

inspired by
the motion picture
Old Fashioned

the reclaiming the
lost art of romance

old fashioned
♥ way

GINGER KOLBABA

based on the screenplay by rik swartzwelder



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The Old Fashioned Way: Reclaiming the Lost Art of Romance

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a note from rik swartzwelder

When you are a writer, you are often asked the question, “How did you come up with the idea for fill-in-the-blank?”

In the case of *Old Fashioned*, this question is hard to answer. As Clay says in the film, “It wasn’t just one thing; it was more like a lot of little things, all adding up.”

If I *had* to pick a starting point, it would be that I’d begun to feel the absence of a movie that accurately reflected the lives of the people I knew personally: single people who took the idea of honoring God in their dating relationships seriously. *How would a movie like that look?* I wondered. *And how could you craft it in a way that wasn’t propaganda or completely Pollyanna?*

A lot of other stuff went into the mix, of course, but that was the start. As I sketched out the basic outline of the story, I knew I needed an image that would be a cornerstone for the film. Such things do not always come easy in the creative process, but this time I saw it right away.

Feet at a threshold.

I couldn’t shake that image or the idea that most mistakes in life are cemented by choices made long before any actual “fall.” We cross a threshold, and that leads to . . . and that leads to . . .

What if you applied that image to a romantic context, and what

if you had a character who took that threshold seriously—a character who, for whatever reason, had committed himself to make decisions in advance of the moment? Maybe he began living this way for redemptive reasons, maybe it morphs into a form of isolation that he never intended, maybe he begins to doubt.

What if?

That was the birth of the rather odd and curious character of Clay Walsh and the genesis of what would eventually become the screenplay and motion picture titled *Old Fashioned*.

Cut! Print! Moving on! But why *this* book?

Good question. I can assure you that when I first sat down to write the screenplay for *Old Fashioned*, the last thing on my mind was a nonfiction companion book about dating, courtship, and romance.

I would never claim to be any kind of expert on those things. (I can supply much expert testimony and many witnesses confirming that I am not.) And second, more important, movies are about story above all. About entertainment. True, good movies can be more. They can educate, they can inspire, they can nudge the world in a new and positive direction. But unless they entertain, none of those more noble aspirations has a chance.

We don't go to the movies to see a "how to" on any given topic; we go to be transported outside of ourselves, to share in and somehow connect with the journey of another. To be moved. How-to manuals, no matter how helpful they are, rarely move us in the same way that a film or a song or a painting can.

In saying that, I don't mean to slight how-to books at all; they are needed. Generally speaking, books are much better suited to reflection, to stopping and starting, to digging deeper into an idea and looking at it from all angles and challenging the assumptions and premises of any given work or presentation. And, curiously, our primary purpose when reading a book like this one usually is *not* entertainment. We read it because we want to learn, we want to drill

down, we want to grow. In a sense, we are already invested, at least at some level, in the message of the book.

This isn't to say that movies don't have messages. They do. All of them. There's a famous quote (usually attributed to Samuel Goldwyn) that goes, "If you want to send a message, call Western Union." But as Gary Cooper says in *Meet John Doe*, "That's a lotta hooley!"

Every movie has a message. From *Schindler's List* to *The Hangover*, all movies are saying something—usually lots of things, whether intended or not. People usually only refer to that Goldwyn quote when they have a preexisting strong disagreement with any perceived "message."

That said, where I think Goldwyn was 100 percent right was that if you want to give a sermon, you should give a sermon, not shoehorn it into celluloid (or pixels) and pretend it's a movie.

My creative team and I thought about that quite a bit while making *Old Fashioned*. We worked hard to make the "messages" in our movie organic to the characters and the situations. We consciously tried to keep our movie from becoming a how-to manual or a testament to those blessed few who have made all the right choices. Our characters make mistakes: they are flawed, they are human. Now, whether we succeeded in our storytelling goals is for audiences and critics to decide.

But regardless of how the prevailing winds of popular opinion blow, one thing is fairly clear: *Old Fashioned* raises more questions than it answers. Personally, I like movies that do that. It's somehow disingenuous to have a two-hour monologue that doesn't give voice to opposition or that wraps everything up perfectly. In some ways, I think our film serves primarily as the *beginning* of a conversation, a dialogue.

So I saw this book as an opportunity to continue the conversation in a way that our movie never could (or should, really). After many hours of thoughtful and genuine conversation, I can say with

confidence that Ginger Kolbaba and the team at Tyndale have captured the vision of *Old Fashioned* and illuminated its message in a way that will encourage, strengthen, and challenge you wherever you are in your romantic life.

The times we live in can be difficult and uncertain, particularly for singles, and we need a sane approach to relationships that affirms the reality of human nature and our need for divine intervention. This book will help you take an honest look both at your relationships and at some of the traditions that through the years have been carelessly tossed aside.

Thank you so much for sharing in this conversation with us. May you be as blessed as we have been by the experience.

INTRODUCTION

when life was simpler: welcome to the old fashioned way

“There’s got to be a better way,” a friend told me recently. We’d been chatting about her latest dates, in which she felt pressured and confused and completely unsatisfied. “Why can’t we go back to the way things used to be?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, sensing I already knew the answer.

“You know, when life was simpler. Men were, well . . .” She paused, as if embarrassed about what she was thinking.

“Men?” I offered. “A time when we knew our roles? And when that wasn’t a bad thing? When we knew what to expect from each other?”

“Yes!” She pointed at me emphatically. “That’s it exactly. It’s like nobody knows how to date anymore, or even really how to have a committed relationship. You go out, then the next thing you know, you’re sleeping together with no commitment and no plans to get married.” She sighed. “I know this isn’t what God has in mind, but I don’t know what to do about it.”

My friend isn’t the only one feeling that way. I know lots of singles—women and men—who are wandering around the dating circuit confused, unsure, and unhappy about relationships.

They are looking for a better way, a simpler way. A more satisfying and God-honoring way.

Maybe they are looking for the old fashioned way. Maybe you are too.

Old fashioned. What images come to mind when you hear that phrase?

If it's old fashioned cooking with meat loaf and gravy, homemade biscuits, and pink lemonade, followed by a generous helping of churned butter-pecan ice cream, you may smile and think, *I sure could use some of that old fashioned.* Or maybe it's porch swings, rowboats, clothes hanging on the line, Aunt Bee, and Mayberry. And it fills you with a sense of joy and longing.

But what if you think of old fashioned clothes—those constrictive, high collars, two hundred buttons, and layers upon layers? You probably aren't smiling now. Not to mention, weren't those also the days when glimpsing a woman's ankle could cause a man to have a strong hankering after sinful things? Or maybe you think of old fashioned as the patriarchal, sexist, chauvinistic, we-like-our-women-barefoot-and-pregnant baloney.

Often when we think about *old fashioned*, we think in extremes: the yummy, high-fat, high-calorie, oh-those-were-the-days delights or the tighter-than-tight, no-grace, prudish, yowসা-those-were-the-days angst.

But what about old fashioned romance? What if living (or loving) the old fashioned way wasn't as bad as you may at first think? What if it actually helped you find peace and satisfaction? Is it possible that we've put old fashioned courtship and romance into the same category as the high-collared, puritanical outfits? That we've pushed them off without considering the many joys and possibilities they offer for real, authentic, and deep relationships?

Old fashioned can be a provocative and divisive label, no question. And I certainly don't intend to imply that life in generations past was perfect. After all, the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us not to "long for 'the good old days,' for you don't know whether they were any

better than today” (7:10). We know that things in “the good old days” weren’t always as they seemed. People in the past weren’t necessarily paragons of purity who consistently fought sexual urges. While certain behaviors may have become more “open” in recent years (say, after the sexual revolution of the 1960s), that doesn’t mean those behaviors are new. Grandma Johnson used to say, “Kids today are just doing on the front porch what we used to do on the back porch.”

So we know “the good old days” had their issues, but perhaps there *are* some things we’ve left behind that are worth reconsidering for the way we handle our relationships.

In the following pages you’ll read forty days’ worth of ideals and thoughts that may seem strange, foreign, or possibly downright hokey. You may agree with some and turn up your nose at others. You may think, *Yeah, well, sure it worked for couples in the past, but that’s so . . . yesterday.* And that’s okay. My goal isn’t to twist your arm. But I hope that you’ll at least give these ideals some genuine, open-minded, and honest consideration—that you’ll pray about them and see how God leads you.

This book isn’t a compatibility workbook or a how-to-date manual, nor is it a book to act as a club to beat anyone up with. The goal isn’t to lift up the people who have done it perfectly or to heap shame on those who have made bad choices.

Please remember, we’ve *all* made mistakes. The Christian life is a learning process. We all come from a place of brokenness, and we all long for a better world. The goal, the noble end, is the same for all of us: moving closer to God, closer to how we’re called to live. The goal of this book is to inspire and create a hope and longing for us to be our best selves, regardless of how fractured we are.

If you’ve been hurt, or even if you have hurt others, that doesn’t exclude you from the capacity to love and be loved. There is hope, and there *is* a better way.

Ultimately, this book is about grace—what we offer and what we can receive. The old fashioned way starts with how we treat

others—before we even begin with romance. After all, we can't treat people badly in one area of our lives and expect to behave better in romance. Who we are and how we treat others will inevitably seep into our romantic relationships.

Living the old fashioned way means being intentional in our relationships. It thinks in terms of *I* and *Thou* (such a great and little-used word nowadays!), always considering others above ourselves (you can read more about “I” and “Thou” relationships on Days 6 and 10). The focus is on the other person—which is the essence of the Golden Rule (“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you”—Matthew 7:12).

So let's take this journey and explore these ideas together. Let's look at the ways and traditions of the past. Not with rose-colored glasses that deny what was destructive. But let's examine the good things in the past that were in place to protect us—things like courtship (taking dating and relationships slowly and thoughtfully), chaperones (today's equivalent of getting your friends and family involved in your dating life and listening to their wisdom), and modesty (respecting ourselves and the way we present ourselves to others).

This book came about from several conversations with Rik Swartzwelder, the screenwriter and director of the movie *Old Fashioned*, as well as from the movie and the novel based on it.* Both that movie and this book attempt to challenge our modern way of looking at romantic relationships with wisdom from the past. If you're just beginning your romantic journey, this book may help you avoid some pitfalls. And even if this is round two, ten, or twenty for you, your life can blossom far beyond whatever damage has been done to you or that you may have done to others. The rest of your life doesn't have to be what it was. It can be better; it can be beautiful. The old fashioned way: let's find it.

*For a plot summary and additional information about *Old Fashioned* (the movie and the book), turn to page 221.

DAY 1

what's right about today's dating scene

CLAY: I don't believe our job is the looking, it's the becoming. Once we are the right person . . . when we're ready . . .

AMBER: But if you don't ever date, how will you know?

—OLD FASHIONED

MY FRIEND TODD HAS BEEN MARRIED FIVE YEARS. He and his wife have built a strong relationship that has carried them through job loss and several other challenges. They've started a family, and whenever I talk with him or hear updates on him from other friends, the news is always good. He's happy. He's satisfied. He's still deeply in love.

Todd and his wife met through an online dating service.

Wait, an online dating service? How is that old fashioned?

After Todd spent years searching for the right woman, going on numerous dates—some he initiated, others initiated for him through the infamous blind-date system—he felt more and more discouraged at his prospects.

“Nothing felt right,” he says. “I wasn't dating anyone, was scarred by past hurt, and felt pretty lonely. I began wrestling with why it seemed that every woman I met was not a right fit—it was always a

dance of square pegs and round holes. *Maybe, I thought, the selective matching of online dating would present not just a wider pool—but prescreened compatibility.*”¹

That it did. And after a month of talking over the computer and phone and learning more about each other’s character, likes, dislikes, temperaments, and personalities, Todd and his now-wife decided to meet each other. They had a good foundation to start building a relationship on. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Technology, the improvement of life, and our contemporary dating scene have a lot of great things going on. Some Internet dating sites—such as eHarmony—have hit upon an important aspect of building the basics of relationships. Rather than focusing on physical attributes and sexual chemistry as the main determinants of relational worthiness, these sites center on personality and character, understanding that marriage needs more than physical attraction to make it last.

Modern dating also allows people to focus on building friendships. I know many couples who date in group settings, for instance, in order to allow their trusted friends and family to help them see their potential beloved in a more objective light. Singles groups, church groups, and hobby groups allow for interaction and connection in a (hopefully!) nonthreatening way.

To be sure, nothing is perfect in the world of dating, so you may have tried these options and found them lacking.

Where Todd and his wife got it right was in not idealizing romance. The good thing that many online dating services have going for them is that they push their users to address things that may never get out in the open in a dating relationship: who the other person really is—not the facade he or she is presenting, the issues that are important, deal makers and breakers. Dating websites and similar opportunities allow the user to bring these issues to the forefront so that prospective dates can get a quicker understanding of what makes a person tick—issues that may not come out in a relationship until

further down the road or even never at all—until meeting the divorce attorney after a marriage has gone sour.

I am not implying that today's dating scene or Internet dating sites or church singles groups are holy ground, nor am I suggesting that you sign up for an online dating service. I just wanted you to know that even though I'm advocating the old fashioned way, today's dating scene has some old fashioned similarities that are worth considering and affirming: namely, getting to know the other person beyond appearance and physical chemistry.

If you live a life guided by wisdom, you won't limp or stumble as you run.

—PROVERBS 4:12

JOURNAL

- List some of the good aspects of today's dating ideas and methods. Then explain why you think they are good. For instance, if you list personality compatibility profiles, offer reasons for needing to know about someone's personality before you get too involved in a relationship or why the other person needs to know about your personality.
- Think about what you can offer another person. What are your strengths, not just in a romantic way, but in a lifelong-partner way? What are some weaknesses that you need to work on? Write those out, and then discuss them with God.

PRAYER

God, I've gone in so many different directions, trying to find the right person I can share my life with. I'm often discouraged and frustrated because no one seems to fit or truly connect with me. I've made a lot of mistakes along the way.

Help me to see beyond the typical dating scene and look to the type of person who can grow my character and love me for who I am, and whom I can love as you love. But most of all, keep me attuned to your desires for whom I should allow into my life in a deeper, more committed way.

DAY 2

what's right about yesteryear's dating scene

I know how weird it sounds . . . but a lot of the boundaries that used to be common, that we've thrown away, were there to protect us. We don't have to go around using each other, hurting each other. It doesn't have to be that way.

—CLAY, *OLD FASHIONED*

I REMEMBER WHEN I FOUND OUT my friend Amanda (not her real name) was moving in with her boyfriend of two months—a man who had a string of ex-girlfriends (with whom he had also fathered children). In fact, he was still living with his most recent ex-girlfriend and their baby and was now dating my friend.

“Amanda, why would you do that?” I asked. “He’s still involved with his ex!”

“Well, not really,” she told me matter-of-factly. “He’s still living there, but that’s it.”

She informed me that they were moving in together because it would be cheaper, plus it would help them know better if they were compatible enough to get married.

I pulled out every reason I could think of for them not to move their relationship in the direction they were headed. I told her that

statistically speaking, couples who live together before they marry are more likely to get divorced and to experience domestic violence, and they actually experience less satisfaction in their marriages than if they wait to live together until after they marry.¹ I told her that as Christians we are called to live differently—counterculturally—from what the world says is acceptable, that God’s boundaries were put in place for healthy, good reasons.

Her response: “I don’t set myself up for failure.”

Life in the “good old days” seems passé and prudish. Our culture tells us that if we love someone, we should be able to be with that person immediately and experience all the benefits of married life without actually being married. Our culture continues to try to eliminate sexual behavior from discussions of morality.

To a crowd of civil-rights activists in the black American community, comedian Bill Cosby recently said, “No longer is a person embarrassed because they’re pregnant without a husband. No longer is a boy considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being [a] father.”²

Although Cosby’s comments drew criticism, he makes a good point. Yesteryear’s way of dating and commitment in relationships may have been more difficult, but it was ultimately set up to protect us from undue harm and shame. It kept our consciences and actions in check. Part of being old fashioned is having a realistic view of sin, the world, and human nature. To be sure, the church throughout the years has in many ways overcompensated on the shame part, but being truly old fashioned is a balance of understanding sin and forgiveness, shame and grace.

Abolishing shame completely signifies how much we’ve lost the moral compass that God designed for us and that society, for so long, held us accountable to.

Instead, today men who try to act chivalrous are often accused of being sexist. We talk about “friends with benefits” as though we

can separate the physical actions from the emotional, spiritual, and psychological consequences. Old cultural norms and assumptions are not necessarily true: men *and* women are now both “players.” And without beating up too much on Hollywood or pop culture, many would acknowledge that we send a confusing message to ourselves and to the rest of the world.

Going back to the traditions of our past isn’t a bad thing! Although they are counter to what our culture (and even some churches now, sadly) says is “normal,” they also safeguard our hearts, minds, and bodies from regret and hurt. These traditions keep us pure (an old fashioned word!) and protected for the person who will ultimately become our spouse.

But you may be thinking, *Well, I’ve blown it. I’m not “pure.”* The beauty of this ideal is that through forgiveness, God can clean up your past and make you pure again. Purity really isn’t just a one-time cleansing and then you’re done; it is ongoing. And thankfully, God offers us a better way to live and relate to others—and with that comes a clear conscience and, ultimately, peace.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

—ROMANS 8:5-6

CONSIDER THIS

- What are some things current cultural attitudes would believe are old fashioned in relationships? Do you believe those things are old fashioned? Why or why not?

- If you've struggled with living out old fashioned ideals, has it been because of pressure from others? Some other reason? How were you swayed?

JOURNAL

The apostle Paul offers one of the best yeses in the Bible. Read Romans 8:5-6 (today's Scripture verse) and consider: Is this true in your life? Think about the times in your life and your relationships when you said yes to God's Spirit leading you. Did that decision give you peace? Write about those times as reminders of the power and importance of saying yes to the right things.

Now think about the times in your life and your relationships when you went your own way, pressured someone to cave in, or caved in yourself to the pressure of others around you. How did those decisions make you feel? Did they provide peace, or regret and angst? Write about those times as reminders of the importance of staying true to God's call for morality on your life.

DAY 3

but the old fashioned way
is so *old fashioned*

*There are no knights in shining armor, but you think you're Cinderella,
don't you?*

—LUCKY CHUCKY, *OLD FASHIONED*

IN *OLD FASHIONED* THE CHARACTER LUCKY CHUCKY is a radio shock jock who doesn't agree with pursuing an old fashioned way of life. He believes that life is meant to be enjoyed without bounds. He sees the hypocritical nature of people who say one thing and act differently. He observes that those in the church often seem as lost and confused on this stuff as "the world" is, that chivalry is dead, monogamy is outdated, and abstinence is for, well, no one. If you feel it, do it. Don't allow the emotional or spiritual side to get tangled up in the mess. Relationships are first and foremost about chemistry, he believes. Or simply personal pleasure.

Apart from any spiritual or religious boundaries, let's be honest: what Lucky Chucky believes makes sense. The physical side of romance feels good. Why not enjoy it without the strings of commitment and responsibility? Besides, as the cliché goes, everyone else is doing it.

But when we throw out the sacred traditions of the past, we lose something in the process. “You can tell a lot about a society by who it chooses to celebrate,” a TV reporter says in Woody Allen’s film *Celebrity*. I think the reporter is right. The traditions of the past encouraged us to love and respect our neighbors, to offer kindness and service to others in need. We once praised Neil Armstrong, police officers, and Mother Teresa. Now we can’t get our fill of *Jersey Shore*, TMZ, and *Glamour* magazine.

Aside from his cynical view of love and relationships, there’s some truth in what Lucky Chucky says. It isn’t pleasant, but his assessment of a lot of things is dead on. He sees the superficiality of contemporary love for what it is and doesn’t pretend that it’s anything other than what it is on the surface. He says, “Women are just like men; everyone wants it both ways.” In other words, a woman might want the rebel, the “bad boy,” but she also wants someone who is faithful. We might be drawn to someone for all the wrong reasons, so we shouldn’t act brokenhearted when that person behaves as we might expect him or her (this goes both ways) to behave.

This is true even in church. I see young, quiet, sincere guys who are trying desperately to live authentic, God-honoring lives and beautiful, young, Christian girls who say that’s what they want. But then the girls pursue someone who has more charisma and maybe has been blessed with more social skills but may or may not be pursuing God with his whole heart. Obviously, I’m oversimplifying here, but imagine the Christian guy who’s trying to live a godly life, but at church all the girls are talking about how awesome Channing Tatum (or fill in the blank with some hunky movie star) is. Every time I’m in a situation where I hear that, it breaks my heart. The women aren’t saying that Channing Tatum (or celeb of the month) is awesome because he’s pursuing God in his life. They’re saying he’s awesome because he’s got a great body and he’s handsome and charismatic. And that’s it. It

has nothing to do with his values, his level of integrity, or anything that matters at all.

Part of the reason old fashioned values can seem so old fashioned to us is that we've bought into the world's way of viewing relationships. What we say we want and what we actually want are often different things, and so we become confused as to what it means to follow God in our romantic relationships.

As we consider pursuing the old fashioned way, may the blatant honesty of Lucky Chucky remind us of the truth of who we are and who we don't have to be.

Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves,
you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy,
kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

—COLOSSIANS 3:12

CONSIDER THIS

- Read back over some of Lucky Chucky's attitudes I mentioned. Do any of those ring true in your actions, thoughts, or relationships?
- If they are true, why do you think that is? What do you think needs to happen in order to change that thought pattern or behavior?

PRAYER

God, I don't like the things that Lucky Chucky and people like him recognize and say. But some of those things are true about me. Point those things out to me when I'm tempted to go that way. Give me wisdom and discernment to see that attitude or behavior and then give me the strength to walk away from it and toward attitudes and behaviors that please you and honor those around me.