



The Fulfilled Marriage

THE THREE DOORS
FINDING DEEPER LOVE
and FULFILLMENT in
YOUR MARRIAGE

TED DEAN

FULFILLEDMARRIAGE.COM

Introduction

Over the years working with married couples, Esther and I have observed that many Christian couples we have known or who have participated in the *A Marriage Made in Heaven* course seem to have a sense that there should be something more to life and marriage. Even if couples have participated in marriage programs, courses, and retreats, and have committed their lives to the Lordship of Christ, they have not necessarily experienced nor do they necessarily fully understand what God has intended for them.

These feelings are real, and its implication has less to do with whether a couple currently has a mediocre, good, or even a great marriage; it has more to do with a longing for a fulfilled and meaningful life and marriage. What we all want knowingly or unknowingly is a continual harmonious relationship with our spouse and with our God. The greatest goal of our lives should be for oneness as husbands and wives, knowingly walking in love with each other, and in obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance for our lives and marriage. Success in life should never come at the expense of a marriage relationship, or a meaningful personal relationship with God.

We are here to tell you it is not only possible to have a marriage full of love and joy that comes from knowing you are exactly where God wants you to be, but also that your God stands at the wings ready to intervene and help you do just that. God has given us the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the one who wants to come alongside of us. He is the one that will make you successful in life, as God sees success.

It is our dearest hope that this book will clearly and scripturally convey not only practical solutions, but will also provide you the

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foundational underpinnings, the essential golden nuggets that will enable you to develop a deeper relationship with both God and your wife or husband.

In today's super busy lives, it is difficult to complete or give the required attention to any effort properly. Just getting by is not sufficient when we are talking about marriage and your walk with God. Jesus paid a heavy price for you to have this relationship and for you to succeed in fulfilling God's plans for your life.

In the following pages, we will try to answer many of your longings and questions, including, "Isn't there more to my life and marriage?" and "How can I find true fulfillment and a deeper love?" If you read, apply, and discuss with your spouse each chapter, meditate on the included Scriptures, complete the questions at the end of each chapter, and conduct the guided discussions with your spouse, you will, with the Holy Spirit's support, see your marriage enriched.

Each chapter will give you more understanding of what God expects, and an appreciation of the God-given unique longings your husband or wife has that only you can fulfill as a partner in your marriage covenant.

The goal for this book is to simply point the way, so that you can hear His voice directing you through His eternal words, and through His Spirit telling you, "This is the way. Walk in it."

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Part One:

Preparing or Repairing Your Life for Marriage

Fulfillment in life and marriage for Christians only comes when both spouses are walking daily with their God.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in

you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6



Part One: Preparing or Repairing Your Life for Marriage **Chapter One:**

The Three Doors

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

The First Door:

Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.
Psalm 5:2

It was Christmas Eve, 1994, I had recently returned to my home in Virginia Beach from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, my last U.S. Navy assignment in my twenty-eight-year career, when my doorbell rang. As I opened the door and said hello to the man dressed in a gray suit, without a word he quickly handed me an envelope, and then returned to his car and drove away. In the foyer, I closed the door and opened the envelope, and with dread saw that my wife had filed for divorce.



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Earlier that year while in Japan, I had discovered a hidden letter to my wife that showed that she was involved with another man. We had been married for over twenty-nine years, and before this I had no indication that my wife was unhappy, nor was I aware of any issues with our relationship that were adversely impacting our relationship. I was to find out later that it is not unusual for one spouse to be blindsided in this way. I loved my wife dearly, and she was the mother of our four children.

How could this have ever happened? I felt that my whole life had ended. I felt like I could never serve God again because of my failure, and the only thing that kept me going was the responsibility of being a single parent to my youngest son, whose mother lived literally on the other side of the world.

While still in Japan, after finding a “love” letter, and her refusal to participate in counseling, I went into a deep and dark depression. After several days with no sleep, I began to have severe chest pains and was rushed from my office in the embassy by ambulance to Tokyo University Hospital, Japan’s most revered hospital.

Tokyo University Hospital is world renowned, has the most advanced capabilities, and a high level of expertise in a broad range of medical specialties. For that reason, it has been designated as the U.S. President’s emergency hospital when he visits Tokyo. Upon my arrival, I was taken into the emergency room, where at least eight doctors met me, began to take off my clothes, and proceeded to attach me to the latest monitoring technology to determine what had been causing my chest pains.

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As I watched with wonder at the apparent special treatment I was getting, I began to wonder why the Japanese have so many doctors in their emergency rooms. Then it dawned on me that they were using me as hands-on training for treating the U.S. President because I was one of the managers from the U.S. Embassy. I quietly laughed to myself when I realized I was nothing more than a 200-pound guinea pig, or in military terms, a simulator, test module, or training device.

As a result of this special treatment I felt a great assurance that I was getting the very best care possible on the planet. When I was moved to a private room, this attention was continued for several days, including the nearly full-time attention from two young cardiologists. After many days, many doctors, many tests, many needles, little sleep, and very little privacy, I left the hospital with a diagnosis that I had suffered a minor heart attack and had arteriosclerosis. I had only one complaint about my treatment: the fish for breakfast. My taste buds just could not handle fish at six in the morning.

Since the United States Navy didn't have the facilities in Japan to conduct a proper and detailed cardiological assessment, they sent me to Hawaii with my eldest son as escort to complete a heart catheterization test to determine if I could remain on active duty. This test thankfully proved that I had not had a heart attack, but that the chest pains had come from the stress of my marriage troubles. In fact, the doctor said that my arteries looked like a baby's! One memorable benefit from all this came the next day, when my eldest son caught a large Pacific Blue Marlin off the coast of Honolulu. I still cherish the photo of my son standing proudly by his trophy.

Back in our embassy apartment I continued to be deeply depressed, but I also continued to pray for my marriage to be saved.

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Because of my emotional state, it seemed like my prayers were simply bouncing off the ceiling. Even though my feelings seemed to overwhelm me, I persisted in prayer as often, and as much as I could. When I was able to sleep, or more commonly when exhaustion brought it about, I had many vivid dreams in which I thought God seemed to be encouraging me, reassuring me that all would be well, and that my future was in His hands.

These dreams and my prayers did little to improve my morale until one evening while I was praying prostrate on the floor, suddenly the room filled with the overwhelming unmistakable presence of the living God. This experience would become the pivotal event that would lead eventually to my emotional and spiritual healing, and forever serve for the rest of my life to be the remarkable proof of God's faithfulness and unlimited love of His children. Even in the most adverse situations He stands beside us, and will never forsake or leave us. I never sought this experience, but I believe God wanted to demonstrate that He was in control of my future destiny, and His will for my life would not be deterred.

As I lay on the floor, I sensed immediately that God was going to speak to me. After what seemed a short time He did just that, although I cannot say I audibly heard a voice. I did not. Nonetheless, I clearly understood exactly what God was communicating to me. It was as if my spirit received His message and passed it directly into my mind. First, I understood that He loved me deeply and that I could trust Him for my future. After that I sensed He was not happy with my wife for what had transpired, but with that I sensed that I must not allow my heart to become bitter, and that I must forgive her.

Over the days, months, and years that have followed this encounter, I have come to see that guarding one's heart and granting

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forgiveness to those who have hurt us is not only the key to recovery, but that granting forgiveness is a privilege that allows us to mirror the love that God has demonstrated toward us.

Sacrificially forgiving another, without expecting a response from those who hurt us, gives us a glimpse into the ultimate meaning of our faith in the cross of Christ and the forgiveness that comes at the cost of His precious blood. Without the granting of unmerited forgiveness, we live counter to the Father's will and plans for us as His children. Our ultimate goal for life as we mature must be to become more and more like God's Son. Forgiveness is the awe-inspiring expression of God's love toward us. Living with unforgiveness in our soul causes us to remain locked-up, a prisoner of our own making.

Second Door:

Psalm 30:11-12

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

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After returning to Norfolk, Virginia, I retired from the Navy, and set up a household with my teenage son. Soon after arriving, I started attending First Baptist Church in Norfolk and eventually became active in a "Forty Something Singles Group." One of the regular activities for the group was a welcoming event for new members that took place at the home of the married couple that served as over-seers for the group. For one of these meetings, I was asked to attend the event to help welcome the new members.

At this meeting, I was talking to several members that had already arrived when there was a knock on the door, and because the married couple was preparing food in the kitchen, I told them I would answer it. Unlike the previous experience of answering a knock on the door, I was pleased that it wasn't a man dressed in a grey suit, but a breathtakingly beautiful woman in khaki trousers, a



flowered blouse, and with a smile that completely disarmed me and melted my heart. I remember thinking, *“I need to get over my shyness. There is something very special about this woman and about this encounter.”*

Little did I know that this moment would change my life forever for the good, and additionally make up many times over for all the past hurts and difficulties I experienced through my divorce. When I sat down again, I was thinking of how I could get over my shyness, impress her in some way, and get an opportunity to ask her for a date. It was then that the lady sitting next to me dropped her full beverage glass into my lap. I expect it was an accident, but to be honest, I thought it might have been done to stop me from looking at the new arrival. In spite of the accident, I still was able to get her attention. Many dates, countless hours spent together, and nearly three years later, she became my wife and we began our journey through life together.

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Never in a million years would I have ever thought that we would eventually serve in the marriage ministry, even though our divorces were clearly within biblical guidelines. My former wife clearly and unequivocally voiced that she was breaking the marriage covenant that she and I made with God, nearly thirty years before. Esther's husband passed away before we were married.

In many, probably most churches, Esther and I would not have been allowed to serve in a marriage ministry because of our past divorces. I want to thank our pastor, Dan Backens of New Life Churches in Tidewater, Virginia for the trust and support he has given us in allowing us the great blessing of helping others with their marriages. Even though we would eventually work with couples in marriage ministry, this would follow after nearly fifteen years of service to our church in several capacities, including being greeters, home group leaders, and as missions coordinators.

While previously stationed in Norfolk, I acquired a Master's degree in Biblical Studies from Regent University, and served as a “Tent Maker” (self-supporting missionary) in Japan for several years. Eventually as our church grew to a size that could support a full-time Missionary Pastor, there was no longer a need for Esther and I to serve in the missions ministry on a regular basis. We continue our involvement in missions as much as possible in several ways including short and long-term hospitality for our beloved missionaries when they are home, a medical mission to India (Esther is a registered nurse), and recently we traveled to Nepal to train pastors and church leaders for biblically-based marriage ministry.

After our engagement, Esther and I had mutually agreed that we would do as much as possible to make our marriage successful, including

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doing some form of activity or training to enrich our marriage annually. Right after ending our involvement in our church's mission's ministry, we learned of a marriage programⁱⁱⁱ that would be holding a facilitator training class in a nearby city. Not fully understanding what we were getting into, only with the thought that this course would satisfy our annual commitment to enhance our marriage with a learning experience, we registered and attended.

After being trained to lead the course, we began facilitating within our church's multiple campuses. Little did we know at that time how many couples needed help with their marriages. Quickly it became very apparent that there was a desperate need for effective marriage programs that would be tailored to our church's particular unique multi-ethnic vision and give hope for those wanting to improve their marriage. Nearly every couple was having difficulties of one sort or another, or had accepted the belief that their marriage would never again be what they hoped and expected it to be.

We recognized there was a great need to develop an effective course that would be inexpensive, have at its core the scriptures, "couple's prayer," and dependence on a growing relationship with God through the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. It was then that we embarked on the development of the *A Marriage Made In Heaven* course. *(For more detailed information about the local church-based "A Marriage Made In Heaven" course, see Appendix A., or FulfilledMarriage.com)*

It was essential that we would be able to assist couples first to have a knowledge of God's plan for marriage, and then to help them make the required changes that would enable them to align their marriage to follow that plan. Since that time, we have been astounded at the success God has given our church in helping married couples. It has all been God!

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Detailed surveys indicate that, of couples who fully participate for the entire nine-week period of the course and do their work at home, more than ninety-five percent have improved their marriages. Although the course is designed for couples that are committed to their marriages for life, many couples have indicated, after taking the course, that the course (really God) and their cooperation with Him by doing the work saved their marriage.

The Third Door:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Mark 10:13-14

In the spring of 2018, one morning, I awoke at my usual time, but before I could begin to rise from the bed, I experienced a vision (certainly not a common experience for me) that shook me to the core, and to a great extent still continues to be as vivid as it was then. I saw a white robed arm that was moving from right to left, reaching for and then beginning to turn a door knob and open a door. As the door opened slightly, maybe five or six inches, I saw behind the door a multitude of children crying out in great distress, anxiety, and fear. After a few seconds I sensed that the door was going to be opened even further, and I cried out, “No, Lord, please, I can’t stand it!” Then the Lord spoke clearly, “This is why you are in the marriage ministry.” Then the room returned to normal.

Since that time, I have thought of that vision often, never fully understanding why I was chosen to experience it. Why not someone

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more significant in the Body of Christ that can spread this terrible and important message to a much larger number of Christian couples? On a personal note, I do know that before this experience, my motivation was to simply to help couples have the best possible Christian marriages they could have. Now I see that God sees something much more important about our marriages than I did in the past, namely our children, their future, and the future of His bride the Church.

Now I see that God sees something very much more important about our marriages than I did in the past, namely our children, their future, and the future of His bride the Church.

Since Esther and I had previously been married and divorced from our former spouses, it is important, before we go any further to explain our stand on divorce within the church. All that you will read in this book rests on the foundation of the Word of God. So does our strong stance on divorce. Esther and I spend many hours either administering or facilitating the *A Marriage Made In Heaven* program, training facilitators, or mentoring couples who are in jeopardy of failing in their marriages. **Never do we recommend divorce, that’s not our calling!** Our calling is to help save and build-up marriages that will glorify God and serve as witnesses that God has a much better plan for marriage than any other plans influenced by our culture. Our strongest possible belief is that all Christians can and should have the very best marriages on our planet!

If there is scriptural basis for a divorce, without repentance by the erring spouse in an adulterous relationship, or if any record or form of spousal abuse is taking place, we will recommend professional Christian counseling or meeting with a pastor or suitable church elder couple. Additionally, we would recommend, if there is a genuine fear or potential

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of physical abuse being directed from one spouse to either the children or to their spouse, that they remove themselves and any children from that threat of physical harm as soon as possible!

It is our profound understanding that all Christians can and should have the very best marriages on our planet!

A Personal Message for Those in the Church Who Have Been Divorced

Many who read this book will, like Esther and me, have been previously been married to other spouses and divorced. Whether or not that divorce was necessary or biblically supported, two factors must be understood, accepted, and where necessary, acted upon.

First, divorce is not God's best for us. Whether your divorce or divorces were caused by your former spouse's actions or originated by them, there nearly always are failures and wrong actions that can be attributed to both parties. I know that was true in my past marriage. It is important that we realize the adverse role we played in our past relationships so that we may acknowledge them to our forgiving God, learn from these sins or failures, and make necessary changes. This will not only bring forgiveness and cleansing, but also it will serve as a motivator to eliminate adverse tendencies developed in a former marriage before they sabotage your new marriage.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they?"

Has no one condemned you?"

John 8:10

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Second, recognize and acknowledge your divorce is not the deadly sin, nor is it the end of closeness to your Savior or an end to the plan God has for your life. Realize all your sins and shame were placed on Christ, so that you can leave them behind and walk the path of life, becoming more and more like Jesus your Lord.

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

1 Peter 2:24

The number of divorces within the church illustrates symptomatically that there is something deeply wrong with the way we do marriage ministry, or more commonly, because we do not do local church-based marriage ministry that is effective in making permanent and necessary change. The church is the family of God, and the church is where the ministry for marriage belongs. Para-church ministries can provide a good venue for couples to learn but long-term transformation requires extended periods of time, encouragement, hard work, and a congregation committed to ending divorce in their church. Every congregation should have in place the lofty goal of divorce-proofing their church. Just like a general going to war, all churches should have an operational plan to build

up marriages and help unmarrieds to prepare for this wonderful God-designed relationship that we call the "Covenant of Marriage, Holy Matrimony."

Once we admit we are falling short of His standards and seek Him, rest assured not only will following His design satisfy His purposes, but it will bring joy and fulfillment to us all within our married lives. God loves us, and although He requires us to put Him first, He also desires our marriages to be blessed with joy that comes only with His leadership and presence in our marriage. For those willing to lay their preconceived

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ideas about their marriage behind and begin to do marriage God's way, there will be unrivaled fulfillment that comes from knowing our Heavenly Father is pleased with us His children.

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Part 1

Questions for Chapter One

1. Esther and Ted decided to do something to enrich their marriage each year. List some ideas that you might want to do annually to enrich your marriage.

2. Do you think Ted's vision of the children illustrates reality as it pertains to a significant number of Christian homes? If yes, list some reasons or causes you think this might be taking place today.

Discussions

1. What are you individually and collectively as husband and wife doing that adversely hampers your lives and marriage and makes them more compatible with our culture than the Kingdom of God?

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2. Ted indicated that he was "blind-sided" by his first wife's discontentment with their marriage. How do you think you can ensure this will not happen to you?

3. God forgives all our sins (present, past, and future) and bore all our shame. As a result of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you think it is possible for you to put all the negatives in your past behind and start afresh building a wonderful and fulfilling marriage? Do you think that is what your Heavenly Father wants you to do?

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