirl. I was an independent, confident woman who knew who she was and what she wanted in a man. And I wasn’t afraid to say goodbye if I discovered the man I was dating wasn’t who I wanted.

I think it’s important to point out that I wasn’t confident in the way society views confidence. It wasn’t the cockiness of thinking I deserved the world. Rather, it was after constantly putting my trust in the Lord that my confidence in the Lord grew. And soon, I was confident in who I was as a daughter of the Most High King, who could conquer anything the world threw at me with Christ before me. I was confident that I was competent to do anything the Lord put before me because I knew He wouldn’t give me anything I couldn’t handle. And I knew I wanted a man who was strong and confident in the Lord too.

I wasn’t independent in the sense that I didn’t want or need anyone else and insisted on going it alone. But I was independent in that I would go wherever the Lord directed. I wouldn’t put all my dependence on one person. Instead, I would trust Christ in

me, the hope of glory, to direct me. And it was because of that independence that I did something I never would have considered before—I became a flight attendant in April 2013. And during the last seven years of flying, I have had so many adventures and met so many interesting people. My life has been touched in more ways than I can even count because of the vast number of people I've met who have influenced my life. And I can hope that I've influenced theirs for the better as well.

The further I went in this journey called life, the more I grew to put my dependence on God. And the more I depended on Him, the more I came to the knowledge of who I was on the inside. And once that happened, I knew what I wanted in a spouse. Though it wasn't until I started dating that I learned more and more of what I *didn't* want in a spouse.

You'd think as a Christian gal, I would have found a nice selection of Christian men. I recall regaling stories about ex-boyfriends to a fellow flight attendant once while we were killing time during an all-nighter flight. After realizing all the crazy stories I had, I said, "You name it, I probably dated it." As I mentioned at the beginning, I really knew how to pick them.

Through each failed attempt at finding someone suitable, I was able to add something to my list. When I was twenty-six, after breaking up with my first boyfriend, I created a list of two sections: *Must-haves* and *It'd be nice*. The must-haves were nonnegotiable. And that's where I found my deal breakers. The more guys I dated, the longer that list became. It was from that list that I created questions to ask dates to see if I wanted to even bother getting to know them further. The question that probably shocked the guys the most was if they had any gay tendencies. But then I would explain the backstory to that one.

Unfortunately, guys, like girls, can lie. And sometimes when you put a guy on the spot, he won't be as forthcoming as you would like. He will try to make himself look better and possibly skirt

around uncomfortable questions. So you have to assess not only what he says but how he says it. What’s his body language saying as he’s speaking? Is he making eye contact? Is he shuffling in his seat uncomfortably?

Sometimes you won’t know he’s lied until you catch him in the act. I once asked a guy if he swore. He answered no (since he knew I didn’t cuss). But then after hearing him around the corner, swearing like a sailor with his friends, not only was I disappointed that we didn’t have that in common, but he immediately lost my trust and respect. And two particularly important things you need in a relationship are *trust* and *respect*. So if a man has lost them both within the first several dates, there is no need to continue.

I always made certain guys knew up front that I wasn’t out to play games. I value honesty very highly, and I would rather they hurt my feelings but give me an honest answer. The truth is always best because, one way or another, the truth will eventually come out. And the longer it takes for the truth to surface, the more that lie is going to hurt.

This philosophy goes both ways. It’s best not to cover up things about yourself that you think he won’t like. It’s best to be open about it from the get-go. Because if he doesn’t like whatever it is, he isn’t worth your time to begin with.

You have to be able to accept each other. As human beings, we can change little things about ourselves because we should be ever growing and maturing, but we shouldn’t try to set out to change monumental things about another person. If we can’t accept each other from the start, what makes us think that will change? It takes an awful lot of pride in oneself to think we can change something about a person who’s been a certain way for as long as they can remember.

I don’t say these things to make you too picky. (Although I was told more than once that I was being too picky.) By having a template, so to speak, we know the groundwork of the type of

person we want. The “big picture” of who they are. And if you find someone whose big picture, hot-button items are in agreement with yours, there may be something there worth pursuing. Because if we only have little quibbles (rather than deal-breaker items), then little differences are less significant and can often easily be rectified. Bottom line: You won’t find someone who is exactly like you. So if you can make peace with minor differences while embracing the larger similarities, you’ll be off to a great start with having a successful relationship.

My Waiting Story

My first kiss was from my first boyfriend at age twenty-five. I had told him he had to know he wanted to marry me to kiss me. So after five months (which was my longest relationship until I dated my now-husband), he kissed me. But I wasn’t attracted to him in the way I needed to be. He wasn’t bad looking by any means, but I didn’t have that physical chemistry with him. When he gave me my first kiss, I wanted to be excited; yet I couldn’t help but feel disappointed. *What is wrong with me?* I wondered. Wasn’t it supposed to be butterflies and fireworks? Instead, I was grossed out by the weird squishiness of his lips and the slobber he left on my chin.

I remember being asked by friends if it was difficult now that we had started kissing to refrain from going further (since we were saving sex for marriage). I was frustrated by how often I got the question. No, it was not difficult at all. I didn’t have any inclination to go further. I did want to keep kissing him, though, because I kept hoping that something inside me would click and I would suddenly enjoy it. But that never happened because you can’t manufacture chemistry.

Yes, I thought he was good looking (attractive). But chemistry is more than just finding a man physically attractive. Rather than simply one person admiring another, it involves two people.

It starts as a back-and-forth spark, and ignited by mutual interest, it can go beyond the physical appearance of a person. Then it can grow into an even stronger connection of chemistry through interactions over time.

My Waiting Takeaway

After that failed first relationship, I started making a list for things I wanted in a future husband. Notable items that made it on there in addition to being a believer were: he can’t be a liar or be addicted to alcohol or pornography. With someone addicted to alcohol and pornography, being a liar comes with the territory. Again, it came down to the fact that I just knew I had to be able to trust the man I would marry. Without trust, any prospect of chemistry is destroyed. To have chemistry, I determined that the man couldn’t have a propensity of lying. With my first boyfriend, my heart sank each time I learned of a new lie. Each was a little devastation that caused his attractiveness to diminish. He was a handsome man by the world’s standards; but each unsavory detail unearthed made my admiration fade. That is because there is a direct correlation between character and how we perceive their levels of attractiveness. If we admire a man’s character, chemistry grows. Chemistry speaks to the attractiveness of the heart. Increased feelings of chemistry will make physical characteristics more appealing.

So please, don’t keep dating someone you’re not attracted to. Even if they have all the qualities you are looking for, but you don’t find that person attractive, then you won’t ever gain chemistry with them. And that means no matter how hard you try to muster or manufacture attraction or chemistry, the relationship is just never going to work. You need both facets to weather any storms you may face in the future.

Your Waiting Step

Try writing a list of things you consider nonnegotiable items you want in a husband. Also, add a side list of things that you don't have to have but would be nice. And then bring those lists before the Lord and pray for your future husband and specifically for those things you've listed.

My husband and I have compiled a couple of potential lists to give you some ideas of where to start for your own lists. Take a look at these ideas and then spend some time making a couple of lists of your negotiable and nonnegotiable characteristics. Keep in mind that these are things you are listing to bring before the Lord in prayer. Allow Him to shape your lists and shape your heart with His desires for qualities of your future spouse.

Must-haves

- God-loving/God-fearing
- Honest
- Straight
- Shared theological standpoints
- Financially responsible
- Doesn't have a criminal record

It Would Be Nice

- Number of children wanted
- Open minded
- Loves animals
- Physically active
- Safe driver
- Has good relationship with his family

Now, these are just ideas to help get you started. There are so many options to consider that may or may not be important to

you. So here’s a list of things to think about. You can decide if any should go on one of your main lists.

Options to Consider: Yay or Nay?

- Drinking?
- Gambling?
- Drugs?
- Smoking?
- Porn?
- Tattoos?
- Foul mouth?
- Video games?
- Traveling?
- Time conscious?
- Political views?
- Introverted or extroverted personality?
- Likes/dislikes animals?
- Loves worship?
- Enjoys the outdoors/hiking/camping, etc.?
- Entertainment preferences (TV shows, music, etc.)?
- Food preferences (Italian, American, Chinese, Mexican, etc.)?
- Has/wants children?
- Has dreams and aspirations?
- Friendly or flirtatious with other women?
- Plays an instrument?
- Into competitive sports?
- Likes board games?

This isn’t an exhaustive list of ideas, of course. And things that I would put in my lists may be different from what you would choose for yours, but this should help give you a start.

The Lord was so gracious with me when He gave me a husband who not only meets every criterion on my *Must-have* list, but he even meets everything on my *It'd Be Nice* list as well! Only by the grace of God did that happen. There are even characteristics my husband exhibits that aren't on my lists that I didn't know I would want that complement me perfectly.

Just to give some examples of things on my secondary list to give you a reference, I wanted someone who liked cats, since I love cats. And after dating a guy who was allergic to cats, not having cat allergies went on the nonnegotiable list, since I had a cat. And my husband not only wasn't allergic and loved cats, but he also brought a cat into our relationship. And both our cats got along splendidly from the start.

I also hoped for a man who was a musician, since I am a violinist. And sure enough, I got a husband who sings and plays the trombone. And after we got married, we joined our church's worship team together, which is a joy I never imagined before.

However, sometimes I would shift items from one list to the other. I always thought it would be nice to have similar food preferences. But I soon realized that if I wanted to be able to cook for my husband and him for me, we had to share similar tastes. And as the years went on, I moved it to my nonnegotiable list. I couldn't imagine having to make two separate meals every night to accommodate both of our likes. And then adding children to feed into the mix someday just was too much for me to consider. Guess what happened when I asked my now-husband what his favorite foods were? Yes, they matched mine very well. We have minor differences, of course, such as his love for sausage, tomatoes, and rosemary, none of which I can understand. But he doesn't understand my love for cilantro, beets, or cold medicine either. Thankfully for us, those were extremely minor differences and easily remedied.

Still, food preferences and dietary restrictions are important things to consider. Because even your food allergies will affect each

other. I am lactose intolerant, and my sweet husband refuses to even have any regular milk in the house so that he won't accidentally bake with it. So we have Lactaid milk, lactose-free ice cream, and lactose-free cream cheese and sour cream. Yes, these are all more expensive, but he doesn't want to risk giving me an adverse reaction that will affect the rest of my day.

If your potential spouse has specific dietary restrictions, it could be beneficial to try adjusting your own eating and cooking to see if you can also be on that diet too. It will make cooking for each other easier, and they will greatly appreciate your sacrifice.

Of course, that's not to say my husband never eats dairy, but he's conscious of the fact that I would love to eat dairy just as much as him. So if he is going to eat a dessert that I can't, for example, he'll make sure I get a dessert I enjoy that I can eat too. I should insert here that he did learn the hard way at a family birthday party where I got my feelings hurt when he ate cake in front of me that I couldn't have and there was nothing sweet lactose-free that I could eat. But then I felt guilty for making him feel bad, because I knew I should be happy for him that he was enjoying a treat.

Ultimately, relationships are about putting each other first. And I think that's the biggest reason we get our feelings hurt—when our spouse does something that makes us feel like they don't care. Marriage is a continual reminder to put our spouse first. I think dating is a good place to practice this. We can easily slip into the thought pattern of, why bother since we aren't married to the person? The reason is because you may *eventually* marry that person, and the habits you make while dating will carry into marriage.

While practicing putting your boyfriend first is wonderful, if he isn't making it a practice of putting you first, there may be a problem. We don't want a one-sided relationship. Now it could be that no one taught him to put others ahead of himself. Or it could be that he is selfish. If it's the former, there is a chance that nudging him in the right direction may help. But if it's because of the latter,

it may be because of self-centeredness, or perhaps that he isn't as interested in you as you are in him. Regardless, if that's the case, you may want to consider that your current relationship doesn't have future potential.

Marriage is a constant cycle of giving and receiving, and if there is only one giver and one receiver, that circle is broken. And soon the giver will want to stop giving, and then the receiver will become upset at the giver. Instead, it should be a constant flow. But we shouldn't keep score. Keeping score only invites disappointment and feelings of unfairness. The fact of life is that sometimes when life is good, we will give more; and other times when life gets us down, we will receive more. That's the beauty of a self-sacrificing relationship. You are there for your spouse no matter what, love them no matter what, and will give of yourself no matter what you may receive in return.

Ultimately, when you are determining what you want in a husband, flip the card and recognize that he will want the same qualities in you. Strive to be like the person you want to marry, and when your paths do cross, you will find yourself better prepared for marriage than when you were simply on the hunt for the perfect man.

Your Waiting Journal Tips

Whether or not you've begun either of your lists, here are some questions to ponder and journal. What is the most important thing I am looking for in a spouse? Do I also reflect that characteristic within myself? If not, are there practical ways I can become more of the woman I want to be? Pull out your journal and take a few moments to jot down some thoughts after reading this chapter.

Verse and Prayer

“O Lord, You have searched me and know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.” (Ps. 139:1–5 NASB)

Father God, You know me better than I even know myself. You count every hair on my head. Please help me grow closer in my walk with you. And I ask for guidance as I ponder the type of man I would like as a helpmate. Lord, guide my thoughts as I create these lists. And I pray that You will ultimately allow Your will be done in who I marry. I give You my hopes and dreams and ask for You to mold them and shape them into Yours. Make me like clay that I can be fashioned into the sculpture that You find pleasing. I want to glorify You in everything I do and say. And I want to give You the authority to lead me—whether that is to the mission field, to a friend, to a husband, or to a new calling—I give You permission to guide me through this life. In Your precious Son’s name, Jesus. Amen.

EMPTY SPACES



We fill each day with either work or play. And when we have free space, we quickly fill it with TV, sports, friends, coffee, breakfast, lunch, or dinner dates. Because we don't like empty space—that space between to-do lists and prior engagements. That unmarked time between workdays that still needs to be filled.

But I started to wonder why? Why are we so afraid of silence? Is it awkward . . . to be both in public and private without our phones, music, or headsets?

The answer is yes. I even find it awkward to sit in my own house in silence.

But I see now how empty space is powerful. I was unexpectedly sitting in silence, and I realized: it wasn't so bad.

In fact, it was inspiring. So I started to write.

I started realizing how filling my days, hours, even minutes only distracted me from what my heart really wanted: to spend quality time with my Creator, my lover, friend, and constant companion. Even when I'm busy contemplating my to-do list of cleaning, laundry, packing, shopping—oh yes, can't forget to take the cat to the vet or change the sheets before leaving for the Laundromat.

But the moment I stop the chaotic mayhem of doing things, my brain decides to remind me of other things that need doing.

And then I return to my reflections on the only One who can help me relax and keep from taxing my body and brain from this constant need to be doing something.

And I start to realize that I don't have to *do* anything but simply *be* with Him because I don't have to prove anything to Him. He accepts me without prerequisites. His only requirement is that I rest in Him. And He abides in me. No striving, just relishing His presence, which He gives without partiality.

Whether we're acting in our weakness or strength, He remains the same. He won't remove His presence simply because we're being immature or imperfect. He knew our flaws when He accepted us, and He freed us from our imperfections the moment that He saved us—because now all He sees in me is the perfection of Christ.

I know I'm a work in progress, but knowing that He sees me blameless gives me the boldness to live with the single-mindedness of pursuing Him and His righteousness.

And in consequence, I pray to gain the confidence to not fear the silence, but instead to create empty space to dedicate to pursuing His presence . . . and to simply sit in silent awe of Him.