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This book is one woman's freedom story. Jesus is the Author—the One who redeems, restores, and rewrites stories. Young women learn to cultivate a deep, satisfying love relationship with Jesus that shapes every other desire.

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by Rebecca St. James 11

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## CHAPTER 1

# and the bride wore white

### *deciding to live with sexual integrity*

I met Bob Gresh just after he got back from a tennis trip to Florida.

He was sunburned, grinning, and a little too confident—at least that’s what I thought since he was flirting with a girl he just met. (I’d be lying if I told you I didn’t like it.) His tan, his white teeth, his peeling nose—it’s all frozen in my memory like a highlight reel.

Two years later, he proposed to me in front of two thousand people.

On our wedding day, I wore white and walked in on rose petals while violinists played the “Wedding March.” It was beautiful, sacred, and just a little over the top, exactly how I dreamed it.

We made the uncommon decision to face our guests as we said our vows. I wanted them to see

## And the Bride Wore White

our happiness. The kiss? Simple. Sweet.

At the reception, a whole orchestra played while guests were treated to a culinary symphony.

When we attempted a clumsy waltz, the applause of our guests wrapped around us like a warm hug from two hundred people at once.

Eventually, we made it to our honeymoon suite.

I stood in the bathroom way too long. Trying to decide how to walk out.

Do I wear the sexy lace thing? Too much?

Satin PJs? Too little?

Makeup? Lights on? Off?

I overthought every detail.

Finally, I chose the PJs. Swiped on a little makeup. And hoped the lights would be low.

But the moment I opened the door and saw his face, I felt safe. And rewarded.

We had waited.

And that felt so good.



Jesus was once asked, “Which is the most important commandment?” (Matt. 22:36 NLT).

He said, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39 NLT).

Love God.

Love others.

Of course that begins with *receiving* His love.

Do you know how much Jesus loves you?

I, myself, got confused. If you asked me, I would tell you God loved me, but my emotions betrayed what I believed deep down in my heart—that I needed to be good to be loved.

Here's where it gets challenging: There *are* rules in the Bible. And they matter.

Not because we can earn God's love, but to help us express it.

We don't obey to be loved.

We obey *because* we are loved.

That results in loving others well, because when we express His love in obedience, we don't hurt each other.

In these pages, I won't just ask you to live differently—I'll invite you to love differently.

## loving differently

God uses many things to teach us about His love including marriage between one man and one woman. This is why it's such a beautiful thing when a bride and groom become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Oneness is at the heart of God's intention for marriage. Sex will be one part of that, but there's much more to it. The Bible has a specific Hebrew word for it: *yada*.

### guess what most girls want

*Thinking about marriage and motherhood someday? You're not alone.<sup>1</sup>*

FUTURE HOPE	% OF TEENS (15-19)
Want to get married	95%
Want to have children	87%

*It's okay to want those things. We're wired for love and connection.*

***Yada: to know, to be made known.***

With not one mention of our bodies, *yada* has more to do with emotional and spiritual familiarity. When the Bible describes a husband and wife as "one flesh," it means much more than connecting

their bodies. It's *total* unity—physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational. Two lives becoming deeply connected in every way.

This raises an important question: What happens when physical intimacy is separated from whole-life commitment?

**To have physical union without having  
whole-life union is a lack of integrity.**

—TIM KELLER<sup>2</sup>

Let's think about the word *integrity*.

It comes from a Latin root word that communicates that something is whole or undivided. When we combine integrity and sexuality, we mean that we view our sex and gender as parts of our total being. They are consistently integrated into our lives, rather than split off.

One of today's most respected Christian teachers and clinical psychologists, Dr. Juli Slattery, has dedicated her life to helping the church understand sex. She says sexual integrity shows up like this:

**My sexual choices are a consistent expression  
of my relational and spiritual commitments.**

—JULI SLATTERY<sup>3</sup>

## **yada, yada, yikes**

Here's the problem: Culture talks about sex without the soul. The church talks about the soul but rarely about sex. Many people are left with disjointed lives—either following their desires without discipleship or following Jesus while silently battling their sexual desires alone.

And then there's modern technology: You don't even have to be with someone to experience sexual pleasure. Things like porn separate the act from any attempt at whole-life intimacy. This is creating a terrifying trend: fewer real relationships.<sup>4</sup>

And here's what's honestly kind of scary: Technology like virtual

reality and artificial intelligence is about to escalate that trajectory.<sup>5</sup> High-tech goggles or devices will simulate fake relationships that feel very real. Satan has masterminded a pathway for us to separate sex from all relational and spiritual commitments. Entirely.

In the middle of all this, 70 percent of young women want Christian men to “man up” and ask them out.<sup>6</sup> They’re frustrated with boys who spend hours lost in *Call of Duty* while ignoring God’s actual call on their life to rise up, take responsibility, and step into manhood.

That longing isn’t shallow—it’s holy. This frustration is a cry for integrity. Deep down, it reflects a yearning for a world where sex isn’t separated from emotional depth and spiritual commitment. God’s good design for intimacy still lives in the hearts of His children.

But let’s be honest: The world is full of temptations. And while it’s easy for us to point out what guys are doing wrong, we face struggles too.

You feel it, don’t you?

In this book, I’ll share seven truths from God’s Word to help you sort through all that chaos.

Let’s start here:

*For the grace of God has appeared,  
bringing salvation for all people, training us to  
renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,  
and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives  
in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope,  
the appearing of the glory of our great God  
and Savior Jesus Christ.*

**TITUS 2:11-13**

**the guys are not  
off the hook**

*Guys are fully responsible  
for their sexual integrity.  
There are books written just  
for them. This one? It's for you.  
From one girl to another.  
Let's see what God's Word  
has to say to us.*

Self-control doesn't come naturally, especially when it comes to sex. That's where the grace of God comes in. Let me explain something important.

**God's grace is His love showing up when it's least deserved, but most needed.** The ultimate gift of God's grace is Jesus dying for us and saving us, but there are many gifts that accompany the presence of Jesus in our lives. In

Titus 2, the "grace" refers to God's help to draw us to God's Word and to aid us in understanding it. We simply cannot learn self-control without Him. Specifically, it is the Holy Spirit, our Helper, who empowers us to apply God's grace, producing in us the self-control we could never muster on our own (John 14:26; Gal. 5:22–23).

It is God's grace-filled, Spirit-empowered love that *trains* us—teaches us—to say no to all the worldly passions swirling around us.

In short: God's grace can be your teacher . . . if you let it.

I wish all my days were as beautiful as my wedding day.

Unfortunately, long before that day, I came to realize how difficult the path of sexual integrity can be. I came to God heartbroken.

Searching the Scriptures for direction, I discovered Titus 2:11–13. It was an invitation for my heart. I prayed, "Lord, teach me. I now know these temptations exist, but the only way I will be able to say no is if You teach me!" And from that moment on, God's sweet love directed me. His grace gave me strength.

The difference?

I had placed myself in God's presence to be taught.

*Will you?*

### **it's your turn—write your story!**

Now comes the most important part of this book. If you want these chapters to truly change your life, grab a journal. Because it's not what I write that will transform you—it's what *you* write that counts.

Start today with a letter to Him. Tell Him where you are in your story. Hand Him every part of your past. Ask for His help to understand His love and grace. If you've given in to any kind of temptation—gossip, lying, substance abuse, laziness, or sexual sin—confess it and receive His forgiveness. Ask God to be your teacher as you read through the pages of this book.

Go ahead! Pull out a journal—or even scrap paper—and begin. Or better yet, use the *And the Bride Wore White Study Journal*, which helps you to go deeper into the verses in each chapter.