

Chapter 1

WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE FOR US, HE WILL DO FOR YOU!

What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life—to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent, unspeakable memories?

—George Eliot

He said:

Tiz and I just celebrated our thirty-fifth wedding anniversary, praise God, and in our years of marriage and ministry together, we have learned a thing or two. Our relationship started out on a rough and rocky road, but, by the grace of God, as well as through our own personal growth, we learned how to build a strong marriage and a solid family. Today, we are happier than we have ever could have hoped to be, we're enjoying life more than ever before, and our ministry is more fruitful than it has ever been. We also know that our best days are still ahead of us!

We share these things not to flaunt or brag, but to encourage you—what the Lord has done for us and our family, He will do for you, too! And we're committed to helping that happen. For years, we have counseled couples and taught on breaking generational curses and releasing family blessings. We have seen hundreds of thousands of lives changed, marriages saved, and families helped and made whole by the power of God. That's why we're excited about this book—it's a way to show countless more couples and families how to break the curse and unleash the blessing! Our intent is not to fill your head with teachings but to fill your heart with hope and faith that you, too, can transform your life, your marriage, and your family. Our hope is that you will view our experiences as a bridge over the rocky places of past mistakes and onto the smoothly paved Promised Land of God's covenant blessings.

Worldly Advice Versus Biblical Wisdom

She said:

I know that most people want to be happy; to have the best marriages possible; and to raise happy, healthy children who rise up and call them blessed. Those who aren't married yet probably hope to have a happy marriage someday. And these are some of the wonderful things God has in store for us! Yet we live in a world that gives us all kinds of alternative options. Some people say, "I have the right to do this or that," or "I'm living in liberty. I'm just going to do what feels good." The Bible says that there is a way that seems right to man, but it ends in destruction. (See Proverbs 14:12.) Unfortunately, secular values and worldly "morals" have bled over into the Christian faith, to a large degree. We rarely hear about anyone desiring to stay on the path, even in church. I don't know about you, but if someone can save me from a lot of heartache, I want to hear what he has to say. I want to learn from those who have done it right and found success.

Now, Larry and I won't claim to be experts in the realms of marriage and family. We have a great marriage and a wonderful family, true, but only because of the One who designed marriage in the first place. Our relationship is truly a living testament to the power of God. Sometimes, I just have to sit down and take a deep breath when I think about where God has brought Larry and me. We've proven that He can take two independent, stubborn, angry, messy people, bring them together in marriage, and create a beautiful relationship out of it. God has taken the traumas we've been through and turned them into a sense of compassion for others—a desire to see them through the same problems.

Even though Larry and I became Christians around the same time, our testimonies were completely unique, and our backgrounds could not have been more divergent. When we came together and tried to reconcile our differences, the process was often less than peaceful. We needed to practice forgiveness and learn some new methods of conflict resolution. In Larry's family, "conflict resolution" was achieved through big brawls—whoever emerged with the least amount of blood on him was dubbed the victor. By contrast, in my family, we would talk things out and compromise, but whoever didn't get his way would walk away with an attitude—one that lingered. Which is worse: a bloody brawl or a long-lingering attitude? Which one wreaks more destruction? I'm not even sure. They're about even, in my estimation. When we got married, Larry and I both had to learn better methods—God's methods—of resolving our differences, so that we could become one.

In addition, the Christian fellowship that we were a part of emphasized the sacrifice of self and of family for the sake of the ministry, and it took years for Larry and me to learn to put each other first. Guess what? Thirty-five years later, we're still learning how to do that. Even when we've been married to our soul mate for years and years, the process of two becoming one never quite ends. It's a lifelong journey. On the path of marriage, husband and wife will either move further and further apart or move closer and closer together until they are one unit—indistinguishable from each other. The latter concept is how God intended marriage to be.

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Basically, the only reason we can speak so boldly about building great marriages—the reason we can claim God's ability to turn things around—is because we have experienced it ourselves. God has taken the traumas we've been through and turned them into a sense of compassion for others—a desire to see them through the same problems.

Blessings Come When We Follow God's Plan

In order to bless us in every area, including our marriage, God has worked out a plan for us—a path that leads us to success in all aspects of life, including our relationships with our spouses. And His plan does not consist in a bunch of dos and don'ts. It's a bunch of "get to's" and "want to's." His plan, which is laid out in the Bible through the law, is really a path that leads us on the shortest route to the highest level of blessings possible. The law is meant to signify the pathway to all goodness and blessings.

When I first accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior and became a Christian, I didn't just decide to act differently. In my heart, God gave me a whole new set of "want to's." And that's what we want to develop in our children—a desire and a heart to do what's right, so that, when they're older, they will do it on their own. When Larry and I first became Christians, we came out of the world and stopped acting as we had because something changed on the inside. Our desires had been transformed. Instead of denying ourselves the things we had formerly desired, we started saying, "I don't want to do that anymore, God. I want all that You have for me, instead." This is why, if we're going to raise our children God's way and follow His plan for our families, we must have the living Spirit of God in our homes.

When we say no to God and say yes to junk, we're only hurting ourselves and shortchanging our own futures. God loves us immeasurably, and He wants only the best for us. He accepts us the way we are, but—praise God!—He loves us too much to leave us that way. How many of us became perfect the day we said yes to the Lord and accepted Him into our hearts? How many of us have been perfect in the days since then? I'm not talking about perfection. I'm talking about saying, "You know what, Lord? I blew it. I made a mistake. I gave in to temptation. But I want to move forward. I'm not going to make excuses any longer. I'm going to change, through the power of Your total restoration."

Again, the reason Larry and I are so open about the challenges that we faced early in our marriage, with anger and fighting and immaturity, is that we want you to understand that what God did for us, He'll do for you, too! He is a good God who changes us from glory to glory. Larry and I weren't perfect back then, and we're still far from perfect today. But we see where we want to go, and we're determined to move continually in that direction.

Blessings Come When We're Willing to Change

Jesus said that we can't put new wine in old wineskins, or they will burst. (See Matthew 9:17.) When we give our hearts to the Lord, we become new creations. The old person is gone; a new person has been born. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17.) And we continue to grow by renewing our minds through the Word of God, day by day.

Paul sums it up well in Romans 12:2: "*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect*" (NLT).

When we give our hearts to our spouse, the old person is gone, making way for the birth, or formation, of a new "person"—a new couple.

The same process must occur in a marriage relationship. When we give our hearts to our spouse, the old person is gone, making way for the birth, or formation, of a new "person"—a new couple. When husband and wife renew their minds together, their relationship grows and evolves so that it resembles more and more closely the relationship of Christ to His bride, the church. (See, for example, Ephesians 5:25–27.)

God's will for us—His plans and purposes for our lives—are always good! He loves us with an infinite, never-ending love, and He wants the absolute best for us. We can trust Him with our eternity, and we can trust Him with our lives while we are on this earth!

Larry and I really do strive to build relationship and our family according to the Word of God. We know and we teach that the Lord is never pointing a finger of accusation at us but is always reaching out a hand to help us. If we will develop a sensitive, repentant heart and merely say, "I admit that I blew it. Forgive me, Lord, for being angry and crabby. Please make me a better person tomorrow, and please renew my mind so that I became more and more like You," it makes a big difference.

Yet, some people just want to dig their heels in and say, "This is the way I am, and nobody's going to change me." The Word of God does a great job of getting past the symptoms and getting to the cause. The Bible says that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (see Hebrews 4:12), and it never fails to get in there and pull out the crud that interferes with our lives and adversely affects the people around us and put us on the right path—the fast track to success and fulfillment. Isn't that good news?

Repentance is not the same as confession. Repentance is like a soul shower. I was raised in the Catholic Church. At my weekly confession, I would say, "Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned," and then—guess what?—I would spend the week doing the same things, only to confess them again the following week. But true salvation and repentance are different. You're not just saying, "Forgive me, Lord, for doing such and such." You're saying, "Forgive me, Lord, and cleanse my soul. Change me, Lord, so that I don't go back and do the same things again. From this moment forward, I commit never to go back there again. Please give me Your strength and Your equipping to be strong and committed to moving forward into all that You have for me."

The God we serve answers prayers like that. His anointing, or the smearing of His abilities, is not just for Sunday mornings. His anointing goes with us out the church doors and into the world. He smears us with His abilities so that, no matter the temptations and difficulties we face, His moral compass will guide us in the right direction. His strength will enable us to do the right thing and to walk it out. And this is what we want to teach to our children. It's the Master plan, straight from the Mastermind.

A Resource for All Walks of Life

He said:

You may be a newlywed wondering how to start your marriage out on the right path. You may have been married for some time, and you desire to go from good to great. You may be in a marriage that is struggling, and you don't know how to get past the challenges you're facing. You may have gone through a painful divorce and are wondering if there is hope for your future. You may be facing seemingly insurmountable conflicts with your spouse or with your children. Your family might be in need of a minor tune-up or a major overhaul. Or, you may have a wonderful marriage and family, but you know others who still need some help. You may be a parent searching for a way to raise your kids in the "*training and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4)—whether they're six or sixteen.

Regardless of your situation, it's never too early to get your family going down the right path, nor is it ever too late to steer them back to that path. Our God is a God of hope, restoration, and second chances! Somebody once said that the church is like a body shop, with various wrecks in various stages of repair. Our God is in the business of taking every "wreck" of a life and completely renewing and restoring it! As He does this work in our lives, He is never pointing a finger of accusation at us. He is always reaching out a hand to help us!

No matter who you are, where you've been, what stage of life you're in, or how daunting the challenges you're facing, believe me when I say that God has a new beginning for you! With God's help and a little coaching from Tiz and me, what might have seemed impossible is now within reach.

Get Ready for an Incredible Journey!

She said:

The object of this book is to lead you on the exciting journey of life. Whether you are single, married, divorced, or widowed—and whether or not you have children—God has established a pattern for your life, and He wants to use you to extend His mercy, grace, and healing throughout the world. It's a lofty charge, but you're up to the challenge!

Again, the key is to go step-by-step. Together, we will see the burdens and challenges dissolve and disappear as the blessings of God multiply in your life and family! What the Lord has done for us and for so many others, He wants to do for

you. Remember that “*nothing is impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37 NIV)! Place your trust in Him as you step onto the path toward bringing in blessings and being a blessing. Whatever the enemy may have stolen from you, God is going to multiply back to you, in an exponentially greater amount. Your best days are still ahead of you!

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Points to Ponder and Apply

- ✦ God is the Author of everything, including marriage, and He set out a plan for success in His Word, the Holy Bible.
- ✦ When we enter into marriage, we are to become a “new creation”—two individuals who are at the same time one unit.
- ✦ The key to improving your marriage and family is to move one step at a time. Practice patience as God does a great work in you!