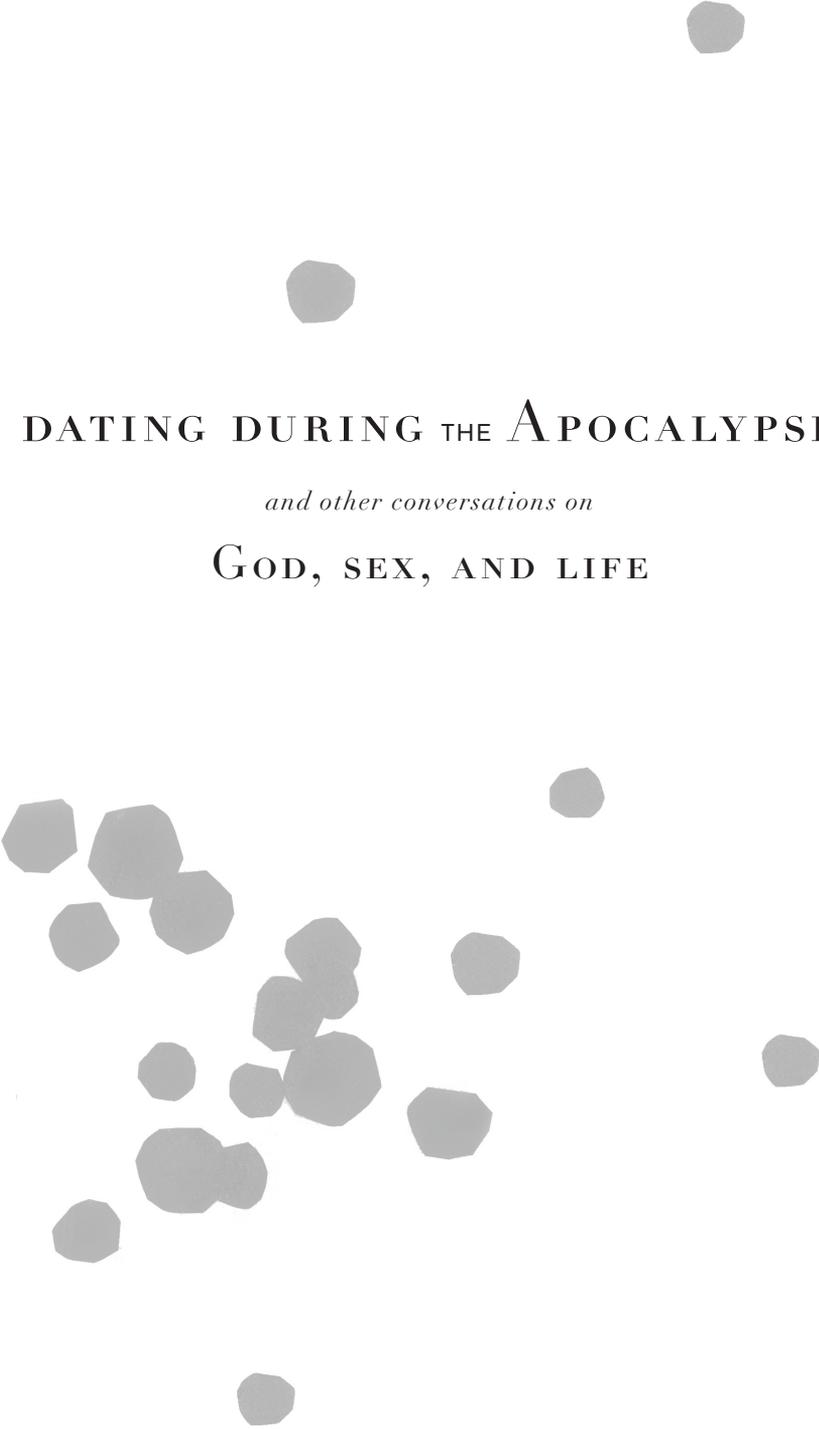


DATING DURING THE APOCALYPSE

and other conversations on

GOD, SEX, AND LIFE



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INTRODUCTION

Talitha Cumi

A.J. Marks



There are unique challenges women face being a Christian in today's world. While there are biblical principles we are called to obey, much of the day-to-day living by faith can be confusing. The Bible isn't exactly explicit on the issues of Tinder, yoga pants, and other cultural topics many Christians seem to have opinions about. And if acting like Jesus as we navigate through life is our goal, we become acutely aware of the unique struggle it can be for women. Jesus was a male after all, and dating and Lycra spandex are twentieth-century constructs. In short, it can be complicated.

So when Katherine and I were asked to help compile a group of essays specifically for women, we were a bit overwhelmed. The modern evangelical landscape is awash with competing prescriptive opinions on the topics

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above (among others), and many of the books marketed for Christian women are often little more than pink self-help books. In creating this collection, our desire was to veer away from step by step directives that promise a brand new you, and go back to basics—the gospel.

The thirty-plus women who have contributed to this book are writing from their own experiences with biblical truths. Like us, they too have wrestled with guilt, shame, and sin. They too have fallen in love with a person, rather than a rulebook. They too have struggled to pursue what is true, what is admirable, what is excellent (Philippians 4:8), and to work out their faith with fear and trembling—through the lens of being a woman. The women in this book range from twenty-something to eighty-something, and collectively hold hundreds of years worth of experiences—experiences that might be quite similar or quite different than your own. Think of this book as a chance to hang out with wise women and to learn from them. As a twenty-something woman in her first few years of marriage, it has been an incredible honor to work with and learn from these women, to apply their wisdom to my own life.

I'm a firm believer that learning becomes transformational through collaborative discussion. And so as you read through this book, grab some good friends. Let Scripture be your guide to truth and let this book be a

Introduction

way to talk about it. The essays are grouped into chapters that explore femininity, identity, friendships, relationships, sex, and purpose. Each chapter ends with a letter sharing something the author wished she had known in college. The final chapter is a deeper dive into challenging topics, including a small-group guide to study Scripture together.

As you read through this book, there will be things that you agree with and things you may not. There might be things you wished we had talked about but didn't; and I'm sure there may be things we wrote about that you wish we hadn't, or had approached differently. The goal of this book is not to be an encyclopedia of all issues facing women today. Instead, I encourage you to use this book as a way to begin deeper study on these topics, and therefore a catalyst for more honest conversations with the believers around you. Don't get caught up in the small things—always return to the person of Jesus. The beauty of the church is that we don't all think the same. We are a powerful testament to the love of Christ when we fight for unity despite differing opinions. An old Cru saying reminds us to “never major on the minors;” or more poetically, “In the essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”¹

As a final note, let me encourage you to do one thing on your own. Take some time to study the Gospels and the person of Jesus. Pay special

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attention to how he interacts with women, his compassion, pursuit, and honor. In Mark 5 Jesus raises a young girl from the dead. He takes her by the hand and says talitha cumi, which in Aramaic means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” It’s such a beautiful depiction of Jesus’ transformational love, of his identity as an intimately involved Savior. We hope this book will remind you that we have also been called to arise, to live a new life changed forever by the person of Jesus. Talitha cumi.



A. J. MARKS is a former Cru staff kid who resisted the call to go into full-time ministry—before eventually winding up on staff at her local church. Currently she spends her free time devouring design blogs, collecting good friends, and fighting for the lives of her container plants—under the misguided belief that she will one day use this vegetation to become a master chef. She and her husband reside in Washington, DC.

¹ This quote is often attributed to St. Augustine, but many scholars disagree on its exact origin.

ONE
...And Sisters

...And Sisters

Katherine James



WHEN I READ MY BIBLE I've developed the habit (after years of faithfully scanning down the page to assure myself that the best translation is indeed “brothers and *sisters*”) of reading the passage in my head to include the ‘sisters’ part, inserting my gender, because, well, I’m included in this big, wondrously mysterious story and I like to remind myself of this. It’s an emotional and not an intellectual thing, I’m well aware that women are included in all these passages, but it makes me feel good to do this. It just does.

The reality is that while many translations of the Bible translate the Greek word brothers into English as the literal term “brothers,” the underlying meaning of the word can be lost. Just as someone might say, “Are you guys coming with me?” and mean both sexes, the true meaning of “brothers”—such as when Paul says in Acts 12:17, “*Tell these things to James and the brothers . . .*”—refers to both brothers and sisters. This is why when you follow the footnotes down to the bottom of the page, you will usually read “or brothers and sisters” — an important caveat.

In fact, in Acts 12, the *brothers* were gathered at a woman’s

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home—Mary, who no doubt scrounged up the first-century’s equivalent of a few bowls of chips and guac to feed the *brothers*.

But chips and guacamole notwithstanding, it was brothers and sisters who were gathered at Mary’s home.

Historically, women have needed to be fighters. They were pernicious and persevering. They held the objects of their love tight to their chests and fought like a young David (i.e. with great faith) to preserve them.

Rahab, Ruth, Mary Magdalene, the Syrophoenician woman (“even the dogs get the crumbs from the table”), all wisely and intelligently understood the glory of heaven and the only one that satisfies. Two of these women, with great faith, preserved the lineage of the Messiah, to the gospel itself. And unlike a 1970’s version of feminism—such as a proud defiance over years of oppression—they humbly took their desires to the Lord with great faith and longing to experience their joyful place among the saints. Acting with both powerful silence and loud, full-bodied strength, they made their way through history toward the goal of their desires—the love of God displayed in Christ Jesus.

It’s my belief that God loves women uniquely. He has given women the honor of a nonpareil fight: A fight that involves an awful lot of faith and a deep desire for him.

Satan has fought long and hard to diminish the feminine voice. Even now some cultures degrade and conceal and even physically harm women, while other cultures objectify and expose them—they are sexualized. In western cultures, women are often distilled down to a body. Just a body—no feelings, no brains, no soul. In both circumstances God’s purpose and love in creating women becomes hazy and vague; it’s hard to see what a great and honorable role they

...And Sisters

have played and are playing in the plans he is carrying out before us.

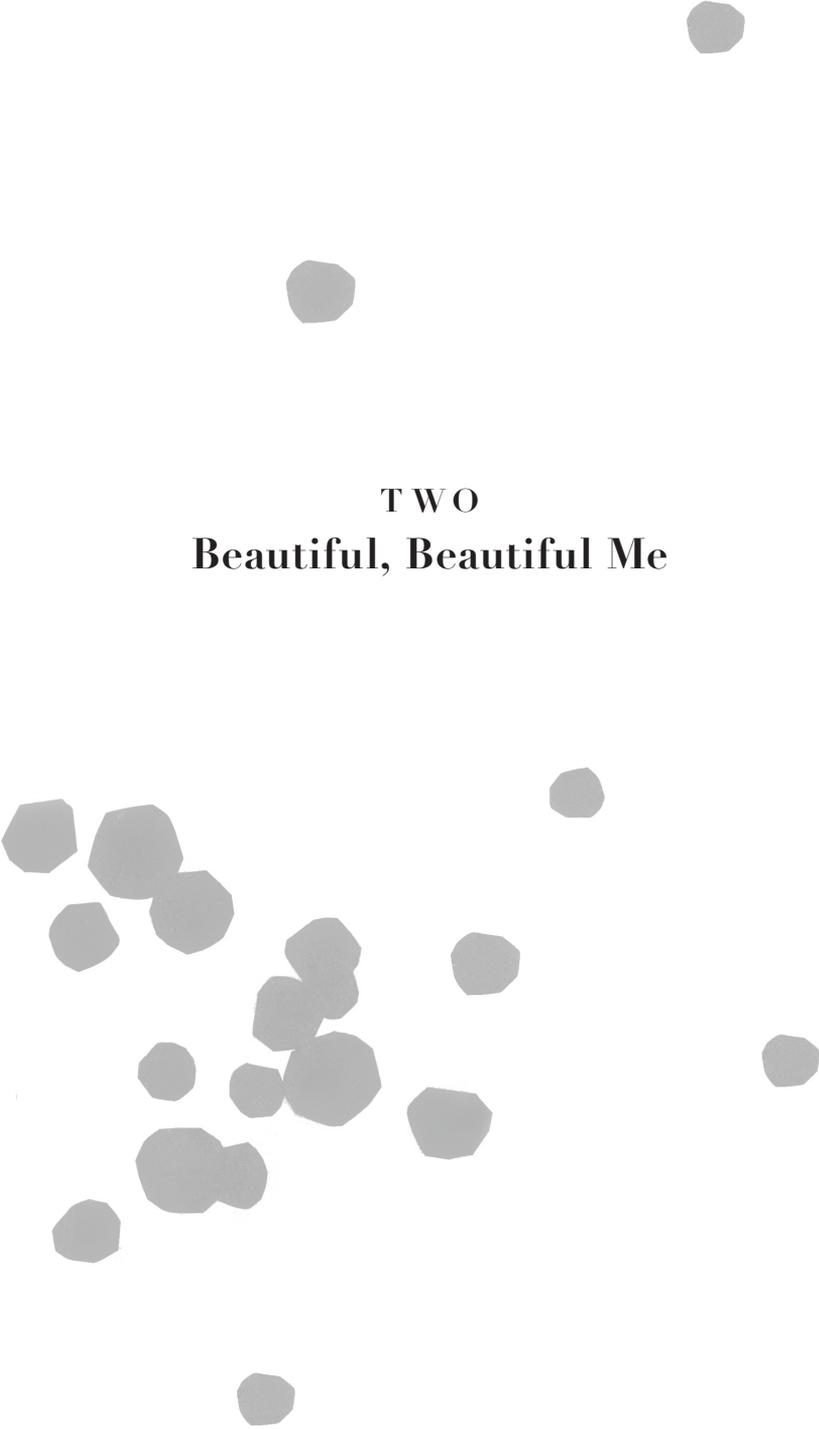
In fact, without women, the lineage of Jesus, the kingdom of Jesus, would have been stopped short.

Praise the woman who let down a red cord over a city wall and saved her family. Praise the woman who followed her mother-in-law into uncertainty and obedience because she was devoted to her mother-in-law's God. Praise the woman who knew that the love and power of God was strong enough to forgive even her own despicable sin. Praise the woman, the humble woman, who was willing to take anything she could get because she knew crumbs were better than nothing at all. Praise the child who grew into a woman, who developed breasts, and didn't flinch when she found herself nursing the God of the universe.

Women are strong and they love God. They *love* God. If you are a woman and are reading this, be strong, be courageous . . . go.



KATHERINE JAMES has worked with Cru for thirty years and seen God do some crazy-cool stuff. Presently she's senior editor for Cru Press and gets to read, edit, and try not to overwhelm her husband, the publisher. She has her MFA from Columbia University where she received the Felipe P. De Alba Fellowship, and is published in various journals and anthologies. Her forthcoming novel, as well as a memoir, will be published by Paraclete Press in 2017. She blogs at northhillsdrive.com



TWO
Beautiful, Beautiful Me

Yoga Pants and What the Bible Really Says About Modesty

Amy Buckley



WHEN I STARTED practicing yoga a couple years ago I discovered the wonders of yoga pants. I liked how they felt during practices. It did not occur to me that wearing them while stopping by the grocery store on the way home could be controversial. Then, one day, I noticed a man staring at a woman's derrière in the frozen food aisle. He seemed to have superpowers for seeing through her yoga pants. I have since stopped wearing yoga pants in public, but not necessarily because of what we could call the "modesty culture."

Why is modesty about yoga pants such a heated issue? The reasons are as numerous as those debating it. Some believe freedom in Christ supports dressing in what's comfortable, practical, and attractive. Some express battles in their minds over seeing contours of women's bodies through microfiber. Some abstain from yoga pants as a means of protecting relationships. Some insist on rights to express their attractiveness and sexuality.

The reasons for supporting and opposing form-fitting clothes go

on and on. Where do we begin making sense of what we should and should not wear? What does the Bible really say about modesty? And, what on earth would Jesus say about wearing yoga pants?

1. Modesty involves much more than how we dress.

For a long time I thought of modesty strictly in terms of a woman's attire: How sheer is her top? Is her neckline too low? How tight are her pants? How short is her skirt? Is she making it easier or harder for men who battle lust? Is she inviting disrespect to herself and other women? Is she embodying the life of a God-honoring woman? Until digging into Scripture, it didn't occur to me that God's words on modesty address much more than fashion.

The most frequently quoted Bible verse about modesty appears smack in the middle of a passage about false teaching.

"I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:9–10).

Paul just instructed men and women to stop angrily disputing ways the surrounding culture is creeping into church. Evidently, it disrupted worship services. Likewise, the fashion of some women caused distractions, drawing attention away from God.

The word for "modesty" (*kosmios*) actually points at orderliness, moderation, and appropriateness. It is a characteristic required of a bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2. Most of the Bible's instructions about modest clothing actually relate to materialism (Isaiah 3:16–23, 1 Peter 3:3). Practicing modesty involves humility and courtesy.

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Biblical modesty addresses any and all human practices, including fashion, getting in the way of worshipping God.

2. The Bible does not contain explicit instructions for how to dress modestly.

Christian modesty debates run the gamut—from “dress attractively, but not too attractively” to “cover up or you are a Jezebel.” The Pinterest board “Guys on Modesty” even makes suggestions for skirts, dresses, shorts, and bathing suits. They post some lovely outfits, but leave it up to women to figure out why skin-tight jeans are included but yoga pants are not (someone please define the difference).

“Modest” skirts cover female legs and thighs while “modest” one-piece swimsuits show legs and thighs in styles in which the average-sized woman would have to diet to look modest. A woman is left wondering whether or not it’s “okay” to dress for the beach, or yoga class (knowing a man could “stumble”).

In truth, the Bible offers little fashion advice. In the case of prohibitions such as braided hair and expensive clothing, God calls for modesty—a fruit of faith—not legalistic control of fashion. Modesty is not preoccupied with external appearances. It does not flaunt wealth, diminish others, or seek selfish attention; it professes reverence toward God. It is a quality both women and men should put into practice.

3. Biblical modesty calls for our undivided devotion to God.

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Modesty permeates Micah's instructions for God's people. Acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our Creator are at the heart of Christian living.

Those wholly devoted to Jesus are not preoccupied with self or external appearances. Like Brother Lawrence, who wrote the classic Christian book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, we are to practice lifestyles of worship every day of the week. This looks different for each of us depending on our unique gifting and callings. We each have a responsibility to grow in our relationship with God as we embody Jesus' presence to the world.

4. Personal choices about modesty influence our communities.

We get it wrong when limiting our discussions of modesty to sexuality. Modesty applies to more than how we dress; it relates to our thinking and attitudes affecting the bigger spectrum of how we live. Our choices relating to materialism, consumption, money management, relationships—and countless other aspects of life—affect more than ourselves.

If, for example, we read erotic novels and indulge unhealthy fantasies about a boyfriend or spouse, it objectifies him and harms the relationship. If we flaunt an expensive outfit to a friend struggling financially, she suffers. None of us live in a vacuum. Our values result in choices affecting others.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

5. We are responsible for our own attitudes and behaviors, no matter what anyone else does.

Every woman has experienced it no matter how she dresses—men

Dating During the Apocalypse

staring at portions of her body. One can't predict when or why it happens. During seminary, I made extreme efforts not to attract attention to my body, and some men still carried on theological discussions with my chest. Now that I live in Florida and enjoy going to the beach, I observe some men lingering over women's bodies in swimsuits while others don't. Some men lust after women's bodies no matter what they wear.

Lust is more than looking. It is different from feeling attraction or involuntary sexual arousal. Lust entails seeing another's body as an object for self-gratification. It defines the person not as a human, created in the image of God, but as a means of carnal pleasure.

Shechem's lust led him to sexually assault Dinah in Genesis 34. Scholar and pastor Ron Clark explains, "Shechem has violated the rights of Dinah as well as the covenant with the Jacobite."¹ Clearly men do not rape women because of how they dress.

"But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"
(James 1:14–15).

6. We Practice Modesty When Choosing God's Ways Over the Status Quo

From the get go, God established boundaries (orderliness, moderation, and appropriateness): "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:16–17). We can only imagine the gorgeous symbiosis the first man and woman enjoyed while caring for each other and the rest of creation. Tragically, that didn't last long (Genesis

3:16–19). Our souls yearn for Paradise though we have a track record of transgressing the limits (Romans 3:23).

We see the consequences play out in our relationships and communities—tensions between men and women; parents and children; brothers and sisters (the list goes on). The news is brimming with political, religious, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic divides. Stepping outside God’s bounds has serious consequences. The good news is that the spirit of Jesus promises to clothe us with new lives.

“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

7. True modesty comes from dressing in the spirit of Jesus.

“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14).

The apostle Paul offers an elegant solution to immodesty—being clothed in good deeds. Rather than conforming to the broken status quo, we aspire to God’s ways. We seek knowledge, belief and practices of God’s realm, peace, unity, and continuing growth in wisdom (1 Timothy 2:3). As God’s beloved children, Paul urges us to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).

Parents remind their children again and again to listen and obey. Similarly, God’s Spirit whispers to us to abide in Jesus’ love, the source of wisdom and strength to embody God’s purposes (John 15:1–17). Scripture promises an overflow of goodness, fruits of shalom, spilling into our communities (Ephesians 2:1–10). In *The Little Book of Biblical Justice*, Chris Marshall describes shalom as “the

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positive presence of harmony and wholeness, of health and prosperity, of integration and balance. It is the state of soundness or flourishing in all dimension of existence—in our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, our relationship with nature, and our relationship with ourselves.”

*“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”
(Titus 2:11–12).*



AMY BUCKLEY, M. Div., is a writer, speaker, and activist. She is passionate about men and women reclaiming their truest, best selves in life together (Gen. 5:1–2, Gal. 3:28). Amy has contributed to Strengthening Families and Ending Abuse and Churches and Their Leaders Look to the Future. She has written articles for REL-EVANT, Mutuality, PRISM, SheLoves, Shared Justice, and blogs at amyrbuckley.com. Amy is a founding board member of Life Together International (501c3). She is a member of the Redbud Writer’s Guild.