

MARRIAGE 45 YEARS IN

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What does love have in common with Charles Dickens' famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*? The opening sentence "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." makes you want to proceed with caution. But think about how those contrasts apply to marriage. When my husband and I married forty-five years ago, we were young and in love, and ready to face life's challenges together. For the next four years, those challenges were pretty manageable. And then we had twins, and that changed everything. We got our first dose of reality. (When we went home for Christmas with our 12-month old babies, all our friends told us how bad we both looked. What?!?!)

John and I started our marriage with a **dream** of what life would be like. We were committed to each other and believed that living life according to Biblical principles meant things would go well. But then we encountered the next, inevitable stage—**difficulty**. We encountered things we hadn't anticipated (twins!) and frequently felt poorly equipped to navigate life. Because life was harder than we expected, we experienced **disappointment**. But what were we to do with our

disappointment?

We had a choice to make—**devotion** or **destruction**. The destruction route is easy to imagine because we've all seen it. Destroying the dream happens when a spouse walks away from the marriage, believing it is dead. But then the search for a new dream begins where life will surely be different with someone else. Or so one thinks. But, you guessed it, the cycle goes on and repeats itself. Destroying the dream can also look like a decision to live a life of despair with the person you thought would be your closest friend. How depressing! What is a better way? You can choose devotion. You can fight for your marriage, and tackle the task of growing and learning together. We have made this choice many times. (Yep, it's not a one-time choice!)

The devotion route isn't easy, and it works best when BOTH spouses want to fight for their marriage. The good news is you can **find support for this choice** in a variety of ways—meeting with a marriage counselor, learning from skilled communicators (authors and speakers), etc. Choosing devotion is a choice to embrace the reality that there is a mashing together of both agony and ecstasy in real love and learn how to navigate our way through it because the reward is *so worth it!*

So what can I do to improve my chances of a long and healthy marriage?

1. **Read** *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy and Kathy Keller. Read it to each other—a handful of pages every night. This is the single best book on marriage I have read.
2. **Learn** how to admit you are wrong and ask forgiveness. Practice saying "I was wrong to . . ."
3. **Find** a church in your area that offers *Re-Engage*, a program to help spouses reconnect as they work to revive or resurrect their marriage.
4. **Ask** God, "What do I need to do differently?" At the front of my prayer journal I have a quote from psychologist and author Henry Cloud. It says, "A wasted day is one where we only thought about how someone else should change."