



The Perfect Fit

Piecing together true love...

Julie Ferwerda



Crazy Moose
Publishers

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	3
Step 1: Starting on the Table of Truth	
Chapter 1: Swing the Stick (Aim for God’s Promises).....	4
Chapter 2: Unleash Your Obedience (Start Obeying God)	9
Chapter 3: Don’t Settle for a Skunk (Don’t Compromise).....	15
Chapter 4: Recharge the Road Runner (Put and End to Your Flesh	
Step 2: Assembling the Border	
Chapter 5: From Here to Timbuktu (God’s Best Will Find You)	
Chapter 6: Learn How to Tell Time (The Right Thing is the Right Time)	
Step 3: Filling in the Middle	
Chapter 7: Don’t Cross the Line (Stay Friends for Now)	
Chapter 8: Scatter Your Skeletons (Reclaim Forgiveness)	
Chapter 9: Don’t Be Late for Your Own Funeral (Keep Your Security in Jesus)	
Chapter 10: Eat Your Veggies (Go for Nutritional Value, Not Taste)	
Chapter 11: Stand on the Sidelines (Don’t Take Control)	
Chapter 12: Red Light—Green Light (Pat Attention to Signs)	
Chapter 13: Reach for the Apple (Keep it Pure)	
Chapter 14: Huff, Puff, and Blow the House Down (Watch the Enemy’s Plans Collapse)	
Chapter 15: Dive in the Deep (Don’t Fear the Unknown)	
Step 4: Placing the Last Piece	
Chapter 16: Lemons Before Lemonade (Contrasts are Sweeter)	
Chapter 17: The Jigsaw Jig (The Proposal)	
Step 5: Applying the Glue	
Chapter 18: Dream About the Day (July 23, 1999)	
Chapter 19: Behold Your Knight (The True Romance)	
Epilogue: Restored Dreams	

Foreword

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. Isaiah 64:4-5

Do you wonder if there are second chances after divorce or broken relationships? Does pure, lasting romance really exist? Do you want to believe God can fix any mess you have made and bring a fulfilling, purposeful plan into your life in spite of your mistakes? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, then this book is for you.

No matter what mistakes have been made in the past, singles coming out of divorce or failed relationships can have hope of a second chance for romance God's way. This book uses a step-by-step jigsaw puzzle analogy to show how God can take the broken and jumbled pieces of your life, and turn them into a beautiful picture when you wait for His Sovereign leading. How do I know?

He did it for me, and He can do the same for you. In the following pages, you'll find out how an inspiring, many-pieced jigsaw puzzle came together, giving me an inspiring second chance at godly romance. My story, woven throughout the pages of this book, demonstrates God's goodness and sovereignty, and brings assurance through personal example that our lives are not left to chance.

As my picture is put together piece by piece, hopefully you'll experience newfound hope in God's personal attention to the details of your life in a deeply moving and intimate way. I pray that my story will give you the patience to believe He can and will prepare an exciting romance adventure for anyone who is willing to trust and obey Him, regardless of whether it involves a relationship or not. Obedience is a powerful tool in the hands of a loving God!

It is my greatest desire that you are ready and willing to discover the wonderful adventure God has planned just for you.

Chapter 1: Swing the Stick (Aim for God's Promises)

"Will you be traveling first class or economy class?" the agent asked me over the phone, trying to help me book my airline ticket.

I knew what I wished the answer could be. I mean, who wouldn't want to travel first class? I'd been traveling economy all my life—crowded seats, cranky flight attendants, not enough pillows. And these days, add extra for luggage fees and a little baggy of pretzels.

On my occasional glance beyond the holy veil into first class section, however, I've noticed something quite different—something I could only dream of on my limited resources. People—happy, contented people—reclining back as far as they wished, a TV in front of them, cozy slippers on their feet, a steak dinner on the way, and cheerful flight attendants doting over their every need.

"How much is the difference?" I daydreamed about the possibilities.

When the agent quoted the price I gasped. I didn't have those kinds of resources! No wonder I flew economy—at least I could afford to buy my ticket on the spot. If I opted for first class, I'd have to plan and save up well in advance.

When it came to the friendly skies, I'd spent my life opting for the quicker, cheaper alternative, flying economy class. Unfortunately, the same was true in relationships...only with more regrets. Now I wished for something better. After a failed marriage of thirteen years and a myriad of dating relationships gone bad (before and after the marriage), I wondered if it was too late for me to upgrade the next time. Was my romantic life beyond repair? Should I settle for the first tolerable guy that would have me? Had my only chance for a first class romance (God's best) made a takeoff without me? With my limited resources, the prospects didn't look good.

The Problem: Doubt & Disbelief

Before we jump into my story, I need to share some important foundational problems in my thinking at this time—problems that led to my inability to upgrade.

The limited resources keeping me out of something better were certain lies I believed, causing me to doubt and distrust God:

My dating life is insignificant to God.

My future is left to chance.

God isn't big enough to solve my problems.

These kinds of lies left me insecure and fearful about turning over the ticketing controls to the One who said He could secure a seat for me up in front. I also believed lies that left me hopeless:

I've been so bad that God won't bless me.

It's too late for me.

I'm ruined.

Where did these lies come from? The apostle John tells us, “[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). I didn’t exactly understand then that it’s Satan’s day job (with a lot of self-paid overtime) to keep me from experiencing a Loving Father’s best, by fueling me up with as many lies as possible. Hey, as long as they keep working, why not? Why not continue to “steal, kill, and destroy” the awesome, abundant plans God intends for His children as long they keep allowing it (John 10:10)?

Since the days of old, Satan began murdering our perception of God’s character and His plans of good for us. Eve could certainly attest to this! In Genesis 3:4 a certain charming cobra suggested to her that God gave her *everything but that one “better” thing*. God supposedly held out on her! So you see, through lies, Satan murdered Eve’s innocent trust in the true character of her God.

Just like Eve, I’d “bitten into” the same lies. To aid his methodical character assassination against God, Satan pointed to certain circumstances and events from my past to persuade me that God didn’t “come through” for me either, and that it was up to me singlehandedly to solve my own problems. Like the repeated physical and emotional abuse I endured as a child at the hand of a close family member. Consistent rejection from prominent men throughout my life. Attempted sexual abuse from a longtime, trusted spiritual mentor in 8th grade. Countless other disappointments and hardships added up over the years, and now this—a shattered heart and marriage. All I had worked for toward my own dreams lay in a heap of ashes, save my two resulting precious daughters.

Using these situations, Satan worked hard to convince me that God either wasn’t paying attention, or He was too busy with more important things. My perception of God’s goodness was being challenged so deeply within me that I couldn’t even find the words to verbalize my doubts and fears.

What next? Was solving my own problems or taking matters into my own hands the answer? Wasn’t that ultimately how I got into this mess in the first place? I certainly hadn’t consulted God with any measure of honest seeking before my first marriage because, as my Mom always liked to point out, I was one of those kids who had to figure things out for herself. I always thought I knew what I needed—what was best for me—and then I went for it.

Planning and pursuing my own way ended up about as successful as a presidential deficit reduction plan. Was there a better way—something untried and true? Was there a way out of dreaded economy class?

The Solution: Truth

Here’s what I’ve learned along the way. *The only power Satan has over the lives of God’s children is the lies he can get them to believe.* That’s it. But until we become aware of them and figure out what to do with them, they most often work.

So how do we overcome the lies? What is going to give us that edge to let go of our doubt and start believing God? Maybe you’re like me and you are good and ready for a new start in your life, but what will pull us through this time when crushing

doubts beckon us to revert to what we've always known—settling for the wrong thing out of fear, impatience, or rebellion? Unless we learn to recognize the lies and replace them with truth, an upgrade to fuzzy slippers and marinated rib eye is not going to happen.

As surely as socks get lost in the washer, God cannot lie; He has no deceit in Him. His Son, Jesus, said thirty times in the Gospel of Matthew alone, “I tell you the truth.” Truth is the only sure power we have over the lies keeping us behind the veil of economy.

God claims His Word and His promises are true, but are these something that can be relied upon to hold us up when we put all our weight on them? That is what we are going to explore together in my story. Sure, others have tested God's promises, but remember what my Mom said! The experiences of others are never good enough for me—I've got to figure it out for myself. Little did I know there was a catch 22 involved in my relearning the character of God. It all started with that one little practice that's easy to pronounce, but difficult to act upon. Without it, there can be no intimate learning of the character of God.

The Vehicle: Faith

Faith is putting belief into action. It's the difference between saying you believe that the rather thin looking ice of spring is strong enough to hold you up, or actually stepping out onto the ice to prove it. By definition, situations requiring faith never look sturdy or safe to the untrained eye.

I've found that God is eagerly waiting to prove Himself to us when we risk belief. God's truth, no matter how thin in appearance, can be relied upon to hold us up when we put *all* our weight on it. But much like a bungy cord is useless around your ankles until you take the plunge, God's truth has no power in your life unless you believe it and try it.

Faith can be developed two ways: either through our own experiential leaps with God, or through studying about the experiences of others. For instance, even though King David had an amazing relationship with God, he also had many difficult things happen to him in his life—many of them beyond his control. If anyone tested out the promises of God, it was David. What did he discover and believe about God's character? In Psalm 34:8, 10 David gives the report: “Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who trust in Him! Those who trust in the Lord will *never lack any good thing*.” David is a man who knew! He was the teacher's pet. He had tried and tested God's promises over and over.

Still, I had the usual doubts. I did want peace and a hopeful future, but I didn't want boredom. Would the will of God (marriage or not) be too placid and uneventful for me? Sometimes I envisioned his call upon my life as rounding up used tea bags for the missionaries in Africa, or maybe opening a daycare. I feared God would require the very thing that would leave me the least fulfilled or happy in light of my personality and desires. I sincerely hoped that God's way would truly be better than anything I could do for myself—a real adventure as enchanting as David's life. Delving into Samuel and Kings, I saw how David's desire for and obedience to God's will brought about such an exciting life full of surprises. Even when it didn't look to David like

anything significant was happening on the surface, a grand, unfolding plan was in the works.

We are so fortunate to get the historical overview because we get to see both David's part and God's part—the part that David couldn't see. God shaped events by placing people and circumstances in the right places at the right time to fulfill His promises to David and to work out a plan for good in his life. Although it took David many years to see conflict resolution and fulfillment of promises, we have the benefit of seeing all those years being compressed down into a few hours of reading.

God doesn't play favorites, so I figured if God orchestrated such an adventure for David; He would do it for anyone who had a passionate and obedient heart for Him. When David trusted God and didn't lose heart, even after years of waiting, God fulfilled all His good plans for David. I wanted that special adventure and romance with God in my life, even if it took years. For once, I wanted to see things turn out God's way—in God-sized, breath-taking, unfolding of events, not the simple, average, problematic, dead-end things I could do (and had done so far) for myself.

If David had so many difficult things happen during his lifetime that were out of his control, and he could still say he didn't lack any good thing, perhaps what I lacked was a right perspective about my circumstances. Those who wronged me were not a reflection on God's character, but upon man character, still within the sovereign power of God's ultimate plan of good (Gen. 50:20). I was also willing to admit that many of my problems—including the consequences from my marriage and divorce—were the result of many of my own choices.

So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

So what was my decision going to be? I stood with great uncertainty on the bridge, bungee cord around my ankles, teetering on the brink of trust. Was I going to keep trying my own devices and solutions that had only brought me pain and emptiness, or was I going to take a risk and trust God with my future? I wanted to see God's promises fulfilled in my life—promises like “a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:3).” I understood those promises didn't necessarily mean I would ever remarry. But I needed assurance of a hope and a future, that once I turned over my life to His care, His will for my life would be as good as He promised.

Making a Connection

Have you ever seen or been one of those blindfolded kids at a birthday party, trying to hit a piñata with a skinny stick? While the poor kid can't see a thing, someone spins him around into dizzy oblivion, and then they tell him to go for it. It is so frustrating watching him swing that stick around, usually not even in the direction of his target. But don't get between a kid and his candy. He's so intent on making contact; people have to run for their lives just to stay out of his way.

I felt like that kid—dizzy from lies, unable to see a thing that God was doing around me. But then I swung the stick around frantically in the dark, trying to land

on God's promises. I knew I had to keep going no matter how much I missed, because at some point I would make a connection—if I didn't give up. And then, when I least expected it, I finally made a hit—I found the assurance that I would be rewarded for my faith.

I can just imagine God watching us, rooting us on the whole time, thrilled when our stick finally hits the target. Secretly, I know that He nudged my stick in the right direction; it's no less than I would have done for my own kids. Of course I wasn't expecting a hit at someone else's wedding, of all places! God loves to be unpredictable and surprising at times. Anyhow, I think I hear music. We can't be late for this wedding. Something amazing is about to happen.

Chapter 2: Unleash Your Obedience (Start Obeying God)

Before arriving at the wedding, we have to make an unusual detour—through a graveyard. This particular graveyard is located in the book of Ezekiel. EZ's book is a little like reading on an acid trip. But in his defense, he's just writing down what he sees. In chapter 37, God took Ezekiel down to a valley of old, dried up bones. The bones were apparently human bones, left over from one of many battles. Ezekiel stood there looking around, wondering why God brought him to such a place, consumed by death and defeat.

Suddenly a voice from this graveyard proclaimed, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone" (verse 11). Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones to come back to life. As EZ obeyed, calling the bones together, they made an unforgettable clattering and rattling, rising up to attach in all the right places. They became flesh right in front of his eyes! Then God breathed His living breath into them so that they were restored to life.

At least one of the intended points of this passage is that the hopes and dreams of the people Israel were a heap of bones in the graveyard, just like mine and maybe, just like yours. God restored new life and breath to those dreams for Israel, just as He wants to do for you and me. My dreams were "dry as bones," yet God looked at the pieces lying around in a valley of death, visualizing a new picture, a new dream full of hope and life. Even though I couldn't see what He could, since I was still down in the valley, I could begin to feel the comforting breeze of His very breath stirring a new dream for me.

The Sign

The setting was a beautiful candlelight wedding of one of my co-workers on a festive December evening in 1997. Around that time I'd been praying fervently that God would send me a sign of hope about my future. I deeply desired another chance for a godly marriage and a healthy father figure for my young girls. All my life I had dreamed of this kind of family. After all, wasn't it God who said, "It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18)? Especially as a mother, I didn't feel the particular call of singleness on my life. The hope for a godly mate seemed like a reasonable request.

After the wedding ceremony, the time came for that traditional [ridiculous?], superstitious practice where the bride throws her bouquet to the throngs of pining, desperate gals, promising the one who catches it to be the next bride. I may have been desperate, but I'm certainly not superstitious. Although my friends were trying to push me toward the expectant group of women, I purposely stepped back at least fifteen feet from the group, blending back into the crowd of onlookers.

Looking around the room at the lavish Christmas decorations, trying to appear disinterested, I nearly missed my own commotion. As the bride threw the bouquet, I caught the bizarre unfolding of events out of the corner of my eye. Several girls jumped

up to catch the bouquet at the same time, much like a jump ball at center court in a basketball game—and about as graceful, too! As they did, the bouquet was jolted back up into the air a second time. A single white rose tore away from the rest of the flowers, flew in a high arc away from the crowd, and landed perfectly right side up into my clasped hands. The crowd let out a few gasps of surprise about the amazing chain of events, and a few even asked me, over chuckles, how it happened.

Was it chance? Was it a strange coincidence? I didn't think so. It seemed too precise and too intentional to be an accident. Because of the context of the bridal bouquet and wedding, I highly suspected it was God's (non-superstitious) zany antic of reassurance that He would bring someone into my life again one day. But I had to be careful not to be too presumptuous. His plans are never defined or constructed by my own ideals or hopes. I would just have to wait on God for whatever would materialize in His way and His time, but it was sure to be special!

With this new clue about my future promise, I could hardly stand the suspense. How could God possibly expect someone like me—someone with the patience of a New York City taxi driver—not to take matters into my own hands? I had the clear feeling that if I weren't careful, I would miss out on something extraordinary.

I sincerely asked God that day to help me not miss His divine leading with ignorance or impatience. If the white rose did mean that He was going to bless me with a certain husband of His choice, I wanted clear road signs—even if He had to paste them to my eyelids!

Lord, I believe You are telling me You have a special man picked out for my future. I am seriously going to need Your help to be patient! When the time comes and You bring him into my life, please, give me a sign by having him present me with a white rose, so I will know it's Your leading.

I had heard of similar requests answered for others, so it didn't seem unreasonable. After all, I was asking Him for help and direction for my future. What Loving Father wouldn't grant such a simple plea for help? What Fair Judge wouldn't grant such a favorable ruling? In my best attorney impersonation, I approached the bench.

[Clears throat] *Lord, didn't You say yourself, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5)? Didn't You also say in Proverbs 3:6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths" (NKJV)?*

Believing God would answer my request, I took an oath of silence never to tell anyone about the white rose request until after the man of the future asked me to be his wife. It was a little secret between God and me, and I could only imagine that it was going to be both exciting and difficult to keep.

The Instruction

As much as the Israelites are criticized for their fickle nature, constant doubt, ridiculous impatience, and blatant disobedience when they left Egypt, they looked like devoted and unwavering followers compared to me. Not long after the rose incident, the hope and excitement wearing off, I began struggling to trust God again.

So God, when You say this thing about “a thousand years is like a day...” that kind of gets me all worked up. I’ve only got a few years to work with here. What good will it do if I’m using social security and Depends® before You make good on Your promise?

Patience and obedience seemed like unreachable goals for someone like me. Still, I saved the rose in a visible place in my kitchen to remind me often of God’s mystery promise to me. Who knew—perhaps a visible reminder would help me wait patiently and obediently, much like the daily manna and quail helped the Israelites do the same [read: sarcasm].

Have you ever tried to pretend that you can’t (or didn’t) hear God? This usually happens to me when I want to do my own thing or to get away with something I’ve been told not to do. Well, not long after I prayed to God for direction, He answered. He started by giving directions tailored to my individual set of circumstances. His directions couldn’t have been more obvious than a road map with only one highway. Coming to me at least four different times through different vehicles was this directive: *“Stay out of relationships until your ex-husband either remarries or comes back for reconciliation.”* This was one of those times when I knew that if I chose to do my own thing, I couldn’t blame Him later when things got really messy.

It’s important for you to know that I believe God works differently with different situations and people. This was the direction He gave me at the time because of many extenuating circumstances—I wasn’t enduring physical abuse, both my husband and I had been unfaithful toward the end of our marriage and equally bore fault in violating our marriage vows, and most important was that our children did not deserve the loss of their sufficiently functional biological family. They had two relatively loving parents who could provide the stable home environment they needed to thrive. I will make it clear that I believe in most cases, divorce is not the answer, especially when kids are involved. Instead of divorce becoming the answer to desperate situations, I favor separation with intent to reconcile, unless absolutely directed by God to do otherwise.

In my case God showed me that, even though my husband had divorced me, He wanted me to demonstrate an attitude of reconciliation with single-heartedness until that door was firmly shut.

How did I hear God’s direction on the matter? The first came as a recognized conviction of the Spirit—quiet as a summer breeze but impactful as a locomotive. Through my prayers, God impressed heavily upon me to stay single in heart and action until further notice. The second came through counseling with my pastor (who was aware of the whole situation). He urged me that I had a responsibility before God to honor my marriage vows “till death do us part.” He helped me to understand that if my ex-husband married someone else, our vows would be put to death, and then I would be free to remarry. The third came through my sister and her husband, who confirmed through their own convictions and love for me that I should not seek out other relationships until there was no hope for reviving my marriage.

God has rarely, if ever, affirmed something four times. But one Sunday I visited a church that I had never attended before. At the end of the service, the pastor invited anyone needing prayer to come forward. I was having one of my dark days and was desperate for prayer support, so I went forward. I don’t even recall being able to ask for prayer because I was crying so hard when I went forward that I couldn’t speak.

This pastor, who didn't know anything about me, spoke several affirmations to me that exactly paralleled the things God had spoken to me privately.

"God has collected all your tears. He will give you great joy in proportion to your former sorrow. He has a wonderful plan for your life, but right now He wants your *undivided heart*. He wants you to focus completely upon Him with patience and obedience. Wait for Him. He will prepare you and restore to you all the years that the locusts have eaten. He will use your life to minister peace and hope to others who are hurting..."

Moments like that are what you call spiritual CPR. They're like that great first gasp of air when you break the surface of the water after holding your breath as long as possible. But along with the comforting affirmation often comes sobering responsibility.

In the midst of the message, God gently admonished me to drop my fears of being alone and not to look for the attention or approval of any man—one of my deeply rooted habit sins originating in my youth. *He* wanted to be the First Love of my life, and He assured me that He would be everything I needed. "*For it was I, the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it with good things...put your trust in Me and you will never be disappointed.*" (Ps. 81:10, 22:5).

He wanted the chance to heal my broken heart by filling me up with His unfailing love and incredible healing touch, something that could only take place if I focused on Him completely. This would surely not happen if I poured out emotional energy—energy I didn't have—on men and relationships.

The Compromise

I wish I could say that after all the assurances—the white rose, the pastor, and the others—that I perfectly trusted and obeyed God, waiting with the patience of a saint. But as I said, patience isn't one of my strong points. Although I did verbalize a commitment to my ex-husband that I wouldn't consider remarriage unless he remarried first, to allow for possible reconciliation, the verbal commitment was only partial obedience to God's directive. My impending choices would prove my full obedience—or not.

Living each day was the hard part. I had too much time on my hands to think about how long it was taking and how things would move along more quickly if I helped them along. I started rationalizing that since my ex-husband was in a relationship, why couldn't I be in one, too? Then self-pity chimed in his two cents, "Poor you. Everyone else is out having fun and getting what they want while you're here all by yourself. That's so not fair!"

More rationalizations headed in while the door was open. *Just because I might get into a relationship, doesn't mean it would have to be serious or lead to anything long-term. If I were to, say, find a man who would just be a good friend, it would solve my immediate loneliness problem. It would be fun. Besides, it works in the movies!*

My great rationalizing abilities rivaled that of a modern day presidential cabinet. They quite possibly started years earlier on the way to the cookie jar. I have a great fondness for cookies and I will sneak them at any opportunity. If I even start thinking

about the cookie jar, I'm already doomed. In the same way, the choice to be disobedient often starts as soon as we begin entertaining temptation.

Not more than three months after the powerful assurances and direction by God for me to be single-hearted for Him, a tick came out of hiding, looking for a dog. I didn't feel complete without the presence and assurance of a man in my life. Sure, I had improved somewhat since the days of moral failure and seeing where this unhealthy need for attention led, but I still couldn't connect my heart with the notion that God alone was enough.

The Internet seemed like a rather harmless alternative to dating. It was more or less like making new friends—not dating, for Pete's sake! And the men I met online were Christian men, no less. Not unlike eating a dozen fat-free chocolate chip cookies on a diet. It couldn't hurt to make "friends" via the Internet for later, since the only eligible males I had met so far in the sparsely populated state of Wyoming were sheep. That means any men I met were all going to be long distance anyhow—what harm could befall?

It wasn't too difficult to find another needy soul—another tick looking for a dog. "Matt" and I met on a Christian singles site. It's interesting how the mind and will make alliances to trick one into disobedience. Soon enough, I'd made my way close enough to the cookie jar until I believed it was okay to get into a relationship with a "Christian man." *There's no harm done as long as he's a believer...maybe there's a man on here that God wants me to be with down the road and I'll miss out on meeting him if I don't try now...God isn't hung up on a little timing problem. Quit being such a martyr.*

To reinforce my own lies, Satan was right there, making all sorts of coincidences look like spiritual confirmations so I would think I was on the right path. I've fallen for it and I've seen countless others fall for it. But deep down, I knew the lie. I knew I had specific instructions and wasn't following them completely, no matter how right things appeared for the moment—no matter how many coincidences added up to look like "signs." Overshadowing it all, there was no peace.

I constantly felt guilty pursuing this relationship. Whatever emotional energy I had going into it was dried up like the soil in August. The truth is that God's hand was heavy upon me, not to *keep me from* something, but to *save me for something much better*. God was practically saying, *"Hey bozo, I already told you I have something wonderful for you, and this isn't it! You've gotten way ahead of me again."*

The Conviction

How does God continue to have patience with a dense, impatient, and rebellious human like me? The Maker of all, the Omnipotent God of the Universe who formed every cell of my body and knows exactly how many hairs I have on my head at any given moment, has to be incredibly insulted when I look to anything but Him to fill up my emotional empty places or to satisfy my longings. Ironically, anything I have ever tried to fill up those longings with aside from God has never been satisfying in the least anyhow. It only leads to greater emptiness, disobedience, and rebellion.

I have heard it said that, "delayed obedience is disobedience." When God tells us to do something, unless we are prepared to deal with the consequences of disobedience, we better do it *now*. I can't remember the last time I asked one of my

kids to clean their room and I meant next week. When I tell my kids to do something, I expect it done right away! And if for some reason they are unwilling to comply, I'm pretty good at applying a little motivational pressure to help them obey.

That is exactly how things work with God. He won't usually make us obey, but He will certainly apply pressure where necessary to promote obedience. And He may enforce some pretty heavy consequences for not obeying Him right away. Most importantly, He wants us to obey because we *want* to obey. He wants our motive to be love fueled by gratitude for all of the kindness and mercy that He showed us first. "We love Him because He first loved us" (I John 4:19 NKJV). God knows that in the long run, love is much more motivating than fear, guilt, or coercion.

Many times God has to "let out the leash" and give us over to our independent, stubborn inclinations so we can learn the hard way how much better it is to obey. Leashes are normally for dogs. That's because by nature, most dogs are willful, much like humans. The Bible says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). Since the dawn of mankind, stubborn humans keep going back to repulsive, destructive sins and habits that are about as attractive as vomit. Just as a dog must not realize how repulsive his behavior is, we often don't stop to realize how unbecoming our sins are either.

God had to give a little yank on my leash when I started to get a little too far out into old, dangerous territory. I'll never forget the day I was on my way to see Matt for a visit. There I was, sitting in an airport, trying to kill some time with one of my favorite books, a brilliant allegory by Hannah Hurnard, *Hinds Feet on High Places*. As I began reading, God began speaking to me through the book so directly and so loudly, it was as if I was being paged over the airport intercom system.

"Julie...this is God speaking. There's no need to pick up a yellow paging telephone. I can talk to you right where you are sitting..."

Chapter 3: Don't Settle for a Skunk (Don't Compromise)

Feeling rather exposed, I looked around to see if anyone else noticed anything out of the usual. Well, at least no one was staring at me. As my eyes fell back onto the page, I got that familiar feeling closing around my neck, "YANK!" The leash pulled tight as I read these words:

"I think," said the Shepherd (Jesus) gently, "that lately the way seemed a little easier and the sun shone, and you came to a place where you could rest. You forgot for a while that you were my little handmaiden, 'Acceptance-with-Joy,' and were beginning to tell yourself it really was time that I led you back to the mountains (the promised destination) and up to the High Places. When you wear the weed of impatience in your heart instead of the flower Acceptance-with-Joy, you will always find your enemies get an advantage over you."

Much Afraid blushed. She knew how right he was in his diagnosis. It had been easier to accept the hard path and to be patient when the sea was gray and dull than now when the sun shone and everything else around looked bright and happy and satisfied. She put her hand in the Shepherd's and said sorrowfully, "You are quite right. I have been thinking that you are allowing me to follow this path too long and that you were forgetting your promise." Then she added, looking steadfastly into his face, "But I do tell you now with all my heart that you are my Shepherd whose voice I love to hear and obey, and that it is my joy to follow you. You choose, my Lord, and I will obey."

The Shepherd stooped down and picked up a stone, which was lying beside her feet and said smilingly, "Put this in your bag with the other stones as a memorial of this day...of your promise that you will wait patiently until I give you your heart's desire."ⁱ

Feeling a sudden sense of dread wash over me, accompanied by the sensation of lead weights attached to every limb, I slammed the book shut. Busted! I was not ready to echo Much Afraid's words of obedience, but conscience-stricken just the same. I knew without a doubt that God was speaking to me through that passage, exposing my disobedience and impatience.

This is a sure way to put a damper on my trip before it starts, and it's the last time I open THAT book while I'm exploring the boundaries of my leash, I thought with disgust. Unfortunately, trying to arrange my own future was about to make my life much more complicated. Worst of all, I completely disregarded how much my sin hurt God.

The Sin

Contrary to Satan's claims, we are not happier when we run our own lives. When we give our lives over to God's control, He's not a rigid taskmaster making our lives into miserable slavery, as Satan would have us believe. The exact opposite is

true! The more we submit to God, the more freedom and peace we experience. In John 8:34-36, “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’”

We are all slaves to something. If you and I are not slaves for Christ, we are slaves to sin. The more we try to run our own lives, the more enslaved to Satan’s lies and sin we become. The more we consciously enslave ourselves to the will of Christ, the more He sets us free. What an exciting paradox.

Barging down my familiar path as a slave to sin, God still continued pointing my way to freedom—even to the point of trying to reach me boldly while I was enroute to disobedience.

It’s no surprise that, since I had rationalized everything about this relationship from the beginning, I was about to be greatly disillusioned. On this trip to see Matt, it became glaringly apparent that his faith was all talk and no action. In the short time we were together, I got sucked in to his compromising arguments.

“We have both been married already. It won’t hurt if we sleep together. Besides, God doesn’t expect us to be perfect.”

“I believe that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, but He still has standards for obedience. If we love Him, we will try to obey Him. It’s not right for us to have a sexual relationship outside of marriage.”

“So then let’s get married!”

“Are you kidding? We’ve only known each other for a couple months!”

“Look,” he said, his tone changing to condescendingly sweet. “You are way too legalistic. You make a mistake and beat yourself up about it. Yes, we try not to sin, but God doesn’t get all bent out of shape if we mess up. He knows we can’t be perfect. *He doesn’t even expect it!* Don’t you think He understands that we have certain needs? I don’t think He’s watching our every move waiting to punish us over every little mistake like you seem to think. My God offers more grace than that. You’re way too guilt-ridden.”

Matt’s standards made me angry, but also planted some seeds of doubt. Could I really be that legalistic? Didn’t God still want us to follow the rules and try to keep a pure heart even though we’d both been married before? God seemed pretty black and white about this kind of behavior, but at the same time, Matt did seem to want to live for God in many ways. Was I too idealistic at my age in hoping to find a man who strove for purity? Now that I thought about it, I hadn’t met very many Christian men in my lifetime that lived any different than the world’s standards when it came to purity. Maybe I expected too much.

Listening to his arguments, I allowed Matt (and Satan) to sway my thinking. Confusing thoughts made my convictions fuzzy, and I compromised my desires and goals to wait until marriage for sexual intimacy. I was temporarily convinced that the guy who waits until he’s married to have sex doesn’t exist in this day and age. Afterward, I felt like a hot air balloon that had just been deflated. Where a short time before I’d been floating peacefully on the heights of obedience with God, soon after I was plunged into a deep valley of sin and gloom.

The Counterfeit

Until the point where I actually fell into sin, I waffled about my relationship with Matt. Yes, deep down I had those moments when I felt convicted, or when I lacked peace. But because of my inexperience with Satan's tricks in this capacity, I had several unexplained coincidences that made it seem as if God might actually be leading me into a relationship with Matt. My straying off the path was much more identifiable in hindsight than it was in the moment because I was impatient, confused, and vulnerable. Satan took advantage of the situation by sending the most confusing situations possible; He used a counterfeit to sidetrack me from God's plan.

Counterfeits are Satan's way to deceive us into accepting something that looks like the real thing, but isn't. This sobering and frightening realization left me wondering how I could possibly be smart enough to figure out when it was the real thing. I mean, he successfully tricked Eve and she had every reason not to be misled. How was I, someone well versed in being duped by Satan, going to have the discernment or confidence to recognize the real thing?

My question led me to consider the most well known venue for counterfeit identification procedures. Do you know how a currency counterfeit specialist identifies counterfeit money? He learns to identify phony currency by studying—very, very carefully—*authentic* currency. He has to have a standard, something true and right to compare to, so that's why he only studies the real thing. Then, when a counterfeit dollar passes in front of him, it just doesn't look or feel right. There is something about the texture, the color, and the overall appearance of it that isn't right, because he is accustomed to the feel of what is authentic moving across his fingers and gaze.

Our lives have to follow this example if we are ever going to recognize the truth and not be swayed and confused by every seemingly good thing that comes along, especially when it comes to relationships. If you want to know what an authentic godly relationship looks like, you have to study authentic godly relationships, which is what you are doing right now by reading this book.

Of course, the Bible is the best place to start for authenticity, because it's teeming with principles that apply to character and relationships—ones that are genuinely obedient and passionate about God. There are other inspiring books and testimonies of believers who elaborate about what God's best looked like in their lives as well. Even though the events of their stories will all be different, the foundational elements and principles will all be the same, because truth doesn't change. Only how it is applied will contain variety and unique stories.

Because Satan is a master at trickery, we need to read and study all the truth we can so that he can't fool us with confusing counterfeits. The Bible says, "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (II Corinthians 11:14). That means he doesn't necessarily show claws and fangs. On the contrary, his plans look enticing. He wants to trick us into falling for something that appears to be the real thing, but is only a fraudulent imitation.

The imitation left me emptier than before, and it wasn't long before my restlessness and lack of peace drove me back to repentance. I missed God's presence in my life. I agonized over the broken fellowship that had been so sweet in my life before. I needed God's approval back at any cost. I was beginning to realize that the

price of not trusting God and not waiting for His promises weren't worth any short-lived pleasures—and surely not this miserable relationship of my own doing.

Finally, that very weekend, I got the courage to end the relationship—a decision that was really hurtful to Matt. I felt guilty for causing him unnecessary pain since I had disobediently entered into the relationship to begin with. That is another consequence of taking matters into our own hands—not only do we hurt ourselves, we also hurt others in the process. Thankfully, when I went back to God with a repentant heart, I was strengthened and encouraged, filled with that mysterious and permeating peace through my restored relationship with Him.

Let's Make Another Deal

I'd like to say that from this point forward, I perfectly obeyed and trusted God, waiting on Him with more deeply resolved patience. I had absolutely no excuse not to trust God after all He had done to give me assurance, forgiveness, and second chances. I had seen once again the fallout that came into my life as a result of not trusting Him. Oh, how I wish this part of my story didn't have to be so repetitious, but the Bible does say the dog returns to vomit. It's hard recognizing Satan's lies for what they are—he *always promises much more than he delivers*. But you would think I would be smarter than a dog by now.

There's a saying that "old habits die hard," but many old habits are really just old lies that Satan keeps recycling as long as they keep working. The sin that he entices us into looks really good and satisfying before we carry it through, but afterward it leaves us emptier than before. He doesn't tell us up front that there will be consequences like guilt, shame, emptiness, grief, fear, (possibly diseases), and even more problems than before.

So, once again, about three months later, unwilling to be patient and accept being alone, I began searching for more vomit to feast on. I started a relationship with "Tom"—another poor, unsuspecting victim. Somehow I believed this time it would be different, and that we would (could) "just be friends." Besides, I did more to check out the spiritual maturity of this Internet acquaintance. I called his pastor for an extensive interview, even before we met. I covered all the bases. God could just sit back and rest easy since I'd done my homework. He wouldn't even have to be bothered this time—I had everything under control!

From a worldly standpoint, Tom was a great catch! He was boo-koo loaded (a.k.a. rich!) and I found myself wondering if money really could buy happiness. Satan loomed on the scene with his latest array of alluring selections, just like Monte Hall on "Let's Make a Deal," offering me all three doors *and* the bag.

"Yes, Julie, all these can be yours just for the asking..."

"DOOR #1: a *huge* lake home in the mountains;

"DOOR #2: a red mustang convertible—I know you've always wanted one; and..."

"DOOR #3: frequent world travel—your favorite pastime. Anything else you want is already in the bag. What's it going to be, Julie?"

Uh...uh...so tempting!

The lifestyle he offered was so mesmerizing, that I actually began hoping Tom would be the one to give me the awaited white rose. I asked God about it, forgetting that I was the one who initiated the relationship, not Him.

Surely this guy with the money and the fabulous lifestyle (oh yeah...he has You, too) will be “the one”, right God? Didn’t you say something about blessing your children?

Tom did send me flowers—sometimes two or three a week. Each time, I received them expectantly, practically dumping the whole bouquet out on the counter, looking over, under and through the flowers for that white rose. There were purple chrysanthemums, pink carnations, white daisies, orange tiger lilies, yellow roses, red roses, pink roses (and one pathetically desperate woman with bits and pieces of flowers strewn all over her kitchen). But no white roses.

Lord, remember, we talked about “white roses.” Did you forget?

It wasn’t long before my house resembled a funeral home and the bi-weekly bouquets started wearing out their welcome. This flower thing wasn’t fitting into my fantasy ideals of the unique moment that I would receive a white rose—you know, the moment like in the movies where I’m standing barefoot in a flowing dress in a field of daisies. A brave warrior rides up on his gallant steed, white rose in hand. Tenderly he reaches down and places the rose in my outstretched hand, and we ride off into the sunset, awaiting our romantic destiny. Oh yes, and music is playing in the background.

I imagined countless ways I might receive a rose—okay, all of them quite a bit more realistic. But each time I wondered how God could possibly pull it off, since He would undoubtedly (and hopefully) do something I couldn’t even imagine. What if I’d already thought of every possible scenario? Judging from the above vain fairytale, I know you are thinking that realistic options were not going to be a problem.

Skunked Again

My ex-husband scheduled his remarriage about five months later, so I figured Tom and I could start out as friends and then maybe reevaluate the possibilities in a few months. As you could probably tell by the floral shop in my home, Tom had other plans. He wasn’t feeling too *friendly*, if you know what I mean.

In practically just minutes, Tom’s feelings for me grew, and GREW. His ultra lovey-dovey behavior left me feeling like the smothered cat in the Pepe Le Pew cartoon. You know, the one where Pepe the skunk is in love, and the object of his greatest affections always looks like she wants to disappear when he’s around, forcing himself on her. There are only three words appropriate for an occasion like this: smothered, cornered, and repulsed. *Yank! Yank!* Oh, yes, and strangled.

The weekend he drove down to visit me at my parent’s home—against my wishes—I was emotionally distraught! My Mom was at her wits’ end. Every time she saw me come into the room after talking to Tom, she handed me another Kleenex for my tear-streaked, blotchy face. I single-handedly emptied every box of Kleenex in the house that weekend.

My Dad, on the other hand, was in love with Tom. They shared a common passion for hunting and fishing, a prerequisite before Dad would allow himself to get attached to any potential son-in-law. They sat around the breakfast table, long after

everyone else had tired of hearing about the latest conquest, discussing every hunting and fishing topic available—from gun cleaning products and the best walleye spots, to proper elk gutting techniques.

“Care for another elk sausage, Julie?” Tom asked with his mouth full as I cleared the dishes.

“No. Thank you.”

Tom was so pushy that, during this weekend together and only a few weeks into the supposed “friendship,” he was already talking marriage with my parents—right in front of me as if I was on board! He started the conversation in the wood paneled living room, sitting forward on his green wing back chair.

“Sam and Molly, I want to let you know what my plans are. I think I would make a great husband for Julie. I certainly have a lot to offer her.” He looked as if he might flex his biceps at any moment to prove it.

“Undoubtedly.” My Dad beamed back his total agreement, thinking of all the future hunting trips together. The daggers I shot at him across the room with my eyes went unnoticed.

“Anyhow, I love Julie. I’m asking your permission to marry her. I will take good care of her and provide well for her.”

He loves me? He doesn’t even know me! It was all I could do not to throw myself off the couch and start a full-blown tantrum.

Dad was all thumbs up. Mom, on the other hand, held true to her sensitive nature when she saw me steaming over on the couch. “Maybe we should take more time to think about this. After all, you have only known each other for a few weeks.”

I wanted to raise my hand and say, “Excuse me, I hate to intrude in this little private conversation, but since this is my future too, could I have a say in this? I am not just another elk waiting to be shot for your trophy room. You don’t win a woman the same way you hunt down an animal. You can’t possibly love me already.”

Instead, unable to speak, I headed into the kitchen for a moment of solitude. Sitting down at the table, I felt so ashamed of myself. Here I was, about to hurt another poor guy who didn’t even know what was going on inside of me because of my disobedience. I was wrong for disobeying God and encouraging Tom’s attention, and now I felt lonelier with Tom than I ever did without him. There was just one thing left to do.

I just wanted peace again.

I just wanted to be alone again.

I just wanted to get rid of the skunk.

I sent Tom down the road in his cute red Mustang convertible—the one thing I did love about him. I felt so relieved and lightened in spirit, even—happy. As the car disappeared from sight however, my Dad cried his eyes out on my shoulder.

Good is Not Best

Either of these two men, Matt or Tom, could have easily fooled me into thinking they were God’s best for me. Both men were professing Christians who claimed they had a committed personal relationship with God. They were each, from all appearances, a good catch—Christian men, involved in church and ministry, nice

looking, athletic, growing somewhat in their knowledge and understanding of God, smart, and successful in business. There was no *good* reason to think they might not be potential life partners. But there was a *God* reason.

Just because a man is a Christian, and by all appearances perfectly suitable husband material, that does not make him God's best for me any more than a Santa suit makes a guy Santa Clause. Satan (and my impatient will) enticed me with things that were by all appearances *good*, to keep me from waiting for *best*—God's best. *If Satan knew he couldn't ruin my life with a bad choice, he was going to do his best to get me to settle for "good enough."* Settling for good enough would mean giving up a once in a lifetime adventure too good for words, but Satan will use any method possible to keep us from experiencing God's best for our lives.

So what does God's best look like? How can we know beyond a doubt that we have found the real thing? Hopefully you have caught a few principles already, but let's keep going on this journey toward authentic, godly love. I think there's a certain Road Runner who can give us some helpful advice.

Notes

Chapter 3

1. Hannah Hurnard, *Hinds Feet on High Places*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975), 104-105.