

*Confident
Love*

WORTH THE WAIT

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Love*
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JANICE MCLAUGHLIN GEORGE


REDEMPTION
PRESS

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Confident Love Tributes

This book is written in loving honor, praise, and obedience to
my Heavenly Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Thank You for the gift of eternal life and the privilege to be Your child
and to do Your work.

In tribute to my husband, Tom, with whom I share confident love,
thank you for the privilege of being your wife.

In recognition of the legacy of love and marriage
until death us do part:

Verlena McLaughlin and the late Thomas D. McLaughlin, Jr.
(49.75 years of marriage; shortened by Dad's death)
Thank you for the privilege of being your daughter and for teaching
me through your example.

Colonel James T. George, Sr., USA (Retired) and Juliette George
(56+ years of marriage and still counting)
Thank you for raising a great son and for the privilege of being family.

Grandparents

The late James Clark, Jr. and the late Elizabeth Clark
(56 years of marriage)

The late L.B. McLaughlin married to
the late Thomas D. McLaughlin, Sr.
and the late Richard McLaughlin
(40 years of marriage combined; shortened by death)

“Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Philippians 4:20 NASB

Table of Contents

Forewordxi
Preface and Prayerxiii
Acknowledgements.xix
Chapter 1: Before I Said Yes	1
Introduction.	1
My Journey of Waiting.	6
What about You? What's Your Story?	14
What to Do While Waiting	19
Chapter 2: The YES	23
Yield Your Heart to God	25
Entrust Your Future to God	30
Surrender Your Everything to God	35
Chapter 3: The WAIT: Part 1	41
Worship God	44
Anticipate God's Best	50

Chapter 4: The WAIT: Part 2	65
Ignite the Beauty in You	66
Transform Your Mind.	76
Chapter 5: The Effective TEAM.	103
Treasure Your Differences	106
Encourage Mutual Trust and Transparency.	109
Assess Your Team-Ability	113
Maintain Focus on God	117
Chapter 6: The LAMP in the Darkness	121
Look to God’s Word.	123
Attend Your Church Regularly	127
Make and Cultivate Godly Friendships	132
Pray Continuously and Fervently	136
Chapter 7: The LOVE He Needs	141
Learn Him	143
Overflow with Unconditional Respect	147
Value Him for Who He Is	151
Evaluate Your Motives	155
Chapter 8: The BUILDing Blocks of Encouragement	159
Believe in Him	161
Understand His Dreams, Fears, and Anxieties	165
Inspire His Confidence in God.	168
Live in Peace.	171
Deliver Effective Encouragement and Feedback	175
Chapter 9: The LORD, the Provider of All.	179
Look to Jehovah Jirah for All You Need	183
Own Your Part	188
Rejoice in What You Have	193
Determine to Give	197

Chapter 10: The AWE of God!.....	201
Act in God's Power.....	204
Watch God Work.....	209
Enjoy God's Blessings and Joy Forever	213
Appendix	217
The SPA Menu.....	217

Foreword

I had the privilege of meeting Janice almost twenty years ago. She had moved to the area, had been visiting our church, Antioch Baptist Church, for a while, and was considering joining. During the decision-making process, Janice requested a meeting with my wife and me to discuss church doctrine and leadership. She wanted to observe, more than on Sunday morning, the authenticity of the pastor and his wife and ensure that the church doctrine and practices were biblically sound. I was impressed and touched by her due diligence. Over my twenty-one years of pastoring, not many people go to that length to interview their prospective pastor and wife. But that is what is special about Janice; she does her homework and seeks the Lord in all she does. It was a pleasure to serve as Janice's pastor then, and now to serve as pastor to Janice and her wonderful husband, Tom.

In my journey with Janice, I have always seen her as a solidly biblical woman who strives to live and act according to God's will. This is her attitude at work, home, play, and with family and friends. Janice is fiercely independent when it comes to her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In a world full of biblical compromise and situational ethics, Janice is

biblically and ethically sound in all her life. She speaks the truth from God's Word when it's popular and when it is not popular! I love this about Janice. You always know where she is coming from; she is solidly and unapologetically biblical. And I have observed God blessing her over the years due to her God-honoring lifestyle.

One season in Janice's life really evidences her love for God. Janice had been dating a young man for a while. I could tell they really liked each other and were falling in love. In my humble opinion, they were made for each other! He was also a very, very biblical man and solidly obedient to God. Well, the two of them were discussing the possibility of marriage. Janice was ready; the young man was ready. But he had some reservations and wanted to make sure that Janice was the woman that God had for him to marry. Well, he was hesitant for quite some time. I told Janice on three occasions that if this young man could not see that you are a godly woman and you would make a wonderful wife for him, if you were my daughter, I would tell you to kick him to the curb, move on and stop waiting for him to make up his mind!

I'll never forget what Janice said to me each time. Janice said, "*Pastor, I have prayed about this, and God has told me to wait. So, I'm going to wait.*" Well, I don't argue with God. And sure enough, in Janice's obedience to God's leading, she waited. And today that young man and Janice have a beautiful marriage. She waited for Tom, and today she is Mrs. Janice McLaughlin George because she trusted God enough to wait.

It takes a lot of faith to wait on the Lord when we live in a right-now kind of world! As you read Janice's book, *Confident Love: Worth the Wait*, I pray that you will be blessed as she has poured herself into these pages to be a blessing to you in obedience to the Lord.

Rev. Dr. Marshal L. Ausberry, Sr.
Senior Pastor, Antioch Baptist Church
Fairfax Station, Virginia

Preface and Prayer

Whenever I interview for a job, I assess the culture of the organization to determine if I can fit in with the team and achieve my career goals while helping them realize the organization and team's vision and mission. I am looking to see if I can build a rapport and work well with my prospective boss by inquiring about his or her leadership and management style. I want to enjoy my job and the people with whom I work. I want to do more than just get along with my superiors and colleagues. Because work culture is based on the values and beliefs of the organization, I want to understand their core values and assess if they align with mine. I am observant and discerning from the first telephone conversation, to when I first put my foot in the door for the interview, and during the negotiation of the compensation package. In every exchange, I am also actively listening to assess myself correctly to ensure I have the interests, skills, and aptitude for the current assignment with growth opportunities to build or enhance my skills. My time is valuable to me and as most of my waking hours are at work, the culture at my job has to support my career and personal requirements so that I can have a restful sleep and not dread going to work the next day.

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

In like manner, as I dated, I was looking for a marriage culture that aligned with God's requirements and would enable me to fulfill the purpose God has designed for me and be an effective teammate for my future husband. To that end, I needed to date and marry the right man according to God's will and purpose. On my journey to love—confident love—a few potential dating relationships ended after the first or second conversation. In my relationship with Tom, every encounter made me want to qualify for the job called, "Tom's wife." And, during the journey of waiting, I constantly consulted with God as He talked to me through various sources—His Word, my church, and interactions with others. As I fasted and prayed about my relationship with Tom, God birthed this book in me. Therefore, the writing and publishing of this book is a result of love, honor, and obedience to my Heavenly Father, and a tribute to Tom and the confident love we share.

Through the process of writing this book, I have had my share of challenges and discouragements to the point that I questioned the assignment and God's will. Whenever I asked Him, He consistently gave me an emphatic "Yes!" With His power, I have stayed the course and honestly enjoyed the extraordinary peace and confidence of knowing that I am in His will. I had the vision and concept as early as 2000 and started writing some content; however, the actual execution of this book began in 2007 when I attended my first writers conference. So, you can see that I have been on this journey for a very long time, and I am rejoicing now as you and I can hold this book in our hands. Sometimes I wondered why it had taken me so long, but then I realized that the learning was part of the journey, and some of the experiences addressed in the book would not have been possible if I had written it earlier (Rom. 8:28). Also, this book is a testimony of my journey to confident love with Tom as we have celebrated fifteen years of marriage as of this publication, demonstrating the maturity of the relationship

PREFACE AND PRAYER

with credibility to write it based on our personal application of God's Word. Tom and I LOVE being married and would marry each other all over again. We are confident of that.

This book is founded on Scriptures God gave me during my fasting about possible engagement and marriage with Tom, and for that reason, my initial working title was, *Before I Said Yes*. It wasn't until a Saturday morning in January 2016 while unloading the dishwasher, as I was thinking about my relationship with Tom, that the book title, *Confident Love*, was conceived. I googled and searched Amazon and found that no other book had the title. Once I shared it with Tom, he loved it, confirming for me that this was it. The title represents the confidence we have in our marriage due to the confidence we have in our God, the Father of love, who empowers us to be the Christians we are to be. We are not perfect individually nor collectively and certainly our marriage is not perfect, but our success and confidence depend on knowing and doing God's will. We understand that our vertical relationship with God is dependent on our horizontal relationship with each other and vice versa. Whenever we say or do something that may hurt the other, we are confident that the God in each of us makes a difference in our lives, requiring us to correct the matter quickly—apology, repentance, and obedience to God.

Because I was born and raised in a Christian home and was seeking a Christian, Bible-based marriage, this book targets women seeking the same—a marriage culture based on the Word of God with husband and wife striving to fulfill God's divine purpose. Nevertheless, anyone (e.g., male, female, Christian, non-Christian, single or married person, counselor, or preacher) reading this book will glean nuggets of truth that can facilitate becoming a better person and experiencing healthier relationships.

As you read this book, I want you to know:

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

- I have prayed for you that the transforming power of God’s Word will go forth in your life to help you trust God as you allow Him to direct your friendships, dating, courting, and marital relationships. I pray every chapter, Scripture, prayer, and action provided in this book will transform you to be the best, and may you find your confident love in God and in a marriage that exceeds your expectations, according to His perfect will for you.
- God is the author of this book. I didn’t know what to do or how to do it except through the power of the Holy Spirit, working in me. So, all praises, glory, and honor to Him! I have written what I believe God placed on my heart to encourage you on your journey to confident love. May you seek God’s direction on what to accept in this book, how to apply it to your life, what to discard (if any), and trust Him on your journey as He is the only source of confident love.
- Throughout this book, I share my journey to confident love, discussing how Tom and I met in Chapter 1, to sharing our wedding in Chapter 10. Chapters 1–4 are the foundational chapters and may be a little longer and tougher than the others. Chapter 1 gives a more detailed background about the book, foundational Scriptures used in the book, along with discussing the early days of my relationship with Tom, including the agony of waiting. Chapter 2 encourages a commitment to God, while Chapters 3 and 4 address things to do while waiting. Chapters 3–9 provide the necessary ingredients for developing and enhancing healthy relationships with God and others in your quest to confident love. While you may read the chapters in any order, I encourage you to read them sequentially. This book does not exhaust every topic, and some could potentially be a stand-alone book. In your

PREFACE AND PRAYER

fellowship with God, He may direct you to go a little deeper with additional Bible study and counseling (if needed).

- I share personal stories throughout the book, representing all phases of the relationship (i.e., singleness, dating, courtship, engagement, and marriage). These stories are not in chronological order but are provided where appropriate to demonstrate personal and practical application.
- Tom and I say “I love you” several times a day—at the end of every conversation, exchange, or departure (face-to-face, phone or text). Several years ago, I began to realize that I tell Tom I love him more than I say these words to God, and decided I need to do better in my relationship with Him. In your journey with me through this book, I have included “I love You” to God in the prayers to possibly encourage or transform a new habit for you in your genuine expression of love and worship to our God.
- Each chapter includes acrostics and SPAs (Scriptures, Prayers, and Actions) to help you remember and apply the content to your life, assessing and addressing factors impacting relationships and marriage (e.g., character, experiences, expectations, and challenges). If you are divorced or have been in a long-term relationship, you may want to consider reflecting on those experiences during the action steps (when appropriate) to learn from them and mitigate risks of those challenges in future relationships.
- As I do not know where you are in your relationship (e.g., dating, not dating, courting, engaged), I interchangeably refer to your potential husband as friend, man, boyfriend, etc.

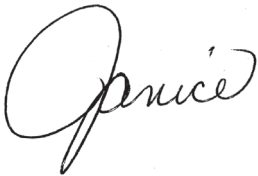
CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

- Recognizing that everyone reading this book may not marry, I pray that you will glean principles that will help you on your journey to be God's best, have healthier relationships, and share treasures of God's truth with others as you enjoy confident love in Him.

My maternal grandma's expression of love for my grandpa was "I love me some Jim." Well, following in her footsteps, I love me some Tom! I love marriage with him! I attribute the success of our marriage (although far from perfect) to a marriage culture founded on the Word of God—the basis for our beliefs, values, character development, behavior, and decisions. Likewise, I implore you not to compromise your Christian faith requirement as you seek confident love. I pray that you will date and marry a man who has sacrificial love for you and with whom you can work together as an effective team to fulfill God's purpose so that when this life is over, you each will hear God say, "Well done!" I pray that God will do exceedingly more than you can ask or imagine as you operate in His power in every area of your life (Eph. 3:20).

May confident love be yours!

Blessings and love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Prudence". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the page.

Acknowledgements

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for Your love for me in sending Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for me. Thank You for the fellowship we enjoy and entrusting me with this assignment. I love You and pray that through the power of Your Holy Spirit, You are pleased and will say, “Well done!”

Thank you, Tom, for the love, friendship—the everything—we share. I could not imagine life without you! Thank you for your godly character, prayers, patience, support, and encouragement throughout our marriage and during this project. Thank you for your confidence in me in every area of life. I am overjoyed that God saw fit to bring us together . . . ’til death us do part. I love you!

Thank you, Mom, for your strong faith in God, prayers, commitment to God’s Word, unconditional love, personal sacrifices, and encouragement throughout my life. You are the prayer warrior and pillar of strength, for whom I am grateful. I love you!

Thank you, BJ Whitley, for your friendship and seeing something in Tom and me that would cause you to introduce us. You are the greatest matchmaker!

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

Thank you, Rev. Dr. Marshal Ausberry, Sr. for being an excellent pastor who stands firmly on God's Word and for providing all the counseling in our singleness, pre-marriage, and post-wedding tune-up. You helped us build our marriage on a solid foundation, and we thank you.

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Thank you to the host of family and friends who prayed for me and encouraged me along the way. As you know, this book has been a long time coming. So, please praise the Lord with me!

Tom and I love you all! May God bless each of you in an Ephesians 3:20 way! May you too enjoy *confident love!*

Before I Said Yes

Introduction

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph. 3:20-21 NIV)

I had just moved to Northern Virginia (Fairfax) and had not met a lot of people. One fall Sunday afternoon, I was standing in the church foyer, chatting with my newfound friend and fellow Sunday School classmate, BJ, an accomplished entrepreneur. On previous occasions, we had had conversations regarding the possibilities of her speaking at a Johns Hopkins alumni event. This time, out of nowhere, she asked, “Are you dating anyone?” This question caught me off guard, and before I could determine a response, replaying the question in slow motion in my head, she went on to say, “One of my business clients asked me to find his son a Christian wife.” As she proceeded to tell me about this nice, young Christian business associate, I now have this big

question mark on my forehead, representing the questions in my heart. What? She doesn't know me that well. Who is this guy? Why marriage and not friendship first? Why did she have to say, *wife*? How can I be confident of not making another mistake in relationships? Well, finally, I mustered up a response, "I am OK with being someone's friend; but, I am not interested in the title of *wife* right now." She then discussed the possibilities of a group dinner date: she, her husband, this business associate, and yours truly.

As I contemplated this exchange and the potential of meeting someone on a blind date with an audience of people I am just getting to know, I thought of the possible dating blunders with all eyes on us. There could be the silence, not knowing what to say, no common interests, and the misery of not clicking and having to endure the dinner with all the smiles and niceties. I decided I didn't want that. I had gone on a group blind date once many years ago, and all of the above happened; but, in that case, I must say, I didn't have the warm and fuzzy from the start. It was, more or less, a favor to get a colleague off my back. So, this go-around, I decided I needed to get ahead of the train. Several weeks passed, and I had not talked with BJ. However, when I saw her again, I suggested that she just give us each other's number, and we take it from there. She did her part and provided the 411. He didn't call me, and I certainly didn't call him.

Fast forward with me to Christmas. BJ told me that she invited him to the church Christmas play with hopes that we could meet and possibly have dinner afterward. While I was intrigued and wanted to meet him, my sister's college graduation scheduled the same weekend of the church play saved me. Later, I found out that he did attend, and to be honest, I was a little curious about what I may have missed, and also what things may have been like if I had been there. Nevertheless, I did not regret being with my family to celebrate my sister's graduation. I

also had the rare pleasure of being home to celebrate my birthday along with my most favorite time of year, Christmas.

After Christmas, my sister, Cindy, moved to Northern Virginia with me, an answer to my prayers. We went to my church the following Sunday, the last Sunday in the year. During the welcome, all first-time visitors were asked to stand and state their name. Well, it just so happened that this mystery man whom BJ planned to introduce me to was one of the visitors; but, BJ was out of town, attending a funeral. This church has four sections of pews. My sister and I were sitting center-left, and he sat in the far-left section and a few rows behind us. In essence, we shared the same aisle.

I whispered to my sister, "That's him. What am I to do?"

She said, "You have to speak to him because you now know what he looks like; he only knows your name. It will be messed up if you don't talk to him." At that time, we were living in a pre-social media world (i.e., pre-Facebook and LinkedIn) so this was wise advice from my sister and would have been easy for her as she was and is a very outgoing lady with lots of male friends. I, on the other hand, was somewhat shy and old-school regarding men. So, there were inner struggles and discomfort, but I knew in my heart of hearts that speaking to him was the right thing to do. After the service, I did just that and introduced my introverted, shy self to him. After all, it wasn't that difficult because I had to pass his pew to walk out of the church. Greeting the mystery man, Tom, was very quick; there was not a lot of talking on either side. I guess you have to be careful what you ask. I didn't want an audience, and thankfully I didn't have one with BJ being out of town. Of course, with her outgoing personality, I am certain the encounter would have been much better. Too late now!

I was hoping and praying Tom would call me soon after the exchange. Since I had not heard from him, I began to question things: the introduction (which was awkward), my looks, and his interest or the

lack thereof. He was 5' 8" and I was 5' 5" so I wondered if he preferred short, petite women. All these questions and no answers. Nevertheless, we finally talked in mid-January 1998. He asked what I was doing the upcoming weekend. Cindy and I were going to see the movie, *Amistad*. He wanted to see it too and decided to join us for the movie—a date of three.

Following the movie, Tom and I went to dinner; and, little sister went home. As we talked over dinner, I knew there was something unique and extraordinary about him. While I did not know if he was the one, I knew he would be the standard by which other prospects would be measured. And, thank God, he was and is the one! We married in November 2001. I will continue to share our story throughout this book.

This fairytale romance—the journey to our commitment to love each other until death us do part—came with its share of waiting, prayers, and tears as we progressed through every phase of the relationship. We both needed, in our special, individual way, to be confident that this was the relationship God wanted us to have. Even with the challenges, irritations, and frustrations along the way, I must say without a doubt, every aspect of our relationship has been great and truly exceeded our imaginations (Eph. 3:20).

I am sure as you read this book, you will agree with me that waiting for Mr. Right, a new job, promotion, or anything you want badly is certainly not easy, especially when you feel so out of control and do not understand the reasons for the wait. You cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel or God's master plan at work. People are riding on your last nerve with questions about why you are not married, and the voices seem to be louder as the biological clock ticks away. All you know is that today your heart is filled with dreams and aspirations of the perfect mate, perfect wedding, and perfect marriage where you both live happily ever after.

BEFORE I SAID YES

So, what do you do as you wait for Mr. Right? Most importantly, what is God doing in you, through you, and for you during the waiting season? Great questions, but they are not always top-of-mind from a human perspective. We want what we want when we want it—NOW! Waiting is indeed easier said than done. But it does work when one is yielded to God and trusting that He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows the man you will marry better than the man knows himself; and He knows your future and what is best for you better than you will ever know or imagine. So, hold on my friend, and let me tell you my story with a hope and a prayer that it will encourage you on your journey.

My Journey of Waiting

As I shared earlier, Tom and I had our first date in January 1998. We talked occasionally and saw each other an average of about once every two months. In essence, the relationship went very slowly at first although we had not planned it that way. Life, busyness, and questions got in the way. However, this pace was the best thing for us as it afforded us time to develop a true, genuine friendship. We had time between dates and conversations to assess what we had learned about each other, what we had learned about ourselves, and God's will about the relationship. The challenge was that neither of us knew what each other thought about the other person or the future of the relationship.

With all the unknowns and uncertainties, things began to heat up a little during the Christmas 1998. Cindy and I hosted a Christmas party, inviting our singles Sunday School class, friends from graduate school, and other friends we had developed during our brief time in Northern Virginia. Tom, of course, was invited. When he arrived, he brought us a hostess gift—a good sign that his parents had raised him well. As my birthday was a few days later, he had a gift for me—a small, framed quotation that read, “When I count my blessings, I count you twice.” Well, well, what was a girl to do with a gift like that? Naturally, I began to speculate and ask myself all sorts of questions: Does he like me? What does it mean? Needless to say, I was smiling all over myself, and that first gift is sitting on my nightstand this very minute.

As Christmas quickly approached, we had already experienced some snow and the forecast did not look good for traveling home for the holidays. We wanted to go home, and our dad even offered to come pick us up, but we did not want to take any risks. During the previous year, my sister and I had actually skidded on the highway due to an unpredicted snow, and we did not want that experience again. Therefore, I began to plan a special Christmas dinner for Cindy and me. Once

Tom found out we were not going home, he invited us to his parents' house for Christmas dinner. Assuming Cindy would not be interested in spending Christmas with strangers and I was certainly not going to leave her alone on Christmas, I regretfully declined. Nevertheless, while shopping for Christmas dinner ingredients, I also bought a box of candy for a hostess gift just in case there was a change in plans. You never know. Later in the day, during a conversation with Cindy and my mom, they both said we should go. So, I called Tom back that Christmas Eve night and left him a message to accept the invitation, if it was still open.

On Christmas Day, Tom kindly picked us up and took us to his parents' home. Now there were lots of questions and thoughts going on in my mind. What does this mean since we had not had the DTR (define the relationship) conversation? I had never met his parents or family before, yet I was meeting his family on Christmas Day.

While his mom, sister, and brother-in-law were still preparing dinner, Tom was sent out to run an errand. His dad entertained Cindy and me, showing us family pictures. Dad George is a conversationalist at his best and was very comfortable talking to us and put us at ease in our exchanges with him. What caught our attention was that he knew so much about us, more than one would imagine for people who are "just friends." At dinner, his sister appeared to know a lot as well. So, naturally, when we got home, Cindy and I were speculating again about what this all could mean.

Now, New Year's Eve is approaching and the weather forecast will not permit us to go home. So, again we stayed in Northern Virginia. A few days prior, Tom asked if he could go with me to the New Year's Eve service at my church if I was in town. With questions on my mind, I reluctantly said, "Yes." However, after we hung up the phone, I decided to call him back to ask what his intentions were for this relationship. Well, Mr. George could not answer the question; nevertheless, I allowed him to go with me to church anyway even though my initial thought

was that I did not want to bring an uncommitted male with me to church especially on New Year's Eve. Later that month (January 1999), we finally had the DTR discussion. During this phone conversation that started Sunday night and ended around 4:00 a.m. on Monday, we expressed our feelings to each other and our desire to move into a courtship. Needless to say, with very little sleep, we survived Monday, walking on cloud nine.

Throughout the months that followed, Tom and I enjoyed each other's company and meeting more of each other's family and friends with no further discussion on the future of the relationship. Tom was very creative in planning special dates and was the perfect gentlemen. I would laugh sometimes when he gave me cards wherein he had crossed out the author's name and signed his. I especially loved and cherished the first Valentine's Day card. He was not quite ready to say he loved me so he signed his name and drew a thermometer that had the word *like* at the bottom and the word *love* at the top. He colored it in three-fourths to the top. What an original and cleverly honest way to define his feelings for me. And, I loved it! And love was not too far away. One beautiful March Sunday afternoon as we sat gazing at the Potomac River, he told me he loved me, which was music to my ears! I knew I loved him as well; so now I could share my love, too—I just wanted and needed for him to say it first. He was truly an original romantic with a genuine love for God, which drew my heart. If he was not the one, he was setting a very impressive standard for anyone to measure up to in my eyes. So, I was determined to wait for him with God's guidance and green lights.

As time progressed and I was enjoying every date, every conversation, every encounter, I had many questions about the future. I wondered where the relationship was going, especially since we had been dating for almost two years from the first date including that turtle's-pace, slow start. Because time is very precious to me, and there is none to waste, coupled with the fact that my previous marriage ended in divorce, I

was prayerfully trying very hard to guard my heart, although bitten by love, and ensure that I would not make another mistake. To that end, I decided I needed some clear direction from God. Now, by no means was I trying to pressure Tom into anything; however, I believed that as grown people in our mid-30s and as Christians who rely on God for direction, we should have had a better sense of what we wanted and what God's will is for our lives. In this case, the relationship needed to progress or come to an end.

One weekend (September 1999), I decided to fast and pray, asking God for direction on what I should do as I valued my time and wanted to know without a doubt God's will for my life regarding this relationship with Tom. As a single, I always went to bed with the TV on low, needing a little light and sound. And, most of the time, the TV would be on a news station (e.g., CNN). This time during the fast, I put it on a Christian station, TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network). On my bed, I also had the *Experiencing God* devotional by Henry and Richard Blackaby and Dr. Charles Stanley's book, *The Glorious Journey* (now renamed *Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living*). When I woke up that Saturday morning, I thought I was picking up the *Experiencing God* devotional, but I actually picked up *The Glorious Journey*. When I opened it, the chapter, "Waiting," was staring me in the face. As I read it, I felt God was speaking directly to me about my relationship with Tom. You may call this coincidental. I call it the sovereignty of God because He knew what I needed to hear and read. Immediately after I read the chapter, there were some kids on the TBN station singing the words, "Lord, I am waiting on You." Need I say more? My fast had just begun, but I believed God had already instructed me to wait on Him. So, I was obedient.

In February 2000, February 20 and 21 to be exact, five months from my initial fast regarding the relationship. I was fed up with Tom although he didn't know it, and quite frankly, frustrated with God. And

I needed an answer and confirmation because I did not see any progress in the relationship. On Sunday morning, February 20, I wrote in my prayer journal: “Show me, Lord, what You want me to do. Speak to me clearly. I am ready for this relationship to go one way or the other . . . Dear Lord, I know I cannot make You do anything. You are God, and You are sovereign. Nevertheless, I beg and plead for a miracle . . . Please make a move even if it is the end. I cannot waste my time . . . Please do abundantly more than I can ask or think (Eph. 3:20).”

The following Monday morning as I was talking with God, the Holy Spirit interceded for me, praying what I could not verbalize (Rom. 8:26). And while writing in my prayer journal for that day, February 21, 2000, at 6:26 a.m., I remember telling God with anguish in my stomach, “Help me to be obedient to Your Word. If I am to wait for Tom, please make it emphatically clear *today*. I need to hear from *You*. I do not need to hear from anyone else but You.”

I do not remember what I read in my devotional or Bible study that morning, but I do remember that the Bible verse for the day on my desk at work read, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him” (Ps. 37:7 NIV). The verse for Saturday/Sunday, which I also read on Monday, stated, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

I said, “OK God. You want me to wait some more.”

I tell you the truth; I am afraid not to obey Him, and continued to wait. And, fifteen years later, during the writing of this book, I am so glad I did.

Let me tell you more. It was April 2000, and I began to see progress. I was in Los Angeles on a business trip, staying over Saturday night to decrease travel expenses significantly. As I talked with Tom on Saturday, he informed me he was going to my church on Sunday, which was a surprise to me since his policy was not to join a church where his girlfriend attended. So, his plans to attend my church during my absence made me go, “Hmmm?”

A month later, in May, Tom joined my church; it was a sign that the ring was on the way. In July, I decided to fast again because while I believed God had been guiding us and endorsed the relationship all along, I now needed His final divine confirmation that Tom truly, truly was the one God wanted me to marry. For a week (Monday through Friday) I prayed and fasted (only eating fruits and vegetables) for divine answers. On July 24, 2000, my prayer journal read: “Dear Lord, today I start my five-day fast for Your will regarding my relationship with Tom. Please confirm this week that he is or is not the person You want me to marry. Give me peace with the decision. Please do immeasurably abundantly more than I can ask or think (Eph. 3:20). In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.”

During this fast, I learned more about God; He does have a sense of humor. He knows how to communicate effectively as He is omniscient, knowing what we will read in our devotions and Bible study, and whom we may listen to on the radio or in person. He sometimes has a pattern for communicating His answers. However, since I was still learning how He speaks (and still am), all antennas were up to be in tune with everything around me and what God could be saying. Monday came; I had my regular devotions and Bible study. Then I went to work, and there it was! The Scripture verse on the calendar for that day was: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2 ESV).

As I reflected on the day and the fast throughout the week, I began to see that God redirected the light from Tom to me to help me address some unknown flaws in me and my expectations for a mate and marriage. I will continue to elaborate on this throughout the book. In this case, God was showing me that I was looking at the relationship selfishly—what I needed or wanted in a husband—and I was taking my focus off God, the Provider of all my needs. Through this particular verse, God was reminding me that in marriage or any relationship, I also need to consider how I am to help bear another’s burdens.

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

The other calendar Scriptures throughout the week included:

- July 25 – “Yea, thou art my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness” (2 Sam. 22:29 RSV).
- July 26 – “Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful” (1 Cor. 13:5).
- July 27 – “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11 ESV).
- July 28 – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1 RSV).

I ended the fast with a solid green light that Tom was the man for me to marry because of his heart to obey Christ. This heaven-sent confirmation was the assurance I needed on the journey to confident love. The concerns and reservations I had been having were really about God needing to address some things in me: my view of the relationship, dependence on God, and expectations of marriage versus focusing on assessing Tom’s ability to fulfill my somewhat flawed expectations. What a switch! God turned His light on me to point out things to not only help me to answer the forthcoming marriage proposal in the affirmative, but to also give me Scriptures, resolution, and confidence to keep me grounded in marriage. What a blessing that was truly beyond my imagination!

Finally, in November 2000, Tom asked me to marry him, and we wedded in November 2001. I will tell you that story in another chapter. Marriage with Tom is great and beyond my imagination; the proposal, wedding, and the marriage were certainly worth the wait. Even during challenging times—health issues, career issues, and family crisis requiring much prayer—I have this confident love for Tom because of our

BEFORE I SAID YES

confidence in the sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God.

I can only imagine how you feel as you wait, regardless of the reason for your wait or what you are waiting for: a mate, a job, a house, a health assessment. I have lived through all of these challenges and then some with much agony, pouring my heart out to God and pleading with Jesus to intercede for me (Heb. 7:23–28; Rom. 8:26). So, my advice to you is to *wait* on God and trust Him for the results that will exceed your expectations (Eph. 3:20), for He truly acts on behalf of those who wait for Him (Isa. 64:4).

What about You? What's Your Story?

Now, enough about me. What about you? After all, this is the reason you are reading this book. I am sure you, like everyone else, have a story to tell about dating—some good, some bad, and some you just want to keep to yourself. What is your story as you prayerfully wait for God to send your knight in shining armor?

I imagine you are a wonderful person, certainly not perfect because none of us are, who wants marriage and is seeking His best. You may have been on this road a long time or are just getting started. As you desire marriage, you have your feelers out with your family, friends, and colleagues, but Mr. Right just will not show up. You may even have tried Internet dating, but to no avail. You sometimes look back at missed opportunities with possible regrets or waiting for the call that never comes or is delayed. You experience times when there are several prospects at the same time, and then there are the serious droughts—no dates and no prospects. Or, perhaps you are married and want encouragement in your relationship.

Whatever may be your case, you are so sick of the waiting that you cry out, “Why, God? Why, God? I thought I was obeying You and trying to seek Your will. Why do You have me in a state of waiting and at other people’s mercy?” (At least that’s how you feel.) “Although I know for sure You are in control, I am at a point where I do not want to talk to anyone else about dating or marriage. I am tired of the disappointments. I want kids—a family. When are You going to deliver?” However, in your agony, you are determined not to give up because you believe it is God’s will for you to marry at His appointed time. You continue to look your best at the gym, supermarket, and mall. You also attend various functions, socials, and networking events with some possible hope Mr. Right just might be there. Let’s play out a few scenarios I am confident you can relate to with your special twist.

There may have been times in your life when you have had a nonchalant attitude about dating. Your friends may have, on occasion, set you up with a prospect. You met him for lunch; you connected in some areas but not on others. At some point in the conversation, you wondered why you were there and question what your friend thought when she set you up. During the conversation, you even realized that your friend had left out some details, however small, that clearly indicated that there was no possibility for a just-friends relationship and certainly not a match made in heaven. The lunch date ended; you both gave your cordial goodbyes. He did not call you, and you were not interested in any follow-up. There were no feelings of rejection. All feelings were mutual.

Now you may have also experienced times when you had found favor with dates coming left and right. You had several dates with two different men in one week, and you concluded that God was clearly showing up and showing out! The prospects excited you. The chemistry and some interest were there on both sides. Because you did not want to waste anyone's time and cause unnecessary hurt for them or yourself, you began to assess which one better met your requirements. In your mind, while keeping both options open, you leaned towards one, but as time went by, you found out that he was interested in someone else. But that was OK because you knew you had another prospect who was really more exciting and promising, he just did not have as many of his ducks in a row. However, you knew he was also interested in you. Wonderful! He talked about you to some mutual friends and acquaintances, and you eventually met his family—a positive sign. However, in the back of your mind, something did not sit well with you, and some of your close friends and relatives shared some of their concerns. Nevertheless, there was still something about him that made you want to keep the relationship, believing he could still possibly be the one. Over time, you gradually saw things go awry. A dear friend told you he had moved on, but because you still had some hope, you tried to stay in contact with

him. He said he would call, but he never did. So, you finally take your friend's advice and move on as well.

In the midst of your questioning God about your life and your dating or the lack thereof, you met a wonderful guy with a great job and promising future. On the first date, there was a mutual attraction; he liked you, and you liked him. Things moved quickly, you met his family and friends, and he was ready to tie the knot. He met most of your requirements. You never intended someone to meet them all, but you did not have peace about moving forward; something just didn't seem right. "What in the world is going on? God, what do You want me to do?" you asked. You decided to go down the path to accepting his proposal. But again, something was not right, and you also began to see things in his character that would not work in a marriage. You shared your concerns with your closest friends and relatives, and they agreed that this was not the right match for you. With no other prospects in sight, you said thank you, but no thank you. Praise the Lord that you made the right decision before it was too late!

While you were at peace with the decision, the next few months were filled with much agony and affliction as you reflected on your dating experiences. What have I done wrong? Why am I going through this when I only want to do God's will? Nevertheless, you were so thankful that you saw things in this guy before you stayed on a road leading to a life of pure hell. While you had matured in your spiritual walk, becoming more in tune to God's direction for your life, another prospect comes your way. But this time, you were able to size him up from the very beginning and decide not to even date him. Perhaps there was no mutual attraction, or he was just too boring!

On the other hand, perhaps you had been in a situation wherein you had a pleasant phone conversation with an excellent catch, and you set up your first date. You loved everything about him and even found out that some mutual acquaintances sang his praises. Was this the sovereignty

of God shining on you? So, you began to think he was the one. As you continued to learn more about him, you realized that if this relationship turns into marriage, you would have to make some personal sacrifices that would impact your family and perhaps your relationship with God. But you were OK with that because he was perfect. You wanted a relationship with him such that you found it hard to pray, “Lord, let Your will be done.” Because you wanted to follow the heart of God, you finally prayed the prayer with tears in your eyes, believing that God knows tomorrow and what is best for you. Some weeks went by, and the relationship ended; he was in a dating relationship with someone else. Although you felt a little rejected, you were also very relieved as you realized the sacrifice was too much, and there must be more fish in the sea. Some months later you also found out more things about him that caused you to thank God for His sovereignty, saving you many tears, heartache, and pain.

You continued to seek God’s will while asking many questions about relationships, your future, and why you were not married, especially when you saw less attractive women with not as much going on as you, ending up with great men. Where is mine? What is wrong with me? What are You doing to me? Why are You allowing this? God, where are You? And you soon realized that just because you did not see the floods of dates, this did not mean God was not there or overlooking you. You knew in your heart of hearts that God was sovereign. You recognized you were still irritated, upset, frustrated, and lacked patience.

You later experienced favor again with several prospects. You met one guy who seemed to be really nice. You liked him, and he liked you. However, he was moving a little too slowly. As time went by, you had a date with another guy who was in hot pursuit. He knew what he wanted and wasted no time. He wanted you to meet his family and friends, and because you had been praying constantly, he did seem like a great catch. So, you were continuing to trust God to lead and guide you.

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

There may have also been times where you were in a relationship that you believed with all your heart was where God wanted you to be. However, things were moving slower than you would like, and you did not know what was holding him back. You also encountered some tough times and wondered if he is the one? While there were other prospects, you decided that you would remain committed to the courtship, praying, talking things out, and asking God for further direction and clarification.

You also may have been in a long-term relationship with questions about the future—should you continue in this relationship or end it. All of your dates, conversations, and encounters were very positive. You met his family and friends and developed great relationships. However, as time went by, you noticed he was not as attentive as you would like, and there were things about him that frustrated you. As time passed—six months, then nine months, then twelve months—you began to wonder where this relationship was going. Do I really want to be in this relationship? Are we wasting each other's time? Since you thought you had prayerfully made the right decision, what were you to do? You liked the guy, but you were not comfortable being yourself. He did not return calls as quickly as you would like, and sometimes you even felt ignored. You were not growing as a person. You had become stagnant while trying to fit in with him and his friends. As you grew closer to God, you began to see some discrepancies in your boyfriend's character that made you question any possible future with him. But again, you enjoyed all the dates; he knew how to make you laugh, you saw a bright future, and you even liked the sound of your name when you added his last name to yours. Where do you go from here? You were standing at the crossroads again, wondering what it would have been like if you had moved forward with another prospect. In your frustration, you cried out, "Dear God, talk to me. What do You want me to do as I wait on You?"

Today is no different. You have questions and concerns. "What do I do as I wait on You?" Today is the beginning of your answer.

What to Do While Waiting

To answer this question, let us take a look at one of the Old Testament books of the Bible, Esther. Esther was a beautiful young woman, which gave her favor in being selected as part the king's court, vying for the position of queen. While in the court, she had ample time to prepare herself to meet the king. She was given maids to assist her with the foods and beauty treatments to make her outward appearance attractive to the king. Inwardly, Esther was also beautiful; she had a committed, submissive heart, and she was a woman of purpose, willing to put her life on the line for the welfare of her people. She was truly beautiful inside and out. Esther became queen and saved her people. In essence, Esther had an opportunity to run for the office of the queen, and she successfully prepared herself for meeting the king.

So, let's pretend you are Esther today in the king's court, and you have an unknown period of time to make yourself ready for your king. What are you doing to prepare yourself for the interview as you apply for the job of wife? What are your strengths and challenges? What are your strategies and execution plans for enhancing your strengths while working to develop your growth areas? What is the differentiator that makes you attractive, set apart for the man God has for you? What are your interview questions for your prospective king? Are they based on the Bible or man-made guidelines from worldly standards? How can you be certain he is the one? How can you have confident love? Most importantly, are you willing to wait for God's timing to receive it?

As you wait for your Mr. Right, I want to encourage you to partake of a spiritual SPA retreat to make yourself ready for your king and all the blessings God has in store for you. During our time together as you journey through this book, I will expound upon the key Scriptures God gave me during my quiet time with Him (i.e., devotions, Bible reading, and fasts) as I waited. These Scriptures encouraged me and helped me

to address some hidden spiritual flaws and concerns that I may not have been aware existed. These Scriptures helped me to deal with my *stuff* and paved the way for me to say yes to a marriage proposal that has brought much joy and happiness beyond my imagination. The wait was a blessing that fulfilled God's perfect plan in His perfect time. May this SPA retreat be a blessing to you as you meditate on God's Word and pray for God's direction for your life. May you experience confident love.

In this book, I will give you Scriptures, prayers, and actions (SPAs) that will prayerfully transform you and your relationships, especially in your dating, courting, and marriage. You may find that you have excelled in some of these areas and could write a book. There may be some areas where you struggle and honestly may not want to apply any of these ideas to your life. While in other cases as you read and pray, reflecting on your life, God may bring something else to your attention. No matter what, please remember that none of us are perfect, but we strive to become more like Christ every day. So, please do not get discouraged; just continue to ask for God's help in transforming your life one moment at a time. As time goes by, you will see growth and others will see growth while you become God's bride without a spot or wrinkle. As much as possible, I have tried to maintain a conversational style; however, due to the seriousness of the topics, especially our relationship with our Lord, there may be times when my tone may be a little stern, reflecting my passion for laying the right foundation for confident love.

May God bless you on your quest to become God's best and for God to put you in the right place at the right time for your Mr. Right to find you. May God give you the wisdom you need to make the right decisions prayerfully in all phases of the relationship to edify one another, becoming the people God wants you to be individually and collectively. May you be blessed beyond your imagination with confident love!

SPA Treatment 1: Wait

Scriptures for Meditation:

- “For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him” (Isa. 64:4).
- “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope’” (Jer. 29:11).
- “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (Josh. 1:8).

Prayer of Transformation:

Dear Heavenly Father, today I thank You for my singleness and all the blessings You have given me. I thank You for Your sovereignty and perfect love toward me. I confess that there are times when I don't understand or like the fact I am single. Nevertheless, I know that You know what is best for me. Today, as I begin to read this book, I ask that You guide my heart and help me to understand the principles that You want me to gain from this reading. I also pray for spiritual discernment to help me discard any content that may not apply to me for this season of my life. Please also give me insight regarding friendships and relationships that may not be right for me according to Your standards. Please transform my mind to think Your thoughts and follow Your direction in my singleness, in dating, and in every aspect of my life. I ask

CONFIDENT LOVE: WORTH THE WAIT

for your Holy Spirit to rule and reign in me and lead me into a dating relationship and marriage that will exceed my expectations. Please help me wait solely on You in this request for confident love. May my life, dating, and marriage be a testimony of You and give You glory. I love You! In Jesus' name I, pray. Amen.

Actions for Transformation:

1. Establish or enhance a quality fellowship with God each day through reading and studying His Word, prayer, and praise.
2. Consistently pray as you read this book, asking God to prick your heart and transform you in the areas He deems necessary to prepare you for successful living and marriage, discarding anything in this book that the Holy Spirit does not give you peace about its application for you.
3. Wait with high expectation for what God will do in you, through you, and for you, as you obey and depend on Him, walking in faith for success in every area of your life.