

When Shall We Eat Cake?

By Kellen Brooks

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When shall we eat cake? When the cake is done.

I grew up smelling the fragrance of freshly baked dishes in the kitchen. Both my grandmother and mom were quite the cooks growing up. As a child, I always wanted to mimic what I saw my parents do. Trying my hand at baking was one of them.

My mom purchased a cookbook for us that had a recipe for each letter of the alphabet. I fondly remember the bakery item for the letter “A” – Applesauce Breakfast Cake. I was excited to try out my recipe book and make this dish that caught my eye.

We had all the ingredients we needed: milk, eggs, salt, sugar, butter, flour and, of course, the applesauce. The oven was preheated, the ingredients were mixed, and it was time to place it in the oven. We baked the cake and the aroma filled the house. In my haste, I took the dish out of the oven. After all, it looked golden brown on the outside and smelled pretty scrumptious. But one cut into the cake revealed that it was done on the outside but not fully cooked on the inside. It looked as if it were ready for consumption, but it needed some more time in the oven.

Sometimes, things can seem to be all set and ready to go on the outside, but there is still some inside work to be done before making the life-long commitment of marriage. What loose ends need to be tightened up? What issues need to be dealt with? What things need to be developed? What questions need to be asked? Only you can answer the question concerning the inside job you must take care of before adding another person to the equation. Those things that are not handled on the inside have a tendency to show up at the most inopportune times.

Many things could be happening on the inside that need to be addressed. There may be some character issues to work on. Maybe there are selfish tendencies, trust issues, impatience. Perhaps things like improving your integrity, keeping your word, increasing your work ethic, and a number of other character traits are ready for improvement. Do you possess some bad habits you know could drive another person crazy like punctuality, cleanliness, complaining, overspending, or over committing? Now, I'm not saying that you have to get yourself perfect before marriage. There are

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always areas of improvement, and you'll keep growing and changing even after "I do." However, we should be perfecting ourselves while we *wait for the cake*. We can maximize this time by taking advantage of the time we have to ourselves to improve in all areas. That may look like consistent time with God, working on our health by getting a gym membership or joining a fitness class, or improving our image and outer appearance with a closet purge and wardrobe change. Since we have to wait, we might as well make the most of it.

Take inventory

Spend some time with yourself to think and reflect on the things you could improve in your life. Think about improving in a few different areas:

- financial
- personal (physical health, image, space)
- schedule (how you spend your time working, serving, playing)
- spiritual
- educational (not just formal schooling, but also self-help, seminars, etc.)
- emotional

When you've listed areas for improvement, take just one or two of them and list about three action steps you can take to improve them. Note that some of these action steps may require additional action steps to complete the goal.

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Self Help

Spiritual

- Audit a course / attend a local seminar

- Download a devotional reading plan

- Purchase 2 books on area of growth

- 10 minutes of prayer & scripture in the morning

- Watch a video teaching weekly

- Encourage 1 person daily this week

Put a due date on them once you write them down. What gets dated gets done!

There may also be some very specific and specialized areas of your life, such as your business, life goals, or other area you lead that needs improvement. Whatever it is, just jot it down. When you start improving in one area of your life, it will undoubtedly overlap with other areas and give you the motivation to keep moving forward.

So you've started working on yourself. Great! Things are going pretty well and at this point, you've accepted that you personally are not the holdup to being married. What a relief! But keep in mind, dealing with our own inward issues is part of the equation in waiting for the cake to finish baking. Another extremely important factor is simply waiting for the right conditions and the right person. Will we choose to wait until we find the person that fits our standards, "clicks" with us, and accepts us for who we are? Will we wait for the person with whom we feel at peace, or will we rush the process, loosen our non-negotiables, and try to work with what seems to be best at the moment?

Waiting for the cake to bake can seem like an eternity. Truthfully, the older we get and the longer we wait, it can become more tempting to lower our standards and expectations. The longer it takes with whatever we are pursuing, the more relaxed our

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standards usually become. Think about your list of things you wanted in a spouse when you were a teenager. It was probably different by the time you reached your twenties. As a teenager, a young woman may have said, "I want him to be 6'2, a millionaire, etc." But then she gets into her twenties and says, "Ok, he doesn't have to be a millionaire, but he needs a good paying job; he doesn't have to be 6'2 but he has to be taller than me." By your early thirties, it's "Forget about the height. Just a nice and respectable guy with a cute face." Then come the forties: "Lord, just let him love God and like women." The older you get, the longer it takes, it becomes more tempting to relax your standards concerning a spouse.

Let's examine a 40 year-old single man in the Bible, Isaac. His story from singleness to marriage is found in Genesis 24, an entire chapter dedicated to Isaac finding a wife.

1 Abraham was now a very old man, and the Lord had blessed him in every way.

2 One day Abraham said to his oldest servant, the man in charge of his household, "Take an oath by putting your hand under my thigh. **3** Swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. **4** Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac."

5 The servant asked, "But what if I can't find a young woman who is willing to travel so far from home? Should I then take Isaac there to live among your relatives in the land you came from?"

6 "No!" Abraham responded. "Be careful never to take my son there. **7** For the Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my descendants.^[a] He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a wife there for my son. **8** If she is unwilling to come back with you, then you are free from this oath of mine. But under no circumstances are you to take my son there."

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9 So the servant took an oath by putting his hand under the thigh of his master, Abraham. He swore to follow Abraham's instructions.

(Genesis 24:1-9)

Now, let's unpack this here. Firstly, Abraham had the liberty to choose a wife for his son, so he sets the standards for the wife Isaac will marry. She has to come from a specific place and a specific family. As we saw in the previous chapter on questions to ask a person you're dating, it is important for you to share the same faith and be equally compatible spiritually.

The second standard Abraham sets is that the bride-to-be has to follow Isaac and live in Canaan with him. Language surrounding a woman following her husband is not very popular in an era of rugged individualism and questions surrounding gender roles in marital relationships. I had a teacher who, when describing her life as a single woman before marriage, said "I'm like the queen of Sheba. I got my own stuff," referencing the African Queen who visited King Solomon and brought with her an abundance of wealth and resources.¹

I believe it is perfectly ok to have accomplished goals and possess your own things, choosing not to wait for a man or marriage before you start "living your best life." I encourage any woman to *do her thing*. Explore the world, pursue your career, buy a place to live, and do whatever it is you are passionate about doing. Do it big! But understand that when you get married, stuff changes. You submit yourself to the one God has ordained. That word submit is almost like a cuss word to some people. The reason why it gets a bad rap sometimes is because of the chauvinistic and domineering behavior exhibited by some men. Ephesians 5:22 says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands." But this comes right after verse 21, which says "Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ," is a call for service to one another and mutual submission that honors Christ. This submission doesn't mean "I'm lording over you." Rather, it's a mutual submission that honors Christ and says, "we respect and love each

¹ 1 Kings 10:1-13. Jesus also talks about the Queen of Sheba (Queen of the South), Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31.

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other as equals.” This doesn’t negate a husband’s leadership; it just shows that he has to be a servant before he can lead. Wives will be more apt to trust the leadership of the husband as he first loves her like Christ loves the church. She will follow the man who is going somewhere.

Abraham not only set a standard for the woman, but also a standard for Isaac. Abraham commanded his servant to not let Isaac go back where he came from. Why is this? Abraham was well acquainted with the promise of God. Abraham’s last recorded words are of him rehearsing God’s promise on his life. “God is going to give this land to me and my offspring.” Abraham knew that in order for this promise to go forward, Isaac would have to live and raise his family in the land of Canaan. What we’re seeing in this passage is that Abraham didn’t change his standards because Abraham knew his purpose.

When you know your purpose in life and stick to your standards, you create a buffer against connecting with someone as a spouse who does not complement that purpose. If you don’t acquaint yourself with your purpose and standards, it is possible that you could connect with someone who may work as a spouse but not fully complement who you are and where you’re going. Personal standards help weed out the pool of people. Abraham knew his promise and this gave him direction concerning Isaac’s spouse.

Unrealistic Standards?

These guys were *getting up there*. Abraham was 140 years old. Isaac was 40 years old and had never been married. Abraham had what some would consider to be some unrealistic standards, especially at the twilight of his life. But they waited patiently for what they believed God to do concerning Isaac’s marriage. I can imagine the conversation between Abraham and his servant.

Abraham: “I need you to do a 450-mile camel ride to find Isaac a wife.”

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Servant: “450 miles? That’s pretty far! Why can’t we go somewhere closer to find a spouse?”

Abraham: “Nope! Go there and bring her back home.”

Now, what are the chances that a woman who doesn’t have a clue who Abraham’s servant is will be willing to follow him back and marry a man she’s never met? I think we can all agree that, on the surface, this was an unrealistic standard. However, it wasn’t too unrealistic for God. God honored Abraham’s standards and allowed each of them to be met. Now, if Abraham was 140 years old with these types of standards, and Isaac was 40, single, and waiting, we can still have standards—at whatever age we are—concerning the things we desire God to do in our lives. Abraham further shows us that we don’t have to settle for less than we expect.

Like Father, Like Son

Isaac later had twin boys, one of whom was named Jacob. Just as his father had done for him, Isaac also set standards for whom Jacob should marry.

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him:
“You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. **2** Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.

Genesis 28:1-2 (NKJV)

God also repeated to Jacob the same promise that was given to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. The promise, once again, served as a confirmation of the standards for which Jacob should pursue a wife.

Jacob arrived at the homeland and became acquainted with the servants of her mother’s family and also the daughter of his uncle, a woman named Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel, who was a beautiful woman. Jacob knew this was the woman he wanted

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to marry and told her father that in place of payment for working for him, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.”

Genesis 29:20

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed *only* a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

Jacob found a woman that met the standards, and yet he still waited. You may find exactly what you’re looking for and the timing may still not be right for moving forward. The cake is still in the oven. Jacob waited because of his love for Rachel. He kept his word and kept himself. Jacob’s patience and discipline teaches us that true love waits. When we are driven by our unbridled passion and desires, they can override our discipline and sobriety. But when true love is in the equation, sacrificial and giving love, waiting becomes easier to do. Jacob could have chosen an easier and quicker route, but what’s readily available and easy to attain isn’t always the best thing for us.

The sad reality is that many people have grown weary of waiting. They have given into the demands of a world that says, “Don’t take your time. Hurry up!” They ask the question, “What’s the use in waiting any longer?”

In the process of waiting, it’s important that we learn to manage expectations. **As believers, we must learn to manage expectations.** We should always believe God for the best and to answer our prayers, even as it relates to a spouse. But we must also be alright with the possibility that God will not always answer in the manner or timeline we expect. We must not grow weary in these moments. If we do not train ourselves to manage expectations, we will grow faint in our hearts when things don’t play out as we hope. Many of us are facing some sort of temptation, trial, or pain. You even feel like the clock is ticking. You’re asking the question, *Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? I’m going to be a senior citizen before I get married.*”

Here are 18 reasons why we should wait. We should wait because...

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1. God said so.²
2. Creativity flourishes when we are not rushing.
3. We get renewed in the waiting.
4. God knows what we need better than we do.
5. The immediate isn't always expedient.
6. Well done is better than half baked.
7. You don't get penalized for doing it in God's timing, instead of culture's timeline.
8. Growth takes time.
9. It shows God honor, love, respect, and gratitude.
10. We can show a *microwave* world how to endure and be patient.
11. Somebody waited on us.
12. Decisions made in haste can have detrimental consequences.
13. Our dependence on God is able to increase.
14. God is working behind the scenes.
15. God can get all of the credit.
16. There are more things God wants to download into our spirit.
17. The passion needed to carry us through can build.
18. People will appreciate our stance after they see the success it brings.

And so we wait. We wait because not only do we want God's best, but we also want to give our best. We wait because real love says I don't have to pressure anyone or be pressured. Your waiting may be a few months, a few years, or several years. Your teens and your twenties may have passed, as have mine, and you are yet waiting. But resist the urge to rush the process and lower your standards. Take this time to grow yourself and allow God to do a work in you while you wait for God to work things out. God knows your desires, hopes, and dreams! Just wait on Him and He can do beyond your imagination. God's baking up something great for you.

² Psalm 27:14

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