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Divorce-Proof Your Marriage

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WHEN OUR Dream Marriage Began to Fade

Seven years into our marriage, my life was a blur. I was working hard at being a good provider for my wife, Barb, and our two young daughters, Sarah and Missy. I had a full-time job as the director of a correctional facility. At the same time, I was working toward a doctoral degree in counseling, spending many evenings each week studying at the university library.

Most of the time I felt stretched beyond my limits. As I juggled family, work, studies, and church activities, I prayed daily for strength and wisdom, longing for the day I could focus full-time on counseling families. Even more important, I wanted to free up more time to be with Barb, Sarah, and Missy—my family, the love of my life. The job and doctoral dissertation filled my schedule completely. I tried to eke out a little time here and there to help Barb, but I was at best only a part-time husband and father.

I honestly thought I was doing rather well in my role at that time. Then one day I was sitting in my favorite chair, studying for the final stages of my doctoral degree, when my five-year-old Sarah announced herself in my presence with a question: "Daddy, do you want to see my family picture?"

I really felt stressed and pressed for time, with a week's worth of work to squeeze into a weekend. "Sarah, Daddy's busy. Come back in a little while, honey." Sarah obediently left me to my work.

Ten minutes later she swept back into the living room, "Daddy, let me show you my picture."

The heat went up around my collar. "Sarah, I said come back later. This is important."

Three minutes later she stormed into the living room, got three inches from my nose, and barked with all the power a fiveyear-old can muster, "Do you want to see it, or don't you?"

"No," I told her emphatically, "I do not!"

With that she zoomed out of the room and left me alone. And somehow, being alone at that moment wasn't as satisfying as I thought it would be. I felt like a jerk. So I got up and went to the front door. "Sarah," I called, "could you come back inside a minute, please? I would like to see your picture."

She obliged with no recriminations and hopped up onto my lap.

It was a great picture. She'd even given it a title. Across the top, in her best printing, she had inscribed: OUR FAMILY BEST.

"Tell me about it," I said.

"Here is Mommy [a stick figure with long yellow curly hair]. Here is me standing by Mommy [with a smiley face]. Here is Katie [our dog]. And here is Missy [her little sister was a stick figure lying in the street in front of the house, about three times bigger than anyone else]." It was a pretty good insight into how she saw our family.

"I love your picture, honey," I told her. "I'll hang it on the dining-room wall, and each night when I come home from work and from class [which was usually around ten o'clock at night], I'm going to look at it."

She took me at my word, beamed from ear to ear, and went outside to play. I went back to my books. But for some reason I kept reading the same paragraph over and over. Something made me uneasy, something about Sarah's picture. Something was missing.

I went to the front door again. "Sarah," I called, "could you come back inside a minute, please? I want to look at your picture again."

Sarah crawled back onto my lap. I can close my eyes right now and see the way she looked. Cheeks rosy from playing outside. Pigtails. Strawberry Shortcake tennis shoes. A Cabbage Patch doll named Nellie tucked limply under her arm.

I asked my little girl a question, but I wasn't sure I wanted to hear the answer. "Honey, I see Mommy and Sarah and Missy. Katie the dog is in the picture, and the sun and the house and squirrels and birdies. But Sarah, where is Daddy?"

"You're at the library," she said.

With that simple statement my little princess stopped time for me. Lifting her gently off my lap, I sent her back to play in the spring sunshine. I slumped back in my chair, dazed. Even as I type these words, I can feel those sensations all over again. She had nailed me, right between the eyes. I wasn't in her family picture because I was at the library studying. I was too busy to be her daddy at home.

Although I didn't remember Barb's having expressed those thoughts, she had probably been trying to get through to me for months. All of the cautions I had received from sermons, books, and friends to keep a "balanced lifestyle"—God first, family second, work third—had not penetrated my careerbent brain. But Sarah's simple pronouncement got my attention big time.

A MARRIAGE FADING WITH TIME

Not long ago, I had an experience that helped me more fully understand what Sarah's picture really meant at that point in my life. I had pulled out some other pictures: my childhood family album. I flipped through old photos chronicling my life growing up. I stopped to examine a black-and-white photo of my mom and dad when they were newly married. I couldn't help smiling with pride at the images. Dad was one sharp-looking guy, reminding me of a movie idol from the 1940s. And Mom, I must say, was beautiful. I could see the sparkle in my parents' eyes, the look of love, their hope for a bright future.

Yet the photo itself wasn't as clear and sharp as it had been years ago. The crisp sheen that once caused this handsome couple to stand out on the page was now dull. Time had taken its toll on the old family album.

Decay is normal. In the natural process of aging, machinery wears out, buildings fall into disrepair, pictures fade, and our bodies lose their tone and strength. Scientists say, in fact, that everything in the universe is perpetually moving to greater and greater disorder—a state of entropy. You don't have to be a quantum physicist to know that even the most beautifully designed and well-built house will eventually crumble if left unattended. To keep anything fresh, alive, and in good order requires care, maintenance, and at times repair.

A marriage is no different. Unless a marriage is kept fresh and nurtured, it will fade like an old photograph. Marriage is a dynamic love relationship between a man and a woman, and at every moment that relationship is either growing deeper and richer or stagnating and decaying. And all deteriorating marriages are at least pointing down a dark and lonely road that can end in divorce.

When Sarah showed me the family picture with her daddy

missing, I realized (or at least admitted to myself for the first time) that I wasn't tuned in to the warning signs that my marriage and family life were in a state of entropy.

I WANT TO COME HOME

I mounted Sarah's drawing on the dining-room wall, just as I promised. And through those long, intense weeks preceding the oral defense of my dissertation, I stared at that revealing portrait. It happened late every night as I consumed my warmed-over dinners while my family slept. I didn't have the guts to broach the issue with Barb. And she had the incredible insight to let it rest until I was ready to deal with it.

I finally finished my degree program. I was "Dr. Rosberg," and I guess it should have been a big deal for me. But frankly, there wasn't much joy. It felt a little hollow.

One night after graduation, Barb and I were lying in bed together, and I found myself working up the nerve to ask her a question. Actually there were three questions. It was late, it was dark, and as I murmured my first question, I was praying Barb had already fallen asleep. "Barb, are you sleeping?"

"No."

Rats! I thought to myself. Now I'm committed.

Question number two: "Barb, you've obviously seen Sarah's picture taped on the dining-room wall. Why haven't you said anything?"

"Because I know how much it has wounded you, Gary."

Words from a wise woman, wise beyond her twenty-something years.

Next I asked the toughest question I've ever asked anyone in my entire life. "Barb, I want to come home. May I come home?" Twenty seconds of silence followed. It seemed as if I held my 8

breath for an hour. "Gary," Barb said, "the girls and I love you very much. We want you home. But you haven't been here. We don't know you anymore."

The words look cold in print, but she said them with restraint and tenderness. It was just the plain, unvarnished truth. My little girl had drawn the picture, and now her mom was speaking the words. I lay there in the dark, pretending to sleep. But I couldn't. Events raced through my mind. I remembered when Missy was two and refused to sit on my lap for more than a few seconds. Why? Because she didn't know her daddy. I recalled missed dinners with friends, evenings Barb waited for me to come home but I had to study just a little longer. I thought about the vacations we had canceled so I could finish a class. My life had been out of control, the people in my family were on automatic pilot, and I had a long road ahead of me if I wanted to win them back.

I didn't know at that time how God would heal the pain in our hearts. I just knew that I was at the end of myself and needed him like never before.

Maybe you have looked into the eyes of your spouse or your kids and known you were not connecting. Maybe you realized that your failure to connect heart-to-heart was mainly your fault. That's where I was that night. I was scared. It felt as if I were slipping down a mountainside, unable to grab onto something to stop the slide. I desperately hoped to regain my balance, but near terror was rising inside me. I was afraid I could never rebuild the family I loved.

After Barb's chilling words, I slipped out of bed and went downstairs to our living room. I pled with God that night for wisdom, perseverance, and faith. I begged him to restore my family. I was at risk of losing the security, joy, and direction I had dreamed of and expected from our marriage. Publicly, I appeared fine to our friends, coworkers, and even extended family. But privately, I could not fool the three people closest

to me. I was a man "missing in action" in our family, and Barb, Sarah, and Missy knew it.

Deep down inside I knew that God is a God of second chances. He was capable of leading me through the restoration process with my family. But that night, as I poured out my heart to God in our living room, my hope for the future seemed buried under the avalanche of pain and discouragement in my heart.

And what about Barb? Would she offer me a second chance? I'll let her tell her side of the story in her own words.

FULL-TIME MOM, FULL-TIME PAIN

Gary wasn't the only one feeling terribly hurt over our marriage relationship and family life. I also was hurting. I was aware, though, that it takes two in every marriage to bear the fault. We were partners in the disconnected lifestyle we were living. We entered Gary's doctoral program in full agreement. We had decided that he would be a full-time breadwinner and doctoral student, and I would be a full-time, stay-at-home mom for our two little girls. We charged into this phase of our life together as most couples do, with optimism and our eyes wide open.

At the outset I worked hard at being my husband's greatest advocate and cheerleader. I was very proud of him and his desire to accomplish his goals and dreams. But over time, the stress, separation, and loneliness began to wear me down. Gary was constantly submerged in work and academic demands, distracting him from me and the girls. And I felt left out of his picture. In just a couple of years I went from being an optimistic wife to a woman who felt less and less understood. My resentment began to grow. I wanted to have family time together. At times I felt a bit like a single mom because Gary was absent so much.

I cried a lot. I felt isolated. I watched longingly at other young families who were doing so many fun things together, and I wanted that for us as a family as well.

Our marriage had been my dream come true. But during these stressful years it was hard to stay optimistic. Our marriage wasn't what I had expected it to be. Gary was my best friend, and I missed him. Most days he left home before seven o'clock in the morning, and many nights he didn't return until after ten o'clock. The girls hardly saw their daddy.

I loved my husband and was devoted to our marriage. The Lord comforted me, but it was still difficult. I was determined to keep my marriage vows to this man and to God, but I lived day in, day out needing more connection with Gary. I didn't understand at the time that God had created me with legitimate needs he intended to meet through my husband. And since Gary was so absorbed outside the home, many of these needs went unmet.

I came to the point where I quit talking to Gary about my thoughts and feelings of isolation. It seemed useless. And in some ways I stopped trying. I stopped expecting Gary to fight this enemy of workaholism that was undermining our marriage. I had made suggestions, tried new approaches, even pleaded. But nothing ever changed. I didn't know how to stop it.

One day a switch flipped on the inside, and I made the decision to give up. I never told Gary or anyone else, but I remember the moment I stood in the middle of our living room on the green shag carpet and made the decision to quit trying. I was protecting my heart from feeling the hurt, so I thought. But by building a wall of protection around myself, I was not only locking up my heart but unfortunately also locking Gary out. On the outside I continued to be respectful, even pleasant—but on the inside I knew the difference. There was less transparency and sharing between us and more formality and distance. We were commit-

ted to each other, and I never would have consciously thought about walking away from him. But I had emotionally disconnected from my husband.

I know now that we were in a very vulnerable position at that point. I know now that if our disconnection had lasted for six months or more, I could have become a statistic, a "walkaway" wife.

But God in his mercy intervened before that could happen. He began to answer my prayers once I got out of the way. Then he began to work in my husband's life.

God used our daughter's crayon drawing to break through to Gary. A child's simple picture was the tool. It became a non-threatening voice to help a distracted man get refocused. When Gary asked that night if he could "come home," I had no doubts that he loved me. And my love was so deep and nonnegotiable that all I wanted was for him to come home. But would he? Could he really change? His doctorate was something we both wanted and worked for, but our marriage was suffering because of it. We didn't know how to nurture and tend to our marriage. I had become brittle and demanding. The distance had taken its toll, and we both knew it.

I sensed an emotional distance between Gary and me. When we were together, I didn't feel the same closeness and connection we once had. I desperately wanted Gary to come home, but in order for that to happen, something would have to change. Gary is going to share with you what that change would mean to him.

THE MISTRESS IN THE LIBRARY

In the weeks and months after I asked Barb if I could "come home," God showed me how I had been neglecting my family emotionally. At first I didn't want to admit that my affections had wandered from home. I had no intention of being lured away from my family, and I certainly had never contemplated divorcing my wife. Barb and our two girls were my treasures.

At the same time, I prided myself in pursuing a career in marriage-and-family counseling. And I was doing so for the sake of God's kingdom. Yet while my goal of becoming a counselor was legitimate, I allowed books and study to lure me away as a temptress. My scholastic endeavors captured my heart and became my treasure. The love of my life—my family—was slowly and insidiously being replaced with coursework and learning: a mistress in the university library dressed in pages of black and white.

I never dreamed it could happen. I never intended for it to happen. And I was unable to see or admit that it had happened until God used my innocent five-year-old daughter as a wake-up call. God showed me through my child's drawing that I had emotionally left my wife and family for the mistress in the library.

THE JOURNEY BACK HOME

Knowing how to remedy a deteriorating marriage is vital for keeping any marriage alive and well. Barb and I didn't know how to turn our relationship around, but as I finished my doctoral work, we agreed that something had to change. We committed ourselves to finding a solution to the emotional distance between us. Little did we know that our search would initiate a journey that has become the foundation for our ministry to married couples and families today. In the pages that follow we will share that journey with you.

Can you identify with the distance and deterioration Barb and I felt? How close are you to your wife or husband today? Have the stresses, demands, and disappointments of life created an emotional distance between you and your spouse? Do you know what to do to close the gap? If you are not growing closer together, you are drifting farther apart. Although you may never consider divorce, the road of a decaying marriage is always heading in that direction.

Is your marriage divorce-proof?

In our prayerful search to rebuild our marriage, Barb and I have discovered a marital road map that has led us back home together. We have shared this map with countless other couples—many with good marriages—and have seen their relationships revitalized and restored. The marriage map will enable you to identify where you are in your relationship, the first step in reversing relational distance and halting the slide into marital entropy. Understanding the map will help you fight negative tendencies, keep your love fresh and vibrant, and keep your relationship intimately connected and perpetually enriched.

We are not offering you a magic formula or a three-easy-steps program to marital bliss. Rather, we will describe a road traveled by thousands of couples we have encountered in the counseling office, in our conferences, or through our radio broadcasts. It is a road that leads toward home, not toward divorce. And it is a road Barb and I have traveled personally, though we have not always navigated it perfectly. It is a road rich with purpose, God's purpose. It is a biblical design that is guaranteed to deepen and enrich your relationship beyond your fondest dreams.

We cannot guarantee that walking on this road will be easy. But we can guarantee that following God's design will divorceproof your marriage.



CAMPAIGN RESOURCES FOR DIVORCE-PROOFING AMERICA'S MARRIAGES

Dear friends,

The resources for the Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages campaign are designed *for you*—to help you divorce-proof your marriage. You and your spouse can certainly read and study these books as a couple. But it's only when you meet with a small group that is committed to divorce-proofing their marriages as well that you'll fully experience the power of these ideas. There's power when believers unite in a common cause. There's power when men and women keep each other accountable. To take on this challenge, you must have a group of friends who are encouraging you every step of the way.

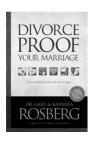
There are several ways you can connect to a small group:

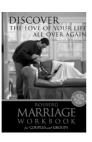
Start your own Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages small group in your church or neighborhood. For workbooks, leader's guides, videos, and other resources for your small group, call 888-ROSBERG (888-767-2374) or visit our Web site www.divorceproof.com.

- Give this information to your pastor or elders at your local church. They may want to host a Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages small group in your church.
- Call America's Family Coaches at 888-ROSBERG
 (888-767-2374), or e-mail us at afc@afclive.com and
 we will connect you with people and churches who are
 interested in Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages.

Yes, together we can launch a nationwide campaign and see countless homes transformed into covenant homes. But beware. If we do not teach these principles to our own children, we risk missing the greatest opportunity of all: to pass our legacy of godly homes to the next generation. Barb and I believe that, for the sake of the next generation, there is no more worthy cause. This holy fire must purify our own homes first.

Gary and Barb Rosberg





DIVORCE-PROOF YOUR MARRIAGE

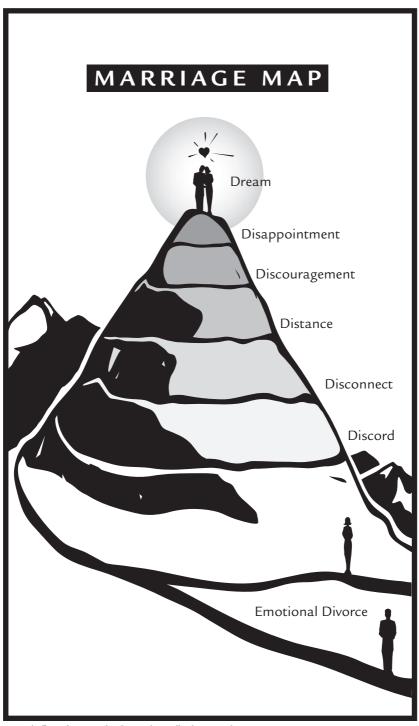
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DISCOVER THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN (workbook) ISBN 0-8423-7342-X

Your house is weatherproofed. But is your marriage divorce-proofed? In this foundational book of the Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages campaign, Gary and Barb show couples how to keep their marriages safe from the threat of divorce. Divorce doesn't happen suddenly. Over months and years couples can slide from the dream to disappointment and eventually to emotional divorce. However, they can stop the slide



Cach self-test and checklist discussed in this book is included here in a format that is easy to photocopy for use by an individual couple or a small group of couples.

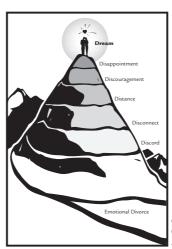


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THE DREAM STOP

Compare yourself to these indicators, and check any that describe the current state of your marriage:

Н	W	
		I communicate freely with my spouse, and we keep no inappropriate secrets.
		I forgive my spouse when I am wronged and seek forgiveness when I offend. I am loved without strings.
		My spouse and I eagerly seek to discover and meet each other's needs.
		We have faced and conquered difficult circumstances that have undone other marriages.
		I consciously guard myself against threats and temptations that could pull our marriage apart.
		We enjoy ongoing emotional, physical, and spiritual closeness.
		We are committed to keeping our relationship fresh and alive "till death do us part."



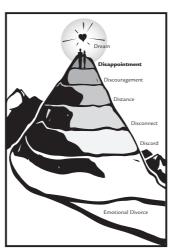
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THE DISAPPOINTMENT STOP

Compare yourself to these indicators, and check any that describe the current state of your marriage:

Н	W	
		I have difficulty expressing affirmation to or about my spouse.
		My spouse isn't the flawless person I thought I married.
		I feel surprised and let down when I notice an imperfection in my spouse.
		My spouse and I have caused each other to feel hurt and angry.
		My spouse and I have experienced conflict over personality differences, male-female wiring, or ways of doing things we learned from our families.
		I compare my spouse to other people.
		I have a mental list of things I wish I could change about my spouse.



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DISCOVERING YOUR TOP FIVE NEEDS

The findings here represent the categorical data that emerged from our survey of 700 couples in 8 cities. We gave each husband and each wife a list of 20 needs and asked them to rank them in order of importance. The lists here represent their choices.

How would you have ranked your needs? How would your spouse have ranked his or her needs? Find your top five needs, and share them with your spouse.

HUSBANDS' NEEDS

- 1. Unconditional love and acceptance
- 2. Sexual intimacy
- 3. Companionship
- 4. Encouragement and affirmation
- 5. Spiritual intimacy
- 6. Trust

WIVES' NEEDS

- 1. Unconditional love and acceptance
- 2. Emotional intimacy and communication
- 3. Spiritual intimacy
- 4. Encouragement and affirmation
- 5. Companionship
- 6. Family relationships

HUSBANDS' NEEDS

- 7. Honesty and openness
- 8. Emotional intimacy and communication
- 9. Family relationships
- 10. To be desired
- 11. Career support
- 12. To provide and protect
- 13. Personal time
- 14. Understanding and empathy
- 15. Admiration
- 16. Security and stability
- 17. Significance
- 18. Romance
- 19. Domestic support
- 20. Nonsexual touch

WIVES' NEEDS

- 7. Honesty and openness
- 8. Nonsexual touch
- 9. Security and stability
- 10. Romance
- 11. Trust
- 12. Understanding and empathy
- 13. Sexual intimacy
- 14. Personal time
- 15. To be desired
- 16. Domestic support
- 17. To provide and protect
- 18. Significance
- 19. Admiration
- 20. Career support

What People Are Saying about Divorce-Proof Your Marriage

"Gary and Barb, through their candid and contagious style, have an unflinching message for couples. And it's high time we all took notice. Through this pivotal book we pray that millions will catch the message and inoculate their relationships against the ravages of tough times. With uncompromising biblical standards and practical solutions for real-life problems, *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* is bound to ignite within the church a movement that that will enable couples to safeguard their marriages and pass on an invaluable legacy to the next generation. We urge you to read this heartfelt book and begin building walls of protection around your marriage—starting today."

DRS. LES AND LESLIE PARROTT, Seattle Pacific University, authors of Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts and When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages

"Whether or not your own marriage is in trouble, you need to read this book because the marriage of someone you know is at risk, moving toward emotional divorce. Intervene now—for the sake of your own marriage, for the sake of your neighbor's marriage, for the sake of the next generation."

DR. GARY SMALLEY, founder and chairman of the board of the Smalley Relationship Center, author of *One Flame*

"With penetrating compassion, conviction, and clarity the Rosbergs offer the solution for your marriage. Gary and Barb are indeed warriors for the family, and they offer proven answers to a needy generation. I applaud their campaign to 'take on divorce,' and I pray that they are successful in lowering the divorce rates. Read this book, and pass it on to a friend."

DENNIS RAINEY, executive director of FamilyLife, author of Building Your Marriage

"Divorce is a death that keeps on giving grief and heartache long after it is finished. When a bride and groom say their marriage vows, they never plan for their marriage to end up in divorce. But by simple neglect many good marriages slide toward dissolution without alarm. Gary and Barb Rosberg personally and practically offer a vision and a plan that could alter the American tragedy that eats away at the integrity of our culture. Their rare honesty will quicken your desire to walk a path that not only preserves your marriage but also grows your delight in the pleasure of love."

DR. DAN B. ALLENDER, president of Mars Hill Graduate School, author of *Intimate Allies*

"No couple in America is more dedicated to quality marriages than Gary and Barb Rosberg. Their approach is sophisticated, and their spirit is passionate and pure. In this new book they have taken a major step not only to help readers diagnose their marriage problems but also to divorce-proof those marriages. I am convinced that every marriage in America can grow substantially through the reading of these chapters. The material is lively and fast paced, highly intimate and illuminating, and the result is a powerful book that will profoundly change thousands of marriages for the better."

DR. NEIL CLARK WARREN, founder of eharmony, author of *Finding the Love* of *Your Life*

"What a pleasure for me to endorse this book. The Rosbergs are for real. Their passion for helping people in hurting marriages is very evident. Any couple who reads this book will say, 'We can do this. We can divorce-proof our marriage.' So if your marriage is slipping toward disconnection, you'll want to read every page of Gary and Barb's book. You won't be sorry you did. It's a great investment."

DR. KEVIN LEMAN, author of Intimate Connections and Becoming a Couple of Promise

"Helping to lower the divorce rate in America is no easy calling, and I applaud Gary and Barb Rosberg for accepting it. This book is a passionate primer on how we can protect our marriages from harm and reach for the very best God intends for us. Don't settle for less. Don't settle for divorce. Read this book!"

BILL MCCARTNEY, founder and president of Promise Keepers, author of *Sold Out: Two-Gether*

"With so many marriages in trouble today, couples need help. The Rosbergs' Marriage Map will help you assess where you are in your marriage, and the six facets of love will lead you on the path back to your dream marriage. You can't afford not to read this book. For the sake of your own marriage—as well as your children's marriages—study this book and make sure you are headed in the right direction: away from divorce and toward the dream you have of what your marriage should be."

DR. TIM AND JULIE CLINTON, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, authors of *The Marriage You've Always Wanted*

"My wife, Karen, and I have known Gary and Barb Rosberg for almost twenty years. Their passion and calling have not wavered. They have given their lives to strengthening, rebuilding, and preserving marriages. *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* is not only a call to enduring love and commitment but also a compelling manual that provides vision, hope, and practical help for building a marriage that will go the distance. This is Gary and Barb at their best."

DR. CRAWFORD W. LORITTS JR., associate director of Campus Crusade for Christ USA, author of *Lessons from a Life Coach*

"Gary and Barbara Rosberg take on one of the greatest scourges on the American family—but they do it with transparency, compassion, and grace. Their tender advice in *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* gives couples who want to stay close and those who want to recover their lost dreams a plan that not only works but also rewards. You'll find a lot more than help and hope; you'll find two new friends to walk alongside you through the challenges of love. Gary and Barbara Rosberg are gentle sages of God's love and mercy—fresh voices for divorce-proofed marriages."

DR. TIM KIMMEL, executive director of Family Matters, author of *Basic Training for a Few Good Men*

"Gary and Barb love people, and they love God's Word. That's an unbeatable combination when it comes to the loaded issue of divorce. There is a fabulous balance that comes through time and time again from the Rosbergs—quite frankly, it's their joint ability to speak the truth in love."

DR. STEVE FARRAR, founder and chairman of Men's Leadership Ministries, author of *Point Man*