



defined

EMBRACING GOD'S VISION
FOR LASTING LOVE AND
SATISFYING RELATIONSHIPS

KRISTEN CLARK AND
BETHANY BAIRD



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2018 by Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN: 978-0-8010-7556-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2017055473

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2011

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The names and details of some of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the authors have worked.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



To our amazing parents, Mike and Heidi.
Your investment in our lives has shaped us
into the women we are today.
We love you!—Kristen and Bethany

To my husband, Zack. Thank you for showing me
the beauty and power of Christ-centered love.—Kristen

Contents

PART ONE: HAPPILY EVER DISASTER

1. Love, You Are Oh So Complicated 13
2. Seeing through the Fairy Tale Facade 24
3. The Merry-Go-Round Method for Modern Relationships 35

PART TWO: BRINGING BACK TRUE LOVE

4. From Little-Girl Crushes to Big-Girl Relationships 51
5. Getting to the Heart of Love, Marriage, and Sex 64
6. Taking Femininity into Your Love Life 85
7. God’s Timeless Method for Lasting Relationships 97

PART THREE: SINGLE AND WAITING TO MINGLE

8. When Your Heart’s Desire Is Unfulfilled 115
9. Five Strategies for Thriving as a Single Girl 127

PART FOUR: WORKING THROUGH THE NITTY-GRITTY

10. How to Be “Just Friends” with Guys 139
11. Is It Okay to Date a Non-Christian? 150
12. Qualities to Look For in a Future Husband 157

Contents

- 13. What to Do When He Comes Calling 166
- 14. Romance without Regrets 179
- 15. Ten Red Flags to Look For in a Relationship 194
- 16. How Do I Know if He’s “the One”? 203

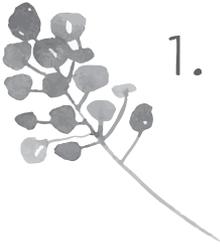
PART FIVE: LIVING WELL ON THIS SIDE OF THE ALTAR

- 17. What Married Women Want You to Know 217
- 18. A Love Story Worth Fighting For 233

- Appendix A 243
- Appendix B 249
- Notes 253
- Verses 257
- Acknowledgments 259

PART ONE

Happily Ever Disaster



1. LOVE, YOU ARE OH SO COMPLICATED

The clock read 4:21 p.m. In exactly nine minutes, my life would change forever. This was the day I (Kristen) had dreamed of for twenty-four years. Standing in the bridal suite, I gently adjusted my floor-length veil and white wedding dress. Up until this point, the day had been a crazy blur. Last-minute venue prep. Steaming my wedding dress. Applying waterproof mascara. Trying to get my straight hair to stay curled. Oh, and helping a bridesmaid who ironed a hole in the front of her dress. The day was in fast motion. Every minute flashed past as quickly as I blinked.

Until now.

The bridesmaids were out of the room. The moms were being seated. My dad was waiting nervously right outside the bridal suite door. For the first time all day, the room was quiet. Everyone was gone except for one person . . . Bethany. This girl was my best friend. My maid of honor. My adventure partner for the past two decades. My sister.

Standing across from each other, we silently soaked in this moment as time stood still. And then, without warning, Bethany did

the unthinkable. With my makeup finished and the touch-up powder out of reach, she burst into tears. And that’s all it took for me. After I burst into tears myself, both of us stood there crying and laughing.

“I can’t believe you’re making me cry right before I walk down the aisle!” I said, laughing.

Scrambling for some tissues, she laughed through her tears and said, “Sorry . . . it all just hit me. I can’t believe you’re about to get married. Things will literally never be the same again.”

“I know,” I said, dabbing my cheeks. “It’s crazy. I honestly thought this day would never come. And now here we are.”

.....
*Standing across
from each other,
we silently soaked
in this moment
as time stood still.*
.....

“No kidding,” Bethany replied. “You’re actually getting married . . . to an amazing guy. I guess that means there’s hope for the rest of us single girls!” Putting her hand on my shoulder, Bethany smiled warmly and said, “Seriously, Kristen. I’m really excited for you. This is an incredible day. God is so good, and Zack is perfect for you.”

“Okay, don’t make me cry again,” I said, fanning my eyes.

This special moment, as we embraced in a long sister hug, was one neither of us would ever forget.

And with that, our dad knocked on the door and said, “Time to go, girls.”

But First, Heartbreak

As beautiful and romantic as my wedding day was, my relationship journey wasn’t always picture-perfect. Four-and-a-half years before Zack and I got married, I went through one of the hardest breakups of my life.

“Look, you’re not supposed to know this, but Ryan’s shopping for rings!” Bethany said to me in an excited whisper.

“What?” I asked with huge eyes. “Seriously? How—”

“I can’t tell you any more,” Bethany said. “Just make sure your nails are looking good over the next few weeks.”

I was surprised by this news, but not shocked. Ryan and I had been seriously getting to know each other for six months. Deep in my heart, I truly believed he was the one. *So this is what true love feels like?*

My parents and siblings loved Ryan (well, most of my siblings). And even though we came from completely different types of families and backgrounds, we shared a lot of common interests. Even though our relationship had endured some rocky patches, we seemed to be pushing forward. He loved Jesus. I loved Jesus. We got along great. We enjoyed each other’s company. What else did we need?

At twenty years old, I thought I was getting off easy in the love department. *How awesome would it be to get married now and avoid the drama of single life?* I thought. Confident I had found the one, I figured a little wedding research would be harmless. With my head in the clouds, I turned on my computer and searched for wedding dresses. Little did I know that exactly one week from this point I would be flying away on a plane with a shattered heart.

The next few days turned out to be some of the hardest in my *entire* life. My dream world came crashing down before my eyes. Although my relationship with Ryan looked great on the outside, it was covered with red flags. He and I had convinced ourselves we were “perfect” for each other. But we weren’t. Not in reality.

My infatuation with Ryan had blinded me to the many issues and problems in our relationship. And sadly, Ryan’s rough past wasn’t as much of his past as it was his present.

After a lengthy conversation with my parents, my fears were confirmed. Getting married to Ryan would be an extremely unwise decision. As this realization flooded my mind, I burst into tears.

.....
At twenty years old, I thought I was getting off easy in the love department.
.....

I cried that entire night. I cried that entire next day. Bethany and I even cried together. It was painfully hard.

After Ryan and I broke up, I desperately wanted to get away for a little while. I needed time to think. To pray. To breathe. I hopped on a plane with Bethany to go visit our grandparents in Chicago. As the plane took off early the next morning, I honestly wondered if I would ever be able to love again.

He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not

One year after Kristen's breakup with Ryan, I (Bethany) met an amazing guy named Justin. I was falling hard for this guy. The chemistry was instant. He was funny, tall, good-looking, easygoing, and he loved Jesus. What more could a girl want?

Justin and I met through some mutual friends. His personality was everything I had ever imagined in a future husband. Our growing interest in each other was becoming obvious to everyone around us.

With my parents on board and excited about our relationship, Justin and I began getting to know each other more intentionally. As a nineteen-year-old girl, I couldn't believe how my life was panning out. I had always wanted to get married young. And with Justin being several years older, it seemed like the perfect love story. My head was in the clouds. My heart was on fire.

.....
*My head was
in the clouds.*

*My heart
was on fire.*
.....

After several more months of getting to know Justin, I just knew. *He's the one. He's totally the one.*

Up until this point in life, I had never been in a serious relationship. Crushes? Yes. Lots of them. But never a real relationship like this one. I had never met a guy like Justin. I had never been friends with a guy who I genuinely wanted to marry. Until now. Justin changed everything.

Over the next few weeks things continued ramping up. Justin began meeting with my dad for some good guy-to-guy chats. Even

though Justin was a fairly new Christian, he was anxious to grow in his relationship with God. I loved his passion for theology. I loved his desire to know the Bible. He seemed perfect in every way. The fairy tale movies I had watched as a little girl were coming to life right before my eyes. *This love thing is so easy!*

And then—out of nowhere—my entire world came crashing down. “We need to talk.”

Those were the four little words that popped up on my phone. I quickly clicked on Justin’s text message. My heart started pounding. Something wasn’t right. Our text messages were always surrounded by hearts and smiley faces. This text was plain. To the point. No fluff.

After texting back and forth for several minutes, my phone rang. It was Justin.

“I hate to do this by phone,” he said with a sad tone, “but since I’ll be gone on my business trip for the next week—” He paused. “Well, I . . . I just need to tell you what I’m really thinking.”

The next thirty minutes were a shock and a blur. Justin told me that he really liked me but had come to realize “we” wouldn’t work long-term. He explained that his interest in God wasn’t as strong as it seemed. He confessed that he didn’t genuinely share the same convictions as he had led me to believe. He told me his life would be going in a very different direction from this point on.

After what seemed like forever, this awful phone call finally ended. With my heart crushed and my dreams pulverized, I hung up the phone. I cried for the next three weeks. Love wasn’t all that simple after all.

Love and Romance Are Complicated

If there’s one thing the two of us have learned over the past decade, it’s this: romantic relationships are complicated. Those charming little princess movies we watched as kids didn’t do either of us any

favors as we grew older. Our simplistic view of love and romance was quickly shocked into reality.

As teen girls, we faced new challenges regularly. *Is it okay to tell this guy I like him? How do I get this cute guy to notice me? Is dating around okay? Is it possible to be “just friends” with a*

.....
Our simplistic
view of love and
romance was
quickly shocked
into reality.
.....

guy? What if my best friend likes the same guy as I do? How do I guard my heart? What about flirting? Physical boundaries? Late-night phone calls?

We had a lot of questions. Our parents and others wisely helped us work through these issues. But it wasn't easy.

And then we grew a little older and everything changed. Again. *What qualities are important in a future husband? How do I set God-honoring boundaries? What are the nonnegotiables? How do I know if he's “the one”? What do red flags look like? How do I stay content when all my friends are getting married?*

Question after question. Situation after situation. Year after year.

Despite our childhood fantasies, we quickly learned that there wasn't a one-size-fits-all mold. Navigating romance and relationships wasn't as simple as Hollywood made it seem.

The fact that you're reading this book probably means you've experienced some complications too. We're guessing you've asked similar questions. Faced similar challenges. Experienced some form of heartache. Wrestled through singleness. Wondered if God's Word had anything to say.

Sister, you're not alone. We've been there. Others have been there. It's tough. Navigating the waters of love isn't a piece of cake. And it doesn't help that modern culture is feeding us conflicting messages about how to navigate best. The movies tell us to follow our hearts. Love songs tell us to find the one. And our friends give us all sorts of random advice.

A twenty-three-year-old single woman named Chelsey wrote to us expressing her struggle in this area. “It’s so hard to know what’s right anymore when it comes to romantic relationships! The culture around me is throwing its view on me every day, and I’m not even sure what to think anymore.”

Can you relate? Whether you’re eighteen or well past your thirties, you’ve probably experienced the confusion and complication associated with romantic love in some form or another. And if you haven’t, you’ve probably experienced the longings and struggles of being single. If you’re anything like the two of us, you’ve wondered if there’s a better way. A wiser way. A God-honoring way.

In short, there is. There is a much better way. Thankfully, the Creator of the universe didn’t leave us hanging when it comes to our love lives.

Why We Wrote This Book

Instead of offering you a new dating program or an ABC solution to finding the one, the two of us want to offer you a biblical approach for true love and lasting relationships. It’s pretty clear that modern methods for pursuing romance and relationships aren’t working. We need something better. Something smarter. Something lasting. The two of us are calling a time-out in the modern game of love and declaring “enough is enough.” Hollywood, we’re calling your bluff. Unless we, as Christian women, break free from our modern culture’s broken view of love, we will continue to struggle down the same miserable path.

.....
*We need
something better.
Something
smarter.*
.....

Over the past decade the two of us have opened God’s Word and discovered a radically better approach to love and relationships—an approach that places Christ at the center of our love lives.

Despite your current season of life, we are confident that God's Word has specific and helpful answers for you. After all, God designed love and marriage, so He would know how to navigate it best.

Whether you're single and struggling to stay content, involved in a confusing relationship and need clarity, trying to guard your heart and stay pure, or wondering how to navigate the path to marriage successfully—*God's Word has answers*.

Regardless of why you picked up this book, we want you to know that the Bible has practical, applicable, and insightful wisdom for helping you navigate your love life—all for God's glory.

THROUGHOUT THE PAGES OF THIS BOOK YOU WILL DISCOVER

- A BIBLICAL APPROACH FOR TRUE LOVE AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS;
- GOD'S SPECTACULAR DESIGN FOR LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SEX;
- WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION NOW FOR YOUR FUTURE MARRIAGE;
- PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE PATH TO MARRIAGE;
- HOW TO LIVE A LIFE OF PURPOSE, INTENTION, AND SATISFACTION AS A SINGLE WOMAN;
- ESSENTIAL QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN A FUTURE HUSBAND;
- HOW TO BUILD A CHRIST-CENTERED LOVE STORY THAT LASTS, AND MUCH MORE.

The two of us aren't experts on the topic of love. We aren't relationship gurus or professional matchmakers (although we've had some success!). But we know the One who is. And as we've applied His truths to our lives, we've learned how to trust Christ more deeply and find our total satisfaction in Him. When Christ took center stage in our love lives, everything changed.

If you're tired of riding the waves of infatuation, crashing on the shores of heartache, and struggling down the road of confusion, join us on this new journey. A journey to discovering God's beautiful and incredible design for true love and lasting relationships.

Say hello to *love defined by God*.

CHAPTER 1
STUDY GUIDE

*Regardless of your current season of life,
we are confident that God's Word has
specific and helpful answers for you."*

1. In what ways have you experienced “complications” when it comes to love and romance?

2. Which of the following questions have you asked yourself? Underline any that apply.

Is it okay to tell this guy I like him?

How do I get this cute guy to notice me?

Is dating around okay?

Is it possible to be just friends with guys?

What if my best friend likes the same guy as I do?

How do I guard my heart?

What about flirting?

Physical boundaries?

Late-night phone calls?

What qualities are important in a future husband?

How do I set God-honoring boundaries?

What are the nonnegotiables?

How do I know if he's "the one"?

What do red flags look like?

How do I stay content when all my friends are getting married?

3. What has been most influential in shaping your current view of love and romance (e.g., movies, music, novels, friends, parents, church, God's Word, etc.)?

4. List three things you're hoping to learn by reading this book.

MAKE IT *personal*

Let's start things off right. Take a moment to stop and pray. Ask God to help you have an open heart and mind as you seek to embrace His vision for lasting love and satisfying relationships.