

[00:00:00] <music>

Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talked through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the absolute full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun and we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

So, friends, guess what? Today is our 100th episode of The Girls Night Podcast. Isn't that amazing? I cannot believe it. I feel like this totally snuck up on me. But the truth is, I love this show so much. It has been such an honor to get to share with you over the past 100 episodes, and I cannot wait for the next 100. Also, side note, I really wish we could have some sort of party to celebrate. We're going to have to have a belated celebration sometime.

Anyway, since this is such a special episode, I knew I had to choose a special guest. And so today I'm chatting with my friend, Debra Fileta. Debra is a licensed professional counselor, a national speaker, a relationship expert, and the author of a new book called *Love in Every Season*.

Her popular relationship advice blog, truelovedates.com, reaches millions of people with the message of healthy relationships. I cannot wait for you to hear from her, especially because today we are talking about a subject that is very near and dear to my heart. Today we're talking about how to know if you found the one.

The reason I'm so excited about this episode is because this is a question I majorly wrestled with when Carl and I were dating. This is also a question I get asked all the time by our Girls Night listeners. You're dating a guy, things are going well, but how do you know when things are going well enough for you to actually get married? How do you know if he's the one?

For me personally, this is one of the most stressful, anxiety-ridden questions I've ever asked in my life. And I know that's not everyone's story, but it is mine. And I know I'm not alone. So in this episode, I asked Debra all the questions I wish I could have asked back when Carl and I were dating. And I'm hoping that this episode brings some peace and clarity to anyone who really needs it right now.

But before we dive in, speaking of peace and clarity about the future, friends, I wanted to make sure you've heard the news. I have a brand new prayer journal coming out on August 17th, and I am so excited to share it with you. It's called *The Between Places: 100 Days to Trusting God When You Don't Know What's Next*. And if you're in this place right now, trying to make an enormous decision about your future, this prayer journal is for you.

Here's the thing. We all find ourselves in-between places throughout our lives. Maybe you're single and you're wondering if you're ever going to find the person you've been looking for. Or maybe you're dating someone trying to figure out he's the one. Maybe you've worked in the same career for several years now, which has left you absolutely sure that this is not what you want to do for the rest of your life, which brings up the question, what do you want to do for the rest of your life?

Maybe you're thinking about your future family. You're wondering if you're ready to have a baby, or maybe you've been trying to grow your family but it's been a lot harder than you thought it would be. Maybe you're waiting for something, longing for something, or working for something, but it just isn't happening.

Maybe you know where you want to go, but you have no clue how to get there. Or maybe you have no clue where you want to go, in the process of trying to figure it out you twisted up in anxious knots. Maybe you're trying to make the biggest decision of your life so far and you have no idea which option to choose.

Or maybe you're feeling like the whole world has turned upside down this year, taking your life, your plans, and any sense of security right along with it. And in it all, you're trying to trust God with the future, but you're not sure how to practically do that and how to quiet that fear and anxiety all of this uncertainty has brought up in your heart.

Friends, that's what *The Between Places* is here for. *The Between Places* will help you trust God with the trickiest, most uncertain, and most important parts of your life. It'll help you believe more fully than ever that God is good, that He loves you, and that He's taking care of you. It'll help you live today with more contentment, step into the future with more courage and faith, and rest in God's peace knowing that he's with you every step of the way. I am so excited to share this with you.

The Between Places comes out on August 17th. And starting then you can pick up a copy in my shop. It's smaywilsonshop.com. And I am just over the moon about getting to share this with you.

Okay, now without any further ado, let's hop into my episode with Debra.

[00:04:17] <music>

Stephanie: Hi friends! I'm so excited for who I get to introduce you to today. I'm sitting here with my friend Debra Fileta. And I'm so excited for you to get to know her. She has some incredible wisdom for us today. Debra, thanks for being here.

Debra: Yeah, I'm excited.

Stephanie: We were just talking about this. I keep wanting to call you Deb, which I asked permission to do. And you said I could, so I just need to get that out there. But you said you have a story about Debra versus Deb.

Debra: Yeah, it's funny. Feel free to call me whatever you want. But when I was growing up, I actually went by the name Debbie. So all my friends, all my family members called me Debbie. All through college everyone called me Debbie.

And then when I met my husband, he literally... I met him at this conference, and he just started calling me Deb. Like he didn't even ask if he could call me Deb. He just started calling me Deb. And at first, it really annoyed me. But then when I started having feelings for him and our relationship developed, I found it endearing that he was the only person that called me Deb.

But what's interesting is that you can tell how somebody knows me by what they call me. So if they call me Debra, it's usually a professional way that they know me. If they call me Debbie, it's someone from high school or family member or college. And if they call me Deb, it's the post-John years. So it's just a hilarious pattern. But yeah, that's a little bit too. So you can call me whatever one you feel most comfortable with.

Stephanie: Okay. That's amazing. That's amazing. I'm really glad to know that. Okay, so, Deb... we're going to go with Deb.

Debra: I like it.

Stephanie: Tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself.

Debra: Okay, well, I am a licensed professional counselor, and I also run one of the most popular faith-based relationship advice blogs called truelovedates.com. And I'm also an author. So those are just some things that I do.

A fun fact about me, I can think of two. First of all, I homeschool my three kids. And that's kind of a neat, fun thing. But also my background is Egyptian. So my parents are both from Cairo, Egypt. So I always think that's a fun fact.

Stephanie: That is a fun fact. Those are both fun facts. I love that. I love getting to know that. Deb, I personally am so excited about this conversation. In a way, I feel like I'm recording something that I wish I could pack up and send into the past to myself because I really, really needed this a handful of years ago.

So this really is for me, I wish I could go back and give it to myself, but it's for anyone else who's sitting in this place right now. Because when I went through this in my own life, there were no resources about this. And so I'm super grateful for this.

So what I want to talk about, I get this question from women all the time who are dating a guy and things are going well, but they're asking, how do you know when things are going well enough for you to actually get married? How do you know if he's the one?

And when I started dating Carl, we knew pretty quickly that something was special about the other one. We had both dated quite a bit and spent a lot of time really getting to know ourselves and growing as people, Like we just did a lot of work before we came across each other. And so when we did, I mean, we really knew pretty quickly that something was really special.

But as we started to look towards the future and talk about marriage, I found myself I was in the safest, most stable relationship I've ever been in but I was freaking out at the prospect of marriage. And I had never been scared of marriage before, I didn't think I had any sort of crazy marriage issues, but I found myself really doubting my ability to make a lifelong decision like this.

I found myself questioning everything, questioning Carl, questioning myself, questioning the Lord. Like just totally lost and looking for answers because I was really scared of doing this wrong. And the thing that I think was the scariest for me is that no one else was talking about this. So I'd see people get engaged, and you know, share it all over Instagram, or Facebook, or whatever. And they looked so happy and not at all confused about whether they were doing the right thing or not. And I was so confused.

And in that, I think because I was scared, the thing I was most afraid of was that my fear meant something bad. Like, if you're afraid to marry this guy, you probably shouldn't, is kind of what I was thinking. I mean, I went to counseling about it. I just was a wreck about it. And I really felt so alone in it. So that's kind of the background and how I'm coming at this conversation. And so I have a million questions that are very from my own heart.

But before we get into any of them, I want to talk about the idea of the one. Everyone has different ideas about this. Some people think that there is one person on the planet for each of us and it is our job to find them or we have to wait for God to connect the dots. And other people think that there are a handful of people that we could be compatible with. What are your thoughts on the idea of the one?

Debra: That's such a good question. It's one that I get a lot as well from readers and listeners and people who are just kind of concerned to same exact idea of what you just shared. I love that story because it's just so real. It's just such a real perspective into relationships and not the Instagram picture of relationships that we often see.

What's interesting about this is that my husband and I have different views on this question. And I love that because it just goes to show you that there are people on different ends of the spectrum. I have always grown up learning that there is one person out there for you. That's kind of how I grew up and the things that were passed down to me.

But there came a point in my life where I kind of realized, like, I don't know how I feel about this concept. I mean, let's just say Sam was supposed to marry Rebecca and he ended up marrying Rachel instead. Then what does Rebecca do? Who does Rebecca marry? And does that totally ruin God's plan for the one that each person is supposed to marry? If one person marries the wrong person, then does that ruin the-

Stephanie: Shake up everything.

Debra: Shake up the entire algorithm, right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Debra: Like it just messed it up. And just something about that idea didn't ever sit well with me. When I met my husband for the first time... I was sharing a little bit about that experience at a speaking event I did and this girl came up to me afterwards. And she was like, "When you met your husband, did you receive confirmation?"

I literally had no clue what she was talking about. I was like, "Confirmation? Like I'm flying tomorrow, do I need to confirm my airline tickets? What is she talking about confirmation?" And I realized that she meant confirmation from God. Like, "Did God give you a signal or sign or a voice or a feeling that this was the one?" And I was like, "No."

I mean, the first thought when I met John was, "Who would wear long sleeves with shorts? Why is he wearing that?" That was the first thought. And then I was like, "You know what? He's really tall." That was my second thought. And then my third thought was, "He's a really nice guy. I'm looking forward to becoming friends with him." There was nothing deeper than that.

Now, when John met me, he says that he had this feeling that he was going to marry me. He just had this gut feeling. And he called his best friend and he was like, "I met the girl I'm going to marry." And it's really not like him. This is not his personality at all. So his friend was like, "Are you okay? What is wrong with you."

So we had two completely separate experiences when we met. But even though he might have come into it with this idea of the one—and I did not come into it with the idea of the one—we both had to pass through the same next steps in order to know if this was going to be a good match for us.

We each had to go through what I call the four seasons of a relationship. And these four seasons are basically the next steps of relationship that kind of exposed to you what this relationship is made of. They expose the ingredients of the relationship, the health of the relationship.

And those are the things that God used to give me confirmation. Not the initial feelings. My feelings are crazy. I mean, one day I'm feeling this, one day I'm feeling that. I can't trust my feelings. That's the kind of person I know I am.

And so I feel like the answer to this question looks different for everybody. And even if some people do believe in the one, the next thing still has to be the same whether you believe in the one or not. And that's a process.

Stephanie: I'm trying not to dance in my chair right now. I love this so much. It's funny because you said that your husband reacted in a way that isn't normal for him.

Debra: Yeah.

Stephanie: I am, like, totally a feeler. And if I have a gut feeling about something, I'm going with it. And I feel like I'm much more, I don't know, maybe spontaneous. I do way less research than my husband. And Carl is more methodical and a little more critical. Like he's a really good critical thinker, does tons of research. And so it would be more like our personalities for me to see him feel something and be like, "I'm just sure he's the one," and for him to make a pros and cons list.

When it came to us meeting each other, I was so pro and con list. And he was like, "I just..." I mean, he didn't instantly see me and think that I was the one. I think his

first thought about me... like we didn't really get along when we first met. It's a longer story. We've told it on the podcast before. But like neither of us had a gut feeling right at first.

But he talks a little bit about praying and talking to God and just saying like, "Is Stephanie the person I should marry? Is she the one for me?" And I remember asking him about that. Like, "Have you talked to God about this? What do you feel like He's saying?" And Carl always says that he felt like God said, "She can be." Like, "Is she the one?" "She can be?" And he was like, "What do you mean by that?" "So you want her to be? Do you want to marry her?" Carl's like, "Well, yeah," and God's like, "Okay."

At first I thought that was shocking and unromantic. I wanted God to be like, "Yes, you love each other. The stars are lining." But instead, it's really cool that Carl picked me and I got to pick him back. For me, it took a really long process of seeing our relationship through several seasons to feel confident in making that decision. And he wasn't looking for that confirmation as desperately as I was.

Debra: Yeah. But it's so good.

Stephanie: It's just cool.

Debra: And the truth is once you choose somebody to marry, you know, the moment you say I do, you have chosen the one. That's it. You made that choice and they became the one.

I think part of the problem is for people who do believe in the one, again, it's a fine belief. It's fine if that's how you want to believe. But then what I struggle with is when people come to me on the brink of divorce and they say, "Well, this is the one that I was supposed to marry. I must have listened to God wrong, I must have heard him wrong. I must have married the wrong one."

Like then we struggle, it's like, "If there is only one person out there, then maybe I messed up somewhere along the way." Rather than taking responsibility for our choice from the beginning, from day one taking responsibility for this relationship that we're cultivating and whether or not it's a good match for our life.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. So whether or not we believe in the one, at some point we need to decide if the person we're dating is the person we want to marry. And like I said, this was incredibly stressful for me. I needed to see our relationship go through a lot before I felt like I could really make this decision. And so I feel like I probably went through the spring and summer and fall and winter. Can you talk to us about those seasons and what that looks like?

Debra: Yeah. So just as nature passes through seasons, so do relationships. And some people will tell you, just literally speaking, you need to go through the four seasons of relationship. Meaning you should see somebody at every point of the year. See them in spring, summer, fall, and winter. See them at the beginning of the year, all the way through Christmas, and just see how they handle life and relationships and experiences.

So there is something to be said of the literal time period of 12 months. But there's also something to be said figuratively as well. Because just as nature passes through four seasons, so do relationships. They pass through four different stages. And each stage gives you more context of how healthy this relationship is.

So let's start with the season of spring. The season of spring is the time where attraction tends to blossom and affection is blooming. Everything feels nice and new and exciting. It's also the season of planting seeds, because the seeds that you plant in spring are going to be what bear fruit later on. So are you planting good seeds? And what do they look like?

It's the season of growth, and the time when your relationship is rapidly growing. And there's a lot of give and take that needs to happen in order for a relationship to grow. You can't give too much or you'll suffocate the relationship, and you can't give too little or the relationship will wither and die. There's got to be this equal balance of initiative and pursuit and give and take.

So there's a lot of things that we can kind of unpack in the season of spring, from attraction to the people who are struggling with those feelings of, you know, maybe not having them the way they expected to have them in the season of spring. But maybe we'll get to that a little bit later.

And then we move into the season of summer. And Summer is the season when things get hot and you start shedding your layers. And you're learning a little bit more about who this person is in real life, not just who you thought they were or who they presented themselves to be in the beginning.

One thing I love about summer is it's a season of heat, the heat of intimacy. You know, you start developing intimacy emotionally and spiritually and physically and kind of start testing out all of those things and, and whether you've got healthy things going on in those aspects of a relationship.

Then we move on to this season of fall. And fall is when your true colors start to shine through and you realize that you are two different people with two different personalities and ways of processing, two different family of origin, that you came

from two different experiences and you have different expectations and different personalities and communication styles.

Fall can be the season of conflict because all of a sudden you're like, "Wait a second, we don't agree about everything. No, I don't like that. I don't really want to do that." And you start realizing that you're different. But conflict is not a bad thing depending on how you navigate it because it can be an invitation for deeper connection. So a lot of that happens in the season of fall.

And then we move into this season of winter. And winter is kind of the season where things begin to cool off a little. You're not fogged by the infatuation of spring. You start seeing the relationship for what it is. You start slowly combining your worlds. It's the season of comfort, and familiarity. It's the season of the mundane day in day out stuff.

And when you're in the season of winter, you've kind of seen a lot of things unfold along the way. And I feel like when you get to the season of winter, you can really make an informed decision about whether or not this is the type of person you want to spend your life with.

But the problem is people just zip through these things and they don't even think about them. There's more to relationships than "how do I feel?" You've got to unpack the ingredients and the things that you're seeing they're either going to make a healthy relationship or not.

Stephanie: I love this so much. I never would have thought about this way, especially because I think we think of spring as new things. I love this. This is so helpful. And really, as I'm looking back on that year of Carl and dating, we really went through so many of these things.

It was getting to know him better. It was like taking off some of those layers and seeing the kind of messier stuff. It was seeing his true colors. And it was seeing what day in day out life with him looked like and how he treated me. That really by the end of about a year, I was like, "This person is quality, this person is really good." But I really needed all of that time to really make pursuit.

Debra: So true. And you know, when I hear you tell me your story about those beginning stages, this book I just wrote about the seasons, *Love in Every Season*, in the beginning, in the season of spring, I actually talk to people who are struggling.

Because sometimes in the season of spring, instead of feeling the excitement, and the attraction and the affection, you're feeling anxiety, or doubt, or worry. And I was actually there as well. But we have two different stories because I was in a

relationship—and I talked about this in more detail in the book—but I was in a relationship that wasn't actually a good match for me.

And I didn't take the time to navigate through the seasons, I kind of zipped through them and went with the first relationship that seemed okay. The problem is sometimes what's okay takes the place of God's best for your life. And so I went into that, and I'm like, "Okay, this relationship is okay, but I'm struggling with doubt."

So here's you struggling with doubt and here's me struggling with doubt. So the doubt in and of itself doesn't give us direction, because we've got to figure out where this doubt is coming from and what it's rooted in.

And in *Love in Every Season* I explained that. There's two things that you need to really address when you're feeling that anxiety. Number one, you've got to ask yourself, Does this anxiety reflect a problem in the relationship? Or number two, does this anxiety reflect a problem in me? Because the answer to that is going to help me determine the next steps.

For me, I was looking at this relationship I was in, this was long before I met my husband, John, and this relationship that just was missing some things. I didn't even know who I was, much less know what I needed in a relationship. So the doubt was God's way of saying to me, "Hey, this isn't a good match for you. There's something else that's going to be better for you."

But for someone like you, the doubt was rooted in fear or maybe a fear of commitment, maybe a fear of making a mistake, maybe a fear of doing something that wasn't God's best for you. Like your own personal fears of failure, your own personal fears that were probably rooted in your past experiences.

So sometimes it's our own junk that holds us back from relationships, and sometimes it's the junk in the relationship, and sometimes it's a little bit of both. So that's why it's really important for us to kind of learn how to get to the root of those anxieties and fears and what's really fueling them.

Stephanie: I was so afraid that doubt was a bad thing. It sounds like doubt is actually a really good thing because it makes us ask some questions and it helps us find-

Debra: Totally.

Stephanie: I mean, really the more I dug into, poor guy, making pros and cons about whether I thought Carl was the right one for me, the more I got to know his character. And he has a solid gold character, and I got to see that the further I dug.

And it was cool because a lot of the conflict in that season... I mean, I was pretty honest with him about how scared I was and how unsure I was. And I got to see that he was so sure. Like he didn't back up, he didn't run. My doubt didn't make him still with doubt. He just was so steady through all of it.

Debra: Right.

Stephanie: I got to see really how he handled me not at my best, which is so good to see because there are all kinds of times in our marriage when I haven't been at my best.

Debra: Exactly. It gives you a glimpse of how he's going to handle you for the rest of life. It sounds to me also like you do struggle with probably a general underlying anxiety in life in general. Because I can really connect to that, too.

I worked with this person who was in a relationship and struggling with whether or not they should marry this other person that they were dating for five years. Five years. But here's the thing. They were a great match and there were so many good signs. But what was paralyzing this person was their clinical anxiety. The clinical anxiety of "I don't know if I can make such a big choice."

So, as a counselor, you're looking at the situation and you're seeing there is nothing, even remotely near a yellow flag or a red flag. So, to me, this is underlying clinical anxiety. And when we got to the root of the clinical anxiety, it gave that person the freedom to say, "You know what, I'm not going to let anxiety be my God, and I'm going to move forward in faith." And they are currently married, and they have an amazing relationship. So it goes to show you like, we've got to get to the root, you know.

Stephanie: Deb, I feel like the girls who have been listening to the show for a while are like, "She just nailed Stephanie." Because that time in my life, I never thought that I struggled with anxiety. But in that season, I was having real panic attacks, but I didn't know what they were.

Actually, the girls, again, who have been listening for a while know that it wasn't until about two years ago that anxiety came back in such a way that I finally had to be like, "Is this a real clinical thing in my life?" And it absolutely is. I've been struggling with anxiety my whole life. And I really didn't know it until about two years ago. But-

Debra: I am right there with you, girl. I am right there with you. I was a very anxious child and anxiety has sort of been on the backburner for many years. But thankfully,

because I'm a counselor, it was easier to identify. Not easier to work through, but easier to identify.

I feel like there's a freedom there when you can recognize this is not me, this is anxiety, and I don't listen to anxiety, I listen to God. And here's the difference. Instead of them all big one. And it's so confusing.

Stephanie: It's so confusing. Honestly, I'm like, "I really wish that you had said that sentence to me years ago because it would have been so much easier."

Debra: I wish I could have, too. I really do.

Stephanie: We've talked about going through these seasons and looking for different qualities in someone trying to see kind of what they're made of. I want to know really what are some of the qualities we need to see in a person we're dating before we decide they're the one we want to marry? And how many of those things should be romantic feelings? Like, I'm so attracted to them, or I feel so happy when they're around or whatever. And then how many of those things should be practical things like he has a job, and he's responsible, and I feel like he would be a good life partner?

Debra: Yeah. Well, I think there's a balance. I'm going to refer to the spring chapter again where we talk about the laws of attraction. Attraction is essentially your desire to move towards somebody. Like human beings are magnetic. We tend to attract people who are similar to us in health, emotional, psychological, spiritual health.

I always say if you want to attract a healthy relationship, you start by becoming healthy because you're magnetic. And you're going to change your relationships when you get healthier because you're going to attract different kinds of people and be attracted to different kinds of people.

But all that to say, attraction is multifaceted. It's not just this one thing. When we think of the word "attraction," a lot of times we think physical. Like I'm attracted to that person, they're good-looking. But attraction has layers and different things that we've got to look at.

So there is the physical piece, but there's also the personality piece. Am I attracted to their personalities? Do we connect well? There's the mental piece, mental and emotional attraction. And then there's spiritual attraction.

So all of those things are important ingredients. Because we've all had that experience where you are attracted to somebody very much physically and then you

get to know them and attraction just dies. It's like, oh, man, this person is not at all what I envisioned.

And I think the opposite happens too, where sometimes you meet somebody and they're maybe not your type or what you expected. But all of a sudden, you get to know them, and you start becoming more and more drawn to them. And to me, that's attraction when you are drawn towards somebody. So there's a balance.

I think, sometimes we look at the physical piece and we let it make up too much of the equation of what I'm looking for, it's like I'm not feeling these crazy feelings, like Hollywood tells me I'm supposed to feel instead of trying to maximize all the other components of attraction and invest in spiritual attraction, emotional attraction, personality.

So there's got to be a healthy balance in what we're looking for. We don't want to be completely logical, because somebody that looks right on paper isn't necessarily right in person. So I feel like there has to be a healthy balance of all those different things that we're looking for, and realizing I want a little of each category as I'm looking for someone I want to spend the rest of my life with.

[00:31:23] <music>

Sponsor: Yeah. Hey, guys, I hope you're loving this conversation with Debra as much as I am. She's amazing, right? I wanted to pop in for one quick second because our show would not be possible without our sponsors. And I wanted to take a quick second to thank the company sponsoring us today.

Our sponsor today is a company that I just love. It's [HelloFresh](#). I know that lots of people have heard of them, but just in case you haven't, HelloFresh is America's number one meal kit that shops, plans, and delivers your favorite step-by-step recipes in pre-measured ingredients so you can just cook, eat and enjoy. I love that.

Now, some of you guys may already know this about me, but I'm not the best cook. When Carl and I got married, I could cook mac and cheese and pasta and that's pretty much it. Now, while it's definitely gotten better, I still don't love meal planning or cooking. It's just not my thing. But that's why I love HelloFresh.

First of all, with HelloFresh there's something for everyone, including low calorie, vegetarian, and family-friendly meals. You can even add exercise to your weekly order like garlic bread and cookie dough. Yes, please, to cookie dough!

A few days ago, Carl and I made barbecue chicken tacos and they were amazing. And not only is the food super flavorful but the process of making it is so easy. All

of the ingredients come pre-measured in handy labeled meal kits so you know which ingredients go with which recipe. There's less waste. And plus the recipes only take 30 minutes.

And I'm telling you guys, I'm still a beginner in the kitchen and even I can cook these recipes. They are so simple. And they come outlined on pictured step-by-step instruction cards. They walk you all the way through the whole thing. It actually feels like a cooking lesson. HelloFresh actually makes cooking fun.

I'm also a huge fan of HelloFresh for donating over 2.5 million meals to charity in 2019. And this year, they're stepping up their food donations even more with the Coronavirus crisis. So good, right?

And of course, I love HelloFresh even more because they want to give you a promo code for \$80 off. Isn't that amazing? \$80 worth of free food. Yes and amen to that. If you go to hellofresh.com/80girlsnight, and use the code 80GIRLSNIGHT, you can get a total of \$80 off, including free shipping on your first box.

Additional restrictions apply, but you can visit hellofresh.com for more details. So again, go to hellofresh.com/80girlsnight and use the code 80GIRLSNIGHT to get \$80 off, including free shipping on your first box. HelloFresh thank you so much for sponsoring Girls Night. We just love having you.

Okay, now without any further ado, let's jump back into my conversation with Debra.

[00:33:56] <music>

Stephanie: I feel like someone is sitting here feeling like, "Yeah, but what if that doesn't exist? I'm dating someone and we have several of those categories, but we're missing some pretty big things, but I'm just kind of feeling like maybe I should overlook it because nobody's perfect, and I'm worried that there won't be anybody else."

Debra: First of all, that strain of thinking is definitely harmful. Because when we start thinking negatively like that, it begins influencing how we feel which then influences what we do. Your thoughts impact your feelings which impact your behaviors.

So if you start thinking desperate thoughts, black and white, like, "There's nobody else out there. This is impossible. I'm never going to find somebody," you better believe you're going to start feeling depressed and hopeless and lonely and you better believe that's going to start impacting your relationship choices.

So I think as much as it feels real to think those thoughts, they're not real. It's not truth. And if we really believe God is who He says He is, then we can't allow those thoughts to fill our mind. Because those thoughts end up influencing our behaviors and end up causing us to move into relationships out of desperation or settle for big picture things that are not healthy.

Now, there's a difference between major things and minor things. Like, sometimes I think girls tend to put their entire list on one page and everything is just as important. Like, not only do I want him to be a prayer warrior, but I also want him to be taller than me so that I can wear heels. And all of that is like on the same level of importance.

"He has to live in the same town as me, but he also has to have a heart for missions." Well, what do you really want here and what are your actual majors? I used to think I didn't want to date somebody long distance. I used to think I didn't want to date somebody who was not blond-haired, blue-eyed.

Stephanie: Same.

Debra: My husband is dark, tall, and handsome. He is not anywhere what I expected my type to be. He and I were long-distance. And there's so many things about him and me that I wouldn't have expected. But you've got to understand there are majors and there are minors.

If you're looking at majors and minors, and they're all the same, then you're going to struggle and you're not going to find somebody who fits the bill of perfection, that's for sure. But to look for a healthy person who matches your life, I do not think that's an unrealistic expectation.

And if he's not here yet, that doesn't mean he's not coming ever. It doesn't mean he doesn't exist. You just got to hold on to that hope and keep bringing it before the Lord and just walk and move forward in faith.

Stephanie: I love that so much. I'm just grinning over here, because I love this. This is so helpful and so good. So I know that people have different thoughts on this. I think you ask 10 different people, you'll hear 10 different answers. But I want to know what you think about how long a couple should date before they get engaged or married? Have you seen any research on it? How long is long enough?

Debra: I have. I have. You know, it's funny you say it's controversial because probably people do have a lot of different opinions. But the research will tell us this. If you've been with somebody for less than one year, you have a higher likelihood of

divorce. If you've been with somebody for more than three years, you also have a higher likelihood of divorce.

Because less than a year, you hardly know them, right? It's like I am jumping into this, I haven't gone through the seasons, I don't totally know what I'm getting myself into. Well, that makes sense. Why would you think Stephanie, more than three years? What's your guess on that?

Stephanie: Oh, I have a lot of thoughts on this. I think there are a couple things that can happen when we've been dating for a really long time. Either we're being too critical. Like we're looking at this other person waiting for them to sort of change or match this perfect set of standards. Or we're looking for something that they're not going to become. We're looking for them to change in a way that they're not looking to change, or I think we're afraid of commitment. We're looking for some sort of, I don't know, magic sign that this is the right thing.

I think at some point marriage is a leap of faith. At some point, you're deciding. And this is really what Carl talks about when he talks about us getting married is this person isn't perfect. And maybe they're not the only person in the world for you but you're done looking. You love this person so much and they fit you so well that you don't want to look anymore. You want this person to be the person.

And so I think that if you've been dating for a really long time and you're not committing, I think that, I don't know, maybe there's something wrong or maybe you're still looking or I don't know. I'm swimming around here.

Debra: Yes, exactly. Everything you said is exactly on point. Because if you've been dating for longer than three years, there's a good chance, like we mentioned in the beginning, there's either something wrong with the relationship or there's something going on in us that you haven't addressed and gotten to the roots of. And both things. Whether you have not addressed and healed your own stuff or whether you have not addressed and healed the stuff of the relationship, it's going to end up impacting you in it in a negative way.

So three years or more, there's a good chance or something in the relationship that's not necessarily good that you're ignoring and avoiding. It's not getting any better. So you're just kind of stalling rather than taking that leap of faith. And so think statistically that tends to happen.

Now, do statistics mean everything? No. There's people who've dated for longer than three years and they're happily married. And there's people who have met each other and dated for a couple months and they got married, and by God's grace, they're making it work.

But those outliers are not our example. When we're looking at developing healthy dating and healthy relationships, we want to look at what's worked for the majority of people. That's the pattern that we want to follow. So not saying that God cannot do A, B, and C, because He can. But He also gives us wisdom to follow in the ways that have worked and the ways that are proven to be the healthiest.

Stephanie: And it's not just time for time sake. It's like you want to [inaudible 00:40:45]-

Debra: Exactly.

Stephanie: ...you can get through the season so you can get to know each other well enough to make an informed decision. And you-

Debra: There's married couples that have been together for years and they haven't gone through the seasons. Like when I wrote *Love in Every Season*, I ended each chapter with reflection questions for singles, but also reflection questions for couples. Because I feel like whether you're single, dating, or married, time doesn't necessarily mean you have been intentional to get through these things, and to dig up these topics, and to really get to the root of what's going on.

Stephanie: If someone has been dating for years and years and years, maybe they're overthinking or over-analyzing or maybe they're not analyzing enough, what do we do? If we're sitting here and we're like, "I've been dating the same guy for five years and the relationship isn't moving forward," what do we do?

Debra: My first and straight up direct answer is get plugged into counseling. Get plugged in with a counselor that can walk with you and help you identify what are the roots here. Are these roots of fear, of fear of commitment, maybe stemming from my family of origin issues growing up? Like the things you experience are going to shape you.

I worked with a girl who was afraid of marriage because of the roots of her family of origin. And just seeing such a terrible example of marriage instilled a deep, deep-seeded fear in her of what her own marriage would be like. And so she's stalled for years.

And sometimes there's so many things in our life that we don't even realize are impacting us. Or maybe the problem is in the relationship, and it's something we haven't addressed or something we're afraid to address or something we haven't yet recognized but our gut is just like having a hard time moving forward.

When I went through that season back in college, I wish I would have seen a counselor during that time. I really wish. I feel like it would have helped me so much. Instead, I prolonged the experience and struggled with a deep anxiety for way longer than I needed to.

So get plugged in with a licensed counselor, somebody that can help navigate this journey with you. A Christian who is also a licensed counselor is the best fit because you can pray with them, they will lead you to truth scripturally but then they'll also help you psychologically to kind of unpack what might be going on here.

Stephanie: Yeah, I love that. The phrase that you said "prolong the experience" really stuck out to me. Because I think that going to therapy is really... It's a lot of work. I went to counseling starting, gosh, I'm trying to think... well, when I was starting to feel really anxious couple years ago. And for the first couple months, I just felt so raw all the time. And especially after one of my sessions, I just felt like my heart had been like, I don't know, cracked open and reworked.

And it's painful. It's painful looking at your past, it's painful taking a good look at your present. But you, I feel, really just pointed out the stakes here. You might get through this or you might... I mean really the stakes are marrying someone that you are going to wish you didn't marry or living a life that is so broken when it could be healed.

And really you're prolonging the experience instead of facing it and working through it and doing the hard work of healing. You're stretching it out longer than it has to go. And that's really a painful thing. I think we've all done that. I've definitely done that.

Debra: You're absolutely right.

Stephanie: So where does God fit into this? And you mentioned this at the beginning. I think we've all heard that story of, you know, someone walks into a room and a guy meets a girl and the girl feels something in her spirit all of a sudden that's like, "He is the one." And that's kind of what we're looking for.

But I didn't feel that; you didn't feel that. My first thought about Carl was like he's wearing bright yellow pants. I guess they were mustard. But he was wearing mustard yellow pants. And what's his name again? I'm kind of intimidated by him. I mean, really there were no fireworks at the beginning.

We want to follow where God is leading, but does God always tell it like... was that girl right? Do we always need this stamp of confirmation? Do we always get that? Talk us through this?

Debra: Most of the Christian life doesn't happen in one-time magical moments. Most of the Christian life happens in the day-to-day process of walking with God. And I think it's funny how we expect God to kind of give us this answer, like this a once and done thing when we're dating somebody. It's like, "God, speak to me. Why aren't you speaking to me?" but the rest of our lives we haven't been asking Him to speak to us in other areas.

Recognizing God's voice starts with recognizing God's voice in every area of our life. Walking with Him every day, knowing Him so well, that when that decision comes to date somebody, we've heard Him so clearly in every other point in our life, that we feel the freedom from Him.

Your husband is a good example of this, of someone who's walked with God. And He knew His voice so well and He was right away able to hear God say, "Sure, if you want to marry her, marry her." Like the conversation had been happening for years and years. It wasn't like he met you and he just started talking to God, and he really needed to know.

When we wait till that point, we don't have a good recognition of God's voice and His leading and what He wants for our life. So the process of allowing God into our relationship starts with allowing Him into our personal life day in day out through the mundane things of life. And trusting that He's going to lead us when the big things come along too.

Stephanie: Something one of my girlfriends pointed out recently, she was talking about James 1:5. And it says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." And the thing I never noticed before is that it doesn't say "If any of you lacks answers." It says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, God will give it to you generously without finding fault."

And I think that that's really when I look back, what I wanted was God to give me an insurance policy and to tell me, "Yes, I created Carl Wilson to be your husband. There is no other option, you are not screwing this up. It's going to work out perfectly. And I'll make sure of it." Like, that's what I wanted from Him. And He didn't give me that.

But what He did give me was wisdom, and people speaking into my life. And he gave me the decade I had known him up until that point of knowing His voice and his character and learning what His character looks like. And so when I should be

looking for another person. I mean, He gave me wisdom generously. And I think I missed it in a lot of ways because what I was looking for were answers.

Debra: Right.

Stephanie: And I think God sometimes does give us answers. There have been times in my life where God has said, "Turn left here," or where circumstances have given me no other option. I've come to a dead-end, so I have to turn left. But I don't know if His directives are always that specific.

And so I think it gives us wisdom to pick what college we want to go to based on what has our major and what's close to home or far away from home, whatever we're looking for. He gives us wisdom to make decisions with Him, but not for us, if that makes sense.

Debra: Yes, absolutely. I love that.

Stephanie: So, what are some signs, you know, when we look at our relationship that we need to move on? What are some red flags? What are some things that are like, "This is a no. This is not something to work through. It's time to move on?"

Debra: There's so many different things. I'm trying to think what my top ones are, as I was writing *Love in Every Season*. The first one that comes to my mind now as important is the idea of give and take. I think a lot of times we underestimate the need for a relationship to be reciprocal.

I'll tell you a quick story. I'm really bad with keeping plants alive. Like I have a blank. So I tend to like forget them and never water them and they die. So my husband bought me these succulents because you only have to water them weekly. And he thought I would keep them alive because they're made to be neglected, but I kept forgetting if I had watered them weekly. I'm like, "Is this the week I was supposed to water them?" And then I would just water them anyway just to be on the safe side, and I ended up overwatering, and they died.

So long story short, relationships are like that. And I think sometimes we get into relationships where we do most of the giving. Like we're doing the initiating, the pursuing, the asking, the texting, the calling, the sharing our hearts. And we're not getting anything in return and then we make excuses. Like, "Oh, he must be so busy. He just has this or that," or "He needs more time" or whatever. And we end up giving too much and the relationship dies. We kill it. Or we prolong something that should have been dead.

And then the opposite is true. If we have trust issues or we're afraid, we can build a wall where we give too little. And if you give too little, the relationship also dies. There's got to be an equal balance in relationships of give and take, because at the forefront, that is one of the most foundational things.

The other thing that comes to mind, of course, that I have to mention is being spiritually in sync. When I was doing research about this book, we live in a very agriculturally focused town. I live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and there's a lot of Amish people here. And they literally still use mules to plow their fields. Like there's no tractors. It's like two mules. And I am so far removed from this. I'm like, "What is going on here?"

So I met with an ex-Amish man, one of my pastors at my church is ex-Amish, and we sat down, and we had an agricultural conversation. And I was just asking about the passage in scripture where it says to be equally yoked. I was saying to him, "What does it really mean to be yoked in these terms?"

And he shared with me this story about how when he was young in farming, you know, it's a no brainer that you put two mules together. Like duh, you have to put two mules together or two horses together. You can't put a mule with a horse because it's not going to work. So to me, that's the duh of you have to be in relationship with someone who is a Christian. Two horses, two mules. Like it have to match. But I think it goes deeper than that.

And when he was talking to me about being equally yoked, he said, "When we put two mules together, they had to have a similar strength and disposition in order for them to work. If one was stronger than the other, it would just go forward, and the other one would get dragged behind and they would really suffer."

And I just thought about that in terms of being equally yoked as believers. I'm like, it doesn't just mean to marry somebody who's also a Christian, it means to marry somebody of equal strength in their relationship with Jesus. Somebody who is moving in God's direction the way that we are moving in God's direction. Someone with a similar disposition, a similar passion, a similar drive for Jesus.

I feel like there's something really important to be said of that and dating somebody who we feel equally yoked. Like we're on the same page and we're moving towards God together. And I think sometimes we take that a little lightly and end up dragging somebody behind when God intended for us to walk together.

Stephanie: I love that. That's so good. As we're looking towards marriage, whether we are single right now, whether we're dating around a little bit, whether we're in a serious

relationship or committed relationship, what are some things that we can do right now that will help set us up for a more successful marriage in the future?

Debra: First and foremost, become as healthy as you can be standing alone, because that is what we talked about earlier. You attract people on your level of emotional, spiritual and psychological health. So deal with that baggage. Deal with those sins. Deal with those struggles. Deal with that anxiety. Deal with whatever God is bringing to the surface.

But secondly, don't be afraid to have an active role in your relationships. We encourage singles to be active in pursuit of their career, their education, their friendships, their ministry. But when it comes to their love life, we're like, "Oh, God's going to bring the right person. You just keep waiting." And it's like, do you don't have to do anything. Just twiddle your thumbs and wait around.

But if marriage is the desire of your heart, then invest in marriage, invest in healthy dating, invest in counseling, invest in reading books, invest in taking courses, invest in bolstering your online dating profile, invest in getting mentors, invest in asking people you know to match you with other people. Invest in healthy dating. Because if marriage is on your heart, you move towards that desire that God has placed in you. And you do it to the best of your ability. You do it in the healthiest way possible.

Marriage is a really important relationship. And so it makes sense to invest in it right now and to invest in becoming the best you can be. It always strikes me in a very strange way when it's the area that we tend to be the most passive in, when it's really one of the most important areas of our life.

Stephanie: Oh, that's so good. Okay, Deb, we could talk forever. I'm so excited to have you on the show, because I'm like, "Everybody, I'm so glad that you guys get to be friends." And I know that you're going to have just as an amazing crew of women headed your way and checking out your blog and your books and all of your resources.

But before we go, do you have just one last piece of encouragement for the woman who is sitting there trying to figure out if this guy is the one for her?

Debra: Yeah. Well, the good news is you don't have to figure it out overnight. It's a process. I think sometimes we put so much pressure on ourselves to just know right this second. But it is a process. Continue asking God to reveal to you day in day out. Continue to be looking for those things that point to healthy relationships. Continue to surround yourself with mentors and counselors that can help you and guide you.

Because you don't have to do it alone. You don't have to figure it out alone. And you don't have to figure it out tonight. One day at a time. God is going to reveal to you whether you should move forward or whether you should back away. And resources like *Love in Every Season*, resources like this podcast, resources... We're surrounded by resources and God uses them to point us in the right direction. Like you said, He gives us the wisdom.

One thing I will commit to is praying for those of you who feel that, who are struggling, and asking God to give you an extra dose of His wisdom and an extra ability to hear His voice as you move forward and trusting Him with your love life.

Stephanie: I love that. Deb, thank you so much for being here.

Debra: Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure.

[00:57:09] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't Deb amazing? I just love her and I love this conversation. And I am so happy I got to share it with you. One thing I wanted to mention quickly is that I know we talked about a lot in today's episode. So if you want to find the links to any of those things, all you have to do is go to my website. It's girlsnightpodcast.com.

And for every episode, we'll have a blog post with the show notes. All of the links will be there for everything we talked about, including all of Debra's contact info so that you can follow her and so y'all can be friends.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that if you haven't had a chance yet, it would mean so much to me if you would take a quick second to leave us a rating and review on iTunes. We've gotten so many amazing five-star reviews from y'all and you've left the sweetest comments. I cannot tell you how much it means to me. And also it helps our podcast more than you can imagine.

So if you haven't yet, please take just one quick second to leave us a rating and review. Thank you so much. Friends, that's all we have for today, but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. And I'm so excited about this one. All right, see you then.