

A Wife
After
God's Own
Heart

ELIZABETH GEORGE



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*For Jim—
Thank you for being
a husband after God's own heart
so that I could grow into
a wife after God's own heart!*

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Becoming... A Wife After God's Own Heart

Often, especially in marriage conferences when my husband, Jim, and I both speak, we spend the first session sharing our testimonies in tandem. It is such a riot, because we couldn't have come from more opposite backgrounds!

For instance...

- We met on the University of Oklahoma campus when Jim was walking toward his pharmacology lab...and I was on my way to ballet class.
- Jim is an only child, and I have three brothers.
- Jim's mother was a stay-at-home mom, and mine taught six classes of English literature every school day for most of her life.
- Jim's mother cooked all day every day to provide dinner fit for a king and his prince. Meanwhile, at my house, my dad did the cooking—and the grocery shopping.

—After dinner, Jim's mother parked Jim and his dad in front of their favorite TV programs with a homemade dessert. Then she proceeded to wash the day's dishes and cooking utensils (by hand) and cleaned up the kitchen before she joined them. Meanwhile, in my home, my dad did the dishes and cleanup while my mom graded essays and book reports until midnight.

Oh, the list goes on—does it ever! But you can imagine what happened after Jim and I got married. When Jim arrived home from his part-time job or his classes, naturally he expected a meal to be ready and waiting for him.

Meanwhile, I was patiently waiting for him to get home so he could fix us something to eat.

After about a week, I realized *I—yes, me, myself, and I—*needed to learn how to cook! My first “dinner” was “homemade” beans and cornbread. Well, who knew you were supposed to wash the beans before you cooked them? That meal of dirt-, sand-, and rock-filled beans (except for the cornbread) went out in the trash.

As you can probably guess, Jim and I had a l-o-t of growing to do in the marriage department. Oh, we were happy. We got a puppy. We went on many whirlwind last-minute trips together. We pursued and completed our goal of each graduating from college—actually, on the same day. And then off we went on a thrill ride for the next four years, living in four different states as Jim advanced up the corporate ladder in his job as a pharmaceutical salesman, while I worked at an odd assortment of jobs so we were free to move for Jim's job almost once a year.

But once we landed in Los Angeles and visited all the popular sites, all the fun seemed to roll to a stop. Because Jim was

routinely promoted within the vastness of Los Angeles County, we didn't move anymore.

We had just “moved” out of the excitement phase of marriage to a “Now what do we do?” phase.

Now that we were “settled” (against our wills and desires), we did things settled people do. In addition to our full-time jobs we started to stuff our evenings with a variety of activities. For instance...

We competed in bridge tournaments. We took a class to learn how to play chess. We joined a dinner group that rotated through the members' homes for the “courses” of a gourmet dinner once a month. Jim enrolled in a woodworking class, purchased a load of tools, and built two beautiful bookcases for our home. Next he joined a photography class—which, of course, required a better camera and rolls and rolls of film.

Oh, and in the midst of all this, we even took a marriage class taught by a husband and wife who were both marriage counselors!

Each of these ventures was exciting and challenging and fun. None of them was evil or bad or wrong, and we were growing in a variety of ways in a variety of areas. But at the end of each six- or eight-week class, the big question was, “Now what?”

Looking back, we realize we were stuffing our free time with a lot of “things” that were somewhat empty.

Operation Family

After five years of marriage we began to want to start a family—and had two girls thirteen months apart. We were ecstatic, if not a little overwhelmed.

Well, “a little overwhelmed” quickly advanced to “totally

overwhelmed.” I felt like I had twins (although moms of twins are always quick to let me know, “No, you didn’t have twins!”). I was on mom duty 24/7. There was no longer any such thing as a good night’s sleep, let alone a day off. There was no sleeping in or snoozing when a baby—or two—was crying her lungs out. No more eating whenever Jim and I felt like it. No more relaxing in a nice long hot bath. Shopping came to a screeching halt (which had some good side-effects when it came to managing our money—see chapter 5). Personal hygiene and grooming went out the window until I mastered a few life-saving shortcuts. And a stay-at-home date of watching a little TV on Friday or Saturday nights? Forget it. Neither Jim nor I could stay awake for even a one-hour program, let alone a two-hour movie.

Unfortunately I enrolled in a master’s-degree program for getting a license in marriage and family counseling, of all things! What marriage? And what family? I know now that I was looking for help with my lackluster marriage and unfulfilling family life. I was searching for answers, solutions, and guidance that would help make things better.

Yes, I needed help—and went looking for it. But this was definitely *not* the season to take on a full-time educational degree program with two little ones under three years old. My days were spent driving my girls to babysitters and day-care centers, then heading for my classes. Once we arrived home after dark, I threw food on the table, threw my girls into the bathtub, threw them into bed—and pulled out my classwork for another all-nighter of reading and writing papers.

All of this helter-skelter activity and my new frenetic lifestyle led to an unforgettable moment I have never forgotten. It happened in the kitchen after I had returned from school with my girls, trying to get a meal prepared before Jim arrived home from work. I don’t remember what triggered it, but both of my

little ones were distraught and crying. One was holding on to my left leg, the other to my right leg. Both were looking up at me, pleading and in agony. What did I do? I looked up at the ceiling and screamed to it, “There has got to be more to life than this!”

The One Missing Element—the Most Important Element

Was I crying out to God? If I was, I didn't know it. But I believe with all my heart that God heard that cry.

Amazingly our lives began to take a little tiny turn—that ultimately ended up becoming a full U-turn. Easter was coming up, and Jim asked, “Hey, what do you think about us going to a church Easter Sunday?” I had no problem with that. During my growing-up years, my parents made sure everyone in my family went to church—and youth group.

So off we went that Sunday to a packed Easter service. During the next week a pastor from that church visited our home and shared about Jesus Christ and His sacrifice and how I could know Him and become a child of God. I politely listened, thanked him, and got back to whatever I was doing before he had arrived.

But it was a seed! And God made sure that seed got watered as I began to take our two little ones to church on the Sundays Jim had his Army Reserve meetings. Soon Jim and I started attending a church and became a part of a Sunday school class. On one of Jim's Reserve weekends, our teacher announced he was being transferred and that we, the people in the class, would have to teach the class until the church appointed another teacher.

There I was, alone. And here it came—a clipboard with a pen for each person or couple to sign up to teach the class for one week. I froze, wondering, *What should I do?* All I could

think of was that two years ago, one of the doctors Jim called on in his pharmaceutical work had given him a religious book. Jim had read the book and asked me to please read it. I knew I would, because Jim doesn't ask me to read very many books. So two years after Jim made his request, I signed up for us to do a review of this book, thinking, *Now all I have to do is locate that book in our house, and, of course, read it!*

Well, all I can say is that through some unusual circumstances, I ended up reading a book filled with Bible verses about nothing but Jesus Christ. The book told me clearly who Jesus is, what He had done, that He was coming again, and how I could know Him. Late one night when I was halfway through the book, I was compelled to do something about what I was reading. Not knowing what I was doing—or what I should do—I looked up at the ceiling in our family room and said, “Hey, I believe this!”

To fast-forward, Jim and I both gave our hearts, souls, and lives to Christ. Immediately after our first visit to a powerful Bible-teaching church, we went to the bookstore on the church campus and purchased matching Bibles and started reading them that afternoon while our girls napped.

An Exercise for You as a Wife

There was one more thing that I purchased that glorious Sunday after church in the on-campus bookstore. While Jim and I were paying for our two new Bibles, I noticed a glass fishbowl on the countertop that was filled with highlighter pens. I stood there looking at the assortment of colors, and reached in and pulled out a gold highlighter pen. Then I prayed, “God, I’m the new kid on the block and I don’t know anything about You. Tomorrow I’m going to start marking everything in my Bible with this gold marker pen that has to do with You, God.”

Well, who knew the entire Bible is about God? And who knew it would take six gold highlighter pens to make it through the Bible one time? Wow, talk about a life-changing exercise!

And as I stood in the checkout line hugging my Bible and gold marker pen, I reached into that glass bowl again and grabbed a pink highlighter pen, this time praying, “And God, I don’t know anything about what it means to be a Christian woman, wife, and mother. Tomorrow I’m going to mark everything in my Bible with this pink marker pen that has to do with my role as a woman, wife, and mom.”

If you are wondering where I found the information I am sharing in this book about being a wife after God’s own heart, it came from my study of what I call “the pink passages” in the Bible. In this book, I am passing on to you a number of key verses for you as a wife. Your first priority in life is, of course, God—to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). Your first priority each and every day of your life is to love and follow and obey God. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

This is why the chapter on “Growing in the Lord” is chapter 1. Growing in the Lord is thrilling and essential for your heart and absolutely vital in your marriage. Not only does your goal and decision to grow in the Lord advance and encourage your relationship with God, but it makes you a better wife—a godly wife, a wife who knows what God’s Word says to wives...and does it.

And your second priority as a wife is your husband. In Titus 2:3-5, the Bible says the older women are to teach the younger women to (1) “love their husbands,” followed by (2) “love their children” (verse 4).

To lay a solid foundation for yourself in your role as a wife to your wonderful husband, try this exercise. Do as I did and mark every verse you read every day that presents information about being a Christian woman and wife and mother. Day by day as you read God's Word, you will learn and know what the Bible says about you and your roles as a woman. You will have, in your heart and your mind, God's instructions to guide you as you live out the days of your marriage as a wife after God's own heart.

Now, turn the page, and let's see what becoming a wife after God's own heart is all about. What really matters in your marriage?

Growing in the Lord

*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added to you.*

MATTHEW 6:33

Whenever I think about the first 30 years of my life, I automatically think, *That's when I did everything wrong!*

Why would I say this?

Because, my new reading friend, that's when there was no rhyme or reason for my life. That's when there were no guidelines for my life, no instructions for how to live my life. That's when I wanted what I wanted and did things my way. In short, that's when I did not have a relationship with God...which is why I am choosing to begin our book here, with God as the Number One way to make a difference in your life and in your marriage.

And what was it that I wanted for those three difficult decades? I wanted a lot of things, and most of them were things that every person wants. My personal "I Want" list included happiness, fulfillment, a life of meaning and contribution. I

don't remember wanting fame or fortune, or to climb any corporate ladders or shatter any glass ceilings. No, I wanted what I'm sure you also want—a life that matters and counts. I dreamed of a life of joy and graciousness. And thrown into my dreams was, of course, a happy marriage that was satisfying and exciting.

I did marry at age 20, as I was beginning my senior year of college. Jim was 22 and entering his senior and fifth year in pharmacy school. There was the usual stir and flutter and frenzy of emotions that accompanies every new budding love relationship. Ours was truly love at first sight as we passed and smiled at each other regularly on our way to and from classes. Then came the “blind date” in November...with a proposal for marriage on Valentine's Day...and the wedding on June 1. Wow, what a whirlwind of excitement!

Things went well for a while. And then... Well, both Jim and I would tell you that after eight years, things became awfully empty and got pretty rocky, even after two children were added to the makeup of the George family.

Then a “miracle” occurred, and we became a *Christian* family. By God's grace, our hearts were opened to the truth of Christ...and by God's grace, we responded to that truth. And, beloved, that has made all the difference in the world! Things have never been the same. Before becoming Christians, we were like a couple with a great car...only we had no key. We couldn't get the car started. We couldn't make it work. We couldn't use it. We couldn't go anywhere.

My friend, a relationship with God *is* the key, the key to all of life, including your marriage. And that's what this chapter is all about—growing in the Lord. And that means learning what God, the Creator of all things *and* of marriage, has to say. You see, God and God alone possesses the instruction book for your

marriage, and He's made it available to you. He knows what makes a marriage work. And He's written His divine guidelines right in the Bible. We'll look at what God has to say to you and me as wives in the chapters to come, but for now, let's see why it's important for you as a wife to grow in the Lord.

First Things First

I've chosen as our theme verse for this chapter a beloved favorite of many Christians. They are the words—and the heart!—of Jesus. They were spoken to His disciples and His followers. And they address the concerns of daily life. After telling His listeners not to worry, Jesus said they should instead “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Now, how does Jesus' teaching apply to you and me as wives? Well, married or single, *every* Christian is to put first things first. *Every* Christian is to seek the Lord first and foremost. God expects *every* Christian to grow. For instance...

- The apostle Peter wrote that we are to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).
- He also urged you and me to, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may *grow* thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).
- And the writer of Hebrews, in Chapter 5, chastised his readers with this scathing rebuke: “By this time you ought to be teachers, [but] you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who

partakes only of milk...is a babe" (verses 12-13). In other words, these people had not grown.

So how do we grow in the Lord? Answer: By putting God first. That's how spiritual growth occurs. And the most tried-and-true way to put God first is to read His Word, the Bible, and obey it. I like to think of spiritual growth as a three-step process. Keep in mind as you note them that all three steps are absolutely necessary to grow in the Lord. There are no shortcuts to spiritual growth.

Step #1—*Discover* through reading the Bible what God says about your life and how He wants you to live it. How is this done? By listening to God's heart through His Word. By reading and paying attention to the teachings in the Bible. By learning more about Him and His standards for righteousness.

Step #2—*Discern* through studying the Bible the meaning and implications of what you are reading. This is the point where you pray and seek to understand what God has said in the Bible.

Step #3—*Do* through heartfelt obedience what you have read and learned, discovered and discerned. This is the step where you do something about what you now know to be the will of God. This is where you put your knowledge into action in your life.

How's Your Heart?

Now, here's a question for you: How's your heart? Is your heart strong in faith...or weak? Is it a hot heart...or perhaps

one that's losing its fire? A woman—and a wife—after God's own heart is someone who follows hard after Him and close behind Him (see Psalm 63:8).

Therefore prayer and awareness of weak—or sinful—areas in your walk with God can be the beginning of even greater growth. God desires that we develop spiritual muscle so we are strong enough to stand against the powers of this world and to resist its pressures.

God asks that you and I “do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Here's another question for you: Are you satisfied with your current condition, spiritual maturity, and rate of growth? If so, you will grow no more. However, if there is a holy desire to grow in the Lord, to know God in a deeper, more intimate way, to be a woman after *His* heart, to strive toward His standards, to please Him, to be more Christlike, to identify, attack, and triumph over ungodly conduct and practices...then yours is the soft, responsive-to-God heart that will grow in the Lord.

God desires that we develop spiritual muscle so we are strong enough to be His kind of wife.

Deciding to Grow

I'm sure you are as busy as I am. Honestly, every morning when I wake up, I wonder if I am going to make it through the day in front of me—if I'm going to get everything done, if I'll have the time and energy it will require to take care of my responsibilities at home and to others. Then one day it hit me that *I* sit in the driver's seat concerning most of the structure of my every day, including growing in the Lord. *I* decide whether

the things of the Lord are really that important to me...or not. *I* decide whether I will make the effort to grow...or not. *I* decide whether I will schedule in the time it takes to grow, to meet with God regularly, to stop, look, and listen to Him by reading my Bible...or not.

The most important thing you must decide to do each and every day as a wife is to put the Lord first.

So, dear one, as you can see, you and I are our own best ally...or our worst enemy, depending upon our choices concerning spiritual growth. I remember the day some months after becoming a Christian that I wrote an impassioned letter to God about the issues in my life at that time. It was sort of my cove-

nant with Him to seek to grow—my commitment to grow in Him. It expressed the desires of my heart to mature as a Christian, along with my dreams of honoring and serving Him. I included the issues and areas in my life as a wife and mother that definitely fell under the “Needs Improvement” column. And I included the practices in my life that I labeled “Sin Areas,” purposing to be done with them. I prayed on paper that God, through His great grace, would come to my aid and sustain my deepest desires to grow.

I saved the spiral stenographer’s pad where I wrote my “Letter of Commitment” to God those many years ago. It has aged over the decades and how I thank God it was written in ink and not pencil! And now I want to ask two things of *you*. First, realize that this is the *commitment* section of this chapter. A section like this will occur throughout the book that asks you (and me!) to determine to grow, to determine to move out, to determine to take action, to determine to do the “putting off and putting on” of the practices and attitudes God calls us to, to determine

to pay the price to follow after God—to put Him first, whatever that cost may be and however high it may soar, no matter what. I know my heart is racing right this minute as I'm writing about the most important thing you and I must decide to do each and every day of our lives—to put first things first and make the choices that can help us grow in the Lord.

Second, I want you to write out in your own way, in your own words, and from your own heart, your personal commitment to God. Make a commitment—a decision—and determine to grow into the woman—and wife—you yearn to be—a woman after God's own heart, one who will do all *His* will (Acts 13:22). You'll be glad you did! And by the way, save it in a special place and read it often.

Tending Your Growth

Just as any skill or talent requires careful attention, so does your precious, priceless spiritual growth. What will it require?

Spiritual growth results from discipline. Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. Paul uses this illustration to explain that the Christian life takes hard work, self-denial, and grueling preparation. As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. The essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship equip us to run with vigor and stamina. Don't merely observe from the grandstand; don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning. Train diligently—your spiritual progress depends upon it.

Spiritual growth results from self-denial. At times we must give up something good in order to do

what God wants. Each person's special duties determine the discipline and denial that he or she must accept. Without a goal, discipline is nothing but self-punishment. With the goal of pleasing God, our denial seems like nothing compared to the eternal, imperishable reward that will be ours.¹

My dear friend, your "special duties" as a wife definitely require discipline and denial. And your *reward* for faithfully tending your growth? How about a gentle and quiet spirit that is precious in God's sight (1 Peter 3:4)? How about bringing honor to God as you live out His Word and His will for wives (see Titus 2:5)?

Reaping God's Blessings

Oops! I almost got ahead of myself. This is the *blessings* section, but I just had to mention those two spiritual growth truths. But let's go on and count—and consider—a few more blessings you will reap as you grow in the Lord. As you tend to your growth you'll find...

Your behavior changes. How? You will take on more of the character of Christ. You'll become more Christlike as God's Word and your walk of obedience work together to conform you to His image (Romans 8:29). In short, your life will be changed.

Your relationship with your husband changes. (And, by the way, this goes for your relationships with *all* people!) As your behavior changes (for the better, of course), and as you put more and more godly practices into place and heed more and more of God's commands, and as you grow in the Lord, you'll be a better wife. You'll manifest more of God's love, peace, patience, kindness,

and goodness. You'll display more of a spirit of meekness and gentleness, not to mention greater self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Now I ask you, why wouldn't these spiritual changes make a difference and bless you and others, beginning with your closest, most intimate relationship—your husband? They do...and they will!

And think of the difference such glorious changes will make in your dear husband's life. He'll be more relaxed...instead of waiting for the next blowup or attack. He'll be more comfortable with you, knowing the two of you can communicate peacefully. He'll be more appreciative of you as a wife as he senses your heartfelt concern and support of his endeavors. He might even talk to you more often and about deeper subjects (like the issues and challenges on his job), knowing he has a tender, sensitive, sympathetic, and wise listener to share them with, knowing he has a wife who will pray for him.

You are blessed. Growth is definitely rewarding. You'll experience unspeakable rewards as you surprise yourself by the way you handle life's challenges and difficulties, as you marvel at your peace of mind, as you (miracle of miracles!) hear yourself speaking with wisdom and expressing comfort and encouragement to your dear husband. Oh, you will most definitely be blessed! And when the rewards and blessings tumble in, there is only one response to make and one person to thank—and that is the response of thanksgiving and gratitude to *God* for His marvelous grace!

Heart Response



On one very special evening, Jim and I had the opportunity to dine with the founder of Harvest House Publishers. As we asked questions of this legendary man and he shared openly, he made a statement I'll never forget. He said, "Three words will sell a book—*simple*, *love*, and *home*."

My precious reading friend, I'm not selling anything, but here's how I'm thinking after reading what I've shared in this opening chapter. Growing in the Lord is *simple!* There is nothing new or earth-shattering here. Life-changing, yes, but you probably already know these simple (there's that word again!), foundational guidelines to spiritual growth. Like the cookbooks I received at my bridal shower, they were simple, basic, fundamental—the first-steps and the how-tos of cooking. As simple as simple can be. Aren't you thankful that God keeps it simple when it comes to such a mystical, mysterious element as spiritual growth? We only need to know what God says is the basic recipe for being a woman and a wife after His own heart. . . . and to faithfully follow His recipe. That's what "great creations" are made up of. And I'm praying that you and I will become just such creations as we faithfully follow these very few-but-simple steps for growing in the Lord!

Little Things That Make a Big Difference

1. Read your Bible every day.

Keep in mind that something is better than nothing, so aim for at least five minutes a day of Bible reading. That's about how long it takes to read one chapter in your Bible. Because of the subject matter of this book, and especially that of the next chapter, I suggest this schedule for your first five days:

Day 1. Genesis 1

Day 2. Genesis 2

Day 3. Genesis 3

Day 4. Ephesians 5

Day 5. Colossians 3

Then go back and begin at Genesis 4 and finish the book of Genesis one day at a time, one chapter at a time.

2. Pray for your husband three times every day.

Pray before he wakes up, at noon, and right before he comes home from work. Of course it will be easy to repeat this exercise every day for a week. Then, of course, you'll want to do it for life!

3. Plan to go to church this week.

Whether you are a little rusty on your church attendance, haven't been going at all, or don't know where to go, planning to attend this week will set your personal church wheels in motion. Place this all-important "date"

on your calendar. Then make any necessary phone calls to neighborhood churches or friends to find out where to go, the exact times of the weekly services, and any other information you might need regarding a couples' class or a program for your children. Then begin the night before to get your act together—lay out your Bible, organize for a no-hassle breakfast, and get to bed a little early.

It's important that you talk to your husband about your desire to go to church. Ask him if he would like to go along with you and see what it's like. Tell him you value his opinions. Also share the information you've gathered and ask for his input. If he doesn't want to go to church with you, that's okay. Your assignment is to be friendly, excited, and to make a move in the direction of attending church yourself. God's job is to work on your husband's heart. And, of course, you'll be praying for him!

4. Sign up for a Bible class or Bible study.

I know you're busy, but you should never be too busy to take care of your spiritual growth. This "little" exercise may require making a few phone calls, but it will be worth it when you experience the exhilarating joy of growing in the Lord, which is the most important way to make a big difference in your life and your marriage!

5. Purchase or borrow a Christian book on any topic.

Ask your friends and other Christians for their favorite Christian book titles. You can't buy every book, but you can create a list to remind you which ones to purchase in the future. And don't forget to make good use of your

church library. It's been said that "by spending 15 minutes a day you can read 25 books in a year."² Now, can't you scrape up 15 minutes today...and every day? As you learn from authors and teachers and scholars who share their knowledge and their passion for God and His Son, you, too, will grow in knowledge!

6. Write a letter of commitment to God.

On paper, pour out your desire to grow spiritually. It will only take you about five minutes...but those few minutes could set in motion the direction for the rest of your life!