

# Praying for the right thing?

By Margot Carmichael Lester Most of us believe in the power of prayer—and, since World Day of Prayer is on March 2nd this year, perhaps prayer is especially on our minds at this particular moment. But some of us think dating is too frivolous bring up with God about. Many religious leaders, however, believe that we should talk to God about anything that's important to us, including dating.

"To me, God is the Divine Presence within each of us," says Rev. Bonnie Barnard, founder of Spirited Women in Phoenix, AZ. "I would definitely partner with God to guide me to my mate."

In fact, she has done so and with good results. "I'm new in town and was given box seat tickets to the Suns vs. Sonics basketball game, but I didn't have a date because I didn't know anyone. I started asking friends and colleagues—do you know of a single guy I could go to the game with? Zero. So, driving home from a meeting I asked God to bring me the guy. I checked my phone messages when I got home and a realtor who has me in his 'tickler' or reminder file called me to see if I was ready to buy a house. I called him back and asked him to the game. He said yes. I believe that was an answer to a prayer."

But before you start praying, Barnard cautions, it's important to know what you want in a date. Otherwise, you risk praying for — and getting — the wrong thing. Here's some advice on how to do so.

**Research successful relationships.** Barnard advocates checking in with yourself about what feels good. "What did you enjoy in previous relationships? What would you like that is different? What do you admire about the relationship your parents had? Or what do you appreciate in the presence of other couples? What you want in a relationship is a direct reflection of who you are and what you value. None of it is wrong, and yet clarity helps with decision-making."

**Know your non-negotiables.** "Make a list of your top five non-negotiable qualities," suggests Jeff Palitz, a San Diego-based therapist. "What many people do not realize is that relationships that never get off the ground, or that get off to a quick start and fizzle, often occur with people who do not meet at least one of these non-negotiables. We allow ourselves to compromise very early in the dating process, thus giving up on our own agenda. I believe that if people stick to their non-negotiables firmly, then they will begin to see the ups and downs of dating as more of a necessary process to ensure that they do not compromise on what is most important to them. They will have the greatest potential for happiness once they find The One."

"Just be sure you're focused on deeper things than appearances," Barnard notes. "A friend of mine gave up the idea of a list of personal traits altogether and in her prayers asked for a man who would just love and accept her unconditionally," she recalls. "She got him, but she never would have picked him out on a list where she was specifying height, weight, hobbies, etc."

**Understand what makes you happy. Really happy.** "There is often a difference between what you think will make you happy and what actually does make you happy," says Jacob Spilman, a therapist and counselor in Portland, OR. "If you don't really *know* what makes you happy, then no one will be able to satisfy you." Look back at your life for times when you were deeply happy. Deconstruct them to find out how you were being treated, what you were thinking and doing. This information will give you some valuable insight into what *actually* brings you joy and satisfaction. Was it another person getting your quirky jokes? Was it someone physically affectionate, who was always holding your hand? Then you'll know what makes you happy.

Once you're clear on these items, you can start asking for God's help in bringing you someone who can fulfill these needs. But remember that God might send you some people who don't quite measure up as a way of helping you get even clearer on your true needs.

"Every date is a win because it tells us more about who we are, what we want in life, and what we don't," Barnard notes. "This keeps us clear about our own values and calls more of ourselves forward. The good

and bad news is that we tend to attract to us people who will bring out our unfinished business. What we are searching for in another, we are searching for in ourselves. When we get that, we can give it to ourselves and then leave the neediness at the door when we date."

*North Carolina-based Margot Carmichael Lester also writes for Go magazine and Monster.com. Once she refocused her search on relationship qualities rather than a person's qualities, she found the love of her life.*