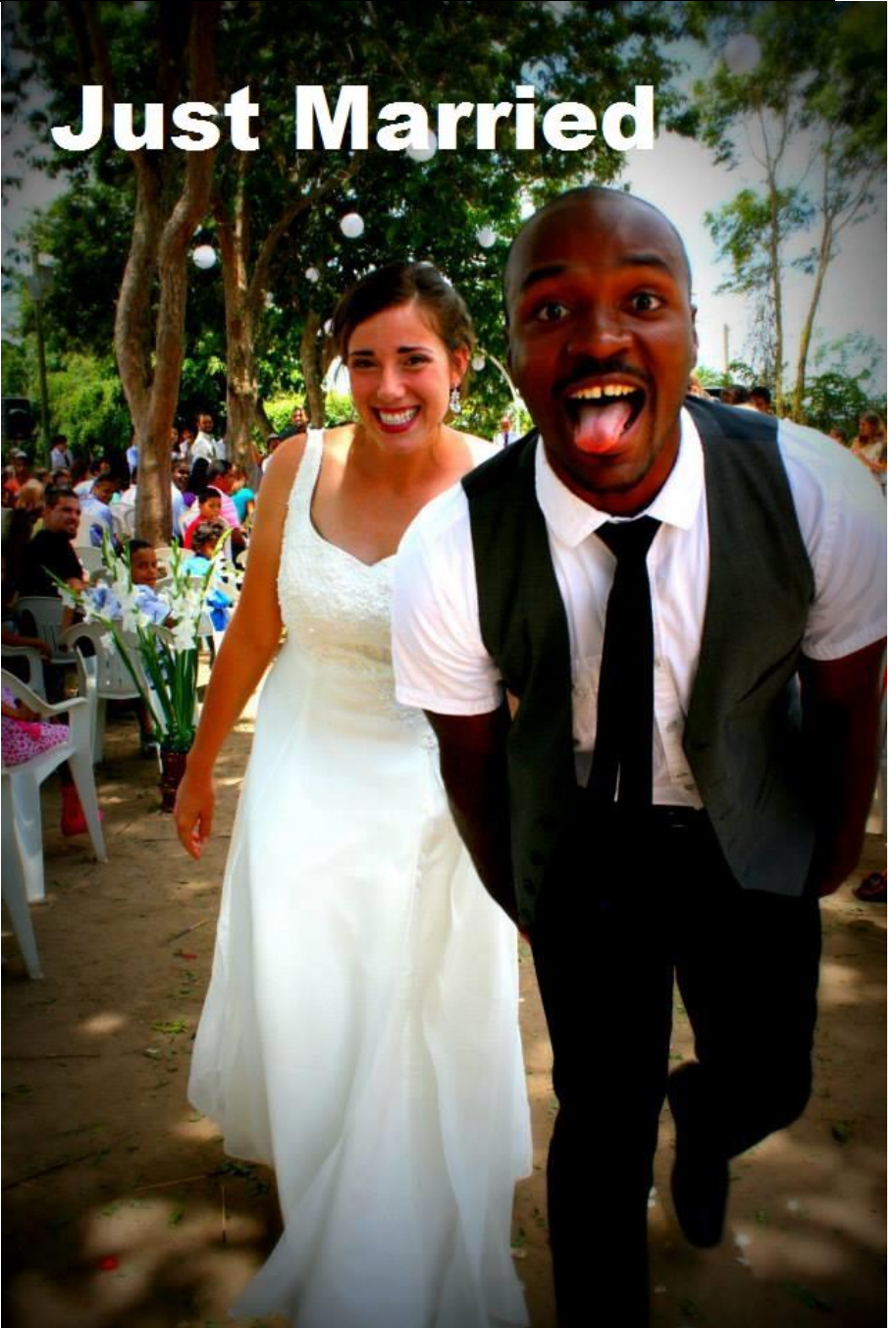

Just Married



November 9, 2013: Fergie Adventures Begin

He says I am short. At 5'3", I am one inch under the USA average for women. To me, this makes me just a little under average, not short. We have agreed for him to call me petite.

It is the little joys of him sweeping the floor while I do the dishes. Cheering when fixing the oven. High fiving it when the toilet finally flushes. Rolling over in bed and finding someone there. Having an arm wrap around you in the dark. The honeymoon was really nice. We slept alot, and didn't go out and do anything. Sex is exhausting.

He shakes his head and mumbles "Type A" under his breath again. I like getting things done. Before our honeymoon, the longest I'd been able to last at the beach (without internet, without doing work) was five days. The honeymoon was nine days, and I was sad to go. This marriage stuff could be really good for me.

We have started our own collection of secrets. I've never done that before. Growing up, I never really had secrets. All my awkward quirks were already obvious. My friends and I giggled about boys, but I was too shy to talk to them. But now I have this friend—this best friend—and we read about keeping some things secret. Sacred. Just me and him.

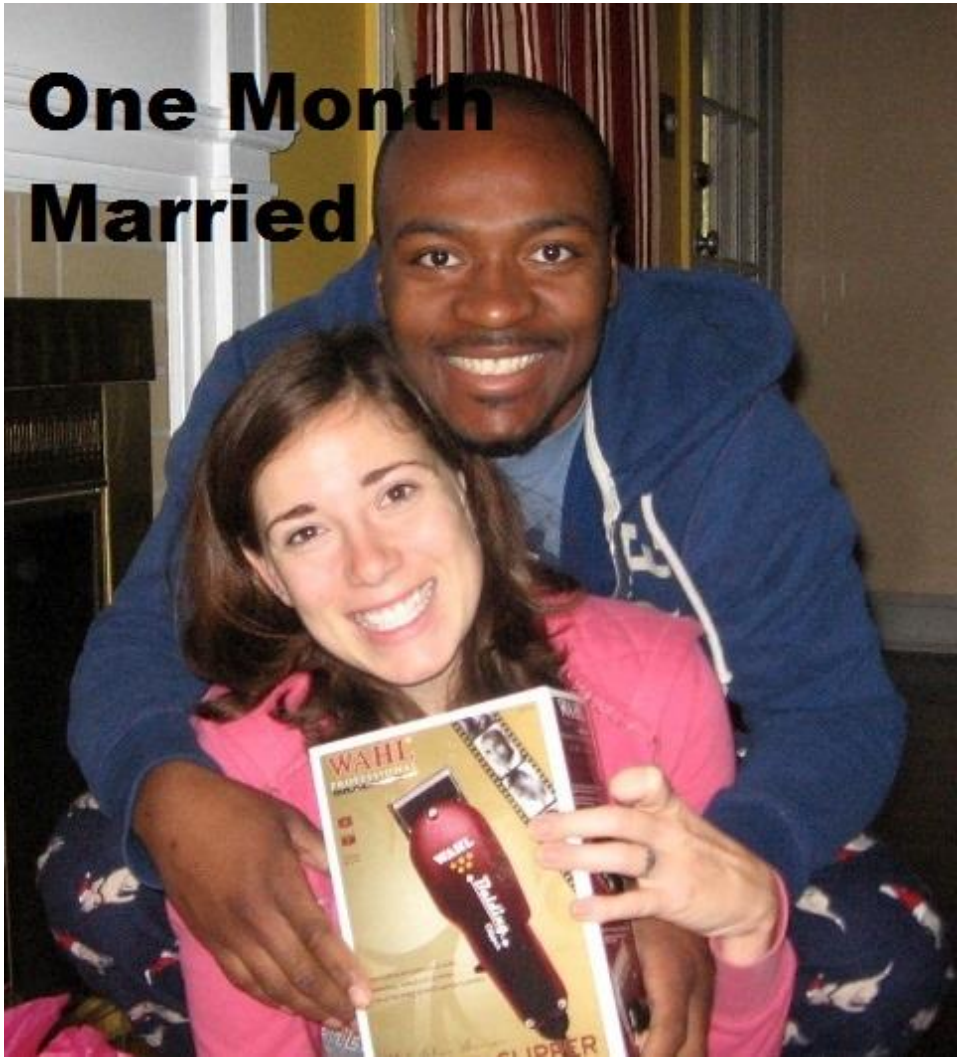
They all have the same look on their face as they hug me: "How was your honeymoon?" (Smirk) "It was fantastic! So relaxing and fun!" (More smirk) "Ooooooh, reeeeeally?" And I turn red not because I know they are thinking about how we had sex, but because we can't say it for what it really is. No one ever says the S-word. Our culture is so interestingly screwed.

I am the product of either sex-overload or sex-silence. Culture and movies have created 30 years of what I thought sexuality was. A few good conversations with a few good people gave me some perspective, but most everyone else was silent.

And then a man and a woman come together and have sex for the first time, and it is like a whole pot of issues and confusion is opened. 95% of what we knew was wrong. It is so much more and so much less than what we were told.

Christianity told me to "Just wait and then it will be great." What? I put on hold a whole part of my life—my sexuality—because I figured it was just to be ignored until it was unlocked on my wedding night. I have come face to face with a huge part of ME, who I am, that I have never met.

I've read every Bible verse there is about sex, I have read every popular Christian book about it—and yet, I still feel like I have no idea what God thinks about sex—and wants me to think about it—while I am actually DOING it. And in the end, this is no one's fault but mine. And so I am getting to know myself.



I am amazed at life and change, and how smoothly and quickly it can happen. I am captivated by the idea of “normal,” and how we CREATE our own version of normal. I have worked a long time to live an intentional life: choosing what I wanted in my life, creating a life that pleased God, made me feel good, and helped others.

For 30 years I created the normal for Rachel Winzeler. And I did it pretty darn well. And then, I changed my name. Symbolic for changing everything. The normal I see right now, this morning, typing on this computer is so completely different from the normal I had one month ago—and yet—it is still ME.

Caid and I are now intentionally working on this new “normal.” This isn’t easy because there are two brains/ideas now. My previous version of productivity has decreased 90%, but my happiness and completeness has increased 80%, and in ways I never expected: there is a whole world of companionship I never knew existed.

I looked at the row of single students at the Thanksgiving Eve service and I gasped at the idea of going home alone. I never missed it that deeply while single—but I must admit, it was because I didn’t know how nice it could be to go home with someone, your someone every night. It is an unexplainable comfort and joy to me. A blessing I never expected.

And we stay up late to talk through something that bothered one of us until we figure out why. And then we snuggle together in the firm belief that nothing can touch us there and honeymoons last forever. No, it isn’t perfect, but it is honestly better than I thought it would be. Not that I thought marriage was horrible, but I’ve seen quite a few, and it just seemed generally...hard. But I see why nine out of ten people get married now.

And my normal has already changed to not being able to imagine being single again. My normal is okay with spending an evening “accomplishing nothing,” because I simply spent time with him. For the first time in my life, I am fine with doing nothing, because I realize it isn’t NOTHING--it is the most BEAUTIFUL thing--because when I am doing "nothing" with Caid--it is relationship building, it is deep soul growing...and even if we are just snuggled up and watching a movie--it is something important I am doing--I am creating a most amazing wonderful marriage/relationship/soul bond forever. And that is worth investing my life into making.

Caid brought me flowers yesterday. The perfect kind for me, and they meant a lot. I didn’t even realize (and neither did he) that yesterday was our one month anniversary. We don’t remember dates well. But we celebrated and had an amazing day—we lived it, a normal day, like it was a special day, not knowing it really was a special day. And that is how it should be.

I hope this isn’t just a “honeymoon phase” thing. I want life to keep on like this. Some people say it can, others say it can’t. I am trying to put my brain to writing down the things I have learned about life and love and marriage in the first month, so that next month I can laugh at them and write new ones. I’ve turned into a snoot that looks at the single person and feels sorry for them. Oh darn. But it really is like opening a door to another world.



Half way through the wedding ceremony I thought, “I have no idea what I am doing.” I looked at him and realized, “He doesn’t know either. The next idea was, “And this is the only way to find it out.” So I kept on my permanent wedding smile.

It has been two months now. I think back and remember things like how little Iasmine couldn’t keep her eyes off of me in my wedding dress. She stopped dead in her tracks and stared like her life depended on it. I smiled, and told her to go back with the other girls. No movement, not even a blink. I frowned, and told her to go back with the other girls. Repeatedly. But she wouldn’t budge, looking at me like my wedding finery was feeding her hungry belly. Iasmine lives at the dump. She has never been to a wedding. There isn’t much she sees that is beautiful. She was starved for beauty. I couldn’t be angry about that. I signed and let her stare.

Vulnerable. That is the word that ran through my head over and over as I prepared to get married, and then took the plunge. My goal in being single was being self-sufficient. Taking responsibility as an adult and learning how

to make it work the best I can. Changing into marriage phase of life was vulnerable.

Learning to love someone. Letting them in. Entrusting them with the rest of your life. Planning a wedding in another country and not knowing how to do much of anything. Two days before the wedding I stood in the line of the grocery store, having bought food for 250 people. As I saw the bill, I fiercely proclaimed that they'd better come. My hard front for the fearful feeling that no one would show up. Vulnerable.

And when we finally got in the car and left for the honeymoon, it hit me again. Vulnerable. Naked bodies and whole worlds I have never known. I have had to retrain myself—it was like my body didn't know how to enjoy itself. There were stigmas tied everywhere to feeling guilty for feeling good, or wondering if I crossed a line into lust...I had turned off pleasure for so long, my body didn't know how to let go.

What do you get when two virgins get married and start having sex? Confusion. You realize all you knew about sex and intimacy you've learned from Hollywood and the porn industry. The church told us "Just wait," but the part of you called sexuality didn't just lie dormant and still—information snuck in under the door. Subconsciously, while I was keeping my clothes on, my heart was naked and held by the ideas of culture. The lie is that part of your life would just stay "Empty and void" until married. It is an illusion to believe that everything we let into our minds for years won't come into our bedroom now that we are married.

I hold him in my arms and he tells me he is broken. I am broken too. We had our honeymoon, moving back to Indiana, Thanksgiving and family reunions, Christmas letters with wedding invitations, family vacation, and Christmas in Connecticut with his family. Now it is a new year with new goals. We wrote our resumes, our 2014 goals, and our bucket list. We move from dreaming to doing. Dreaming has been nice.

This morning when I woke up, he opened his arms to me and said, "Come." Soon I am enfolded in him. He invites me in closer, in so many ways. Even when we argue he grabs my hand—calling me to stay. There are so many things I appreciate about him, from his like-ability and fun-lovingness, to his optimism and humility: it has been an amazing two months.

Indiana Three Months Married



A conversation with a friend:

“This whole marriage thing is high maintenance. It is one person who wants all of me, really. I talked with Anna and she was like, “Well I guess that is all you need Rachel, someone to appreciate what you do.” And it probably is true. Caid makes me perfectly happy. Completely happy.

“I feel guilty about not talking with you more. I am in this husband phase, and I am trying to figure it out. I am pretty sure the honeymoon ends when my focus on him ends. The problem is I don’t know how to do this—I used to just tell you all my secrets as my best friend, and I can’t say everything now. Now I have Caid and Rachel secrets. I’ve never had any secrets I didn’t tell you before. I don’t know how to balance my time, my sharing, my life.”

Her response:

"I will wait until you're ready to add in heart-to-hearts with girlfriends that are sort of separated from Caid, until you are secure and solid in your heart being together and on the same page with him that you can have your own separate thoughts/feelings/problems/solutions without needing to filter it through an establishing relationship first.

"I want to assure you that your phase, even if it seems to separate other friendships, is not just normal but healthy and necessary. In the Bible it was about a year right? That for the first year of marriage they didn't even work? That the dude was supposed to "cheer up his wife" or something? Just a year of getting bonded before moving on with life. (Deut. 24:5)

"I think that's about how it works. After a full year than you're ready to add in other things. And you don't have to wean yourself off - it just moves that direction. And I was scared of that idea at first - I never wanted to lose that magic and complete satisfaction. But it doesn't really die, it just sort of gets layered with contentment, with... security.

"Marriage just sort of works itself out... you'll include more people slowly and steadily and yet find a balance. Your husband IS your priority and until you two have really gotten to know each other (and more than conversations, but for example, watched and experienced each others work ethic etc... know how you tie your shoes... know exactly how he brushes his teeth... know how to inspire him, know what to do when he's depressed, know what to do when he's lazy, know what it takes to keep an open full relationship...) EVERYTHING takes a lot of time and focus. And this is when that it supposed to happen. So I not only get that you're a little busy right now, but I RESPECT that. And I'm guessing within a year you usually have gotten a pretty good grasp on marriage and sort of are ready to embrace more."

This is a lot of what I am learning in this third month. We are moving into schedules and jobs and homework and "how does it all fit" questions. Some of the warm fuzzies have worn off and then it is about choosing to love. And love comes best/easiest through gratefulness.

After a tiring day of little tifts, Caid turned off the car, pulled my forehead next to his, and started a list of "Thank yous." It went from "Thank you for sharing your family with me," to "Thank you for still listening" and on. It was beautiful.

I feel happy. Complete. I am not so productive, but a better person for it. It is easier than I thought it would be, but more time consuming as well. He is always more layers than I first saw. I will always be wondering if I will ever stop learning him. It is a great adventure.



So four months married and 9 godchildren--our family is growing fast--how fantastic!

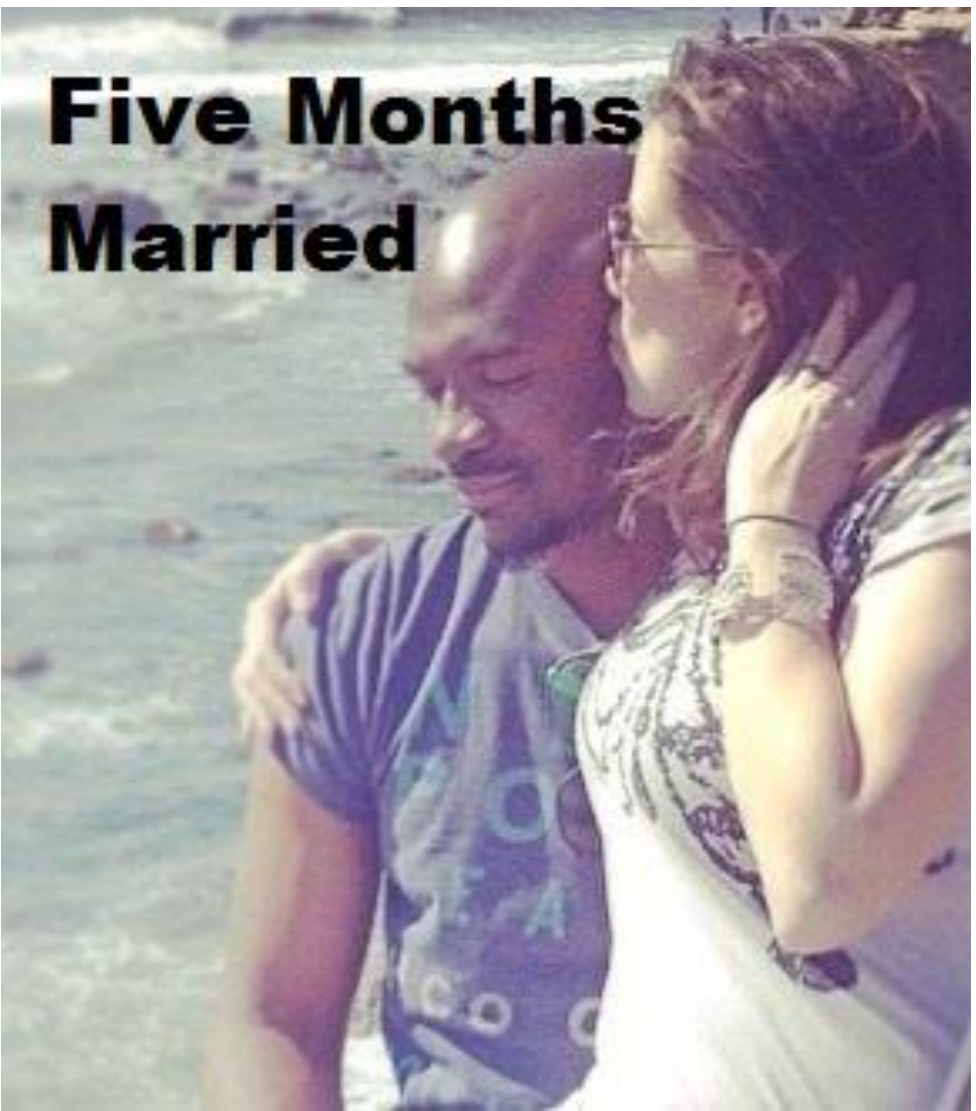
The main thing that is happening in our lives is What I learned from my First wedding, and getting ready for my second and third wedding. I have made my own bouquet and am almost done with garland. Still have to figure out the aisle runner.

The most exciting thing that has happened this month is Being commissioned as Missionaries and the special amazing donation/blessing that came with that.

Something really personally soul-searching was Mr. Gothard Issues, and I am enjoying my lists and projects as we begin Lent: Reading the Gospels in parallel, Chronological order.

As I look at Caid and we celebrate four months of being together, I resist the urge to sigh and say, "We have arrived!" Because that is how it feels--but hey--I am totally open to the idea of it getting even better. I thank the Lord for this Godly man and best friend that I get to hang out with all the time. And he is hot. gee.

Five Months Married



This month has been the most active and accomplished: we got married two more times. It was amazing, and I am overwhelmed with how loved and cared for we are. Month six involves writing a lot of thank you cards. We had our biggest fights and our best make-ups so far this month.

*

He left after the fight, and I let him go. The feelings swelled until they filled my ears and I thought I heard his steps on the stairs, but no, not yet—not yet. It cut me, somewhere deep inside, where little me remembers mommy and daddy fighting and the door closing behind daddy. He came back, he

always came back—I have never been abandoned. But I still believe I can be. Maybe this will be my first—the time of no return. These things do happen, you know. They happen all the time.

The door closes on hope. Each minute goes by timelessly, tugging me into a picture of life without him. My hardness crumbles. My laugh of independence fades and I am a shaking little girl curled up in a ball on a very big bed. The sheets are cold and still around me, I am treading water in an ocean. There is no rest. I run out of blame.

Why are you depriving me of you? Waiting for the unknown moment of your return. He comes back—he was only clearing his head. I crumble in his hands. I am undone. I feel ashamed of my weakness and dramatic sobs. He pulls back my pain and holds me.

I am sorry and I forgive you and I forgive you again. He wasn't walking out the door, he was walking into my nightmares, released until he returned. When did I become such a part of you? When did you become my everything?

*

Girls go on a date thinking, "Everything is a no until I say so. I am in control."

A guy goes on the date thinking, "Cool! Everything is a go until she says NO."

A lot of physical ground can be covered between a stated YES and NO. Most guys understand physical yes/no cues, but unless very direct, they will quickly try again.

The girl is still thinking she hasn't said yes, when the guy is thinking, "But she hasn't said no yet."

Finally the girl gets tired of nicely saying no, and will either give a little just to shut him up, or pop him on the head.

I asked Caid what he would have done, if I would have let him, before we were even dating: "Oh, you are letting me ___? Why thank you!" To which I balked at: "You do know that is what will be going on with our daughter someday." A hard look passed his face: "Let me get a gun."

Six Months Married



I still roll over in the middle of the night, put my head on his chest, and wonder, "Who is he?"

I still look up and see him looking at me and think, "What is us?"

I don't know if that ever will go away. I hope it doesn't.

Growth and discovery should never end.

When do you ever truly know a soul?

Our patience wears thin quickly with his knee sprain. Our major accomplishment this month has been getting through all this knee stuff.

We have found that I am a good nurse for short periods. Unfortunately, this is a long period. All the questions: What does this mean for us? What expenses? How do we get through this? Day-by-day, without yelling when I have to run to get another ice pack from the freezer. When he can't get into a comfortable position. When we have to cancel some more plans.

And enjoy the moments. Pausing more to just lay there together. Stopping to talk and share and re-evaluate. Caid asked me how he could live this intentionally when NOT in an emergency crisis. I don't know. But good to learn. And learning how to be grateful for the opportunity.

And an amazing interlude to knee issues in California: California, part 1 and California, part 2, and then came back to find out Caid needed surgery. The actual surgery was on our 6 month anniversary, hence this post is late.

The surgery went well--he had to have a partial meniscectomy, and was a cute goofy out of anesthesia, but it went well. Day two was the painful one, coming off the medication, but it seems to be balancing out now. We will see the doctor in two weeks, and he may be able to drive/return to work soon after that. The scary part is, recovery is different for each person, and so it is unknown if Caid will regain full use/ability in his knee. But he has everything he needs to heal well and quickly.

I was able to run the Mini, and my friend went in Caid's place, with Caid waiting at the end--making it a wonderful experience and a check off my bucket list. I am also so thrilled to be learning and stepping outside my comfort zone with Caid at Supercamp, celebrating at Disneyland, and Mexico adventures.

We feel more settled. We knew we could make it through anything, and now we are walking through those "anythings," the "sickness" in "sickness and health." And it is still filled with sweet moments. Amid the insurance scare and Caid not being able to work, with the generosity of so many we love (I am still writing thank you notes from our March weddings), we have been able to pay off over half of our student loans. Amazing!

"Caid and Rachel Argument Process"

1. Something happens
2. I blame him (in my head), he blames me (in his head)
3. It builds
4. It explodes
5. We take turns explaining our blaming
6. Anger happens
7. We remember (and say) we love the other
8. We sort it out (Why are we feeling hurt? why blaming? what responsibilities weren't done? what decisions/actions need to be made? What just needs to be let go of because ****happens?)
9. We remember the other person is an amazing person (They didn't set out to hurt me, they still love me, they are all I need/want)
10. We remember that after God, this is my most treasured, valued relationship and I will do whatever it takes to make it beautiful and growing



He called me today at work to tell me how much he needed and appreciated me. I saw something on my face today and tried to wipe it off until I realized it was a crinkle wrinkle. The thought passed through my head that there are many things I am never going to do in my life--one of them becoming a superstar singer--but my daughter might. I've never thought much like that before. Maybe baby time is creeping up on me. Caid and I have finally finished writing "Thank you" notes from all three weddings. Addresses unknown do not count. My name is officially Rachel Ferguson now--according to the government. Yes, these things took me seven months to accomplish. I do have excuses if you want to hear them. This month we slid down the "knee injury" slope, almost to an end. The physical therapist was like "Get outta here--I don't know what to do with

you--you are healing perfectly and better than anything I could do."
YESSSS.

I had an epiphany. I was feeling stressed and moody towards Caid one day, when the thought came, "If you are stressed and things are hard, it is a clue your spouse is probably feeling that too: time to give extra grace." Simple, yet hard-hitting.

I've been reading a lot: Books reading, and went barefoot for a week (check that off my bucket list) 7 days no shoes. Caid's reaction?): "That is a great idea, honey—and I will support you 100%. With my shoes on."

This month was a hard one for my pride. Circumstances and people have shown me that I have some real rough patches and God has some big construction projects on my heart. I am a tally-keeper, when I need to be a let-it-goer. I am a projects over people-er. I am a get-er-done-r when I need to be training and delegating.

We get so tangled up in the day to day things so quickly. I constantly go back to a scene from "Modern Family" where the Real Estate Dad is staring as his blond wife and saying, "Sometimes I just forget that she is a person. An amazing person."

We got to go to a "Need to Breathe" concert (close enough to our month-iversary for me to say) for our seven months together. I thought tickets were a little pricey so ended up buying them last minute from a crusty guy on a bicycle right before it started. Caid thought that was pretty great.



This 8 months married has two parts: the part where I realize I am often a butt, but how great it is to be married to Caid, and the part where Caid left for teacher training and I fell apart.

We had been engaged a month when I realized I wouldn't be able to suck in my pooch or straighten my posture forever around him--he was going to see it all. We'd been engaged for two months when I realized he was a very touchy person, and would want to touch me even on days when I felt ugly and fat. And then we got married. I kept wondering why everyone would let me make such a drastic decision. No one tried to stop me. I was used to a certain level of resistance to my crazy ideas, and here was my craziest--and no one said a word. The silence was terrifying.

"Marriage reveals what a crappy person you are" They told me.

"Nonsense" I said, up until the 7th month of marriage. I guess I should be glad I made it that far. I sit there as he explains his side of things and realize that YES, I was a butt. And on top of that, I was mean to him about it and dragged our whole time together through the dirt. Shoot. Why do I try to control so much?

To accomplish anything, you sacrifice something else. To say "Yes" to one—you say "No" to countless others. I am stingy with money and selfish with time, and I do all I can to control both.

Growing up, there wasn't a lot of money. Enough, but always careful. And I learned from my generous parents that money was to save and give, save and give. That is how it worked.

Growing up, there wasn't a lot of time. Jesus was coming back at any time, and to top it off, from our theology, all we had to look forward to was the tribulation starting at any moment. I just prayed I would get kissed first. There was always a sense of urgency—and we had better use our time wisely. That is how it worked.

So I became successful at accomplishing goals. Anything I wanted, I turned into a project, and any project I wanted enough was accomplished. I would sacrifice time, energy—even relationships were put on hold to get my project done. The biggest project I had was Brazil. And then I fell in love: love always complicates things, especially when you are in love with a country.

Then I got married. And to some extent, marriage has become my current project. Mostly, that is healthy: I work hard, invest, and sacrifice time and even other relationships to focus on "us." And thank God, he is the people-focused person who will hold me and say "put the paper away and just be." And the plus-side to realizing I am a butt is realizing that he loves me anyways. Some of that lovey-dovey feeling I lamented losing around month 3 has returned. Our goodbyes are positively gushy. I feel bad for observers.

Part 2: The five stages of grief are denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. I heard on a radio show that depression is over diagnosed: that if you can tell someone WHY you are depressed, it isn't clinical depression—it is grief. In our technological world, I fear we have forgotten the simple emotion of grief and how to deal with it.

We have forgotten that we are broken and live in a broken world and some days...many days...are filled with grief and must be dealt with as so. I don't feel I have ever dealt with depression in my own life, but I have been overwhelmed and debilitated by grief before. Yes—when someone dies, but it is so much more than that. It is seeing poverty every single day. It is seeing children you love not have enough food. It is seeing kids in Indianapolis go home every night to an abusive home. It is not being able to be there for your best friend. It is a million and one things that come every day.

Sometimes I sit down and have a good cry and feel better for it—though I couldn't tell you why. Life just needed to be grieved for. So when I tell you that I have been going through the five stages of grief since Caid has been gone, don't think he has died. Don't think I am over-reacting. Don't worry that I am depressed. It has changed up my life considerably, and so I identify my emotions and continue on living a perfectly responsible life.

Denial/Isolation: Caid only went to North Carolina. It is only 12 days. I am not in denial, but I did find a good fantasy book that was 1,040 pages and read it in three days. I wanted another world to hide in for a while, instead of a world without Caid. I often used books for hiding and isolation growing up, when I just didn't want to deal with present things in the present.

Anger: ok. I haven't been angry--skip that. I want Caid to get this training—and I am so excited about the opportunities it brings. Bargaining: My prayer/conversations with God often revolve around bargaining much more than they should. "Can you make time go faster if do all I am supposed to do?" "Can you help me forget about missing Caid if I read more Bible?" How sad.

Depression: this is not clinical depression—and I think people confuse this with "feeling blah, feeling sad, feeling down." My body, for some reason, which has always been really good at eating and sleeping, doesn't want to anymore. "I will see Caid soon" I tell myself, but still...bleh.

Acceptance: Life must go on and Rachel, you are being too dramatic about everything. I know. And I helped my parents re-decorate the living room, saw a movie with my friend, got together with friends, went shopping, and did my duties. But goodness, I'll be glad to be back with Caid.



Nine Months Married

I got out of the car to head into church last Sunday and Caid said, "I feel like you are dousing me with a bucket of water anytime I say anything about having a baby. You are being pessimistic."

Ouch. And baby talk has been creeping in more and more and I fight more and more every time. Do I want to be a mom? Yes. Now?

Uhhhhh...Reasons? There are always reasons. Student loans, Caid finishing college, unsure what happens next...Kid phase of life is just so...permanent. I want to be a "Yes" person. I want to be wise.

Supercamp was incredible. Standing side by side, working with Caid in a professional/growing job, and then collapsing into bed each night to pray for everyone we'd just met...it was deepening and intimate to grow together in this way.



I started making our wedding scrapbook this month. We have a LOT of good stories, good times, and good people. My favorite time, every day, is every night when I snuggle up with him and we talk, laugh, and pray.

"(I read how this woman) regretted waiting until she was married. How waiting wrecked a deep and real part of her. How all those years of no made her ashamed of when she finally said her marital yes. I waited and I was her. After getting it into your head that you don't — it can take a long time after you say "I do".... for the rest of you to say I do. The soul of a woman needs to feel a deep safeness before you ever touch the skin of a woman.

"Great sex is a parable of the Gospel—to be utterly accepted in spite of your sin, to be loved by the One you admire to the sky." –Tim Keller

The exclusive communion between husband and wife is to reflect our exclusive communion between soul and Christ. But hear me: No matter what's happened to the rose — Jesus desperately wants the rose. Your naked body deserves the honor of being shared only with someone who is covenanted to never stop loving your naked soul." –Ann Voskamp

Advice to Someone Getting Married

1. Enjoy each other. And this goes so much deeper than sex. Let it be a party when it is an evening of just you and him. From now on: you + him = fun

2. Put marriage on your "to do" list. Right under "time with God" which should be right at the top. Because you spend time with God (your most important relationship) and then you spend time/invest in your husband (your second most important relationship). Everything else comes later. Even kids. Because what your kids need most is your priorities set properly.

3. Have an "Argument Process"

- Something happens
- I blame him (in my head), he blames me (in his head)
- It builds and explodes
- We take turns explaining our blaming
- We remember (and say) we love the other
- We sort it out (Why are we feeling hurt? why blaming? what responsibilities weren't done? what decisions/actions need to be made?)
- We remember the other person is an amazing person (They didn't set out to hurt me, they still love me, they are all I need/want)
- We remember that after God, this is my most treasured, valued relationship and I will do whatever it takes to make it beautiful and growing
- (Remember that make-up sex is a real thing)

4. Talk until you understand where he is coming from—and that it isn't that he is against you. Coming from two different families means coming from two different cultures—no matter how similar you think you are.

5. Make sure that he is fed and sexed regularly. The only other thing he really needs is to have you happy and content. So spend the rest of the time making sure you get what you need for you to be happy and content.

6. Don't feel bad about letting go of other relationships. It isn't worth putting your marriage at risk. And especially the first year, while you are forming and cementing your relationship, you might find that you don't have a lot of time for friends/family. The ones who love you and are worth keeping will understand. (Deut.24:5 to reinforce this idea)

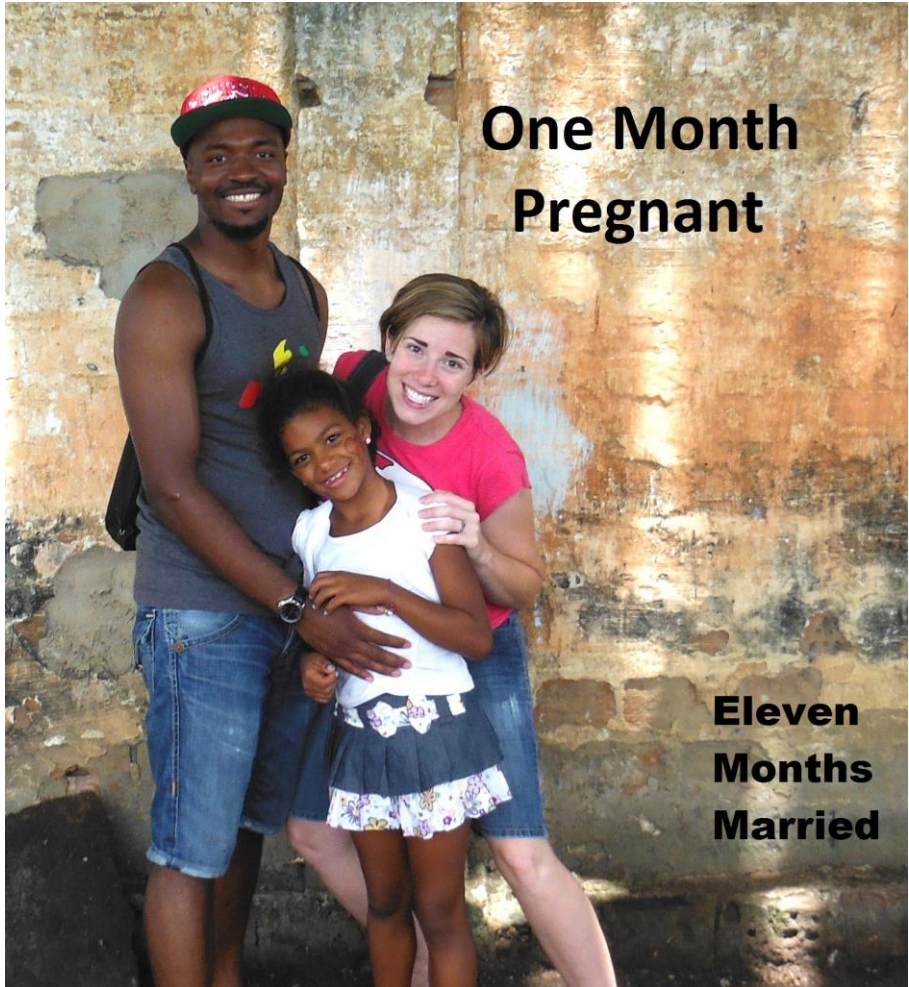
7. Learn together. How to do everything. How to make the best life you will ever have—together. Start traditions. Make a bucket list together. Set goals together. Write a marriage mission statement.

8. When all else fails (or just because), think of 3 things you are grateful for about him. Extra credit for telling him what they are.

9. Learn each other. There is an amazing soul standing next to you, and you don't know them yet—not all of them. There is always more.

10. It is okay to not be as productive as you were when single. Being single you have a lot more time to give to others. Now you are giving it to him. That is good, healthy, and fine. Outside ministry will still happen, and will look a little different. And that is as it should be.

11. If you are stressed and things are hard, it is a clue your spouse is probably feeling that too: time to give extra grace.



When I was 19 I put together a pretty complete list of what I wanted in my prince charming. But I didn't list the thing that I have most appreciated the past 11 months: him being a generally happy person. You can call it optimism or positivity, but whatever it is, I am extremely grateful that Caid has it. I think I would wilt into a little ball if my husband was a downer. His

optimism and excitement for life gives me permission to be realistic when normally I would be "sunshine and rainbows," making sure that everyone was having a good time and bought into whatever we are doing. It is so refreshing to not have to pull that load.

I woke up one morning and wanted to figure out my "words." I feel that whenever we are in close relationships with others, the two personalities collide, and in a sense, you become someone...more. Who you choose to marry affects who you become. If I had chosen to marry someone else, I would have become someone else. So I sorted through the life of Rachel and thought of past relationships: with one, I would have become "sharp and smart." With another "cared for and comfortable." with Caid? The words that came to my head were "happy and healthy." And truly, I couldn't have picked any words I'd rather be.

My sister told me I'd better think of the words she's given me as well, since she was a very important relationship too. Good point.

On past road trips, we have been listening to marriage podcasts. The most recent trip I realized I didn't want to, which made me question why to myself. The answer came that it is because we are doing really well--Caid and I--and without too much work/investment, and I was at the point of "Just don't screw it up." When we first got married, I wanted all the advice possible, because it was a blank page. But I don't want to ever stop growing, just because we are coasting.

So we listened to the podcast and it was really good. And at the part where it was giving advice to men, Caid stopped it and turned to me and said, "I want you to know I hear this." And he does--he already put those words into practice. It is really incredible to be married to someone who has the same goals as I do, and really does them.

We will arrive in Brazil on our 11 month anniversary, and be there for almost three weeks. We are at a wonderful place of not-knowing and assurance of something GRAND in God's plans. Changes are coming in many different ways, and we are determined not to just coast, but to play hard, work hard.

**Two Months
Pregnant**



**One Year
Married**

We left for Brazil serving six Living Stones programs, and came back with one functioning Living Stones, and five that are in other stages of ministry. Coming together to build up strong.

I had a way of doing things. Undone. Learning to ask and submit to others instead of plunging forward on my own. Undone. Even within my own

body, in my middle of middles, there was an undoing of my life as I knew it, as a baby was being created.

I suspected the morning I left for Brazil. That somewhere in the last weeks, a miracle created inside me. A secret—just God and this new soul knew about—tingling in cells buried deep in me. In Brazil I was in Brazil—my focus on a long list of things to do and people to see. And we did. Now I am home and find I am pregnant. And I sit and stare into space about it (from the utter exhaustion that overcomes me random minutes of the day, and from the whole idea of it—it is quite a lot to get your head around).

Undone were all of my plans, and this one was stated: having my baby in Brazil. My firstborn, a Brazilian. Caid hugged me and said, “The whole thing scares me, but I think this is how things are going to go.” I nod, my mouth closed from nausea and overwhelming first trimester issues—relocate, change, move everything...all while pregnant? The idea seems impossible. Yet one by one things seem to be falling into place.

We, Caid and Rachel Ferguson are happy to announce that we are expecting a baby June 17, 2015. With Caid finishing his bachelor’s degree spring 2015, we have decided to begin our ministry together in Brazil, and welcome our new baby into our lives there. I am completely, 100% on-board and excited about having our child in Brazil: how amazing has this adventure with God been since I was 16 and felt Him say “Brazil is yours?” Caid has been helpful and loving in all ways possible, especially in my grumpy “don’t breathe on me” first trimester. He has stepped up and been my support in ways I didn’t even know I needed. He is leading our family in faith, as we seek the Lord and truly believe He is leading us to serve and trust Him in Brazil.

So married one year. Caid made it through all of my “month-a-versaries.” Now he shakes his head as I let him know that now we get to celebrate each month of pregnancy...and then, each month of our baby’s new life...will it ever end? Well, I hope my writing/blogging doesn’t.

Here are some of our regular traditions:

1. Praying together every night
2. Me making his lunch (unless I forget and he buys Subway)
3. Kissing goodbye before either of us leaves
4. Special prayer time on Sunday mornings
5. Work out together multiple times a week
6. Read aloud together
7. Hold hands while driving
8. Date night multiple times a month

9. Talk it out, no stonewalling or leaving
10. Sleep skin to skin to get our Oxytocin
(<http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/oxytocin>)
11. Caid takes care of the car
12. Rachel cleans really well once a week

Before we got married, we put together our values:

1. FOCUS on what really matters: God and love
2. Work together and find BALANCE alone and together
3. Have true INTIMACY--physically, emotionally, and spiritually
4. Have a godly HOME that we can bring others into, with lots of traditions and celebrations
5. Be CREATIVE--Life full of music, arts, communication, and sports
6. Have MINISTRY outlets for what we are passionate about
7. Stay HEALTHY, pure, fit, and disciplined--clean and limited media to make room for outside life/exercise, natural and simple food/surrounding
8. Laugh, have FUN, and stay forever young

Here are some traditions we want to work on some more:

1. Weekly worship and music time
2. Having more people over to our home for meals regularly
3. Weekly "create something" time

Holiday traditions:

1. New Years toasts with family and then go watch a movie together, just us two
2. Valentine's day: ?
3. Celebrate Lent in some way
4. Easter tree, baskets/eggs hidden, door taped up.
5. Birthdays: take the birthday person out to someplace they have never been before
6. Mother and Father's day: ?
7. Basic holiday rule: spend quality time with others and seek to share the day, add special food
8. Halloween: dress up, no matter what else
9. Thanksgiving: weekend with the Coombs family
10. Celebrate Advent in some way
11. Christmas: Connecticut trip! Cooking with all the nieces/nephews--make your own pizza and tacos and random desserts



I told Caid after the first year we could stop celebrating "month-aversaries." Now we are celebrating "moving out of the first trimester." It was rather awful.

I felt old. I felt grumpy. I could smell everything and wanted nothing. I was so exhausted that I didn't even appreciate sleeping. And the worst part? Life just wasn't fun anymore: it was all hard work. It is really hard when you don't enjoy anything. I love people and projects and work and life...but not anymore. I just ended up lying in bed until I fell asleep.

I used to wonder about this "hormone change" people would talk about. The other day my husband said, "I miss you." As I was about to ask him why, I hadn't gone anywhere--I realized that I missed myself. I missed

enjoying life. I missed my creativity and drive and if that wasn't me anymore--who the heck am I? Hormone changes are scary because it makes you question your whole identity: If I am not the same as I always used to be--then who am I?

This past week I went a whole day without a nap. But it made me hope for glimpses of my second trimester, which everyone says is "almost like normal." Saturday we had a ladies missions meeting. Probably why God invented church--or at least missions--to remind us it is not all about us. I was thinking in my head how much WORK it all was when I finally got caught up in the Christmas song, "The virgin sings her lullaby: the babe, the son of Mary."

I teared up. All the complaining I've been doing about being pregnant. I am not a virgin, but I still relate. Mary was pregnant for the first time; and so am I. Silly as it sounds, I understood Christmas better in that moment, in a way I couldn't before. And next year, holding my child, I will understand on an even deeper level. How blessed I am!



Four Months Pregnant

I still needed lots of naps, but I was able to get all my Christmas presents and plans done, including the girls annual Christmas caroling party, Christmas with the Potters, Winzeler Christmas, driving to Connecticut, and Ferguson Christmas. New Years was a perfect date with my husband, who fell asleep before midnight.

January 2nd began a new (and very real) phase for me: NESTING. I could NOT draw myself away from Pinterest--planning how to change around not only our USA little nest, but our future Brazilian apartment. As soon as we arrived in Indy, I got out the trash bags and began sorting and cleaning. Three days later I calmed down a bit, 5 trash bags gone to the trash, and 6 bags gone to Goodwill. Caid is working on his last three college classes and taking over all the fundraising/planning/scheduling for Brazil while I am working.



Five months of weird things happening to my body and when I finally get to the doctor he asks "Any questions?" And I smile and say NO. What is wrong with me? But really, I don't have any questions. I can't find them in my brain. Why didn't I make a list? Because really, I have been blessed with a fairly decent and normal pregnancy from what I can tell.

It has been a journey to get to the doctor. I am finally covered by Medicaid (#pregnancyperk), but free isn't easy. It has been a couple months of paperwork and re-sending paperwork and switched networks—when I finally see the OBGYN I tell him we are moving to Brazil soon. Oh well. The doctors are super great, and the ultrasound was so fun--and, of course, she was able to tell us it was a healthy baby girl.

I've been reading baby books (all that are available at the library), so now I feel slightly confident when talking about pregnancy. "The Business of Being Born" said that many people study/know more about the new cell phone they are buying than about giving birth--I will not be that person. It struck me how I need to not only take ownership of my body, pregnancy, and giving birth, but also take pride in it. As one person said, "If I can do this, I can do anything."

Six Months Pregnant



It has been an amazing month--with an incredible baby shower (Thanks Anna!). Caid is finishing his bachelor's degree (straight As!), and we are enjoying our time visiting friends and family and sharing about Brazil. We are turning the last corner in getting ready for Brazil. It is really a guessing game, deciding what Caid, baby, and I will need for the next six months to a year (we don't know how long it will take for all of our Brazil/having baby documents to go through, and are not leaving until they do).

We will soon have our very own Jamaican-American-Brazilian. We are trying to figure out how to best impart all parts of Jamerazilian-ness to this little bundle of joy. Caid and I both went through a stage of figuring out where we fit, and what culture we identified with (Rachel born American, choosing Brazilian, Caid born Jamaican choosing American). The whole mixture can be very confusing. Here are so ideas that we want to incorporate for our future children (yes, we know culture is more than food, holidays, and communication, but it is a start):

Jamaican:

Holidays: August 6 Independence Day and third Monday of October National Hero day.

Food: rice and peas, veggie patties

Language: Caid's family and music

Brasilian:

Holidays: September 7 Independence Day and October 12 Children's day

Food: meatless fejoada

Language: Community (when in Brazil) Home communication/movies/music (when in USA)

American:

Holidays: July 4 and February 14 and March 17 and Thanksgiving

Food: Mac 'n cheese

Language: Home communication/movies/music (when in Brazil)

Community/family (when in USA)



I find it amusing that Ana Sofia has already flown to Brazil twice before she is born (we found out I was pregnant the day we left for a short-term mission trip to Brazil). I can't figure out if her movement is a sign of excitement or annoyance—she often stops if you touch my belly, which makes me think she is thinking “Oh no, they noticed—gotta lay low.” It is much easier for me to imagine her as a sea otter than a human being (probably because the mental image I have is of a little Barbie doll human) in my stomach as she moves/SWIMS around in there. Lately, I've been imagining what she is thinking. Sometimes, when snuggled up to Caid, I just know she is saying “Hey—that is my space!” as she kicks him. When I feel the steady bumps, she is thinking “Darn hiccups!” and sometimes, she simply wants OUT—that is all I can figure. That, and somersaults. She almost kicked my belly button into an outtie yesterday.

Being in Brazil has been great. Everyone has been so kind as we jumped back into ministry/Easter celebrations. I haven't had heartburn since arriving, proving Ana Sofia has good taste in food. I also started the "feet bloating" thing since being here--weird.

April 14th was our first trip to the doctor. His normal hours start at 8am, so we were told to come at 7am to meet him and get set up, since I am so far along in my pregnancy. At 5:30am we pick up Lindsay, who knows this doctor, and knows how to get there.

Caid's main concern is getting me there. And luckily, it is not too difficult. Without traffic (well, much traffic), it is about 50 minutes. It is a straight shot with one turn at a big building that says "BIG CAR" on it. There is also a Subway (they are taking over the world), Habibs (Brazilian fast food), and Bob's Burgers (Brazilian burger place) around the corner. These are the important things for Caid to know (and keep himself fed).

I am still working on reality setting in. Goodness—I am still working on "I am having a baby" reality to sink in. I still wake up at times with a jolt, thinking, "WHAT IS TRYING TO GET OUT OF MY STOMACH?" Then there is the "I am having a baby in Brazil" reality. Then there is the "I am having a baby in Brazil without my family and in Portuguese" reality.

So we drive up to the building and it is like "So this is where I am having my baby. We wait and meet the receptionist and it is "So this is who I pay when we are having a baby." We meet Dr. Renato Grandi and it is "So this is the doctor who will help me have my baby."

All of my US paperwork and tests were put into Brazilian form and the doctor checked me over. The sweetest part was when he was measuring my tummy and listening to the heartbeat--he got such a look of love on his face—that makes him a go in my book. He gave us his personal phone

number and then went over the costs, which are an interesting Brazilian concoction.

Everything went well, but I had a mini-panic in the middle. It is just so different. It is a nice hospital--everything I need. They are nice people--and well trained-but it isn't the same. It isn't the USA. It is just different. So is talking to the doctor in Portuguese. And it just tugs at me sometimes, asking "Why? Why are you doing things differently? Why aren't you normal?" I'll get over it 😊.



After reading all of the baby books and articles and conversations with wise women, I have started to piece together my "guidelines" and ideas of what I want to do for mommyness:

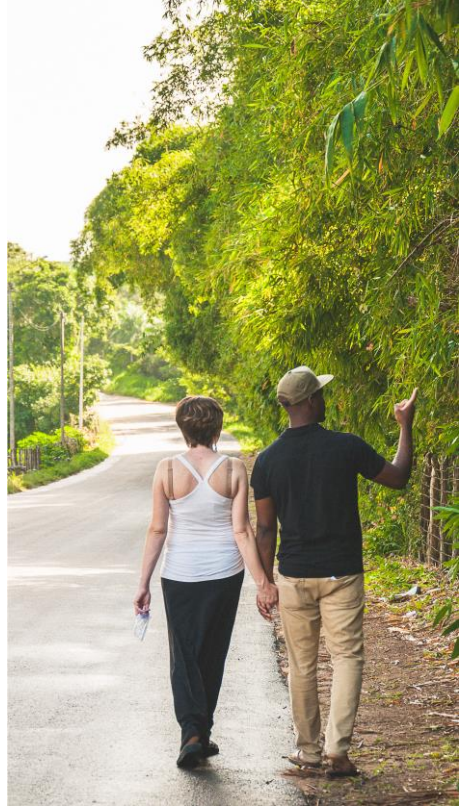
1. PREGNANCY AND LABOR: Know yourself and what you want
 - a. As a Woman: know your body and what it needs to be healthy in all phases of pregnancy/mommy--read books and watch videos--be informed and empowered by birth and how awesome your body is to grow a human!
 - b. As a Mother: journal your thoughts in becoming a mom (probably why God gave you nine months to get used to the idea). Write a birth plan (it helps you learn all those technical terms)
 - c. As a Wife: spend extra time/take dates with your husband--this is the (last) time for just you two!

2. FIRST 10 DAYS: Get to know your baby ASAP. Caid and I will be (Lord Willing) taking 10 days(ish) after birth to do nothing but bond and heal.
 - a. Since we are far from family, we will be having a cooking/cleaning lady come for the first two weeks so we can focus on us time and I can REST.
 - b. Caid will let visitors know we would LOVE to see them--after our 10 days are up (we will warn people beforehand as well).
 - c. We are NOT worried about spoiling our baby--she was used to being held and fed 24/7 for 9 months, she needs some time to adjust.
 - d. We are going to keep track of feedings/poop to make sure she is getting the nutrients she needs (making sure she stays awake for a whole feeding--30ish minutes--at least 8 times a day)

3. FIRST THREE MONTHS: Don't pile on the pressure (give yourself grace)
 - a. Baby is still getting used to being outside the womb, so use the 5s method (swaddling, side/stomach, shhhh, swinging, and sucking) and don't be worried about spoiling them.
 - b. As you get to know the baby and yourself, begin establishing routines that work for both of you (suggestion: eat/awake/sleep patterns every 3ish hours and then 5 hours at night)
 - c. Don't plan much outside the house--don't feel forced to exercise/lose birth weight and return to all your old habits/routines. Don't feel like you need to visit everyone/let everyone see the baby.

4. THREE MONTHS AND BEYOND: You decide what goes, not the baby
 - a. You know what is best for everyone--and so you stick to it--for the sake of everyone
 - b. After 3 months, focus on the training that you have decided is important
 - c. Suggestion: eat/awake/sleep routine around breakfast, mid-morning, lunch, mid-afternoon, dinner, bedtime, then sleep 9-10 hours at night
 - d. Around 6 months, add solid foods after breast feeding during the three mealtimes.
 - e. After three months, it is normally safe to exercise like normal
 - f. Don't micro-manage or worry about things--it never helped anything ever
 - g. Think "training" not "discipline."







I have a human in my belly. I think that just as in living in close quarters with my husband we share experiences and it doubles our joy/tears/laughter/love, the same is true of this lil girl creature. My theory is that the things that Ana Sofia likes--I now enjoy even more. From this, I have deduced that Ana Sofia's favorite things are:

1. Sitting down (I suddenly LOVE sitting down. All. The. Time)
2. French Fries
3. Hot showers (Our shower heater died and in those couple of days I became exceptionally grumpy. But Caid and a friend fixed it.)

Last week I gained three pounds. That is pretty exceptional since I've only gained around 20 pounds the whole pregnancy (9.5 kilos). It also means I got some stretch marks. Luckily, I can't see them. My energy level is way down and my appetite is up. The car trunk is packed with tons of stuff for the hospital, just in case. We had a wonderful Brazilian baby shower (Thanks Kattia!), and are now ready to wait. Still waiting. I had low amniotic fluid, but coconut water and fluids brought it back up quickly. If this baby doesn't come soon, my schedule, among other things, is going out of whack.

**Ana Sofia Carol Ferguson
June 25, 2015 at 12:09
7.17 lbs. 19 in.**



“300,000 women will be giving birth with you today. Relax and breathe and do nothing else. Labor is hard work and you can do it.” ~Unknown

Ana Sofia was due June 17th. By Wednesday, June 24 (Sao Joao), I had contractions starting at 9am, but they didn't get serious until 6pm. By 9pm, we were at the hospital with the doula, and by midnight I was in the birthing pool. The doctor came in the early morning, once I was in active labor, and broke my water when I was 7cm dilated. By 11:30am, the baby and I were both ready to be done. Caid joined me in the birthing pool and over a series of 5 sets of contractions (and agonizing waiting in between), Ana Sofia was born at 12:09pm, all natural. (See the *edited* video on youtube, with everything else, at “Five Minutes of Fergie”)

A tear ran down my face as I thanked God for Ana Sofia. Because in being grateful for her, I acknowledge that she isn't mine. And when something isn't yours you don't have control . And when you don't have control you realize that it might not always be there. It makes me treasure the moment and admit I'm finite. And a little bit sad.

I just got started in this mommy thing. And it often seems to be about all the things that could go wrong rather than the things that go right. I am constantly checking if she is still breathing when she is quiet, rather than

relishing all the times she is breathing. For everything I do, there are ten things not to do.

Coming home from the hospital a family of three means everything is new: how does eating work now? How does sleeping work? Pooping? Conversation? Affection? Visitors? Clothing? Bath time? Trial and error as we not only get to know a new soul, but this soul is brand new and just being made. We are not just discovering, we are creating, and we are creating the future and eternity. I want to do that well.

One day old





One and a half weeks



Two and a half weeks



1. I am almost over needing to check and see if she is still breathing
2. She looks really ugly when pooping sometimes and I pray her face does not get stuck like that
3. Gas smiles are adorable. I kept wanting to think they were the real thing, but then I would have to say her “boob fights” (where she pushes away/eats hand instead/goes after her blanket/won’t open mouth enough) are on purpose too. I’d rather say she is just oblivious in all areas.
4. I am sure my boob will suffocate her one of these times
5. They said I would forget the pain. I said I wouldn’t. I did. I mean, I can still remember it was the MOST PAINFUL THING I EVER DID in capital letters, but the whole pain part faded into the whole “whew that is done” oblivion.
6. Typing one handed is common, with a sleeping baby draped on me, or a sucking baby attached to me. So is one handed eating—she does not seem to mind random dropping crumbs.
7. We are both used to being slathered in milk. It gets everywhere. And fast.
8. I remember thinking my new-mother friend was a little silly for not watching the action movie with me. I now see her point. Why add violence to part of my life when there are a million and one scenarios already playing out in my head of my child’s demise? Same reason why I never watch scary movies—life is scary enough without it. Besides—why not actively put positivity and happiness into my life instead? Where are all the happy movies??
9. She isn’t a baby. I have not turned into a baby person. She is just a little person who is very focused on three things: eating, pooping, and sleeping.
10. I have never liked killing bugs. Growing up I would capture and release them into the wild. I now kill bugs without a second thought if they come near my girl.
11. The hair on top of her head is receding and the back hair is growing. Mullets can be hidden with hair bows. What do you do if you have a boy?
12. Adventures in rural Brazil wearing a baby pouch sling. The double takes. The jaw drops. The pointing and commenting, “THERE IS A BABY IN THERE” in capital letters. The parenting advice from total strangers. Everyone loves you when you are holding a baby.
13. I am so blessed. First week was like a baby honeymoon, where Caid and I got to hang out and figure out BABY. Second week was baby and me while Caid was working. Ana and I got to watch movies and read books on my kindle. Third week is winter break while we start planning the next semester. I look at my daughter sleeping on me and feel bad that I probably will not have this much time to just STARE at my next kid.

Can't believe she has been in our lives for only a month. As with all phases of life, you find the page turned and you know this is the right place to be, and you know how you got there, but it still feels a bit surreal and foreign—but at the same time—like you've always been here.

She takes life so seriously. She is a whole, complete person in a very little package. And she has three objectives: eat, sleep, and poop. And these things take up her whole life. She puts her whole self into getting these three things done.

I read a lot of baby books before Ana Sofía was born, but I still had to google: 1. How to give her a bath (answer: everything is easy after the umbilical cord falls off) 2. How to swaddle (answer: Ana will eventually get her hands free no matter what) 3. How to cloth diaper (answer: just do it and keep figuring out as you go—which went great until the washing machine broke) 4. How to use the breast pump (answer: CAREFULLY turn the pressure up.) Caid was so excited to be able to have a bottle to feed Ana. He was like “Now she will love me!”

There is a way that babies look at the person that feeds them that is overwhelming. She looks at me like I am everything. And to her, I am. I look at her and see someone so new and innocent. Then I look outside and wonder what the heck happened to everyone else.

I can fit into my clothes, and am walking/doing postnatal yoga and Pilates, and feel rather proud of myself. The first month has gone really well, and quite frankly, very easily. I keep waiting for it to get really hard and horrible like the stories I hear.

I am reading a book and it says the season as new parents is of wonder, “When we are reminded to sit back and observe all that God has done for us, through our infant’s eyes.” (Toddlers are then a season of discovery) “As parents we have a special privilege of knowing God from two perspectives. As we longingly hold our babies in our arms, we catch a glimpse of how God, our Father, loves us. Our feelings as earthly parents cannot compare to the love God has for us, and yet our parental emotions are a wonderful taste of what His love for us is like. At the same time, we catch a picture of what it means to be the child our Heavenly Father loves.” —“And Then I had Kids” by Susan Alexander Yates

She is old enough now to want to stare at my face for hours. Well, until she is hungry or pooping or sleeping again. And it makes me stop life and just stare back. Mostly because I am not used to someone adoring me like that—wanting nothing more in life than to just SEE me. And I know it won't last forever. She will figure out the TV has more interesting faces. She will want to discover everything else in life. But right now, it is just me.

Mommy.

I know that every moment I invest in her is worth it. She has taken over my life. And I don't hold it against her—I love her even more for it. How weird is that? I wonder if I have more kids, if I will have anything like this kinda time for them. The newness would have worn off by then. The first kid will be calling loudly. Life will continue to claim my time. I feel rather sorry for any future kids I have already—because all kids should be given time—this individual investment. This eye contact. This running conversation that I have with her about everything and nothing because the baby book says it is mentally stimulating for her.

I tell her she is one lucky girl. All she wants is food—all she understands is food. And I give her so much more...because I have been given so much. I give in direct proportion to what I have received. Then a thought tears through me: what of the parents who have nothing? What do they give their babies? I think it is harder for the parent than the child because they know exactly what they are not giving whereas the child only understands a small part of what they are missing (at least when they are young). Poverty now looks even uglier to me.

If something were to happen to me, suddenly, I want her to know how much I loved her. I am not sure how to write that in her baby book—at least not in a way that will explain and soothe my absence over all ages and phases that she goes through. I don't know how this whole thing works, being a parent, but I think it is pretty much about doing the best I can with what I have right now. And the best is always love.

After teaching kids for over 15 years, I can see it. I don't catch it all the time, but most of the time I can identify the change in a child's face when they "get it." The Eureka moment. The small window that teachers live for when you feel invincible because you can tell the information is connecting. In that moment you know you are inspiring them. That is the time that makes it all worth it-- the low pay, the long hours preparing-- they GOT it. The window to the soul.

I have gotten good at noticing when this time might be sneaking up-- I don't want to miss it. Knowing it is coming is part of what makes me a good teacher because it keeps me focused and on point. It shoots adrenaline in me and makes me enjoy myself...in turn letting the students enjoy themselves.

Being a mom is different from being a teacher. Those moments sneak up on me. They come at the most random time and it makes me catch my breath because I almost missed them. I realize that the influence, the ah-ha moment came and went and I barely saw it. As a newborn, her whole life is an Eureka moment.

It makes me scared to look away. What if that second, that instant that shapes my daughter's life comes and goes and I was too busy cleaning the house - or worse-- watching TV or Facebook? (or posting a blog??) As a teacher, I have learned how to control the environment and the situation as much as possible to lead to a positive learning experience. But being a mom informs me that life happens everywhere and always and it is uncontrollable and my daughter is still learning every second of it. I don't want to miss it, I want to live it right next to her. This is often exhausting. This is sometimes exhilarating, as I catch her studying me from the corner of my eye. I am not the 5th grade teacher she will remember that inspired her that one time--I am the one who will show her what "normal" looks like. I am the one who will--or will not--set her up with roots and wings. There are some answers, some places in her heart that only I can answer and fill, and if I don't, they will remain empty (or require therapy). She is sleeping now. As I look at her I realize she just gave me learning and understanding I didn't have before. We make a good team.



Two Months Old

Caid and I still feel like pretty good parents, meaning we haven't had any accidents /emergencies /sicknesses. Ana Sofia is a very chill baby, and sleeps through the night, 11ish-6ish! The best part about this second month has been being able to go to Living Stones programs with Ana Sofia: sharing our joy with the kids, and seeing her do so well, surrounded by kids. I must say, Brazil is a wonderful place to have a baby. Everyone bends over backwards to make sure she (and I) are taken care of--strangers even stop traffic to help me cross the street!

Currently on my kindle (best thing ever while breastfeeding!) from the library (I can borrow e-books online from Indiana while in Brazil!) is "Surprised by Motherhood" by Lisa-Jo Baker. She is an incredible writer who had her first child in Africa. Here are some of the things she wrote that resonated with me: "Next time I'd do motherhood differently. I'd just revel in the daily, sleep deprived merry-go-round and eat a lot more chocolate cake."

"It is one thing to read about and imagine the birth stories of a hundred other women; it is quite another to witness a brand new being you have pushed out of your own body cough and gasp his way to a first breath as lungs that have never held oxygen before expand for the first time. It is one thing to understand with your head that man was made in his Father God's image; it is quite another to look into the crinkly eyes of a wailing infant and hear his cries soften as you whisper, "I'm your mama" and you see your own image imprinted over his profile. It is sacred. It is bloody. It is real. It is truth that climbs off the pages of Scripture and leaps alive into your arms when theoretical beliefs in a Creator give way to experiencing the act of creation."

"Mothers may want to find room to breathe, to weep, to panic. But they don't want it to end---this delivering, shaping, cheering, loving, bringing life into the world. With this boy wrapped in my arms, this flesh and blood and bone that I had grown in my womb, clinging to me, I understood what the God parent feels for me. To die for this love-yes, it made sense."

"I cradled it in my arms—all this new life. the Creator's Spirit lingered on her skin, in her hair. There was a reverence in the air; she was still so fresh in the making from the passing of His hands to mine. And me—I was so aware of my rough, scuffed self with skin stained from years of living on this silent planet that only stubbornly, in fits and starts, acknowledges its Maker."



Ana Sofia is so much bigger/stronger/interesting-er than I thought she would be at three months. The whole "newborn baby" phase only lasts a couple of weeks. You know, the part where you are scared you are going to break them and they look alien-ish and bleh. It seems like every day Ana shows me a little more of her growing personality and funny faces. There is also a lot of drool involved. At two months and one day she rolled over for the first time, now making mom and dad more nervous.

I am enjoying this phase of baby-ness a lot, as we take her with us to Living Stones and let her join into our lives. On the days when Ana and I don't join dad at Living Stones, she is a bit fussy, and lets me know she'd rather be out and about. Here she is, helping us teach Portuguese and English. It is the kids (at Living Stones) favorite question: which language does she speak?

She enjoys talking to herself, talking to us, and complaining. Her laugh has also evolved into the most show-stopping thing at our house. We then go running for the camera, which magically turns off her laugh the instant it turns on. Oh well.



Ana is giggling as she rolls over and waits for me to notice. I flip her back onto her belly and she smiles at her reflection in the mirror. I read in a lot of baby books about how three months is a big timeline, how it takes most of that time for the baby to get used to being outside the womb (“Happiest Baby on the Block”). It is like one long introduction to the rest of your life. I thought the “newborn baby” thing would be the first three months, but really, it was the first three weeks. After that Ana began to be more than just a lump (sorry, baby lovers). I did enjoy the newborn baby thing more than I thought—I was happy with being done with pregnancy, and starting a new phase. Besides, everything is interesting when it is new. And the whole “so little” thing is ridiculously irresistible.

So from reading all my books, I wasn’t worried about spoiling Ana Sofia, or about getting on some ridged schedule for the first three months. They were about taking it easy and enjoying this new creature and phase of life. And that went well. And Ana slept through the night on her own, and got along well with our normal schedule, and loved going out with us to Living Stones.

Now I am beginning to see changes. Someone has decided she wants to be entertained. I find myself telling her, “If it isn’t a poop, sleep, or eat problem, you are now on your own.” We have a system of while I am working on the computer, she can sit in my lap, tummy time (now rollover practice), bouncy bed thing, or bouncy chair thing (attached to the door frame). She normally cycles through all of these in an hour. By then it is normally time to eat, sleep, or poop.

She cried for the first time when someone else held her. She cried herself to sleep (finally). Her personality is coming out. She laughs, she is ticklish, she complains, she is curious. I started snapchat to record things I am grateful for, and I find they most all revolve around her (add me: rachtheferg). We are enjoying getting to know her: happy four months, Aninha!



The biggest thing I have realized this month is that Ana Sofia wants to be invited into my life. She doesn't want me to create a life around her, she wants me to do all my stuff...with her actively involved.

So at meal times, Ana gets a spoon. or a cracker. or her fruit-mushy thing she can suck fruit out of. So when I cook, she gets a little taste on her tongue, or gets to touch all the ingredients. So when I am working on my laptop, she gets to read (eat) her book in my lap. So when we go to Living Stones, she gets to play with all the kids too.

I am absolutely sure that when she is in her baby carrier, facing outward, she believes it is her walking around and doing everything. At the grocery store, she reached out and held on to the cart handle, like she was pushing it along as we walked. When it started raining, she held on the umbrella with me, with a face of "Of course I am helping."

This reminded me of God and I, and Revelations 3:20, about inviting Jesus in. But the more I know Him, the more I realize I don't just want Him in my life, I want to be invited into His life.

We have dived into preparing to return to the USA and Christmas (suitcases and presents are taking over the apartment), and Ana has begun to find her voice. Literally. All possible notes and sounds--and her favorite--screeches, fill the air. I feel sorry already for the people who will share the 10 hour plane ride with us. Please pray for our little lady, as everything (climate, home, stuff, clothes, food, people) she knows will change. As I kiss her perpetually-non-clothes-wearing belly, I wonder what she will think of snow.



It has been an incredible journey, from single to married to mother; from Winzeler to Ferguson; from me to we to us: building a family. Here is to two years of marriage!



“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.” Hos. 2:19

We, Caid and Rachel, founded on Jesus Christ,
Are consistently and actively growing in love and grace,
Ministering to others and each other through the arts,
multicultural communication, and creatively sharing
To bring us all closer to the heart of God.

We take each other, to have and to hold from this day forward,
For better or for worse, for richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health, to love and to cherish;
From this day forward until death do us part.

Sneak peek at a book I eventually would like to write:

Flipping the Switch: From Single to Married

It is scary. Why do you think so many people are living together before they get married? Because flipping the switch is hard. They want to put in a dimmer switch to SLLLLLLOWLY move from one phase to the other. They want control. They want it their way. But that isn't how it works (statistic on living together failure). Somehow or another, if you choose lifelong commitment—it is going to be about taking a plunge.

Our generation is putting off marriage more than ever before (article on Becky' fb), because they have seen it fail (divorce rates), and they have seen it be miserable (how many marriages can you look at and say “DANG, I want that! Thing I wrote about happy marriages in the Bible). So yes, it is hard. Yes, it can be miserable. But yes, it can be the best decision you ever make (after Jesus).

I was absolutely single for 30 years. My dating life consisted of two different guys for a total of a little over a year. I've been married a couple years to one of those guys. So I have no place to write about dating or marriage, since I haven't much experience. But I was single—a very fulfilled, happy single—and I have gotten married—and am still fulfilled and happy—so I'd call that a success.

The most notable change in getting married was my sex life (from zero to honeymoon in two hours—ahhh!). Flipping the switch changed EVERYTHING—sexually, spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. But, I was shocked to find, it didn't change ME. I didn't look like the pinterest pictures at my wedding (darn it), and I sure as heck didn't feel anything different inside after I repeated all the words the preacher said and slid on the ring.

When we left for our honeymoon I kept looking around thinking, are they really going to let us do this? Why isn't someone stopping us—or warning us not to do this? ARE THEY REALLY GOING TO LET US DRIVE OFF INTO THE SUNSET????? ALONE?????

I understood the gravity of our choice to get married—but what I didn't know was the joy of it. It surprised me. Over and

over I was astonished as all of the aspects of my life on the outside changed, while on the inside I was still that single girl—making new decisions—and I LIKED it. It was an adventure. (Ok, I didn't like all of it, but) it was much more pleasant than imagined, and fulfilling in a way I didn't know I was empty.

Being married has changed me. I no longer call myself single, and slowly, I am beginning to feel married—even though that isn't who I am—I am still ME. A me that makes a choice to be connected to my spouse through thick and thin. A me that says I am in this marriage 100%.

1. **Sexually** flipping the Switch: from NO YOU CAN'T to YES PLEASE

Sex is like Hawaii. Everyone talks about going there.

My friend Karianne has a theory that sometime between 28-32, something big happens—mentally. Like the final stage of development: childhood repression comes up. You suddenly remember traumatic experiences you had previously ignored. Quarter-life crisis (what's it called?). All that happened to me was right around age 28 I became really horny.

My sisters' theory is that all men are junk until 26—don't mess with them until then.

So right around 28 I started wanting sex. And that meant, in my mind, I wanted to get married. I didn't get married until I was 31, but Karianne says everyone should have a couple years of “angst,” it does us all some good to not get what we want for a while. Helps us appreciate it more when we do get it.

BEING SINGLE:

- Clothing/body image (not being naked)
- Lust vs. Beauty
- Learning about/talking about sex
- Boys in general
- Pornography
- Masturbation
- Purity—where is your focus?
- Basic guidelines for not losing your virginity

BEING MARRIED:

- Sex is now good—“WHAAA?” says my body
- Clothing/body image (being naked)
- Lust vs. Beauty
- Learning about/talking about sex
- Men in general
- Pornography
- Masterbation
- Purity—where is your focus?
- Basic guidelines for helping others save their virginity

The basic idea is that you should be able to build off of your single foundation in marriage—not have to build the whole thing over again...and worse—destroy all that you took time to build previously. Living your life WHOLISTICALLY helps make flipping the switch more natural and less nauseating.

2. **Spiritually** flipping the switch: from YES GOD! To LET’S PRAY TOGETHER

- 2 callings, 1 choice
- God in first place
- God in first place through your spouse
- Priorities and values
- missions statement
- pre-marriage counseling
- accountability partners (other people than your spouse)
- praying together
- serving together
- Worshipping together (Bible together)

3. **Physically** flipping the switch: from ME to WE

- exercise together
- eating together (going on a date night)
- cooking and doing the dishes together
- organizing your time together and alone
- not losing yourself
- caring for yourself is caring for “us”—If momma ain’t happy, no one is happy

4. **Mentally** flipping the switch: from COLLECTING to SHARING
 - how to keep learning after college
 - MONEY MATTERS
 - Making a home and hospitality
 - Passing on what you know/learn

5. **Emotionally** flipping the switch: from SELF-FOCUSED to SELF-CONTROLLED
 - how to fight fair
 - how to communicate
 - How to alternate bad days/ not do it at the same time

Not saying that any of these single things are wrong—even being self-focused is a good thing (in a balanced way), and I am not saying that being married is better. I am the first person to point out that I was at least 40% more productive SINGLE than married (that number went waaaaay up when I was married with kids).

“Productive” being defined as in my job, career, ministry, and general output into the world. Getting married was investing first in one person (spouse), and then later, kids. I didn’t stop working (in fact, I probably worked MORE), productivity just went IN to my family instead of OUT into the world. I had to make a choice to understand and VALUE that change in what productivity looked like.

