

WHEN
WIVES WALK
IN
Grace

STEVE MCVEY



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*To Agape, whose sunrise tranquility, gentle pitch, and
soft, sweet melody of breath through her rigging
awakened this book in me.*

*To Jan, Carol, and Melanie, whose feminine
affirmation of early chapters convinced me that the
Breath giving voice to this book was real.*

*And to Roger and Al, whose amen backed
the verdict of their wives.*

Acknowledgments

As with each book I've written, *When Wives Walk in Grace* is a team effort. The initial motivation for the book has been all the wives who have asked me questions about marriage as I've traveled in ministry for almost 20 years. Your transparency and hunger to know your Father's heart on these issues were the seminal inspiration for what you now hold in your hand.

Appreciation for the hardworking team at Harvest House Publishers is an ever-present reality for me. So many people there have a hand in the making of a book, and I'm indebted to them all. I especially appreciate Gene Skinner, my editor for this book. His encouragement and editing skills have made it a better book.

I want to thank my Grace Walk team, those who stand with such enthusiasm to share the message of grace around the world. They aren't just co-laborers in the ministry, but are each dear friends who fan the flame in me constantly. What a thrill to serve together with such a great group! I can't imagine this journey without them.

Deep gratitude to my most precious treasure, Melanie. Her encouragement and suggestions have been of inestimable value with this book. As this book is released, we'll be celebrating 40 years of marriage. Wow, what lottery in heaven did I win!

Finally, my greatest thanks to the One who has put it all into place. None of it would matter without Him. He is the true Author and Finisher of my life, and to Him I give the greatest glory and praise. Thank You, Father.

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Foreword

Finally, a book written for women! I've always told Steve this was his specialty. After years of Steve counseling women, of studying, of teaching and preaching, this book has finally come about.

Steve and I have counseled women and prayed with them about their marriages, their children, their parents, and their in-laws; about abuse and betrayal, about hurts, failures, and disappointments. It's more than could be discussed in this one book, but one thing was always clear to me. I could listen with sympathy and compassion, I could hold hands and give hugs, I could cry with them...but the one thing I did not have was the gifting to see into the very heart of their problems. I could not see the truth that lay beneath all the shouting, the finger-pointing, the tears, and the lies. Not so with Steve. He has always had the ability to cut through to the heart of the matter. He is able to move all the clutter to the side and uncover the heart of the issue.

When Wives Walk in Grace is for women who need help—real help. Not trite words spoken in a religious, almost robotic way. Not someone quoting Scripture to them about the kind of Proverbs 31 wives they should be regardless of the kind of man they are living with.

You will find that this book cuts through all the empty Bible babble that's out there and points you toward a loving God who

embraces you and will carry you through the terrible times when you don't have a clue what to do or where to turn.

I know the thoughts many women have. "Men have always abused me in one way or another. I can't trust a man to give me the answers I need. I just can't listen to a man right now."

I understand that kind of thinking, having been abused by men myself at a very young age. It took me many years to find the healing that our Father offers and that my husband loved into me. I believe that this book has been written in such a way that you will hear the voice of your loving heavenly Father. You will know in your very soul that God Himself has spoken to you through the words written here.

Trust our loving God—that He led you to this book and that in it you will find many of the answers you have been seeking. Steve is a man of wisdom and integrity. He loves the Lord with his whole heart and loves people (me most of all!). It is from that baseline that he writes. You will see that he is a man you can trust—one who will not give you pat answers to your most difficult problems. I believe that as you read, you will hear real answers for very real circumstances.

I pray that *When Wives Walk in Grace* finds its way into the hands of women everywhere who struggle to be loved, to be heard, and to be valued. This is the book for which many have long waited. No book can give every answer to every problem, but this one will certainly take you to the One who does have all the answers.

May our loving and gracious heavenly Father bless you and complete the work He has begun in you. This book will help you discover the life God intends you to have—one of peace and joy.

Melanie McVey
Atlanta, Georgia

Introduction

I became a senior pastor in 1973 and have counseled wives for thousands of hours in the ensuing years. Since I left the local pastorate in 1994 and began traveling as an itinerate speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak to wives on six continents. I have noticed that across the world, these wives have asked me almost identical questions about their marriages. This fact has convinced me that the problems wives face today are universal.

As I helped women understand how the sufficiency of Christ is the key to seeing transformation in their marriages, I began to see that this book could fill a need. I realize that a multitude of books address marriage, and I affirm that many of those books have much good to offer. However, this book isn't like some of the self-improvement books that challenge the reader to personal change.

Unlike other books on the subject, *When Wives Walk in Grace* doesn't present behavioral prescriptions for strengthening your marriage. You certainly will find much practical direction in these pages, but the underlying theme of this book is that Jesus Christ can transform and strengthen your marriage by His grace. Principles don't produce miracles. But there is one Person who can transform anybody's life or home.

As you read this book, ask the Spirit of Christ within you to speak to you. As you trust Him, you will find yourself growing in hope, in practical knowledge, and in faith that your marriage can be

the relationship your Father intends for you to enjoy. The One who gave Adam and Eve to each other as gifts wants you and your husband to know and enjoy the gift He has given to each of you. Many wives have seen their marriages transformed by the things you will learn here. I pray that God's Spirit will lead you into that same sort of divine transformation.

Kissing Frogs

I've been on a zillion diets. A lot of men wouldn't admit that, but I'll acknowledge it to make a point here. It's not something I've been pleased about or successful doing for long. Even as I write these words, I would like to zap away the weight. It's just the way it has been for me all my adult life. Through the years I looked for the perfect diet, one I could live with indefinitely so I could keep the weight off. Every time I started a new one, I thought, "If I can just follow this regimen, I should be able to keep off the weight." The problem was that my if-then scenario never worked out the way I hoped it would.

You're probably familiar with the Atkins diet—the low-carbohydrate, high-protein approach. One day while I was on that particular diet and had deprived myself of carbohydrates for weeks, I discovered something so wonderful it almost brought tears to my eyes—Russell Stover sugar-free, low-carb chocolates. I had avoided chocolate for so long that I secretly feared I might never know such carnal pleasure again.

Then Russell Stover came to me. In the depths of my dieter's despair, he lifted me up from my sweetless wasteland and set my feet

on chocolate ground. May his name be blessed! Russell Stover delivered me from the prison of chocolate deprivation.

Long had there been civil unrest in the depths of my soul as my dictatorial and determined dieter's will held me in slavery. My unbridled yearning for chocolate had regularly chanted, "We shall overcome." Now at last my appetite cried out, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"

When I discovered these chocolates, I thought the millennial reign surely had begun. I felt as if the wrongs of the earth had righted themselves and all of life made sense again. The famine was over, and chocolate had returned to its rightful place in my life.

I bought low-carb caramels, a low-carb version of Butterfingers, low-carb peanut butter cups, low-carb chocolate-covered peanuts, and even a low-carb version of M&M's. It was a dieter's nirvana. With those first bites of chocolate, I savored the delicacy. Then for the next week, I ate it with no restraint—freely enjoying it with an innocence I believed hadn't been known since Adam and Eve walked naked in the garden and were not ashamed. After all, it was *low carb*!

I gorged on this cocoa-manna from heaven. I felt that truly I was experiencing life the way it was meant to be enjoyed. I never varied from my previous low-carb routine at mealtime. But between meals, Russell Stover low-carb chocolates and I became best friends.

When Monday rolled around and it was time for my self-imposed weekly weigh-in, I stepped out of the shower and onto the scales with no fear at all. After all, I was on a low-carb diet that surely had been working for me. But as I looked down at the number on the scales, I was shocked. I assumed I was misreading the digital display. I stepped off the scales to give them a moment to reset, and then I stepped back on again. The number was the same. My heart sank. Anxiety suddenly flooded my emotions, and the fat demons of the universe taunted me: "Gotcha, sucker! You gained more weight this week than you lost in the previous two weeks!"

“What happened?” Those words bounced around inside my fat head in derision. “I ate low carbs this week!” I protested. “*If* I eat low carbs, *then* I’m supposed to lose weight every week! That’s how this thing works!” I thought. Then it hit me. “The candy! Could it be the low-carb candy?” I quickly dressed and went immediately to the kitchen to read the nutrition panel on the bags again to make sure my memory of the carb count was correct.

As I stood there in the kitchen, barely dressed and with my wet hair still sticking straight up, I anxiously studied the nutrition information on the back of the candy bags. Then I saw it—the other column, the one that listed serving size and calories per serving. I was shocked.

Suddenly the scales made sense. I had indeed eaten low-carb meals all week. But with this candy, I had eaten enough calories to feed a family of three for a week in some poverty-stricken countries. It was a lesson hard learned—low net carbohydrates might still mean a lot of calories.

I thought that if I ate a low-carbohydrate diet, I would still lose weight. Was I ever wrong! “*If* I do this, *then* that will happen.” Most of us take that approach in many areas of our lives, and then we feel complete frustration or even anger when things don’t work out the way we had hoped.

Of Frogs and Princes

Do you know the story about the young maiden who kissed a frog that turned into a prince? Well, it’s a fairy tale. The real world is quite different. Take it from a guy who for 40 years has counseled a multitude of women about their relationships with men. Sometimes the real-life story is just the opposite from the fairy tale. More times than you might think, women feel as if they kissed a prince, but after they married him, he gradually turned into a toad. They came into marriage with high expectations, but as time passed, things didn’t turn out at all the way they had hoped.

Maybe you bought this book out of a sense of despair about your marriage. You may desperately want to see your husband change but wonder if it's even possible. If so, I have bad news and good news. The bad news is that a wife can't turn a toad into a prince regardless of how hard she tries, how much she prays, or how badly she wants to. No wife has that kind of power.

The good news is that even though *you* can't change your husband, he *can* be changed. By stepping away from the fairy-tale metaphor and into biblical truth, we can see the situation in a much more hopeful light. Your husband can be transformed. It may take a miracle, but thankfully, God is a miracle worker who can do what needs to be done in you, in your husband, and in your marriage. The One who created your man knows better than anyone else (including you) how he thinks and functions.

Not a Prescription, but a Person

In this book, I'm going to tell you some things that I've seen put to the test and that have worked. The reason for that is simple. I'm not going to give you a prescription for a strong marriage. Instead, I'm going to guide you to the Person who has a long track record of healing and restoring sick and broken people and relationships. Nobody is beyond the reach of God's amazing grace. Even if we run from God, eventually we discover that we can't outrun Him. I tell you this to give you assurance and hope. God can capture your husband's attention and do what He wants to do with him.

If you feel a sense of desperation about the way your husband behaves or doesn't behave, take heart. God cares about him even more than you do, and He cares about your marriage too. Maybe your husband is a believer, or maybe he isn't. We'll discuss both scenarios. God is big. In fact, He is bigger than the most stubborn person alive. So if you're wondering whether your husband can ever truly change, embrace hope now. He can't change himself, but he

can be changed by the One who created him. Let your desperation give way to a renewed hope in God.

Maybe you aren't feeling the kind of desperation I've just described. Perhaps you just want a stronger shared faith between you and your husband, but you're frustrated. Like me on the Atkins diet, you thought you were doing all the right things. You've read other books about marriage. You've read your Bible and prayed about your relationship with your husband. You've put in the work. You've tried to talk to your husband. Maybe you've even cried about your marriage at times. You've done all you know to do, and things still haven't changed. Now, you may not be desperate, but you are discouraged.

Let me assure you that you're not alone. My motivation for writing this book comes from this one need. I travel in ministry much of the time, and almost everywhere I go, wives want to talk to me about their marriages and children. Many are sincere Christian ladies who are frustrated because their husbands don't share their spiritual passion. They grieve the fact that their husbands aren't as "spiritual" as they want them to be. They imagine what life would be like if their husbands were the kind of godly men they want them to become.

Others are in dire situations and don't know what to do. They face physically abusive husbands, husbands who are emotionally absent, and husbands who try to get them to do things that are blatantly sinful. I'll address these and other such scenarios in this book.

If-Then Thinking

Some situations are more serious than others, but there is a common error many wives make. They believe that *if* they can only discover what to do to help their husbands become the men they ought to be, *then* life will correct itself and things will be fine. To their dismay, the if-then expectation they've imposed on their marriages isn't working out so far. Most haven't given up though. They think they

simply need to find the right approach and come at the situation again from a different angle and with renewed vigor.

I always feel sorry for these wives. If grades were given for sincere effort, they certainly would make the dean's list. The problem is that regardless of what they do or how well they do it, they can't change their husbands. It's just not going to happen. Only God can do that, and He'll do it in His time and in His way. Waiting for your mate to change can be maddening when you feel as if it's never going to happen.

If you've felt that way about your husband, this book will encourage you. I'm not going to offer you tips on how to change your husband. That's not what you need. Rather, I'll offer you hope based on the nature of your loving Father and on biblical truth. This book is filled with practical biblical guidelines, but it won't give you a silver bullet to end everything you think is wrong in your home and instantly make it right. Let's be honest. That's not realistic. Instead, I'll give you a platform of grace to stand on and a practical approach in relating to your husband while you wait for your Father to bring the transformation to your marriage you want to see. I'll also help you know what to do and what not to do in the meantime.

Although the title of this book suggests it is directed to wives, there will also be discussion here about rearing children. Much tension is created in marriages because of the stress associated with children. Several chapters will speak from different angles to the matter of parenting.

Grace Versus Self-Help

Grace—that's the key. Grace can be described in many ways, but for our purpose here, we will define it as the miraculous ability you possess (because of Christ living inside you) to be, do, and say the most helpful and effective things possible to move toward a strong marriage and family.

It's not about you and your knowledge or ability to change the

situation by doing the right thing. That's not grace at all. That's called self-help and is an expression of a fleshly and counterproductive self-sufficiency. There's a lot of that kind of talk going around in the modern church world, but it's not going to work. I hope that you've had enough of the methods prescribed by the religious gurus of our day and that you know firsthand that they don't work. If so, you're already ahead in the game because you realize that formulas for changing your marriage are misguided and doomed to fail every time.

I hope you don't think you just need to try harder or pray more or do something different. Again, it's not about you and your efforts. When things change (and they will), it will be obvious to you that God was the One who did it. That's the way grace works.

Jesus in You

The key here is Jesus Christ. It's all about what He wants to do—first in you, then in your marriage relationship, and finally in your parenting approach. Notice the order. It has to start with you personally. You won't be passive through this process. Christ will empower your actions as He works through you and in your home. I'm not suggesting that your husband doesn't need to change. I'm simply saying that you can't change him. Not now or ever.

If, on the other hand, you find your own attitudes and actions about your marriage being changed, you might be surprised by what ends up happening in your relationship. Frustration, conflict, or disillusionment in a marriage make it hard to see things clearly.

As you read through this book, your disillusionment will be displaced by hope. You will be equipped with grace-based truths and specific, helpful steps of faith. These grace-based truths and steps aren't principles per se. That's too academic and sterile. Marriages aren't built on formulas regardless of how good they are. Rather, we will discuss actual expressions of Christ working out His life in your marriage relationship. "Unless the LORD builds the house, the work

of the builders is wasted” (Psalm 127:1 NLT). How true. Christ is the One who has to do it, or you’re sunk. The good news is that He *does* intend to do it.

So we’re going to discuss how to let Him build up your marriage and strengthen you as a parent. I assure you that the things suggested in this book won’t simply be theoretical ideas. I will present you with very practical ideas in each chapter. I will offer you direction about certain things you can do, but you’ll do them in the power of Christ’s indwelling life and not by sheer self-determination. That difference may not sound like much now, but it’s actually *huge*, and you’ll see that clearly as we progress.

How do you change a frog into a prince? You don’t—but God can. Do you believe that? Okay then, are you ready to move forward? It all begins with the matter of whether God really cares about what’s going on in your marriage right now. Sometimes it seems as if He must not, or He would do something to change things. But things are often very different from the way they seem.