

Jesus Christ can help you redeem the broken places of your marriage. Danah helps you:

- **Stop pretending everything is okay**
- **Strengthen yourself in the Lord**
- **Fight for your husband instead of with him**
- **Discover 7 essential beliefs every marriage needs to survive broken places**
- **Participate in your husband's redemption story**

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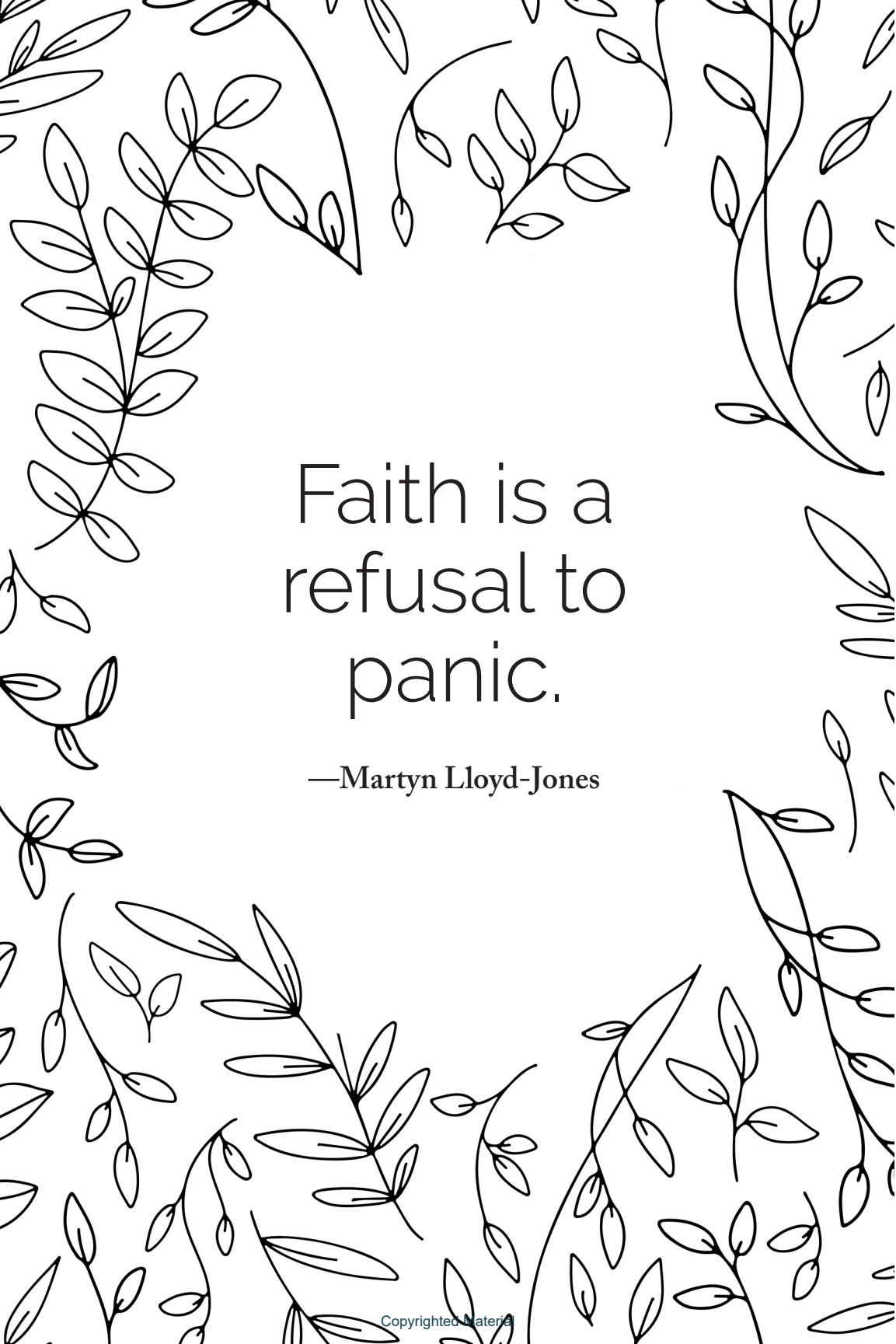
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Faith is a
refusal to
panic.

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones



chapter one

We Are Happy Even After

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

—JOHN 8:36

You never forget the day that blows out the flame of happy in your heart.

That afternoon I was at home, waiting for my husband, Bob, to come pick me up in his big red truck so we could “eat our way” through the Centre County Grange Fair. It’s a family tradition that sticks better than the fly tape in the pig barns, which are ironically located just next to the Scott’s Roasted Pork stand.

Bob was late, but I wasn’t mad. In fact, I was feeling really good about my husband that day. A week earlier I’d injured my back helping a friend move. I did not like the pain, but the attention and care my man had lavished on me was another story. He’d been so loving as he nursed me through recovery.

I decided to get in another stretch and was hanging upside down over an exercise ball when Bob walked in.

“Yay,” I exclaimed as he sat down in one of our red leather chairs.

I plopped myself right side up and balanced over the rubber orb like a teenager hanging out with her boyfriend. My heart was carefree and unbraced for what was coming.

Bob studied me with a smile. I felt so seen in that moment.

But wait—that look in his eyes was oddly distant and hollow. Empty.

I had recently confronted Bob about my suspicions that he was not walking in sexual integrity. He had blown me off. Now everything in me suddenly realized that he was about to tell the truth. I stood up, moved to sit in our other red chair, and turned to face him.

My counselor and I had been praying for God to work in Bob's heart. I still wasn't prepared for what came out of his mouth.

"I don't know how to find my way back to you or to God without breaking your heart," he began.

And then he did.

He broke my heart.



I am not going to share the details of what Bob told me that day. Suffice it to say that before we were married, my husband had humbly confessed a fierce battle with sexual temptation that we thought would just go away after the wedding. It hadn't. And we'd fought hard against it. Together. For many years my husband had experienced freedom. But one day, sitting in our red chairs, Bob confessed again. He'd lost ground.

It's my decision not to tell more. But Bob wants you to know that what he did is worse than you may think, but not as bad as you might imagine. In his opinion, this ambiguity is another consequence of sin. We both believe that the pain of betrayal in marriage is similar whether

a man has looked at pornography, had an affair, or acted out sexually in any of a number of ways.

And yet despite the pain of that betrayal, I am here to tell you that the story of Bob and Dannah Gresh is *not* over.

That sentence is an admission. Writing this book is difficult for me because my husband and I have so far to go—and we know it. *Our story is not over.* Period. Sobering fact.

That sentence is also a battle cry because Bob and Dannah Gresh have won over and over again. *Our story is not over!*

And that sentence, finally, is an exclamation of triumph because the two of us, with God's help, have won over and over again. Our story is not over! Exclamation point. Sublime expectation.

Everything started so beautifully. On our wedding day we made a covenant before God to be united in marriage. We believed then—and believe now—that for Christian couples this is a sacred act with a special purpose. Marriage helps tell the story of a much greater love. It invites the world to see the sacrificial, unconditional love Jesus Christ has for His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:31–32).

It is sacred for you too.

That's why you hurt so deeply right now!

The ache in your heart to know and be truly known
is from God.

At our wedding, Bob and I wanted all our friends and family to know that we wanted to help tell the story of God's love with our marriage. So we decided to speak at our own wedding.

I chickened out, terrified of speaking in public!

Bob did not. The words he shared that day were my favorite part of our covenant ceremony. I delighted to hear them, and I believed we would portray God's love beautifully together.

But we did not ride off into the sunset.

In fact, we weren't even successful at riding off in Bob's new Nissan Sentra. We could not find his car, which the groomsmen had parked for us, in the parking garage after the wedding reception. What a pair we were, walking through each level of that concrete maze—I in my wedding gown and Bob in his tux! But nothing could have stolen the joy of that enthralling beginning.

Of course, our story contains a day that was as sad as that first one was joyful. A day when I had to absorb words I did not want to hear—that my husband's hard-fought battle against lust had become unmanageable. And both our hearts would be bloodied in the aftermath.

Were we still telling the story of God's love?

It sure didn't feel like it then.

It felt like our story as we knew it was over. Or at least the ability to live happily had ended.

But God in His rich grace was not lifting His providential pen from the page, ending our story abruptly. Instead, He was preparing to write a chapter that mercifully revealed something Bob and I could not even see.

We actually weren't as happy as we were pretending to be.

Making a Lie Our Refuge¹

Many centuries ago, God's special people (the Israelites) went looking for "happy" in all the wrong places. They slid slowly into sin and rebellion. Eventually they made alliances with their enemy the king of Assyria rather than trusting in and obeying the one true God. The prophet Isaiah gave this explanation for what happened over the course of time:

"We have made a lie our refuge
and falsehood our hiding place."

—Isaiah 28:15 NIV

This describes all too well the circumstances that result in many couples sliding ever so slowly from a healthy covenant marriage into unwholesome, just-living-together misery. They slither into falsehood one small decision at a time over the course of years. And before they know it, they're faking a relationship. Disconnected from God and each other, they just go through the motions. They have made a lie their refuge and falsehood their hiding place.

That's exactly what had happened to Bob and me. We were enjoying our family, going on vacations, managing a little hobby farm, and running two successful ministries. We lived something that *looked* happy. But over the course of a few years we had fallen into something unhealthy and lonely.

My husband was haunted by guilt and shame from sin, which he desperately wanted to overcome without hurting me. And I just had a sense that something was "off" but didn't like the idea of what it might be.

We both felt the nudge of God's Spirit to slow down and get honest. But we didn't.

We just kept on making a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.

Is it possible that you have too?

It is Satan who writes these stories of bondage and destruction in our lives. And he uses only one language: *lies*.

"The devil . . . was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

—John 8:44

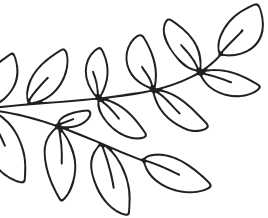
All lies originate with Satan, including the ones your husband may have told you or lived and the one you've been living with him, knowingly or not. The enemy's ultimate goal is your destruction.

But you and your husband do not need to be one of the devil's casualties. God wants to write a freedom story with your life.

***This book is your invitation to make God
your refuge (Psalm 46:1, Psalm 91).
And His language is Truth.***

The Truth Will Set You Free

Now, maybe the idea of hearing the whole truth from your husband terrifies you. Here again Satan likes to lie to us, telling us that the truth will be too devastating. But truth, though not always pain-free, is never destructive. It always sets us free.



So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

—JOHN 8:31–32

The kind of Truth I want you to know is not a set of facts, though the details do matter and will be part of your journey. The Truth that will set you free is a person. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). True freedom is found in a living, loving relationship with Him. As you abide in the words of the Bible, you’ll come to know the Truth more deeply than ever before and experience a whole new level of freedom.

You might be saying, “Dannah, I have already been set free by Christ. But something didn’t work, or I would not be sitting here in absolute misery.” Ah, did you forget the part about the epic battle between good and evil? The moment you discovered the freedom of



find Jesus

If the concept of a relationship with Jesus sounds new to you, please turn to bonus content at the back of the book. In it I answer some important questions, including “**How do I know if I’m a Christian?**” (question #1). Getting to know Him is an important step for you to experience the full potential of healing as described in this book.

Jesus Christ, Satan put you in his crosshairs. In this case, your marriage is the target. He wants to see if he can steal what’s already yours.

Tell him no!

Plant your feet firmly. You need not let yourself be caught again in the shackles of spiritual bondage (Galatians 5:1).

Remind the devil of the words of Jesus Christ: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

That’s not to say that this journey we are about to embark upon together will be easy. It won’t be. I know you’re probably sitting there downhearted, angry, frustrated, and disappointed with your husband. You could have hard questions about your own culpability in these horrific circumstances. You may also feel defensive and distracted from the work God wants to do in your own heart because people all around you have opinions and you don’t know what to do with them.

Been there, done that, as you’ll soon see.

But today is the stuff healing is made of, my sweet sister. Cozy up. I’m here to share my heart with you and deliver a fresh download of faith for *your* story.

Here's the most important thing you need to know right now: *you cannot do this alone*. No one experiences the grace of God's redemption power in isolation.

**the truth
you need**



You cannot do this alone.

Today I'm writing to you from a historic inn—a Quaker farmhouse just outside Philadelphia. It was built in the 1700s and surely has stories to tell—including a whole chapter about when it was a safe house for the Underground Railroad.

You probably know that the Underground Railroad was not a railroad at all but a complex network of secret routes, churches, privately owned homes, and fearless individuals who aided runaway slaves on the dangerous journey from enslavement. Pennsylvania, a free state just north of the Mason-Dixon Line, provided many entry points into freedom for these desperate men and women.

I pray that this book provides that kind of entry point for you on your journey to freedom! When there has been a great enslavement in your marriage, you face a grueling journey to move away *from* the bondage of sin and pain to the freedom your soul longs to know.

Do you know who led most of those slaves through those secret routes? Those who'd known intimately the pain of slavery but refused to stay in bondage. The leaders were men and women who'd traveled the secret routes themselves and knew the way out.

Bob and I are familiar with the secret, rocky footpaths to freedom and redemption in marriage after the pain of hiding in lies and falsehood. We want to show you those secret routes. We have chosen to be honest with our story so that you can know the Truth and experience liberty.

Imagine closing this book having replaced all the heartache you're feeling with true freedom!

- freedom *from* the blinding pain
- freedom *from* those haunting memories
- freedom *from* hopelessness and confusion
- freedom *from* bitterness and anger
- freedom *from* the opinions people have about you and your marriage

But we won't just be running from the past! The freedom Christ brings is so much more complete than that. We'll be chasing down some things that may be missing from your life right now. So you'll experience not only freedom *from* the things that bind you up and hold you back but also freedom to dive into the future with joy.

- freedom *to* forgive *fully*
- freedom *to* enjoy life and maybe even your marriage again²
- freedom *to* make decisions and stand confident with your head held high
- freedom *to* love—again
- freedom *to* turn this hard thing into a purpose so meaningful that only God can see it right now

Even as I type those words, I feel such a stirring in my belly because I know this is true. Why? Because I'm experiencing happily *even* after Bob and I once lived in bondage. When we stopped making a lie our refuge, we discovered that Truth really does set you free.



As I write the first chapter of this book, Bob and I are here at this lovely place called Sweetwater Farm.

Smelling flowers.
Quite literally.

This region of the country has just emerged from a winter that was punctuated by extreme cold and excessive snow. But yesterday, when we walked the grounds of the farm, I noticed the tiniest promise of a much-anticipated spring. There it was—one little crocus bud begging for the sun to shine upon it so that it could bloom. And then another. And another. More crocuses than I've ever seen in one spot, just waiting to bloom.

I began to hope it would be sunny and warm enough for those little buds to open before we checked out of this special place. Then I checked the temperature. It was only just a couple degrees above freezing and not expected to warm up much.

Every now and then I throw up an audacious prayer. No one *needed* those flowers to bloom. I just really wanted them to. *Lord, bring us unexpected and unseasonable warmth—oh, and a bright sun shining all over this field tomorrow!*

We returned to our room and enjoyed the evening. And today we woke to the kind of day that makes us draw suns with smiley faces on them. It's sixty-four degrees in spite of what the weatherman predicted!

Bob and I walked out to see the crocuses. Sure enough, they were open. And to our delight we found another wonder—a whole swarm of honeybees. They were busy as, well, bees. The sound of their buzzing seemed to be a joyful song of praise to God for their first harvest of the season.

We sat down together in the middle of it all—hundreds if not thousands of crocuses and bees. We were just enjoying life together.

And that's the real miracle on this page.

We Are Happy Even After

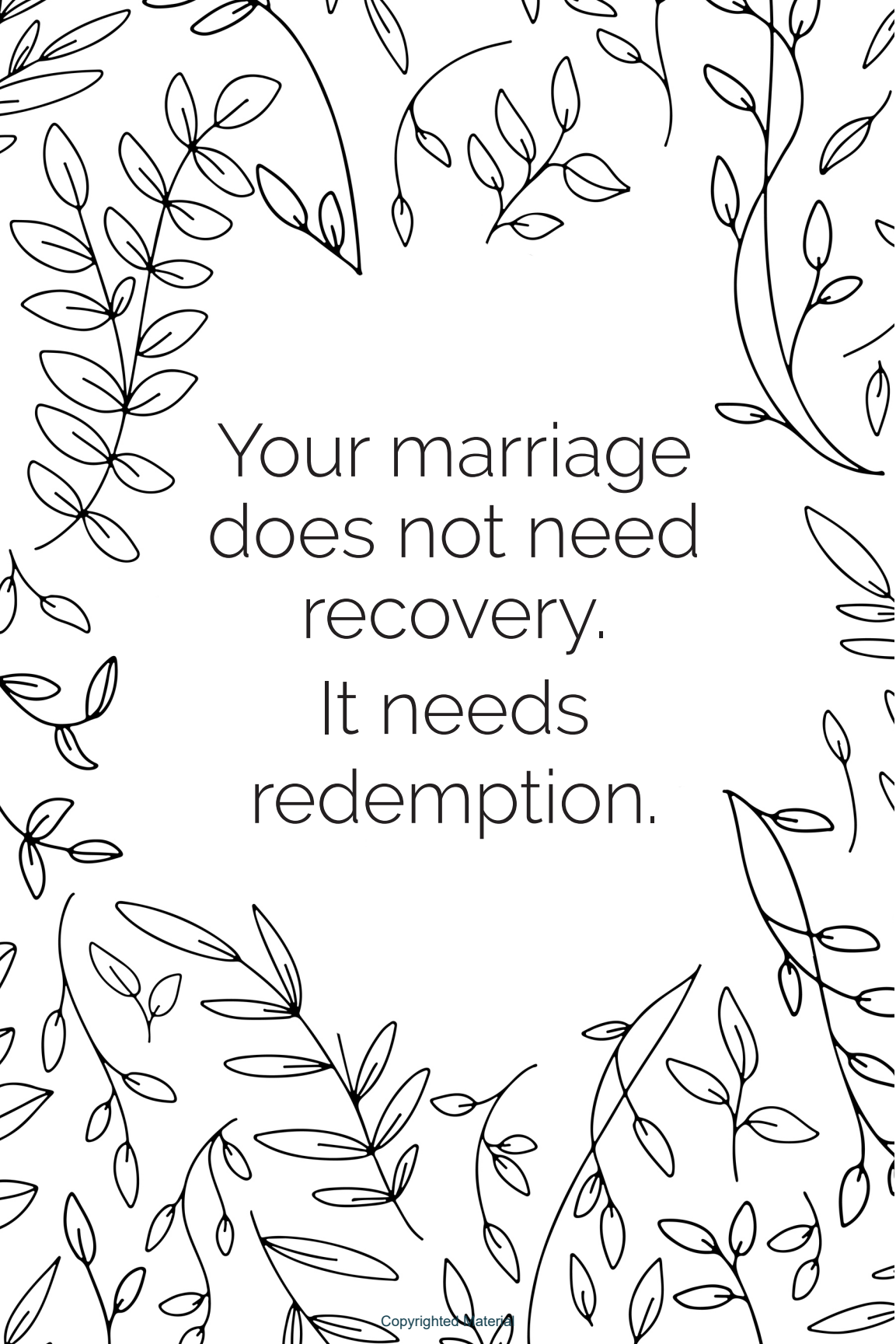
Not that the weather warmed so I could see honeybees on crocuses,
but that our hearts have been warmed. To our marriage. To one another.

We are living in happily even after.

And I want to help you experience that too.

Let's get started, my friend.





Your marriage
does not need
recovery.
It needs
redemption.



chapter two

Can You Be Happy Even After?

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! . . .

*May he grant your heart's desire
and fulfill all your plans!*

*May we shout for joy over your salvation,
and in the name of our God set up our banners! . . .*

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

—PSALM 20:1-7

I was walking through my living room when I suddenly had an overwhelming urge to pray for my husband. It had been just a few weeks since we'd sat in this very room, perched in our red chairs, and he'd told me things I did not want to hear.

I dropped to my knees.

For many weeks I'd been struggling to intercede, but now the words erupted from me for a good twenty minutes. I sensed a strong battle in the spiritual realm.

I wondered what was happening in Bob's day.

Almost immediately after that “red chair” session, he had flown to another part of the country to participate in an extremely well-regarded therapy program. But in recent days I had begun to grow concerned about the quality of what he was experiencing there. Many of the faith-based services we’d been told would be available weren’t. And though the facility’s website had specified support for partners and families, I could barely get them to return my phone calls, let alone schedule the in-person couple’s weekend we’d been promised.

Oh, Lord, I don't like not being a part of this! Is that me just being discontent, or is that You redirecting us? Please show me if it's okay to change course. Show Bob!

The flow of words stopped as suddenly as they started.

Well, that was unusual!

I jotted the time down in my prayer journal: 6:51 in the evening. I intended to ask Bob what was going on when I was praying.

Hours later he called.

“Baby, I don’t know what you’re going to think about this,” he began. “But I think I need to leave this place.”

He went on to explain that earlier he had attended a specially called meeting. Several of the men in the program had been concerned that their wives were not getting the support they needed. When they expressed their concern, they’d been told they were experiencing “impaired thinking.” The therapist had asked them to all repeat, “The team loves your wives and is doing their best to care for them.”

I jotted that remarkable statement down. In my experience it was not true. Then I asked, “What time did this meeting happen?”

It was underway at the exact time I was compelled to pray.



You are in the middle of a cosmic spiritual battle of epic proportions. Don't for one second forget that Satan is after your marriage and your man!

You must act quickly.

And with great discernment.

You will need help—good, solid, wise help. And finding that help can be tricky.

The sad state of our culture has resulted in a recovery industry that doesn't always get it right. Never be afraid to change course to find what works for you. And do not let anyone gaslight you.

Not the cultural voices that seek to normalize sexual sin.

Not your husband if he tries to defend his behavior or tell you you're overreacting.

Perhaps not even a well-regarded, "gold standard" recovery clinic.

One reason I'm writing this book, in fact, is that Bob and I did not get our own marriage work started on the right foot. I desperately want to help you—so you won't have to learn the hard lessons I did on the hot pavement of life.

How I wish I could come knock on your door and just listen to your heart. Sometimes you desperately need someone to hear your story and tell you that this is not the end. It's been my tremendous pleasure to be a listening ear for a whole lot of girlfriends who are where you are right now. So many of us have been wounded by our husbands' battle with lust!

Recently one of my favorite friends wrote to me. She recalled that I came to visit right after she discovered her husband's sin. She was so overwhelmed and hurt that she doesn't remember much about those first few days.

But she does remember my visit.

I remember you showing up at my front door with a bag of your favorite granola. (Do you remember?) You came in and listened to my story, my thoughts, my emotions. (I was all over the place!) But I knew you understood. You extended so much grace! I knew you would eventually encourage me to lean into what God's Word would have me do next, but you mostly just listened. You made time to be there with me—you chose me—when I felt terribly rejected, abandoned, and unlovable.

Do you feel rejected, abandoned, and unlovable?

I understand. I have felt those hopeless emotions too.

You might be wondering if there is any hope to be had. The answer is an unquestionable, unequivocal yes!

Pull out some of your favorite granola and maybe a cup of hot tea. Let's sit quietly together as you work through this book. If you need to stop to yell or cry, it's okay. When you just need to stare at the wall for a while and process, I'll be here waiting for you.

In the pages ahead I'll give you a chance to process some of your story. For now, how about if I share a bit more of mine.

When Bob and I found ourselves at relational ground zero, we made the decision to restore our marriage together.

"Get the best help that exists," said a friend.

We did—or we thought that was what we were doing. We both assumed that Bob needed to go into "recovery," so our choice was to invest in one of the most popular types of programs in the recovery marketplace. According to our research, it was a top-notch, "gold standard" program. Although the approach was essentially secular, we were assured that it featured a faith-based track consistent with our Christian beliefs.

But halfway through the forty-five-day program we both felt uneasy. Bob would tell you that some of what he experienced was helpful, but that the presence of God seemed to be roadblocked. The faith-based

track we'd been promised kept getting delayed because "the book didn't arrive." And the family therapy weekend kept being canceled, preventing us from entering into the work of recovery *together*.

We had tried to access the best of the world's treatment while integrating it with our Christian faith, but it just wasn't working.


Many women come to me because they have made similar mistakes. Often they turn to whatever local program or therapist their insurance pays for or is most affordable. Sometimes they find a well-meaning pastor to counsel them who does not understand the clinical complexities of what they are experiencing. Other times they find a clinically informed provider who simply does not understand the spiritual battle taking place. Inevitably they find themselves at a place where what they're trying doesn't work.

It can be daunting to filter through who you can trust to guide you on this tortuous journey.

So let me be direct and tell you why the world's recovery marketplace isn't where you want to shop right now. These programs have a terrifyingly high failure rate. The late Neil Jacobson, a professor who specialized in research about marital discord, claimed that just 35 to 50 percent of couples in marital therapy saw improvements and that after a year less than half of those couples retained the benefits.¹ This led John Gottman, a psychologist who has worked for more than four decades on divorce prediction and marital stability, to write that "in the long run, marital therapy did not benefit the majority of couples."²

If you place your trust in therapy and recovery, you may find yourself deeply disappointed in the results.

Let me suggest a braver, deeper, more sacred route.

**the truth
you need**  *Your marriage does not need recovery.
It needs redemption.*

Redemption is the act of being saved from sin, error, or evil and restored to healthy functioning. It's sin that's gotten you where you are. You are probably deeply hurt by and aware of your husband's sin right now, aren't you?

The sad truth is, no program, plan, or psychological treatment will be sufficient to redeem your husband, you, or your marriage. There may be some instruments in the world's toolboxes that God can use to help you, but without Him there will be no redemption. Why?

There are some things that only God can do, and for us to attempt to do them is to waste our efforts. . . . Among the things which only God can do . . . is the work of redemption.

—A. W. Tozer³

No program to heal your marriage will work unless God is at the center of it because He alone can redeem an individual from sin.

The days in which we are living—and so many of our marriages as well—are tainted with the deep pain of *sin*. Of course, most people prefer to speak of the “s” word in hushed tones, if they use it at all. Certainly the black-and-white language of sin is hardly ever used in counseling rooms.

Christian psychologist Mark R. McMinn believes that most of us, Christians included, don't genuinely want to discuss and understand sin. He writes,

This is not just a mainstream psychology problem; it has affected Christian psychology as well. Philip Monroe, a faculty member at Biblical Theological Seminary, recently noted that only 43 of the 1,143 articles published in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* and *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* have been related to sin, and only four of those are related to the effects or

treatment of sinful patterns. I wonder if we lost the language of sin because the language of psychology took its place.⁴

I wonder too.

The messages of psychological methods, self-help, emotional therapy, and the recovery movement are loud and almost universally applauded, despite their limitations. So it can be easy to forget that Jesus Christ alone has the power to redeem broken people from sin.

I'm here to remind you.

As long as your Redeemer is invited to write your redemption story, there is hope that you can be happy even after your marriage has experienced great pain. But it depends on your answer to this question:

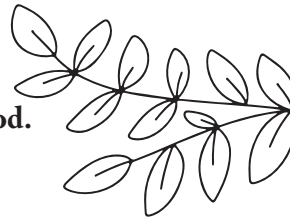
Where Will You Put Your Hope?

Chariots and powerful horses were the racing cars of the ancient world. They epitomized modern living. Not only were they the preferred mode of transport for royalty and the elite, but they revolutionized military warfare tactics.

(I know it seems like I just switched into History Channel mode, but stick with me!)

King David wrote a powerful statement of conviction that we need for a time like this:

**Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
—PSALM 20:7**



With those words he was dissing the state-of-the-art approach to winning a war—and suggesting that Israel had something much better. They would win, he implied, because they trusted in God's name.

Or, as some versions of the Bible translate it, because they “remembered” the name of the Lord.

I love that.

Because it’s so easy to forget.

Recovery programs and self-help books are the chariots and horses of our modern day. They are the world’s trailblazing standard in winning mental, emotional, and marital battles. That’s why so many in our culture place their trust in them.

But don’t be fooled. Don’t get spiritual amnesia—not at a time like this!

Instead, I’m inviting you to mindfully put your trust in the name of the Lord. Let Him be your refuge. He *is* the hope you have of redeeming your husband, your marriage, and your story.

In the middle of our marriage work, Bob and I chose to leave that treatment program that is considered the gold standard in recovery. For us it was the wrong chariot because Jesus wasn’t driving it.

But this is absolutely crucial: we did not throw the baby out with the bathwater! We have far too much experience to believe the lie that we could overcome the grip of lust in this day and age without the help of individuals who are clinically informed. The same day Bob left that program, he arrived at another one, where a licensed Christian therapy team employed the diagnostic tools and research of behavioral science.

The difference is that they put Jesus in the driver’s seat of our healing.

We firmly believe it is *imperative* that you work with a counselor, support group, or treatment program that is both biblically based *and* clinically informed. The next chapter will help you understand why. It contains important information that I wish someone had told me when I began asking the Lord to redeem my broken marriage.

Writing Your Redemption Story

Bob and I are a redemption story in progress. Ours won't look exactly like yours, and it shouldn't. You are a unique couple, and your journey will be different from ours.

There's something our stories probably have in common, though: pornography. Because it's become a sad norm in our culture, it is often the gateway to other marital problems and pain. A 2002 study revealed that among the general public, 68 percent of divorce cases involve "one party meeting a new lover over the Internet," while 56 percent involve one party having "an obsessive interest in pornographic websites."⁵ Even more tragically, Christian marriages are not exempt. Did you know that 64 percent of Christian men and 15 percent of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month!⁶

Don't let anyone tell you that pornography isn't harmful. Prolonged exposure to this twisted version of God's good gift dismantles intimacy in a marriage, erodes sanity, destroys trust, and often leads to unfaithfulness.

Because porn is seemingly ubiquitous, many women are becoming complacent about their husband's struggle with it. Do not let that be you. Not *all* men are living in enslavement to a lustful mindset. And the fact that many are enslaved is no reason to simply accept it in your marriage.

You must do something. And you can.

***As long as you are walking with the Lord,
the Holy Spirit is never going to let you be okay
with anything less than complete sexual fidelity
in your marriage.***

Only God's Spirit can bring your man to repentance, but you can influence your husband to seek the Lord and get the help he needs. Even when a man does not "obey the word" he can be "won . . . by the conduct" of his wife (1 Peter 3:1). You possess that power through Jesus Christ!

I'd like to be a part of your redemption story. I don't have all the answers to your questions. I'm not a trained counselor or expert. I'm just a woman who's been where you are and wants to walk with you a while in your journey because *I desperately needed a friend like that when I was where you are*. It's so helpful to learn from someone who's been there.

For example, it would have been so good to understand what was happening in my husband's brain.

And mine.

So turn the page. And I'll tell you what I wish someone had told me!



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