

JOSHUA HARRIS

NEW
UPDATED
EDITION

I Kissed Dating
GOODBYE

A NEW ATTITUDE
TOWARD ROMANCE *and* RELATIONSHIPS

I Kissed Dating
GOODBYE

JOSHUA HARRIS



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

I KISSED DATING GOODBYE
published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

© 1997, 2003 by Joshua Harris
International Standard Book Number: 978-1-59052-135-9

Cover design by The Office of Bill Chiaravalle
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For information:
MULTNOMAH BOOKS
12265 ORACLE BOULEVARD, SUITE 200
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80921

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Harris, Joshua.

I kissed dating goodbye/by Joshua Harris.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-59052-135-8 (revision)

ISBN 1-57673-036-0 (alk. Paper)

1. Dating (Social customs) 2. Dating (Social customs)—religious
aspects—Christianity. 3. Man-woman relationships. I. Title.

HQ801.H329 1997

306.73—dc21

96-51843

CIP

*To my parents,
Gregg and Lono Harris*

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*I Gave Josh Harris
a Chance*

by Sam Torode

I WAS A COLLEGE SENIOR, making a late-night run to Wal-Mart and Taco Bell with my friends. As we walked into Wal-Mart, my eyes were drawn to a book sitting on a rack right inside the door. The cover had a black and white photo of some suave guy—like a young Cary Grant—holding a fedora over his face. I picked it up and started reading the back cover.

“Hey,” one of my friends said, “that’s the guy all the girls are talking about. The one that says you shouldn’t date.”

Once, a girl turned me down because I hadn’t met her father and gotten his permission to ask her out. *This book must be the source of all the lunacy among girls on our campus*, I decided.

“He doesn’t want us to date because he wants all the babes for himself!” I said. “What an arrogant jerk.”

Little did I know, at that very moment, five hundred miles away, a beautiful young woman—the sort I hoped to marry someday—was hanging on every word of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. After reading the book, she promised that she would save her first kiss for marriage. A couple years later, she even wrote a magazine article

about her decision called “(Don’t) Kiss Me.”

Somehow, I stumbled onto Bethany’s article. Still annoyed that all these young women were being led astray by Josh Harris, I wrote a letter to the editor arguing that not kissing until marriage was just too extreme. (I hadn’t kissed anyone before either—but I hoped I wouldn’t have to wait many more years.)

Not willing to let me have the last word, the author wrote back to me. One thing led to another, and a few months later, on a cold January day, we met for the first time. I admired Bethany’s principled approach to romance—even if I still hated Josh Harris’s book (which I’d never actually read).

During a visit with Bethany’s family several months later, I found myself alone for an hour and—in a moment of desperate boredom—I pulled her copy of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* off the shelf and started thumbing through it.

I was expecting to find a long list of rules for “courtship God’s way.” After a few chapters, I started impatiently skimming ahead. *The rules must be in here somewhere!* To my surprise, I discovered *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* isn’t really about dating at all. Instead, it’s a book about following Christ and what that means for *all* of our relationships with others—whether romantic or not.

Joshua writes, “Every relationship for a Christian is an opportunity to love another person as God has loved us.” That sums up the book’s message. Once we embrace this principle, the rest is just details.

Indeed, my own story proves that foregoing casual dating (and even kissing) just might be the thing that brings you and your spouse together. About the time Joshua came out with his second book, *Boy Meets Girl*, Bethany and I shared our first kiss—at the altar.

In the end—in a roundabout way—Josh Harris brought my wife and me together. And now that I’ve read his books, I admire and recommend them.

Thank you, Josh—my hat’s off to you.

Sam Torode



Introduction

THANKS FOR PICKING up this book. Some people never get past the title.

“My friends won’t touch it,” one girl told me. “They hear the title and say, ‘There’s no way I would ever do that.’”

One guy urged me to change the title. “More people would read it,” he said. Maybe he’s right. I heard the story of a confused bookstore customer who asked the owner for a copy of *I Kissed My Date Goodbye*. Now there’s a book with a message people would read!

I decided to call this book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* because I want to be up front with you—there are some radical ideas on these pages. Most other books on dating will tell you how to make dating work for you. This book tells you how to make your life pleasing to God—even if that means taking a break from dating.

So let me make a simple request. Just read the first chapter. If nothing in it grabs you, that’s fine. But I think you’ll discover that something in this book could help you.

You see, I don’t want to argue with you about whether or not you should date. Yes, I’ll be honest about the problems I see in the

way most people date today. But ultimately my goal isn't to convince you to stop dating. I want to help you examine the aspects of your life that dating touches—the way you treat others, the way you prepare for your future mate, your personal purity—and look at what it means to bring these areas in line with God's Word.

So even though in one sense this book is about dating, in another sense dating isn't *really* the point. The point is what God wants. Discussing if or how to date isn't an end in itself. Talking about it serves a purpose only when we view it in terms of its relation to God's overall plan for our lives.

You may not agree with some of the things I write. That's okay. My hope is that you'll stick around to see what I have to say. If you at least walk away from this book with a little more wisdom, my mission will have been accomplished—and your life could be enhanced. I pray that the ideas shared here will bring you a little closer to God's desire for your life.

So thanks again for picking up the book. Thanks for reading more than the title.

Joshua Harris

PART ONE



*Isn't There a
Better Way?*

CHAPTER ONE



So This Is Love?

Beyond What Feels Good, Back to What *Is* Good

IT WAS FINALLY HERE—Anna’s wedding day, the day she had dreamed about and planned for months. The small, picturesque church was crowded with friends and family.

Sunlight poured through the stained-glass windows, and the gentle music of a string quartet filled the air. Anna walked down the aisle toward David. Joy surged within her. This was the moment for which she had waited so long. He gently took her hand, and they turned toward the altar.

But as the minister began to lead Anna and David through their vows, the unthinkable happened. A girl stood up in the middle of the congregation, walked quietly to the altar, and took David’s other hand. Another girl approached and stood next to the first, followed by another. Soon, a chain of six girls stood by him as he repeated his vows to Anna.

Anna felt her lip begin to quiver as tears welled up in her eyes. “Is this some kind of joke?” she whispered to David.

“I’m . . . I’m sorry, Anna,” he said, staring at the floor.

“Who are these girls, David? What is going on?” she gasped.

“They’re girls from my past,” he answered sadly. “Anna, they don’t mean anything to me now...but I’ve given part of my heart to each of them.”

“I thought your heart was mine,” she said.

“It is, it is,” he pleaded. “Everything that’s left is yours.”

A tear rolled down Anna’s cheek. Then she woke up.

B e t r a y e d

Anna told me about her dream in a letter. “When I awoke I felt so betrayed,” she wrote. “But then I was struck with these sickening thoughts: *How many men could line up next to me on my wedding day? How many times have I given my heart away in short-term relationships? Will I have anything left to give my husband?*”

I often think of Anna’s dream. The jarring image haunts me. There are girls from my past, too. What if they showed up on my wedding day? What could they say in the receiving line?

“Hello, Joshua. Those were some pretty lofty promises you made at the altar today. I hope you’re better at keeping promises now than you were when I knew you.”

“My, don’t you look nice in that tuxedo. And what a beautiful bride. Does she know about me? Have you told her all the sweet things you used to whisper in *my* ear?”

There are relationships I can only look back on with regret. I do my best to forget. I laugh them off as part of the game of love that everyone plays.

I know that God has been faithful to forgive as I’ve asked Him to. And I know that the various girls have forgiven me, because I’ve asked them to.

But I’m still aware of the consequences of my selfishness. I gave my heart away too many times. And I took from girls what wasn’t mine.

Living for Myself

My own self-centered approach to romance started young. Even though I grew up in a Christian home, by the time I reached junior high I had embraced a very ungodly attitude toward relationships. I didn't fear God. Despite my parents' diligence and godly example, I was living for sin and my own pleasure.

The older guys on my gymnastics team bragged about the different girls they had slept with. I was mesmerized by their stories. Sin sounded so enticing. With a friend I stole pornographic magazines from a bookstore and pored over them, stoking the fire of my own sinful cravings—I was enslaved to lust, and girls were nothing more than objects to satisfy my desire. One night I snuck out of the house for a prearranged meeting with three girls and made out with each of them one after the other.

Looking back, I'm sickened by these memories, but at the time I only wanted more. The fact that I remained a virgin during those years is, to be honest, a miracle. It had everything to do with God's mercy and nothing to do with any self-control or virtue on my part. I can easily be brought to tears when I think about where I'd be today if God had not chosen to intervene.

God convicted me of my disobedience through a message given by Randy Alcorn at a retreat I attended my freshman year in high school. Randy spoke about heaven. He talked about how Jesus died for my sins. Even though I claimed to be a Christian, as I listened I knew that I wasn't living for God. I had to change.

I repented of my sin right then, and when I got home from the retreat I threw away the pornographic magazines and paid the bookstore for what I'd stolen (I was too embarrassed to tell them in person, but I left a note with the money on the counter). At the same time I quit the gymnastics team and got involved with my church's youth group. My next girlfriend was a Christian and we didn't even kiss. I became a student leader and gained a reputation as someone who was serious about his faith. I assumed that my love life was now pleasing to God.

But I still had a lot to learn.

Not Quite Forever

Although I'm grateful for the changes I made then, I now recognize that much of it was superficial. I wasn't sneaking out to meet girls in the middle of the night anymore, but most of my wrong attitudes remained the same. My main concerns were still my own gratification and the fun I could gain from relationships with girls. I liked the way I felt when a girl liked me. I enjoyed the rush I got from flirting or expressing my feelings to a girl. I was still very immature and selfish.

In church my friends and I played the dating game with passion—more passion, I regret to say, than we gave to worshiping or listening to sermons. During Sunday morning services we passed notes about who liked whom, who was going out with whom, and who had broken up with whom.

During my sophomore year, my involvement in the dating game took a more serious turn. That summer I met Kelly. She had just become a Christian and was new to my church. She was beautiful, blond, and two inches taller than me. But I didn't mind. Kelly was popular, and all the guys liked her. Since I was the only guy who had the nerve to talk to her, she ended up liking me. I asked her to be my girlfriend at the youth group water-ski retreat and sealed our new relationship with a kiss.

Kelly was my first serious girlfriend. Everyone in our youth group recognized us as a couple. We celebrated our "anniversary" every month. Finding ways to spend time together and worrying about the current status of our relationship consumed my energy.

Kelly knew me better than anyone else. After my folks were asleep, Kelly and I would spend hours on the phone, often late into the night, talking about everything and nothing in particular. We thought God had made us for each other. We talked about getting married someday. We began expressing our feelings physically. I promised her that I would love her forever.

My parents didn't want me in a serious relationship, but they adored Kelly. They enjoyed the time she spent with the family. Their love for both of us blinded them to the fact that we were headed in a

dangerous direction. They had no idea about our sinful physical relationship. I hid that from them. I never lied outright to my mom and dad, but I half-answered questions and tried to put things in a better light.

Like many high school relationships, our romance was premature—too much, too soon. And our struggle against sexual sin was a losing battle. Though we never actually had sex, we were dishonoring God. We were violating each other's purity, and our spiritual lives were stagnant as a result.

After a summer missions trip that kept us apart for two months, I ended the relationship.

"We have to break up," I said to her one night after a movie. We both knew this was coming.

"Is there any chance we can have something in the future?" she asked.

"No," I said, trying to add resolve to my voice. "No, it's over."

We broke up two years after we'd met. Not quite "forever," as I had promised.

A Heart Made New

I was seventeen years old when my relationship with Kelly ended. I walked away asking, "Is this how it's supposed to be?" I felt discouraged, confused, and desperate for an alternative to the cycle of short-term relationships in which I found myself.

For the first time I really began to question how my faith as a Christian affected my love life. There had to be more to it than "don't have sex" and "date only Christians." What did it mean to genuinely care about the girls I knew? What did it feel like to really be pure—in my body *and* my heart? And how did God want me to spend my single years? Was it merely a time to try out different girls romantically? Was dating such a good idea for me?

Books like *Passion and Purity* by Elisabeth Elliot and long talks with my dad and mom began to change my perspective. Slowly, and in spite of my resistance, God was peeling away layer after layer of

wrong thinking, wrong values, and wrong desires.

Some people who hear about my decision not to date till I'm ready for marriage assume that my heart must've broken. No, my heart was made new by my Savior. The change in my attitude was the result of realizing the implications of belonging to Him. The Son of God died for me! He came to free me from the hopelessness of living for myself. That *had* to change everything—including my love life. Having a girlfriend was no longer my greatest need. Knowing and obeying Him was. I wanted to please Him in my relationships even if it meant looking radical and foolish to other people—even if it meant kissing dating goodbye.

This Is Love

I've come to understand that God's lordship in my life doesn't merely tinker with my approach to romance—it completely transforms it. God not only wants me to act differently; He wants me to *think* differently—to view love, purity, and singleness from His perspective, to have a new lifestyle and a new attitude.

The basis of this new attitude is God's love for us. John explains the connection between God's love and the way we relate to others in 1 John 4:10–11:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Do you see what John is saying? God's amazing love for us at the cross provides both the *example* and the *power* for us to love others. People whose sins have been forgiven through faith in Jesus' death on the cross can't live or love the same ever again. We've been set free from our old self-centered life. We used to be controlled by what felt good, but now, as new creations, we're to be controlled by *God's love*. In 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, Paul writes:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (ESV)

The Bible teaches that if we truly trust in Jesus Christ, we die to our old way of living. And we can no longer live for ourselves—we now live for God and for the good of others.

Because of that, relationships with the opposite sex can no longer be about “having a good time” or “learning what I want in a relationship.” They’re not to be about getting, but giving. Every relationship for a Christian is an opportunity to love another person like God has loved us. To lay down our desires and do what’s in his or her best interest. To care for him or her even when there’s nothing in it for us. To want that person’s purity and holiness because it pleases God and protects him or her.

So whether or not we take a break from dating, if our dating is controlled by Christ’s love it will look so radically different than the relationships around us that we’ll want to come up with a different name for it!

In recent years, I’ve tried to let God’s love as displayed at the cross define the way I love members of the opposite sex. This kind of love leads to some very practical changes in the way a person approaches relationships. Personally, I’ve come to some pretty intense conclusions for my life. I’ve come to realize that while friendships with the opposite sex are great, I have no business asking for a girl’s heart and exclusive affections if I’m not ready to consider marriage. Until I can do that, I’d only be using that girl to meet my short-term needs, not seeking to bless her for the long term. Would I enjoy having a girlfriend right now? You bet! But I wouldn’t truly be loving her and putting her interests first.

As I’ve sought God’s will for my life, I’ve discovered that a relationship wouldn’t be best for me or for the one I’d date right now.

Instead, by avoiding romantic, one-on-one relationships before God tells me I'm ready, I can better serve girls as a friend, and I can remain free to keep my focus on the Lord.

So even though I'm not romantically attached, I'm loving the girls in my life more than I ever did in the past. And not with the selfish kind of love I practiced so often in the past. I'm loving them based on what *God* says is truly loving.

True love isn't just expressed in passionately whispered words or an intimate kiss or an embrace; before two people are married, love is expressed in self-control, patience, even words left unsaid.

Knowing What's Best

Waiting until I'm ready for commitment before pursuing romance is just one example of letting Christ's love control my relationships with the opposite sex. Each person has to examine his or her own life and ask what it means to love others like Christ. I won't pretend that the day-to-day issues of dealing with attraction or how close a friendship should get are easy to sort through (we'll talk more about this later in the book). But I'm learning to make God's Word, not my feelings, the guide. And as I do, my love is getting smarter. Yes, the Bible actually teaches that our love can and should grow in knowledge. Paul writes in Philippians 1:9–10:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

The way we love others should constantly grow and deepen in its knowledge and insight. And when our love grows in knowledge, we can more readily “discern what is best” for our lives. Don't we all desperately need that discernment?

After all, when we engage in guy-girl relationships, we're not always choosing between absolute wrong and absolute right. Often

the choice is between what's good and what's best.

For example, even though I decided to quit the dating scene, I don't believe that dating in and of itself is sinful. Because there's no biblical command not to date, this is an area that we each need to evaluate in light of our own maturity, our motive, and the other person involved. The decision requires wisdom.

This is where it's so important that our love for others be shaped by God's love for us. This kind of love looks beyond personal desires and the gratification of the moment. It looks at the big picture: serving others and glorifying God.

"What about me?" you might be asking. "What about *my* needs?" This is the awesome part: When we make God's glory and other people's needs our priority, we position ourselves to receive the greatest joy in our lives as well. Let me explain.

In the past, the starting point of my relationships was what I wanted instead of what God wanted. I looked out for my needs and fit others into my agenda. Did I find fulfillment? No, I found only compromise and heartache. I not only hurt others; I also hurt myself, and most seriously, I sinned against God.

But when I changed my attitude and made pleasing God and blessing others my first priorities, I found true peace and joy. When I stopped seeing girls as potential girlfriends and started treating them as sisters in Christ, I discovered the richness of true friendship. When I stopped worrying about whom I was going to marry and began trusting God's timing, I uncovered the incredible potential of serving God as a single. And when I stopped flirting with temptation in one-on-one dating relationships and started pursuing righteousness, I uncovered the peace and power that come from purity. I kissed dating goodbye because I found out that God has something better in store!

Pure and Blameless

The ultimate goal behind my choice isn't to avoid pain. I'm not afraid of another breakup. I know that even in a godly relationship I might face disappointment one day. No, the reason I want to love like Christ

is so that one day I can stand with purity and blamelessness before God. This purity goes beyond sexual purity. While physical purity is very important, God also wants us to pursue purity and blamelessness in our motives, our minds, and our emotions.

Does this mean we'll never sin? Of course not! We can approach God only because of His grace and the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. And yet this grace doesn't give us license to be lax in our pursuit of righteousness. Instead, it should urge us to desire purity and blamelessness even more.

Ben started dating Alyssa during his senior year of college. For quite some time, he had planned to marry the summer after he graduated. Since he and Alyssa were deeply attracted to each other, he thought she was "the one."

In a letter, Ben told me that he had grown up with high standards in his dating relationships. Alyssa was another story. While Ben had never so much as kissed a girl, kissing was practically a sport for her. Unfortunately, Alyssa's values won out. "When she looked at me with those big brown eyes like I was depriving her of something, I caved," Ben wrote. Their relationship soon became almost entirely physical. They maintained their virginity but only in the technical sense of the word.

A few months later, Alyssa began to be tutored in chemistry by another Christian guy whom Ben had never met. "That was a mistake," Ben wrote angrily. "They were studying chemistry all right—body chemistry!" Alyssa broke up with Ben and the next day was hanging on the arm of her new boyfriend.

"I was crushed," Ben told me. "I had violated my own standards, and more important, God's standards, and it turned out that this wasn't the woman I was to marry." For several months Ben wrestled with guilt but finally laid it at the foot of the cross and moved on, determined not to make the same mistake twice. But what about Alyssa? Yes, God can forgive her, too. But I wonder if she has ever realized she needs that forgiveness. When she passes Ben at school or sees him in the cafeteria, what goes through her mind? Does she real-

ize she played a part in tearing down his purity? Does she feel pangs of guilt for breaking his heart? Does she even care?

I believe the time has come for Christians, male and female, to own up to the mess we've left behind in our selfish pursuit of short-term romance. What excuse will we have when God asks us to account for our actions and attitudes in relationships? If God sees a sparrow fall (Matthew 10:29), do you think He could possibly overlook the broken hearts and hurt we cause in relationships based on selfishness?

Everyone around us may be doing it. But at the end of our lives, we won't answer to everyone. We'll answer to God. Our actions in relationships haven't escaped God's notice. But here's the good news: The God who sees all our sin is ready to forgive if we repent and turn from them.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice for me, I know that God has forgiven me for the sins I've committed against Him and against the girlfriends I've had. I don't have to live overwhelmed by regret or fear of the future. Because we serve a God who makes all things new, the wedding nightmare my friend Anna had doesn't have to be ours—no matter how many mistakes we've made in the past.

It's this grace, this mercy, that should motivate us to live differently for the rest of our lives.

I'm an unworthy sinner that God chose to rescue and forgive.

This is love.

And because I've experienced it—because Jesus died for me—I'm committed to a love life that's controlled by Him. I invite you along. In light of the love He's given us, let's make purity and blamelessness our priority.

Excerpted from *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris
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