

Sex
and the Single
Christian
Girl

fighting for purity in a rom-com world

MARIAN JORDAN ELLIS



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*This book is lovingly dedicated
to my husband, Justin.*

I did not know the meaning of the word *cherish*
until I met you. Thank you for cherishing me.

Words fail to express how grateful I am
to have you by my side
and to serve Jesus with you.

With you, I learned to “stand” against the evil one.
I know that God’s best is worth fighting for,
worth praying for, and worth waiting for.

I love you.

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Introduction

a christian girl in a rom-com world

So what is it like to be a Christian woman in a rom-com world? For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term *rom-com*, it is slang for “romantic comedy.” You know, the movies that you go see with girlfriends. The ones guys mockingly call “chick flicks.” It is the genre that establishes which A-list leading man will, no doubt, end up on the cover of *People* magazine as the sexiest man alive. Romantic comedies make you laugh, cry, and run to the mall to buy what the leading lady wore.

A rom-com is that great comedic romp from *girl-likes-guy*, *guy-likes-girl* through *they-almost-don't-make-it-as-a-couple-yet-hilarity-ensues* to *at-the-last-possible-moment-they-finally-end-up-together-as-swelling-music-crescendos!*

At the final scene, we all tear up and glance sideways at each other to make sure we are not the only pathetic sap in the audience. We cast knowing looks to our girlfriends as we leave the theater while chatting and quoting our favorite one-liners. Which we will all memorize, of course!

Romantic comedies are the stuff a girls' night is made of. No boys. No makeup. No problem. All we need are flannel pajamas, a cuddly blanket, our favorite junk food, and anything starring Jennifer Aniston, Katherine Heigl, Kate Hudson, or Emma Stone.

Rom-coms are just what they claim to be: both romantic and funny. Typically, we have a leading lady and a leading man who struggle through hilarious real-life relationship scenarios. This is part of the genius of the genre—we can insert ourselves into their drama.

However, unlike in real life, the man is often sensitive, verbose, and drop-dead gorgeous. He is the guy that has all of the one-liners our heart has yearned to hear from our own leading man. Except this guy does not stink after a workout—sweat simply accentuates his perfect abs. This guy does not forget your birthday or the song that was playing when you first met. This guy loves his dog—but not more than you. And the best thing about the rom-com guy is that he inexplicably has loads of money and a cool place to live without all the hassle of a real job to deal with.

Therefore, Mr. Rom-Com has oodles of time on his hands to bring you coffee, drop by your place of work with flowers, or cook you dinner while blasting his super cool tunes on his iPod. For some reason this guy usually has a penchant for jazz, which I still don't get, but it seems to give him immediate cool status. Oh, and it is very likely that he secretly paints or sketches on the side. Sigh.

Here's how Hollywood hooks us. Mr. Rom-Com will have a flaw—a fabulous flaw, that is. It usually just makes him more endearing to the audience, who is privy to the scenes that his leading lady does not get to see. For instance, he may not answer his phone when she calls. She then begins to suspect something is amiss. *Perhaps he is not so perfect after all. Perhaps*, she surmises, *there is another woman!* Unaware of the truth and feeling rejected, she accepts a date from a slick, not-so-sensitive real estate tycoon.

“But wait!” we scream from the other side of the silver screen, leaning forward in our sticky movie theater chairs. “He’s not cheating—he is feeding orphans! Of course he leaves his phone tossed on the seat of his really cool vintage truck when he goes to visit little Susie with the limp. She needs his full-on attention!”

Hooked on the suspense, we hold our breath in painful agony, hoping and wondering if the two star-crossed lovers will end up together.

And so, you see, this is the first problem for the single Christian woman living in a rom-com world. The romantic comedy formula hooks us and reels us in with near-perfect characters within very believable contexts. Our secret longings and desires are played like a fiddle, and we cast upon the leading lady our personal dreams for happily ever after.

But there’s a catch. With its idyllic settings and loyal sexiest-man-alive characters, the rom-com sets us up for a serious crash; it’s a fantasy. In a romantic comedy, everything wraps up in a beautiful little package in an hour and thirty minutes. But real life doesn’t work that way. For one thing, there are never negative consequences for sex outside of marriage. In a rom-com world, everyone is happy, STD-free, and blissfully strolling off into the sunset.

Yes, ladies, for the single Christian woman who desires sexual purity, I believe this is one of our Enemy’s secret weapons, which is launched through the stratosphere, wrapped in great lighting and good wardrobe, and set to the latest music by Norah Jones. The happy endings completely ignore the fact that these people (cheered on by us) slept together before they were married, and we actually pulled for them every clothes-tossing, table-clearing step of the way.

The power of the rom-com personally dawned on me one flannel-pj’s-and-blanket night with a couple of my girlfriends. After the Cheetos and blueberry muffins were history, we discussed one of our all-time favorite movies, *The Holiday*, starring

Cameron Diaz and Jude Law. We love this movie. It delivers on so many levels: beautiful music, amazing scenery, quotable one-liners . . . and just a pinch of agony.

But here's the problem: I am a no-holds-barred, sold-out Christian woman. I love Jesus. I teach the Bible. I write Christian books for women. I speak on sexual purity and fight for it in my own life. And yet . . . and yet, I did not blink when Jude Law and Cameron Diaz had sex before they even knew each other's names.

For those of you who don't know the movie (*where on earth have you been?*), let me set up the scenario for you: Two women, each fresh from a breakup, want to take a "holiday" from their own lives. They stumble onto a website that offers a house-switch. One woman lives in a gorgeous home in Hollywood Hills, while the other lives in a quaint village in England. They switch. And romance and hilarity ensue.

Cameron Diaz's character, who is from Hollywood, finds herself in a village in England where there are no single men . . . or so she thinks. Cue Jude Law's character, who stumbles into her cottage looking rakishly handsome, if not terribly tipsy. Stone-cold-sober Cameron Diaz tries to shoo him away, but alas . . . they kiss and melt into the blankets together. Which, she assures us the next morning, *never* happens.

Pause.

Okay, I vaguely remember thinking this was a stupid move on her part because he could have been a serial killer. *But other than that*, no real clanging bells or screaming sirens went off in my mind. After all, Norah Jones was playing in the background, so I kinda knew he was no killer. Serial killers aren't set to Norah, right? Swaddled in rom-com perfection, their one-night stand seemed like no big deal.

What? No big deal? Who am I?

This thinking goes against everything I live for and believe. Yet I was absolutely engrossed in the story, hoping the two would live happily ever after!

This was the precise scenario that my friends and I began to discuss years later after we had each seen the movie a dozen times or so. Yes, ladies, a Christian woman can be bamboozled by the rom-com world. We can become so smitten with the feelings and one-liners emitted from the silver screen that we become desensitized to the immorality that has been wrapped up in a beautifully soft-lensed package.

How could I have missed this?

Now that we have established the power of the rom-com, I want to look more closely at why this good gal-bonding, heart-swooning genre makes it tough for Christian women to live out sexual purity. When the very thing you are fighting against in your own life is paraded as normal in your favorite flick, then the question of *why* purity matters gets super fuzzy when you are kissing your boyfriend. No wonder sexual purity is such a tough battle for Christian girls.

Recently, while on the road for a speaking event, I found myself with a few unplanned hours in Nashville before my flight home to Texas. So I called a friend who lives in the city to see if she had a few hours to spare to hang out until my flight. She is a worship leader and is often on the road, too. But to the surprise of both of us, she was in town and did have some free time! We met for coffee and caught up on ministry life, my recent marriage, and a few blind dates she'd recently had. Coffee progressed to shopping (duh), and while perusing a clearance sale, we started discussing the topic of this book.

I told her that I felt called to address the struggle that single Christian women face to remain pure in a romantic-comedy world. Standing in front of a full-length mirror with a latte in one hand and a killer new scarf in the other, my friend confessed: "It's getting to the point that I really struggle when I watch those kinds of movies. I have to fight to keep my thoughts pure and to resist temptation. As a single woman in my thirties, it's difficult

to watch scenes that evoke desire for sex when I know that's not a possibility at this point in my life."

I applaud my friend's discernment, and recognize that her struggle is one common to many women. Her past before knowing Jesus was similar to my own, and she does not want to go back to a lifestyle of sin. So she is wise to keep her guard up to any way that Satan can creep in to deceive her and detour her into sexual sin.

I love a good romantic comedy as much as the next girl, but obviously, many of them are not edifying. Honestly, discernment is the key. I'm not writing this book in hopes that women will boycott movies or burn their favorite DVDs. That's not my style. My desire for this book is to expose the battle that rages around sexual purity.

• • •

Sex and the Single Christian Girl is for Jesus-loving girls living in a rom-com world. We may know what God says about sexual purity, but living it out proves to be a completely different story. It can be a tough world for a godly girl. We live in a culture that sells sex, promotes sex, and degrades sex, yet God calls His daughters to live as light in this darkness.

Today, sex is marketed as the norm for anyone, at any time, in any fashion. God's beautiful design for sex, to celebrate oneness and commitment, is now demeaned to nothing more than a cheap hookup. How did we get here? Christians today are inundated with a proliferation of messages that scream, "If it feels good, do it!" Contemporary television shows and movies portray couples sleeping together on date number one as the natural progression in a relationship.

In this book I will share my own struggle to fight for sexual purity. I will also include stories of other women who, after falling into sexual sin, are trying to live differently. While the topics in this book are direct and will expose our fears, insecurities,

and vulnerabilities, I hope to encourage you with a God-sized vision of *why* sexual purity matters and equip you *with* the tools to live it out.

You may be reading this and thinking, *But, Marian, I want the fairy tale*. Stick with me. Our God writes the best love stories, and He does have a wonderful plan for your life. But as we will discover in subsequent chapters, there is an alternate script that Satan has for your life. This evil script provides a detour, where much more heart-wrenching scenes unfold.

Perhaps you've *Never Been Kissed*, or maybe you're the girl with *27 Dresses*, or maybe your life looks more like a scene from *Knocked Up*. Wherever you are on this journey, this book is for you. We all come from different backgrounds, but as Christians, we are all called to sexual purity. It is oh so easy for us to fall into a rom-com-induced haze of fuzzy morality and ebbing purity.

Trust me, my story before Christ was anything but pure. Like many young women of my generation, I viewed sex as “no big deal” and lived a very promiscuous lifestyle. Hoping for my own happy ending, I fell for all the lies concerning love and sex that I will discuss in upcoming chapters. So if I, by God's grace, can change, anyone can! The book you hold is written from the perspective of a woman who loves Jesus, who was transformed by grace, and who fought for sexual purity. While it was not easy, I can say with my whole heart that purity was worth fighting for! These are lessons that I learned on the battlefield, and I hope this book will inform you, challenge you, and empower you to win your own battle for sexual purity in a rom-com world.



I want the fairy tale.

~ Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts)
in *Pretty Woman*



Worth Fighting For

God created marriage as a living, breathing portrait laid out before the eyes of the world so that they might see the story of the ages. A love story, set in the midst of desperate times. It is a story of redemption, a story of healing; it is a story of love. God gives us marriage to illustrate His heart toward us.

—*Love and War* by John and Stasi Eldredge

Raw, unfiltered emotion hit me like a mighty rushing wind. As I took my first steps to walk down the aisle on my father's arm, the sheer intensity of the moment ripped through me. I was completely undone. Just as wind precedes rain, the tears quickly began to fall. When I say tears, I do mean sobs. Yes, I full-on ugly-cried all the way down the aisle on my wedding day. Not exactly what one would want in photos that last a lifetime. Yet at thirty-eight years old, it should not surprise anyone that I shed a few tears—but the full extent of the crying bears explanation.

First, by far the easiest emotion to explain was my pure, unbridled joy. Like rain on a sunny day, tears mingled with radiance.

Later, when asked by a five-year-old if I was crying because I was sad, I said, “Oh no, that was the happiest day of my life.” My joy was uncontainable, and it seeped out of every pore and tear duct of my body.

Gratitude hit me next. For starters, after months of planning, I finally saw my family’s old barn transformed into a cathedral. One word: breathtaking. I was beyond thankful to friends and family who worked tirelessly to plan and execute my dream wedding. Theirs was a labor of love, and I its humbled recipient. Then gratefulness hit me once again as we entered and I saw beloved faces—friends and family who traveled from across the country to show their support and join our celebration. With each face, fresh tears. Their support was a gift, just like God’s grace—unmerited.

Primarily, I found myself overwhelmed with sheer thankfulness to my loving heavenly Father, whose sovereign goodness and perfect plan were arranged that day. Grasping the bigger story, I realized that my heavenly Father loved me too much to let me settle for less than His best. Every broken heart and all those years of waiting were a gift. He loved me enough to allow me to wait, long past *my* timetable, for His time and for His man. My heavenly Father wanted His best for me, and every *no* along the way was His *yes* to the best.

Then I saw him, my groom. He stood, eyes beaming with his trademark beautiful smile, and he watched me, with his own tears, as I walked toward him. In that moment, everyone else disappeared. I can’t tell you how much I love this man. At this point, words just fall flat. He is by far the kindest, most Christlike man I’ve ever met. But while I was extremely grateful for the gift that Justin is, when I saw his face, a new emotion unleashed. Relief.

Relief? This may seem a strange emotion for a bride to feel on her wedding day, but honestly, I can’t think of a better way to express the ultimate source of my tears. For it was when I looked into his eyes, and the relief washed over me, that the true sobs

broke forth. We've all witnessed this kind of emotion before. Perhaps you've seen it in a movie, or in a touching airport reunion. It's that moment when the war ends, the troops come home, and the loved ones race into each other's arms. Those aren't tears of sorrow; they're tears bursting forth from a well called relief.

The war . . . it was finally over. *Sweet relief.*

In many ways, my single years were a type of war zone. Sure, I battled through heartbreaks and loneliness. But my true weariness was from years of standing against an invisible Enemy who despises God's glory and seeks to detour Christians away from God's good and perfect will. All those years Satan tempted me to settle, to follow the world's ways, to forsake the desire of my heart to be cherished, and mostly, to forsake my Jesus. My single years were a faith walk—to trust in God's promises and to resist the lies and schemes of the Enemy. So when I saw Justin's face, with knowing looks we said to each other, "We made it." I knew in that moment that God's best was worth fighting for. The battle over sexual purity and the fight to resist our Enemy was more than worth it. No shame. No regret. Robed in white. Ready. Enveloped in peace. Sweet relief flooded my heart.

While dear friends sang my favorite hymn, "Fairest Lord Jesus," we arrived at the altar for my father to give my hand to my groom. In that moment I felt the powerful presence of God rest on that Texas hilltop. Then, looking up, I saw it. Positioned high above the altar, at the top of the barn and the central point of the ceremony, was the most gorgeous cross of white flowers—the symbol of God's perfect love. It was a reminder of my Jesus, my first love, who mercifully died to redeem my life, whose love transformed me, and without whom I never would have stood at that altar.

Justin then accepted my hand from my father, pulled me to his side, placed a kiss on my temple, and whispered, "You are my treasure." As the worship team transitioned to the Doxology

and sang, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” a powerful rushing wind whipped through, lifting my veil to the heavens.

We were standing on holy ground.

It was a reminder from the Lord—marriage is sacred. And as our God was lifted high in praise, Jesus graced us with the outpouring of His Spirit. In response to His presence, I lifted my bouquet high in praise and wept sweet tears of worship to my God.

Purity

I do not share the story of my wedding day to convey that my experience is the end goal for women who pursue sexual purity. It doesn't matter if we are married or single. Whatever season of life we find ourselves in, we share a common purpose and a common Enemy. One season is not more honorable or less difficult than the other. Married women are in a battle for purity just as much as single women. We live in a world filled with darkness at every turn, and our hearts and minds are continually under assault. A wedding ring does not make a woman immune to spiritual darkness. What I hoped to communicate to the best of my ability was the sheer relief that washed over me as I stood at that altar and realized . . . Satan didn't win!

Today, I still fight an invisible Enemy, whose desire is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). Spiritual warfare did not end on my wedding day. What I hope to convey in this book is the particular brand of warfare a single Christian woman faces who seeks to honor God with her body by remaining sexually pure.

Through my many years as a single woman, I fought lies, temptations, fears, and worldly influences. Standing against these pressures was not easy. The battle for purity was a long and hard-fought endeavor for one reason—the glory of His name! From the time I

fell in love with Jesus, God's glory was the desire of my soul. The choice to fight was birthed out of a deep love for God.

Somewhere along the way, it clicked. I stopped trying to remain sexually pure just to follow a rule or to "save myself for my future husband." As a single woman in her thirties, I didn't know if there would be a "future husband." A far more compelling reason gripped my heart. I wanted to offer my body, my whole self, to the Lord as a living act of worship. As the apostle Paul so eloquently stated in Philippians:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:7–14

I love that phrase, "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." As I set out to write a book for Christian women on sexual purity, one of the most difficult aspects is convincing anyone that purity is worth fighting for. What compels someone to resist, to stand, and to fight must come from a place deep within that wants something better. My "something better" is and was

Jesus. Throughout this book, I'm going to be brutally honest and confess I struggled. Sexual purity was tough, but what kept me fighting was my desire to honor Christ. I wanted to stand before Him unashamed. As Paul said:

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:20–21

Fairest Lord Jesus

Purity is not defined by whether we are married or single or if we are in a relationship or not. Purity is about exalting Jesus to the watching world as better. I was single until my late thirties and knew Jesus as my all in all—my strength, my light, my Lord, my provider, my protector, my comforter, my husband, and my best friend. My single season was a gift—one that I will always treasure. I desired marriage, but I knew the Lord ordained my season of singleness, and I experienced great joy and purpose in His will for my life.

When the Lord placed marriage on my heart and I began earnestly praying for my future husband, it wasn't because I was suddenly graduating from singleness to marriage—as if singleness were a lesser calling. Not at all! God's plan was unfolding and I was simply walking in His will. Today, in this new season God has ordained for me, I can praise and proclaim that Jesus is still my all in all. Friends, our heavenly Father writes the best stories. He has a unique plan for each of us, but a woman who is walking in His will (married or single) can glorify Jesus with her purity in whatever season or stage of life.

Søren Kierkegaard said, “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” For the single Christian woman who loves Jesus, her “one thing” is

Christ himself. The glory of Christ becomes our supreme purpose and passion. Therefore, the pursuit of sexual purity is, in fact, the pursuit of Jesus—not the pursuit of a man or marriage. Purity of body and soul is about one thing: a woman’s heart being so consumed with the glory of God that she will fight to resist a real and present Enemy who seeks to pull her away from her First Love. Holiness is a life set apart to God; therefore, purity is not defined simply by a set of moral rules but as a life fully devoted to Jesus and His glory.

In the Bible, men and women were often consecrated unto the Lord. *Consecration* simply means to be “set apart” unto God. To be set apart or consecrated to God means to be wholly His. You may be reading this book and deeply desire marriage, or you may be reading and feel called to singleness for the rest of your life. Whatever the future holds, single or married, none of us really knows, but we can begin today by fully devoting ourselves to Jesus. Consecration is the heartbeat of a woman who flat-out loves Jesus. She is motivated by more than just a white dress on a wedding day. She sees herself as belonging to the Lord; therefore, the end goal of sexual purity is not marriage but her devotion to Christ.

For this reason, I chose to walk down the aisle to my favorite hymn, “Fairest Lord Jesus.” More than beautiful flowers or Pinterest-worthy decorations, I wanted Jesus lifted high and honored. I wanted to declare—without question—that He is my first love. Originally, I chose this hymn simply because it is a favorite, but reflecting on the words and the significance of the moment, I now see a beautiful connection between our passion for Christ and our pursuit of purity:

*Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,
O thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
thou, my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.*

A passionate pursuit of God's glory becomes the driving ambition of a woman's heart when Jesus is our "soul's glory, joy, and crown." The choice to live a holy and pure life finds its origin in our love for Him. There were many nights when Justin and I were dating that this proved true.

At the outset of our relationship, we openly discussed our expectations and the desire to remain sexually pure. We set clear boundaries concerning our physical limits and candidly discussed our pasts and weaknesses. We shared the same vision concerning God's design for sex and marriage, and knew we wanted to protect and honor our future marriage. All this to say, our hearts were in the right place and we both wanted to please God. And yet we still struggled.

Typically, we would find ourselves weak to temptation late at night, when it was time for us to leave each other and return to our separate houses. The tempting voices would begin to whisper, "Just stay the night. You will be fine. You won't do anything." (Yeah, right!) Those voices in my head that justified and minimized sin would grow louder. As the minutes clicked by, we both knew we were standing at temptation's doorstep and that cracking open the door would welcome in stronger ones. Sure, we would have loved to stay together longer, but we both knew that would lead us into even more temptation.

In those moments we would look at each other and say, "I love you, but I love Jesus more. For that reason, I'm going home." Our love for God conquered and was our power to resist Satan. Girls, I'll be the first to admit that the choice to say no to temptation was never easy, but when we stood before each other on our wedding day, I knew the wait was worth it.

A single Christian woman who loves Jesus Christ does indeed live in a war zone. Each step I took before walking down that aisle was a battle with my own flesh that wanted to sin, but also with an invisible Enemy who desired to detour me from God's

best. The battle still continues on this side of marriage, but the unique battle that single Christian women face is the one that I know must be addressed—I want to equip my sisters in Christ for victory.

First, as noted, purity is birthed out of a passionate love for Jesus. Second, purity is rooted in knowing and believing your identity in Christ. These are two essentials for victory—and they are both beautifully conveyed in a word that I finally grasped the meaning of on my wedding day: *cherish*.