

Smart Girls, Smart Choices

Megan Clinton
with Laura Faidley



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Contents

Introduction	7
1. Crazy for Love	11
2. Controlled by Emotions	27
3. Consumed with Self	43
4. Addicted to Approval	59
5. Chained to Insecurity	77
6. Hanging with the Wrong Crowd	93
7. Drifting Through Life	109
8. Living Without Boundaries	125
9. Can't Let Her Hair Down	141
10. Living As If God Didn't Matter	157
Notes	163

Crazy for Love

*What if you have a genuine and captivating beauty
that is marred only by your striving?*

STASI ELDREDGE

Eight p.m. Monday night. Time to put down the homework, pop the popcorn, grab my girlfriends, and turn on today's most popular reality dating show: *The Bachelor*.

In a crazy lineup of exotic dates, 25 women take a chance at winning the handsome young bachelor's heart. We are drawn in to the delightful suspense and argue about who *we* think the bachelor will present with the rose and ask to be his soul mate. Laughing, crying, and sighing as the romance unfolds, we join these girls on their emotional roller coaster of searching for true love.

Oh, the drama, the tension, the emotions. "I came here to find love," Michelle declared to Jake. "I really, really, really want a husband." Could this be her chance at happily ever after? Apparently not. Her dreams of a future with Jake vanished along with the hopes of 24 other girls who are desperate for love.

And ah, the fickle, fun fantasy of relationships! Now in its fourteenth season, *The Bachelor* has captured the hearts of women around the world because it shows real women who are desperate to get guys' attention. I like watching this show with my friends because on some level, I can identify with these women. I long to be loved, accepted, cherished, and chosen. Don't you?

We girls love to talk about guys, flirt with them, and chase after them. But when our lives become obsessed with getting guys' attention, we're headed for trouble, just like some of these bachelorettes who get a sudden case of the stupids.

In this chapter, we'll see what desperation looks like, and we'll consider a better alternative. We'll find that we can rediscover ourselves by embracing the fact that God deeply loves and cherishes us.

Defining Desperation

So what does it mean to be desperate? Dictionary.com defines *desperate* as an attitude: "reckless or dangerous because of despair or urgency, extreme or excessive." Desperation can drive a girl to do some wild, crazy, and destructive things just to feel loved and wanted.

Of course, God created all of us to be loved and wanted. The defining characteristic of desperation, however, is that we'll often do whatever is necessary to feel that love *now*. The sense of urgency takes over because we think that if we don't get him now, we may miss out on our chance for love and end up single and alone for the rest of our lives.

So what do we do? We often mistake feelings of attraction for true love. We fall for the incredibly hot but shallow guy. We share deep secrets of our hearts prematurely. We confuse sex with love. We ditch lifelong friends for the new Prince Charming. And we ignore our parents' and mentors' advice.

When we feel desperate, we begin thinking with our emotions and not our brains. Sure, when the cutie in class or the ripped guy at the gym turns his head, we *feel* good. It's fun and exciting. The attention of a guy (especially a hottie!) holds great power over a girl's life. And nothing is wrong with that in the right context. But when we're desperate, we will do *anything* just to keep a guy in our lives.

Desperation can cause us to lose our objectivity, so we think and do things we never dreamed. And I'm not just talking about sex. Even if we technically remain virgins, giving away our bodies and the deep places of our hearts can leave lifelong scars.

These are some of the crazy things we often do when we're crazy for a guy's love and attention:

become clingy and obsessed with him
change who we are to make him happy
put all our confidence in what he says
become willing to do anything for him

tolerate his rude and mean behavior
ignore red flags
become blind to his weaknesses
assume that this is as good as it gets

We girls will often stay in horrible relationships because we feel trapped. Love is powerful, but it can also hurt like crazy. When *he* moves on, we are left more desperate than ever. And alone.

Getting to Know Desperate Dana

“Guess what I’m doing Friday?” Dana asked excitedly. Without waiting for an answer, she blurted out, “Hanging with Jared! Yeaahh!” She broke into a little song and dance, and with glowing eyes, she confided to me, “You know, Megan, I think he’s the one. I really do. He...he told me the other day that he loves me!

“Ah...Friday night! I can’t wait!” She bubbled on. “We’re going out to Olive Garden and then going to a movie, and then...well, we’ll just see.”

“What about the sleepover at my house?” I asked her. “I thought you were coming.”

“Well...I mean, I’m not going to turn Jared down. He’s such a great guy...and soooooo cute! Are you kidding me? You guys enjoy your chick flick.”

Desperate Dana! Listening to her dream on and on made my heart sink, and not just because she had blown us off. I’d heard Dana say the same thing about a different guy just a few weeks earlier and of yet another only three months before that. She was so desperate for the attention of a guy—any guy. Sure, we all like to be noticed, to be beautiful and wanted, but Dana’s longing for a boyfriend had a lot of stupid in it. Ever had a friend like that?

A few weeks later, Dana gave me the news I had expected to hear. “Jared dumped me. Megan, I gave him everything. What do I do? I don’t know who I am anymore. I can’t keep living like this. I hate guys. I hate myself. What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I just be normal and find a boyfriend who will love me?”

In Dana’s mind, her life was over. Breakups always hurt, but when we build our identities on our relationships with guys, we have no idea who

we are without them. Our hopes and dreams shatter when things don't work out, and life becomes a big black hole of hopelessness.

We feel insecure, empty, depressed, wounded, and desperately alone. The ache just won't go away, and no amount of Ben and Jerry's will make it better. The only relief from the excruciating pain seems to be to throw ourselves at the next guy who comes along. We're acting like Desperate Dana.

**GIRLS LIKE YOU AND ME HAD
THIS TO SAY ABOUT BOYS...**

"I'm learning that I can still live and breathe without a boyfriend."

—KELLY

"All the girls you're jealous of because they are prettier, skinnier, more popular, or richer than you... well, they're just as insecure as you are."

—LAUREN

"Be committed to Christ. Don't search for boys—seek Christ, and the boy you want will find you."

—TRACY

"Your value does not rest on others' opinions of you. Your value is inestimable because you are a child of the King."

—LAUREN

"God has created you to be uniquely you. Be yourself, and don't change for any guy."

—SUSAN

So what's the big deal about boys? What's so important about the way we do relationships? I was a little shocked when I saw this recent post on a chat website: "I am a cute 11-year-old girl, and I am desperate for a boyfriend." Romantic relationships may seem like innocent fun, but we girls

can easily feel incomplete or less-than if we can't snag and keep a guy's attention. Looking for acceptance and security in a boyfriend often leads us to compromise and do things we said we'd never do.

- Nearly one third of girls (including preteens) see oral sex as “a fun, bonding thing to do with a guy.”¹
- One study of kids from a Midwestern high school showed that a little more than half the students were sexually active, and the average age of initiation was 15. Sexual networks were common.²

What's the pressure behind this trend toward sexual activity? Statistics from the Kaiser Family Foundation show that many girls confuse sex with love.

- Nearly a third of all teens feel pressured to have sex.
- A third of sexually active young women report being in a relationship where they felt things were moving too fast sexually.
- One fourth of sexually active young women report doing something sexual they didn't really want to do.

What's tragic about this picture? By the time most girls have walked across the stage to receive their high school diploma, they will have lost their virginity—and their sense of who they are. You might be thinking, *Megan, you're being old-fashioned*. No, I'm just committed to doing relationships according to the Bible. When we do, we honor God, we respect ourselves, and we build our self-esteem. We also carry a lot less baggage with us when we get married someday!

In fact, surveys of sexually active teenagers show that 55 percent of the boys and 70 percent of the girls wish they had waited longer to have sex. They are significantly more likely to be unhappy and feel depressed than teens who are not sexually active. One in four sexually active young women contracts an STD each year, and more than 1 million teenagers get pregnant each year.³

But the biggest wounds we carry are deep in our hearts. Whether we have been sharing the deep secrets of our hearts or making out, when the fun is over and the guy moves on, we girls are left to pick up the broken

pieces. Many of us starve ourselves, binge and purge, change our hair and fashion style, and even cut ourselves because we didn't get the guy's attention.

We put ourselves through this madness in the hopes of being beautiful enough to catch Mr. Right. Maybe you can identify with one of these struggles. Let me tell you, there is a better way.

Desperate Dana and You

"I don't know who I am anymore." Dana's gut-wrenching cry reveals that her desire to be loved had led time and again to a broken heart. What about you? Does Dana's story sound familiar? Are you desperate for love? Are you insecure in who you are? Here's a little quiz that will help you find out. Take the time to write down your response to each question and think about it.

1. Am I consumed with getting guys' attention?
2. Do I have trouble talking to guys without flirting?
3. Do I hang out only with guys, or do I have solid friendships with girls too?
4. What am I communicating through my words and body language?
5. Do I want to be viewed as a sexy babe with a great body or as a beautiful and God-centered girl?
6. Do I dress in a way that accentuates my natural beauty, or does my fashion style shout, "Look at my body!" Am I all body, no brains?
7. Do I build my sense of worth and significance on the things guys say to me?
8. (If you are not in a relationship right now) Am I content being single? Do I feel incomplete without a boyfriend?
9. Do I have a timeline for getting into a relationship? Am I totally obsessed with looking for prospects?
10. (If you are dating) Do I define myself by my boyfriend? Am I possessive or controlling?

How did you do? I'm no scientific expert, but let's be honest. If a few of these questions raised red flags, you may just be a little desperate. Hey, welcome to life on this planet! The good news is that desperate Dana and the rest of us are not doomed to a life of failed relationships and unrequited love.

We can develop a more healthy way of interacting with guys. We can enjoy friendships with the young men God has placed in our lives. We can have godly and passionate dating relationships. But these things don't start with the guys.

When I was younger, I would lie in bed and ask my dad if he thought I would ever find someone to love me. He would just smile and say, "Sooner than you think—and I can't wait to meet him."

Have you ever laid in bed late at night overcome by the fear of being alone? Have you ever cried yourself to sleep over the "man of your dreams" who wouldn't even notice you? Has your heart ever soared at the sight of him, only to be crushed when you found out he already had a girlfriend?

These things are normal. We're made for love and companionship. In Genesis 2:18, God says, "It's not good for the Man to be alone." From the very beginning, woman was created for intimacy with God and man. Eve was created for Adam, and God called it good.

We create problems when we try to fulfill our need for love and acceptance solely in a guy, forgetting that God Himself is wildly in love with us. In the Bible, God says, "I've never quit loving you and never will" (Jeremiah 31:3). You and I will never have a healthy, balanced view of guy-girl relationships until we learn to be in a relationship with our heavenly Father.

God created you uniquely as a woman with the powerful desire to be known and loved for who you are. Our souls cry out for intimacy, and I don't just mean sex. As others have said, *intimacy* can be pronounced "into-me-see."

At the core of who we are, we long for someone to cherish us, rejoice over us, and love us extravagantly. We want to be known for who we are the way God knows and loves us. We naturally look for that intimacy in relationships with guys, but the truth is that no guy can fulfill the deepest longings in our hearts. Even if he says the three magical words *I love you*, he cannot really love you enough to satisfy your soul.

The most important thing to understand first is how much God loves

you. Imagine Him saying to you, “I love you, daughter. You are precious and beautiful to Me. I’ll do anything to include you in the church, My bride. I’ll die for you.” And that’s exactly what He did. God sent His Son Jesus, who took God’s punishment for you on a wooden cross and died an inconceivably painful death so you could live forever with Him.

Now *that’s* what I call love.

One of my favorite verses is Zephaniah 3:17-18 (NIV):

The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

Stop and think about this and let it sink into your heart: *God* loves you. God *loves* you. God loves *you*. Very few of us know what this really means. Understanding and believing this verse can be really hard if your dad or boyfriend tells you you’re no good, if he offers you love only when you perform perfectly, or if he ignores you, abuses you, or maybe even walked out on you.

If you have been hurt by men in your life, God’s love may not make sense for a while. Sometimes we’re afraid to accept God’s love because we associate God with the guys we know. To really “get” God’s love, we have to understand He is not at all like the guys who hurt us, and His love is nothing like theirs. God’s love is perfect and unconditional—and it does not depend on what we do.

At the root of it all, desperation in relationships stems from good desires gone bad. *I just want someone to love me*, our hearts cry out. That desire is from God Himself, who created our hearts. In a prayer to God, Augustine wisely wrote, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”⁴

Stop for a minute. Take a breath and think about what you’re doing. The God of the universe delights in you. He is actually pursuing you. He has made each one of us to be perfectly satisfied and complete in Him—when we seek Him. “If you seek GOD, your God, you’ll be able to find him if you’re serious” (Deuteronomy 4:29). Speaking of his relationship with God, King David says, “My heart leaps for joy” (Psalm 28:7 NIV). David realized that knowing God intimately is better than anything we can

imagine: “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11 esv). God promises that He will never leave you or forsake you (Joshua 1:5)! No guy can promise you that.

You've spent your whole life running and running, trying to catch up with something that has never been there for you. And all you've done is go farther and farther away from the precious love that's been waiting for you all the time.

ANONYMOUS

Your Ticket Out

We girls can be desperate for several reasons, and each reason can lead to even more problems.

- We can draw our worth and value from getting guys' (or a specific guy's) attention. When we don't get that affirmation, we feel worthless.
- We can be overwhelmed by the fear of being alone and think no guy will ever love us. So we do anything to stay in a relationship—even a bad one—just to avoid feeling lonely.
- We can try to put a Band-Aid on the wounds in our hearts by jumping into new relationships. The sparks of romance may dull our pain, but we forget that even the best guy can't fix our broken hearts. Only God can.

So what's a girl to do?

I dream for the day when my knight in shining armor will come, sweep me off my feet with his strong arms, and draw me close for a kiss. When he says “I love you,” his words will communicate more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. My prince's love for me will blossom as he asks, “Megan, will you marry me?” The music will soar as I ride off into the sunset by his side into the world of happily ever after...

Okay, enough Disney. But you think about it too, don't you! We just need to balance our dreams with a solid understanding of God's love for us.

Perfect intimacy,
unconditional acceptance,
faultless righteousness,
and direct access to your King's presence 24/7.
He will never stop loving you,
always fight for you,
and never let you down—
no matter what.

By now you may be thinking, *I understand the whole God thing, Megan. I love God. But I just need a guy. I can't imagine my life without a boyfriend. I want to feel his touch and know his love is real.*

Let me challenge you one more time: What does an un-desperate girl look like? If you look in the dictionary, you will find that the opposite of being desperate is being confident, content, satisfied, secure, unworried... and the list goes on. The un-desperate girl is free to become the woman God wants her to be because she isn't consumed with getting guys' attention.

So how do we do it? How do we break free from desperation and learn to live as God's girls?

Anchor Your Life in God

Do you believe that the One who created these desires for love and romance in our hearts, who knows every hair on our heads, who gave us eyesight to read these words...is He able to bring the right guy into our lives too? Don't you think He—the Creator of romance—can write a love story that's *way* better than anything we could come up with?

Being God's girl starts with pursuing the one true love of our lives—Jesus—rather than chasing after guys. Living our life for a guy may make us happy for a time, but it won't satisfy our souls. Only Jesus can do that.

Despite our good intentions, we *will* go back to reckless chaos unless we choose to follow Jesus Christ with all that we have. We get to know Him by spending time with Him, so read the Bible, meditate on it, and hide its truth in your heart. Find a good devotional. Find some girls who get it too.

I know this isn't easy to do, but the Bible says, "Steep your life in

God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met" (Matthew 6:33)...including your concerns about guys.

Remember, we always make time for what's important to us. So don't just *talk* about chasing after God. Run for Him! And as you do, realize that following God may mean leaving some things (and some people) behind. Remember, you live to please God, not a guy.

Reject the "You Complete Me" Lie

The "you complete me" myth sells movies, music, books, and magazines, but it can give us really messed-up ideas about who we are. This is what the Bible says: "Don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life" (1 Corinthians 7:17).

God knows what He's doing. He knows the deepest desires of our hearts. And because He created us, He also knows that no guy can ever complete us. Here's the way my dad describes it:

incomplete woman + incomplete man = incomplete,
dysfunctional relationship

but

complete woman + complete man = complete,
God-honoring relationship

God has a dream for our lives, but it's not just about getting what *we* want. It's about us glorifying God with every single part of who we are—even in our relationships with guys.

Sometimes we girls are confused and don't understand what God is doing. Honestly, sometimes I wonder why it takes so crazy long for God to bring the right guy along. But when we feel that way, we can rest assured that where we are is God's place for us right now.

Talk to God About Everything

Living as God's girls includes talking honestly with God about the deepest needs of our hearts. Rather than always running to guys for affirmation when we are stressed, upset, worried, or depressed, we can pour

out our hearts to God, knowing that He hears our words and sees our tears, and He treasures them.

Think about it—God wants us to talk with Him as we would with a wonderful dad. He is ready and waiting to listen to us. Why would we *not* talk to Him?

David is one of my favorite Bible characters because He didn't hold back. He talked to God about everything. And I mean *everything*. Angry, happy, despairing, or ecstatic, David was blabbing on to God. How could he be so bold? Well, look what he knew.

You've kept track of my every toss and turn
through the sleepless nights,
Each tear entered in your ledger,
each ache written in your book (Psalm 56:8).

Every ache, every tear, every sleepless night...regardless of the craziness we feel, we can talk to God about it. Whether you're sad, mad, angry, upset, or hurting, don't hesitate any longer. Run to Him! Don't worry, God isn't scared off by our drama or our brokenness. He already knows our hearts, and He desperately wants to satisfy us with His unfailing love. God specializes in healing broken hearts and fixing messed-up lives in a way no guy ever could.

Treasure and Guard Your Intimacy

Attraction is a powerful force. As women, our bodies are powerful tools created uniquely by God to be stunningly beautiful and irresistible to our husbands. God made us to be beautiful. But until we say "I do," we show respect for ourselves and the guys around us by valuing our bodies.

Now, don't get me wrong. I love my heels, my pearls, and a little lipstick. Looking good and feeling confident in our beauty is great. I love dressing up, mixing and matching the latest fashions to get my own unique look. We don't need to be ashamed of our bodies. God never tells us to wear shapeless sacks, but Scripture does tell us to honor God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20).

But the way I attract a guy determines what he will love me for. I don't know about you, but I want to be loved for more than just my looks, my cute outfits, and my heels. I want a husband who will also treasure my heart.

Guarding our intimacy is not just about what we wear. It also involves what we say and don't say. Keeping our emotions in check is an important part of treasuring our intimacy. As God's daughter, I want to respect myself and save the deepest places of my heart for my husband rather than share those secrets with every guy who comes along.

Focus on Things That Really Matter

How many girlfriends have you lost to their boyfriends? When she met him, everything between you as friends changed. She didn't seem to care about you anymore. That's definitely not cool, and the same goes for you. Take a moment to think about everything and everyone in your life. Now read these verses:

- "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17 NIV).
- "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2 NIV).
- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10 NIV).

Regardless of how mundane our lives may seem, we can choose to look for ways to help and bless the people God has placed in our lives. Here are a few ideas:

Write an encouraging note to someone who is down.

Text your friends and ask how you can pray for them (and then pray for them!).

Bake cookies and deliver them to your neighbors.

Help out with the kids' ministry at your church.

Volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen.

Tutor underprivileged kids in your area.

Become a companion to a nursing home resident.

Organize an after-school Bible study at your school.

These are just a few options. Don't be afraid to dream big! God can use you to encourage other girls and share the gospel. You can probably think of countless ways to get outside of yourself and invest in the lives of

hurting people around you. And believe me, *that* is attractive to a godly guy.

In the Word

Lord, my longings are sitting in plain sight,
my groans an old story to you.
My heart's about to break (Psalm 38:9).

Oh, the feelings we battle as young women! Romance may be one of the greatest gifts God created, but it can tear apart our hearts and hurt like crazy. The messages of our culture add to our confusion. As we struggle to find out who we are, the only secure place to start is in God's Word. Let's dive into the Bible together and find out what God has to say. These powerful truths can demolish the lies you may have believed about yourself. (They are paraphrases of the NIV.)

You are precious and honored in God's sight (Isaiah 43:4).

You are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10).

You are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).

You are completely forgiven (Ephesians 1:7).

You are free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus
(2 Corinthians 5:21).

It's easy to base our identity on the guy we're with, but when we truly grasp that *this* is who we are in Jesus Christ, we can be confident as God's girls rather than feel the compulsive need to get guys' attention.

Emotions like fear influence us girls a lot. Fear can steal our objectivity. It can cripple us and make obedience to God difficult. Fear can keep us in unhealthy relationships just so we won't be alone. The only force in the whole universe stronger than our fear is God's love, which is perfect. And "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18 esv).

Are you a little bit anxious? Maybe you're downright afraid to give God control of your love life (or nonexistent love life).

Are you terrified of being alone? Of never meeting the love of your life? You're not the only one. All of us girls think about this.

But here's where we get to trust God and believe His promises. In the Bible, David told God, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3 NIV). Sounds simple, huh? But oh, so hard! Trusting God means resting in Him rather than trying to figure everything out on our own.

Regardless of how alone we feel, we are never ever alone. "I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you," God tells us (Hebrews 13:5). When we feel overwhelmed and paralyzed by fear, we can take it to Jesus. He already knows our hearts, and He promises to never leave us or forsake us.

God can handle our fears. In the Bible, David writes, "Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Psalm 139:10 NIV). Where is *there*? It's wherever you are right now. Even in a place of confusion, desperation, loneliness, or whatever, God is holding your hand. Imagine Him saying this to us, His girls:

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.

When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.

When you come looking for me, you'll find me.

Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

No joke, being alone is tough sometimes. But pursuing Jesus first and basking in His love for us will save us from a lot of bad decisions and subsequent heartache. With God and a few good girlfriends, we can make it.

We looked at Psalm 38:9 earlier. This is what David goes on to say:

What I do, GOD, is wait for you,
wait for my Lord, my God—you will answer!
I wait and pray (verse 15).

Smart Girls Remember...

We'll conclude each chapter by summarizing a few of the most important points and providing a prayer you can use.

- Having a boyfriend will not complete you as a woman. Only by knowing who you are in Jesus Christ will you ever be whole, complete, and confident.
- If you live your life to make other people happy, you will never be wholly satisfied.
- Desperation will get the attention of guys who want to mess around, but it is not attractive to the kind of guy you want to marry.
- Guys tend to view desperate girls as easy, trashy, and cheap.
- Who you are is not wrapped up in what you look like or what you do. Who you are is defined by *whose* you are, and you belong to God.



Lord Jesus,

Thank You for creating me as a woman with the desire to be known and loved. God, I mess up sometimes, and often I try to find that intimacy in a guy, forgetting that You're my first love. Remind me, Jesus, of how much You love me. Help me to learn to run to You and not to be desperate for others' attention. Set me free from this crazy desire to be noticed and affirmed by guys all the time. I want to change, God, but I need Your help. Show me how Your unconditional love is far more satisfying than a guy's infatuation. Teach me to trust You with my future.

Amen.