

“Once God’s sweetness has been tasted, it draws us  
to the pure love of God more than our needs  
compel us to love him. Thus we begin to say,  
‘We now love God, not for our necessity,  
for we ourselves have tasted and know  
how sweet the Lord is.’”

—Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)<sup>2</sup>

HOW DO I TURN MY SPIRITUAL ROUTINE  
INTO A SACRED ROMANCE?

*rendezvous*



# Day 1

## A LOVE STORY

*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39).*

Everybody loves a love story! I’m not talking about grocery store romance novels near the checkout stand with pictures of beautiful women being swept off their feet by heroic men. That’s fantasy. I’m talking about a story of genuine love. It might be the story of high school sweethearts who fall in love as teenagers and commit themselves to the marriage of a lifetime. It might be the story of two football players whose lives are torn apart by cancer. It might be the story of a saint who pours every free minute of his or her life into meeting the needs of suffering people.

Love stories differ in an infinite number of ways, but they share common characteristics. Every love story has a subject, an object, and the love that binds them. Life has a way of complicating every love story. Obstacles test or confound love. Great effort must be exerted to overcome those obstacles. Love stories with happy endings usually speak of true love triumphing over every obstacle and binding the main characters even more strongly together.

This book falls clearly in the category of a love story. Christ is the subject and the main character of the story. We are the objects of His interest. Indescribable, unspeakable, unimaginable love brings us together with Him. As in every love story, life has a way of complicating the plot.

Think about the things that complicate your life right now. Maybe your thoughts turn to family responsibilities or issues, trouble at

work, stress with the kids, health concerns, problems with the neighbors, unpaid bills, or an out-of-control schedule. That last one describes most people I know! The list of complicating issues in people's lives can be rather long. I don't want you to focus too much on these issues, but I do want you to be aware of them.

These complications in our lives can create roadblocks that impede our awareness of Christ's love for us. They can also hinder our effectiveness in loving Christ the way we want. Many of us are so busy or so overwhelmed with life's problems that all of our energy, attention, time, and effort go to dealing with them.

“For our soul is so specially loved by [God] that it surpasses the knowledge of all beings—that is to say that there is no being made that can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly our Maker loves us.”

Julian of Norwich (c. 1342—after 1416)<sup>3</sup>

That's where this book can help. It will refocus Christ and His love front and center so we can see Him in new ways. It will provide tools for breaking through those roadblocks in our lives, so we can reconnect with Christ in meaningful ways every day. This book won't take away all of our problems; only heaven can do that! It will, however, help us encounter Christ in new places and experience His love in the midst of our current situations.

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I flew home yesterday and landed in the midst of a windstorm. Flags stood at attention. Trees and bushes shook vigorously. Our plane rocked back and forth and up and down to maintain a steady glide path onto the runway. The minute our wheels touched down I noticed the wind had no effect on the airport's tower. It's footing of

steel and concrete buried deep in the ground gave it the ability to resist the wind's fury.

Life happens to all of us. So, yes, the winds of life will blow on us. Yes, we will be shaken at times. However, we can have a footing in Christ that will plant us so deeply in Him that we will be able to resist the wind's fury. We'll explore strategies in this book for holding steady through the fiercest windstorms life throws at us.

Look back over your list of complications. See them as wind gusts blowing on you. Now remember that Christ's love for you anchors you as firmly in Him as steel and concrete anchor the airport tower. You're safe in His love!

When I think about a true love story, I always think about the love of my life—Sue. Since we were married, we have spent nearly every day together for more than three decades. I don't look like one of those guys on the cover of the romance novels at the grocery store. I'm sure Sue doesn't feel swept off her feet with indescribable romance on most workdays. But we love one another deeply.

Our love for each other does not still the winds of life. The winds come, and they sometimes can complicate or frustrate our love. But we survive together when those same winds seem to drive so many other lovers apart, because we find ways to connect and reconnect daily. If I'm out of town, we call and e-mail each other. If one of us has a work deadline, we get the job done then make time to be together. We've determined that come what may, we're going to stay together for life. Why? Because we love each other with a love that grows day by day.

Our friends recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. When I asked Bill the secret of their marital success, he responded, "Iced tea." "Iced tea?" I asked. "What does iced tea have to do with a successful marriage?" I'll never forget Bill's response. He said that at the end of nearly every day for the past 40 years, he and Ruth sat in the swing on the back porch with glasses of iced tea, just spending time together. Now that's a line right out of a love story if I ever heard one!

## *rendezvous*

Christ loves you. The Bible is certain about that. And I'll bet you love Him, too, or you wouldn't be reading this book. For the next 40 days we're going to talk about strategies to spice up your love with Christ so you can encounter Him in new ways. These strategies won't assume everything in your life is calm; it probably isn't. But these tools will give you more opportunities to love Christ and experience His love for you amid your daily challenges.

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### Day 1

**Remember:** Christ loves you, and you love Him.

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matt. 22:37).*