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—Liz Curtis Higgs, best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible, Really Bad Girls of the Bible,* and *Unveiling Mary Magdalene*

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Igniting the Joy and Passion You Both Desire

Shannon and Greg Ethridge

Introduction by Stephen Arterburn

and Fred Stoeker

WATERBROOK
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This book is dedicated to our parents,
James and Joan Phillips
and
Jay and Wanda Ethridge,
who combined have been married almost one hundred years.
How fortunate we've been to have your examples
of unconditional love and commitment to live by.

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And finally, but most of all, we want to acknowledge that You, Jesus, are the glue that holds us together. Thank You for teaching us by example how to love one another without limits.

introduction

From Fred Stoeker

Much rides on a marriage, doesn't it? It's incredible when you stop to think about it. Perhaps that's the truth that kept you from tossing your marriage into the trash bin labeled "Wasted Time" and getting on with yet another search for an improved relationship. Sometimes a spouse's heart can seem hard.

But I wonder how many times some couples rush out of marriage without realizing how hard their *own* hearts were in the marriage? Speaking from personal experience, I find it difficult to spot a hard heart in the mirror. When Brenda told me mine was there years ago, I couldn't see it until the day she sat me down at the kitchen table, looked me straight in the eye, and flattened my world with these words: "I don't know how to tell you this, so I'm going to tell it to you straight. My feelings for you are dead."

Her declaration took me by surprise. She was the sweet girl God Himself chose for me. She was my wife—and all my hopes and dreams were tied up in her. I'd have done anything for her. How could that be happening?

I asked Brenda a few questions after her stunning declaration. "Honey, what about it? Do you still love me?"

"Yes," she said. "I still love you."

"If the love is still there, then how come your feelings for me are dead?"

Brenda's inability to put it into words left me confused. For the next week, waves of panic washed over me, buckling me in unguarded moments. Finally one day, as I stepped into the kitchen for a glass of milk, tears pooled in my eyes once again. After I poured myself a glass, I stood for a long time, just staring at the refrigerator through tear-filled eyes. Then I pointed to heaven, declaring, "God, I don't care how much gravel I have to eat, but I am not getting a divorce."

That was the day I softened my heart, the day I knew it was time to pay a real price, a much deeper price than I'd ever considered paying before. God said in Ephesians 5 that I must lay down my life for my marriage, just as He laid down His life for His bride, the church. I hadn't even begun to approach such sacrifice.

I lifted up that desperate statement to God twenty years ago. Recently, a deacon said to me, "Fred, I know only two couples who enjoy a level of intimacy that allows them to talk to each other about absolutely anything—even their sins—without fear and with total love. You and Brenda are one of them."

How did we get here from there? *Every Man's Marriage* tells the story about how I once thought that marital leadership meant I was the one who never had to change, but I came to learn that leadership requires embracing more change in me than I ever dreamed possible. It's about carrying the honor of being the one who sets the example, the one who is the quickest in the household to search his heart for flaws and change them before he disrespects his wife to the core of her soul.

I've seen men read *Every Man's Marriage* and turn their marriages around when they put the principles in place. But I've also heard from men who said, "Fred, I agree with your book, and I believe I have to change some things in the way I treat people around here, especially my wife. I'll admit that she pointed out some of these things to me even before you did, but I haven't been listening.

"I'm ready to listen, and I'm hoping my wife is too. I've been telling her some things that she's not hearing, either. Is there a book out there that you can recommend that talks about the other side of the issue?"

Yes, there is, and it's the one you're holding in your hands. If there is anything I've learned along the way with Brenda, it's that marriage is about change. It's about becoming the spouses God intends us to be. This book gives us the opportunity to listen to the Lord's direction one more time and to change.

I have been looking forward to the day *Every Woman's Marriage* would be published for a long time, and I couldn't be happier that Shannon Ethridge is the author. From the first day I met her, I was impressed with her passion for sexual purity and her passion for oneness in marriage. She has a level of clarity of God's personal vision for her life that few people ever know.

But it wasn't until I met her husband, Greg, and shared breakfast with the two of them that I really understood what God had done when He chose her to write the Every Woman's book series. After seeing them together and hearing her speak publicly and privately about her love for Greg and for all that marriage means, I knew *Every Woman's Marriage* would be in good hands. I can't wait to read the

e-mails from men and women whose lives have been changed as a result of Shannon's fine work here.

From Stephen Arterburn

If you were to spend time with Fred and Brenda, you would see that their love for each other is the real deal. Their closeness is rare and beautiful, and it inspires many of us to take a second look at marriage, how it works well and how it does not.

I have seen in my own life how things don't work out well, and it hasn't been pretty. Many of you may share that sad and painful experience. It could be because you are married to a man unwilling to see marriage from any other view than the one he crafted for himself, or a man whose marriage philosophy was handed down to him by unknowing family or clergy.

Fred and Brenda's story of their tough marital journey (as written in *Every Man's Marriage*) was a masterpiece on what God intended marriage to be. It was radical and went against what numerous biblical educators were teaching. Fred pointed out what husbands often do to cause harm to a marriage, and then he talked about what men can do to reverse the damage.

After the book was released, the letters and e-mails came in, stating that this against-the-grain book opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. Miracles happened, and we were thrilled to hear of lives changed and marriages healed. Women sang our praises for introducing the concepts of mutual submission and rich, loving intimacy to their marriages. It's amazing what can happen when two people willingly look at themselves and go to work on the defects. We men needed to do that.

Now it is time for women to have a tool to examine themselves and their role in marriage. *Every Woman's Marriage* is that tool. Shannon Ethridge almost destroyed her marriage, but she found great hope and healing by taking care of her own issues rather than pointing the finger at her husband, Greg. I admire her for her strength and her biblical wisdom. The marriage she and Greg have today is a testament to the truths found in this great book.

My prayer for you is that you will open this book with an open mind, not looking for parts that verify you're doing the right thing, but looking for areas that

need work in your own heart and home. If you do, your marriage can be much different and much better, the beginning of a new way of living for both of you.

Allow me to leave you with two cautions, however. First, not every troubled marriage enjoys a happy ending like the marriages of the Stoekers and the Ethridges. Even if you do everything within the pages of this book, you have no guarantee that your marriage will be healed. Why? Because it takes two to heal a marriage, and without the two of you working together, you cannot find healing, growth, and deeper intimacy.

But you can count on a couple of things happening. You will change the dynamics of your marriage, and you will change your relationship with God. You can't implement these principles and stay the same. The difference can lead your marriage to heal.

My second caution is this: do not think that divorce fixes very much. From personal experience, I can state that it does not. So I leave you with a challenge. Read this book with great anticipation. Then be patient and see what God can do.

Finally, thanks for allowing Shannon and Greg to lead you to a new look at yourself and your marriage. I hope you like what you see.

PART I

when hearts grow cold

desperate housewives, desperate husbands

"You just don't meet my emotional needs!"

After seven years of marriage, I was actually thinking of leaving Greg and my two young children in pursuit of the "love" I felt entitled to but didn't feel I was getting in our relationship. I had no idea where I would go or how I would make it on my own, but I wasn't sure I could survive a lifeless marriage. I felt like I was nothing more than a maid, cook, nanny, and occasional outlet for sexual tension, positions for which I was sadly underpaid.

I couldn't imagine how my heart had grown so cold toward my husband. We met on April 21, 1989, when I visited a local church's singles group for a game night. Although I don't believe in love at first sight, Greg definitely caught my attention that evening as he stood head and shoulders above all the other single guys (literally, since he's six foot seven). Every time we had to pair off with a partner for another game, I hoped Greg and I would wind up together, but no such luck. However, things did begin to warm up between us as we got to know each other over the next several weeks, and we began dating exclusively that summer. Every morning I walked through the neighborhood praying, *Lord, I want to marry whomever You want me to, but if You are looking for my input, I'd like it to be Greg!*

I soon felt 110 percent sure that Greg was the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. By Thanksgiving I was desperate for him to pop the question, and he finally did just before Christmas. He said, "You plan the wedding, and I'll plan the honeymoon." That sounded great to me.

We married on April 21, 1990, exactly one year after we had met. Even my dad knew Greg was definitely the one for me. He said to me on the way down the aisle, "Don't you even think about changing your mind, or I may have to put a

shotgun to your back!" The thought of backing out never even entered my mind. This was too good to be true, and I wasn't about to mess it up.

However, before the honeymoon was over, feelings of discontent reared their ugly heads. Greg had planned a trip to Walt Disney World for five days, followed by a two-day weekend in Clearwater Beach, Florida. The first morning we woke up in Orlando, I was completely wiped out from all the wedding festivities and traveling. I just wanted to leave the shades down, the covers up, and enjoy a few extra hours of sleep. However, I was awakened when Greg sat down on the edge of the bed, showered, shaved, dressed, and ready to go by 7:00 a.m. "Come on! Get up! Let's go have breakfast with Mickey!" he coaxed.

I gave in and dragged myself into the shower at that ungodly time of the morning. But after two hours of following Greg all over Epcot Center, his long legs trotting from ride to ride and my squattier legs galloping to keep up, I threatened to go back to the hotel room without him. He tried to slow down, fighting back his enthusiasm, and I tried to calm down, fighting my urge to complain about his choice of honeymoon spots. Although it was fun and we made some great memories, sprinting all over Walt Disney World was not my idea of a relaxing, romantic honeymoon. All that week I looked forward to lying on the beaches of Clearwater and just vegetating in the sun together as husband and wife.

But there would be no basking in the sun that weekend. We arrived at Clearwater Beach in the midst of a windstorm and a cold front that brought temperatures in the low fifties. Thinking that we'd not be spending much time indoors, Greg had booked a dumpy little hotel room, but we couldn't get out much since we only brought warm-weather clothes. We mostly watched movies and ate leftover pizza. The ambiance (or lack thereof), exhaustion, and disappointment eventually got the best of me. I don't remember what was said, only how we said it. Greg and I had our first major fight before we even returned from our honeymoon. I couldn't believe that he had failed to check the weather before we came and that he hadn't even consulted with me about how I envisioned spending our honeymoon. He, on the other hand, couldn't believe that I was insensitive enough to get so angry with him when all he had wanted was to surprise and delight me.

Of course, I wasn't going to let one little argument ruin the marriage. Greg was a committed Christian and a leader in the youth group, which inspired me to

begin working with youth as well. He was fun and adventurous, and he took me on several group trips to go skiing, backpacking, and scuba diving. He was intelligent and financially stable, a graduate of Southern Methodist University and a certified public accountant. He was extremely laid back and had such a reputation of being a nice guy that no one ever got mad at him. No one, that is, except me.

Seven years and two children later I was constantly badgering Greg for not initiating romance anymore, for being too laid back. I had a long list of complaints: He never called me up for a date or offered to take me out to dinner. He didn't send cards or bring me flowers. I was weary of having to hint around for my emotional needs to be met, and I felt it didn't count if he didn't come up with the idea of how to do so himself. I was sick and tired of always picking up LEGOs and Tinkertoys, wiping children's noses and behinds, cleaning Goldfish and Cheerios out of the minivan seats, and feeling as if there had to be more to life.

With each passing day, I slipped deeper into depression. In hindsight, I realize that my unhappiness wasn't about what my husband was or wasn't doing; rather, it was about how I felt about myself. I needed Greg to affirm me, to make me feel beautiful, and to convince me that I was desirable, because I didn't know how to feel any of these things on my own. But at the time, I felt sure that he was to blame.

I am not the first or only wife to feel this way. In fact, I've heard from many women who feel deep dissatisfaction with their husbands and their marriages.

Stories of Discontent

Married fourteen years, Ramona thought she had wed Mr. Right, but feelings of fear, bitterness, and rejection surfaced as she and her husband struggled to understand each other. He is rarely home, leaving her to raise four young children on her own much of the time. There's been little romance or time for one another. He's consumed with his job and their financial status, and she is consumed with the kids and her work, which she admits is really just an outlet to get her emotional needs met by others. Their church obligations and kids' sports and extracurricular activities also take up an enormous amount of time and energy. Feeling overwhelmed by the lack of joy and passion in their relationship, Ramona says:

> My husband seems unable to express how much I mean to him and says it's because of the way he was raised and that men aren't good at that stuff. I have felt lonely, cheated, and empty, and when other men begin to compliment me, I feel I am falling for them hook, line, and sinker. I've been guilty of emotional affairs but feel that God wants me to be strong and stay in this marriage. I've tried to romance my husband and captivate him, but it always seems we are worlds apart. I am tired of trying to be supermom, wife, and spiritual leader in this family. When is he going to step up to the plate and take over?

Of course, disillusionment can set in even before you become overwhelmed with raising children. After only one year of marriage, it's clear that Claire's reality isn't measuring up to her expectations. She laments:

> We're usually either fighting or not talking much at all. The word *divorce* isn't in our vocabularies, but I frequently have thoughts about what my life could be like after my husband dies. I have a mental list of men I'd date. It's pretty long. They have all met different needs at different times. Then I think of how wonderful it would be to be single again. I'd be better off without his college debt and dirty socks. But I married him for a reason. What was it?

Ironically, Claire also recalls that she was miserable as a single woman and thought that getting married would solve all her problems. As her situation illustrates, getting rid of your single status only exchanges one set of problems for another, more complex set of problems.

Some women hold on to the hope that their unhappiness will eventually disappear and that life will somehow "get better." As Helen testifies, such hopes for a more fulfilling relationship down the road are often dashed:

> It seems that every season of our marriage brings a new hope that things will surely get better right around the corner. We'll be happier when we can afford a house…when we have children of our own…when our

> children are out of diapers…when my husband finally gets that promotion that will allow me to be a stay-at-home wife and mother… when our children leave for college…when we don't have to pay for college anymore…when my husband and I retire. I've been waiting for a brighter tomorrow almost every day of the past twenty-seven years, and frankly, I wonder if we'll ever have the marriage I've always longed for.

Some women are so unhappy, they consider pushing the Eject button and leaving to find another man. That was the case with this woman, who signed her letter to an advice column "In Relationship Hell":

> Three years [into our marriage], I'm horribly unhappy. I am no longer in love with my husband, although I do care about him. My son is deliriously happy here in the suburbs with his two-parent family, and, at 13, would be very vulnerable to emotional problems should we get divorced.…
>
> Should I stick it out with my husband, who is my friend but not my soul mate, until my son is in college (five more years!)—even if this involves fantasizing about another man during sex? Or, should I get out and hope I find an available man to love?[1]

I have to wonder what part this woman has played in undermining her own happiness during the three years she's been married. If she finds yet another "available man to love," she'll more than likely discover that there's one common denominator in all her relationships—*her.* As long as that common denominator is unhappiness with herself, she'll be unhappy with any relational equation.

The Mistake We Make

Let's face it. Nothing magical happens once we put those rings on our fingers. If we were unhappy before marriage, chances are we'll go back to being unhappy shortly after the honeymoon. Marriage doesn't make us feel better about ourselves or solve our problems in the long run. No husband can be the White Knight who rescues us from all our issues and insecurities. At some point we have to put on our

"big-girl panties" and go through the work of resolving our own issues, remedying our own insecurities, and becoming happy with ourselves before we can truly be happy in marriage.

But if we fail to acknowledge the need to work on our own issues, we believe that our relational problems must be *our husbands'* fault. We may mistakenly assume that our lives would be so much better if we just had a different man to love, and we may not stop to consider that *we* might play a part in our own dance of discontentment.

The truth is, no marriage is exempt from disillusionment. Even the brightest relationship has dark days clouding a couple's history together, raining on their "we have the perfect marriage" parade. On the exterior, a wife may appear to have the ideal marriage, but the interior landscape of her heart often reveals deep disappointment, anger, bitterness, and regret.

The same is true for many husbands. Don't think that that could possibly be the case with your husband? You may be in for a surprise. I certainly was. If anyone had asked me during the first seven years of our marriage whether Greg felt fulfilled, I wouldn't have batted an eyelash. "Absolutely!" would have been the response coming out of my mouth and the one I truly believed in my heart. But one day I got a wake-up call.

My Own Rude Awakening

It was probably the umpteenth time we were having the same argument. I didn't feel that Greg was making any attempt to meet my emotional needs—again. It had been days since we'd had any real conversation, weeks since we'd had sex, and months since he'd taken me out for any quality time together. Rather than lovingly asking him, "Am I doing something wrong that's causing your heart to grow cold toward me?" I am ashamed to say I went back to that lame old "You're too *passive*!" accusation and angrily blamed him for the lack of passion in our relationship. "Why don't you pursue me anymore? Does it ever occur to you to just pick up the phone and ask me if I want to go to dinner? Or to bring me flowers? Or ask me to go on a walk? Anything to show me that you still care?"

As I lay in bed for what seemed like half an hour, awaiting a response to my

barrage of demanding questions, I grew more and more furious over what I felt was a major character flaw. Finally, I threw back the covers and dramatically exclaimed, "I'm so fed up with your passivity, I just can't sleep in the same bed with you tonight!"

Our kids were staying the night at their grandparents', so I stumbled into my daughter's room with my pillows in tow, only to turn on the light and discover that there were no sheets on her bed. As I went downstairs to the cold basement to fish her sheets out of the dryer, I was determined to send Greg the message loud and clear that his lack of attention to my emotional needs was not going to cut it with me any longer. When I got to the basement, the wet sheets were still in the washing machine. I had asked Greg to switch the laundry earlier, which he had forgotten to do. Now I was really mad.

Fishing my sleeping bag out of a downstairs closet, I returned to find Greg waiting for me in Erin's room. He asked, "Could you please not do this, Shannon? Just come to bed and let's talk this through. Sleeping apart isn't going to solve anything!"

At that moment, I had to make a choice. I could either soften my heart, swallow my pride, and return to our bedroom like a big girl, or I could die on this hill in a desperate attempt to prove how strongly I felt about this issue. I chose to stand firm atop the hill. I stuck my finger in the face of a man who stands fourteen inches taller than I and weighs almost one hundred pounds more and declared, "I will not stay in a lifeless marriage! Every time there's been a problem in our relationship, I've always gone to counseling by myself, but this time the problem is *yours,* so I suggest *you* go deal with it!" I crawled into my sleeping bag sobbing, and Greg retreated to our bedroom in defeat.

Twice during the night I heard Greg get up and walk into the room. I awoke hoping he was going to crawl into bed with me, apologize for his inattentiveness, and hold me for the rest of the night, but no such luck. Both times I drifted back to sleep by myself.

The next morning I couldn't believe what a wicked witch I had been—as if *yelling at him* was going to cause him to want to do a better job of showing me how much he loves me! I finally swallowed my pride and slithered back into our bedroom, surprised to find Greg lying on a wet pillow with a flushed face and a look of fear in his bloodshot eyes. Here's what Greg says about his night:

Shannon went to bed around midnight, and I continued to think about all the things I wish I had said or done over the past few months to show her just how much I love her. Though I felt drained of energy, I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking, *I know what she likes and how to make her feel special, so why can't I remember to do those things? Why am I so motivated to work hard to please other people but can't seem to recognize when my own wife needs my attention?* I felt like a complete failure as a husband.

Around 3:00 a.m., I began thinking about how much happier Shannon would probably be if I were just out of the picture altogether. I told myself that if anything ever happened to me, she'd be better off with the insurance money and a chance at a happier marriage with someone else than to be stuck in this "lifeless marriage," as she so often put it.

By 4:00 a.m., I had myself worked up into such a tizzy that I began wondering if she felt the same way—that she'd be better off without me. Though it sounds foolish to me now, because she has never been a physically violent person, I even had thoughts that Shannon might try to get rid of me. I envisioned her taking a butcher knife from the kitchen counter and coming into the room while I was sleeping. The thought scared me so badly that I got up twice in the middle of the night to see if she was out of bed, perhaps heading toward the kitchen.

By 5:00 a.m., I realized that such thoughts were ridiculous, and my fear turned to depression. Not only was I not living up to Shannon's expectations, but I felt like I was letting everyone else down too. I was working long hours and accomplishing little at the office. The more time I spent at work, the less time I had for my kids. We were under a load of debt, and bills kept piling up. Life just seemed to be knocking me down in so many ways, and I didn't feel I had the strength to get back up too many more times. *Perhaps I should just put the butcher knife into my own belly,* I thought. Fortunately, Shannon crawled into bed with me soon afterward, and I worked up the courage to tell her about what I'd been thinking.

When Greg told me about his night, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. A small part of me wanted to get angry again over the absurdity of the idea that I would ever bring physical harm to him. However, a larger part felt convicted as I realized, *Shannon, this is the effect your anger and disillusionment has on Greg. You are killing him with your own misery. This is not* his *problem; it's* yours. *If you ever want him to meet your emotional needs, you have to learn to* inspire *his affections rather than to* require *them. And how about recognizing that he has emotional needs too?*

Up until that unforgettable night, I had been blaming Greg for my unhappiness. But I could no longer deny that *I was the one who had been poking holes in the bucket of our marital bliss*! Within days we were in a counseling office together, where Greg made a vow not to harm himself, I made a vow to try to control my anger, and we made vows to each other to try to understand each other's emotional needs.

Lest you think that in this area Greg is unique among men, think again. Some women assume that all a husband needs to be happy is sex and a sandwich, and as long as he gets that on occasion, his wife can treat him however she wants. But a man has deep-seated emotional needs too—needs he may be unwilling or unable to communicate. If his wife ignores or denies those needs, he feels devastated and will take steps to protect himself with either a fight or flight pattern. He may fight for his rights in the relationship by demanding that his wife submit to meeting certain expectations. Or, like Greg, he may prefer the flight response and withdraw emotionally from the relationship or even look for a more satisfying love somewhere else.

The reality is that men aren't all that different from women when it comes to their basic needs. Men have emotional needs too, and they can feel a sense of desperation when those needs aren't being met.

Men Have Emotional Needs?

September 11, 2001, was a day of countless tragedies. Thousands lost loved ones in the blazes and subsequent collapses of New York City's Twin Towers. However, the tragic loss of loved ones didn't stop after the fires were extinguished. For eight wives married to New York City firefighters, each would later experience her

biggest personal loss in an equally startling manner. Most claim they never saw the loss coming.

What loss am I referring to? The loss of their husbands, who left their marriages because they had fallen into extramarital affairs with women they had rescued from the burning buildings or with widows who had lost their husbands in the terrorist attacks. On the August 30, 2004, episode of *Oprah,* a representative from the New York City Fire Department explained that this is a relatively common phenomenon following a massive tragedy. Firefighters are encouraged to play "surrogate protector" to a widow's family, helping them to adjust to life without their loved one. However, the temptation to go from surrogate to substitute is obviously difficult for some to resist.

What struck me about the report was that the eight wives who had been left by their firefighter husbands claimed that they never saw the affair or the divorce coming. According to their perspectives, everything seemed fine in the relationship. However, the husbands told very different stories. They claimed to have felt ignored, belittled, disrespected, and taken for granted. Many reported wanting out of their relationships long before the affairs began.

Even though nothing can justify unfaithfulness in marriage, I believe there's a lesson we can learn from this disheartening story. It is this: *men need to feel like heroes to their wives.* They not only want their wives to meet their sexual needs, but they also want them to meet their emotional needs for love, respect, appreciation, and admiration. When these needs don't get met, a husband's heart will grow cold toward his wife. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Giving What We Long to Receive

As much as we long to have our husbands understand and meet our innermost needs, we have to learn to give that which we desire to receive.

So how can a woman understand a man's emotional needs? Better yet, how can you meet those needs in your husband, igniting the joy and passion you both desire and inspiring him to treat you the way you long to be treated? Read on, as we consider how desperate times call for desperate measures.

desperate times call for desperate measures

I'll never forget the day one of my best childhood friends got a new swing set for her birthday. Why? Because the scar on my forehead won't let me forget.

The contraption had the typical swings, a slide, and a U-shaped bar for twirling around, but it also had something cool I'd never seen on a swing set before. It was the shape of a cage and had two benches facing each other, allowing two people to "pendulum swing" at the same time. Two of the birthday party attendees climbed onto the benches, and I offered to push them, hoping I could have the next turn inside the cage. As I pushed, the girls squealed, "Higher!" so I decided to push the way I often pushed someone on a typical one-person swing—putting my hands on their back and plowing forward until I had run all the way under the swing to the other side. I braced myself to give it the old heave-ho, then pushed as high up in the air as I possibly could.

Suddenly I realized that the weight of the second person prevented me from pushing the swing high enough to go under the cage, but it was too late. My body movements were already committed to the task. Rather than running all the way underneath and through to the other side, I was caught up in the backlash of the pendulum swing. The footrest caught my forehead, knocked me down, and dragged me along the ground flat on my back.

As foolish as this maneuver sounds, many women today are caught up in a similar pendulum swing—feminism. When God created men and women, He designed us to be coheirs of His kingdom with a delicate balance of both power and submission to one another (we'll discuss mutual submission in chapter 10). In the centuries that followed, however, the balance of power swayed too far toward the male side, and women felt cheated of their basic human rights, particularly the

(continued on page 20)

else will help to calm you. If he can't give you that time, call a friend and ask her to take care of the kids for a little while, offering to do the same for her when the need arises. Our emotional and mental health can be fragile at times, so we have to handle ourselves with care when we're feeling out of sorts, being careful not to damage our relationships.

5. Because our disappointments are most often fueled by unmet expectations, avoid filling your mind with contrived ideas of what your husband "should" be like. Don't compare him to other men or harp on the ways he just doesn't measure up. Especially avoid comparing him to characters on television, in movies, or in romance novels, as these forms of entertainment paint very unrealistic portraits of how men typically conduct themselves in relationships.
6. Don't put on your husband's shoulders the burden of responsibility to meet all your emotional needs. Rather than blame him, remind yourself that getting your needs met is your responsibility, not someone else's. Look to God first, then other family members and female friends to satisfy some of your cravings for connection. Also keep in mind that he's not a mind reader. If you feel there is something you need that he can provide, don't hesitate to simply ask for it.
7. Take care of yourself—get plenty of rest, balanced nutrition, and consistent moderate exercise, and avoid unnecessary stress caused by overcommitment. Often the discontentment and disillusionment that a woman feels in marriage aren't as much about her unhappiness with her husband as about her feeling too tired, too fat, too sedentary, or too busy. All these issues can easily spill over into the marriage relationship, allowing the wife's misery to negatively affect both her and her husband, not to mention their children and other loved ones.

rights to protect themselves from physically abusive husbands, to own property, and to vote.

Today, however, some women are pushing in the opposite direction, resulting in women wanting power *over* men. I've heard some men refer to this bold breed of women as "feminazis." These women promote reproductive freedoms (abortion without the father's consent), alternative lifestyles (lesbianism), and a general hatred for the male gender.[1] Now many men are feeling the way women did long ago—somewhat cheated of their basic human rights to be respected in their homes and to be treated with dignity. Some even feel as if they are being emotionally abused by their wives and that they have no right to speak out about it.

Although I would have never considered myself a feminist, I've come to realize that many of us who grew up in the seventies and eighties have naively embraced some feminist philosophies without recognizing them as such. Unless we were raised underneath a rock and were completely sheltered from the many feminist messages in the media, we could not escape feminism's influence.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger commented on this pendulum swing in her book *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* when she said:

> Commitment to marriage and child rearing was once viewed as the pinnacle of adulthood identity, so that women looked carefully for the "right" man for the job, and parents were consulted for opinions and blessings. Now, with so few sustained marriages and children growing up with complex family trees made up of multiple marriages, divorces, and out-of-wedlock children, fewer women look upon marriage and child rearing as stable or even normal.
>
> The feminist double whammy of the elevation of women without men (and children without fathers) and the dismissal of men as unnecessary or even dangerous has certainly not contributed to the kind of positive disposition that women need in order to function well within a monogamous, heterosexual, committed relationship.
>
> This grandiose self-centeredness about the value of women, paired with a virtual disdain for men, leads women to treat men badly. Too

> many women look at men with a sense of entitlement versus an opportunity for selflessness. Why? All those forces taken together have given women a false sense of superiority.[2]

This false sense of superiority can't be denied if we look closely at our society. In some circles, women are applauded for their courage to leave their husbands and children to discover "who they really are" and to pursue their own dreams (as if a successful marriage and strong family life aren't sufficient goals). When it comes to marital discord, society insinuates that it's primarily the fault of men.

Hollywood has repeatedly taught us that men know nothing except how to use power tools, vegetate in front of a television, yell for another brewski, belch louder than the next numbskull, and complain that their wives don't give them enough sex. The decline of the masculine image in television and movies has created an undercurrent of disrespect and discord in many homes. Even worse, some families cultivate sheer animosity toward one another. Some spouses are even desperate to fast-forward to the "until death do us part" part of marriage. In 2003, of murder victims who knew their murderers (either as family members or through some other type of acquaintanceship, such as employment), 21 percent were killed by their own spouses or intimate partners. Seventy-nine percent of those victims were women; the other 21 percent were men.[3] While the circumstances surrounding each domestic murder in this country vary from case to case, there must certainly be an overwhelming sense of disillusionment, anger, resentment, and bitterness to cause such rage and violence. Let's face it. Men and masculinity are under attack. Even in Christian homes.

What Husbands Have to Say

When I asked husbands for examples of what goes on behind closed doors that makes a man's heart grow cold toward his wife, many jumped at the chance to unload their grief. Here are a few of the their responses:

- "If my wife gave me a monthly report card, every month I would get an F. No matter what I do, it's not good enough for her. Ninety-nine percent

of the time I make the effort to do everything she asks me to do, or else I know there will be hell to pay that night. But other times I just think, *What's the use? She's not going to appreciate it anyway!"*

- "By all appearances, my wife is a wonderful person and well-thought-of by others as a good wife and mother. But if you were a fly on the wall at our house, you'd hear that she's often a completely different person in private. Her sharp tone and disrespectful attitude would cause your jaw to drop, and yet I'm supposed to keep a stiff upper lip and take it like a man."
- "My wife frequently says she understands that men have sexual needs, but she rarely ever delivers the goods! All I get most of the time is compassionate talk and a pat on the knee, accompanied by an excuse—she's too tired, too distracted, too busy to come to bed at a reasonable time."
- "It hurts when my wife accuses me of being disinterested in her and the kids if I need to rest for a few minutes when I get home from work. Once I'm accused of being a lazy person and lousy husband and father, the last thing I want to do is connect with my wife. The rest of the evening is pretty much downhill from there."

Clearly, none of these men feels like a hero to his wife. I doubt that any of these wives wanted to make their husbands feel this way. But too often we wives seem to assume that our husbands' hearts are made of steel. Perhaps the rings we wear on our fingers give us the impression that regardless of how we treat them, they'll always be by our sides.

I don't know about you, but I don't want a husband who is physically alive but emotionally dead toward me. I want Greg to be excited about our relationship and to look forward to coming home every day. I don't want him going through the motions to jump through my hoops just to keep me off his back. I want his heart to remain soft and warm toward me. However, I've come to realize that I can't have these things while taking him for granted and treating him disrespectfully, both of which I have done many times in the past.

Maybe you are thinking that your husband would never fall into the "desperate" category. Perhaps you've never heard him say anything remotely like these comments. Don't assume that if he's not talking about feeling dissatisfied it means he is happy. Men don't talk about their feelings openly like women do. Most say

nothing and then harbor the pain deep in their hearts. This isn't a character flaw; it's just the way men are. They let their emotions drive them toward taking action to "fix" things, but if they suspect a problem can't be fixed or have no idea how to fix it, they often bury their frustration. However, whenever a person buries an emotion, it takes root in the heart's soil and often blossoms as other, more intense emotions. Most of the men who responded to our survey admitted that their frustration had blossomed into either fear or loathing of their wives, neither of which is something any woman would desire.

Perhaps you are wondering if these husbands told their wives how they felt. Most husbands claimed that yes, they had tried to communicate their feelings but were shut down by defensive comments. They said that they are tired of trying to convince their wives they have legitimate complaints and that if they insist on change, their wives will accuse them of being tyrants. Other men said that fear of making matters even worse prevented them from openly discussing these issues with their wives.

What Part Do You Play?

If you are not happy in your marriage, don't make the mistake of putting on your husband all the responsibility to turn your marriage relationship around. It's *not* completely up to him. Problems are usually the result of *both* spouses' actions and attitudes.

Of course, when there does seem to be a problem, the wife is usually the first to suggest marriage counseling. But what are her expectations when she drags her husband through the door of the therapist's office? Her goal is usually for *him* to change so that *she* can be happy. Consider another passage from *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands:*

> [An unhappy husband and wife] go to a therapist, but sadly, much of the psychotherapeutic profession is populated by folks with an agenda: Traditional values are out, men are the bad guys, and women are oppressed. Their cure is either to feminize the husband or suggest divorce. Ken, a listener, confirmed that position when he wrote:

> "It has been my experience through nearly all the avenues we have tried (i.e., self-help books, tapes, private counseling, etc.) that today's society insists that it is COMPLETELY THE MALE'S RESPONSIBILITY to learn how to understand and communicate on a level that the female can comprehend and digest. It seems that positive improvements to a relationship can ONLY occur if the husband is willing to alter his very nature, to tune in to his 'feminine' side, and learn how to think, respond, and 'emotionally perceive' the same way as his wife does.
>
> "If the male has any desires or perceptions that are different, it's only because of his selfish, obtuse, knuckle-draggin' nature, and it is up to him to cleanse himself of anything that might be termed 'masculine' if there is to be any peace in the house."[4]

It's true that many women aren't happy; it's equally true that many men aren't happy. These *are* desperate times, and perhaps this desperation is an indication that it's time for us women to take desperate measures and ask ourselves, *Am I contributing to the demise of the masculine image by how I treat my husband?* Love takes two to tango, and as much as we want to throw stones at our clumsy partners, we all need to stop and ask ourselves, *What part do I play in my marriage's dance of discontentment?*

The bottom line is this: *Even if you firmly believe that 95 percent of the issues in your marriage are your husband's fault, are you willing to focus on the 5 percent that you do have control over?*

If so, the chances are very good that you could experience the joy and passion you've always dreamed of in marriage, and you could grow to become the ultimate fulfillment of your husband's greatest needs and desires as well.

Putting Principles Into Practice

Writing a book with a subtitle like *Igniting the Joy and Passion You Both Desire* creates a lot of internal pressure. There have certainly been times since submitting this idea to my publisher that I wondered if I had any business writing such a book. Although Greg and I have had moments when we felt incredible emotional close-

ness and sexual passion, we've also had moments when our hearts felt chilled toward each other. The day I got my biggest boost of confidence for following through with this idea was actually the day that Greg and I were going away to a bed-and-breakfast to begin working on this manuscript together. I was put to the test in a big way. Greg will explain that test:

> Shannon and I had a writing retreat scheduled for several weeks, and we were both looking forward to it. However, I had an important board meeting scheduled for the following week and needed to get several financial reports completed and e-mailed out to the board members that Friday afternoon before leaving for our retreat. I was feeling incredibly stressed about it.
>
> My plan was to get those reports done and be home by 3:00 p.m. so we could drive the kids to her parents' house before going to the bed-and-breakfast. However, around 2:00, I realized my plan wasn't going to work. I did the only thing I knew to do. I called Shannon (with fear and trembling) and asked if she would be willing to drive the kids to her parents' by herself, then come back and get me around 5:00 so I could have a couple of extra hours before leaving the office.

When Greg asked me to take the children by myself and come back to pick him up later, I hated the idea. I had envisioned us talking and brainstorming together in the car after dropping off the kids, and I shuddered at the thought of making that drive all by myself while he was still at the office. On the other hand, I knew there was no way he'd even ask such a thing unless it was really important. I felt as if the choice were up to me. I could start the weekend off on a sour note by responding the way I would have in the past ("We've had this planned for weeks, Greg! Why didn't you budget your time better? Why can't it wait? Why does work always have to come first? What about me? Why can't you put me first for once?"). Or, I could start the weekend off by putting his needs first and setting the tone for a wonderfully intimate experience. Fortunately, I was able to choose the latter.

I suggested, "Why don't I make a different deal with you? I'd prefer not to take the kids to my parents' without you because I'm really looking forward to the drive

time together. Why don't I call the bed-and-breakfast and tell them we'll be later than expected, then wait until you are finished at the office so that we can head to Greenville together?"

Relieved, Greg responded, "I promise I won't be past 4:30!"

"Take until 5:00 if needed," I said, hoping he'd feel the extra slack I was intentionally giving him.

When Greg walked in at 4:58 p.m., he was relieved to have that project completed and appreciative that I wasn't upset. But the best thing was how it set the tone for our weekend together, as well as the week that followed. Greg says:

> I couldn't believe that Shannon was cutting me that much slack and wasn't ticked off about doing it, either. Her decision to be so amiable made me feel respected and affirmed. She's always been attractive to me, but this particular weekend I was struck by how beautiful she appeared. She probably looked the same as she always does, but I saw her through fresh, new eyes—I felt like she really loved me, and that made it really easy to love her back.
>
> When we returned home, Shannon knew I was under the gun to finish getting ready for the board meeting. I wound up working from 8:00 a.m. until midnight three nights in a row, which was something I'd never done before. It was stressful enough to have to work those kinds of hours, and I didn't need the stress of feeling like I was in the doghouse at home for having to work late. But Shannon's sympathy and commitment to oneness continued throughout that week. She never pestered me to come home but simply left a light on for me each night and called a couple of times each day to say she was thinking about me. She surprised me with dinner one night and brought enough groceries to last me a couple of days. By the time the board meeting was over later that week, I couldn't wait to get home.

While I wouldn't want Greg to regularly work such long hours, I have to understand that his position comes with an enormous amount of responsibility, which a few times each year requires an extraordinary investment of time and energy. I

know that he'd much rather be home with us if he could, and keeping this thought fresh in my mind makes it much easier to sympathize with him during stressful work situations.

I share this illustration with you not to toot my own horn but to paint a vivid picture of what it looks like for a wife to take desperate measures in desperate times—in a constructive, affirming way rather than in a destructive way. Every marriage will go through some desperate times—that's just part of the terrain. It's what we choose to do in those desperate times that can make all the difference in the world to our husbands and to the joy and passion we experience in the relationship.

What's Coming Up

In the next part of this book, we'll stand back and take a look at the big picture of marriage, including how we hold the potential to minister to our spouses in ways that no one else can. Then in part 3 we'll examine some of the most common things that we (often subconsciously) do that cause our husbands' hearts to grow cold toward us. In part 4 we'll focus on how you can understand and meet your husband's most basic emotional needs. Finally, we'll discuss how you can throw fuel on the flame of your husband's passion toward you. When his passion is burning brighter and you are inspiring him to engage with you on an intimate level, you will both experience the joy and ultimate fulfillment you hope to have in your marriage.

Remember, you are not the only one who desires for your marriage to grow stronger, happier, and more fulfilling. It's also God's desire for you and your husband to have a relationship that doesn't just survive, but *thrives*!

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