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*Renewing Your Love*

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# *A Special Note from Gary and Barb*

## INTRODUCING THE DIVORCE-PROOFING AMERICA'S MARRIAGES CAMPAIGN

DEAR FRIENDS,

The book in your hands is a vital part of a campaign to Divorce-Proof America's Marriages. Couples across this nation—from Boston to Los Angeles, from Miami to Seattle—are joining together to divorce-proof their marriages. They are taking a stand *for* healthy, growing, lifetime marriages and *against* the looming threat of divorce.

Why now?

If we don't do it *now*, then when?

If we don't start *here*—with our family and yours—then where?

If we don't do it *together*, who will?

We believe that if we fail to address divorce now, the next generation of marriages will be lost. We must catch the vision for divorce-proofed marriages and push back the threat of divorce as far as our influence can reach. We want to join you not only in proactively protecting your own marriage but in helping divorce-proof the marriage of every couple you know.

As we go to battle together for the cause of the Christian home, we will pay a price. We have a powerful enemy in this endeavor. The apostle Peter warns, "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

You and your marriage are the devil's intended victims. Since a divorce-proof marriage is high on God's priority list, you can know that such marriages are also at the top of the enemy's hit list. Satan would like nothing better than to discourage you, debilitate your marriage, and add another crippled or broken family to his ledger. That is why we are asserting that your marriage and family *are* your ministry.

Let us proclaim together loudly and clearly: Divorce will stop—and stop *now*. Starting in our home and in yours, let's draw a line in the sand and tell anyone with ears to hear, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Let's agree to pull out all the stops in order to build biblical homes—for the sake of our marriages, for the sake of the next generation, and for the cause of Jesus Christ.

## A SPECIAL NOTE

But it doesn't stop there. If you—as a couple, a pastor, a small-group leader, adult Sunday school teacher—share these principles with other couples and families you care about, you will become part of God's work to change the face of marriage in our country. (For additional resources as well as ideas about how to start a small group in your community, please see the appendix. Be sure to log on and register at **[www.divorceproof.com](http://www.divorceproof.com)**)

How does *Renewing Your Love* fit into the campaign? We believe that in order for our marriages to stay fresh, we must commit to nurturing them on a daily basis. This thirty-day devotional book will help you not only to reflect on your marriage, pray, and set goals together but also to practice renewing love, one of the six different kinds of love outlined in our campaign book, *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*.

We hope you catch the vision for divorce-proofing your marriage—and the marriages of people you know. It's a campaign worth investing in!

Your friends,

GARY AND BARB ROSBERG

## How to Use This Book

YOU ARE ABOUT to embark on what we believe will be an exciting and enriching thirty-day journey in your marriage. It's a journey of renewing your love. As you complete Day 30 in this book, we trust you will be more in love with your spouse than ever before and more deeply committed to honoring and serving God, the author of your marriage, together.

As married couples, we need a love that allows our relationship to grow continually and blossom repeatedly. We need a dimension of love that refreshes and supports our bond as husband and wife, one that helps each partner feel deeply confident and rooted in the relationship. We call this ongoing process *renewing your love*, a key element in divorce-proofing your marriage. As you persistently work hand in hand with Jesus Christ at renewing your love, you will keep alive your marriage commitment, that solemn, heartfelt

pledge of undying love you made to each other before God, your families, and your friends.

We're not talking about equipping you with a *new* love for your spouse; we're talking about refreshing and revitalizing the love you already have. Like anything of value and beauty, your love for each other must be constantly renewed over the months and years of your marriage. It's like your backyard garden. In order to keep it beautiful, colorful, and fragrant, you water and weed, add nutrients to the soil, snip away dead leaves, and occasionally plant a few new varieties here and there.

But there is a sobering side to renewing your love. As every gardener knows, if you don't stay on top of the yard work, your beautiful garden can quickly turn into a jungle of weeds. This reality applies to your marriage as well. A marriage relationship is never static. When you are not actively renewing your love, your marriage will drift into a state of decay or entropy. You must keep renewing your love, or the weeds of selfishness, conflicts, and hurts will spring up between you and push you apart. We have prepared the *Renewing Your Love* devotional to assist you in nurturing and maintaining the garden of your love.

## GETTING STARTED

The *Renewing Your Love* devotional will lead you through a series of daily, biblically based, love-renewing exercises. Specifically, we will challenge you to consider, discuss,

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

and apply to your relationship six facets of marital love that are integral to keeping your marriage thriving:

- ☺ forgiving love
- ☺ serving love
- ☺ persevering love
- ☺ guarding love
- ☺ celebrating love
- ☺ renewing love

Each part of the book focuses on one of the six loves, with five devotions in each part.

You can finish the devotions in a month's time, working together through one of the devotions a day for thirty consecutive days. If you prefer, spread the six parts of the book over a six-week period, completing five devotions per week. Or you may choose to complete one of the devotions each week for thirty weeks. Set your own pace.

Here's how each of the daily devotions is structured:

*A Devotional Reading.* Each of the devotions begins with a key Bible passage followed by a thought-provoking, conversation-prompting devotional message for you to read. We suggest that you sit down together as a couple and one of you read the devotional message aloud, perhaps taking turns doing the reading on alternate days or weeks. If you prefer, you and your spouse may opt to read the devotions separately as part of your own personal devotional time.

*Three Responses.* Each devotional message is followed by an

invitation to respond to what you read in three specific ways. Whether you read the devotions together or separately, we urge you to spend several minutes together working through this response section.

- ☺ *Reflect Together.* Here you will find several questions to guide you in talking about what you have just read in light of your own marriage. Share your answers to these questions with each other.
- ☺ *Pray Together.* We have provided a brief prayer you can pray as an individual or a couple, inviting God to renew your love in a specific aspect of your marriage. We suggest that one partner read this prayer aloud to God. Feel free to personalize the prayer if you wish, such as changing *I pray* to *we pray*, etc. The other partner may want to add a spontaneous, more personal prayer after the printed prayer. Consider alternating prayer roles each day.
- ☺ *Renew Your Love.* This section contains a suggested assignment or choice of assignments to help you apply the key truth in the devotions to your own lives as husband and wife as well as to your marriage. We urge you to follow through on these assignments. It's where the rubber meets the road, where biblical principles for renewing your love are translated into daily experience.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

### **If You Are Part of a Group**

The *Renewing Your Love* devotional can be used as a discussion resource for your couple's Bible study group or Sunday school class. Or you can simply gather a group of friends to go through the book with you. For group use, we suggest that you work through the book in six weeks, focusing on one of the six parts of the book each week. Individual couples should complete the devotions at home as directed above. When your group comes together each week, ask couples to share some of the highlights from their personal discussion and application times at home. Here are some discussion questions you can use:

- ☞ What passage of Scripture from the week provided the most helpful insight for you into your relationship?
- ☞ Which devotional message this week made the most impact on you personally? On your marriage?
- ☞ What significant thing did you learn about your spouse this week?
- ☞ How did you renew your love as a couple this week?

### **If You Are Alone**

You may be reading this book alone, perhaps because your spouse is unable or unwilling to work through the devotions with you at this time. We applaud your interest in renewing your love for your spouse, even without his or her involvement or response. You can still work through the devotions as directed above, even though your spouse is not there to

interact with you. You can use the prayer under *Pray Together*, asking God to make you the loving spouse you want to be. And you can complete many of the application assignments under *Renew Your Love*, even though your spouse may not reciprocate.

If you are going it alone in your marriage right now, don't lose hope. Sometimes it takes only one spouse to start improving the quality of a marriage. As you follow God's principles for loving, honoring, and cherishing your spouse, two things will happen. First, your character will become more Christlike. And second, your faithfulness to God *will* make an impact on your spouse. So hang in there! You're doing a good thing for your marriage.

As the two of you together—or you alone—begin this thirty-day journey, it is our prayer that God's Word will minister to you and God's Spirit will empower you. We pray that your love for each other will grow deeper and your commitment to one another stronger with each passing day. May this devotional experience launch you into a fulfilling lifetime journey in which you are constantly renewing your love.

—GARY AND BARB ROSBERG

DAY 1



# *Do You Have What It Takes to Forgive?*

*J*ESUS SAID, "FATHER, FORGIVE THESE PEOPLE,  
BECAUSE THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE  
DOING."

LUKE 23:34

JESUS' PRAYER from the cross has to qualify as the greatest understatement of all time. He asked the Father to forgive those participating in his murder "because they don't know what they are doing." Before we look at his amazing reason for requesting forgiveness, let's zoom in on the request itself: "Father, forgive these people."

To whom was Jesus referring when he said “these people”? Was it the Roman soldiers spiking his arms and legs to the cross? The bloodthirsty crowd cheering the soldiers on and jeering the condemned prisoner? The Jewish leaders who masterminded the plot to arrest him and drag him through a kangaroo court? Caiaphas, the high priest who accused the Savior of blasphemy and called for a death sentence? Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who let the execution happen?

Well, we don’t know. In the text, Jesus didn’t name any names or classes or categories of people. He just said “forgive *these people*.” We must assume he was referring to the whole lot of them—anybody who had a hand in what was happening on Golgotha that dark, dismal afternoon. It was a blank check kind of prayer, as if Jesus had said, “Father, you know who’s guilty, and I ask you to forgive every one of them.”

Wow! How could the innocent Son of God let everybody off the hook just like that? His answer: “They don’t know what they are doing.”

*Who* didn’t know? Once again, no names are mentioned, so we must assume once again that everyone present was included. But wait. The Roman soldiers knew what they were doing, didn’t they? They were following orders to conduct a grisly execution. And the Jewish leaders knew what they were doing, right? They were ridding themselves of a rabble-rousing rabbi who was upsetting the religious status quo with his unconventional and blasphemous teaching. To whom was Jesus referring?

The people Jesus prayed for that day thought they knew what they were doing, but their knowledge was shortsighted and self-centered. But they *really* didn't know what they were doing or, more important, *who* they were doing it *to*. Jesus saw the big picture. He could have said

- ☹ You don't know that you have condemned as a sinner the only person ever to walk the face of the earth without sin (see Hebrews 4:15).
- ☹ You don't know that I am dying in innocence so you don't have to die in your guilt (see Romans 3:23).
- ☹ You don't know that you are putting to death the one who breathed into you the breath of life (see Genesis 2:7).
- ☹ You don't know that you are destroying the one who holds the universe together around you (see Colossians 1:17).
- ☹ You don't know that the One whose life you are trying to end today never had a beginning and never will end (see Revelation 21:6).

What capacity for forgiveness! Jesus was the victim of the greatest injustice and atrocity perpetrated by humankind. Here was an innocent man, God's own Son, come to earth to fulfill the plans foretold in Scripture—to fulfill his Father's will. He didn't sin, he didn't hurt anybody, he cared for others instead of himself. He taught about love, forgiveness, faith, hope, and heaven. Yet they crucified him. He didn't

fight back. He turned the other cheek. They nailed him to a tree, and he willingly submitted to their cruelty.

Why? Guiltless, he loved us enough to die the death of the guilty. He was our sacrifice for sin, the perfect lamb—slain. And while in mortal agony and with his dying breath, he asked his Father to pardon those who did it even before they knew what a horrible thing they had done. Amazing!

How do you feel when your spouse insults you or ignores you or betrays you or lies to you or offends you in some other way—and you are supposed to forgive him or her as Christ has forgiven you (see Colossians 3:13)? Do you reach into your heart at times like that, wondering if you will find what it takes to forgive him or her?

If so, you're not alone. On our own, we all lack the limitless grace that can release the offender completely and forgive the offense. Once again, God the Great Forgiver steps in and helps us. He not only knows about the cost of forgiveness, but he wants to fill our hearts with what it takes to forgive our spouses when they offend us. He has lavished on us this gift of forgiveness, amply supplying us with exactly what he wants us to give to others.

The power to forgive in marriage ultimately comes from God. All he asks is that we pass his gift along. Forgiving love comes from God, and when God's forgiveness fills us, we have more than enough forgiving love to share with others, including our spouses.

"But the hurt is too great," you may argue. "It is impossible for me to forgive." We have all endured situations so

painful that we wonder if we can let go of the offense and forgive the offender. But forgiveness is never impossible. God would never command us to do something we cannot do. By allowing God's gift of forgiveness to fill your heart, you can overcome the greatest of offenses, including devastating financial blunders, addictions, abuse, and adultery.

You may further object, "Well, I'm not going to forgive my spouse until he [or she] asks for it." Good luck, because it takes some people a long time to own up to their mistakes, and others may never get a clue. And when you get right down to it, forgiveness, as God showed us, is an act of grace. It's not something your spouse must earn with a heart of contrition and an apology, even though confession of wrong is a vital part of resolving conflict.

Our forgiveness must be patterned after God's forgiveness of us. Did Jesus die on the cross because we were worthy of it? Not a chance. He forgave those who killed his Son—and all of us—with no strings attached. In fact, he forgave us more than 2,000 years before we even sinned against him. God forgives out of a grace-filled heart of forgiveness. It cannot be earned, so we must not offer forgiveness with conditions. We must simply forgive as God does and let him deal with the heart of your spouse regarding his or her offense.

## REFLECT TOGETHER

Imagine Jesus gazing at you from the cross as he prays, "Father, forgive these people." How do you respond to

Jesus' request on your behalf? Is there a part of you that tends to resist because you feel that your sin is too great to forgive? Is there a part of you that takes God's forgiveness for granted because you have been a Christian most of your life? Is there a part of you that swells with gratitude because you are painfully aware of what God forgave in your life? What other thoughts and feelings rise up in you? Which response seems to be the most dominant for you? In your opinion, why?

### PRAY TOGETHER

Forgiving Father, I realize that I can never do anything so bad that you cannot or will not forgive me. I rejoice and revel in your goodness and grace. Your Son's sacrifice on the cross has set me free from my sin and its penalty. Hallelujah! You treat my spouse the same way, even when he [she] offends me. How can I hold something against him [her] that you will not? Fill me with your grace of forgiveness this week, not only toward my spouse but also toward others who offend me. May I continually grow as a forgiving person, beginning in my marriage. Amen.

### RENEW YOUR LOVE

As you peer into your heart today, do you find forgiveness for your spouse to be weak or incomplete in some areas? Do you have any conflicts between you that are not fully resolved because your forgiveness has not been fully

offered? Prayerfully summarize your insights and feelings in a brief note to your spouse. Explain what God is teaching you about forgiveness and state your desire to follow through. At an appropriate time, read the note to him or her, then verbalize your total and complete forgiveness.

DAY 2



# *Let Your Spouse off the Hook*

*Y*OU MUST MAKE ALLOWANCE FOR EACH OTHER'S  
FAULTS AND FORGIVE THE PERSON WHO OFFENDS  
YOU. REMEMBER, THE LORD FORGAVE YOU, SO  
YOU MUST FORGIVE OTHERS.

COLOSSIANS 3:13

A WEEK AGO, your husband agreed to watch the kids on Saturday while you enjoy a moms-day-out at the mall with a few girlfriends. But he forgot his promise and scheduled an all-day committee meeting at church. You are ticked. Your husband has robbed you of your long-anticipated day off with your friends.



It wasn't what she said, it was how she said it. You and your wife were talking with friends after church, and the topic—oddly enough—happened to be amusement parks. She seemed to take such glee in revealing that you are a chicken when it comes to riding roller coasters. You laughed with everyone else, but you felt exposed and embarrassed—and it hurt.



Your husband has been under a lot of pressure, but no way did you deserve the tongue-lashing he dished out last night. One little mistake in the checkbook, and he exploded, railing on you for anything and everything he didn't like around the house. You know he's stressed out, but his tirade was uncalled for and deeply hurtful.

These scenarios may not describe you specifically, but one or two of them might remind you of a similar painful conflict with your spouse. One thing is for sure: We hurt each other sometimes, even when we don't want to. So forgiveness needs to be an ongoing element of a healthy marriage relationship.

When we teach about divorce-proofing marriages in our conferences, we spend quite a bit of time talking about what we call "forgiving love." Forgiving love is the love that brings you and your spouse back together when the inevitable offenses of a marriage relationship have pushed you apart.

Forgiving love heals hurts, resolves conflicts, and helps you feel accepted and connected again.

Forgiving love is a good place to start in a relationship because that's where God starts with each of us. When we come to him by faith, confessing our sin and accepting Christ as our Savior, he forgives us and welcomes us into his family. The sins that stood between us were sent "as far away from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). God's grace-driven forgiveness cleared the way for the loving relationship we enjoy with him on a daily basis.

When we extend forgiving love to each other as husband and wife, we enjoy the same kind of relationship-restoring experience. Biblical forgiveness means that you willingly and actively choose to give up your grudge despite the severity of the injustice done to you. Now, you may not be able to hurl the offense to the other side of the compass as God does. But you *can* choose to let go of it. Once you "drop the charges," as it were, the path is clear for restoring the relationship.

It is also important to realize a couple of things that biblical forgiveness in marriage does *not* mean.

First, in forgiving your spouse, you are not denying that he or she hurt you in some way. Of course your spouse's offense hurt you, perhaps deeply. There is nothing wrong with feeling the hurt and admitting it while deciding to let your spouse off the hook by forgiving him or her.

Second, in forgiving your spouse, you don't have to minimize what happened. You may be tempted to say, "It's all right, honey, it didn't really matter." But it *did* matter. You

were offended in some way. The intimacy of your relationship was disrupted. There was a violation—no matter how slight—of the marriage vow to love, honor, and cherish. It's okay to acknowledge that something wrong happened as you choose to forgive.

Wonderful things happen when you choose to forgive your spouse for offending you. They parallel the great benefits we realize when God forgives us. Here are just a few of them:

**Forgiving love sets your spouse free.** Remember the weight of sin and guilt you felt before you received God's forgiveness? Well, your spouse probably feels something of that pain and discomfort from hurting you. Remember how liberated you felt when God took your burden of sin away? When you say, "I forgive you," you provide your spouse with a similar sense of freedom.

**Forgiving love ends the skirmish.** Once you experienced God's forgiveness for sin, the war between you was over and God welcomed you into his family justified—as if there had been no sin in the first place. In the same way, when you forgive your spouse, the air is clear between you again. You can pick up your relationship where it left off before the offense, as if the hurtful behavior never happened. You are free to accept and connect with each other again.

**Forgiving love gets you back on track.** Once your sins were forgiven, all the wonders of God's plan and purpose were suddenly available to you. Nothing stood between you and all God had for you. Similarly, when you forgive your spouse and your relationship is restored, you can resume

pursuing your marriage dream. The offending issue is behind you. Let it go, and move on full speed in the ministry of growing deeper in your relationship.

“But I can’t forget how badly it hurt,” you may argue. “How can I move on with life after the pain my spouse inflicted?”

That’s right, you may not be able to completely forget an offense. Only God can say, “I will forgive their wickedness and will never again remember their sins” (Jeremiah 31:34). You don’t have the power to forget sin as God does. But God doesn’t intend for you to forget. Remembering the pain your spouse caused you may help prevent you from hurting him or her in the same way. In the meantime, you *decide* to let your spouse off the hook and go on. After a while the memory will fade, and the pain will be healed.

Forgiveness is how we bring our relationship into the light. It’s how we set free the offended and the offender, reconcile with each other after a conflict, stand before our spouse without blemish, cut loose the guilt and grudges, and are cleansed from every wrong. And God says we *must* forgive—because he has forgiven us.

## REFLECT TOGETHER

How do you respond to the reality that God has totally forgiven you for every sin? How difficult is it for you to forgive your spouse when he or she offends you in some way?

Are you quick to forgive even when your spouse does not acknowledge doing wrong? Do you withhold forgiveness until your spouse apologizes? Do you tend to hold a grudge even after your spouse tries to make things right? What other hindrances do you encounter when you know you should forgive your spouse?

### PRAY TOGETHER

Gracious and forgiving God, thank you for the fellowship I enjoy with you, provided through the sacrifice of your Son for my sin and the forgiveness you have extended to me in response to faith. Thank you for not holding any grudges or taking delight in my weaknesses. Thank you also for standing ready to forgive me again and again, even for the same nagging failures. Deepen my understanding and gratitude for your grace and forgiveness so that I may be quick to forgive and restore my spouse when he [she] offends me in some way. Amen.

### RENEW YOUR LOVE

Do you feel a barrier of distance or dissatisfaction between you and your spouse because of an unforgiven offense? Are you allowing the memory of a painful hurt to block your willingness to forgive your spouse? Consider taking two important steps this week to reach closure and clear the air between you. If your spouse has not acknowledged the wrong and asked for forgiveness, you may need to preface these

steps by lovingly confronting him or her with your hurt, prompting his or her confession and apology. Then:

- ☺ Approach your spouse sincerely, graciously, and lovingly, not with a you'd-better-shape-up attitude. Say something like, "I want to forgive you and close the loop on the issue between us." Your humility will relax any defensiveness in your spouse.
- ☺ Be specific. Say something like, "I forgive you for \_\_\_\_" and name the offense. Don't leave the issue hanging in the air by not clearly stating it. And once you make this declaration, begin to live out its truth by treating your spouse as if it never happened.

# *Campaign Resources for Divorce-Proofing America's Marriages*

*D*EAR 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-ROSBURG (888-767-2374) or visit our Web site at [www.divorceproof.com](http://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-ROSBURG (888-767-2374), or e-mail us at [afc@afclive.com](mailto: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*

## Notes

1. Peggy Vincent, "Gentle Landings," *Reader's Digest* (March 2002): 112.
2. Gary and Barb Rosberg, *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2002), 182–83.
3. David Ferguson, *The Never Alone Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1998), 46.
4. Ibid.
5. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "hate."