



Also titled, “How you can marry the man of your dreams and still want to punch him in the face sometimes”

A few years ago, as a single woman, I sat across from a young engaged couple at a Theology of the Body retreat during lunchtime. Curious about their “love story,” I listened for 45 minutes on how God wove everything together for them—how it took YEARS of prayers and novenas that eventually were answered in the most crazy ways. I mean, it took 45 MINUTES to tell their story. By the end I was thinking, “Oh my gosh. This is the most amazing love story I’ve ever heard. There’s no way that I could ever have that kind of story. With my luck, I’ll meet my future husband in a bar—like the one time I ever frequent a bar—and have absolutely no cool story to share and my life and marriage will be ruined!” Okay, maybe I wasn’t that dramatic.

Feeling a bit hopeful by this couple’s story, but also a bit doubtful, my prayer to God was, “Jesus, I trust in You. I trust whatever plans you have for me. I pray that my time as a single woman isn’t just a ‘waste’ until I get married. Lord, use me however you want. I will be patient with you, knowing that the longer I wait for my husband, the better he’ll be, assuming we are both growing in holiness everyday. I know the best thing I can do for my future vocation is to become holy now. And, if I die tomorrow, then my vocation will be in Heaven with you, and that would be awesome! Help me live everyday with joy and not be a miserable single person. You are the only one who satisfies this heart and I would rather be single and joyful in you, than be miserable in a relationship with someone just because I didn’t want to be ‘lonely.’ Jesus, I trust in You.”

Of course, my little heart would get caught up in the romantic comedies (I mean, “You’ve Got Mail” is constantly on cable) or the Disney fairy tales and wonder how my “love story” would ensue. (I should’ve read Sarah Swafford’s Emotional Virtue on how to control all these daydreams, but it wasn’t written yet!). I also met a lot of Catholic young adults who were married and I would envy their love stories, because it seemed like they all had these amazing fairy-tale stories that ended with “Happily Ever Afters.” All these women were married to amazing men of God. I kept thinking to myself, “If I’ve met all these amazing married men of God, surely

there have got to be some SINGLE amazing men of God! And God, I only need ONE!”

Well, I did meet a lot of amazing single men of God. I traveled to over 40 states and 16 countries in the last 7 years doing ministry, and let me tell you—there are a TON of amazing men of God (and, if you want me to set you up with them, I can... wink, wink). However, none of them were my husband. Yes, I may have dated or been courted by a few of them, but at some point it was pretty easy to realize they weren't “the one” (even if it took 6-10 months to figure it out). Maybe it's because I was older and knew myself really well. Maybe it's because God was guarding my heart. For goodness sakes, the year before I dated Bobby, there were 3 guys that I really liked and wished would ask me out. My little heart waited and waited, but none of them even liked me back. Maybe it's because I was praying to God, “Lord, if he's not ‘the one,’ don't let him like me back. I don't want to waste his time or my time from finding our future vocations.” Well, God listened to my prayer, and I was frustrated. Annoyed. “God, WHY would you actually answer my prayer the way I wanted!? Couldn't at least ONE of them have liked me?” (Isn't it funny how we do that with God?)

Well, sure enough I re-met Bobby. And yes, the love story that God had for me was way better than the one I could've imagined for myself. I am glad I was patient. I am glad I didn't settle for a previous boyfriend. It was worth it to wait on the Lord and not just “take” any relationship that came my way because I wanted to be married and have babies. I am glad I did it God's way and not my way.

HOWEVER, just because it was easy to discern the relationship doesn't mean the relationship itself was easy. Relationships with human beings, in general, aren't easy. We are imperfect people dealing with other imperfect people. Even if they're our family or our best friends, relationships take work and require commitment, understanding, compromise, a common goal, etc.

During girls' sessions, I normally get to share our love story. And girls are normally pretty inspired to not settle, to have hope that God has a love story for them, too, and maybe even have courage to break off a relationship they're in, knowing it's not leading to marriage and/or knowing they have a complete lack of peace and joy that one should have going into their vocation.

The problem is, these girls' sessions only last for so long, and it always seems like “THE END! And we lived “HAPPILY EVER AFTER!” It's only in further talks about dating and relationships that Bobby and I get to share the “fun” stories about the trials, the arguments, the real everyday reality of a relationship based on God. These are actually my favorite talks to give, because I want people to have hope that marriage is awesome, but that it's also work. It also causes one to die-to-self a lot.

In fairy tales, you don't actually ever get to see what happens after the end. In real

life, you actually get to live the “after.” And trust me: while I always knew God had an amazing “knight in shining armor” out there for me, I also knew we’d probably argue a lot, make each other frustrated, get annoyed, etc. I never had this weird fairy-tale idea of a relationship where none of that stuff happens, even if it was with the man of my dreams.

In our dating/courting relationship, just like all couples, Bobby and I had to learn how to communicate with each other. With an extrovert like me who likes to “talk” about things and an introvert like Bobby who doesn’t, this was a painful, arduous process. At one point during an argument, I said to Bobby, “Seriously, you aren’t in seminary anymore—you can’t just run to your room and shut the door. If we are going to be married we have to talk about things!”

There were many times that Bobby had to endure my few “days of the month” where I was very emotional and either wanted to cry at every commercial or I wanted to punch him in the face. Thankfully, once we started taking NFP classes 6 months before our marriage, Bobby was charting my cycle and could pinpoint the exact two days when he could buy me flowers or chocolate to lessen the “crazy.” (I may or may not have still wanted to punch him in the face).

Our dating/courtship saw a lot of tears from me, a lot of dispelling weird expectations we had from previous relationships or being raised in different families. We also had to deal with our un-chastity in previous relationships and how that affected our current relationship. We had to discuss our prayer life—what that would look like individually and as a couple. We had to discuss stupid things like which way the toilet paper roll goes on (there IS a right way, and it’s with the paper flowing “over the top”).

But let me say—there were other guys I dated where I couldn’t talk about these things. In other relationships I would be afraid to bring up “tough” subjects for fear of being dumped. I would be afraid to talk about our prayer life or chastity.

With Bobby, on the other hand, I felt comfortable to be myself. I felt comfortable to show my crazy side, my crying side, my “I’m proud to be Catholic” side, my girly side, my tough side, my goofy side, etc. I believe if you can’t bring up tough subjects with your significant other out of fear of ruining the relationship, that’s a HUGE red flag that they aren’t the person you’re supposed to be with the rest of your life.

While my marriage is not a fairytale—it consists of real life, real people, real poopy diapers, real pride, real selfishness—I wouldn’t have it any other way. Why? Because I know that the only real “Happily Ever After” where “The End” consists of no death, no mourning, no wailing or pain is in Heaven (Revelation 21:4). This life, however, does have death, mourning, pain, and suffering. And no marriage is immune from that. Our goal in life is to learn how to love—

God, others, and ourselves. And real love is demanding. Real love is painful. Real love hurts. Real love demands a dying to self. Real love is sacrificial. Real love is not just a “feeling.” Real love is the Cross (the agony) and the Resurrection (the ecstasy). You can’t have the Resurrection, though, without the Cross. You can’t have the ecstasy without the agony. You can’t have Heaven—the “Happily Ever After”—without the Cross, both literally and figuratively.

After every argument or moment(s) of suffering, I love and respect my husband more. (Whereas in previous relationships after those things, especially arguments, I noticed that I respected my boyfriends less). My most memorable fight was when Bobby and I were 3,000 miles apart and we hung up the phone still angry (since the issue wasn’t resolved, it was midnight my time, and I had to wake up early the next morning for an event). I woke up, though, to an email from Bobby that said, “I am still very frustrated. However, I love you and I’m not going anywhere.” There was an assurance in that statement. I thought, “I have peace in my soul that this is the man I’m called to marry, even though we are both frustrated/angry with each other. And wow, I really love this man.” And guess what: that’s how I feel during the arguments/fights we have in our marriage, too. (In my mind it normally sounds like, “Ugh, I still love you even though I want to punch* you in the face right now!”)

I love him more everyday because I get to know the real him and not the “idea” of him. He is a good man. He is a holy man. We are not perfect, but we are perfect for each other (I could write a whole other blog about that). I am so thankful to God everyday for our marriage, in all its strengths, in all its trials. I am thankful for a husband who leads me to Heaven, and a marriage filled with joy. I am thankful for learning that it’s not all about me. I am thankful that I get to learn how to die to myself and how to live for another (and, of course, it sucks at the time to actually do these things).

And mostly, I am thankful that God, who brought us together, is the foundation and center of it all. To me, that’s what makes our marriage full of peace and joy—even when I want to punch* my husband in the face.

Life is not a fairy tale. Marriage is not a fairy tale. Thank God for that. Because in the end, when we’re chillin’ in Heaven together, we’re really going to live “Happily Ever After.”