



Soul Mates or Sole Mates?

by Gary Thomas



Looking for your soul mate? Looking for someone to complete you? Well, you might be looking for the wrong thing.

The young woman calling the radio program admitted that the man she was dating was— for lack of a better word— a "jerk." He had cheated on her with her best friend; he had no aspirations, and any objective person could see that the guy she had fallen for was not suitable marriage material.

Still, she persisted: "I know I can't trust him, I know he doesn't treat me very well, I know he's not going anywhere, but I think he may be *the one*."

Our culture has embraced a rather absurd notion that there is just one person who can, in the words immortalized by Tom Cruise in *Jerry Maguire*, "complete us." This is a disastrous mindset with which to approach a lifelong marital decision.

The notion of a "soul mate" is actually pretty ancient. Well over two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Plato surmised that a perfect human being was tragically split in two, resulting in a race of creatures sentenced to spend the rest of their lives searching for that missing other who can complete them.¹

The real danger in this line of thinking is that many people mistake a storm of emotion as the identifying mark of their soul mate.

Despite such bizarre philosophical musing, the notion of a soul mate has deeply rooted itself in our culture, inspiring countless movies, novels, and top-40 songs. One Rutgers University study found that 94 percent of people in their twenties say that the first requirement in a spouse is someone who qualifies as a soul mate. Just as surprising, 87 percent think they'll actually find that person "when they are ready."² A culture suspicious of God nevertheless has brazenly embraced some sort of forceful and intelligent destiny that brings two lovelorn souls together!

The real danger in this line of thinking is that many people mistake a storm of emotion as the identifying mark of their soul mate. How else can you identify "destiny"? Such individuals marry on an infatuation binge without seriously considering character, compatibility, legal issues, family desires, spiritual health, and other important concerns. Then when the music fades and the relationship requires work, one or both partners suddenly discover that they were "mistaken": this person must not be their soulmate after all! Otherwise, it wouldn't be so much work. Next they panic. The soul mate must still be out there! Such people can't get to divorce court fast enough, lest someone steal their "one true soul mate" meant only for them. When we get married for trivial reasons, we tend to seek divorce for trivial reasons.

Good and Bad Choices

In a biblical view, there is no "one right choice" for marriage, but rather good and bad choices. We are encouraged to use wisdom, not destiny, as our guide when choosing a marital partner. There is no indication that God creates "one" person for us to marry. This is because Christians believe that God brings the primary meaning into our lives. Marriage— though wonderful — is still secondary.

We are encouraged to use wisdom, not destiny, as our guide when choosing a marital partner.

Consider, for example, Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. He clearly leaves the choice of marriage up to us; there are benefits to singleness, and benefits to being married. If you're unable

to handle sexual temptation as a single, Paul says, then by all means, get married. There is no hint at all of finding "the one person" that God created "just for you." It's far more a pragmatic choice: do you think you'll sin sexually if you don't get married (1 Corinthians 7:2)? Are you acting improperly toward a woman you could marry (1 Corinthians 7:36)? If so, go ahead and get married — it's your choice, and God gives you that freedom.

Proverbs takes the same approach: "A wife of noble character, *who can find?*" (31:10, NIV). This passage has been hilariously misunderstood as being directed toward women, but the verse you've just read makes it clear that Proverbs 31 was written mostly for *young, single men*, telling them, "This is what you want to look for in a wife." And the top thing to consider is this: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). The Bible is telling young men to search for a woman of character; looks won't last, but character never leaves.

I can speak from experience: nothing compares to being married to a godly woman. Nothing! But there is also nothing more tedious and exhausting than being married to a narcissist, or a selfish woman. Marriage is 98 percent living and 2 percent looking — so learn to value character over appearance.

Making the Choice

The reason it is so crucial to adopt the Bible's view of "good and bad choices" over your destiny of finding "the one" is that the former attitude allows you to objectively consider the person you marry. There is no objective measurement of "destiny." Powerful emotions can blind us to all sorts of clues; when we adopt the biblical attitude of making a "wise" choice, we can use all that God has given us to arrive at a solid decision that should be based on a number of factors:

- **Scriptural mandates**

Is the person a believer who fears God (Proverbs 31:30) and who is biblically eligible for marriage (Mark 10:11-12)?

- **Wisdom**

How do they handle their money? (Proverbs 31:16, 18)

Is this person a hard worker? (Proverbs 13:4; 26:13-15)

Do they live an upright life? (Proverbs 13:6, 20; 25:28)

Does this person wound people with their words, or are they an encourager? (Proverbs 12:18; 18:21)

Are they peaceful, or quarrelsome? (Proverbs 17:19; 29:8)

- **Parental, pastoral, and wise advice**

Your parents know you better than you may realize, and even if they aren't believers, they generally want the best for you.

Also talk to your pastor and people you respect for their counsel: "Does this relationship seem like a 'fit' to you? Are there any areas you're concerned about?" If the people

I most respected had serious reservations about a relationship, I would assume I had lost my objectivity due to infatuation and put all marriage plans on hold.

- **Prayer**

Rejecting the notion that God creates one person just for us doesn't discount the reality that God can lead us toward someone, and help us make a wise choice when we seek him in prayer.



What criteria will you use to decide whom to marry and how does wisdom, as opposed to "destiny," inform this decision?

[Join the discussion!](#)

What is a 'Sole Mate'?

The search for "the one" is often an idolatrous pursuit. As Christians, we must believe that our primary meaning comes from our relationship with God: "Seek *first* the Kingdom of God and his righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33, NIV, emphasis added). Thus, a Christian should not consider any marital union that would not feed this primary relationship with God. You'll bring great misery into your life if you ignore this command.

But also — just as importantly — we mustn't enter into a marriage expecting more than another human can give. If my wife looks to me to do God for her

— to love her like only God can love her— I'll fail every time and on every count. I'm trying, but I fall short every day. Tragically, I see many young people wanting to get married in order to find this God-acceptance and God-love. Infatuation can initially feel like it approaches this God love, but eventually it fades, disillusionment sets in, and the once fabulous relationship soon becomes an excruciating prison.

[A] Christian should not consider any marital union that would not feed this primary relationship with God.

Can I suggest a more biblical pattern? Instead of following Plato in a wild pursuit of our soul mate, we should seek to find a biblical "sole mate." A sole mate is someone who walks with us as together we apply biblical love. The

most accurate definition of true love is found in John 15:13 (NASB): "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

This love is not based on feelings, but on sacrifice. The Bible calls men to act like martyrs toward their wives, laying down their own lives on their wives' behalf (Ephesians 5:26). Love is not an emotion; it's a policy and a commitment that we choose to keep. Such a love is not based on the worthiness of the person being loved — none of us deserve Christ's sacrifice! — but on the worthiness of the One who calls us to love: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

A "sole mate" appreciates that marriage is a school of character. Clement of Alexandria, an early church father (ca. 150-215), captures this thinking marvelously when he writes, "The prize in the contest of men is shown by him who has trained himself by the discharge of the duties of marriage; by him, I say, who in the midst of hardship for his family shows himself inseparable from the love of God."

Clement asks, who wins the prize?

Not the couple displaying the most emotion, with the biggest smiles on their faces, or who can't keep their hands off each other; but rather,

the women or men who, through the duties and sacrifice of marriage, have trained themselves to love with God's love. They live out the gospel on a daily basis, forgiving, serving and putting others first in the most ordinary issues of life in such a way that they see themselves in training for godliness.

As Christ's follower— as a true sole mate— I'm called to take his example and his definition of love and apply it to my spouse. It really doesn't matter whether my spouse is a "soul mate," as much as it matters that I choose to love her with Christ's love. That means a sacrificial mindset marked by generosity, kindness, and mercy — for she certainly is my sole mate, my precious sister in Christ.

A biblical sole mate who walks in this truth, who daily travels God's journey of sacrificial love, and who willingly goes "into training" for godliness is a far more stable foundation upon which to build a lifelong partnership than the philosophy of Plato. "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." This may not sound like the most exciting or emotional love, but it is certainly the best love.



Notes

1. See Plato's "Symposium" in *The Portable Plato*, Scott Buchanan, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1948), pp. 146 -148. [Back^](#)
2. *The State of Our Unions 2001* (Princeton, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2001), pp. 6, 8. For more information, see [The State of Our Unions: 2005.](#) [Back^](#)

About the author

Gary Thomas is the founder and director of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality, a writing and speaking ministry that integrates scripture, church history, and the Christian classics. A teacher and author, Thomas' work includes the excellent book, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy* (Zondervan, 2000).

[Back to top](#)

Copyright © 2005 -2008 Focus on the Family. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. TrueU, TrueU.org and the TrueU shield are trademarks and "A Place to Discover the Truth" is a service mark of Focus on the Family. Privacy Policy/Terms of Use