



Step by Step

Candace Calvert

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This realistic, wholesome love story emphasizes the significance of faith.

As Candace Calvert's *Step by Step* illustrates, belief in God does not mean an automatic end to pain. This Christian romance novel realistically portrays how hope can survive in the midst of death, and how love can find someone even after a great loss.

Three years after her husband's sudden death, ER nurse Taylor Cabot struggles to forget the pain. Seth Donovan, a crisis chaplain and friend from her rejected past, thwarts her efforts by reentering her life. The two rekindle their friendship in spite of Taylor's hesitation. New feelings begin growing between them, but both must deal with the personal obstacles that prevent their possible romance. In the meantime, their friends and associates grapple with separate yet parallel difficulties, creating several overlapping subplots.

Instead of portraying an unrealistic whirlwind romance, Calvert crafts the love between Taylor and Seth in a steady manner. They first love each other as friends; as they grow closer, their feelings blossom into something more. The entire process seems genuine and natural. Additionally, the dysfunctions present in the novel's romantic subplots—memories of both protagonists' deceased spouses, the misguided actions of Taylor's other romantic interest, and relationship troubles faced by other secondary characters—further underscore the rightness of the match between Taylor and Seth.

Step by Step also has an honest, Christian tone. Each character has a clear position on faith. While the book is up-front about this, Calvert does not beat the message into every sentence. Moreover, the novel demonstrates that faith in God is powerful, without idealizing faith-driven life. Bad things happen to Christian characters here. Taylor struggles with questions about God's will; devout Seth struggles with his temper; characters lacking faith don't suddenly experience cure-all conversions. Rather than deemphasizing the significance of faith, this realism illustrates how powerful it can be.

Sincere in matters of love and faith, *Step by Step* weaves a realistically wholesome tale. While Calvert's novel will likely seem most appealing to Christian-romance fans, all romance lovers may enjoy it, especially if they prefer well-rounded characters who have life experience.

CAITLYNN LOWE (Spring 2016)

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