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# BEFORE YOU MEET YOUR FUTURE HUSBAND

30 Questions to Ask Yourself and 30 Heartfelt Prayers

ROBIN JONES GUNN AND TRICIA GOYER



#### Before You Meet Your Future Husband

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To the Dear Hearts who have a tender spot for the ways of God. May this book lead you to the One who loves you completely and has designed beautiful plans for your days.

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#### Hello, Beautiful Reader!

From Tricia

Honestly, I didn't give much thought to my future husband. Instead, I can pretty much say that all my choices about what I should do—and with whom—stemmed from a heart that longed to be loved. Born to a single mom, I didn't know my biological dad. Even though my mother told me his name once when I asked, I never met him and he wasn't involved in my life. My mom married when I was four years old, and my stepfather was distant. The longing for someone to tell me I was beautiful, worthy, and priceless created a big hole in my heart. And this gaping wound moved up to my head, where it echoed, *I need someone to love me! I need a boyfriend!* (I bet you can imagine that didn't lead anywhere good, right?)

My longing to be loved, and my craving for a boyfriend, led me to heartache. I would find someone I thought was wonderful, then be crushed when he didn't like me. Of course, this didn't help my already-hurting heart. I felt more unloved and more unworthy.

Finally the day came when someone I was attracted to was interested in me. Not only was he interested in me, but he was also amazing: tall with blond hair and crystal-blue eyes. He was three years older than I was. I couldn't believe my luck. When he asked me to be his girlfriend, our relationship quickly became physical. My heart soared when we were together, and my mind claimed, *This is forever! Finally I've found what I've been looking for!* 

Then, months later, he moved away. To say I was crushed is an understatement. I was truly broken: in my heart, head, and body.

I wish I could say that at this point I took a step back and decided to do things differently. But again my heart ruled, roping in my mind and body. I found it easy to date guys and give my whole self away in my search for "love." Yet those choices often led to more pain. Eventually I found myself pregnant.

Still in high school, I took what I thought was the easy way out, choosing abortion. That decision brought more emptiness, shame, and heartache. I deeply regretted that choice moments after I went through with it.

Now I saw myself as wholly unworthy. My future looked dark, with no hope, no light. Still seeking love in all the wrong ways, I soon found myself in the same situation: pregnant and abandoned by my boyfriend. Yet this time, I made a different choice: I decided to have my baby.

I clearly remember the day when I was six months pregnant and realized what a pain-filled path my empty heart had led me on. That day I prayed, "God, I have screwed up big time. If You can do anything with my life, please do."

Light, love, and hope flooded in, and I've never been the same! Jesus took my broken, empty, hurting heart and filled it with Himself. He also gave me a desire to do things differently—correctly.

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That's when I started praying for my future husband. I also started asking God to change me, to prepare me for him.

God in His mercy quickly answered my prayers. Two weeks after my son Cory was born, I started to date John Goyer, my pastor's son. As I'm writing this, we've been married thirty-two years!

Needless to say, I wish I would have given more thought to my future husband from the start. That's why I wanted to write this book with my longtime friend Robin. First, to help you recognize how our desires, thoughts, and actions affect everything. And second, because I want you to understand what I didn't know for many years: You are loved and worthy, and God has good plans for your life. Those plans may include finding your future husband, or He may lead you on another path. But I hope your life's journey will be one of falling deeper in love with the Creator of your soul.

If you couldn't quite relate to my experience, maybe you'll see yourself in Robin—a girl who grew up in a family that went to church. Her parents were protective of her, paying attention to what she did and whom she hung out with.

When you read her story next, you'll notice that we both had the same desires: to be wanted and loved. Doesn't every young woman feel that way?

From Robin

As a young woman, I often felt driven by the same longings Tricia described. I wanted to be desired, loved, and cherished—or at least noticed.

Being a middle child probably added to my need for attention. Having a matter-of-fact, efficient mom and a kind but reserved dad may have added to my longing for affection. I dreamed of being sought by a guy who thought I was lovely.

Those feelings stayed hidden in my early teen years because of the conservative Christian circles in which our family orbited. For my sister and me, makeup, music, magazines, and, of course, dating were restricted. Our mom sewed most of our modest clothing, including our bathing suits. I have a picture of me at Newport Beach in a lime-green polka-dot creation of hers. Oh, and it had ruffles. Cute for a four-year-old, maybe. I was fifteen. Also, I didn't have a driver's license until I was eighteen.

None of those social hindrances stopped me from "falling in love" repeatedly before I turned twenty-two. I met my first "true love" at church camp when I was fourteen. He was so cute. I was a Christian; he was a Christian. It was perfect.

On the last night of camp, he walked me to the closing campfire and sat next to me. Our shoulders brushed, and my heart felt like it had been lit on fire. I was sure he was "the one." We became pen pals after camp, and for my birthday he sent me a gold ID bracelet. Our long-distance, innocent "love" endured our freshman year of high school. Then the frequency of our sweet, handwritten letters slowed, and our "true love" drifted away on a cloud.

My desire to have a real, day-to-day boyfriend became a constant thought. I dreamed about what it would be like to have a guy hold my hand, kiss me, and smile at me. I found ways to work around my parents' socializing restrictions by going on church outreach trips and flirting with the cutest guy on the bus. I made sure my partner for class projects was my current crush. Youth group events and camps were gold mines in my relentless hunt for a boyfriend.

The curious factor in my quest to find love was that I had a deep respect for God. I wanted His blessing. I wanted to serve Him and follow His Word. I honestly tried to do what was right—most of the time. I think, in a way, I wanted to make Him proud of me. I didn't understand that wasn't what my heavenly Father wanted from our relationship.

My focus was constantly on myself. How could I love myself more, accept my uniqueness, and be more attractive? Where did I need to go and what did I need to do to find "the one"? Surely God wanted me to be happy, and marrying someday would make me happy, wouldn't it?

Over the next eight years, I experienced a variety of relationships with a lot of young men. Some friendships were the true brother-and-sister-in-Christ type, and the fellowship remains. Some relationships were destructive, even though we both thought of ourselves as Christians. One was manipulative and abusive, but I was young and too naive to see it at the time. I messed up one relationship because I never cared for him as much as he cared for me and I waited too long to tell him. I liked the attention too much.

At the end of my sophomore year at a Christian college, I became engaged. We had been together for a year, and when he graduated, he bought me a ring. I loved him-meaning that I didn't want the pace of our complex relationship to change. We had worked so hard to get to where we were. Surely all those heart-toheart talks and all the laughter and tears meant something.

Six months into our engagement, with my wedding dress hanging in the closet and the invitations on order at the printer's, he told me he didn't love me and could never marry me. Oh, and he thought it was only right to tell me he had been with his previous girlfriend the night before, so there was that.

That was the day I began to deconstruct my concept of love and what it meant to find "the one."

I think that was also when I started to write this book. I didn't know then that it would turn into a book, nor had it entered my mind that one day I would become an author. All I knew was that my heart and head had wandered for years in a cultural and selfinduced fairy tale. What was true love? What example could I learn

from? Would I ever be able to trust another man and commit to another relationship? Would any man ever love me completely?

All the answers led me back to Christ. His love for me was like an ancient secret hidden in plain sight. All those years, I had been trying to fall in love with the right guy, yet True Love was right there. Jesus waited so patiently for me to turn my heart fully to Him and to fall in love with Him.

When I gave my life to Him, He opened His arms to me as His bride. He promised to always be with me and be the source of all my joy and contentment. The foundation for all love is from Him, through Him, and because of Him.

As I began to understand how much Jesus wanted me, all the other pieces of my life shifted into place. I saw that God would fulfill His purpose for me as I continued to live in a committed relationship with Him. If a spouse was part of His faultless purpose, God wouldn't withhold that relationship from me. He would accomplish His beautiful design in His way and in His time. If not, then I would still spend my life fully being who I was created to be. No anxiety. No regrets. Only hope and confidence in all the ways the Holy Spirit was at work in me.

I wrote in my journal, "I wish I would have understood the real source of love earlier. How can I help girls who are frantic to find love the way I was?"

Soon after I wrote that, I went on a youth group outing as a leader and told the young teen girls what it was like to fall in love with Jesus. I told them that He was their everything and that they would be changed inside if they feasted on His love letter to them, the Bible. I told them how lavishly He loved them.

Now here I am, telling you the same truth. God's love for you is eternal. He is The One for you. He is your true First Love.

When I met the man who has now been my husband for decades, we didn't think much about each other at first. But when we connected again two years later, everything was different. During that time, both of us had recalibrated our focus. I knew that I didn't need a man to save me. Jesus already had done that.

On our first real date, that guy—the one who would become my husband—didn't tell me that I was cute or had a nice smile or that he wanted to kiss me. (All that came later.) Instead, unlike any other guy I'd dated, he told me that he loved God and that his heavenly Father would always have first place in his life. I think that was the moment I started to fall in love with him. For several years I'd been writing letters to my future husband, and those were the same words I'd been writing to some mysterious man I hadn't met yet. We quickly saw that our hearts and minds were on parallel paths. Marriage would be a continuation of our walk with the Lord as we joined together to finish the journey God had put each of us on.

How will your story unfold? Will you get married one day? Will you meet a man traveling down a parallel path, join hearts and lives, and keep on going together?

I don't know. Your future is a beautiful mystery.

Tricia and I hope this book will be an encouragement as you journey on into that beautiful mystery. We wanted to share our personal stories so that they might help focus your thinking and prepare your heart before you meet your future husband.

Above all, our prayer is that you will fall in love with Jesus. You have been chosen by the Prince of Peace to be His bride now and forever. Before you meet your eternal Husband in heaven, may this book draw you closer to His heart.

Your Bridegroom, Jesus, loves you more than you will ever know.

## Section ONE

HEART



#### From Robin

Tricia and I had lots of ideas on how to organize the thoughts we wanted to share with you in this book. Our conclusion was to create three sections: Heart, Head, and Hands.

We wanted to start with the heart because, for better or for worse, the heart is where we hold on to and examine our feelings. Love, in its simplest form, usually starts with a feeling. The Bible talks about the heart in more than six hundred places, including Matthew 22:37, where we are told, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (NIV).

The heart is the dwelling place of all love. It's also our personal treasure chest, where we keep what we value. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (NIV).

Did you catch that?

It doesn't say that a few things are inspired by your heart. It says that *everything* is. It also doesn't say, "Don't pay attention to what your heart is telling you."

No. Everything flows from the heart—it's the wellspring of your whole life. That's why we must pay close attention to what we take in or hold on to and guard our hearts above all else.

When a root of bitterness takes hold in a broken heart, it soon grows into a toxic vine that not only lashes out at others but also entangles and hinders us. Before you meet your future husband, you'll want to make sure you've ripped out all roots of bitterness and planted seeds of hope and peace in freshly turned soil. Good things grow alongside hope and peace in a cleaned-up heart. It's the ideal environment for love to grow.

#### 4 Heart

From Tricia

When I was growing up, I heard a lot about "following your heart" and not very much about "guarding your heart." I didn't see my heart as something to protect. Instead, I believed that I needed to figure out how to fill the emptiness I had inside. I wish someone back then would have told me how precious my heart is. I wish I had known how to tend it well. That's what Robin and I hope to help you discover in the following section.

All the wrong decisions I made as a young woman started with my trying to find a guy to fill my heart. That led to a lot of brokenness. I'm so thankful God gave me a new heart to replace the broken pieces that resulted from bad decisions. (I'll tell you more about that concept later in the book.)

Whether or not you marry someday, guarding your heart will protect you from a lot of pain.

Now let's ponder what's in our hearts and what adjustments we might need to make to plant a beautiful garden there.

## DAY 1

#### What Your Heart Needs

Tricia

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires.

Psalm 37:4

When I was seven years old, I wanted a Barbie paper doll book with cute two-dimensional clothes to punch out. I desperately wanted it, so I prayed. I had heard a lot of Bible stories, and I knew, if God could heal a blind man, He could make a paper doll book appear. I told God that He could drop the book in my closet and I'd keep it just between Him and me.

I prayed as long and hard as a second grader could. But the next day, when I opened the closet door, the paper doll book wasn't there. How could that be? Wasn't God supposed to answer my prayers?

A few weeks later, my birthday arrived. Guess what I received? Yes, the paper doll book, among other things. From that experience, I learned a lot about God and myself. Even though my thought process and prayers were immature, I knew I could turn to God with the desires of my heart. But I learned that sometimes prayers aren't answered in the ways we want. As I grew older, I realized I didn't need to bargain with God or expect Him to be some sort of magician who makes whatever I want appear (no, not even in my closet). Instead, it's okay just to share what's on my heart.

Father God knows the desires of our hearts, and He will handle those desires in tender ways. Sometimes He will ask us to wait, knowing the time isn't right. Other times He will turn our hearts to different desires.

Pause and consider what you truly desire in terms of your future husband. Make a list. Then look at that list and pray about those desires.

Is it hard to trust God with your desires? The more you delight yourself in the Lord, the more you'll understand how good God's heart is toward you. As you delight in Him, your trust in Him will grow. As you pray, you'll see that His answers are for good, even if they are different from what you wanted.

God cares about your desires, but mostly He cares about you. He knows when—or if—your future husband will come and how that person will be the man you truly need, someone your heart will also desire.



What desires of your heart do you need to turn over entirely to God, especially concerning your future husband?



#### Father God,

You know the desires of my heart. Could You help me trust You with those desires? I know that what I want now might not be what's best for me. So guide me to delight in You. Enable me to trust that You know the perfect gift of a future husband for me and that You will bring him to me at the ideal time. Help me trust that You will give me what I desire or provide me with someone or something better.

I ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.



## DAY 2 OPENING YOUR HEART

Robin

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

Human nature yearns to know and to be known. This heart-to-heart closeness infuses a marriage with a beautiful, one-of-a-kind intimacy and love. If we want to get to know someone, we have to be willing to open up to them, to receive them completely. We need to spend time with them and let them get to know us at the same level that we're coming to know them.

God made it possible for us to experience the same heart-toheart closeness with Him through His Son. Think of it! The Creator of this universe wants an intimate relationship with you. He is waiting for you to come to Him. It starts when you open your heart and receive the gift of His love through Jesus.

A few months ago, I was at a wedding held in a beautiful chapel on a bluff above the Pacific Ocean. It was a gorgeous day. The chapel's tall glass windows provided extraordinary views of the sea for miles. The flowers, the music, and the sunshine all filled the space with the sense that we were part of a sacred moment.

The minister entered and took his place. The groom followed with a look of patient expectation. The congregation rose and watched as the radiant bride came down the aisle to join her groom. I couldn't hold back the silent tears. It was all so beautiful. I knew their love story well. I had prayed for her and for him for years. They were finally becoming man and wife.

Their defining moment at the altar when she said "I do" took my breath away. I felt as if I was witnessing an earthly representation of the sacred union that happens between Christ Jesus and us when we open our hearts to Him. God has sent an invitation to each of us to come to "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7). He even calls us "the bride" in the Bible, and Jesus is called "the bridegroom."

Picture yourself as a glowing, desired bride. You are walking down the aisle. Your heavenly Father stands before you. Next to Him stands Jesus, who has paid the ultimate price to make this union possible.

God turns to His only, beloved Son and says, "Jesus, do You take this woman to be Your bride and love her forever?" Looking you in the eye with a heart overflowing with pure love, Jesus says, "I do."

Now God turns to you. "My daughter, do you take Jesus to be your bridegroom to love forever?"

And you say . . .

What do you say? How would you respond? At such a moment, face-to-face and heart-to-heart with the Prince of Peace, would

you say, "Umm, I don't know. Let me think about it"? Would you say, "I want to try out some other love interests first, and then maybe I'll come back to You later"?

Or would you open your heart and say, "I do"? Would you let the intimacy and the never-ending love relationship begin with the One who will never leave you and will always love you?



If you haven't yet said "I do" to Jesus the Bridegroom, are you ready to receive Him as your Lord and Savior right now? If you have already said "I do" to the Lord, in what ways are you becoming closer in your relationship with Him?



Heavenly Father,

Thank You for loving me unconditionally and for inviting me into Your family. Forgive me for all the wrong I've done. I want to receive the gift of Your love through Jesus. I open my heart to Him now and promise to spend the rest of my life growing in love with Him. I want to be with Jesus every moment, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Best of all, I know that I will be with Him forever.

I pray this in the name that is now written on my heart. Amen.



## DAY 3

## GROWING PEACE IN THE GARDEN OF YOUR HEART

Tricia

May the Lord bless you and protect you.

May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

Have you ever visited the house of a grandparent, aunt, or uncle, and they've called out as you left, "Be safe and drive carefully"? Of course, we plan to be safe. We have no plans to drive recklessly. These common phrases aren't directions to follow. Instead, they can be considered blessings. Our loved ones want us to be safe, and their words are a send-off with hope for good things.

Similarly, in the Bible, God's priests prayed blessings over His people. First, the priests taught God's children about His truth and laws. And then, when the people went on their way, the priests offered a blessing as a holy send-off, like the one on the previous page.

The priests prayed for God's protection over the people, but more than that, the priests wanted the people to understand God's love and favor. It's only when we embrace the love and approval of God that peace comes.

Just as plants need good soil, water, and sun to grow, peace grows in our hearts when we understand how much God loves us. Peace comes when we feel blessed and protected. Peace comes when we know that God unconditionally offers us grace and forgiveness. These things feed our souls and help peace grow.

Whenever you feel worried that your future husband will never come or that he won't be everything you hoped for when he does come, you can turn to God. Peace comes when we understand God's smile on us and our lives.

Yet, to understand God's smile, we have to look up. We have to lift our eyes from the troubles around us and turn to Him. God doesn't just like us—He adores us. Knowing that the God of the universe looks on us with such tenderness should fill us with peace in all things.



ow can you remind yourself to look to God and seek His peace instead of letting the worries of this world claim your attention?



Father God,

I pray that You will bless me and protect me. I pray that You will smile on me and be gracious to me. I pray that You will show me Your favor and give me Your peace. I pray that I will learn to lift my eyes daily to You and truly understand Your love for me. Help me, Lord, not to be distracted by the worries of this world but instead to put my trust in You.

I pray the same for my future husband, and I ask all this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.



Relax, everything's going to be all right; rest, everything's coming together; open your hearts, love is on the way!

—Jude 2, msg

## DAY 4

#### What Do You Treasure?

Robin

Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Luke 2:19, ESV

I loved watching our daughter when she was young, how she valued certain qualities such as honesty, kindness, patience, and trust in God. Those gems maintained their assigned value during her teens and twenties as she dated. I found it beautiful to watch her hold fast to what she treasured, even when so many of her friends were shifting their values and changing their goals. She knew what qualities mattered most in a future husband, and she stored the same traits in her own heart.

Many of those prized attributes developed in her life as she prayerfully went through different relationships. I cried with her over breakups and laughed over ridiculous first dates that were dead ends. (One guy owned a pet raccoon that lived in the house and walked on its back legs across the living room!) She continued to treasure her values and didn't trade any of them for temporary relationships that would turn to dust. As the years went on, she grew in patience and peace as she trusted God to bring the right man into her life at the right time.

One night she called to tell me about a guy she was thinking about meeting for coffee. They hadn't met face-to-face yet, but she was willing to take a chance because there was just something about him. She had checked out his social media and had a good feeling about him.

I asked his name because, of course, I wanted to check him out too.

"You can marry him," I said when I heard his name.

"Marry him! I haven't even met him yet."

I couldn't stop smiling as I told her, "His mom was my college roommate, and we went to the same church when we were in high school. You have to at least meet him."

They met and talked for hours. He walked her to her front door, placed his hand on her shoulder, and said, "May I pray for you?" She was smitten.

Their wedding was a joyful celebration as well as a sweet reunion of family and friends who hadn't seen one another for years. Our daughter and her groom were patient and trusted God's timing and His leading, all the while holding on to what they treasured. They had prayed for each other for years before they met. His mom had prayed for her future daughter-in-law. I had prayed for my future son-in-law. Many prayers were answered on their wedding day. I still smile when I think about how God was orchestrating their love story long before they were even born.



hat are the traits you treasure most in a future husband, and how are you trusting God to develop those golden traits in your life right now?



Father God,

I want to trust You. Teach me how to do that completely. Help me see the big picture and believe that You have a plan for my life that is better than I could ever imagine. Show me the things in life that are true treasures. Teach me how to rid the treasure chest of my heart of all the things I've stored there that are not of value in Your kingdom. Fill my heart and my life with true treasure.

In Jesus's name, amen.



## DAY 5

#### HEALING FOR A BROKEN HEART

Tricia

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.

Ezekiel 36:26

I wonder how many young women believe that their first boyfriend is "the one," like I did. Buying into the instant-romance story lines of the movies I watched, I thought I'd found the guy who was right for me. Yet even if my first boyfriend hadn't moved away, I know now that our relationship wouldn't have lasted. We had no foundation on which to build a relationship or a life together. My broken heart came from placing my hope in the wrong place and the wrong person—and from not preparing for the right person.

I wish I could say that I learned from my error of "falling in love" fast. Instead, I made the same mistake a few more times until

it seemed my broken heart was irreparable. As I shared at the start of this book, by the time I was seventeen—and pregnant—despair overwhelmed me.

When I finally made the decision to trust God, I pictured all the broken pieces of my heart and envisioned myself daring to lift them to Him. "God, if You can do anything with this . . ." I prayed.

The most beautiful thing happened next. God didn't glue together the broken pieces. He gave me a new heart. It's not that the ache stopped completely, but I did feel the transformation deep inside. Where despair once reigned, hope replaced it. I began to believe that God had a good purpose for me. And I no longer desperately needed a boyfriend. Then, as I became content in God's love, I attracted the type of person who also loved God. John told me that my love for God was what drew him to me, and I'm glad!

Healing happens when we turn our broken hearts over to God. He longs to give us new hearts. He also longs to bring healing, which allows us to hope. It's a gift that will change everything from the inside out.



What has broken your heart, and what would it look like for you to turn the pieces over to God today?



Father God,

The truth is that my heart has been broken as I've looked to others for the wrong type of love. I know that human relationships can never give me the kind of love I desire. So today, Lord, I give You my broken heart. I pray You will provide me with a new heart in return. I know that only with You in the center of my heart can I achieve healthy relationships. Re-create me from the inside out as only You can.

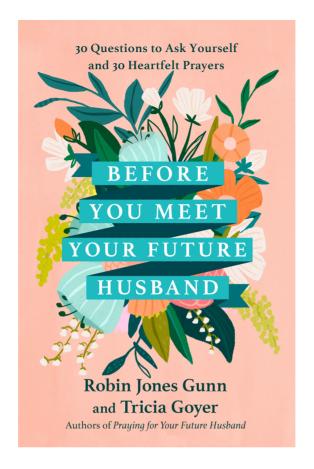
I ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.



# There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart.

—JANE AUSTEN, Emma





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