

NICK VUJICIC

International Best-Selling Author of *Life Without Limits*



UNSTOPPABLE

The Incredible Power of Faith *in Action*

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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THREE

Matters of the Heart

I FOUND THE LOVE OF MY LIFE IN A CROWD OF PEOPLE HIGH ATOP THE Bell Tower at Adriatica. While it looks like one of those ancient structures found in old European villages, this stone tower is actually a unique office building in McKinney, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. I was there in April 2010 to speak, but I had some trouble focusing on my talk that day after locking on to the most beautiful, wise, and warm eyes I'd ever seen.

You may think this “love at first sight” story is a cliché, but if this is what being a cliché feels like, believe me, mate, I'm okay with it. As a Christian, I follow the lessons from the Bible. This one is drawn from the Song of Songs: “You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes.”

If you follow my website, blog, tweets, or Facebook page, you likely have learned that my heart was captured that day by the wonderful Kanae

Miyahara. We became engaged in July 2011, and we were married in February 2012, just after I finished writing this book.

There are several reasons I want to share with you the story of how Kanae and I met and fell in love. The biggest is that so many people of all ages come to me with questions and stories about their own relationship challenges—junior high kids, teenagers, college students, young adults, middle-agers, seniors, singles, and marrieds. The details of their stories vary, but the central themes are universal: each of them wants to love and be loved in return.

- *Nick, I'm afraid no one will ever love me.*
- *How do I know this is the right person for me?*
- *Why don't my relationships last?*
- *Can I trust this person?*
- *What does love feel like?*
- *I've been hurt so many times I'm afraid to try again.*
- *I'm alone and happy. Is there something wrong with me?*

Matters of the heart have confounded, distressed, and fulfilled males and females since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. The powerful yearning of the heart is one of the most essential human needs. Yet when we look for love, we open ourselves not only to being loved but also, unfortunately, to being hurt. So there is a decision you have to make: you can give up on love and never find it, which seems like a waste of a good life, or you can keep trying.

I put my heart on the line and came away bruised more than once. I was hurt, embarrassed, angry, and sometimes I felt like a complete fool. But I got over it. Each and every time I eventually decided that the only way to find what I was looking for was to put faith into action and keep trying.

You may have had similar heartbreaks. Few of us who choose to seek

love survive unscathed. My advice is to consider your failed attempts as nothing more than tests: situations that build your strength to love even more when the right person comes along. As long as you remain open to love, love can happen. If you build a wall around your heart, it won't.

I certainly struggled for many years with feelings of insecurity and loneliness. As someone who is two arms and two legs short of the standard-issue Prince Charming, I feared rejection and often despaired that I would never find someone to share my dream of having a family. I've often spoken and written of my youthful fears that no woman would want me because I cannot hold her hand or hug her.

I grew up, as most men do, with the traditional image of a husband as the provider and protector in a marriage, so the last thing I ever wanted a woman to think was that she would need to care for me instead of simply being my wife and partner in life.

Concerns about finding love are by no means unique to me or other people with physical disabilities. Everyone has insecurities and fears about relationships. Yet I urge you to never give up on love. I found the perfect woman for imperfect me. We know we each have our flaws, but we see ourselves as perfectly matched. (One wise-guy friend who knows us both too well said, "I'm glad you found each other. Why waste two other perfectly good people?")

Now, some people prefer to remain single, and there is nothing wrong with that if it makes you happy and fulfilled. But if it is in your heart to share your life with another person, I assure you there is someone for you if you put your faith into action in matters of the heart. To do that, you first must accept these four basic tenets:

1. You are a child of God. He created you. You may see yourself as imperfect, but God does not. You were made according to His

plan. If you treat others with respect and kindness, if you try to do the right things and to make the most of your gifts, you will be worthy of love.

2. To be loved by others, you must first love yourself. If you find it difficult to love yourself, then you have work to do before you can expect anyone else to sign on to a relationship with you.
3. If you come from love, there is no need to look for it. Put yourself out there by opening your heart to others. Listen to what they say and also to what they feel. Prepare to give your love as a caring, honest, and trustworthy person, and you will surely receive it in equal doses.
4. You cannot give up on love. You may try to bury your feelings, and you may harden your heart as a protective measure, but you were created out of love and it is part of your life force. God does not want you to squander the love you have. Know that broken relationships prepare you for the one that will last. So stay in faith, and remain open to one of God's greatest gifts.

GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU MAKES YOU LOVABLE

As I noted in chapter 1, there was a time early in my life when I felt that if I really was a child of God, I must have been the one child He did not love. I could not understand why a loving God would create me without arms and legs. I even thought God was punishing me or that He must have hated me. *Why else would He make me so different from most other people?* I wondered also why God would create a child who would be a burden to good Christians like my parents.

For a brief time I shut God out of my life because I was angry. I could not accept that He loved me until I realized that everything He does has a

purpose. I read a Bible passage in which God used a blind man to teach a lesson. He healed his blindness “that the works of God should be revealed in him.” In reading that passage in John 9, I had a revelation. *If God had a purpose for a blind man, He must have one for me too.*

I found God’s purpose for me over time, and I realized that I am indeed a beloved child of God, even if He didn’t give me arms and legs. The same holds true for you. I had issues. You may have your own. You may have insecurities and imperfections. Don’t we all? You may not understand what God has in mind for you. I certainly didn’t for the longest time, but when I read of the blind man in the Bible, I put my faith into action. I saw that God had a purpose for the sightless man. I was blind to my own purpose, but my faith allowed me to accept that one day I would find the path God had laid out for me.

The Bible says whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. Know that you are God’s creation and that He loves you just as He loves all who stay in faith.

LOVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Once I accepted that God loved me and had a purpose for me, my self-image changed and so did my attitude and my actions. It didn’t happen overnight, but over time I stopped avoiding my classmates in school and around town. I no longer went to the music room so I wouldn’t have to interact with them during lunch hours. I quit hiding behind the bushes on the playground. My parents had encouraged me to speak up instead of waiting for other kids first to reach out to me. I finally emerged from my shell, and I discovered that once people knew me, they accepted me and found me inspiring. More important, I accepted myself.

When I kept to myself out of a fear of rejection, no one could get to

know the real Nick. I felt sorry for myself, and that's all others could feel for me. But when I shared my victories with my classmates, they celebrated them too. Once I opened up to their curiosity and questions about my lack of limbs, talked openly with them, and laughed with them, they became my friends.

Their respect bolstered my self-image and in turn gave me the confidence to be more outgoing. I realized that being different physically was only as limiting as I allowed it to be. There were some things I could not do, but I often surprised others and myself by finding ingenious ways to overcome challenges. I skateboarded, swam, and excelled in many of my classes, especially mathematics and—surprise—speech!

When I understood my own value, I valued others more. They returned my appreciation for them by appreciating me. That's the message contained in the Bible when we're told to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If you love and accept yourself, you will become more loving and accepting of others. You create an environment in which friendship and love for others can be nurtured.

You attract what you put out. If you have no respect for yourself, do you think others will respect you? If you don't love yourself, can others love you? Of course not. But if you are comfortable in your own skin, others will take comfort in your presence. If you make others feel good about themselves because of your positive, encouraging, accepting, and inspiring presence, I believe love will find you.

When I speak at schools and church gatherings for young people, I always tell them that God loves them just as they are. I tell them they are beautiful and that they need to appreciate themselves as much as God does. Those are simple words. Yet every time I say them, the tears start flowing. Why is that? It's because young people especially think they must fit in or

be cast out. Too often they feel it's necessary to have a certain look, certain clothing, certain physical attributes, certain this or that to be accepted. But that's not true. God accepts us as we are.

You are a beautiful child of God. If the Father of us all—the Creator of the universe—loves you, then you must love yourself as well.

GIVE LOVE TO RECEIVE IT

Now, maybe someone you loved and trusted broke your heart. I know it's little consolation, but many others, including me, have gone through this truly awful and humbling experience. But a breakup and betrayal does not make you unworthy. A failed relationship only means that it was the wrong relationship for you. I know that right now you may find it difficult to see why things went wrong, but someday you will understand. In the meantime do not make the mistake of shutting down your ability to love and be loved.

For a time I didn't trust God to make a match for me. I was lonely and tried to push friendships into relationships even when my feelings were not reciprocated. Kanae taught me the beauty of a true loving relationship in which both people are all-in. Loneliness can make you feel that you should settle for a relationship that may be comfortable but lacks the spark of love. But you should not compromise on love. Instead, believe in it. In the Bible, Jesus commands us to love as He loves: "Love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Understand that there are many single people with fulfilling and joyous lives. I know unmarried people whose lives are complete with the love of God. I had a strong desire to be married and one day to have a family, but over time I put it in God's hands. I left it to His will to decide whether I would remain single or not.

Okay, I admit that I did pray to God to make Kanae love me, but she was praying that I loved her too. Of course, I didn't know that at the time. It's better to ask the Lord to help you find the one whom He wants you to be with. Pray: *Lord, take my feelings for this person away if it is not Your will or If this is the person You want for me, please let us love each other according to Your plan.*

NEVER GIVE UP ON LOVE

You may have tried and lost before. Maybe you've had relationships that did not work out. Consider them preparatory courses for the real thing. I've had failed relationships. I've put my heart out there only to discover that the other person was more interested in a friendship than romance—or worse, neither one! As painful as those breakups and rejections were, I refused to give up on love and loving. It's just too important. Without love we are nothing.

The Bible makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 13: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

For many years I prayed and prayed and prayed for a woman who would truly love me. Did I ever feel discouraged? Yes! Did I sometimes think of giving up and joining the French Foreign Legion? (Well, I do like the uniforms, but the whole marching and shooting thing might present challenges.)

The important point here is that I did not give up, and I encourage you to never give up on love either. Put your faith in action. Pray for God's guidance, focus on being the best person you can be, and open your heart to the possibilities and opportunities that will come to you.

I would not wish loneliness, rejection, or a broken heart on anyone. I hope your path to love and marriage is smoother than mine, yet I have come to understand that the trials I endured prepared me to fully appreciate the joy I've found. God didn't want me to discover my true love until I was mature enough to appreciate and nurture it.

Scripture tells us that of the three spiritual gifts—faith, hope, and love—“the greatest of these is love.” This greatest gift is one that we can fully experience with another person when we are physically, emotionally, and spiritually mature. Like most young men, I thought I was prepared for love as a teenager, but I see now that there were experiences God wanted me to have. He sent me across the world several times to speak to millions of people and to see incredible beauty and splendor as well as crippling poverty.

God even allowed me to have relationships that went wrong so that I would fully appreciate the one that would be exactly right. He allowed my heart to be broken so that I would truly appreciate the completeness of love. The end of one particular relationship was painful beyond words, and the breakup confirmed every fear I'd had about rejection. Not to sound too pathetic, but I was a bit of a lost puppy after that experience. I spent several years struggling to rebuild my self-confidence and to build another relationship. I made some good friends with some wonderful women, but I was often lonely and yearned for a deeper, lasting partnership.

You may right now be feeling unloved and lonely, but consider that maybe, just maybe, this time of trial is your preparation for many years of blessings. I know to some that may sound highly optimistic or hopelessly

naive, and there were times in my life when I probably felt the same way. But now my once-empty cup has been filled to a level that I never knew existed, thanks to faith in action.

THE EYES OF LOVE

Kanae and her older sister, Yoshie, came to my speech at the Bell Tower at Adriatica with my friend Tammy, who is also a speaker and author, and her husband, Mark. The sisters were then working sporadically as nannies for the couple, but since they were more like family, Tammy had invited them to meet me. Kanae and Yoshie have exotic looks because their mother is Mexican and their father, who sadly passed away, was Japanese. They are both striking, but while speaking that day I had a clear view of Kanae, and I could not take my eyes off her. I could hardly concentrate on what I was saying.

After my speech, I stuck around to talk with members of the audience. Kanae and Yoshie came with Tammy to say hello, and I was very happy to meet them. In fact, when they tried to walk away to make room for other people wanting to speak with me, I told them to stay close so we could get to know one another.

Whenever I had a break, I'd try to get in a few words with them. The more I chatted with Kanae, the more I wanted to whisk her away and find out all there was to know about this enchanting girl who seemed so self-assured and kindhearted.

Finally, as they were preparing to leave, I made a bold move.

"Let me give you my e-mail address so we can stay in touch," I said to Kanae.

"Oh, that's okay, I'll get it from Tammy," she replied.

I really wanted to establish a line of communication with her so that I didn't miss the opportunity to get to know her better. Part of me wanted to beg and plead: *I want to give you my e-mail myself so I'll be sure you have it!*

That's what I wanted to say, but my father had instilled in me that real men do not beg. I took Dad's advice and played it as cool as I could, given my instant infatuation with this enthralling young woman.

"Okay, that's fine. Let's stay in touch," said Mr. Cool.

Kanae and Yoshie then left with Tammy and Mark.

My friends and I were just a few miles down the road when Tammy sent me a text message: "What did you think?"

"She is one of the most beautiful women of God I've ever met, inside and out," I texted back. "She literally took my breath away!"

So much for playing it cool.

This all happened on a Sunday. I flew home to California on Monday, hoping I would hear from Kanae the next day, if not sooner. Maybe I did check my e-mail as soon as the plane landed, and perhaps I kept checking it every ten minutes all day long to see if she'd sent me a message. (Have you seen her? Can you blame me?)

TWITTERPATED

Isn't it crazy how our hearts rule our minds and our actions in these situations? You can be fourteen years old or sixty-four years old—your age doesn't matter. When sparks fly, the reaction is always the same: you can't focus on anything other than trying to figure out how to be with the person who lit your fuse.

This love-struck state of mind is captured in the classic Disney movie *Bambi* when a wise old owl explains to Bambi and his woodland friends