

When (and Why) ‘The Vow’ Breaks

by Gina Meeks



Just in time for Valentine’s Day, a true love story of a couple’s Christ-centered commitment winds up shredded by Hollywood’s moviemaking machine in this sign-of-our-times “chick flick.”

Kim and Krickitt Carpenter’s real-life story is one of sadness, true love, and God’s grace and protection. The couple—whose inspirational account was first told in their 2000 book, *The Vow* (B&H Books), and now in a movie by the same name—never gave up on their marriage, despite tremendous obstacles thrown in their way.

After only 10 weeks of marriage, the Carpenters were involved in a life-threatening accident the day before Thanksgiving in 1993. Though Krickitt was given a less-than-1-percent chance to live, she eventually awoke from her coma. But Kim’s excitement to have his wife back didn’t last long: Krickitt had no memory of meeting him, getting married or going on their honeymoon. Doctors explained that the last year and a half of Krickitt’s memory was gone and would possibly never return.

Throughout their struggles to restore the life they’d dreamed of sharing, the Carpenters clung to God and centered their broken relationship on Him. And through His goodness, they were able to save their marriage and push past Krickitt’s memory loss and personality changes caused by her severe head trauma.

That’s what happened in real life. Onscreen, however, it’s a different story—literally.

The major motion picture, which hits theaters 16 years after the Carpenters signed over the rights to their story, is not only a prime example of what happens when a true story goes through Hollywood's fine-tuned moviemaking machine, it's also a tell-tale sign of our culture's modern fixation with antiheroes and not-so-happy endings.

Starring Rachel McAdams and Channing Tatum, *The Vow* had every opportunity to be a heartwarming romance to the likes of *The Notebook*—a broken man fighting for the woman he loves, no matter the cost. Unfortunately, it hardly measures up to the Carpenter's truly inspirational story.

The film is about Leo, a record studio owner, and Paige, an art student and sculptor. From flashbacks, we see the young couple happy and in love, with Leo constantly wooing his beautiful bride. But after the two suffer a car accident four years into their relationship, Paige wakes up with no memory of her husband. And it's at this point where the movie takes a major detour from the true story.

In fact, Paige has lost five years of her memory and last remembers being engaged to another man, Jeremy (Scott Speedman). She can't recall leaving law school to become an art student, meeting her husband or even that she's been estranged from her family for a number of years.

Although the relationship breaks down after the accident, the couple's fairy-tale romance is depicted in an enjoyable way through a series of flashbacks. The little snippets into their love story pre-accident portray two kindred spirits falling in love and getting married in the beautiful city of Chicago. Leo continues to romance Paige even after they're married, and she is clearly smitten.

But when Paige wakes up, her commitment to Leo has vanished. Although she briefly tries living with the husband she can't remember, the young wife quickly escapes to the comfort of her

old life—ex-fiance and all. Leo fights for her, trying to help jog her memory with their wedding video, apartment and her art studio.

His attempts to win her back culminate with him taking Paige on a romantic date. Paige keeps her promise—which she doesn't recall making—to skinny-dip (wearing underwear) with Leo in Lake Michigan, and the couple even share a kiss or two. They really hit it off, and it seems their love story is back on track. But shortly after, Leo gives up on the woman he loves.

With all of the negative elements added to the story—Paige's controlling parents, the man she almost married trying to win her back and Leo's absence of a family—*The Vow* becomes another case of Hollywood furthering our culture's supposed preference for depressing endings in the name of "reality." Add to this a bedroom scene that features partial nudity, a rear-view shot of Tatum fully naked and an opening sequence graphically reenacting the auto accident, and this PG-13 film clearly proves it's not family friendly.

For all its changes from book to the screen, however, *The Vow*'s most glaring omission is also the most important part of the Carpenters' real-life love story: their faith in God. To this day, Krickitt still can't recall an important segment of her life, yet she continues to remain faithful to the vow she made to her husband as she puts all of her hope and trust in God. She and Kim place their Creator in the center of their relationship and relentlessly work on recovering what they once had.

"We don't have a story without God. And that story really is about commitment—commitment to Him and commitment in marriage," Kim told the *Christian Reader*.

In a recent interview with *The Daily Times* (Farmington, N.M.), Krickitt said: "I would love to say that I fell in love with him again because that's what everybody wants to hear. I chose

to love him and that was based on obedience to God, not feelings.”

Sadly, though not surprisingly, *The Vow* heavily focuses on the feelings and not at all on their obedience to God. In fact, the movie never even mentions God other than when characters—including the couple—take God’s name in vain (along with using profanity).

Most people enjoy a movie more when they haven’t read the story in a book. And that’s obviously the case with *The Vow*, which misses out on telling a truly romantic—and yes, just as realistic—story without all the dark elements. Yet even for those who have nothing to compare it to, the movie still lacks the quality of romance (and acting) most chick flicks offer. While it offers plenty of awww moments and is sure to leave its (mostly female) audiences fawning over Leo’s sweetness, this *Vow* ultimately breaks down in depicting a heartbroken husband winning back his wife.

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