

FINDING THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE

by Janet Chester Bly

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janet@blybooks.com

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The process of discovering or finding another person is the process of losing oneself. This is certainly not a loss of identity, but only of the false identity that is founded upon self-will. Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, pg.86

I'd been dating Jess all summer. A nice guy. Good manners. Pleasant to be around. And he had a motorcycle. We doubled with another couple going to all kinds of car races. But I knew beyond a doubt he wasn't The One. No chemistry. No shared interests. No similar goals. No future that I could see beyond summer. But I didn't know how to tell him. When he asked me to go with him to the first fall football game, I stalled.

"I've got other plans," I said. A coward's response, but there it was.

I planned to meet some girlfriends at the game, but arrived earlier than they did. When I noticed Jess across the stadium, headed my way, I panicked. I looked up into the bleachers and spied Steve, a schoolmate, sitting by himself. In alphabetical style, his name being Bly and mine being Chester, he'd sat in front of me all four years of high school English class. We'd done a lot of teasing back and forth. I considered him a friend. Nothing more.

In a flash of inspiration, I saw an opening out of my dilemma of explaining myself to Jess. I shot up the steps and eased beside Steve on some pretense. To give the appearance we had come together. We chatted as I watched Jess pass by, with one quick look our way. Soon, the game started and I didn't leave. Steve bought me pizza afterward, then gave me a ride home in his '55 Chevy blue and white convertible with red interior.

The following Monday morning I told him I couldn't find my Student Body card. "Did I leave it in your car?"

"Yep," he said.

"Can I have it back?"

"Nope," he said, "Unless you go out with me Friday night."

Week after week, the friendship grew into a major crush, from my part. By Christmas, I met his parents, re-connected with his older sister, and felt I found home. We married less than two years later. . .more than four decades ago.

There's multitudes of ways of finding the love of your life. The search itself consumes plenty of time and energy. Finding the love of your life settles most of the facets of who you are and where you're going. If you've done it right. With some reason and logic. With some wisdom and guidelines. With some comprehension, a measure of sense of who you are and what he needs to be.

Who is the love of your life?

He's your kindred spirit. Your soul mate. That is, he's compatible with your personality, worldview, and your passions. He offers you understanding, acceptance, and being valued. Out of this whole world he's chosen you. Only you. Such emotional power.

Then it happens. You meet a guy. You like him. You think you love him. But you're not sure. You've never really been in love before. You don't know what to expect. But you know that choosing him means you eliminate one supreme life pursuit. Life's simplified, in that arena anyway. You open your door to him and close it to all others. This is no trifling matter.

Of course, reading this article won't insure your absolute success in finding the love of your life. But you might discover the one next step for you to take. . .or pick up an idea or plan that never occurred to you before. That's why it's worth your reading. Or give it to a friend who's looking for the love of her life.



IS HE WORTH YOUR TIME?

Do you like the people close to him?
Are you comfortable with his pattern of relationships?

What kind of baggage does he bring?
Is he too pushy?

Does he get along with my friends & family?

WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVE?

Otherness: that strange encounter of separate identities as one person rubs up against another to produce an edge, to produce the flashing keenness of love.

Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage, pg.46

That sharp stab of first love. Oh, the marvel. And also the utter misery. Why do you want the pain of passion?

Okay, you don't like being alone. You see yourself as a single in a two-some world. You feel there's a congenial counterpart out there. Somewhere. When you connect, you'll feel at peace, whole, fulfilled. But are you sure you're ready to find the love of your life?

For instance, do you know who you are yet and what you're meant to be? If not, how much beyond the first flush of the feelings of 'being in love' do you need to see before you know this could make a compatible lifetime match? It's dicey to leap before you take an informed, hard look. You've got this one life. Make your love count. Not only for your happiness, but for his peace and those around you.

What's your motivations for searching for the love of your life? Check all that apply:

- I'm lonely
- I'm unhappy (at home, at work, with life in general)
- I've just come through a bad relationship
- all my friends have found theirs
- my biological clock's ticking
- I need a financial partner
- I've got lots of love to give
- I need to be loved
- other: _____

Every woman needs to receive love. And give love. "A woman becomes beautiful when she knows she's loved" (John & Stasi Eldredge, *Captivating*, pg.112). A woman comes alive when she's pursued. But don't expect any man to be the center of your happiness. To meet your every need. To fulfill your deepest dreams. Only God can do that. You may not believe it now. But time, testing, and your tried faith will prove it to you.

God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is.

*A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God**

The Love Wars

You have to weigh the positives and negatives to every relationship.

Some things can be overlooked, like funny clothes or stupid hair.

Buy new clothes and find a good stylist. But if they don't like your kids or are upset that your ex is actively co-parenting? That can't be overlooked.

Jann Blackstone-Ford and Sharyl Jupe, co-founders of Bonus Families

"Just Walk Away and Here's Why", The Lewiston Tribune, 3/12/2008

Tyler was ten years older than Nicole, very handsome, divorced, and the father of two pre-schoolers. She was charmed by his attentions. She couldn't stand his little kids, so she stayed away when he had them. Otherwise, she knew he was perfect for her. Until she discovered he had two other girlfriends too.

Nicole hadn't healed from her failed relationship with Tyler. She tried to ease the pain by jumping at the first guy who flirted. The hurt of rejection still stung. And she refused to assess what had happened between Tyler and her, to give herself that time for reflection. Instead, she flew into Sean's arms. After two months, he dumped her too. She sought out an older friend from her church to confide in.

"When you fully forgive, you'll be able to see clear enough to find the right one for you," her friend advised. "Release Tyler in your mind and heart. And Sean. Release what you can't hold and keep. Besides, neither of these guys was good for you."

Nicole got busy with her church and her job. She passed her real estate license. She determined to wait a full year before she dated again. That extended to two years. By then, she knew who she wanted. And why.

THE SEARCH

In our culture we allow adolescents, who do not yet fully understand themselves or their own needs, who have had absolutely no experience in choosing a mate, and who may be insecure, vascillating, and immature, to make a choice that is supposed to last for more than fifty years.

Jim Conway, *Men In Midlife Crisis*, P. 181

So, where do you begin? You may find him at work. Or in class. Or at places you like to go for recreation or worship, doing hobbies or exercise. Nowadays it's not uncommon to look on the internet, with varying degrees of success. And sometimes danger. Predators and con artists find naive girls and lonely women a potential online target. You do what you can to find that one person for whom you'll spend your days learning to love.

One idea is to befriend or date a fair number of guys—to get an overview of the types of personalities and what and who appeals to you most. A well-rounded social life aids with critical choices. Brother-sister relationships between the sexes enlarge all your worlds.

One of the purposes of dating is to get to know those of the opposite sex and to learn to relate to them as persons. Half the world is made up of individuals of the opposite sex. If I fail to learn the art of building wholesome relationships with "the other half," immediately I have limited my horizons

considerably.

Gary Chapman, *Toward A Growing Marriage*, p.16

Catherine believes she found the love of her life at first sight. "I remember the first time I saw him at the bus stop. *Zowie* went my heart. Tender eyes. Shy smile. Neat, adorable mustache. And he carried a copy of a Dean Koontz novel. I love that author—makes me shiver all over!"

"We've been an item over six months. We still get on the same bus every day. Everything I've learned about him I admire. He's a decent guy in every way. Communication comes so easy to us."

It begins before the moment of contact.

What do you want in a life partner? It's smart to think about that before the love hormone clogs your brain. Are you more likely to choose a guy who makes you feel good when you're with him? Or one who fits into your goals and dreams for the future? The sooner you know what you cannot tolerate in a relationship, the better up front choice you'll make. The ideal is to engage your mind before you give your heart.



BEST PLACES TO LOOK:

- 1) Church
- 2) Retreats
- 3) Reunions
- 4) Christian Conferences
- 5) eHarmony.com ®

RISKY PLACES TO LOOK:

- 1) Internet chat rooms
- 2) Bars
- 3) Cruise ships
- 4) Job
- 5) Blind date

Okay, the heart often snaps to attention first. And then filters everything you see and hear. Realists may say, those who wait for the mind to analyze before investing emotion. . . never marry. Because all boys need to grow up. And all men have flaws.

But at the least, form a friendship. Define who he is and who you are. Discern what you foresee of your future. Deepen conversations. Develop shared activities. The intricate process of becoming friends, especially best friends, probes the depths of discovering a potential lifetime mate. Vigorous proof requires going through lots of stuff together.

Whom you choose. . . or don't choose. . . frames your character, reveals your moral resolve, and sets your priorities.



Choose your life's mate carefully. From this one decision will come 90 percent of all your happiness and misery. Be willing to wait for the love of your life. From *Life's Little Instructions from the Bible.*



GETTING-TO-KNOW-YOU-DEEPER ACTIVITIES:

1) Serve as counselors at a summer camp, 2) work together on a political committee, 3) chaperone a junior high field trip, 4) take on a debating class, 5) go whitewater rafting

What Do You Want/Need In A Life Partner?

I've heard enough from psychotherapists and counselors over the years to believe that we shouldn't try to change each other.

I discourage newlyweds, for example, from making marriage into a spousal remodeling project.

Pastor Forrest Claassen, Lewiston Tribune, 2/23/08

It's important to let him be who he is, not as you want or need him to be. Get to know his uniqueness. Keep an open eye on his reality. Can you accept his quirks without privately plotting to change him? Offer him friendship on his terms. Gouge out all pretense of appearances on your part. Are you able to express displeasure or concern in a way that helps rather than hinders?

Somehow, find his pulse. Know the best and lesser beats of his heart. Discover at least one imperfection and measure it against his strengths. Does that one blemish alter everything? Does it dull your sureness? Has the life gone from his appeal?

Jennifer shared thoughts about her fiancé. "It bothers me that Kevin isn't always kind. He's not always gentle with others' weaknesses. Sometimes even mine. But he works hard. And I've noticed a fierce kind of loyalty to his employer and his friends. And to me. When bad things happen to me, he's the first one I want there. He seems to know what to say, what to do. He grasps the core of situations quickly. That's important too."

You want a relationship that makes sense. Something about it falls into place, with what you've been, with who you are now, with a future full of hope and promise. It feels good. More

than that, your mind and reason grasps a purpose for the two becoming one. He's got to come packaged already with some of this going for him.

From Staci, who broke up with her boyfriend of one year: "I discovered I need honesty. I want compassion. I've got to sense that he's got a will to understand me. Otherwise, we'll never connect at any level other than just acquaintances."



FIND A THINK TANK. *Where can you go to think through your relationship? A private spot away from the emotional and social pressures? Do you know a get-away where you can be by yourself in safety and quiet or with a trusted family member or girlfriend? How about a walk through the woods? A day at a park? A week at the beach?*

When assessing the positives and negatives of your past relationships, step back a bit and determine what's been important to you from the beginning of seeking a lifelong mate. What were your expectations for falling in love? What are the "sure would be nice" traits as well as the Non-Negotiables for a man you want to learn to love? What do you stand for and won't tolerate?

Whether a guy's in the picture yet or not, assess social, spiritual, and intellectual pursuits and interests that define you. Are you aware of your own value system? When you're in love, the temptation's strong to ignore conflicting goals that can blow up when you've cooled down.

Here's my **Ten Things I Want in a Man:**

1. ***Faith.*** He seeks God's will daily. He tries to understand his experiences and situations from a divine viewpoint. And he'll pray for me and us in times of need.
2. ***Creativity.*** His mind's active. He likes to think, probe, debate. He prepares for the future, but makes the present come alive. He plans an occasional surprise for me.
3. ***A sense of humor.*** Because I'm a melancholy temperament by nature, I want and need someone who makes me laugh.
4. ***Some common interests.*** He joins in some of my favorite activities. I'll also acquire a few new hobbies because of him. We've got to have some shared ventures.
5. ***He works at our relationship.*** If something's wrong between us, he seeks me out. He'll look to God, to us, and if need be, a professional, to work things out.
6. ***He loves me with touch.*** Hugs. Snuggles. A stolen kiss in an empty store aisle. A meaningful pat or wink in a crowd.
7. ***He makes me feel safe.*** He makes sure that I'm as protected as I can be. In addition, I don't have to worry about what he's doing, where he is, or with whom.
8. ***He doesn't put me down in public.*** If I do stupid stuff, he waits until no one can hear or we get home to tell me about it.
9. ***He's patient with my femaleness.*** I may get teary when we need to talk. Or get emotional over trifles. I may worry more. Sometimes I won't feel fulfilled or attractive or needed. Some days I need to be like a little girl and sit in his lap. Or I need to just play.
10. ***He's decisive.*** Yet he respects my opinion. He includes me in the discussion.

Make your own list. Put a mark by the ones that are presently being fulfilled, if any. Highlight the points that you consider crucial, non-negotiable.

Talk your list over with a friend. Or with a women's support group whom you've learned to appreciate and respect—at church, on the job, at school. Ask them, what do these wishes seem to reveal about you? Ask yourself, how would you deal with unmet expectations?

The Courting Game . . .

can be dishonest. You work hard to present your best side. You try to keep him ignorant of your faults. You confuse love with physical attraction, personal desire, even lust. This sets the stage for a whole pattern of behavior in your relationship.

Do you know his history? What are his habits? Has he been fickle or unfaithful before? Just as important, what does he need most from you? What's on his list of ten things he wants in a woman? What can you contribute to his life?

Do a lot of talking about important things. Discuss your life goals. Examine your expectations for this relationship. "When these expectations are all brought into the open, evaluated, challenged and discussed," says counselor H. Norman Wright, "greater harmony comes to the marriage" (*The Pillars of Marriage*, Regal Books, p.44). Think through what needs you expect him to meet

Bonnie and Tina both got it wrong—in very different ways.

Bonnie believed in the Perfect Mate Theory. When she found him, there'd never be a squabble. If just a hint of discord appeared, out he'd go. At age fifty, she felt certain she'd finally found her Dream Man. Everything seemed so ideal for that two weeks on that cruise ship where they met. Surely this was the one. "Do you think I'm in love?" she asked. "No one's ever affected me like him. I think I've found my match. Do you think he's the love of my life?"

"Love's a choice," I finally told her on the phone in one of our many conversations. "It's not just a magic meeting with the only one ever right for you. You've got to choose to love him again everyday, as sometimes the mystery, sometimes the monotony of who he is unfolds."

Bonnie broke up the engagement soon after. She admitted that her too high expectations set her up for disillusionment. She wasn't ready to trust her judgment. She expected some magical zap, a mystical sign instead. Otherwise, she couldn't handle the uncertainty of loving a possible imperfect man.

Tina figured love would find her in the midst of bed hopping. It's all she'd known since she was a hormone driven teen. Every date ended at her place. Sometimes the guy left the next morning and never returned. Tina didn't think of it as a 'one night stand.' She was just trying guys out, to find the right one through chemistry alone. The perfect sex partner. Several stayed a spell.

Her way's too common in our society, supported by movies and novels and the internet. She blames her men for their imperfections when she's part of enabling them. A generation ago a



Women Helping Women

Look to mature, stable friends, trusty support groups, or a professional counselor to help you recognize warning signs: That this guy's no good for you. That he'll cause you grief. Or that he's material for the love of your life. It's okay to be picky. Loneliness can lower the bar, but aim for a guy that's a good fit for his life and yours, as it is now and as you dream it will be.

young woman dated. Their friendship grew. They made some vows. Then came the kids. Even if the order got switched, the mores encouraged them to “make things right.”

Today, one of the more common expectations, furthered by women, is that there is no order—women are free, easy, impregnable, disposable and replaceable. We have let go of the expectation that the men who create babies will step up to the plate and become responsible husbands and fathers. You know why men skate? Because the women let them.

Lori Borgman, *“It’s Time Women Put An End To The Live-in Boyfriend”*
McClatchy-Tribune News Service, December 16, 2007

True intimacy, which gals like Tina seek, gets side-swiped when she sleeps with a guy before she knows a thing about what makes his brain tick. She knows his biceps, but not his biases or beliefs or what makes his blood run. Intimacy grasps his psyche, becomes comfortable with his innermost dreams, respect his fears. Intimacy penetrates the personality and soul, making you bosom buddies before you’re bedmates.

Finding The Love

God never sends just one sign: He keeps on confirming His course for us with one vision after another. But the reading of His signs is essentially a task for faith, a task for people who are willing to persist in seeking. . . .

Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, pg.21

You finally find him. But something snaps. A blunder is made. It’s not the same. The relationship’s rocky for a bit, but remains stable. Then you face almost unbearable honesty.

Accept that this thing happened. Give and accept apologies. Verbalize what’s important to you. Clear the air and start over. Stronger than ever. Allow a certain grace note to enter. That’s what love and relationship’s all about, this side of heaven.

Love is not an emotion. Love is not an experience. Love is a promise. A resolve. An attitude. An act of the will—wanting to do good things for your loved one, even when he’s cranky or ungrateful or lost in his own world. Love can be learned through practice. The willingness to love takes courage. You can’t be afraid of the process or the discovery of facts you might find disappointing or frightful. Giving love gets you out of the pit of selfishness.

Love is a choice. Love is life’s greatest challenge. You may need to choose to love this man over and over and over again. Doing the work of love isn’t always *convenient*. It’s high stakes commitment. Love is the roller coaster we call relationship.

Finding the love of your life is so much easier than the nurture and maintenance afterward. The greatest love killer is self-will, self-seeking. Rampant ego. Angry impatience.



“Not much gets through the barbed wire, not much gets by the great bulldog of the ego. For truly to open our hearts to another person is to invite them into our own throne room and to sit them down on our very own throne, on the seat normally warmed by no one but ourselves. And to do that is to have the throne, the seat of the ego, rocked off its foundations. Love is an earthquake that relocates the center of the universe.”

Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, pg.37

Deafness to the other's problems. Hiding in a hard shell. Fully mature lovers mesh their wants and desires into doing for the other. Even when it's inconvenient. Or not fun anymore. If you want love, you give it. But the twist? Expect nothing in return.

Never underestimate the power of loneliness or desperation to entice you to do foolish things, to deceive you into dumb decisions. For instance, the boy you'd pick at sixteen might not be the same man you'd look at twice when you're twenty-five.

Warning signs

Don't respect him.

He's very controlling.

Don't feel like equals.

Something doesn't feel right.

Have reason not to trust him.

He's physically rough with you.

The relationship's out of control.

Lack of wholehearted commitment.

Sense that you picked the wrong guy.

Secret resentment of his demands on your time.

Don't share same important life goals and passions.

Reluctance to give him more than your minimal attention.

Having second thoughts whether you'd be better off as a single.

Don't recognize children from another partner as part of the package.

On different paths in career choices, wanting kids or not, politics, or religion.

Either of you have unhealed wounds or past failures that haven't been confessed.

Brittany says, "I knew he hurt too deeply to be sensitive to my needs. He was too absorbed in his own pain. But I figured my caring would get him through it. He just needed some healing time. But my mom saw it different. She thought him selfish and weak. She turned against him. That made me frustrated, but determined to come alongside, be his helper. But the day arrived that I finally gave up. He exhausted me—all that rush of constant emotional turmoil. I had enough of my own."

Christin knew her relationship with Eric was only superficial. "I never felt free to share my thoughts at any deep level. I felt a check on several occasions to hide the ideals that mean the most to me, in fear that I'd offend or we'd get in an unpleasant disagreement. But I let that slide because I enjoyed his presence, his closeness, the loss of loneliness so much."

There's no sure-fire way to know if his imperfections match your coping mechanisms--without some experiences to explore, to try out these interactions. One suggestion is to measure your relationship with scriptures and all it says about true love, like those from 1 Corinthians 13 (MSG):

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,
 Doesn't force itself on others,
 Isn't always "me first,"
 Doesn't fly off the handle,
 Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
 Doesn't revel when others grovel,
 Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
 Puts up with anything,
 Trusts God always,
 Always looks for the best,
 Never looks back,
 But keeps going to the end.

Which one of these concepts do you need to pay attention to most right now?

Reasons To Mate . . .

are legion. But not to be entered into without care and caution. Man united with woman is the most fragile, yet fruitful of human relationships. It's at once demanding and delightful. And sometimes sad. There's value in confronting and confessing your gut level motives before searching for the love of your life. And recognizing the baggage that can derail your hopes. Such as, look into your past. And into his. Is there a quagmire of hurts? A mess of misunderstanding? A pool of suspicions? A wall of resentment? A galley of guilt? Write down five challenging things that he should know about you before he commits. And have him do the same. Know ahead, as much as possible, the stretches your heart and stamina must make to embrace this love of your life.



Think this through until you can answer a definite yes or no. Do you cling to an "any male will do as long as he's available and interested in me" mentality? Check it out: Have you had some wholesome friendships with guys that have enabled you to 'play the field'? Are you okay with your guy only as long as his attention's always on you? Do you like him better when you can be seen together in public, than in private when it's just you and him alone?

Marriage involves us synecdochically in this mystical activity of God's by choosing for us just one person, one total stranger out of all the world's billions, with whom to enter into the highest and deepest and farthest reaches of sacrificial, loving relationship.
 Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, Pg.47

In other words, marriage is a small sample of a very large picture of God's love for the whole of humanity, and the love we'll express and fully enter into some day in heaven with all his children.

Some Stuffy Fax About Sex

Sex isn't just an act. Sex is a progression. Sex begins with kissing. It goes on to petting, then to heavy petting, and finally has its climax in intercourse. The couple that does everything up to intercourse but stops short of intercourse itself is doing

something unnatural to both bodies.
Greg Speck, Sex: It's Worth Waiting For, pg.11

No healthy, wholesome relationship can grow that's centered solely on chemically charged activity. It stymies the personal growth of the individuals involved in the relationship. Likewise, if you've got no sparks, your love tank's empty. Something's not happening for you here. You gotta feel some shivers for each other. Boundaries and balance keep the respect and romance right. For those who care about staying in control of body urges, here's some blunt guidelines offered by pastoral counselor, Gary Chapman (*Toward A Growing Marriage*, p.21,22):

How do you avoid sexual intercourse?

1. Never take your clothes off.
2. Never put hands under clothes.
3. Never lie down together.

There you have it—simple rules for saving the hottest fireworks for after the ceremony.

Sealing the Deal

The taking of vows is an act of faith. If people were faithful by nature, vows would not be necessary; their yes would be yes and their no would be no. But it is because people are not inherently faithful nor honest nor loving that they must stand up and declare that they will be.
Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage, pg.97

Sealing the deal means **commitment. . . the formal affirmation that you'll love him now and promise to learn to love him better as the years go by.** Commitment confronts your bent to laziness, that evolves into apathy, and taking another's passion and being there for granted. Commitment arouses duty and sacrifice, the essentials of dependable social connect. Commitment signifies you grow up and don't blame him for every whit of your unhappiness. You don't expect him to provide your every whim. Ask rather, what can you do for him?

The good news: that terrifying decision to commit becomes easier if you're head-over-heels crazy in love. It's like a soothing drug. An anesthetic. You're insane enough to have the audacity to trust another human with the key to your heart. That's both the benefit and bane of the in-love frenzy. The intoxicating perfume of the first stages of attraction can overpower all caution.

The careless disregard of basic good sense and morals--such as insisting he treat you with respect and honor--preclude relational disaster. There's no more worthy exercise on earth than to approach mating with a desire and will to do it as right as you can. To become the best of lovers. And more than lovers. To be best friends. To work side-by-side to build a home, make a family.

Love's not something that just 'zaps' you. You can make it happen. By giving yourself the gift of finding the love of your life.

And the journey to finding the love of your life gets much more powerful when God is in it. He enables couples chosen by Him to accomplish purposes beyond what you could ever ask or think. Your match somehow includes the plans for eternity. You bring Him glory.

+++++THE  END+++++

Janet Chester Bly

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