

The Power of
PRAYER™
to **ENRICH**
YOUR
Marriage

STORMIE
OMARTIAN



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Previously published as *The Power of Prayer™ to Change Your Marriage*, now with extensive revisions and new material

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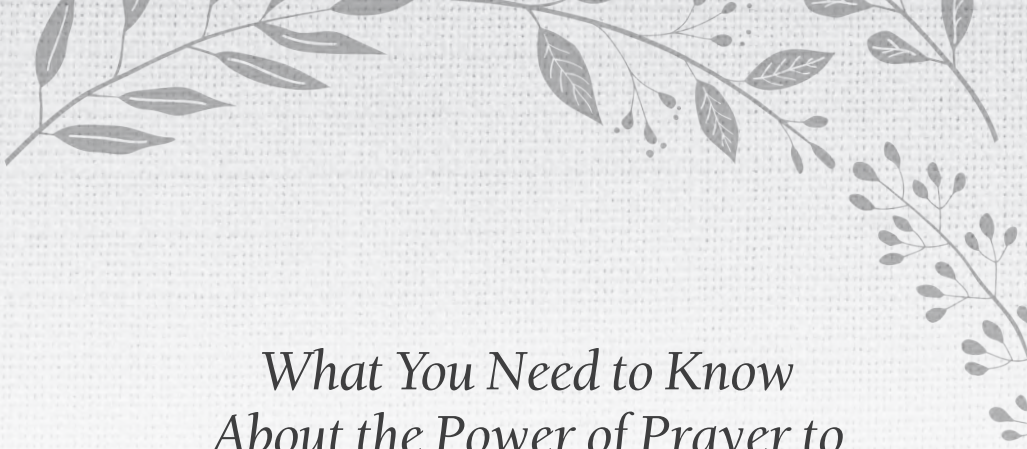
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What You Need to Know About the Power of Prayer to Enrich Your Marriage

Recent statistics suggest that soon nearly half of all marriages will end in divorce. Does this mean, then, that every marriage has only a fifty-fifty chance of making it? That can't be right. There must be exceptions to this. I'm sure there are some couples who have never had a problem and their marriage has always been perfect. I have never met any of them, but they must be out there. And surely there are newly married couples for whom the glow has not worn off and reality has not set in, and they have not yet experienced the stresses, losses, and trials of life that can put a strain on any marriage.

Thanks to the thousands of letters, emails, phone calls, and contacts on my website and social media—including the many who have approached me to talk after a speaking engagement or a book signing—countless people have told me about the problems they are facing in their marriages. I kept a record of their stories (not their names), and in this book I included the 14 most common reasons given for their marital problems. I believe in the power of prayer to *affect* these in a life-changing way.

I wrote this book for everyone who is married—or planning to *be* married—and I hope it will be used not only to *prevent* possible struggles from developing into anything serious, but also for praying *through* current struggles to find healing, restoration, and enrichment

in your marriage relationship. The good news is that when change is needed in a marriage, the power of God working through us as we pray can change everything—even the problems we face that seem to be insurmountable and unchangeable. Can it be that our prayers could produce *divorce-proof* marriages? It's definitely worth making a consistent and faith-filled effort to pray fervently about them.

The truth is, God has more for us in our marriages than just avoiding divorce. He wants us to be happy and fulfilled in them too. He is not glorified when we are married and miserable. He also has a great purpose for each marriage, but His purpose cannot be fully realized if the people in them are living in strife and discouragement.

You might be surprised if you knew how many people there are who *appear* to have perfect marriages and yet are struggling with serious problems. Even the friends and family around them don't suspect they are having difficulties because of their ability to cover them up and present an amazingly strong front. Many people believe they can gut it out and live with the situation, but too often that proves unbearable. This is especially true as people get older and realize that nothing is changing in their marriage, and they know they can't live as they have been for the rest of their lives.

I am thoroughly convinced that all of these problems could be avoided if we would truly understand what God wants for our marriages and how the enemy of our soul will always try to thwart that. And we can, too often, play right into his hand. But there is a way to hasten the demise of the enemy's plans and see God's plans for our lives and our marriages prevail.

It's called heartfelt prayer.

Of course, you can't change someone's will, but your prayers for your spouse can help him (her) to better hear from God. Whether he (she) chooses to *listen* to the prompting of the Lord to his (her) heart is within that person's will to make the choice.

Nearly every marriage has its challenges. So if your marriage has already been challenged in any number of ways, don't think you are failing. You are normal. The good news is that God has a plan to restore your marriage to the way He intended it to be. And He wants you to

partner with Him in order to see that happen. The way you do that is to live close to God and be fervently in prayer every day for your spouse and your marriage.

I know this works because my husband and I have at one time or another struggled with most of these problems ourselves. We have had times of communication breakdown between us that were so bad we didn't speak to each other for days, and then we only spoke what was absolutely necessary and nothing that bordered on real communication for months. We were both so broken by situations in each of our pasts, and my husband's anger and my supersensitive reaction to it nearly caused our marriage to be one of the 50 percent that didn't make it. We've had our times of unforgiveness, and we've both struggled with negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and fear that permeated the atmosphere of our home.

There have also been seasons when my husband and I were so occupied with raising children that we neglected *us*. We've had times of financial difficulty and disagreements over it. We've experienced a hardening of our hearts toward one another, and occasions when we each felt as though we were very low on the other's priority list. We have actually used the "D" word, threatening to get a divorce, even though neither of us really wanted that. I have personally felt at times that all hope was lost and we needed a miracle. And it was true, because outside of a miracle of God, there was *no hope*.

Actually, it did take a miracle of God to turn things around. I saw God miraculously change our hearts and teach us to move into the wholeness He has for us. But it didn't happen by doing nothing. It happened as a result of consistent *prayer* and *faith* in God to *hear* our prayers and *answer* in *His way* and *His timing*. It happened because of God's grace and His power to do what seemed impossible to us. It happened because in each situation, we chose to give up *our own way* and live *God's way*, according to His Word.

How Your Past Can Affect Your Marriage

The reason I was so sensitive to my husband's anger was because I was raised by a mentally ill mother who was angry about everything.

She was angry because she thought her father—my grandfather—loved her older and younger sisters more than he loved her. She thought this because when she was 11, *her* mother died suddenly and tragically in childbirth and her father wasn't able to care for his three daughters. My mother was sent to live with other family members, and she felt rejected because of it. All this happened during the Depression when times were hard and money was scarce. People were just trying to cope with their own problems and didn't have the time, resources, or knowledge necessary to help a young child cope with hers.

When my mother was 19, she had rheumatic fever, and her mental illness manifested with anger and delusions after that. She became angry at people she thought were following her and trying to kill her. She could seem normal one minute and crazy the next. She was adept at hiding her dark side when she needed to, but she couldn't keep up the facade for long. Her mental instability always came out, usually when someone powerless and vulnerable was alone with her.

My dad told me that when he married her, he thought she was normal. That is, until they were driving to their honeymoon destination and she made him bypass the hotel where they were supposed to stay because she thought people were following her there to kill her. After driving to and fleeing from two more hotels in the same manner, my dad finally put his foot down. Upon arriving at the fourth hotel, he said, "This is enough. We're staying here." He was in love with her, and it seemed as though he was willing to put up with anything to be married to her.

My mother was beautiful. Everyone said she looked like Vivian Leigh in *Gone with the Wind*. I looked like my dad. In fact, when people would say, "Your mother looks like Vivian Leigh and you look like your dad," I felt hurt. I took it to mean that I resembled a guy instead of a girl. Once I became an adult and my friends had daughters who looked like their fathers, I realized it didn't mean that at all. It meant that they—or I should say *we*—looked like a female version of our father. That's not a bad thing. So I suffered over that for years for nothing. Anyway, I inherited my mother's good eyesight and teeth, and for that I am very grateful.

My mother was always angry at my dad because he could never *do* enough, *be* enough, or *give* enough to suit her. And she took all this anger out on him, and then me when he was gone. We lived on an isolated ranch in Wyoming, miles from town and the nearest neighbor. My dad was gone a lot out in the fields rounding up and feeding cattle; mending fences; planting, irrigating, and harvesting crops; and working at a distant logging mill in the off season for extra money. Life on a ranch with no one to help is beyond a full-time job. It is a combination of many hard and burdensome jobs—especially in chilly winters with too many below-zero days.

When he was gone, my mother kept me locked in a small closet underneath the stairs where the basket of laundry was kept. I was safe in the closet from her physical abuse for a while, but other terrors lurked there. It was pitch-black inside except for a tiny ray of light coming from underneath the door. I always sat in the basket and kept my legs pulled up so that any rats or mice claiming this closet as their home would not be able to touch me. I had once discovered a big rattlesnake coiled up in the house, and that memory never left me. My dad killed the snake, but meeting that snake's mother in the closet was always an imminent possibility in my mind. I was terrified.

Once we moved from that ranch I was not locked in the closet anymore, but my mother became more and more physically and verbally abusive. I never knew when she would slap me hard across the face. That was her favorite thing to do, and it seemed to give her joy and satisfaction. I feel now that every time she did it, she was getting even with the mother and father who she felt abandoned her, the family she lived with who she thought didn't want her, and the God who never rescued her from the people she believed were trying to kill her.

By the time I was in my teens I knew she was mentally ill, but I often wondered to myself, *What if she is really telling the truth? What if Frank Sinatra and the pope had actually hired the mob to kill her like she said?* For a while I watched carefully to see if I could identify any of the shadowy figures she said were behind her everywhere she went, but as hard as I tried I never did see even one suspicious thing. When she started using very foul language at the people she thought were

watching her through the mirrors and TV, I could no longer even give her the benefit of the doubt. Many times when she was out in public—at the grocery store, for example—she would suddenly turn on some innocent person and verbally attack them, saying loudly that she knew what they were up to, she knew they were following her and trying to kill her, and she was going to report this to the police. When I was with her at those times, I quickly walked the other way and pretended I didn't know her. I didn't dare look at the faces of the people she was attacking to see how they were taking it. I can only imagine their fright as she could become quite scary.

As a result of living with her, I grew up with fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, loneliness, and a deep sadness in my heart that never went away. That's because she told me every day how I had ruined her life, and I was worthless and would never amount to anything. As I grew older I never felt as though I were a part of anything or anyone. I needed acceptance and love, and I sought both wherever and however I could find them. Once I left home after high school, I tried everything to get rid of the pain I felt inside. I became involved with Eastern religions and occult practices, always attempting to discover some kind of purpose and meaning for my life. I looked for love in all the wrong places and became more and more depressed with the failure of each relationship. I worked hard to put myself through college so I wouldn't have any debt because I didn't see how I could ever pay it back.

After my junior year at UCLA, I found great work in television as a singer/dancer/actress. Drugs and alcohol were everywhere, but I only took them when I wasn't working because I was too professional to do anything stupid enough to jeopardize my jobs. However, a few times I took too many drugs trying to numb my emotional pain, and I came dangerously close to accidentally killing myself.

When I was 28, my friend Terry, with whom I had been working on recording sessions and television shows, took me to meet her pastor. He talked to me about Jesus in a way I had never heard before. He told me God had a purpose for my life, but I would never fully realize that purpose outside of receiving Jesus as my Lord. He had the power to change me from the inside out. He gave me three books to take home

and read, one of which was the Gospel of John in a small book form. I read them all in the days following our meeting. When Terry took me back to see her pastor again the following week, I received the Lord in his office. That's when I began to sense that God had a plan for my life, and my years of purposelessness finally came to an end.

During a week of recording sessions that Terry had called me to sing on with her, I met a young man named Michael Omartian before I became a believer. A couple years later, we ended up at the same church and dated about a year before we were married. During that dating time I prayed and prayed for God to show me if Michael was the one I should marry, and every time I did that I felt the peace of God assuring me that this was His will. I kept releasing Michael to the Lord, saying, "God, take him out of my life and close the door if we are not to be together." And I would have let him go if God had showed me to do so because I was well aware of how I had ruined my life doing things my own way. I wasn't going to trust *my* judgment now; I wanted only what God wanted. By the time we did get married, I was convinced it was the right thing to do. Because of that certainty, when Michael and I had problems in the years to come, I always remembered the assurance from God that we were supposed to be together. That's why it is important to pray—alone and together—with your future mate before you get married. But if you did not do that, don't worry. God will still work powerfully through your prayers now because He is a redeemer and a healer.

It's Never Too Soon to Pray for Your Marriage

The greatest problem I saw in our marriage was my husband's anger. It was explosive, unpredictable, and always directed at me. Because of my past I was way too sensitive and fragile to take it or deal with it. At first I thought it was all my fault. I thought, *I must be a terrible person to make him so angry at me all the time*. I was trying the best I could, but it wasn't enough. I was already too broken and hurting to be able to stand up to it, or better yet to understand where he was coming from.

After we were married less than a year, I went through major deliverance from fear, depression, and anxiety with the help of a gifted

pastor's wife named Mary Anne, who prayed powerfully for me. And that helped in miraculous ways. Also, my husband and I went to Christian marriage counselors, and they showed me that Michael's anger was *his* problem, not mine. In fact, one of the marriage counselors we went to at the time said to me, "Michael would have this anger no matter whom he was married to. If he had married someone else, he would have directed his anger at her."

That knowledge helped me to not feel like a failure, but I still couldn't get on top of how beat up I felt when he would attack me with angry words. It was as though my mother were slapping me in the face all over again. It made me feel the same way—small, helpless, and without value. His anger was like a snake hidden from sight, always coiled and ready to strike when I least expected it. It would become a deep problem that nearly destroyed our marriage.

For a long time I was mad at God for letting me marry someone who was like my mother in any way. I saw no signs whatsoever of Michael's anger before we were married, and I questioned why it was never revealed to me. I did see him battle with depression and feelings of failure, but I had those issues too. I thought I could help him through them because I understood those feelings so well. I thought we would be there for each other. I mistakenly believed that because God had called us to be together that there wouldn't be any problems when we got married.

In Michael's defense, I believe now that his anger came from having dyslexia back in the days when people didn't know what that was. His mother told me she was very hard on him because he struggled so much in school and she thought he was being rebellious. Having been blessed with a dyslexic child myself, I came to understand the frustration of the person who has it and the deep feelings of failure they have because they can't learn the same way everyone else does.

I also understand it from a parent's perspective. Before the problem is diagnosed, you can't figure out why your child isn't doing as well as they should be doing in school. You know how bright the child is, how creative and gifted, and how amazing their memory is, but when it comes to reading they seem to shut off. They appear rebellious because

it seems that they are refusing to do the work, but the truth is they can't. So while I definitely sympathized with what Michael's mother went through, I also felt sorry for Michael. He suffered tremendously with overwhelming feelings of failure and depression because of it.

I believe now that's where his anger came from. He was angry over the frustration of being a creative dyslexic in a rigid and uncreative educational system. He was angry at his mother for often being angry at him for something he couldn't do anything about. And he took his anger out on me.

I'm going to tell you more of our story later in the book, but I want to reveal to you now that it has a good ending. Our marriage has gone through many tough times, but we have been married for more than 48 years and, God willing, will celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary together. The only reason we wouldn't celebrate it together will *not* be because of divorce.

My husband and I have changed remarkably for the better, and I will be sharing with you how that happened. I'm not saying we are perfect. Far from it. But we are living proof that if you *want* to, you can change. Or I should say, if you are willing to allow God to change you and pray for your husband (wife) to allow God to make changes in him (her), God will do it. And if you hang in there and keep praying, you will see things turn around. So if you want to protect your marriage from the things that can destroy it, or you long to restore the damage that has already been done, read on and see how best to do it. You can find the success you desire in your marriage if you do things God's way and refuse to give up.

It's Never Too Late to Pray for Change

We are told over and over, "Don't even try to change your husband (wife) because he (she) will never change." Hearing those dire predictions repeatedly can make you feel hopeless. If your marriage is miserable because of something intolerable your spouse does, and you're told he (she) will never change, then what hope do you have for your future together? The truth is, both he (she) and you *can* change. It's just that *you can't* make it happen. Only *God can* make effective changes.

Below are five important truths about change from God's perspective.

1. *The truth is, everyone needs to change.* God says so. In fact, it's His will for our lives that we change because He wants each one of us to become more like Him. And that is a never-ending project, for we all fall far short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:21-23). We will always need to submit to the Lord and not think so highly of ourselves that we feel we don't need to change. God is in the business of changing people. That's why, through our prayers and the power of the Holy Spirit, there is always hope for change—not only for ourselves, but for our spouse as well.

2. *The truth is, every person can change.* *You* can change. And *your spouse* can change. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. It's not that a person *can't* change; but not changing is usually because of the following reasons:

- They aren't aware they *need* to.
- They don't believe they *have* to.
- They *don't want* to.
- They don't know *how* to.
- They won't ask God what *He* wants.
- They don't feel they are *able* to.
- They are happy with the *way they are*.

3. *The truth is, being married creates the perfect opportunity for change.* When you are married, you find out how much you need to improve yourself. It is prideful and selfish for anyone to get married and think they are so perfect they don't need to change in any way. Each one of us always needs to change in many ways—some more than others—but God will start with the one who is *willing*. And the good news is, this is where His blessings will be directed first as well. Remember that both you and your husband (wife) *can* be changed. God is waiting for you to invite Him to do that. Marriage always inspires change.

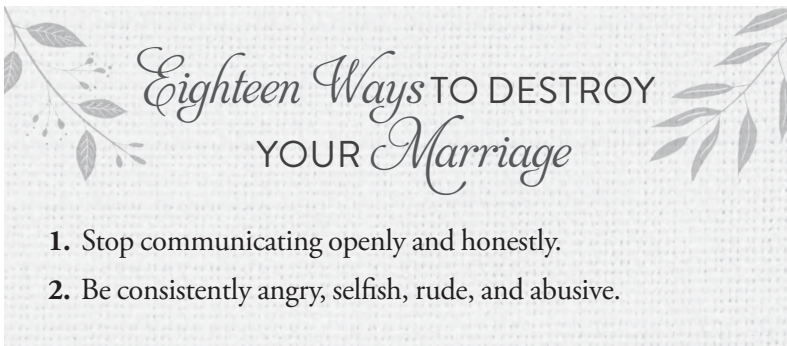
4. *The truth is, people cannot make someone else change.* Never is that more true than in a marriage. A wife can't change her husband.

A husband can't change his wife. But *God* can change both. We have to learn that it's not *our* job to change our spouse. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. No amount of criticizing and nagging will accomplish it, no matter how hard we try. God made each of us in *His* image, and He doesn't want us to try to make our spouse over into *our* image. Our job is to accept our spouse as he (she) is and pray for the Lord to make the necessary changes in him (her). Meanwhile, as He is working on your spouse's heart, God will also be working in yours. In the process of praying for changes in *him (her)*, God will change *you* first if you are willing to let Him do so.

5. *The truth is, only God can work changes in us that last.* Only God has the power to transform us. We just have to be willing to say, "Lord, I recognize that I am far from perfect, and I realize I need to be changed in order to become more like You. I know I can't change myself in any lasting way, but *You can*. Lord, change me into the person You want me to be and show me what I need to do. I praise You and thank You for the transformation You are working in me."

Remember only God can:

- Make someone aware they *need* to change.
- Help someone see they *have* to change.
- Encourage someone to *want* to change.
- Show someone *how* to change.
- Enable someone to *make* a change.



3. Refuse to forgive your spouse for any offense, no matter how small.
4. Stay depressed and negative as much as possible.
5. Convince your spouse that your children are more important than he (she) is.
6. Be consistently lazy and refuse to do much around the house or on your job.
7. Spend money foolishly and continually run up great debt.
8. Give place to annoying habits and defend your right to have them.
9. Don't care about what your spouse needs as long as you get what you want.
10. Habitually look at films, TV, magazines, or advertising and compare your husband (wife) to the glorified images you see there.
11. Allow your heart to grow hard toward your husband (wife) and refuse to ever say "I'm sorry," "Forgive me," or "I love you."
12. Make something other than God and your spouse your top priority.
13. Threaten to get a divorce every time something comes up between you that needs to be worked out.
14. Entertain an obsession of the heart over someone other than your husband (wife).
15. Allow grief over a loss to ruin the rest of your life.
16. Refuse to compromise and agree on anything.
17. Don't try to reconcile your differences.
18. Give up and refuse to believe that God is a God of miracles who can restore love and hope.

No One Is Immune to Problems

Each of the above 18 ways to destroy a marriage can start as something small and turn into something big overnight, even in the best of relationships. You may have an idyllic marriage with the most perfect of mates and you may be close to perfection yourself, but so were Adam and Eve, and look what happened to them.

Don't buy into the dangerous belief that you are immune to problems in your marriage. Too many people have thought that and ended in divorce court. Or equally as bad, they have allowed their marriage to be filled with so much strife and unforgiveness that it became miserable, lifeless, and dead. They lost sight of the purpose God had for them in being married in the first place. And make no mistake, He does have a great purpose for your marriage.

Today there is an epidemic of despair, hopelessness, and pain because of marriages in crisis. There is no greater torment, outside of the death of a loved one, than that which is suffered when a marriage relationship has broken down. The sense of failure, guilt, sadness, and heartbreak over a divorce is unbearable. And staying in a miserable marriage is intolerable. Either choice is heartbreaking.

However, just like the *problem* can happen to *anyone*, so can the *solution* to it. The solutions I have written about in this book are *doable*. And not just for the deeply spiritual and highly disciplined. They are doable for *everyone*. If *I* can do them, *you* can do them. *The reason they are doable* is because they are part of God's will and way for your marriage, and He will help you accomplish them if your heart is willing. *The reason they are not easy*, however, is because of one thing—the *condition of our own heart has to be right*, and changing that can often seem impossible. It's hard to take our blinders off when we've grown so used to them that we don't even know they are there. Marital problems develop in someone's *heart* first, so that is where we have to go to find the root of the problem, and that is where healing begins.

Understand the Authority God Has Given You

God has sovereignly declared that He is not going to just fix things for us without any input on our part. He wants to teach us to have

great faith in Him and move in the authority He has given us in prayer. Without us praying, He *won't* do it. Without His help and power, we *can't* do it.

Let's get some basic facts straight. If you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and you have invited Him into your life to rule there, then you are a child of God. You are a child of God, but you have no relationship with Him if you have not received Jesus, who gave His life for you so you can have life with Him forever. Receiving the Lord makes you the son or daughter of a King. You were born again into royalty. And you are destined to reign over the forces of evil. God has “delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13).

Knowing Jesus and being God's child is where our authority in prayer begins. Praying is putting our authority into action. Satan has the power to destroy us, but we have been given authority over him. “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on *serpents* and *scorpions*, and over *all the power of the enemy*, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).

As I mentioned earlier, I was raised in the wild lands of Wyoming, and I have had way more experience with snakes than I ever wanted. When I think of how many times I came close to rattlesnakes coiled and ready to strike—I have been just inches away a few times—it's a miracle I have never been bitten by one. Snakes slither silently in, and you don't realize they are there until you are upon them and they startle you. Scorpions are known for their sudden, painful, and venomous sting. If you would think of all the threats to your marriage as being like snakes and scorpions, it will help you to see their potential for pain and destruction.

Whether it's something dangerous that sneaks silently into your marriage unnoticed at first, or something small but deadly that rises up and stabs you when you least expect it, leaving you wounded and poisoned, God will work His power through you so you can exercise your authority over all that opposes you through prayer in Jesus' name.

God has given us *free choice* concerning who we will allow to have authority in our lives. Will we respect *God's* authority, or will we bow

to the influence of others? When we choose Jesus, He gives us authority over all situations in our lives. But if we don't submit to Him in obedience to His ways, and in reverence for who He is and what He accomplished on the cross, we will not be able to move in the authority He paid for with His life. The only way to move into all God has for us is to be totally submitted to the authority of Jesus in our lives. God has given us *authority* over the enemy because of what Jesus did on the cross. When we learn to use the power God has given us—meaning *His* power—and the authority over the power of the enemy—meaning the right to exert it in Jesus' name—incredible things can happen in our lives and in our marriages.

Taking Authority over the Enemy's Plans in Prayer

The best place to start taking authority over your life is by praying regularly for your husband (wife) and your marriage. Your prayers for your husband (wife) have great power in the spirit realm. The same enemy of your soul who wants to see *you* destroyed also wants to see *your marriage* destroyed. If you don't realize that, you will end up thinking that your spouse is the enemy and your fight is with him (her). While it may be true he (she) is *acting* like the devil sometimes, he (she) is not the enemy. Jesus won the victory over death and hell, so if you are living in hell in your marriage relationship, you have not yet moved into the victory God has for you.

Whenever you find yourself in a tough situation in your life or in your marriage, take authority over it with prayer in Jesus' name. That doesn't mean you are trying to control your spouse. It means you are inviting *God* to be in control of your life and your marriage and surrendering both to Him.

When you pray with God-given authority, it releases the power of God to work in both of your lives. You can't necessarily change the strong will of your spouse, but when you pray for him (her), you invite God to create an atmosphere in the spirit realm around him (her) that helps him (her) to better hear the truth. After you pray, praise God for the victory He has already won on your behalf. Thank Him that He has a way out of any situation, even when it appears hopeless.

God never said we won't have problems.

Actually, God said we *will* have problems and trials. We can count on it. And when you are married, you will not only have *your* problems; you will have your spouse's problems as well. But the good news is, Jesus overcame all that for us. When we align ourselves with Him in prayer and obedience, He will help us to either rise above our problems or walk through them successfully. He will give you the power to be more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37). That's because Jesus has already conquered death and hell and has secured the victory over the enemy for us. We have to learn to walk with God in that victory. We do that when we pray.

Jesus has enabled you to not only conquer the territory God has for you, but to also experience His miracle of peace in the process.

Praying with Urgency and Power

I don't want to just talk to you *about* praying for yourself, your husband (wife), and your marriage, I want to help you learn *how* to pray in power. I want to inspire you with great hope that things can change. I'm not talking about being religious, saying "church" words, speaking "Christianese," or quoting "catchy phrases" without any power accompanying them. I am talking about praying in a way that will bring results.

I can tell you how to swim, I can describe the water, and I can teach you all the correct moves, but at some point you are going to have to get in the water. Once you get into the stream of God leading you as you pray, you are going to find yourself not only staying afloat, but also rising to the top of each wave of life that might normally overwhelm you.

One of God's greatest promises says that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). But if you read the verses *before* that promise, you will see that the Bible is talking about prayer. In other words, can it be that all things work together for good if we are *praying*? It sounds like that to me. Things are not promised to work out for good automatically. If there have been things in your life you feel did not work out for good, it's possible that somewhere, sometime, the

people who should have been praying for you or your situation, actually weren't.

You have the power to control your own destiny. You can choose heaven or hell as your eternal home. You can choose to give God control of your life and let Him move you into the purpose for which He created you. You can choose either to give up on your marriage or stay and fight for it in prayer and whatever else God shows you to do. You can choose to enrich your marriage by praying for your husband (wife) and yourself in a way that can *prevent* bad things from creeping in, or to *heal* those negative things that have already gained ground in your marriage.

What Jesus accomplished at the cross seems baffling and foolish to someone who has never been born again and had their spiritual blinders removed. But to us who believe, it is the greatest manifestation of God's power. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). When you invite Jesus into your life, that same power that resurrected Him will manifest and resurrect all the dead areas of your life—including your marriage.

God knows we need that. He knows we can't come up with a fool-proof plan that will keep our marriages together. We are way too selfish and blind. We are lacking in wisdom and the spirit of self-sacrifice. "The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile" (Psalm 94:11). He wants *us* to realize that too. He wants *us* to understand that we can't do it without *Him*. He wants us to believe that He is greater than any hurricane, flood, or tsunami of circumstances and emotions that would threaten to wash over your relationship.

God is even greater than you or your spouse's anger, depression, or inability to communicate. He is more powerful than the unforgiveness or hardness of heart in either of you. God is stronger than bad debt, bad habits, and weak willpower. He made you to be victorious over all that and more, but you cannot proceed "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). You have to run to the cross with gratefulness for His sacrifice on your behalf and acknowledge God's power in your life.

God had a plan for your life before you were even born. He says it is He “who has saved us and *called us with a holy calling*, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose and grace* which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9). He called you and your husband (wife) for a purpose, but He still gives you a choice. You can choose *His* destiny for your life, or you can try to make your own.

Let me give you a tip about this that will save you a lot of time and effort: The life you try to make happen will never be as good as the one you let God make happen.

One of the questions I have been asked countless times is “What if I am the only one praying in my marriage?” While it is the best situation if a husband and wife pray together, I want to assure you that your prayers for your marriage have power even when you are the only one praying. That’s because the two of you are one in the eyes of God, and your prayers have power.

Of course, the power is even greater when the two of you pray together, but I don’t want to belabor that point. If you have a husband (wife) who will pray with you, consider yourself blessed. Many people don’t have that. But don’t lose heart. God hears your prayers according to His will, and He will answer in surprising ways.

What if you are the only person in the marriage who is a believer? Or you only are living God’s way? Or you are the only one willing to submit to God’s perfecting process? Or you are the only one really willing to work on the relationship? What if you understand the enemy’s attack on your marriage and your spouse doesn’t get it? Can *your* prayers alone save the marriage?

Yes, they can. That scenario is much more common than you might think. In fact, I have heard of great miracles in that regard. I believe it is well worth trying for.

Can Prayer Really Prevent Bad Things from Happening?

Of course, it would be best to pray about possible problems *before* any of them ever developed. Or better yet would be to pray about them *before* you walk down the aisle. However, even though it would

be wonderful to have all these things resolved *before* you get married, I believe it is actually impossible. That's because you and your spouse have never before lived together as man and wife. And this is true even if you have lived together before marriage. No man or woman truly understands their own limits and capabilities before they have made that public declaration and have entered into this legally binding life-time commitment. When you do that, you are forced to deal with things in yourself and in your spouse as they affect your lives together.

We all put our best foot forward when we are dating, but it's impossible to do that every day for the rest of our lives. Everyone has good days and bad days, weaknesses and strengths, times of patience and times of not so much. Everyone has moments when they let words slip out of their mouth that shouldn't have been spoken, and also times they should have said or done something and didn't. But marriage provides an opportunity to give one another the security you need to come face-to-face with who you really are and have the freedom to be set free to heal and grow. That's why praying in advance of these things happening doesn't mean that difficult things won't ever happen, but if something does, you will be able to survive these times successfully, knowing God is using them to perfect both of you.

The thing you have to remember is that God has more for you than you can imagine. I know this is hard to comprehend because we can imagine some amazing things. We can dream big. But even considering your greatest dream for yourself, what God has for you is far greater. The Bible says: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). It can be as a married couple too. You may have trouble imagining your marriage being better than your greatest dream for it, but it can be. The reason I know this is true is because it is God's will for your life. It's what He wants for you. I have seen God do miracles in my own marriage and in the lives of countless married couples whom I have prayed with and heard from over the years. I'm not saying our marriage is perfect, but it's a lot better than I thought it could ever be at this point. And I know it's because of the power of God working through our prayers. It was hard work, but it was worth it.

Are you ready to pray for the purpose of preventing common problems in your marriage? Are you ready to do what it takes to pray for a needed change? Are you ready to protect your marriage relationship so it will last a lifetime?

If so, read on to find out how.