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## Choice #1

# Choose to Grow Spiritually

Matthew 7:24-27

*A Christian's real development in spiritual life will always be revealed by how he or she thinks about God.*

SINCLAIR FERGUSON

**T**he Great Galveston Hurricane is still considered the deadliest hurricane in United States history. This Category 4 storm made landfall on September 8, 1900 and dissipated four weeks later—after it destroyed the then-thriving coastal city of Galveston, Texas, and everything else in its path. Sustained wind speed reached 140 miles per hour. The storm surge was in excess of fifteen feet. More people were killed in this storm than any other natural disaster in the U.S. since then, with an estimated total death count at upward of 12,000 people. The hurricane caused approximately \$20 million in damage, which is about \$700 million in today's dollars.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, hurricanes are a part of life for those living on the Gulf Coast and other areas vulnerable to such devastation. But all of us can face personal storms that ravage the shores of our lives, too.

It's not a question of if a storm is coming, but when. It's not a question of if the storm will cause damage, but rather how much. It's not about how I will face the problems and pitfalls if they arise, but rather

what I will do when they arise.

Storms can seriously fray or even destroy our own marriage knot. How can we be ready for the inevitable crises that will come our way? Jesus says it's about building your life on the rock—so the first choice is to choose to grow spiritually. In this chapter, I want to share five challenges to help you prepare for your own relational hurricane, those potential conflicts that can wreak havoc on the shores of your marriage.

The foundation is in Jesus' words, found in Matthew 7. He emphasizes the importance of building our lives upon the rock. Jesus illustrates this concept with a look at two very different kinds of builders who constructed their homes upon two very different foundations. These foundations determine the outcome each builder experiences when the storm arises. Matthew 7:24 presents the first group of builders:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (NIV)

So, what does it look like to build on a rock? Jesus explains that wise people build their spiritual lives on a solid foundation of His Word. That approach ensures that your life and your marriage relationship can withstand whatever storms come your way. He continues:

“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall.” (Matt. 7:25 NIV)

Then in verses 26–27, we see another person:

“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (NIV)

The storms Jesus has in mind are the trials of life—those disasters and difficulties we all face.

I remember when we first started our church. We initially gathered each week in a high school in the western suburbs of Chicago. Early one Sunday morning as I was getting ready to leave for church, I received a phone call from my brother-in-law in Toledo, Ohio. He informed me, sadly, that Jody's dad had died suddenly that morning. Her dad had gotten up early as normal and sat in the same spot where he always sat as he read the morning paper with a cup of black coffee and his dog sitting at his side. Not long after he sat down, he took his last breath. He died from oxygen blockage due to COPD.

That was one of the hardest phone conversations I have ever had. When I got off the phone, Jody knew by the look on my face that something terrible had happened. Her eyes welled up with tears and because, coincidentally, my dad had just gotten out of the hospital she tenderly asked me, "Is it your dad?" Then I had to say, "No honey . . . it's yours."

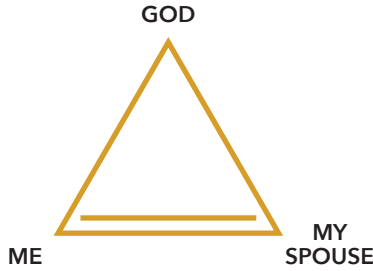
Three of our four parents died during the first two years of starting our church. These unexpected trials and the profound feeling of loss were devastating to us. Had we not had each other and the Lord and His words to lean on, they might have been unbearable.

According to Jesus' story, when we build our lives on the sand of our own wisdom, we risk terrible consequences. Ultimately, total devastation is what's in store for anyone who builds their life, their home, or their marriage on anything but the sure foundation of Christ and His Word.

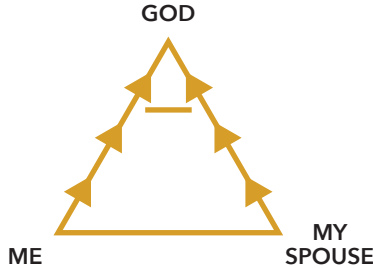
## The Marriage Triangle

This first choice, choosing to grow spiritually, is not easy. Building on the rock means that we build on the foundation of who God is, what He has done for us, and who and what He desires for us. Notice the emphasis is on what He *desires* us to do, not necessarily what we *want*

to do. And of course, this is easier said than done. Yet the alternative is much worse. If we don't listen and don't respond to Jesus' Word, the real trouble arrives when the storm begins. How to prepare? Consider the marriage triangle.

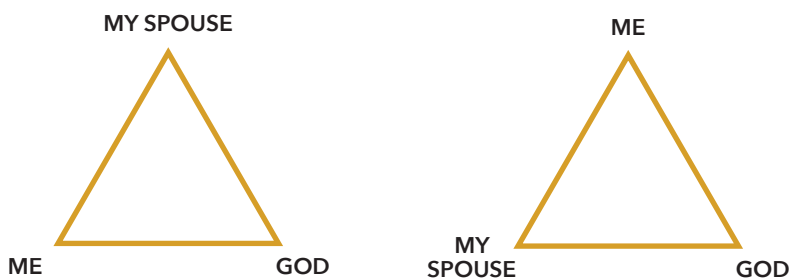


At the church where I serve, we have a concept we call the “Marriage Triangle.” We’ve depicted how it looks to build on the rock in the form of a familiar triangle that is easy to understand. Who is at the top? Of course, it’s God. The husband and wife are, respectively, on the right and left sides of the bottom corners of the triangle.



As a husband or wife, the spiritual choices we make determine whether we grow closer to God or move further away from Him. Most of us understand this. However, as a spouse we often miss out on an important additional consequence. If I grow closer to God, and my spouse grows closer to God, moving vertically up the sides of the triangle, we also grow closer to one another as the distance between us gets much smaller. Our relationship deepens over time. The more we

each grow in the Lord, the more we grow in our marriage. The result is more dependency on God and a delight in Him. Further, we experience a deepening of our relationship with each other.



Unfortunately, too often what I see with couples I counsel is that the triangle looks much different. The triangle is literally flipped over on its side. In other words, we can tend to put something or someone else at the top instead of Christ. Many of us put our spouses on the top—and that puts God on the bottom. In other situations, you might put yourself at the top; it also could be your kids, your job, your ministry, or even your marriage itself!

These other priorities are often good things that are given the wrong level of importance. A good thing becomes a bad thing when it crowds out the best thing. The Bible refers to this as idolatry. Idol worship is much more than bowing down to a statue of gold or silver. We commit idolatry when we put anything or anyone besides God at the top of the triangle. Let me offer a simple definition. Idolatry is anything that causes Jesus to become second in your life. Think with me for a moment. That's potentially a lot of stuff. It starts with conscious choices that we often don't even realize are displacing God from His rightful place in our lives. For instance, think of the spouse who becomes consumed with his work, addicted to her personal fitness, or lost in the family business.

*A good thing becomes a bad thing when it crowds out the best thing.*

As a kid, I used to enjoy watching reruns of a television show called *Lost in Space*. It was one of my favorite shows. One of the “stars” was a robot that was the best friend and protector of the boy named Will, whose family was lost in space, hence the title of the show. There is a remake on Netflix, but it’s not as good as the original (although I may be biased). In the show the boy Will would always get himself in trouble and the robot would wave his mechanical arms and shout, “Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!” The robot’s mechanical voice is etched in my mind. I think of that voice and phrase in this context because there’s a danger when we put something or someone else in first place before our relationship with God. When we do this, we choose to build on the sand. That’s our own wisdom, or worldly wisdom from Oprah or Dr. Phil! It’s what *we* think is best rather than what God determines is best.

Why wouldn’t we build on the rock? The truth is that in our culture, authentic spiritual growth is not popular. What I’m asking you to do in making the choice to grow spiritually is not necessarily trending on social media. I don’t want to push the text too far but even in the story Jesus tells, He notes a fifty-fifty chance of success. Some people build on a firm foundation of rock, while many others do not. In fact, I think the chances are much less than 50 percent since in Matthew 7:13, Jesus indicates the right way is the narrow way, saying, “Enter through the narrow gate” (NIV). Why? Because the other gate is wide and that way is easy but leads to destruction.

Those who take the easy way are in the majority. In contrast, the harder way is the narrow gate. But it leads to life (verse 14). Jesus highlights two different directions. There’s a big road on one side and there’s a tiny little mouse hole over here, and most of the people will never find it because they are taking the easy way. They’re building on the sand. Yet they will face destruction when difficulty comes.

## Putting it into Practice

I'm thankful for you. I know that if you are reading this book, your desire is to build on the rock of faith in Christ. You have a choice to do that. Maybe you've already been building on the rock, and this is a tune-up for you. Maybe you had been building on the rock, and this is your call to return. Maybe you haven't been building on the rock, and this is the "Danger!" warning to get you started! Maybe your role is to continue to stand on the firm foundation and help a few other people who have been seduced by the easy, popular way—the shifting foundation of sand. Either way, this is a game-changer in your marriage relationship, and it takes a conscious choice on your part to continue to move forward.

God's got a work He wants to do in you, and God's got a work He wants to do in your spouse, God's got a work He wants to do in your marriage. And it all starts with the choices to build on the rock individually and collectively.

If you're one of those dedicated people building your house on the rock, know that you are attempting a challenge that isn't popular. A recent survey reported that only 31 percent of Americans go to church at least once a month.<sup>2</sup> That means more than two-thirds of Americans go less than this or not at all. This trend continues to point downward across our culture. But there is also good news, which surprised me. Maybe you've heard, like I have, that the divorce rate among Christians is the same as among non-Christians. Statistics now have debunked this myth.

These results were from a survey where the respondents (who self-identified as "Christian") were asked questions about marriage and divorce, but they were not asked about church attendance. Newer

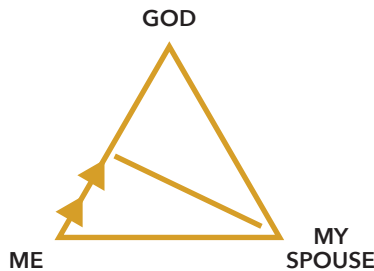
*Only 4 percent of Christian couples pray together on a regular basis. That means that 96 percent don't.*



research that takes church attendance into account shows that regular church attendance decreases your chances of divorce anywhere from 25 to 50 percent.<sup>3</sup> Another survey said that couples who are actively building on the rock are 35 percent less likely to get a divorce.<sup>4</sup>

Remember, in the triangle illustration you and your spouse are both moving forward, and both of you agree that He's at the center. Not that forward motion always happens all the time; sometimes we go one step forward and two steps back. But you're both going for that goal of oneness in Christ, and the distance between the two of you is much shorter.

Here's another compelling stat. Only 4 percent of Christian couples pray together on a regular basis.<sup>5</sup> That means that 96 percent don't. In my opinion, this only causes couples to drift apart and loosens the knot. I would suggest that praying is one way of sharing your spiritual growth with each other to keep yourselves aligned as you move up the triangle toward God together. On the other hand, if you don't pray, a lopsided growth takes place where one is much higher than the other, creating a diagonal distance and feeling of discontent.



It's important to remember that spiritual growth doesn't happen overnight—it's a long, challenging journey. We live in a culture today where we want everything right now. We want to see results, and we want to see them immediately. If we have a question, we can almost instantly get an answer from Siri or a Google search. We have more information at our fingertips than any other generation before us! And, too often, we expect something similar for our spiritual lives.

We want immediate spiritual transformation, but it doesn't work like that. You need to put in the time at the health club to get yourself physically fit, and getting spiritually fit is no different. It's what theologians refer to as "progressive sanctification." In our spiritual growth, we don't instantly change all at once and become perfect in every way. No, we progressively change and become more and more like Jesus in our character and conduct as we pursue a relationship with Him. To be "sanctified" literally means to be set apart for God's use. It's a process that requires faith, obedience, commitment, and intimate fellowship with Him. The results are the changes that we cannot power up and do on our own, as there is no quick fix. They're often the little things we don't even notice in ourselves as people point them out to us or the big things that redefine who we are and what we are all about. How do you do that? By pursuing a relationship with God, by worshiping Him with His people, by reading the Word and responding in action—building on the rock and not building on sand.

It's interesting that the story of the house built on the rock doesn't say how long it took to build. Did it take three weeks? Did it take three months? Did it take three years? Jesus didn't say. But here's my answer: building a foundation for your marriage on the rock of Christ is a life-long process. It's a choice you make individually and as a couple—to grow spiritually. One writer says, "If a man does not exercise his arm, he develops no biceps muscle; and if a man does not exercise his soul, he acquires no muscle in his soul, no strength of character, no vigor of moral fiber, nor beauty of spiritual growth."<sup>6</sup> So true! So, let me share some clear and important steps everyone must take before this process can begin.

### **Receive Jesus**

Let me cut to the chase: you need to receive Jesus. Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross for your sins. The Bible says that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. If He had not sacri-

ficed His life, shed His blood, and died on that cross, then guess what? You deserve what He experienced when He took your place. You should have been the one to die on that cross. The problem is, you cannot take care of your own sin when it comes to eternity. You can't make it go away. You can't clean it up and just move on. It's going to come back to haunt you. No amount of sincerity, good works, good deeds, or good living will pay that debt. Only He can because He is the one and only perfect sacrifice that satisfies the demands of God. Here's a helpful grid to explain why we each need to receive Jesus:

The gospel in four words: Jesus took my place.

The gospel in three words: Him for me.

The gospel in two words: substitutionary atonement

The gospel in one word: Jesus

Jesus took my place and yours on the cross. Each one of us needs to come to the reality and the awakening that we must embrace that truth for ourselves. The rock that we've been talking about is the truth that Jesus gave His life for us to demonstrate God's love so that we could love greater. The Scriptures say "he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). John 1:12 adds, "But to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

It's interesting what this last verse teaches and what it doesn't teach. In our world, you often hear the saying, "We are all God's children." According to the Bible, that's not true. I don't want to offend anyone here, but the truth is this: We are not all children of God. We're all made in the image of God, but we are not children of God until we each individually receive and believe in Jesus. That's a big difference. That's what this verse is teaching.

So, have you received Him? Do you believe in His name? Have you heard Him, and are you doing what He is saying? That's the question that eternity hinges on for you and me. That's our first step. You may be thinking, "Well, I think I received Jesus, but I don't know how to listen

to Him, and I probably don't do what He says." It's okay—we all start out in this way! Receiving Jesus involves belief that is always displayed in action. Hearing His Word, the Bible, and doing what it says. Trusting God instead of trusting oneself. That's building your life on the rock.

### ***Respond to God's Word***

In the church I went to as a kid, as the service began, this big old Bible would be brought to the front of the church in a long, formal processional. But it seemed the big old book was more of a relic to be worshiped than a roadmap for living. It may have been just me, but I wasn't connecting the dots as to the relevance of this book in my own individual life. It was read at each service to a great degree, but it took me a long time to understand and figure out that it contained everything I needed for life and godliness. I'm not sure how I missed it for so long, as I didn't understand its significance in everyday living. Just make sure you're not worshiping the book but rather the God the book reveals.

Ronald Reagan said, "Within the covers of the Bible are the answers for all the problems men face."<sup>7</sup> To build your life on the rock means that you must become a doer of the Word and not just a hearer. That's our second step.

The Bible hits the nail on the head and explains why this is so needed, necessary, and often neglected: we must not simply hear and learn the Word, we must put it into practice (James 1:22-25).

### ***Rely on the Holy Spirit***

What—or who—we rely on for direction and motivation is also an important aspect of building our marriage on the rock of Christ. So, our third step is to realize we need to rely on the Holy Spirit. We must listen for the Spirit and be directed by the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 teaches: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, He is the third person of the Trinity; He is God Himself. And the amazing thing about when

*The truth is that God has deposited Himself in you by His Holy Spirit to guarantee the results He desires in you.*

you receive Jesus is, you receive God Himself. I know that's hard to grasp, but the truth is that God has deposited Himself in you by His Holy Spirit to guarantee the results He desires in you (Eph. 1:14). You can begin to see how profound the impact is on your marriage when both husband and wife rely on the Holy Spirit!

### ***Repent from Sin***

There's a fourth step in building on the foundation of Christ. We need to repent from sin.

Repentance means you agree with God that what you're doing is wrong. Sometimes I have a hard time overcoming something I'm doing because I don't always agree with God that it's wrong. Now, I may say it is wrong, but until I desire to change that behavior, I'm not really in agreement with Him. Repentance is like making a U-turn. Or it's like an about-face. When a soldier hears the command "about face!" he does a 180-degree turn and marches in the opposite direction. That's genuine repentance. We turn from evil and pursue the good that God commands.

### ***Relate graciously with one another***

Our fifth and final step in building on the foundation of rock is that we relate graciously with one another. We need to make relationships with other people and invest in the people God has placed around us. That means we commit to developing authentic, loving relationships with other people who want to build on the rock too.

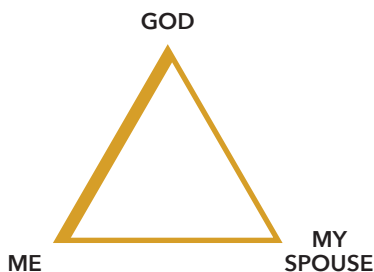
There is someone in your sphere of influence who has experienced something like what you are going through and has found a way through by trusting God's Word. Maybe you will find them at church within a marriage ministry or in a small group or Sunday school class. Maybe you share rides to school, or they're at work or part of a team

that you serve on. The main thing is, you need other people to help you in making this all-important choice to grow spiritually. You cannot live life on an island—especially the spiritual life. That’s a lethal prospect for a Christian marriage. You need God’s people for support. God surrounds us with others to encourage us, to grow us, and to help us through the tough storms of life. The Bible teaches this principle:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25)

### **Know. Grow. Show.**

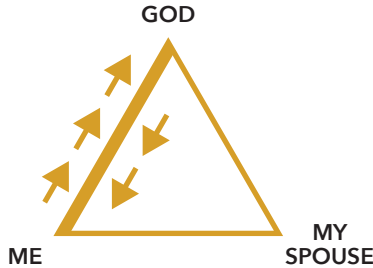
Spiritual growth is not automatic. These are five steps that we need to practice regularly to build on the rock. We must know Christ, grow in Him and, as we do, we begin to show a life that is transformed by His power. How does this look? Let’s return to our triangle illustration for a moment. God is at the top, and you are on the side for the moment. Take a long look at that line between you and God.



This illustration represents your position and connection with the Lord. Think of it as *positional* grace. What you need to know is that nothing can break that line. In John 10:28 Jesus says, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

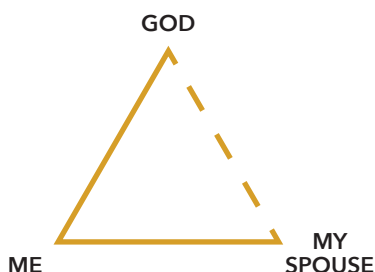
Once you’ve received Him, He promises to keep you, secure in His

hand. No one can take the Lord from us, and no one can take us away from the Lord. There's also a second way to look at this relationship. Think of it as *relational* grace. We need the grace that is God's unearned, unmerited favor. Why? Sometimes we feel very close to God; other times we feel far from Him.



We move up and down on this line God has given us. There's room to grow closer to Him, yet we often move away from Him. Two steps up and one step back. Sound familiar? This is the reality of the Christian life—that we don't always do exactly what He wants when He wants it done. It's a matter of obedience. I like to define obedience as doing what God wants, when God wants it done, with a God-honoring smile. It's what every parent wants from their kids, and it's what God our Father wants from His kids too! But we don't always do what He wants, when He wants it done, with a great attitude. Obedience requires all three.

By the way, we cannot simply transfer our level of spiritual growth to our spouse. However, we can *influence* our spouse in their spiritual growth. We can't change them into the person we want them to be, with the same or greater level of spiritual understanding or abilities or maturity as we possess. My heart breaks for the spouse that attends one of our marriage conferences alone. She wants to grow spiritually, but she can't make her spouse make that same choice. One person wants to grow up the side of the Marriage Triangle, and the other does not.



In other situations, both spouses may attend church, but one spouse leads the way spiritually and the other person goes through the motions. One person is choosing to build on the rock when his or her spouse is not. Maybe you're thinking, "Well, I'm in a situation like that or I know somebody who is. What should I do?"

The Bible tells us we can win people over with our works better than we can with our words. I'm talking about you focusing on your relationship with God and you focusing on the growth that He wants to do in you. And that, along with prayer, is the best way to influence the other person. As your spouse begins not only to see Christ's work in you, but also benefits from it, his or her heart will begin to soften toward the Lord. I've seen it happen many times. But the more you talk down to your spouse or attempt to preach, the further you will push him or her away from Christ.

### ***The homecoming queen and the star athlete***

Have you made the decision to build your life on the rock? Have you made your decision to build your marriage on the rock? I want you to think about those two questions as I tell you about a couple I know very well.

This man and woman were high school sweethearts. She was the homecoming queen, and he was the star athlete. They went to different colleges and continued dating off and on. After graduating, they got married and moved to the big city to pursue their dreams. Neither one



of them came from a Christian home, went to church, or knew what it meant to follow God. They were both climbing up the corporate ladder and things were seemingly going great. The woman was working for a Fortune 500 company and was moving up faster in the corporate world than he was. Her job was her priority. He could feel it but never said anything about it to her.

Along the way, he started making some choices that he knew were not healthy for their marriage relationship. He was putting himself in some situations that would only lead him in the wrong direction. He began reliving his college behaviors and, in his words, “trashed the marriage.” He was building on the sand. Though he knew in his heart that what he was doing wasn’t right, he couldn’t stop the downward spiral. His wife could sense the distance in their relationship and knew something was wrong. She only ever prayed to God when she was in trouble and, for some reason, she prayed, “God, if you will show me what is wrong, I’ll do my part to fix it.”

Then it happened literally the very next day. She returned home early from a business trip and walked into the apartment to surprise him. Instead, she was the one surprised. She saw a bottle of wine with two wine glasses on the end table. Then she saw something that she should never have had to experience. Her husband was in their bedroom with another woman. She was completely devastated. If you haven’t guessed already, the couple I’m describing is Jody and I at the end of our first year of marriage. Let’s just say our marriage knot had completely unraveled.

Not long after, we ended up with a pastor in a counselor’s office at a local church. Jody was seeking “an okay to get a divorce.” I had no place else to turn, as I was immersed with guilt, shame, and embarrassment for who I was and what I had done to the person I loved more than anyone in the world. I’ll never forget the loneliness, hopelessness, and regret that I knew my actions caused, as I had just ruined the best thing I had going in my life. I threw it away like it was just some piece of garbage.

The pastor opened with, “Well, I’ve only got about forty-five or fifty minutes. So, we can talk about how messed up your marriage is, or I can talk to you about God’s plan, the forgiveness that is available in Jesus, and the relationship you can have with Him.” He was so caring, matter of fact, and directly to the point.

We each considered the options before us and chose the latter. We looked at each other and said, “Okay, give us this Jesus thing.” He began to lead us in acknowledging our own sin, confessing it to God, and for the first time, believing that Jesus hung on a cross and died for those very specific sins. Our sins, my sin. Jody thought we were just going to focus on my more obvious sin, but the pastor refused to let her off easy. He was offering both of us the opportunity to receive the fresh start that is only available through Christ, and to begin to build our individual lives on the rock. Later he would describe this counseling meeting—after the hundreds of couples he had previously met with—as the one that stood out to him the most because, he said, “For the first time, I witnessed and had a front-row seat to the act of genuine repentance and transformation of new life happening right before my very eyes.”

That was twenty-eight years ago. We found Jesus at the foot of the cross during our struggle. Or maybe it’s better said like this: He found us. I have since taught, and believe, that the circumstances of life ripen people to the gospel message. Whether that’s through difficulty, disaster, moral failure, even the death of a loved one or possible divorce like us. When we are finally down is when we begin to fervently look up.

We didn’t know what would happen to our marriage as we left the pastor’s office that night, but we each experienced something we desperately needed: a power washing of the heart and a clean and fresh start. I felt like this huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders and, although I wouldn’t have been able to articulate it at the time, I received a new lease on life. We left with the assignment to attend a marriage restoration ministry and to begin getting to know the God who knew us and had just forgiven us of all our sin. We did not realize

*I remember thinking, "I can forgive him, but I don't have to stay married to him, right?"*

all the implications and changes that would come because of that first step of faith to trust Jesus' work on the cross. We began building our individual lives and marriage on the solid and secure rock of Jesus and had made Choice #1—to grow spiritually—without even knowing it!

**Time out!** Have you and your spouse been through a difficult time where you wondered to yourselves, "Are we going to make it"? Go ahead and assess the health of your marriage by taking the Marriage Health Assessment online at [Ronzappia.com/healthassessment](https://Ronzappia.com/healthassessment)

## *From Jody's Heart . . .*

Well, there you have it! We were less than a year into our marriage, and the marriage knot was completely unraveled! The question I get asked the most often is, "How did you forgive Ron?" and, "How do you build a marriage when trust is broken?" I did not know much in the Bible, but I knew I needed to forgive. I had come across the verse that said, "If you do not forgive your brother, you will not be forgiven." I needed forgiveness, and I had just received it abundantly, so even though it felt like I was stepping off the edge of a cliff, I chose to do it by faith. I didn't *feel* like doing it. It felt scary and risky, but I knew it was right despite what anyone would say or think. At that point I didn't plan on staying married to Ron, necessarily, but knew that either way I needed, and therefore chose, to forgive. Trust was the bigger barrier for me as to whether the marriage would last.

I can remember thinking, “I can forgive him, but I don’t have to stay married to him, right?” More on that later.

What did forgiveness look like practically? It meant a specific start and end to the questions about details. It meant not bringing up past failure, which was painfully difficult daily. Also, I practiced not dwelling on the hurt but instead practiced offering it up to God and asking for healing when needed—and it was needed a lot early on. At times I would ask for reaffirmation from Ron. This meant he would look me in the eye, grab my hands, and affirm his commitment and faithfulness to me verbally, when I was feeling insecure. This he did whenever I needed, though I could tell it made him a little sad, so I was careful to go to God first. He did it with a genuine spirit of love, care, and concern. Husbands, if you are in this place, please slow down. And as much as you want to move on, continually speak words of recommitment and reassurance. It is an act of humility, which goes a long way in rebuilding trust. And the return of trust happens over time.

Maybe your forgiveness issue is an addiction such as pornography, drugs, alcohol, or verbal abuse. Whatever package the pain and hurt is wrapped up in, it’s helpful to know that your husband has a trusted and mature male friend who is holding him accountable and asking him the more pointed questions as he’s moving forward and progressing by changing his thought patterns, routine, and behavior. Whether that’s not going to the same places, not taking the same train, or changing jobs—that’s what Ron did! Or, do whatever it takes to make the restoration of the marriage the top priority as you build on the rock together.

Going to a professional Christian counselor or support group at your church is helpful in moving forward as you

need a safe place to process and people to pray for you. Listen to me, please. Choosing to forgive is courageous! Know that you are not alone even though it feels like you are. Many, including me, have tread this tried-and-trusted path before you. And although you may not always realize it, if you are pursuing God, He can make all things new. Eventually, even bad memories fade and are replaced by good!

When you're struggling to forgive, just do what I learned to do quite often. Forgiveness requires two big stages: First, there's the initial decision to forgive, which often occurs in crisis and runs contrary to what you want to do. That's done. You can't turn back. But then, more importantly, there are the secondary decisions (plural) to forgive continually as you have already forgiven the person who has hurt you. But now, you've entered the process of forgiveness where you must remind yourself that you've already forgiven them and need to continue to release them. To help with this, I purposely remember all the things from which Christ has forgiven me. Therefore, how can I possibly withhold forgiveness from my husband or anyone else? In other words, I'm so glad Jesus wasn't selective in which sins He forgave. Only He can and will give you the strength and ability to forgive as He forgives!