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CHAPTER /



From Pain to Pleasure

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

*W*hat was John to discover in our family? I hoped he would observe people who cared about serving—both one another and beyond.

This had been the first step, taken years earlier, in turning our marriage from withering to thriving. I entered marriage with the idea that my wife would make me supremely happy, that she would satisfy my deep yearnings for companionship and love. To be sure, I intended to make her happy as well, but most of my dreams focused on how happy *I* would be when we were married.

Six months after marriage, I was more miserable than I had been in twenty-three years. Before marriage, I dreamed about how happy I would be—now my dream had become a nightmare. I discovered all sorts of things I did not know before we were married. In the months before we were married, I dreamed about what it would be like at night in our apartment. I could visualize the two of us sitting in our little apartment. I would be at the desk studying (I was in graduate school), and she would be sitting on the couch. When I got tired of studying, I would lift my eyes, our eyes would touch, and there would be warm vibes between the two of us. After we got married, I discovered that my wife did not want to sit on the couch and watch me study. If I was going to study, she wanted to go downstairs and visit people in the apartment

complex, make new friends, use her time socializing. I sat in our little apartment alone thinking, *This is what it was like before we got married*; the only difference was that I was in a dorm room, much cheaper than this place. Instead of warm vibes, I felt the ache of loneliness.

Before marriage, I dreamed that every night about 10:30, we would go to bed together. Ahh—going to bed with a woman every night at 10:30. What pleasure! After we got married, I discovered that it had never crossed her mind to go to bed with *anybody* at 10:30 every night. Her ideal was to come up from visiting about 10:30 and read a book till midnight. I was thinking, *Why didn't you read your book while I read my book?* Then we could go to bed together.

Before we got married, I thought that every morning when the sun gets up, everybody gets up. After we were married, I found out that my wife didn't do mornings. It didn't take me long not to like her, and it didn't take her long not to like me. We succeeded in being utterly miserable. In time, we both wondered why we had married each other. We seemed to disagree on everything. We were different in every way. The distance between us mounted, and our differences became divisive. The dream was gone, and the grief was intense.

TURNING WAR INTO PEACE

Our first approach was an effort toward mutual annihilation. I freely pointed out her faults, and she mine. We succeeded in wounding each other regularly. I knew that my ideas were logical and that if she would listen to me, we could have a good marriage. She perceived that my ideas were out of touch with reality and that if I would listen to her, we could find a meeting place. We both became preachers without an audience. Our sermons fell on deaf ears, and our pain compounded.

Our marriage did not turn around overnight. No magic wand was waved. Our marriage began to turn around over the period of about a year, several years into the marriage. It began to dawn on me that I had approached our marriage with a very conceited, self-centered attitude. I had really believed that if she would listen to me and do what I wanted, we would both be happy; that if she would make me happy, I would

somehow see that it was reciprocated. I had the idea that whatever made me happy would automatically make her happy. I find it hard to admit, but I spent little time thinking about her well-being. My focus was on my own pain and unmet needs and desires.

My search for an answer to our painful dilemma led me to a reexamination of the life and teachings of Jesus. The stories I had heard as a child about His healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and speaking with kindness and hope to the destitute flooded my mind. As an adult, I now wondered if I had overlooked profound truth in those simple accounts. With twenty-seven hours of academic studies in the Greek language behind me, I decided that I would explore the life and teachings of Jesus in the original documents. What I discovered could have been discovered in a simple reading of the English text. His life and teachings focused on sacrificial service to others. He once said, "I did not come to be ministered to but to minister." It is a theme that all truly great men and women of the past have affirmed. Life's greatest meaning is not found in getting but in giving. Could this profound principle make a significant difference in my marriage? I was determined to find out.

LESS PREACHING, MORE DOING

How would a wife respond to a husband who sincerely sought to serve her? To discover her needs and desires and to seek to fulfill them? I began quietly and slowly to do some of the things she had requested in the past. By now, we were too estranged to talk about our relationship, but I could choose to take action on some of her previous complaints. I started washing dishes without being asked. I volunteered to fold the laundry. It seemed to me these were the kinds of things Jesus might have done had He been married. When she made specific requests, I determined to respond cheerfully and, if possible, to do them. In less than three months, Karolyn's attitude toward me began to change. She came out of her shell of withdrawal and began to talk again. I think she sensed that my days of preaching were over and that my attitude toward life was changing.

In due time, I found her doing little things that I had requested in the

past. She held my hand as we walked in public, she smiled when I tried to make a joke, she touched me as she walked by my desk. Before long, our hostility was gone, and we began to feel positive feelings toward each other. I remember the first day I had the thought, *Maybe I could love her again*. For months, I had had no feelings of love, but only pain, hurt, anger, hostility. Now, all that seemed to be gone, and it was replaced by warm feelings. I found myself thinking that I wouldn't mind touching her again if I thought she'd let me. I wasn't about to ask her, but I thought, *I wouldn't mind if she wouldn't mind*. Before spring the thought had become reality. Romantic feelings were reborn and sexual intimacy, which seemed so far away, had become reality. We had come full circle. We were no longer enemies preaching at each other; we had become sensitive to each other's desires. Our attitudes had become that of serving rather than demanding. And we were reaping the benefit of intimacy.

All of that had happened in what seems now a distant past. Now, here we were with two children and an outsider. We had sought to teach our children what we believed to be one of the most important ingredients of a healthy family—an attitude of service. Would John observe it? Could it be discovered by observation? I sincerely hoped so.