

**Bringing
Authenticity and Wholeness
to Your Marriage**

LET'S GET REAL

DALE and JENA FOREHAND

NAVPRESS 

Discipleship Inside Out™



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www.navpress.com

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ISBN-13: 978-1-61521-689-5

Cover design by Arvid Wallen
Cover photo by Shutterstock/iofoto

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Printed in the United States of America

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LETTER FROM DALE AND JENA

Each of us has a story. Our stories involve different characters and circumstances but have one commonality: They all involve a journey. Journeys take us places. Yet each of us plays a part in choosing the journey's end.

The story that follows is our journey. It's the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of our marriage. But this story isn't about us. It's about the incredible truths we learn from God along the way that offer hope and abundant life when we walk in them. For as long as we have Jesus, we have hope.

Our marriage was saved purely by the grace of God. He revealed our selfish ways and helped us trust Him in obedience. God took us on a journey to wholeness. He helped us exchange religious activity for spiritual intimacy. We found that only when we as individuals pursued the heart of God and became whole in spirit, soul, and body could our marriage relationship become healthy and whole. It was here, and only here, that our marriage would bring glory to God. As a result, our house became a home where Jesus reigns as Lord.

Perhaps you have a good marriage but want it to be better. Perhaps your marriage is not what it should be. You may have a marriage that is struggling to survive. Maybe you're divorced, feeling devastated and alone. Whatever your circumstances, we encourage you to walk down a road less traveled.

We believe that fulfilling, lifelong marriages are the direct result of individuals who desire to grow in their personal relationship with Christ. There's a direct relationship between our intimacy with our heavenly Father and our intimacy with others.

This study won't be a tip and technique or quick fix for you. It's a study designed to look at the Word of God to learn how to have better relationships. Its impact will depend on you, your spouse, and your obedience to the Spirit's leading in your life. We know God's Word is true, that He is faithful, and He can do abundantly more than we could ever think or imagine if we will take Him at His Word and trust Him through His awesome power and grace.

To get the most from this study, prepare your hearts for your time with God as you read the pages that follow. Let us offer a few suggestions:

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas in your life that need to be crucified. This study isn't for you to think about how much your spouse needs to change. Let this be a special time where God deals with you and you alone (see Psalm 139:23).
2. Ask the Lord to make your heart tender toward His truths and then give you the strength to walk in obedience to His truths. By His Spirit and your personal evaluation, much can be exposed to help you become as God wants you to be as you read each chapter (see John 8:32).
3. Ask the Comforter to join you in your journey. You'll need His strength and encouragement as you visit many places. As you are comforted, you'll be able to minister to others along the way. The fact is, we learn from one another and thus should share with one another what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
4. Ask God to make Him highly exalted in your life and draw you nearer to Him. If you want to get the most from this book, you

must be willing to let God go to the very depths of your soul and do His healing work (see James 4:8).

We are thrilled that God has divinely appointed this time for us. He always meets us where we are and takes us moment by moment to where He wants us to be. As you read our story, know that God has a story within your life and marriage. As He does His awesome work, molding and crafting you into His image, don't give up. Stay the course. Our relationships with other people and most importantly our relationship with Christ will never be the same as we yield ourselves to His leadership. Let the journey begin.

Chapter One

BROKEN PIECES

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . .

Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)

In 1996, our marriage had reached an all-time low. There was no love, no joy, and no relationship. Misplaced priorities and neglect had delivered us to the doorway of divorce. We'd brought two precious children into the world, Cole and Jorja. We'd built a nice house in a nice part of town. Dale and I were both extremely active in church. Dale was a new deacon in the church. I (Jena) was a leading soloist and had just finished writing our Easter musical. Together we taught a Sunday school class for young couples. From the outside looking in, we had the perfect marriage, the perfect life. In reality, both of us were doing life while neglecting our marriage.

After years of complacency, selfishness, and total disregard for each other, a marriage that had once borne beautiful fruit was withering. Our suppressed emotional pain had turned into a bitter cancer that turned love to hate and freedom to bondage. The wounds we inflicted on each other's hearts left us bleeding hopelessly. The pain was so intense we believed the only way to survive was to get out.

THE MARRIAGE SHATTERS

On a Saturday in July 1996, Dale walked into our home, took out my suitcases, and began to pack my clothes. He said the marriage was over and told me to get out of his house because he was finished with the relationship. I followed Dale into the bathroom as he packed my things. Dale closed the door behind me, held it shut, and began to hurl verbal attacks as Cole banged on the door to get in. When I attempted to leave, Dale held the door shut and laughed as I struggled to get out.

Dale grabbed our children, Cole (age five at the time) and Jorja (eighteen months), and loaded them into his car. Dale sped off to the golf course with the children because golf was a release for him. Later he left the children with his mother at the swimming pool. I drove to the pool, gathered the children, and headed to my sister's house while things settled. When Dale realized what I'd done, he was incredibly angry. I called Dale and explained that I was afraid of him and wanted to stay away until I felt safe again.

Internal frustrations and lack of control angered Dale. He became so enraged that he continued to verbally attack and threaten me. He demanded that I return the children. I became even more afraid for myself, Cole, and Jorja. After four days, I met Dale at a park so the children could play and visit with him. There was no conversation between the two of us. The tension was thick.

I didn't know Dale had gone to see a lawyer. The lawyer told Dale the kids were just as much his as they were mine and to just go and get them. For Dale, this sounded like a great plan.

The next week was Vacation Bible School at our church. I had responsibilities there so I brought the children and participated as if nothing had happened. While I was cleaning up at the end of the day, Cole was playing in the gym and Jorja was with me at the entrance. Dale drove up determined to take our children. I saw him and quickly ran into the gym to get Cole. As I sat Jorja on the ground and yelled for Cole to come to me, I turned around to see Dale grab Jorja and

scramble to the car. Cole jumped into my arms and asked me what was happening and why Daddy was taking Jorja. Panicking, I repeatedly whispered in Cole's ear that it was all going to be okay. With Cole in my arms, I chased Dale to his car. He disappeared with our daughter while I watched in disbelief.

I returned to the gym where Dale's twin brother, Dave, yanked Cole out of my arms and knocked me to the ground as I fought to hang on to my child. As Dave ran with Cole to a car that waited outside, Cole screamed for me in hysteria. I sat on the gym floor, as Cole's voice echoed, "Mommy! Mommy! I want my mommy!" And then there was nothing—nothing but silence.

I sat in shock at what had just taken place. Though most everyone quickly disappeared, a few helped me to my feet and encouraged me to call the police. My family arrived to help while I was reporting the incident to a police officer. As he wrote the report, he explained that Dale was the father and there was nothing he could do about his taking the children. The best advice he could give was to call an attorney.

Meanwhile, Dale went to his parents' house, packed some bags, loaded the children into his car, and disappeared with them for seven days. They went to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama. They traveled to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to peer through the big glass and see all the fish at the aquarium. For seven days, Dale ran from our problems while I lay in a small, dark bedroom in my sister's home, scared and alone.

After fruitless attempts to locate the children, I picked up the phone and called an attorney—something I'd never dreamed of doing. During my first visit, I was advised that the only way to get my children back into the state of Alabama was to file for a divorce. The attorney drew up the papers and an officer left to serve them to Dale.

On the back roads of a Tennessee highway, Dale's cell phone rang. It was his employer telling him they had just received papers that read, "Forehand versus Forehand." Dale's heart fell to the depths of his soul. We both realized we were about to face the most excruciating process

we had ever experienced: divorce.

When I arrived at the courthouse, I was told it would be a long process unless Dale and I could negotiate with the aid of our lawyers. We both wanted full custody, however, and both refused to leave the marital residence. That left the judge with no choice but to place us back in the house together pending a divorce trial.

IN-HOUSE PRISON

For fifteen months we lived in one house, awaiting the trial date. Our home had now become a prison. Dale took the master bedroom and locked me out. I locked myself in Cole's bedroom, sleeping with him in his red wrought-iron bunk beds. Many nights I cried myself to sleep while our six-year-old son patted me sweetly on the back.

As time passed, we returned to court several times, each accusing the other of breaking the rules. The judge ruled that we must have the children in the residence by six every night because of our game playing and manipulation. Being bound to a curfew forced us to spend time together, causing our house to feel smaller with each passing day.

Because of Dale's anger and desire for control, he withheld all money from me. Being a stay-at-home mother, I was reduced to begging from Dale or borrowing from friends and family—a very humbling and shaming experience. Dale gave me a credit card but one false move and he'd rip it away.

We tried to conduct ourselves as if the other didn't exist. We locked doors, separated our clothes and food, and pulled our children from one parent to the other as we each tried to win their love. When we engaged in conversation, our talks escalated into full-fledged arguments that left us wounded and cold. Many fights became so heated that Cole would sit in the corner of the dining room and cry with his hands over his ears, begging for it to stop. We threw things, pointed our fingers, and verbally abused one another.

We tried to buy our children's love with gifts and keep the other

from seeing them. Manipulation became a common behavior, and we showed no conscience in the process. The children quickly learned to manipulate too. There were many situations where they would work the circumstances to force us to be at odds with each other to get their way.

Christmas was a gut-wrenching experience. The lawyers made another trip to the judge because we couldn't agree on any terms. The children and I got one tree and placed it in the den, and then Dale took the children and purchased another tree for the dining room.

I had no money to buy gifts for the children, and Dale wouldn't give me any. So one afternoon, a friend picked me up and took me to Wal-Mart to purchase Christmas gifts for me to give them. I stood in the checkout line and cried at the reality of my life.

Christmas Eve finally came. I came out of the bedroom first and placed my Santa gifts out on the den floor. After I went back to my bedroom and locked my door, Dale came and displayed his part of Santa. The next morning was a smothering event as both of us put on our happy faces and pretended to be a family.

Things continued to unravel as two competing lawyers coached us in the ways of mischief. We paid private investigators and wore tape recorders to catch the other in some incriminating conversation. We tapped phones and kept perfect records to build our own cases. We provoked the other to anger so we could accuse each other of misconduct. Our house was a war zone, and the casualties were not only two adults but two beautiful children.

After living in this hell for fifteen months, my lawyer informed me our day in court was set. My lawyer was prepared, and there was a glimmer of hope that the end was in sight.

THE COURT DECREES

I entered a small courtroom with my lawyer at my side and a small box that represented my life. Dale did the same. The judge entered and took his place. The sound of the gavel meant only one thing: The lines

were drawn and the final battle began.

The next four days we listened to family members and friends testify from the witness stand. They'd chosen sides, and their goal was to convince the judge what a terrible parent one of us was. Lies filled the courtroom. Our parents who once loved their child's spouse were now doing all they could to defend their own flesh and blood. With every comment came another penetrating stab of emotional pain. It felt as if our lives were being ripped to shreds. As the gavel fell for the last time, we left the courthouse with our arms full of broken pieces.

We were told to go back to our house together pending the results of the trial. Four weeks of waiting were smothering as we waited for the outcome. We finally received the papers. The divorce was final, and joint custody was awarded.

Hallelujah, it was finally over—or was it? My (Jena) depression and anger only increased. I rode an emotional roller coaster as I went from the elation of finality to the frustration of always having to communicate with Dale about matters regarding the children. The marriage was over, but life continued. The struggles for personal agendas, strategic plans, and individual time with the children escalated. We argued about everything pertaining to our children before we could make a decision. Every other weekend, as we passed the children to the other, we felt as if our hearts were physically being ripped apart. The anger, frustration, and pain were indescribable.

Divorce is a forever funeral as part of you dies every other weekend while your child grips your neck and begs you not to leave. Divorce is what I thought I wanted, yet I was more miserable than I had ever been. Divorce affects you physically, emotionally, and spiritually. All that's left is a shattered reflection of what used to be. And the pain associated with it cannot be compared to anything except a grievous death.

GETTING REAL

Fortunately, our story didn't end there. God didn't look down from the glory of heaven and say, "Dale and Jena, you have messed things up so badly that I can't fix it anymore." Instead, He graciously said, "I'll wipe this clean and help you start over if you will let Me." Two very broken people, not knowing what the other was doing, dragged themselves to the foot of the cross and fell at their Savior's feet, begging for His forgiveness and help.

One Wednesday morning, four weeks after the final verdict, I called Dale to discuss some gymnastics arrangements for Jorja. Dale, still wounded from the previous battle, told me that he would not be taking Jorja anywhere when she was with him, and another argument began. Our yelling was so intense that Dale had to close his office door to muffle the sound.

I (Jena) chose to reveal myself that day so Dale could briefly peek into my heart. It was the scariest thing I'd ever done, but God was pushing me to obey His prompting. These words came from my heart in the middle of this downward-spiraling conversation: "Dale, what have we done? Why don't you just come get me and let's fix this thing." Like a bolt of lightning, Dale heard words that shocked him to the bone.

Dale was faced with a choice. Would he respond with fear, pride, or anger, or would he return my tenderness of heart with truth of his own? Dale responded with this simple statement: "I can't look at the feet of our children without seeing you." That statement was like a bouquet of roses to me. I didn't think he cared about what I looked like, much less my feet. The Spirit of the Lord began at that very moment to melt the hardened mess of our hearts. The pride, anger, bitterness, resentment, and sheer hatred began to peel back one layer at a time. Within minutes Dale and I were pouring out our hearts while sobbing uncontrollably.

Dale drove to the house where I was staying. He knocked on the door, and a friend of mine who had testified against him in court answered. With great shock and fear on her face, she called for me to come outside. Dale spoke these words from his heart: “Jena, I don’t know what all of this means, but I know it’s the right thing to do.” He kissed me on the cheek and drove away.

We spent the next four months in frequent marriage counseling with a godly Christian counselor who walked us through the healing process. There were hard days when it seemed like we tap-danced on the painful places where we had sworn never to return. Some days seemed like all was fresh and new while others made us question our decision to return to each other. At the end of four months, there was no question in either of our minds. Remarriage was what God wanted. So on December 21, 1997, we were remarried to the glory of God.

On the morning of our remarriage, Cole entered our bedroom and said, “Since you two are getting together with each other, I think I would like to get together with God.” At the foot of our bed, our son prayed with us to receive Jesus as His Savior. Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . .” (NKJV). God not only brought our marriage back together but redeemed our precious child into His family. His plans are truly greater than we could ever imagine.