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Author of *Knowing God*

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Founder, Prison Fellowship

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**MIKE WEAVER**

Lead singer of Big Daddy Weave



sex  
sushi  
& salvation



sex  
sushi  
& salvation

thoughts on intimacy, community, & eternity

CHRISTIAN GEORGE

moody publishers  
chicago

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*For Rebecca,  
my baby back rib*

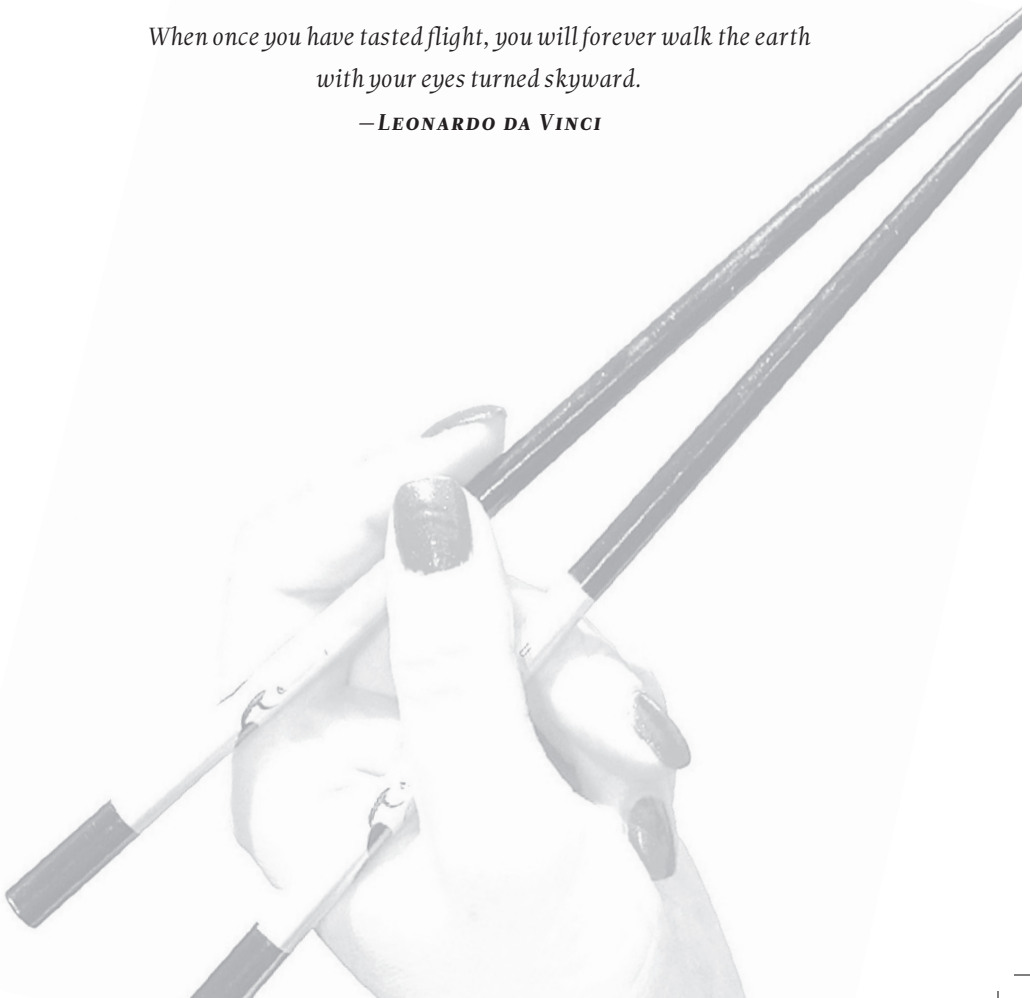


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*When once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth  
with your eyes turned skyward.*

**—LEONARDO DA VINCI**





# fasten your seat belts

**IT WAS A** bumpy takeoff—the kind that makes atheists pray like Catholic schoolgirls.

“Please fasten your safety belts,” the flight attendant requested, “and return your seat backs and tray tables to their full upright and locked positions.”

Happily I obeyed. Then I looked out the airplane window as we began to move. Seventy, eighty, ninety miles an hour. We passed the point of no return, the runway was running out, and the only way back down was up. *God, have mercy.*

“I wish they would give us more peanuts,” the man grumbled beside me. His lips were oily from the peanut package, but he continued stuffing his mouth. This guy was nervous.

“Not a fan of flying?” I asked, sliding my peanuts onto his tray.

He shook his head. “They say it’s more dangerous to drive, but I’d

rather die in a car crash than a plane crash.”

He had a point.

The man consumed the poor nuts. They didn't have a snowball's chance of survival on a hot Alabama afternoon. I tried not to gag, but the urge was overwhelming. Perhaps the *Sky Mall* magazine would take my mind off the salty genocide.

It worked. There were gadgets and gizmos galore! Revolving tie racks, virtual-reality headsets, and pens that did anything and everything but write. The watches were altimeters, the sunglasses were radios, and the only thing longer than the glow-in-the-dark Slip 'n Slide was the triple-digit price tag plastered to its picture. There was even a machine to warm a roll of toilet paper before using it. *Nice.*

Suddenly, the plane jolted. It wasn't a small quiver of the wings; it was a three-second plunge into the depths. My soul sank into my stomach as I clinched the sides of my seat. “OK, God, I'm sorry for my sins.”

*Bump. Bump. Bump.*

The man beside me was beside himself. He had finished eating my peanuts and was looking for something else to devour. I scooted closer to the window to resume my reading.

Another drop in altitude.

Luggage bins burst open, and white clouds absorbed the wing outside. I wanted to drop to my knees in prayer but wasn't about to unbuckle the seat belt. Babies screamed, children cried, and even the flight attendants were wide-eyed. I bit my lip and continued flipping through the *Sky Mall* magazine. *Look at that! An indoor/outdoor s'more maker fully equipped with marshmallows, chocolate bars, sterno, and . . .*

*Bump. Bump. Bump.*

I cringed. “OK, God, when I was six, I poured blue ink all over my parents' brand-new carpet. Instead of telling them, I emptied a

bucket of white paint over the stains. And when I was twelve, I almost burned down our house by throwing an aerosol deodorant can into the fireplace. God, give this turbulence a Tums and land us safely on the ground!”

To my left, a woman immersed herself in a romance novel. I stole a glimpse. “Ronan wrapped his rippled arms around her waist and pulled her close. Helga trembled with lust. But she knew she could never love a Viking.”

I pulled my eyes away from the book. Ancient Chinese monks believed that people only have a certain number of breaths to breathe in a lifetime. Once those breaths are used, the person dies. That’s one reason they practiced meditation and other arts that slow the lungs down to increase the life span. I tried breathing slowly, but it didn’t work because I was distracted by the woman beside me and her rapidly increasing breath.

“Helga felt her lips betray her as she snuggled against the warm marble of Ronan’s chest.”

The seat belt sign flashed, but I jumped up and darted to the bathroom. Anything to get away from Ronan’s rippled body. The bathroom smelled of rotten eggs. Soap was smeared across the makeshift sink, and the last person didn’t bother to flush. I ended up losing my footing, crashing against the mirror, and waiting for the turbulence to quit before I returned to my seat.

Yet this was my life. Turbulence was a frequent phenomenon for a dorky kid like me in middle school. My voice was cracking, my hormones raging, and life was a cloud I never thought would pass. Pre-algebra ate my lunch, biology molested my GPA, and a persistent cough shattered my dreams of staying in shape. Art interested me, but I always feared the artist’s outcome—living from painting to painting, driving a rainbow-colored Volkswagen, and dying from exposure to

oils. On top of it all I had to get braces, which made my mouth a talking chain-link fence.

Closing my eyes, I opened the bathroom door and walked to my seat. My faithful *Sky Mall* magazine greeted me with hot-dog-bun-toasting technology and swinging hammocks. And yet, somehow these things did not satisfy me. I continued flipping the pages, trying to suck bits of comfort from the pictures, but eventually I had to stop. Did I really think that neon popcorn makers and alien coffee mugs could bring me peace? Could portable DVD players calm my nerves?

Turbulence has a way of reminding us what really matters in life. There I was, soaring at four hundred miles an hour through rainstorms and rolling thunder in a plane that was susceptible to lightning strikes and engine malfunction. Did I really think that *Sky Mall* magazine could mask my misery? What happens when life gets bumpy? When the letter reads, “I want out of this relationship.” When the doctor says, “There’s nothing else I can do for you.” What then? Can salty peanuts prevent our pain? It’s simple to say we’re Christians when exams are easy, bills are paid, and all seems right in the world. But when the storms twist our exclamation points into question marks, we discover that there’s more to life than computerized slippers and sexy ring tones. We discover that the world revolves around something greater than ourselves.

Since humans are made in the image of God, we have three basic passions—intimacy, community, and eternity. We burn for them, save for them, pay for them, and pray for them. But only the God who fulfills these desires within Himself can perfectly fulfill them in us. This is a book about sex, sushi, and salvation—a book of snapshots—the ups and downs, the failures and fortunes, the smiles and trials. In these chapters, I retrace my travels around the world, from pagan temples in Greece to Transylvanian mountains in Romania. I confess

my lust and love, my struggle with truth, and my quest for Christ.

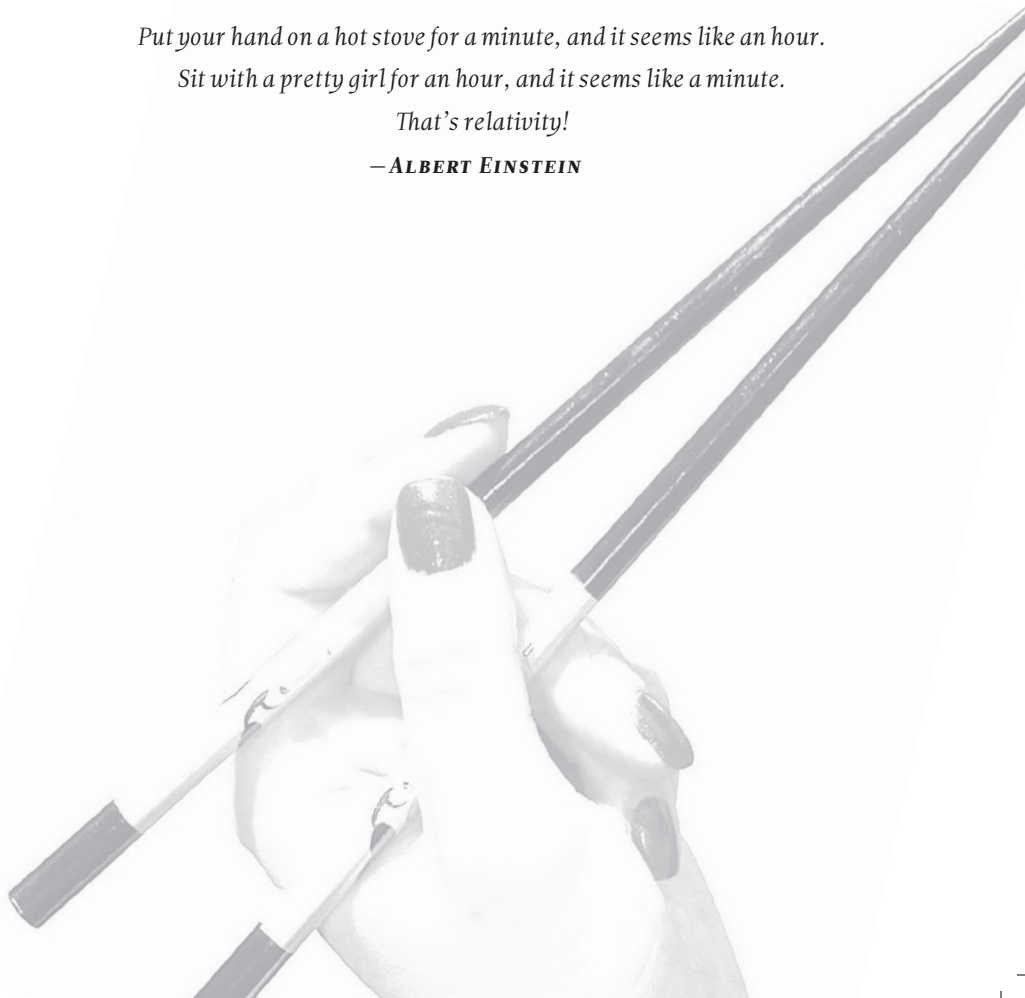
Fasten your seat belt. It's going to be a wild ride. And along the way we just might discover that the God who satisfies us with Himself joins us for the journey.

*Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour.*

*Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute.*

*That's relativity!*

**—ALBERT EINSTEIN**





# russian sex and wedding vows

**ANYTHING** was possible before God created the cosmos. Stars could have burned green instead of white. Planets could have grown like grass in the galaxy. Oceans could have oozed of Milk Duds and caramel. The whole world, in fact, could have been a trampoline, bouncing creatures across the continents.

But God had other plans. He created a universe that was hospitable for humanity—warm sunshine, fresh oxygen, flowing water. He spoke birds and beasts into being. He invented dragonflies, crocodiles, and water lilies. But something was missing. The lions didn't look like God. The tigers didn't talk like God.

“Let us make man in our image,” God said (Genesis 1:26 NIV). “All in favor, raise your hand.” Since God is one-in-three and three-in-one, a single hand streaked the sky, signaling a unanimous yes. Then God reached into the blackness of time, grabbed hold of nothing,

decided it should become something, and altered just about everything so that one day He could bless it with anything. And He named it Adam, and gave him Eve.

I met my Eve on a Sunday. For many it was a day of rest, but for me, activity was in the air. The girl of my dreams was twelve feet away, and my work was certainly cut out for me. We were in the college cafeteria. The smell of burgers filled the air, but I was too nervous to notice. The rest of my life depended on this moment. I had to make it count.

My mission was simple but serious, and with great suaveness, I surveyed the scene. Every time she brought that sandwich to her mouth, I envied the turkey on her lips. What's a guy to do? Sure, I had dated before, but never a specimen like this. She was way out of my league. The brunettes of my past were brushed aside; the redheads were washed away. All the proms, dances, and dates dissolved in my mind, and there I was, captivated by this blonde before me.

"So, tell me your life story," I said, sitting down at her table. It was a risky move but a sexy one.

She looked at me with neutral eyes. But then she smiled. It was a smile to replace the millions I'd seen before, a smile that dulled the sting of yesterday's D on an English quiz.

"My name's Rebecca," she said, twisting a strand of hair around her finger. "What's yours?"

I paused as the amnesia set in. Ever since my infancy I've known my name. I've said it and spelled it a thousand times. But as I watched her caress those locks, my brain was void of thought.

"Uh, Christian," I remembered. Of course, I could have been a Brandon, Steve, or Jason if I thought it would help.

"Christian," she mused, "I like that."

It was a perfect moment, a moment carved forever in my mind. It was a moment that split my B.C. from my A.D., and over the follow-

ing weeks, Rebecca took my life in a new and exciting direction. She told me about her childhood, when ice cream trucks and swimming pools occupied her hours. She told me about her greatest fear: dangling her feet over a shark-infested sea. She told me about her faith—a stubborn, risky, rugged faith that was bold enough to tell God what she thought of Him. We talked philosophy and theology, history and science. And as I turned the pages of her life, I knew she was a book worth wrapping my mind around, and hopefully one day my arms.

### **EMBRACE, ENGAGE, AND SURRENDER**

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. God told the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you” (Jeremiah 1:5). Interestingly enough, in this sense, the Hebrew word for “know” means more than cerebral awareness; it can mean sex. In Genesis 4:1, Adam *knew* his wife and she conceived a baby named Cain. To know God is to be intimate with Him. A first-base relationship is not enough. A faith that flirts cannot satisfy a God who loves. We must embrace Him, engage Him, and surrender to His will.

Salvation is like a sneeze—we can’t resist it for long. Oh sure, we can delay it, swallow it, or maybe pretend that it doesn’t exist. But when Christ looks across the lunch table and asks us our story, it’s only a matter of time before we realize He’s been tickling our nose the whole time. And He’s already written an ending with us in His arms.

Spending time in the presence of Christ should not be a boring date filled with awkward pauses and early curfews; rather, it should be an exciting event, climaxing with sparks flying and passions peaking. The Creator of the universe seeks intimacy with His creation, and if the Westminster Shorter Catechism is correct and God is our chief desire, intimacy with the Eternal will be established.

### **A RUSSIAN REQUEST**

A prostitute tried to have sex with me once. Her name was Nadia, and she lived in Russia. I was on a team of about twenty, some less experienced with mission trips than others, but all of us were committed to the project we were working on. We had come to minister to the orphans, the lowest of the low. There were hundreds of kids, most between the ages of four and fifteen. All of them had been abandoned by their parents and many abused. We had organized a summer camp where they could swim, play soccer, and learn about God. After weeks of planning and months of praying, we stepped off the bus in Vladimir, a small town near Moscow, and prepared to give these children the best summer of their lives.

Their faces were twisted with pain and rejection. Most of the girls would become prostitutes in years to come. Some would be kidnapped and trafficked to European cities for sex. Most of the boys would either serve in the military or end up in prison. And yet, as the camp progressed, so did their smiles. They began to laugh and play, and when we taught them Bible stories their eyes lit up with wild excitement. They wanted to know what happened to Joseph after he was sold into slavery. They held their breath and pretended to be Jonah, sinking beneath the surface of the sea. Some of them even did cartwheels, like the stone that rolled away from Christ's tomb.

As we were working in the camp, Nadia and I came to know one another. She worked at the camp, and her English was broken and thick. At first, it was frustrating to talk to her, like doing a Sudoku puzzle in the dark, but eventually we communicated. I told her about Alabama, how the hot summer days last from April to October. I told her of God and His grace, forgiveness, and goodness. I told her things broken people need to hear. But she also had something to say.

“Do you want to have sex with me?”

I paused.

“Do you want to have sex?” she asked again, flicking her jet-black hair away from her face.

A thousand thoughts raced through my mind. When I was in Sunday school I learned about how Joseph ran away from Potiphar’s wife when she propositioned him. He didn’t even stay to collect his clothes. That seemed like a good idea, and I calculated the energy it would take to hightail it out of there. But my legs did not like that option, and welded to the ground. Perhaps if I stayed, I could talk her out of it. Women like to talk, and it shouldn’t be hard to turn the conversation in another direction. Even the great *Titanic* was steered by a single rudder. But then, for a brief second in time, I thought the unthinkable. It was a dark and dangerous second, but it nonetheless ticked. *What if? Who would know? Why not?*

o o o o o

My first girlfriend’s name was Cindy. Sure, we were in preschool, but she had skills. Really good skills. She could finger paint until the cows came home, and it was too much for me to take. I fell madly in love with her, and during naptime she consumed my little dreams. At recess we chased each other around the playground, and in class we learned to spell our names together. Cindy’s mother took us out on our first “date,” and it ended with chocolate ice cream all over the car.

But the relationship would have never worked out. You see, Cindy picked her nose. Granted, her fingers were exceptionally talented, but when she swirled them around in her mouth, I knew the relationship was not going to last. Besides, we were four years old. And to further complicate the situation, I was moving on to bigger and better things—kindergarten.

When I was in fifth grade, I remember sitting in a sex-education

class that explained the ins and outs (quite literally) of God's great gift to humanity. Since I was the second guy in my class to grow hair on my legs, everyone looked at me to see how I would react to the naughty pictures in the textbook. Victoria's Secret wasn't a secret to me anymore, and I sat in the corner of the class and giggled. I felt like Curious George, exploring the terrain of a new and unfamiliar landscape. It was a landscape filled with colorful charts, enlightening drawings, and memorable diagrams. One page even had a pop-up chart, which gave me no small laugh. Of course, the idea of kissing a girl was foreign to me; the idea of sex, unfathomable.

Those days did change. In middle school, I all but roped the moon to snag a hug from a girl. I wrote girls letters, sent them pictures, and flirted with them in class. I laughed at their jokes, wooed them with winks, and even offered to edit their papers. Every once in a while, my squeaky, high-pitched voice gave way to a masculine man beneath, and I asked one of them out on a date. It didn't work very well, and most of the time they just whispered about me in the bathroom. It was an awkward age to be a boy, an age when girls were angels to me—never sinning, never breathing, and never going to the bathroom. They lived in heaven, pillow fighting in their pajamas while I was stuck on earth, struggling with puberty.

High school could not have come sooner. My hormones took an Alka-Seltzer, my sense of humor, a steroid, and my fast, red Acura landed me more dates than I had weekends to enjoy them. Oh, I had read *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, and Joshua Harris's arguments were admirable, but never did I have the guts to go through with them. The only things I kissed good-bye were the girls I took to dinner. I was a dating machine, or so I thought. The local florist knew my name, I stocked up on Tic Tacs, and I could have bought another red car with all the money I spent on movies, candy, and popcorn. Dating was the

drug of choice, and I wrote myself a new prescription every week.

## **RUSSIAN REDEMPTION**

But Nadia was a pill I could not pop.

“No,” I told her. “I can’t have sex with you.”

She burst into tears and ran back to her cabin, embarrassed, abandoned, and shocked. She had offered herself to me, and I had rejected her—the Russian cookie had crumbled, and I spent most of the night praying for her and praising God for helping me make that decision.

The next morning was an awkward one. I found Nadia eating breakfast, and she avoided me at first. But over the next few days, we became genuine friends. We continued talking about the Christian faith, and I told her about how it had changed my life. Several days later, she told me that I was the only man who had ever said no to her for sex, and before our team left for America, I gave her my Bible.

Leaving the Russian camp was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do. The orphans had attached themselves to us. They viewed us as friends and caretakers who, like their parents, were now abandoning them. I wanted to adopt every one of them and bring them back to America. Theirs would be the finest health care available, the best school systems around, and the freedom to worship Christ in a church where everyone knew their names. Theirs would have been heaven, but I had to leave them in hell. And to this day I can still feel their arms, grabbing and clawing at me to stay as I boarded the bus.

I brooded the whole way to the airport. I thought about my upbringing, being born in America with two amazing parents, a sister, and an ugly but cheerful dog named Snowball. I didn’t deserve those things. I didn’t deserve the Christmas presents and the birthday cakes. I didn’t deserve the pleasant childhood memories. I was never abandoned, and my sister wasn’t trafficked for sex. And I couldn’t

help but pray for Nadia and the orphans in Russia as our plane taxied to the runway.

### **SATAN'S PROSTITUTES**

God created us in His image to be His mirror. When He looked down at us, He saw Himself. He saw the creativity, the ability to communicate, the immortality, and the intimacy. But after Adam and Eve sinned, the mirror cracked. No longer were we perfect representations of God. We were shattered glass, broken bottles, flawed and fractured mirrors that distorted God's holy face. We exchanged our first love for another, and with legs wide open we prostituted ourselves to the serpent. We pimped our passions to the Devil like unholy whores. Beauty became the beast, and we could not even look at God. Moses tried, but his face burned so brightly that he had to wear a sack over his head to protect the people from the rays (see Exodus 34:35). When once we walked in the cool of the garden, our sin led us into the wilderness, and we wandered around, looking for another Eden.

God in His grace, however, didn't let us wander by ourselves. He came down to our level in the person of Jesus Christ and restored communion with creation. The apostle Paul tells us that "God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In other words, God beat His little boy with the belt reserved for us, and we agree with Isaiah: "Through his bruises we get healed" (Isaiah 53:5). On the roller coaster of redemption, Jesus Christ sank from the heights of heaven to the very depths of hell.

But hell was not the ending. On the third day, He arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and now reigns as King with His Father. Through intimacy with Jesus Christ the mirror is restored, and when God looks down at us He does not see shattered souls deserving pun-

ishment but rather a polished image of His glory and grace.

o o o o o

They say when you meet your soul mate everyone else in the world disappears. A crowd of two hundred becomes a crowd of two, and all that matters is the moment, the perfect moment when God has creation accomplish His will. For three wonderful years Rebecca and I became best friends. We talked until the wee hours of the morning, ate most of our meals together, and drove around the city just for driving's sake. Because we didn't want to jeopardize our relationship, we limited our physical attention. We drafted an "Ode to the Sustaining of Friendship in a Relationship."<sup>1</sup> It was a puppy dog love with an electric fence around it, and our friendship survived the years.

Rebecca and I grew together spiritually too. The days of high school were in the past. No more selfish dating and "living-for-the-moment" mentalities. The fast, red Acura rarely broke the speed limit, and I began to love Rebecca's love for the Lord. I also started reading my Bible in the mornings and digging through those Old Testament books that nobody preaches on anymore, like Nahum and Obadiah. During church, Rebecca and I wrote notes to each other. Her questions about God enthused me to know more, read more, and learn more, and though I didn't always have the right answer, our quest for spiritual enlightenment brought us together.

I told her about my adventures and pilgrimages around the world—adventures through Europe, Great Britain, Asia, and Russia. I told her stories about mossy castles and foreign foods. I told her about my cravings for sushi and my passion for writing. We shared deep secrets—secrets that I had never told anyone before. But there was one secret I kept to myself. It was a secret too sacred to say, even to Rebecca, my best friend. At night, I took my secret from its case and

admired its sparkly edges. They say “secrets” like these last forever, and I had emptied my savings account to afford it.

In many ways, falling in love with Christ was like falling in love with Rebecca. The more time I spent with God, the more I loved Him.

God gives us the  
desire for intimacy  
so He can satisfy it.

God gives us the desire for intimacy so He can satisfy it. We often sing the words, “Come, Thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace,”<sup>2</sup> but so

often our hearts are tuned to every frequency but the Father’s. We listen to secularism but avoid the God who calls us to be pilgrims in this land. We listen to materialism but ignore the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Only when we tune to God by prayer, worship, and intimate studying of the Scripture can we finish the hymn, “Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is the greatest love story ever told—a divine valentine licked, sealed, and stamped by the power of the Holy Spirit, and it speaks with great clarity to us today. “‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD” (Malachi 1:2 NIV). What kind of love is this? It is a former love, a past-tense love, a love that saw every sin, every lie. A love that Teresa of Ávila understood when she wrote that God’s love for us is like two wax candles joining “to such an extent that the flame coming from them is one.”<sup>4</sup> The love of God is a former love, melting us to Him—but it is also a frequent and a future love, continually disciplining and washing us in the light of His glory.



I became a man at a Barnes & Noble at 9:45 p.m. Up until that day, life was a playground, and I was at recess. But as I looked Rebecca’s father in the eye to ask him for his daughter’s hand in marriage, I dis-

covered a new definition of manhood. “I love your daughter more than anything in the world,” I told him. “And I want to spend the rest of my life making her happy.”

What an odd tradition—a strange boy asking a father for the life of his little girl. How counterintuitive it must have been for him to say, “Welcome to the family.” He raised her, loved her, disciplined her, and prayed for her. He was there when she learned how to walk and talk, when she learned to ride a bicycle and drive a car. When she was happy, he laughed with her. When she was sad, he cried with her. Such was the relationship between this father and his daughter, and there I was, a semi-polished stranger, asking him if I could take her away. Had it been me, on the other side of the table, I would have said no. I would have said, “Hey kid, crawl back into the hole where you came from, and while you’re there get a haircut.” But he gave me his blessing, he gave me a hug, and then he gave me his precious little girl.

I asked Rebecca to marry me on a Friday. The lights were low and the breeze was cool. I took her to a fountain where we had both thrown pennies into the water, wishing that one day we would be married. My hands were shaking and my knees were knocking as I looked her in the eyes, but the timing had never been better. Romance was in the air, and I dropped to my knee and asked her to be my wife.

We may never fully know why God bends down from heaven to engage our hearts. It’s not because He needed us. Before we were screaming in our cribs, God was complete in Himself. Saint Augustine said that God was satisfied in Himself because of the love each member of the Trinity shared for the other, but we praise Him for being vulnerable with us and saving us from our sins.

Christians are  
God’s boomerangs. . . .  
He bends us  
back to Himself.

It is a mystery—the synergism of salvation. Jesus once said, “The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me—that’s the only way you’ll ever come” (John 6:44). Yet, He also said, “By believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life” (John 3:16). We will never perfectly connect these two truths, but we must believe that they work together. We will never know where our swimming starts and God’s reeling ends, but we do know one thing: When divinity desires humanity, a beautiful chemistry follows.

Christians are God’s boomerangs. He formed us in the womb, throws us in the world, and bends us back to Himself. Since our pilgrimages start and end with God, He becomes the apple of our eyes. He is the center of our thoughts, deeds, music, and worship. When we fall in love with God, sin no longer satisfies us. Our fleshly passions are exchanged for a new temptation, a fresh temptation, a temptation for holiness. We are given taste buds for a different kind of food—a heavenly kind. And we are no longer satisfied with kissing our Creator with the veil between our mouths.



The wedding cake sat alone on the reception table. The halls were hollow and the pews were empty. Soon, nearly four hundred people would show up for the ceremony. Pictures would be taken and hands would be shaken, but for the moment I was in the dressing room looking in the mirror. John spoke of the church as being the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7), and I couldn’t wait to see my very own. My best man, David Riker, offered some well-intentioned sex tips as the pastor walked into the room. But all the awkwardness was forgotten when beauty took the form of a bride and walked down the aisle.

I stood at the front of the sanctuary and watched her. Shakespeare would have been speechless. Her beauty was breathtaking and stun-

ning. As Rebecca's eyes met mine, I knew I was looking in the mirror; she was my other half and man, did I want to be whole! For the first time in my life I was ready to say 'yes.' Yes to happiness. Yes to hardships. Yes to smiles and yes to trials. Yes to sex, marriage, and intimacy. And the kiss, well . . . let's just say it was a long time coming.