

God, Get Me Through

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A CHAPTER SELECTION

One Husband's Love

Six days before Lyn was to enter the hospital to begin the process of receiving a bone marrow transplant from her sister, we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. In the weeks leading up to that day, I felt a desire for Lyn and I to restate our marital vows to one another. Standing on the brink of our steepest challenge, it was a sobering time.

As we waited for family members to arrive at our home for the informal ceremony, I tried to weigh the significance of the day in this journal entry.

On this day, 25 years ago, Lyn and I got married. I pledged to care for her, to nurture and nourish her, no matter what the circumstances, even in sickness.

It is good that there is some foolishness, some youthful zeal in getting married, for if we weighed out all the possibilities for hardship, no one would risk the marriage venture, the ordinance would fall into disuse, and the human race would either die off or function in immorality.

Twenty-five years later, I wade into a dense fog with only the Lord's hand to hold on to for guidance – my wife has leukemia. Six days from now she begins a bone marrow transplant, which holds the best prospect of healing her, but also harbors the potential of killing her.

Twenty-five years later, we have two daughters, one a high school junior, the other a college freshman. I'm wondering how to pay for their education.

Twenty-five years later, we are in a ministry transition. Four years of seminary, eight years of pastoring, ten years in Kenya. Now radio, and who knows what else.

And so today, we meet with a few family members to renew our vows, not that they are broken or tired, but a statement of love for each other. I will say to my ailing bride that I still will nurture her, and she will again promise to love me and submit to me.

The mystery of the marriage bed no longer waits to be opened. But the mystery of a deeper love, a commitment, does.

There was a nervousness of the unknown 25 years ago – what would marriage be like? Now we fight fear of the trial that has unfolded around us. But we know each other so well now. We have come to trust each other's constancy. Our love has stood the tests of time and trial, and has emerged strong as tempered steel.

For these 25 years I give You thanks, O Lord. I cannot claim to have been up to the challenge, but You were – You gave us strength. And You will continue to do so. In another 25 years, if we're still here, we will look back and see how You delivered us from these present trials, and others we don't yet know about.

Who would commit to a bride who is ill? I can think of one. Jesus Christ. His bride is so sick there seems so little chance of survival. But He is full of hope, totally committed to her healing and ultimate perfection. What an amazing Groom He is. If in the smallest way I can reflect Him, I am blessed indeed.

I believe that heaven will reveal that the most significant events on earth took place quietly in obscure places. For me, the opportunity to pledge again my love for Lyn was a little-known but highly-important time. Few knew about it, but I believe God smiled upon it.

If you are going through a deep trial, I know you are enduring many difficulties that no one else knows about.

- You've felt imprisoned in a hospital room
- You've been poked and jabbed till you feel like a pin-cushion
- You miss your loved ones and feel the loneliness intensely
- You look into an uncertain future and often lose hope

What I want you to know today is that, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you have a Husband who knows exactly where you are and what you are enduring. He knows every despairing thought, every haunting fear. He knows your resentment at those who have mismanaged you, and He knows your regrets over what you could have done differently.

This Husband of yours will again, today, pledge before God to love you "for better or worse, in sickness and in health." He'll restate His vows of love right now with the same fervor as the first day of His commitment to you. Even if you never had a husband, and even if your earthly husband or wife has let you down, you have a true Husband who will never disappoint and never prove unfaithful. Only the Lord could be that kind of husband to you, and fortunately He is exactly your man!

For care-givers

If you are a care-giving husband, wife, parent, child or friend, I know you are giving in sacrificial ways that few if any people notice.

- You've faced the fears of losing your loved one
- You know the fatigue of giving long after your strength ran out
- You know the loneliness of feeling everyone else has gone back to their normal lives
- You've felt the burden of finances and the confusion of medical bills

What I want to say to you today is that your quiet love is incredibly important. Your faithfulness and sacrifice for that needy one whom God has placed in your life is a beautiful reflection of the Lord's love for His church, the bride of Christ. And if the one you care for doesn't always appreciate your efforts, the picture is more accurate than ever, for as Christians we don't always respond gratefully to the ministry of our heavenly Husband either!

I once overheard a heartbreaking conversation in a waiting room. The medical professional was talking to a woman who was about to undergo chemotherapy. The essence of the conversation went like this: "Since your husband is planning to leave you, it is essential that you find someone else who can come alongside you to help get you through this difficult time."

My fellow-caregiver, how important you are! Think of the vital role you fill. Where would your loved one be if you weren't there, if you didn't care enough to hang in there and walk through this deep valley arm in arm with one who is weak.

Inevitably, caring for another leads to menial and undesirable tasks. If you aren't too frustrated to see it, many of these tasks are somewhat humorous. I remember one morning Lyn asked me to go to the store to get a few things for her and for the family. I willingly went and made my way through the aisles of the store, ticking items off the shopping list as I went. Before long, the list brought me face to face with the tampon display (we're talking "feminine hygiene products" for you guys who need some training in this area). I was tired from a lousy night's sleep, and I was frankly overwhelmed at the sheer number of options and choices I was supposed to make as an uninitiated member of the husband-race. I don't know what other customers may have concluded about this tired looking fellow, staring at a display of tampons, chuckling to himself, but this I do know: it was at that moment that I recalled that "husband" is a verb. Yes, it's a position and a title, with its accompanying privileges, but brother, let me tell you, a husband is one who husbands a precious person, even when it requires you to leave your comfort zone!

Whether patient or care-giver, we have a Husband who loves us with an unfailing love. To Him, it doesn't matter if you're lovable. You can be impatient and frustrated. You can lose hope and want to quit. He is undaunted in His commitment to love you and to love others through you.

For many months after her transplant, Lyn was on prednisone to limit the outbreaks of chronic Graft-versus-Host disease (GVHD). She reacted to this steroid in many undesirable ways, one of which was puffiness in her face. On several occasions she said to me, "Thank you for loving me even when I look like this." I always had a natural and heart-felt reply: "You're still lovable. I know your real beauty. I know the real you."

How can a husband cast away his glance to others when he has been through so much with his wife, and she has given so much for him? I know it happens, but it shouldn't. And with your True Husband, He will never turn His affections away from you to be drawn away by another. You will forever be the apple of His eye, even when you feel ugly and undesirable.

“Even there”!

No matter how far you drift from God, no matter how unattractive and unappealing you may feel, His compassion will follow you. God wrote of this persistent love through King David.

Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?

If I ascend to the heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.

If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

Even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me.” (Psalm 139:7-10)

Think of the remotest place you've ever been, or the scariest experience you've ever had. Maybe there's a mental "place" you hate to go, or a procedure that you dread. Think of the worst conversation you could imagine, or the toughest decision you'd ever have to face. Maybe your dreaded place is a hospital room or a judge's chamber.

Is there any place where the intimate presence of God cannot follow you? No. The Word of the living God says, "Even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me."

Even there! – in your dreaded place. Whether in the belly of the earth or the depths of your depression, God can meet you there. Whether in the dark hours of a difficult day or in the bottom of the sea, God will seize your hand and lead you through it. He will help

you endure as a patient. He'll help you "husband" that one who needs your help... even there!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am so grateful for Your commitment to love me for better or worse, in sickness or in health. Thank You for Your long-term faithfulness, even when my actions must make me unappealing.

Help me to rest in the security of Your love today. Let me draw confidence from the fact that Your love will not change or be shaken.

And give me grace to reflect Your steadfast love to others. Amen