

## Interview with Denise Kelly

Topic: Preparing yourself for a successful, healthy relationship

Venessa: Welcome to the Love Right Unplugged Podcast where we talk about everything love and relationships. This week, we're going to be talking about preparation or what makes for a successful, healthy relationship, and we have Denise on the line joining us. Hey Denise!

Denise: Hi, Venessa! Thank you for having me.

Venessa: How are you?

Denise: I'm doing well, thank you.

Venessa: Excellent, excellent. Well, thanks for joining us on the podcast today. So, as I mentioned in the intro, we're going to be talking about what makes for a successful, healthy relationship, and what are the keys to preparing for a healthy relationship. Maybe the first thing is – tell me about you. You're married; why don't just tell me a little about how long you've been married and a little bit about that process.

Denise: Okay, my husband and I have been married almost eight years. It will be eight years in March. We actually met about, oh gosh, it's been so long. We probably met eleven and a half, almost 12 years ago. We dated for about five years before we got married. That's a story to tell for a little bit later. But, I think as far as our story ... When I met my husband, I had actually gotten out of a bad relationship about a year before that, and I actually did take some time off to prepare myself for a better relationship, a relationship that I thought would be more fulfilling for myself, and something that I know I could commit to and completely give all of myself.

Venessa: Okay. So, tell me a little bit about preparation. Obviously, you've been with your husband for eight years married – almost 13 years together and a five-year courtship is kind of a long period of time.

Denise: Yes, it is.

Venessa: Let's talk a little bit about your preparation, from the time you got out of your previous relationship, the things that you saw that were different about this particular relationship. Or, not even necessarily that they were different about this relationship. But, what was different about you?

Denise: I think part of it was that I realized that I had been making the same mistakes when I was dating. Some of the mistakes, I'll be really candid and open about the mistakes that I was making were something I call "what people want and desire". You want and desire a relationship so much that you're willing to forego some of your must-haves, and I think that I went through a period where I was like, "look ... Denise, this is just not going to happen. This is not real ... If it doesn't show up in your life, you need to let it go".

So, what I did was I took a look at what it is that I really, really wanted out of a person. What it was that I knew that I wanted to give in a relationship, and I prepared myself by eliminating all distractions. I actually did not date anybody, for maybe about 6 or 7 months. And then, I went on a lot of first dates. I told my husband that because he asked me, when I met him, "Do you date a lot?" I told him that I go on a lot of first dates, and he was puzzled. I told him that most of that is because after the first date, I know right off the bat if something showed itself to me that was something that I knew that I could not live with – I didn't go out with them again. There was no wait and see. There was none of the, "Maybe they might be different or they might change", because that doesn't negate – if they don't present themselves to me as somebody that I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt that I could be with, forever, it doesn't mean that they're a bad person. It doesn't mean that I'm a bad person because I reject them, because it is a rejection, whether we want to admit it or not. You are rejecting that person. That doesn't make you bad. It actually makes you a great person to give them that rejection early on in the process rather than much later after you've gotten your feelings and emotions wrapped into something that you didn't need to be wrapped into to begin with.

Venessa: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's a really, really good point. But, I want to go back to something that you said that I think that a lot of people

actually do. You talked about repeating the same patterns over and over again. I think that this is one of the things that we, particularly as women, we wonder why we cannot find a mate; we're not successful in our relationships because we're dating the same type of people. They're showing up in the same way, and so ultimately, the results are the same. So, talk to me a little bit about your discovery process. You talked about your "must-haves" and your "can't stands". What did that look like for you when you got to that place?

Denise: It didn't look pretty, to be honest, to get me to that place, but, it was after I had a discussion with the person that I was dating at the time, and I had ended it, and he didn't want to end it. And so, we were having a discussion, and I basically said, "I'm tired of the mistakes, I'm tired of the constant hurt, I'm tired of the same thing over and over again, so I'm not allowing myself to go through it anymore". It was more of an empowering type of thing. You're in control of yourself. As long as you continue to put yourself in that presence, the same things will still happen. What it looked like for me was me saying "You know, this person has done X,Y,Z five different times over the course of the time that we've been dating".

Venessa: Right.

Denise: They're still likely to do it again, so why am I here? And, it wasn't even an infidelity thing, it was just more of a disappointed, let-down, couldn't be counted on type of thing. I wanted to be with somebody who I knew that I could count on. And so, that was very big for me, and it took a point where I said, "Okay, Lord, I'm a woman of Faith, so I was like, Lord, reveal to me what it is that I need to do", and the Lord revealed to me, at that time, virtuosity. That was my focus. Become a virtuous woman was basically what he said. That's what I needed to focus on. That is all me. When you – it's a very interesting thing, when you're looking for an answer, and when you're looking for something, we often make it - we'll make this person do this or Lord, can you just show me what I need to do to make this person act right or whatever it is that you're trying to get the other person (to do) – the behaviors that you want from the other person. But what came back was a behavior for myself. And that was very eye-opening for me, and that's why I didn't date for a long time, because I took the time to become that person. It became a lot of reading The Word, and making sure that

when people presented themselves to me, I presented with all honesty and integrity. I was very open and I was ok with sharing what I wanted. Now, you don't have to spill all your guts, necessarily. You shouldn't spill all your guts on the first date. But, you know if you want someone who understands what it's like to have a valuable relationship with a parent. You talk to someone about – you ask them “Tell me about your Mother”. If they say anything negative about their mother, you know this is not the person for you. It's not even – a lot of time we pass over certain things like that because we'll say, “Well, you know, they're just telling you a bad story or a moment in time”. But, it's the mentality of a person to be able to share that moment in time with you in a very casual setting. I would never casually speak negatively about anybody. So, that was a very – that's a very strong thing with me. I think that when we recognize what those things look like and knowing what you want and understanding what that looks like. Because it's one thing to say that you want something, but how does it manifest itself in reality with us?

Venessa: Exactly.

Denise: That's the key. Once you know that, I think it's very easy. If you see it, step away because you're not tied. You're not tied to anything initially.

Venessa: Right. I think that's really key, and you said something that's really important and reminds me of what Maya Angelou said, which is “When people show you who they are, believe them”. Someone who shows up on a first date, and they are speaking negatively or someone who is just pouring out their entire heart to you about a negative situation, that, for anybody should be a red flag.

Denise Right. I agree.

Venessa: Run quickly in the other direction! So, tell me about some of the questions that you feel like are very helpful for a person going into a new situation. You've taken the time to focus on what you need, who you are, I think that's the other piece. You said something else that I think is really key in talking about the fact that your Faith played a great part in it in that you saw yourself as a virtuous woman. I think that that's really important for many people. You have to figure out

who you are before you decide that you want to be in a relationship. Ultimately, if you don't know who you are, then you won't attract what it is that you need.

Denise: I agree.

Venessa: So, when you look at some of the questions that you began to ask of the next person that you met, your husband – what types of things did you ask him?

Denise: It's funny, because I asked a lot of situational questions and part of it – some were for shock value, I will say that. I wasn't so much concerned with the exact answer but moreso with his response and reaction to the question. For example, I asked him had he had any homosexual experiences in his lifetime.

Venessa: Wow! Okay ... Okay, I think that that is a shock value question ... what is the real question? That's real?

Denise: That is a very shock value question, and it wasn't so much – I'll tell you why I asked that question. One, I wanted to see his reaction, because it was important for me to be with somebody openly accepted people the way that God accepts us. And so, if he had come out and said something like, very, very negative against homosexuality or bashed homosexuals in general, it would have been a block for me, and I would have walked away. While I am a Christian woman, and I believe what the Bible says but the Bible also talks about accepting and loving people as they are. If he was that kind of a person, he would not have been for me. That's a shock value question. But, some other questions – I asked him about his relationship with God, if he's a Christian, if he goes to church, I asked him about his mother. You know, my husband comes from a large family so we had lots of conversation about his siblings. I asked him financial questions. I asked him if he supports, you know, does he financially support anyone, and that seems like a weird question to ask someone just right off the bat, but, do you financially support anyone? Because you should know whether or not you are hooking up with someone who is tied, thousands of dollars a month, to somebody else.

Venessa: Right. Absolutely. Do you have any children? Are you supporting your parents?

Denise: You can't be specific, unless that's what you care about, but you know, do you have any kids, do you have an ex-wife, things like that. Those are really, to me, people should be forthcoming in a lot of that. But, yeah, that's good to know – how they manage their finances and what they think about money, when you ask a question like that. Because if the person answers in a situation where they are financially supporting someone, and they feel some sort of angst about it. You know maybe child support or alimony or whatever the case may be, it's a good example for you to see – again, it speaks to the person's character when they start to speak about thing. Having child support was not a dealbreaker for me but had he said, "Yeah, keep payin' my baby momma two thousand dollars a month and I can't stand it!" Nope, not gonna date you, okay? You know, that speaks to how they value their relationship with the people that they've come in contact with over the years. People should value relationships; they should value others. Everything is an experience that we've been through, and everybody comes with something. So, it's definitely key. Those are some of the questions.

I always ask about their goals – what they want to do in life, how they see their career developing over the next five years. That speaks a lot to their aspirations and what kind of person they are. You want to ask questions that matter to you, really, at the end of the day. It's not so much – these are all things that mattered to me. I wanted somebody who had drive and ambition and who understood what it was like to be an entrepreneur.

Venessa: Right.

Denise: Who respected the entrepreneurial game because I'm in it. So, if I can't – those were the things that were important to me. That's why I asked questions like that. And just, overall, how do they feel about children? Not so much do you want to have any, but how do you feel about them? Because you know, especially for someone who might be younger, and you want to have a family – a lot of times how we

end up with our family is not how we think we're going to end up with our family.

Venessa: Yes ... good point.

Denise: So, I think it's key to understand whether or not the person is open to other things like adoption – other ways to conceive or whatever the case may be. Those are the other types of questions you want to have based on what's important to you.

Venessa: Yeah, that's really key. I think that the questions that we ask people are key. But, also, I think that also knowing your own intentions is key. And so, I think that one of the things that's really important that we touched on a little bit earlier, is really knowing yourself. If you know yourself and know what should be, you're able to formulate the proper questions for the individual that you're going to meet. I tell people, I'm not going to help you find a man, that's not what I do. I don't do that, what I do is I help you find YOU. As a result of helping you find you and developing the person you are, you become more magnetic, and ultimately can create the relationship and manifest the type of relationship that you want by the work that we do. It sounds like you did a lot in your preparation for yourself and asked the proper questions not only of yourself but of your husband. When you got to that place, you were ready, he was ready and then - here we are now almost 13 years later.

Denise: Yes. And he was ready a lot earlier than I was, that's why our dating period took so long. You know, it's one of those things where I totally agree with you about the magnetic-ish part, because you will start to attract what you're giving off. My husband asked me to marry him six months in, but I wasn't ready to commit. There was a lot, I think, one of the other keys, I think, when you're working on a relationship is also to make sure that you prepare for understanding your communication style ...

Venessa: Right ... right ...

Denise: And become open to sharing. You know, even though I had prepared myself in many ways, I had not prepared myself to communicate openly, and so that was one of the things that I actually worked on during our course of dating. That's why I didn't say yes the first time.

Venessa:: Right. Right. We all know that communication is very key, and I talk about the fact that communication can make or break a relationship. There are other things that can be worked on but communication – that's one of those things that you really – you don't have it down pat, you're going to have some challenges.

Denise I agree.

Venessa: So that's key. That's key. Alright, this is all good stuff. If you one or two tips that you would give to our listeners out there about preparing yourself or situations relating to dating, what would you say to them?

Denise: Firstly, I would tell people – at first I was going to say for women, but I would say for men, as well, to pause. If you feel like you're not in the right situation or you haven't been doing the right things, it's okay to pause and not go out with people for a while. It's what I call dating yourself. Get very comfortable with who you are and be okay with being by yourself. Once you get comfortable being by yourself, then begin the process of dating again.

Venessa: Yes. Very key. Okay.

Denise: Another thing that I would say is do everything with a purpose in mind. Oftentimes, we date just to have fun, and it causes us to end up in situations that we don't need to be in. So, don't just date the person just because it's fun for the moment, even though you know it's not right. Go with what's in your heart and take a break and don't waste people's time, especially not your own.

Venessa: Absolutely. Absolutely. Those are two key things. Knowing yourself and getting very comfortable with yourself and doing everything with a purpose – making sure that you're dating with a purpose, and you're

not just going out to be going out with an individual. And that's actually funny that you said that second thing, because a lot of women, men, too, they go out just to go out. I guess, for me, when I think about it, if you're not working towards or marriage or long-term commitment, then why are you going out? What's really the purpose? I think that's key. You have some schools of thought where people say you should just date as many people as possible. Well, no ...

Denise: I know, people do that. They think that it's a numbers game and, you know, you really just need the one person for you.

Venessa: Exactly ...

Denise: You're not rummaging, searching for the needle in a haystack. It's not that kind of a thing. If you do the work on you, you'll attract who you need.

Venessa: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I believe it is part of a process of being selective, as well. So, you can determine very quickly, on a first date – if you want a second date based on the questions. A lot of people say, "Oh, well, you know, I felt chemistry with that person, I'm going to go out with them again." Ok, well, did you have some substantive conversation in that time, or were you just caught up in the emotion of the moment?

Denise: Right. You touched on something really key, Venessa, when you said, "Did you have substantive conversation during the time that you went out?" I often tell people, if they ask me about dating, don't do first dates that are entertainment-based dates.

Venessa: Key.

Denise: Be entertained by one another and by the conversation that you're having. If you do an entertainment-based date, and you spend the (time) – I'll use the movie or theater for an example, you spend about two and a half hours together, of which only 30 minutes is likely to be conversation.

Venessa: True.True.

Denise: The rest is shared entertainment, and you go home thinking that was a great date because you were two hours thoroughly entertained by someone else, not the person that you're going out with again. So, people have to really think about this. I actually, I never did entertainment based dates after I went through my self-discovery process. I did a lot of let's go get ice cream, oftentimes, I didn't even do very many dinners, either. Just something that gave us an opportunity where the only way we would be entertained is if we were talking to one another.

Venessa: Very key.

Denise: You find out so much. People can't fake more than 30 minutes of conversation most of the time, anyway. If they're not interesting, you'll find out really quickly.

Venessa: Very true. That's very, very true. I'm not a fan of going to dinner, particularly on a first date. Let's meet for tea, let's meet for coffee, let's meet for a drink, ice cream, something quick so we really can have some substantive conversation so I can get to know you, you can get to know me, and if it works, then, you know, maybe there will be a second date. But, that's the last thing that you want to be in, is sitting there over dinner with someone and within 20 minutes you're like, "This is not going to work."

Denise: Right. If, after 20 minutes, they've never asked you any single question about you ... It's a wrap. Don't go out with them again because they're not really interested in you. They have a different agenda. Trust me, if a person never asks you about you, they definitely have a different agenda.

Venessa: Absolutely. That's so true. That is so, so, so true. And I think that we have to be open to the questions, as well, that people ask of us. So, just like we're giving them, we have to be able to receive them.

Denise: I thoroughly agree.

Venessa: Denise, I think that this has been fantastic. I think that you have given us some really useful advice for our audience and people trying to figure out how they need to prepare themselves for a relationship and then, also, questions – what you ask on a first date to get you to that place. I just want to thank you for your time today, and we'll be back in touch soon.

Denise: Thank you so much for that, and I appreciate your having me.

Venessa: Thanks, Denise.

Denise: You're welcome. Bye.

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