

*Becoming
Your Husband's
Best Friend*

Lisa & David Frisbie



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This book contains stories in which the author has changed people's names and some details of their situations in order to protect their privacy.

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Fixing You or Finding Me?



Take a moment to look again at this book's front cover and title. Did you notice that we chose not to promise a quick fix or ten easy steps? Our mission as marriage counselors is to help you move forward toward becoming the best woman and wife you can possibly be. Along the way, we'll show you how the choices you make can affect your own life as well as your partner's, and we'll give you real-life examples of how God is working in marriages like yours.

You won't find a weapon for attacking your husband or a strategy for manipulating his behavior. We don't offer new ideas for leverage so you can win a never-ending battle between the sexes. We believe war is highly overrated anyway. We really start cheering when peace breaks out around the kitchen table or in the bedroom.

So, what if peace breaks out in your marriage? And if peace is going to break out in your home, how might it begin? More to the point, with whom might it begin?

We hope you'll pray, *Please, Lord, let peace begin with me.* If that's the approach you're taking, you'll find help and healing in these pages as well as a lot of practical, immediately useful advice. The help you'll find here comes from our experience with hundreds of other wives who have traveled this road before you.

Of course, your man is mentioned in this book's title also, and we'll explore together how husbands can and do change their unhelpful

behaviors. Change happens! But the change in *you* and your behavior is most likely to precipitate a change in him and his behavior. That's not a formula or a secret recipe. It's simply an observation based on how God has worked in the lives of His children throughout history. It's the way Scripture describes the dynamic effectiveness of a godly wife as she transforms her marriage relationship in helpful and positive directions.

Regardless of what some advertisers may promise, changes like these don't happen easily, quickly, or without effort. But let's face it, is life really that simple? Does *any* major change happen overnight and without hard work? Can we lose weight, manage other people's behaviors, or become wealthy quickly and without much effort? Real life rarely yields its complexity to simple answers.

Many wives tend to think their husbands need to change, their kids need to adjust their attitudes, or the problem people in their families are the ones who need a lesson in humility. How easy it is to look around our world and notice all the issues and all the problems that other people have—which really do need to be changed by cooperation with God's grace.

Wouldn't it be great if we could magically transform everyone around us who seems to need a makeover? Yes, a lot of people appear to need that. That firmly stubborn and frequently critical supervisor on our job could use a "kinder and gentler" redo. That nosy neighbor who refuses to mind her own business, always looking for new tidbits of spicy gossip around the neighborhood? Bam—let's turn her into a kindly-tongued Christian today.

An old spiritual includes the line, "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standin' in the need of prayer." It's a great line with an important focus. Instead of worrying about the issues of the people who work beside me at the office or live in my home, I can sing these lyrics and open my heart to what God wants to do within me—renew and change my attitudes, behaviors, and choices.

That song frames our approach as we write these pages. This book is not a magnifying glass to help you find the faults of others. Instead,

it's more like a mirror to look into so you can examine yourself. And as we open this book together, we're going to begin by looking straight into that mirror, with God standing beside us, so we get an accurate and clear reflection of our own image, with God's help.

There's no need to be afraid of this process. The God who stands beside us loves us and wants to help us and move us forward. God is not like a misguided earthly parent, always finding fault with whatever we do because it's not good enough. Instead, God is our own heavenly Father, an encourager who believes in us, is proud of us, and stands ready to help us accomplish more and better things.

As we look into a mirror and examine our hearts, we'll uncover our true motives and reveal our frequently unhelpful perspectives. We'll discover that other wives have confronted these same issues before us. Other women have confessed their sins, repented of their hard hearts, and been changed by God's grace. Other marriages have made stunning progress because someone was obedient. Often, that someone was a woman just like you.

When a woman experiences a strong movement of God in her own heart, her resulting transformation often leads to an equal reaction elsewhere. Her husband begins to change also. Yet regardless of whether your husband ever changes, the payoff in this book is even closer to home. It happens within you.

The stories, concepts, ideas, and Scriptures in these pages have the power to help you become your best self ever, the woman you always dreamed of being. That woman is busy going God's direction and being God's kind of person in her interactions with the network of people all around her. That woman has the motives, the attitudes, the speech patterns, and the behavior choices that God has shown her are wisest and best. In the midst of a hurting neighborhood and society, that woman is a healer and a helper to all who know her. She is making a difference.

That woman, with God's help, can be you.

We will move confidently in that direction, learning a lot as we go about becoming our husbands' best friends. But the bottom line

of this little book is not about our husbands. It's really about us. The primary goal and purpose that we seek in these few pages is clearly reinforced by the chorus of that same old spiritual: "It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord, standin' in the need of prayer."

A Scriptural Perspective

In the pages that follow, we'll frame our approach around the key biblical principle of the moat and the beam (King James Version) or the log and the speck (Good News Translation). This biblical understanding will provide us with the foundation for everything we talk about between the covers of this book.

Do you remember this particular teaching example that Jesus provided to His disciples? You can find it in Matthew 7:1-5. Here's how it reads in the Good News Translation.

Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, for God will judge you in the same way you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others. Why, then, do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How dare you say to your brother, "Please let me take that speck out of your eye," when you have a log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Jesus's teaching is sharp and insightful, and it gets right to the point. Before we go rushing off to fix and repair other people, maybe we should spend some time working on our own problems.

Looking in the Wrong Direction

Jesus understands our human nature very well. In this passage He addresses the way we easily notice the faults and the failings of the people around us. Meanwhile, we have far worse faults and much bigger issues that we ought to be seriously working on. But instead

of working out our own problems and getting ourselves in better shape, we point our fingers at the people around us, highlighting their issues, their needs, their flaws.

“My goodness,” we say as we notice someone else’s fault or failure, “that person sure needs a lot of help!” Luckily for that person, we’ve noticed the problem, and we’re ready to get to work helping him or her improve and change. Meanwhile, we tend to ignore or rationalize our own blind spots, downplaying the importance or scope of our own shortcomings. We see other people’s sins and are ready to point them out, criticizing the other people and worrying about how to fix them. We develop strategies for how someone else can get better. Often, we share these ideas with others: “Here’s what Sally needs to understand...”

Somehow we don’t notice our own bigotry or self-righteous pride. We minimize our own jealousy or bitterness while noticing even the smallest things that our friends or family members need to work on in their own lives. We get focused on changing the smaller issues in the people around us. Instead, we ought to be working on the larger issues where we ourselves struggle and need God’s help.

Apparently this is a universal human condition, which is why it occurs within so many marriage relationships also. This powerful teaching of Jesus applies to all of us today, and it especially applies to wives and husbands who are learning how to live together and adjust to each other in love.

The View from Up Close

Forming a united and long-lasting relationship takes a lot of work, and we usually tend to pay special attention to the work our partners need to do. We’re busy raising our children and managing a household. We’re working part-time or full-time outside the home, but every night we pull into our driveway and confront a whole world of work to do under our own roof. No one else has done it! No one else seems to be trying! *Can I get some help around here?*

Women around the world feel this way, and they voice their

feelings to David and me during counseling sessions, retreats, and conferences. Their emotions are normal and valid but not always particularly helpful. Here's why.

When we're doing most of the household work ourselves, we get frustrated, and our frustration seems entirely valid. No wonder we feel this way. *Just look around the place!* Our righteous anger comes as no surprise. *Can't you see what simple justice would require here?* We're right and we know it. And before long, we become so convinced of our own rightness that we quit working on the things we can truly change: our own thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

Instead of doing helpful and useful things, we begin to form harmful habits. We begin to see ourselves as noble and moral and spiritual. We start seeing others as falling short, lacking in spiritual depth, or devoid of character.

When you are married to someone, you are in a unique position to observe his faults and shortcomings. Others may not easily or often recognize these problems in your partner, but you have an up-close and personal view of what's wrong with him. Until you began sharing a home, these issues may not have been visible. But now, sometimes they are all you can think about. You're focused on changing the person you live with because after all, he really needs to be changed! No one can see that better than you.

So you get to work, devising all sorts of plans that will adjust, improve, transform, and enlighten your life partner. Luckily for him, he married someone who has the wisdom and understanding to lead him through all these important transformations. If only you can get him to listen to you, he'll become superhusband right away. He'll see and understand how he needs to change, and he'll get busy doing it.

If he doesn't get started quickly, you'll be right there to remind him again and again. And if all else fails, you can drag him off to a counselor who is certain to take your side and rule in favor of justice: "Husband, change thyself!"

This is exactly why many women eventually drag their husbands into counselors' offices. It's the last great hope of fairness. Once the

evidence has been clearly gathered and effectively presented, surely the counselor will rule in favor of the wife. So if all else fails, let's get some counseling!

But how well does this strategy work? Have you ever noticed how rarely your husband gets excited about marriage counseling with your minister or priest? Husbands intuitively understand that as soon as the counselor's door swings shut and the session begins, their day in court is at hand. They fear they'll be found guilty, so they'd rather not show up.

Many husbands would rather visit the dentist than see a counselor. At the dentist's office, their pain is short-lived and can perhaps be relieved with medication. But after they see a counselor, Novocain doesn't help.

Motivated wives and uncooperative husbands are the daily bread and butter of marriage counselors. And without some genuinely effective biblical counseling, many wives are likely to believe that they are right and their husbands are wrong. Wives often hope that in the counseling office, justice will be served and their husbands will be told to change their behavior. These women believe that the solution to their problems is for their husbands to change.

Is that what you often believe?

Time for a Focus Adjustment

Then Jesus comes along and helps us adjust our focus. "Why are you worrying about all those little issues in your life partner? Instead, why don't you look at your own heart and life? If you do, you'll notice that you have larger and more serious flaws that need your full and complete attention before you focus on trying to change someone else."

It's amazing how Jesus nails it with just one metaphor.

The problem is this: We're in a hurry to fix and repair our husbands when God in His wisdom would rather begin by fixing us.

Sometimes the husband isn't the only one who dreads counseling. Often the wife does as well. She's tired of yelling and nagging and describing the problem, and she's ready for a referee who will

step into the ring, blow a whistle, and declare her the winner of the fight. But she's not prepared for a counselor who blows a whistle, sends her back to her own corner, and tells her to get to work on her own problems.

Time out! When did this become all about me?

None of Us Are Without Sin

Jesus introduces a very similar concept in another setting. While He is teaching in the temple, the religious elite and political power-brokers bring him a woman who has been caught in the very act of adultery. The Jewish law is quite clear and specific: The penalty for her sin is death by stoning. "Here is what the law says," the high priests and self-righteous religious leaders remind Jesus in case He's forgotten. "Now, what do You say?"

Scripture makes it clear that the priests and leaders are hoping that Jesus will incriminate Himself also. They've heard that He is gentle and kind, so they're hoping He will disregard the law and say something compassionate and caring. "Aw, never mind the law. Just let the poor woman go with a warning. I'm sure it won't happen again." Then they could accuse Jesus of breaking the law and condoning the woman's sin.

But the leaders are outclassed in a moment. Steadily writing in the dirt, Jesus avoids their clever arguments in a surprising way.

"Hey," Jesus says after a time of reflection. "Let's go ahead and stone her, just like the law requires. And here's an idea. Why don't we all line up to throw the rocks at her? Those of you who are perfect and without sin, why don't you get right on up in the front of the line? All right, let's get started!"

Jesus doesn't break the law. He upholds the highest moral and ethical standard. If we're going to punish someone else, Jesus suggests here, why don't we let the perfect people begin the punishing? That approach seems fair and right, doesn't it? To let the perfect people take their vengeance first seems to be the reasonable thing to do. Ready to line up and get busy, perfect people?

To their eventual credit, the duplicitous and self-righteous religious leaders figure out one key truth: None of them are perfect. Accordingly, they are unable to follow Jesus's suggestion. Not a single one of them deserves to cast the first stone. None of the woman's accusers are perfect.

They file out of the room, one by one, beginning with the older ones. Eventually the room contains only Jesus and the guilty woman.

Then the only one who is actually qualified to cast the first stone—the world's only perfect person—looks at this woman, perhaps for the first time. "Woman," He asks gently, "Where are those who accuse you?"

"They are all gone," she tells Him. "There is no one here to condemn me."

"I don't condemn you either," Jesus explains to her. "Now, leave your sin in the past. Go and begin living a life that pleases God."

Jesus makes the same offer to each one of us, one sinner at a time.

Traps and Pitfalls of the Frustrated Wife

As we work with marriages around the globe, certain patterns become clearly visible in relationships. After more than two decades of working with couples, we've seen universal principles at work in many homes and many marriages. These patterns affect the dynamics of husband-wife relationships in cities and villages, in rural and urban communities, in developed nations and primitive tribes. The challenges of marriage and family are much the same for all of us regardless of which country we call home.

When we wives are in the right and know it, we tend to behave in ways that are hugely unhelpful. As we'll see in the next few chapters, these behaviors fit into five broad patterns. Although a wife's motives may be good, and although to her credit she may be the one who most wants to improve and strengthen the relationship, if she behaves in one of these five patterns, she is probably harming her marriage even while believing she's helping it. These patterns are not only self-defeating but also capable of destroying the home and family.

We are not trying to frame a new theology of sin or a new understanding of grace. We know what we don't know: We are not theologians, and we won't pretend to unpack a doctrine of sin in this short volume. We also aren't trying to point blame at one partner in a marriage. We're simply pointing out that when wives begin working on their own issues, meaningful change occurs.

We're using the terms *traps* and *pitfalls* to help all of us learn how to avoid some of the common mistakes people make in their key relationships. We hope to catch your attention and to underscore the fact that these patterns are not merely unhelpful and wrong—they are often massively destructive to a person and a relationship. Falling into these patterns can be easy and seem normal, but it can also destroy your marriage one moment or interaction at a time until the relationship crashes and perhaps ends.

If you are frustrated by your husband's behaviors or attitudes, agonizing over his apparent lack of interest in making the relationship work, you may find yourself in these next few chapters. In fact, you may find yourself more than once. Many wives exhibit two or three of these patterns at the same time. In general, the greater the number of unhelpful patterns present in a home, the sooner the negative outcomes will arrive.

Sadly, we see these patterns rising up time and time again in the behaviors of active churchgoers and passionate worshippers. The best women can and often do act out in the worst possible ways in the confines of their own homes. They may mean well, but they behave badly. Meanwhile, they honestly believe that their husbands need help and that they (the wives) are the godly ones.

These traps, pitfalls, or patterns of behavior tend to corrode or wear down relationships instead of building the trust, intimacy, and committed partnership you so deeply desire. Falling into these traps and pitfalls is so easy and so normal that many wives find themselves caught in them before they realize what has happened.

Does this sound like anyone you know? Does it sound like the person in your mirror?

Wouldn't it feel great to start moving forward in helpful ways, finding healthy habits of relating to and understanding your husband? We'll show you how to do it, but first it's time to spend some time in front of your mirror, looking at five ways wives can get tripped up by their own words, thoughts, and deeds as they cope with husbands who can't or won't work to improve a marriage.

When a wife is struggling with an uncooperative or uncommunicative husband, when her life partner doesn't seem to be pulling his own load or doing his own share, we can sympathize with her task. We cheer for her. But as we cheer, we also realize that she is under a lot of pressure and is vulnerable to several traps and pitfalls. There are some serious missteps that might keep her from achieving the one thing she is working so hard to achieve—a better marriage.

What if you wanted a better marriage and were ready to go to work, but you also knew in advance how to avoid these traps and pitfalls? What if you could learn from the real-life experiences of other wives, avoid their mistakes, and learn from their accomplishments and successes?

Other wives have faced the same challenges you do. Their stories are here, and these accounts will probably remind you a lot of the situations you're facing right now.

Be encouraged today. You and God can do this, and you'll be amazed at the results.