

WHY CAN'T HE BE MORE LIKE ME?

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Excerpt

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WHY CAN'T HE BE MORE LIKE ME?

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PART I: This Isn't What I Expected

Chapter One

What Happened to my Dreams?

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

Wow! Who is that?

Eyeballs bulging, I stared at the stranger striding down the aisle of my small, predominantly British church in Nairobi, Kenya. Well over six feet, tanned, and dressed in a light khaki tropical suit, the man's physical appeal oozed out of him. He sat down, pulled out a small Bible from his pocket, and joined in the singing. I had to meet him.

At twenty-years old, I had lived and worked in Nairobi for three years. My parents returned to England two years earlier, when my father's stint with the Royal Air Force in Kenya finished.

My job as secretary to a high-ranking Kenyan in the University of Nairobi kept me busy. I enjoyed friendships with people of various nationalities. And, as a newly converted, somewhat unconventional young woman, I felt embraced by a loving group of older Christians. But, on the rebound from a going-nowhere relationship and with no family to lean on, loneliness consumed me. I longed for someone to belong to.

Watching the good-looking stranger, my mind whirled with excitement: *Who is this man? What is he doing in Nairobi? Has he moved here or is he just passing through? Is he*

single? How can I get introduced to him? If he is unattached, how can I invite him to our single's Bible study without looking like I'm interested? Perhaps he is God's answer to my fervent prayer. Maybe he's the one God intends for me.

So much for worshipping the Almighty! Hymns, prayers, and preaching swirled around me. I was far away on a cloud of dreams and fantasies. I couldn't wait for the service to end.

We did meet that morning and after a few months, Jim started attending the singles group when he was in town. Shy and reserved around me, I wondered for a year if anything would happen.

Finally, on a day vividly imprinted in my memory, we ran into each other at a local grocery store. Smiling down at me, Jim said, "I've wanted to ask you out. Are you free this Saturday night?"

Bells rang, heaven sang, and the angels celebrated. Right? Well, perhaps, but not for the same reasons I rejoiced. My dreams were coming true. But unknown to me, God had far more significant plans in mind. He intended to use my relationship with Jim to radically transform me into a very different person.

In Philippians, the apostle Paul says, "And I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns" (Philippians 1:6 TLB).

God had begun that good work in my life three years earlier when my friends, Rosalyn and Richard, invited me to their home for the weekend. After attending church, Richard asked when I had become a Christian. His question confused me. Wasn't everyone born in England automatically a Christian? By the end of our conversation, however, his explanation of the gospel showed me how far I was from God.

When Richard left me alone with my thoughts, I sat for what seemed like hours thinking about some poor choices I had made. Later that day, troubled by my guilty conscience, I asked God to forgive my sins and help me live in a new way.

Before long, the Holy Spirit made it clear that my colorful language, humorous but hurtful sarcasm, and tendency to flirt with whatever man I found attractive didn't exactly reflect the Lord. But these were only surface issues. In order to become who God had in mind, I needed a deep inner transformation. He knew just the circumstance to use: marriage.

Let's Be Honest

Yes, this is a book about marriage. But not the fairy-tale version where we dream of a man with movie-star looks, meet and date this model of perfection, quickly tie the knot surrounded by family and friends who adore him, and live happily ever after in wedded bliss.

This book is not a philosophical treatise on the wonders of the marital union. Nor is it a Scriptural exposition of how God intends marriage to picture Christ and His bride, the church.

Instead, this book takes an honest look at the unexpected struggles, disappointments, and choices we wrestle with when our dreams fizzle or shatter into pieces. Its purpose is to encourage you to give your broken dreams to God, discovering how He can use them in ways you never imagined to produce personal and spiritual growth.

This Book is For You If ...

Have you ever listened to talks on marriage, watched videos, or read books that left you weeping and unable to relate? In response to one article where the author wrote about her passionate and creative husband, I wanted to shout, "What about the rest of us? We don't have husbands who jump out of closets, bouquet in hand, delighting us over and over again with their love. Get real!"

If you identify with similar frustrations, if you're married to someone who isn't like you, someone you love but want to strangle at times, this book is for you. If your spouse is someone you cozy up to but clash with on numerous occasions; someone who drives you to tears and fervent prayers for God to help you run away; someone who can release tense moments between you by making you laugh even when you want to stay mad, this book is for you.

If you're dealing with fizzled dreams, I promise I won't leave you in a painful place, dwelling on what went wrong and stuck in blame and bitterness. We will visit these issues because we need to learn about ourselves, our spouse, and what triggers our flare-ups. But my heart is to provide you with hope and practical help to strengthen your marriage.

Each chapter in this book tackles common frustration-producing issues. You know, the stuff that makes you scream: "How can you think like that? What is the matter with you? Why aren't you normal, like me?"

You'll have an opportunity to reflect on how you and your spouse respond to various situations. You'll also find life-changing Scriptural principles you can apply immediately. Like the wise woman described in Proverbs 14:1, you'll learn practical ways to build your relationship rather than tearing it down through negative reactions.

My passionate desire is to help you grow in understanding yourself and the man you married. He is not just like you, but God loves him and can work in him, despite his flaws (and yours).

I also pray that you'll ask God to take you to a new level of spiritual maturity as you begin to analyze your relationship, accept the fact that you are two different people, and learn to adapt and appreciate each other.

Let me assure you, if you ask God for wisdom and put His principles for a healthy relationship into practice, positive changes will follow. Perhaps you'll experience fewer angry words, less tension, more grace toward your spouse, a willingness to forgive, or a greater sensitivity to recognizing and releasing bitter feelings.

However, despite the changes you experience as God works in your heart, they don't guarantee that your marriage will improve. It takes the willingness of both partners for that to happen. What I can promise is that when you invite God to work in the deepest recesses of your heart, you will benefit regardless of what happens to your marriage.

Dreams are Made of This

As a young, single doctor in the mid-Sixties, Jim expected to be drafted to Vietnam after he finished his internship. Instead, he found himself on a two-year assignment as a Peace Corp doctor looking after agriculture volunteers working in Kenya. Living a story-tale life, Jim travelled around the country keeping Peace Corp volunteers healthy. He learned to fly, climbed two mountains, and lived in a three-bedroom house with a housekeeper/cook and gardener.

If our courtship in Kenya was any predictor for our future, our marriage looked to be one thrilling adventure after another.

Clambering into Jim's Land Rover one Saturday morning, we drove miles into the bush, his rifle nestled in the back seat. We stopped in an isolated area and I watched as Jim walked a quarter mile from the vehicle and drop to one knee. He raised his gun and shot a hulking, grey wildebeest standing 200 yards away, innocently eyeing him like a curious Jersey cow. I had never seen anyone shoot anything.

After skinning the animal, Jim dragged a hindquarter, along with the skin, back to the Land Rover while vultures circled above. My part was to make spaghetti bolognese that night using the wildebeest meat. We both agreed: the final result smelled and tasted awful.

Jim took me flying in a little Cessna two-seater he rented from a local airport. On one occasion, we almost stalled-out as we took off from a high-altitude runway. Jim had forgotten to adjust the fuel mixture. After that near-death experience, I stayed on the ground.

A five-day expedition up Mt. Kilimanjaro topped all the other exciting experiences that came with dating an adventuresome man. Physical activity was never my strength, so I had no idea what I was getting into. But I was twenty-one, in love, and wanting to prove that I shared Jim's interests even if I risked plunging into a glacier or dying from lack of oxygen at 19,000 feet.

As it turned out, I did develop altitude sickness at 15,000 feet and everyone agreed I needed to descend immediately. While Jim and the others grunted their way to the summit, one of the porters escorted me to a lower hut. Having been trained by the British in the art of "civilized" mountain climbing, he immediately made me some hot tea with milk and sugar and produced a plate of cookies.

A photo of all five of us taken at the end of the climb shows four people with wreaths of everlasting flowers circling their hats. I stood in the middle clutching a posy. Yes, I was the failure of the group, but despite my distinct lack of athletic ability, I must have impressed Jim.

Soon after my brave attempt to conquer Kilimanjaro, Jim proposed. We married a few months later in the small, English church where we first met. Neither of us had any family at the wedding, nor had we met each other's parents. Jim had never been to England, and I had never visited America.

Warning Signs

During our month-long trapeze through Asia on our way back to the United States we stopped in Singapore where my parents lived at the time. Thrilled to meet his new son-in-law, my father beamed and pumped Jim's hand enthusiastically. My petite mother, undeterred by Jim's height, reached up, grabbed him by the neck, and pulled him down to her level. She planted a welcoming kiss on his cheek. They were delighted with my new husband—even if he was an American.

A short time later we flew to Iowa where I met my in-laws for the first time. We all shook hands, politely nodding and saying, "Hello." On the way from the airport to their home, we sat in silence. My stomach churned and my mind whirled with questions. *Why aren't they friendly? Why don't they say anything? Are they upset that Jim married me, a girl ten years younger, from another country and a different kind of church?* They never had to say a word for me to sense that I wasn't the woman they had hoped and expected their eldest son to marry.

What Happened to My Dreams?

Arriving in my new country as a starry-eyed bride of twenty-two, I assumed our exciting relationship would become even more thrilling.

I imagined Jim and I would stay up late, snuggled on the couch by the fire drinking coffee and looking deeply into each other's eyes. In these tender moments, we would reveal our secret longings and deepest thoughts.

It took me a long time to accept reality: Jim didn't like staying up because he started work early. He didn't drink coffee, and he wasn't a talker.

On weekends, I expected Jim and I would go shopping together. I imagined showing him a pretty blouse and watching his eyes light up as he whispered, “I’d love to see you in that. Don’t worry about the price, you’re worth it.” Of course, that never happened.

Like many men, Jim shops only when necessary. He reluctantly sidles into the men’s department, sweeps his eyes over the merchandise, declares there’s nothing he likes, and escapes—all in five minutes. Expecting him to stroll through store after store holding my hand and searching for just the right outfit turned out to be as realistic as believing I could run a marathon.

I also assumed that Jim would be like my father, willing to help with the cleaning, ironing, and cooking. When I asked him to mop the kitchen floor, he quickly informed me that in his home, his mother and sister took care of the household chores. Men did the outside work. Roles were not interchangeable.

After our short visit with Jim’s parents, we settled in Oregon for the first year of Jim’s five-year residency training program. He spent most of his waking hours buried in the hospital, sleeping there every other night as the junior “on-call” resident. When he did stumble home, he buried himself in his studies or fell into bed, exhausted.

Although I found a job and we regularly attended a small church when Jim was not on call, I had no friends to talk with in the whole country.

Disillusioned and overwhelmed once again by painful loneliness, I grew bitter, angry, and hopeless. After being married for only six months, I felt I had made the worst mistake of my life.

What Happened to *Your* Dreams?

To help you begin to understand your own relationship, let me encourage you to think back. What did you envision for those first few months of marriage?

How did you feel about your marriage when some of your dreams fizzled?

How would you describe your current feelings?

Ignorance is Bliss. Or is it?

It never occurred to me that Jim and I would have any problems adjusting to each other. After all, I reasoned, a girl meets a hunky male, her senses go on high alert, her hormones go crazy, and all she wants is to get married and do what comes naturally. In time, she hopes to produce a few adorable babies who complete her other dream, that of the perfect family.

What could be more normal?

The problem is that we expect to marry our clone, someone who is reasonable like us. Someone who sees things our way. Someone whose responses guarantee marital harmony. We reason: since we love each other, how could marriage be difficult? Or filled with hurt? Or produce heart-breaking disappointment?

We'll explore these understandable assumptions and how they contribute to the fizzling of our fantasies in a later chapter.