

Kay Arthur
A Marriage
Without
Regrets



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A FRESH CHALLENGE

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1,2).

HA VE YOU EVER DRIVEN AT NIGHT ACROSS the wide prairies of the American Midwest? Maybe you're somewhere in the middle of Nebraska, or crossing the dark, lonely miles of Montana or South Dakota. Sipping black coffee from an insulated cup, you drive for what seems like hours without seeing a light. All you have is the soft glow from your dashboard, the pool of your headlights out front, and maybe the glint of stars up in that great empty sky overhead.

You feel swallowed up in the darkness, like a little rowboat out alone on the wide Atlantic. Then, way, way off to the left or right of the highway, you see something.

A tiny glimmer.

One little square of light in a sea of inky blackness.

It's so far away it may be no more than a winking pinpoint, but it attracts your attention and interest. After miles and miles of weary darkness, it draws your eyes like a magnet. (*What else is there to look at?*)

As you draw nearer, you conclude that it's coming from a little farmhouse, surrounded by acres and acres of open pastureland. Staring at that little fleck of gold on the bosom of the dark night, you find yourself wondering:

- Is someone up late, going over the farm's financial status, bills, or balancing the checkbook?
- Is the family watching an old movie on TV?
- Is there a croupy child in the home needing attention?
- Is Grampa up late, drinking a glass of warm milk because he can't sleep?
- Is there a teenager out on a late date somewhere in town, and Mom and Dad have left a light burning to guide the homeward journey?

You can't help but feel a sense of longing as you drive by. No one on that little farm realizes you exist. If they could even hear you across the miles, it would be nothing more than the faraway drone of a passing car. All too soon, you leave that welcome little light behind and the mystery remains unsolved. You'll never know who lives within the bounds of that light. The night swallows you up again in a darkness so complete you begin to wonder if the light had really been there at all.

Dear friend, I believe that happy Christian marriages and homes can be just like that farmhouse light on a midnight prairie. If you build a loving marriage and a home with light and laughter brightening everything inside its walls, there will be those who see. There will be those passing by in the darkness who will note the contrast. And they will want what you have found.

As our world grows darker every day before our Lord's return, many in our culture scorn and mock Christian family values. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul clearly warned that "difficult times" were coming in the last days. People will be "lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant,

revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” These are people—many of them our neighbors, our associates at work, even members of our own extended family—who have no time for God and no desire to understand His commands and precepts.

Yet even so...even to these folks, the darkness can grow oppressive. And there is something wonderful about a Christian marriage, something that draws a curious eye in this cynical age. There’s a radiance there...a light that shines through the hard-edged darkness of a skeptical culture. No matter how humble the Christian home, there’s something about the light shining through its windows that creates a longing in weary hearts. Despite themselves, people are attracted by a home that radiates the love of Christ.

You may never know who observes the light shining from your home. The observers may seem as distant and anonymous as cars driving by on the highway at night.

Yet there are those who watch.

There are those who wonder.

There are those who catch a glimmer of the light that is Jesus Christ—and it creates a wistful, wondering hunger and yearning deep within them.

A Culture Within a Culture

Sometimes in my teaching, I describe marriage based on the precepts of God’s Word as a “culture within a culture.” We are living in a day and time when marriage is devalued, minimized, trivialized, and even scorned. It is an era of history when marriage vows are shallow and fragile and may be quickly abandoned for any vague, emotional reason—or for no reason at all. We are living in a world where the truths and principles of God’s eternal Word are rejected, mocked, belittled, or just plain ignored.

That’s the culture.

That’s where you and I live today.

In years past, preachers and Bible teachers used to warn that our nation was entering twilight—that the light was beginning to fade. Now it seems more like we're in the pitch-black of midnight.

Nevertheless, a Christian marriage based on the precepts of God's Word can become a mini-culture of its own that refuses to be conformed to the larger culture. It resists being assimilated or swallowed up by the darkness, no matter how great and prevailing that blackness may be. It is so strong, so resilient, so compelling that it both impacts and influences those who observe it. Those who drive by on the dark highways see its light from afar and wonder what it's all about.

Rather than being swallowed up by the darkness, that marriage, that home, becomes a radiant, shining light.

Those who create such homes declare, "The world around us may be going in this direction, but we're going another way. It may be fashionable—even the expected thing—to have both parents bringing home income, for the woman to work outside the home from the time her child is six weeks old, but we're going to put a higher priority on the care of our little ones. We are not going to be conformed to this world. We're not going to let the world squeeze us into its mold."

Rather than listening to the counsel of talk radio, magazines, or the neighbor over the fence, these stalwarts find out what God has to say about the role of a man and the role of a woman in marriage. They discover what God has to say about communication between husband and wife, about finances, about the sexual relationship, about the raising of children. They learn and put into practice the truths from His eternal Word so that their marriages will last a lifetime.

We can become these people, Beloved of God.

And then, at the end of time when we stand before the Lord as a wife or a husband, a mother or a father, we will have no regrets. We will have done our best, and we will have done it His way. It may not come out like a Hollywood production with a couple walking into the sunset with a great orchestral theme welling up all around us. It may not boast all the thrills and chills that romance authors like to portray in their novels. But we will have the peace, contentment, and satisfaction of knowing that we did it God's way.

In the end, our standard of success has to be *His* standard of success, not the world's!

God's Standard of Success

What is God's standard of success? It is obedience to His Word.

Just hours before Joshua was to lead the nation of Israel into Canaan, a land filled with great promise and great peril, the Lord gave him the following charge. His words continue to bring strong help to you and me as well.

Be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:7-9).

The Lord was saying to Joshua, "Do you want to succeed in this endeavor? Do you want to conquer territory for Me in a land filled with giants and people who hate the very mention of My name? Then you will need to invest time thinking about My Word. Don't let it go in one ear and out the other. Think about it. Ponder its logic. Consider its promises. Meditate on the One behind every word of it. Remember, it is *My* Word, not man's word. It is for all seasons, all times, all cultures, all situations, all ages, all people. It doesn't alter; it doesn't change. It is never out of date and never out of fashion. Remember that, Joshua. Meditate on these things and put them into practice. And then you will have success."

The book you hold in your hands is about success in marriage...about building a marriage without regrets. To find success, we must do precisely as the Lord told Joshua on the east side of the

Jordan: *We must meditate on God's commands and precepts concerning marriage.*

He has not left us in the dark! In His timeless Word, God has given us wonderful specifics about the role of the man and the role of the woman...about how to bring up our children...about handling finances...about responding correctly in the sexual relationship...about communication between husband and wife...and even about divorce and remarriage.

The people of Israel, remember, were about to enter a culture completely hostile to everything God had taught them in His Word. The nations in that land sacrificed their children to idols. They engaged in every imaginable sexual perversion. It was a culture ripe for the judgment of God. For families to succeed in such an oppressive environment would require two very important things: a wholehearted commitment to know and follow God's Word and courage.

Courage to go God's way when everyone else was going the other way.

Courage to believe God would provide and protect in an aggressive, intimidating culture.

Courage to do the right thing even when cutting cross-grain against outward pressures—and even inward desires.

It really comes down to a choice, doesn't it? In his final days, Joshua verbalized that choice very clearly to the people. "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD," he told them, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

It's the same for you and me in our marriages and homes. We may find it disagreeable or old-fashioned or inconvenient or financially limiting to pursue God's precepts for the home. We may find it much easier simply to conform to the world's standards and go along with the flow. But in the end, Beloved, that choice will bring regrets. When we stand before Jesus Christ, we will be compelled to look back over a lifetime of missed opportunities, needless suffering, and wasted potential.

But if we choose with Joshua—if we say, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”—we will find ourselves on a pathway that invites God’s richest blessings. We will enjoy His peace, His power, His presence, and His provision—even through the darkest days and deepest trials.

And when we stand before our Lord, there will be joy...with no regrets.

This book can help you start on that journey.

CHAPTER
1

A MARRIAGE
WITHOUT REGRETS



MY PLATINUM WEDDING BAND ROLLED ROUND and round on the recreation room floor. Tom dropped to his hands and knees, looking for the diamond engagement ring I had thrown at the same time.

I watched him in the shadows, groping for the rings. *That's all he cares about?* I asked myself. *The rings? Doesn't he know what's just happened? I've taken off my wedding band! Doesn't he realize—hasn't it occurred to him—that it has never been off my hand since the day of our wedding?*

I heard him murmur from the floor, “That’s a very expensive diamond.”

Feeling like a detached spectator, I stood there watching him. No crying. No screaming. No hysteria. I was beyond all that. In fact, I felt nothing. I might as well have been chiseled from a block of ice. As far as I was concerned, the marriage was over.

The quarrel had begun upstairs in our bedroom. For the first time in the six years of our marriage, Tom had slapped me across the face. I had cut him down with yet another hateful remark, and he had lost control. As the warm, salty blood from my nose touched my lips, I felt strangely calm—and ice cold. “It’s over, Tom. You’ve done it.” I grabbed my pillow, tore a blanket off the bed, and headed for the rec room couch. We were now downstairs, and I didn’t intend to go back up those stairs. Ever. Tom followed immediately, pleading, his eyes wide with panic. It wasn’t what he wanted. He “hadn’t meant to hurt me.” He’d “just lost his head.”

I wasn’t listening. He might as well have been talking to the wall.

In Retrospect

I’ve had lots of time to look back on that terrible night. In later years, I wondered if Tom at that moment was reliving the horror of an incident from his boyhood—a night when his mother stormed out of his parents’ bedroom never to return. Was this why my strong husband followed me downstairs, pleading? Did that explain the fear in his eyes? Was he remembering the panic and stress of his boyhood, when he sat on the stairway in the darkness listening to his parents scream bitter words at one another? Was he recalling the inevitable drinking sprees, the cold hostility of a couple who continued to live under the same roof but in separate bedrooms the rest of their lives? Was he remembering the hatred and animosity—and the humiliation—when the drunken arguments spilled out in front of friends and guests? Could he have been wondering what would become of our two precious sons he had tucked in bed that night while I was out modeling in a swank restaurant?

I don’t know what Tom was thinking. At the time, I really didn’t care. Nor did I stop to consider how a divorce might hurt our young boys. At the time, I was totally focused on me—too hurt, disappointed, and angry to give those things a second thought. I just wanted out of that marriage, and the quicker the better.

Tom slept alone that night. For the first time in our marriage, I willfully moved out of our bedroom. The next day we called our priest. He

came over, listened to our sad tale, and told us he thought it would be best for us to separate.

That was that.

No words of counsel, no advice from Scripture, and not a single word uttered in prayer. He never talked about how to make our marriage work, never explained what God said about marriage, never mentioned the power, hope, and healing available in Jesus Christ, and never asked us to consider the effect it might have on our sons. In his mind it was cut and dried: We were unhappy and unfulfilled, so we ought to go our separate ways.

I suppose that was what I had wanted to hear, and yet...it was still a bit of a shock. Somehow, I'd never thought it would come to this.

What Happened to the Dreams?

All through my growing up years, I had wanted only one thing: to be divinely in love, happily married, raise wonderful children, and live the good life. When I was in nursing school and met Tom, I was just sure that's how it was going to be. He would succeed in his career, and I would excel as a homemaker. We would go to church, someday belong to the country club, and live just like "Father Knows Best" or "Ozzie and Harriet." I wanted a good marriage—one like my parents had.

I never once heard Mom and Dad quarrel. If they ever spoke cross words, it was never in my presence. What I do remember is hearing Mom call from the kitchen, "I love you, Jack!" And I remember Daddy walking by, patting her on the bottom and saying, "I love you, Leah."

Sometimes when a familiar tune would come on the radio, my mother would leave the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron, and look invitingly at my father—who never needed a second invitation. Daddy would take her in his arms, and they'd dance from the kitchen to the living room. Every now and then he'd hold her at arm's length, then dramatically sweep her back into his embrace...just like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the movies. After I thought they'd had sufficient time to be mushy, I'd tap Mother on the shoulder and cut in to dance with Daddy.

It was a Pollyanna world, and I loved every moment of it. *That* was what I wanted. *That* was what I dreamed of. It was what my first-grade readers promised in their stilted words and primary colors. “Run, Jane, run. Run, Spot, run. See Daddy come. See Daddy come.” And there in the picture was Daddy coming home to a hero’s welcome, hat on his head, tie loosened, briefcase in his hand, a happy family waiting to greet him.

But it wasn’t like that for me. It hadn’t turned out that way at all—and I couldn’t understand why. It had all begun with such promise.

When I first met Tom, it was as though he stepped right out of my dreams. Of all the Phi Deltas I dated while cheerleading for Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio, I knew that this tall, handsome basketball star was “The One.”

We talked about God on our very first date. Our values seemed to mesh perfectly. Here was a man with depth of character, nobility of purpose, and a firm set of principles. I knew instinctively that Tom would always be faithful to me.

He was a gentleman—polished, confident, well-dressed. He knew his way around the country clubs, cut a handsome figure in a dinner jacket on the dance floor, and never bragged about his accomplishments. He never told me he’d been offered professional baseball contracts to pitch for the Yankees, Phillies, Pirates, and Indians. Nor was I aware that Casey Stengel had personally pursued Tom with an extraordinary contract. (I discovered these things only when Tom’s mother showed me a scrapbook she had kept on her son.) He never told me of his academic achievements, or that his classmates in University School had voted him “Most Likely to Succeed.” Tom abhorred bragging—and visibly cringed at the way his father flashed his money, tipping all those who called out his name as he moved through the Lakewood Country Club or the Cleveland Athletic Club.

“Good evenin’, Mr. Goetz.”

“So good to see you, Mr. Goetz.”

Dad Goetz had come up the hard way—and had made it! He was dear in his own special way, and I did love him. While he clearly relished all the attention his generosity brought, it made Tom wince.

When our engagement was announced, my picture appeared on the front page of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer's* society section. Was I impressed! My family had never been “society.” Tom and I flew off for a romantic honeymoon in Bermuda at the crown jewel of the hotels. I was ecstatic, absolutely elated. This was the honeymoon I’d dreamed of, had talked about in the nurses’s dorm at Saint Luke’s School of Nursing. We girls would curl up on our beds, hug our knees, and gab about marriage, and how wonderful it would be. We didn’t talk about sex—although it was never far from our minds. Those things weren’t openly discussed in our circles.

We simply dreamed of romance and talked about the relative merits of different negligees...red or black...slinky or sweet...satin or lace. In such a garment, we would offer to our husbands our virginity. It was a gift I vowed to keep for my husband long before I knew who he would be.

How quickly a lifetime of dreams can be deflated!

We arrived in Bermuda on the second night of our honeymoon. And there in that idyllic setting, my new husband sat me down, looked me in the eyes, and said, “Kay, you are now Mrs. Frank Thomas Goetz, Jr., and these are the things I don’t like about you. I want them changed.”

My bubble burst, pricked by those few devastating words. Words I could never imagine my father saying to my mother in a hundred years. Just that quickly, I wanted to run away. To erase the bad start and begin again. To reach for another chance at love. I suddenly realized the devastating truth: *I was not loved unconditionally; I was not adored. Tom wasn't even pleased with me!*

What a horrible, sinking feeling to realize I had made the biggest mistake of my life—and now I was trapped. Trapped forever because at that juncture of my life, divorce was simply not an option.

Now it was six years later and divorce definitely *was* part of my vocabulary. I wanted out of this roller-coaster marriage as quickly as possible. Oh, yes, there had been interludes of peace and a measure of happiness...interludes when Tom seemed to find himself and experience some contentment. In spite of myself, my hopes would soar again; I dared to dream that we might make a life of it after all. But then, with

sickening suddenness, the roller coaster would plunge over the edge again, and Tom would plummet into depression. Again and again, I felt myself going down with him—falling, falling—with no strong arms to hold me. Was there any end to this nightmare ride? What would happen if I jumped out somewhere along the way and just brought all my disappointments to an end?

I hadn't realized Tom was manic-depressive. Even as a nurse, I'd totally missed it. All I knew was that I wanted out. Forget the girlhood dreams. Forget Pollyanna. Forget the society page. Forget "till death do us part." I would find someone else. I would have a marriage without regrets.

In spite of it all, I really had no other goal. My only ambition was to be loved and happily married.

Crucial Questions

What went wrong? What could I—we—have done differently?

As you read these words, you might find questions just like these on your mind. Maybe it's because you have a good marriage—and want to keep it that way. The dreams are still intact and you don't want anything to cast a shadow over your happiness. What can you learn from a book such as this? How can you make sure that no matter what happens, you will have no regrets when you stand before God?

Then, again, perhaps you've found yourself asking those questions about your own marriage. Life hasn't turned out the way you hoped and expected. Somewhere along the way, you came to the disconcerting realization that your "beloved" wasn't as charming or lovely as you'd once thought. Your marriage is "ho-hum," and you both know it. You exist together under the same roof and file a joint tax return, but there is precious little that is "joint" in your emotions, your dreams, your activities. For the most part, each of you goes your own separate way.

Maybe you're concerned because the passion and joy you knew at the beginning of your marriage has disappeared. The flame of love has so died that you can touch the coals without burning yourself. They're barely warm. You've fanned and fanned the fire, but to no avail. You're

fanned out. You're perplexed, wondering if your marriage is salvageable or if you ought to just shovel up the embers, dump them in the garbage, and go looking for new wood.

Maybe the marriages of one of your children, some of your friends, and someone you're counseling are heading for the rocks. What do you tell them? How do you help them? How do you take what's wrong and turn it around? How do you help them work it out in a biblical way so that there are no regrets, no backlash that will bring them to their knees enslaved in regret?

How?

That, dear reader, is what this book is all about. There is one key reason why Tom and I got started off on the wrong foot in our marriage and ended up walking off the dance floor. There is a reason why divorce shattered our home and Tom ended up committing suicide. It is because each of us went into marriage with our own set of ideals and expectations without once bothering to find out what ideals, standards, and precepts *God* had set for the marriage relationship. I had my notions of what kind of a husband Tom should be, and he had some expectations about what kind of wife I should be.

But neither of us bothered to check with God.

Neither of us took the time to ask the Creator of human life and architect of marriage what *His* opinion might be.

We didn't begin our marriage by asking Him, and when things got rough and turned desperate, we didn't ask Him even then.

Tragically, it never dawned on either of us that God might have a design for husbands and wives, and a good plan to protect and bless our marriage.

The Design

These things are true for many Christian marriages today. We enter into the relationships with our own set of expectations and desires, and when our spouses don't live up to them, we find ourselves disappointed, hurt, frustrated—and maybe even looking for the back door. Sometimes it seems that the harder we try to improve our marriages, the

worse matters become. And so we walk away...only to find that the nagging doubts and aching regrets are with us for the rest of our lives.

God designed marriage to be a permanent, meaningful, truly fulfilling, and—yes—*joyful* relationship. Yet if we don't know His plans, if we haven't cried out for His counsel, we're likely to miss that fulfillment.

Even if your mate insists on walking away, calling it quits, and abandoning you, you *still* need to understand God's precepts and alternatives for you. *What does the Word of God say?* That will always be a relevant question. Does the Bible guarantee that every marriage is salvageable? And if not, where does that leave you? Condemned to a lifetime of lonely singleness? Maybe yes, maybe no. It all depends on what God says. Either way, if you want peace of mind and quietness of heart which cannot be purchased by anything but obedience, you need to know how God's eternal Word speaks to your situation.

And it does. God's Word is alive and powerful, and like a powerful, radiant lamp it will roll back the shadows and show you where to turn, what to do, and how to weather any situation life may throw at you.

More than that, the Bible will show you how to live in such a way that you will one day stand before Jesus Christ as a valiant warrior with no regrets in your heart. Come what may, you will have the confidence that you have lived in obedience and have done all that could be done to make your marriage a success.

In a very real sense, this is a holy moment. If you choose to read this book and pursue the precepts of God's Word for your marriage, you're beginning down a path that will change your life and the lives of those in your family. The effects will reach into eternity.

If I were sitting beside you right now, Beloved, I would say, "Let's pray together." Can we do that right now—even through the pages of this book? Let's approach our loving Father together....

Father, we are about to broach a subject that is causing such distress and turmoil, such pain and disillusionment in so many lives these days. Hopes, dreams, and expectations of a good and happy marriage are being shattered daily. Marriages all around

us seem to be failing, and we don't know what to do to help. Father, more than ever before, we need Your wisdom, Your insights, and Your counsel.

Thank You for assuring us that when we turn to You, rather than to the arm of flesh or the wisdom of man, You will guide our steps. When we trust in You, You will make us like a tree planted by streams of water, with green leaves and fruit even when drought withers all around. Your Word is truth!

Together, Father, we pray that you will lead and guide us into all truth. We want to know Your mind and Your heart. We want to be able to stand in the holy presence of our Lord Jesus Christ one day without regrets. You, Lord, are the One who created us male and female. You ordained marriage and called it a covenant relationship that must not be broken or violated. We long to love and be loved by our mates—to have wonderful, fulfilling marriages. And we are so thankful that you understand this longing, even when we can't put it into words.

Show us, Lord, what to do to make our marriages all that You intend them to be. Teach us Your timeless precepts about marriage, and we will walk in them, no matter what others may say or do. We thank You for Your assurance that “nothing is impossible with God.” We cling to that assurance this day, Lord, and it is on this basis that we come to You in the name of the One who sits at Your right hand interceding on our behalf, Your Son and our own Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.