

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

that with the arrival of each spring, young males and females of all species can become “twitterpated.”

“Nearly everybody gets twitterpated in the springtime,” the owl said. “You’re walking along, minding your own business... All of a sudden you run smack into a pretty face... You begin to get weak in the knees. Your head’s in a whirl. And then you feel light as a feather, and before you know it, you’re walking on air. And then you know what? You’re knocked for a loop, and you completely lose your head... And that ain’t all. It can happen to anyone.”

I was *definitely* twitterpated by Kanae. I could not stop thinking about her. The fact that she had not e-mailed me right away was driving me as mad as a cut snake. *Was I wrong? She looked at me like she was feeling the same way. I can’t be wrong. There was something going on between us. Wasn’t there?*

Days passed. Then weeks. No e-mails from Kanae. Neither a peep nor a tweet.

She seemed to have moved on and forgotten me. I could not think of anything else. I’ve had crushes on women before, but this was beyond that. Her beauty was undeniable, but she seemed to have so much character, such warmth and faith, and then there was her fearless energy. For Yoshie’s twenty-sixth birthday, she and Kanae went skydiving? Skydiving!

I couldn’t believe that God would place this dynamic woman in my life, strike up such powerful sparks, and then have her disappear. So I asked Him: *Why would You put her in front of me if You didn’t want us to be together? Why would you let me be so distracted from my work for You if there wasn’t something important going on between her and me?*

Then, after another week with no word from Kanae, I had a stern talk with myself: *Nick, you did it again. You made up your mind that this girl felt*

the same for you as you did for her, but you were just dreaming. When will you ever learn?

I was bummed out that Kanae hadn't contacted me and disappointed in myself for being such a silly mug. I'd turned into a lovesick twelve-year-old just because a pretty, unsuspecting girl had been nice to me.

Nearly three months went by. I thought of Kanae often, but her lack of communication convinced me that nothing romantic was going to happen with her. My male pride had taken another hit. I had to let it go.

COMPETITION OF THE HEART

In July I had another speaking engagement in Dallas. As usual I would be staying with Tammy and Mark, who lived nearby, and I can't deny that I hoped Kanae would be babysitting then. But I also cautioned myself not to get my hopes up. She hadn't e-mailed me, after all. Obviously, she had not felt the same sparks for me that I'd felt for her. I had to back off and stay in control of my feelings. *Guard your heart! Stay cool, mate!*

Our plane had barely touched down before I found myself texting Tammy. "Is everyone there?" I asked, trying not to be obvious.

"Yoshie and I are here cooking lasagna for you," Tammy texted back.

"Great!" wrote Mr. Cool. "How about Kanae?"

I swear, those words typed themselves on my smartphone, which is sometimes too smart for my own good. Okay, so I'm weak when it comes to matters of the heart. I couldn't help myself. But the answer was even worse than I'd feared.

"Kanae is here, but she's out riding bikes with her boyfriend," Tammy said.

I seriously thought Tammy was joking, so I brushed off that comment.

We arrived at Tammy's house, and sure enough Yoshie and she were in the kitchen, working on the lasagna. I took a seat and we chatted for a few minutes before ol' Lovesick Nick kicked in again.

"So, really, where is Kanae?" I asked meekly.

Tammy put down her bowl of freshly made pasta. Both she and Yoshie gave me puzzled looks.

"She *really* is riding bikes with her boyfriend, Nick," Tammy said.

Blast it, she's not joking!

Then something dawned on me. Tammy was confused that I was asking about Kanae because she thought I was interested in Yoshie! I had never mentioned which sister had caught my eye, and since both sisters are beautiful but only one was not in a relationship, she'd assumed I'd been attracted to Yoshie, who was closer to my age. That's why Tammy hadn't told me earlier about Kanae's boyfriend!

I've heard people talk about having a sinking feeling, but I never knew what they meant until that moment. I felt like the bottom had dropped out of the entire world and I was plunging deep into an abyss.

God, please help me handle this with grace, I prayed.

LOVE NICK-ED

It's scary how often our lives suddenly turn into television sitcoms, isn't it? My parents probably could have written a hit series, *I Love Nicky*, for all the crazy episodes I've acted out over the years. This was a classic!

I wasn't laughing at the time, of course. There is a line in *The Butterfly Circus*, the award-winning short film in which I appeared: "The greater the struggle, the more glorious the triumph." This seems to be true in many aspects of life and even sometimes in relationships.

If love comes easily for you, be grateful and give thanks. If you have to struggle to find your soul mate, as I certainly did, know that in my case the eventual triumph was indeed glorious. Believe in that, and I will pray that it comes true for you as it did for me. I have so much gratitude and appreciation for the way my life has turned out. I can't even say anymore that my ridiculously good life has come about *despite* my disabilities and the hardships I've faced. Now, I must say that my grand life is *because* of my disabilities and hardships.

Does that make sense to you? Here's what I mean: the victories in my life have a richness and depth of meaning for me that I can't imagine would exist if I had been born with arms and legs. I honestly appreciate my life more because I've had to struggle to do many things that most people simply take for granted.

Have there been times when I prayed for arms and legs and fewer obstacles in my path? Certainly. I still pray for those blessings from time to time. I'm not any different than most. I'd much rather take the easy road than the rough one. Yet I also thank God every day for all the good that has come of the disabilities and challenges He's given me.

I encourage you to see your own challenges in relationships and other aspects of your life as potential blessings that one day will come to you, even though their value may not yet be apparent. Sitting there on Tammy's couch, I certainly did not see the value in the fact that the young woman I'd been obsessing over was not available. When I learned that Kanae had a boyfriend, I thought my heart might burst inside my chest.

She looked at me with such warmth and interest, how could she have a boyfriend? Was I kidding myself? Am I deranged?

Just then, Kanae entered with her boyfriend, who dashed up the stairs as soon as he came in the door and did not see me.

Tammy did. Watching from the kitchen, she noted my look of disappointment, and her face went white. She realized where my heart had been directed when I struggled to smile at Kanae's enthusiastic hug. Actually, I've never been so cold and mean to a girl in my life. Playing it cool was no longer in the game plan.

"So, you have a boyfriend?" I said. "How long have you been going out together?"

"About a year," said Kanae.

The abyss suddenly seemed deeper.

I was so mad at myself for misreading this girl who obviously had no interest in me beyond friendship. I wanted to go off somewhere and use my forehead to pound nails, but there was steaming homemade lasagna on the table. Dinner was being served. Kanae's boyfriend joined us, introducing himself. He was friendly and seemed like a nice enough bloke, but I wasn't much in the mood to buddy up. God forgive me, this guy hadn't done a thing to me other than have a girlfriend whom I'd fallen for like a sad sack of bricks.

I managed to get through the meal without biting off the head of the poor unsuspecting boyfriend. My caregiver and I were staying at Tammy's house and so were Kanae and Yoshie, so this was looking like a long night.

I wonder if there's a Red Roof Inn nearby? I thought.

But that would have been bad manners and hard to explain. I had to buck up and make the best of a bad situation. I joined Tammy and her kids in the recreation room, burrowing into a comfy spot on the couch. Kanae joined us after her boyfriend left. When Tammy and the kids went off to bed, I was left alone with my crush, and I briefly thought about pouring out my heart to her. I decided instead to maintain some dignity and let it go.

Maybe I sighed a couple of times. I might even have whimpered once or twice. Despite great temptation I did not cry like a banshee. I was so busy wallowing in self-pity that I did not see Kanae leave her chair. Suddenly, she plopped down on the couch next to me and stared intently into my eyes.

You are so beautiful, and you have no idea how I feel about you, I thought.

“Nick, can I talk to you about something?” she asked.

My Ice Man act melted. I could not resist this woman. I could barely breathe around her. Using every ounce of what little self-control I still had, I responded as matter-of-factly as a quivering, lovesick mess of a man possibly could. I was thankful my nearby caregiver was listening to some music with his eyes shut.

“Sure, what’s up?”

The woman of my dreams proceeded to pour out her heart to me—about her boyfriend. The relationship wasn’t what she’d hoped it would be. Kanae had doubts and concerns about where it was headed. Her family did not approve of him, and she had been pondering a breakup for several months, even before we met. She liked him, but he was not the one she wanted to spend the rest of her life with, she explained.

I put on my best “listening intently” expression. My concerned and caring face. My wise and empathetic look.

As much as I wanted to be the crowbar that pried Kanae apart from her boyfriend, I knew she was seeking my guidance and putting her trust in me. Like a judge who has a conflict of interest, I had to remove myself from this case and defer to the most Supreme Court.

“I understand your concerns. They are valid. You should pray and ask God to help you make a decision,” I said.

If she had simply thanked me for my advice, left me on the couch, and

walked away, our story may well have ended there. Instead, she lingered, so close, with those big, warm, dark eyes.

I heard the words and at first couldn't believe they were coming from my mouth: "I have a question for you. Would you tell me what comes to your mind when I say two words: Bell Tower?"

"Our eyes," she replied without hesitation.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Our eyes," she said again. "I felt something when we looked at each other, and I freaked out because I've never felt that with anyone before."

Whoa! It wasn't just me, after all, I thought.

"Nick, ever since then I've been praying and fasting on what to do," Kanae said.

"Why didn't you tell me you had a boyfriend back then at the Bell Tower?"

"I was going to ask Tammy for your e-mail to tell you everything, but then Tammy told me that you texted her about my sister taking your breath away..."

"No, no, no," I said. "That text to Tammy was about you, not Yoshie."

"It was about me?"

"You were the one I talked the most to that day. You were the one who caught my eye and held it during my speech, and you were the one I texted about to Tammy."

"Well, I thought you were just a player flirting with us both!"

"No," I insisted.

We both paused a second.

"So, now, you are telling me that you were praying to God and fasting about me?" I asked.

"Yes, I didn't know what to do," Kanae said. "I have a boyfriend, but I'd never felt what I felt when you looked at me."

“Are you serious?” I said.

She fell silent.

Me too.

We’d run out of words. We’d been drawn to each other, but we’d both been torturing ourselves because of a misunderstanding. Our eyes locked again, and the longer we sat there, the more I never wanted to look anywhere else.

I was mesmerized.

Then panicked.

I felt an overwhelming urge to lean forward and kiss her. The emotional barriers were down. We’d opened up and shared our hearts. Yet she still had a boyfriend, which saddened me beyond belief.

She sensed what I was thinking.

“What do we do?” she asked.

“We can’t do anything. We’ve got to let this go. You have a boyfriend.”

Did I really just say that? I thought.

“You’d better go now,” I told her. *Because I want to kiss you so badly,* I thought.

I was whipsawed by thoughts of joy and feelings of panic. This beautiful young woman had genuine feelings for me. She could love me! But she still had a boyfriend.

I had to put my feelings on lockdown.

“Give me a hug and go upstairs now,” I told her. “We need to pray for God’s help. No matter what these feelings are, we need to ask God to take them away.”

I was torn, and so was Kanae. We decided to go our separate ways and believe by faith that if we were meant to be together, God would do miracles.

After Kanae left, I prayed on the couch for at least an hour, asking God

first to calm my heart. Then I prayed for Him to help me stop wanting to be with Kanae if He did not want us to be together. I tried to convince myself that if she was not the one, I could just move on.

I dreamed of Kanae all night, and then in the morning, I had to say goodbye to her. Before leaving, she and Tammy and I huddled in the kitchen and talked through all that had happened. Tammy apologized for assuming that I'd been referring to Yoshie instead of Kanae when I texted about my feelings after the Bell Tower speech. We accepted her apology and forgave her for an honest mistake. Then we said our farewells to one another.

I left, not knowing if I'd ever see Kanae again, let alone be with her one day. I was emotionally exhausted from the highs and lows of the last twenty-four hours. All I could do was put it in God's hands, but that didn't stop my heart from aching. There was some consolation in the fact that she had admitted to having feelings for me. Just knowing that meant a lot to me. Her attraction to me confirmed that I wasn't making up things in my head or thinking wishfully.

The fact that a smart, godly, and beautiful young woman like Kanae could see me as someone she might love was itself a blessing, and I had to acknowledge and thank God for this great gift. Kanae had impressed me as a Proverbs 31 woman, a wife or woman of noble character. Her character and faith in God blew me away. Part of putting faith into action in relationships is working to be your best and then believing that it is possible for someone to love you. It's about believing there is a person out there who could look at you, see beyond all your flaws and shortcomings, and still love you.

My story should encourage you in this. Know that if it is possible for me, it is possible for you. If that is not enough, look around you. The world is full of imperfect, normal people who have found love and companion-

ship. Love is possible for you too. I pray that your soul mate finds you soon, and I pray also that your bonds are stronger than the challenges you will face.

WORKING IT OUT

Six weeks passed without any communication from Kanae. I had to return to Dallas for another engagement, and I was torn about whether I should call her. Tammy had extended a standing invitation for me to stay at her house whenever I was in the area, but I didn't want to put Kanae in an awkward position. I decided to stay with another friend in town, but I forgot to call him to check if he'd be around. When I called him from the Dallas airport, he was out of town.

My caregiver and I had been traveling so much neither of us wanted to stay another night in a hotel. I was road weary and feeling down. My mind, body, and soul were weak, and so was my willpower. The thought of seeing Kanae and maybe talking to her a little bit—even if her boyfriend were still in the picture—trumped any thought of staying in a hotel.

I called Tammy to see if we could spend the night. Mark and the kids were home and welcomed us to come by, so we headed their way. And, yes, Kanae was there too.

During the drive from the airport, I had another talk with God.

You know I'm tired, and I am going to Tammy's instead of a hotel. You know who is there and... I smiled at God's sense of humor. I suspected God was smiling too.

I should have been more apprehensive and guarded, but I was so exhausted and disoriented from my travels that I had a goofy grin on my face. "This is going to be fun," I told my friend as we pulled into the driveway.

Mark and Tammy's kids ran out, greeted us, and grabbed our bags, so we went into the kitchen. Kanae was there and we locked eyes.

"Surprise!" I said, feeling a little sheepish.

She laughed and smiled. If I'd had legs, I'm sure they would have gone weak. As it was, I felt as though I'd walked out of a one-dimensional, black-and-white world into a 3-D Technicolor planet. The chemistry between us was ten times stronger than before, and any remaining doubts were dissipated as soon as Kanae walked up, placed a hand on my shoulder, and said, "After praying all this time, God has put peace in my heart to break up with my boyfriend. I want to be with someone who I can see spending the rest of my life with."

Yes!

All the disappointments, struggles, failures, fears, and tears in my life became irrelevant and forgotten in that God-given moment of victory. My mind could hardly wrap around the fact that such a special young woman was saying that she would be willing to spend the rest of her life as my wife.

My wife!

Kanae told me that she'd been attracted to me from our first meeting, but beyond that, she'd felt such a strong emotional connection that it scared her. Mature beyond her years, she wanted to act on faith, not emotion, so after we first met, she pulled back and prayed for God's guidance.

"I prayed for God to tell me what those feelings were, whether they were just a physical chemistry or emotions, or if this really was God's call for a lasting relationship," she said. "I didn't want to rely on my emotions. I didn't want to step forward only for that reason, so I just kept praying." In other words, Kanae put her faith into action.

My prayer for you is that someday, when you are ready to receive it,

God will put contentment in your heart, either by blessing you with someone who loves you or by allowing you to feel fully blessed without someone. Prepare yourself by staying in faith and being the best person you can be. Give as much love as you can. Put it out there, and God will take care of the rest.

LOVE TESTED

As much as that moment felt like the greatest romantic movie ever written—or at least the greatest in which I had a starring role—it was not a movie. This was real life, and you know how that can go. Once we committed to each other without reservations, the next step was to introduce ourselves as a couple to our families.

Kanae's mother and sister gave their blessings right away, and I was very grateful for their love and understanding. When she told her mum, my future mother-in-law actually said, "Glory to God!"

Yoshie had told her mum weeks earlier that there was chemistry between Kanae and me, and their mum said she had been praying and fasting that a relationship would blossom. I won over her grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins by dancing to a mariachi band at a family party and then sharing my faith with them. They weren't worried about my lack of limbs. A few harbored concerns that I might be a shallow celebrity who lacked substance, but after I shared my testimony and Kanae and I professed our love for each other, those fears went away.

I actually put off telling my parents about this new relationship for a couple of weeks because my dad tends to be wary and likes to interrogate me when it comes to women. My mum and dad quickly came to love Kanae too. She has a level of wisdom rare for such a young lady. Her

parents divorced when she was five years old, and Kanae had to take on some adult responsibilities at that early age.

Her maturity became especially apparent when my parents asked Kanae a very difficult question. While my lack of limbs was not the result of an inherited gene—my brother and sister have all their limbs—my parents nonetheless asked how she would feel if one of our children came into the world like me.

My future bride, who had already decided she wanted a large family, replied, “Even if all five of our kids have no arms and no legs, I would love them all. And I know I have it easier than you, because Nick came out of the blue for you, but I would have him as their role model and guide.”

Kanae told my parents that she loved me, and she would love our children too. In the past I had worried that I’d never find a woman whom my parents would approve of because they are so protective of me. But God brought me a young woman who won their respect, their admiration, and their hearts.

Her feelings for me were obviously very sincere, and she expressed them with a depth that fills me with awe, humility, and gratitude. But it’s not just what she says that makes me appreciate and love her so much, she expresses her love for me with actions and deeds each and every day.

I first observed the depth of her caring for me in December 2010. We were only a few months into our relationship when I learned of the cash-flow problems at my business. We were not yet engaged, but marriage was definitely on the table. This was a time when I wanted my potential future bride to see me in the best possible light. Instead, she saw me at my darkest. Maybe, just maybe, there is a worse time in a new relationship to have a total meltdown, but I can’t think of one. There we were, a couple very much in the early stages, and the allegedly strong male went over a cliff and into a valley of despair.

In the previous chapter I gave you all the sorry details of my highly emotional overreaction to a temporary cash-flow problem at Attitude Is Altitude during the economic recession. What I did not tell you is that during the meltdown Kanae proved that her love for me is boundless.

I have never felt the power of unconditional love at such strength. Now that is saying something, because my parents, my brother and my sister, and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins have shown me nothing but unconditional love all my life. Yet they are family. Blood ties are one thing. Kanae's ties to me were far more tenuous and newly formed. She very easily could have walked away. Instead, she came closer. She put her faith and her love into action in ways that seemed heroic to me.

At a time when I wanted to present myself as a successful provider, I had to admit to my new girlfriend that my business had fallen fifty thousand dollars in debt. In my anxiety I felt like a penniless failure. Why she didn't run out the door and never look back, I don't know, but I will be forever grateful that she chose instead to remain by my side, soothing me and encouraging me with her love.

I put a value on my worth as a human being when I felt worthless because of my business debt. Kanae reminded me that love doesn't look for price tags. She demonstrated in words and actions that her interest was not in measuring what I had to give. Instead, she poured out for me all the caring, nurturing, and sustaining love she possessed.

One of the thoughts that really bothered me about the debt was that I'd been hoping to put some money into savings so I could pull back on my speaking schedule for a year or so. I didn't want to be traveling all the time during our first year of marriage. Family and friends had been telling me for years that I should slow down, and finally I had a good reason to do just that—my wife-to-be.

When I told Kanae that my for-profit business was profitless and in

debt, her response was, “That doesn’t matter to me. I’ll get a nursing job and support the both of us.”

She did not hesitate. She did not flinch. She did not run for the door. She ran her fingers through my hair, comforted me, and let me know she would always be there for me.

It meant so much to me also that I knew Kanae was praying for me every day. Emotional support can be a big blessing, but prayers are even more powerful. To know that she understood my needs and prayed that they would be filled was so comforting. God is the ultimate provider of peace and patience, and Kanae prayed for Him to heal me and give me peace and joy.

I realized that she had become the bridge to all that I can be in Christ. Kanae is the key to my becoming all that I can be as a husband, speaker, evangelist, friend, boss, brother, and son. With her, I don’t have to ask for anything. I don’t have to tell her what I need. She knows. She feels what I feel, and she encourages me, but more important, she stands in the gap with prayer and asks God to give me what she can’t provide, which is His wisdom, His healing, His peace, and His patience. Finally, Kanae gives me her empathy. She is my greatest empathizer. Everything that affects me affects her. She is there for me, and I always want to be there for her when she needs to talk and to vent.

You know you are in a loving relationship when you are willing to give without receiving anything in return, when you put the other person’s needs above your own. I put Kanae above my ministry and my businesses, which means spending time together, watching movies, sitting in front of the fire, and just talking through our lives. I’m increasingly amazed at how many layers there are to a relationship like ours. The more Kanae gives to me, the more I want to be worthy of her love and devotion. She makes me want to be better.

A friend was telling me one day about his new relationship, and he kept saying, “I think she is too good for me. I don’t deserve this woman.” I told him that was a great place for him to be at that point in his relationship. We should be with people who inspire us and motivate us to grow, to be more godly, more caring, more giving, more empathetic. I am already a much more patient man than ever before. Of course the bar was not set real high during my single days when I tended to be self-centered and impatient.

My uncle Batta recently reminded me of a journal I kept years ago, and in it I’d made a list of ten things I wanted in my wife.

“Does Kanae fulfill all the things on the list?” he asked.

I had to go back and check it. Then I called him and said, “As a matter of fact, yes! Every one of them!”

It was a funny moment, and beautiful too.

I may be a few years older than Kanae, but she is wise in ways I’ve yet to learn. She has established the foundation for a relationship that is not contaminated by expectations or distractions or subconscious hopes. I believe this is a love that will grow deeper and richer over time. I’ve often said that if you aren’t growing in faith, then you are shrinking in it, and so it is with love. She is truly a child of God. She is royalty, and God has given her to me so that we can love each other and honor Him for His blessings.

Our love is contagious. An elderly woman saw us together one day, talking and laughing, and she came up to us with tears in her eyes and said, “Now I believe in true love again.” I can’t explain to you the joy I have when I see Kanae smiling or laughing, dancing, singing, and having fun. I can’t wait for the day when we can watch our children do the same.

You are God’s creation and therefore worthy of His love, which makes you worthy of a loving relationship too. I pray that you are as blessed by love as I have been, but remember to do your part and prepare yourself to not only receive it but to give it unselfishly too.