

INTRODUCTION

The child is God's gift to the family.

BLESSED MOTHER TERESA

*The history of mankind, the history of salvation,
passes by way of the family...*

POPE JOHN PAUL II

WHEN MOST BRIDES and grooms stand before the altar and say, “I do,” little do they know the challenges that await them. While they dream about stepping over the threshold of their new home together, of babies and successful careers, they are mostly unaware of the reality around the corner. Settling into a new home may not happen for years; they may suffer miscarriages or face disability or disease. There may be the stress of the bills, to add to the challenge of loving daily.

“Ah, the naiveté of youth,” the older people cluck as the newlyweds drive off blissfully in a sedan with the words “Just Married” scribbled in washable paint. “Just wait,” some think. And presently, it’s true, the couple will encounter what others before them have— the tests and the trials of daily married and family life.

What these young hopefuls also may not know, however,

BIG HEARTED

is that just around the corner is more satisfaction and joy than they could have ever imagined. They will soon discover the blessings that come from enduring hardship together, along with surprising moments of delight when they open themselves to God's will. This is his gift to their generous "yes."

When a family opens its collective heart to love one another fully, there is no end to the gifts that God will bestow. It has been said that God cannot be outdone in generosity, and the stories in the following pages will show you how true this is.

Both my co-author and I have university degrees, years of work experience, and nineteen children between us. We are women with hopes and dreams, and none so big as those we have for our families.

In this book lies the heart of our desires. More than good students, athletes, and success at jobs, we want big-hearted families. No amount of studying or training can accomplish this for our children. Our big-hearted goal isn't opportunities or financial success; it's love. Love is something to which we all have access. It is a gift we can spend freely and end up with more than when we began.

The families in this book are just like ours, and probably just like yours, too. The similarity is not necessarily the outer details—every family is unique; it's the goal of striving to put God first, of trying to love well.

We are sometimes weak and imperfect, but love never fails. Love heals and overcomes adversity. It gives us strength and courage beyond our imagination. The source of this never-

Introduction

ending love is our faith in God. As the lives of the families who have generously shared their stories demonstrate, all of us struggle to impart God's love through our own humble efforts. This desire pulls us out of bad days and difficult circumstances and gives us the ability to overcome everything with love.

In this book, you will learn of family struggles with cancer, adoption, alcoholism, miscarriages, financial hardships, and disabilities—and you will read about family joy in these very situations. You will be invited to see extraordinary love in ordinary moments: the simple cooking of a meal or the hug between a teenaged brother and his baby sister. Just like your family, these families experience pain and challenges. And just like your family, they also experience love and immeasurable blessings. It is in the love of God and love of family that joy and healing triumph.

Beyond the stories included here, we invite you to look around and discover the miracles and blessings around you in your neighborhood, your parish, and your community. They are there in abundance. And don't forget to look inside the walls of your own home, where God's great mystery and love is revealed daily to those who are openhearted.

Sacrifice much. Choose God's will. Love profusely. Be big-hearted. And then see how our almighty God, who is the same now as always, blesses you again and again.

—*Patti Armstrong and Theresa Thomas*