

extraordinary change through **ordinary moments**

marriage **matters**



WINSTON T. SMITH



“Winston Smith reminds us that there are no ‘ordinary’ moments in a marriage. With a wonderful understanding of the grace the Lord exhibits in small things, Smith gives us the resources to understand our heart’s response to ordinary moments with our spouse in order to create an extraordinary marriage.”

Bryan Chapell, Ph.D.

President and Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri; author of *Each for the Other: Marriage as It’s Meant to Be*

“It is impossible to capture the genius of this outstanding book in a few sentences. Winston demonstrates how we can turn our ordinary marital disappointments into opportunities for growth in love, faith, and intimacy. Rich in exegetical insight, exquisite theology (don’t miss the chapters on conflict and division: superb!), and warm pastoral insights all presented in a simple and flowing style, this book can help to make your marriage sing. My only regret is that I did not surrender the marriage course to this wise man much, much sooner.”

John Bettler

Former Executive Director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

“Winston Smith combines serious reflection on the Bible with very practical insights in marriage. Married couples and those contemplating marriage can greatly benefit from his wisdom.”

Tremper Longman III, Ph.D.

Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College; author of *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart* and *Intimate Allies*

“*Marriage Matters* will help you. If my own experience is a measure, it will help you. Too much advice, I get lost. Give me spiritual inspiration alone, I get motivated until . . . until I don’t get what I want. Winston draws both inspiration and practical advice together. Even more, he will keep them in front of you until you have a rich vision that leads to specific action. He is nice about it, but he definitely wants to see us grow and change.”

Edward T. Welch, Ph.D.

Faculty and counselor at the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation; author of *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* and *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*

“The strength of this book is the way it takes biblical principles, applies them to the ordinary moments in marriages, and then shows how to connect to Jesus for the change we need. Again and again he brings us to Christ—His Will, His Way, His Wisdom—until we find Him in the ordinary moments of life. It is a book every couple should study, apply, and share with others.”

Rose Marie Miller

Missionary; Bible teacher; author of *From Fear to Freedom*

“Through his own transparency as a husband and his expertise as a counselor, Winston Smith offers very rich, yet very practical insight on how to function relationally from a divine frame of reference. *Marriage Matters* brings the rich theology of Scripture from the abstract to the real-life, from the cerebral to the experiential, offering couples amazing truth that holds the potential to completely reshape their view of relationship. Very refreshing. Very encouraging!”

Jeremy Lelek, M.A., L.P.C.

President, Association of Biblical Counselors

“Too often, couples are resigned to settle for fewer conflicts and minimal hurts in their marriage. *Marriage Matters* is incredibly hopeful and empowering to help couples feel ‘unstuck’ and move toward growth. Winston offers practical insight and suggestions to engage these ‘ordinary moments’ and frames marriage as the context to experience God’s extraordinary love. He shows us that our ability to love is not dependent on the lovability of our spouse, but a reflection of having our entire lives oriented around our love for the living God—this is worship. In this deepest sense, Winston shows us that marriage truly matters.”

Judy Cha, LMFT

Director of Counseling, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC

“*Marriage Matters* is different from and goes deeper than many of the other biblically based books on marriage. In keeping with the scriptural emphasis on being Christ centered and heart centered in all of life, this book helps Christians see what being Christ centered and heart centered actually means when applied to the marriage relationship. After personally perusing this volume, my recommendation to all married people is: read the book and apply its contents and, if you do, you will have a marriage that truly matters.”

Wayne Mack, D.Min.

Professor of Biblical Counseling at Grace School of Ministry, Pretoria and Capetown, South Africa; author of *Preparing for Marriage God’s Way*

“*Marriage Matters* is a vital resource for every married couple and for those who counsel couples. Winston’s honest transparency about his own marriage and the depth of biblical insight and counseling experience combine to reveal the true heart of Christian marriage—a deepening understanding of the manifold grace of God at work in His children. Winston gets it—and he’ll help you get it too! This will be required reading for my students.”

Jason Barrie

Lecturer in Marriage and Family Counseling, Westminster Seminary California; Associate Pastor, Rocky Mountain Community Church

“Under the weight of twenty-first-century pressures and changes, marriages need all the help they can get. Kudos to Winston Smith for weighing in on this important subject.”

Carolyn Custis James

Author of *When Life and Beliefs Collide* and *The Gospel of Ruth*

Marriage Matters

Extraordinary Change
through Ordinary Moments

Winston T. Smith



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TO MY KIM

*Your childlike delight in the most ordinary things,
your revelry in the good and your angry tears over the bad,
your humility and faithfulness—
in these and a thousand other ways
you show me the love of Christ every day.*

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Preface

IF YOU'VE VISITED the love/relationships section of a bookstore lately, you might well ask whether the world really needs another book on marriage. Though you're obviously holding my answer to that question, let me offer a brief explanation of how this book came to be.

Usually, unhappy couples want change and they want it fast. Who can blame them? When the source of your suffering is the relationship that stands at the center of your life, the suffering can be intense. In their unhappiness they look for solutions that offer the fastest, most dramatic change possible. But couples who experience the most significant, lasting change aren't the ones who have a dramatic "aha" moment or locate some forgotten secret to marriage. Rather, they're the couples who begin to see their day-to-day interactions from a different perspective, take simple steps to love one another more effectively, and take those steps over and over again. What used to devolve into pointless annoyances and fights become steps in a journey in which God's activity and love become increasingly evident and powerful.

The title communicates well what I hope you'll learn about marriage. First, marriage matters, not only because it's important to us, but also because it's important to God and he intends to use it in ways that you may not have imagined. Second, moments that seem the most

ordinary—moments of annoyance, conflict, pain, or cold indifference—can become moments in which you’re able to understand God’s incredible agenda for love and begin to do something new. Ordinary moments are steps that take your marriage to extraordinary places and lead you into a deeper relationship with an extraordinary God.

I am especially hopeful that this book will be useful to those who find marriage a daily battle. I ask those couples to read this book thoughtfully and prayerfully, and with hope. During a difficult time in my own life, a wise friend and counselor reminded me of Jacob’s wrestling match with God in Genesis 32. After wrestling all night, God asked Jacob to let him go and “touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched” (Genesis 32:25). But Jacob refused to give up and let go. Instead Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26). And so God blessed him. “Winston,” my friend said, “don’t just wish things were different. Don’t just look for the easy way out. Don’t let go until you get every blessing that God is trying to give you through this.” I pray that you’ll hold on and wrestle well and that God will bless you with more than you’ve dared to ask for.

But I want you to understand, as well, that while a marriage book can be a tremendous help, if misused it can do as much harm as good. Therefore, let me offer a few precautions to keep you on track:

Don’t read this book simply because you think your spouse needs to read it. No doubt, as you read it your spouse’s failings will come to mind. But your real focus must be on how *you* can change. Resist the temptation to meditate on your spouse’s shortcomings. Instead, concentrate on learning how to live a life of love and trust God with the results.

Don’t allow any marriage book to become a substitute for personal support and counsel. God designed life and marriage to be community enterprises. A book may help, but the complexities of life and marriage will always require more than a good book. Strive to include trusted friends, godly ministers, and wise counselors on your journey, *especially if your spouse is battling addictions or is abusive.*

I hope that this book, in addition to being useful to individuals and couples, will be useful in other settings: small group Bible studies, Sunday school electives, perhaps even seminary classrooms.

One final note: Some of the examples in the book are fictionalized for the purposes of illustration. Others are composites of many different couples I've seen over the years who embody similar dynamics. Illustrations and examples aren't meant to foster gender stereotypes or give license to prejudice and are but an honest reflection on my own experience. They aren't intended to be prescriptive in any way.

Acknowledgments

I HAD NEVER given much thought to acknowledgment pages, but now that I've written a book I understand their absolute necessity. Without them, there would be no escaping a nagging sense of unworthiness as I consider the contributions others have made to this book. I sincerely want to thank the many people who have made this book possible:

Of course, thanks to my wife, Kim, for whom none of what follows is simply theoretical. Thanks for allowing me to think, teach, and write about such things when I've got so far to go myself. (If you ever regret letting me write it, just keep rereading the dedication page.)

A special thanks to John Bettler. After teaching a marriage counseling course for many years, John entrusted his course and many of his ideas to me. It would be impossible to separate his foundational wisdom from that which has developed over the past fifteen years, but I've tried to document in the notes the portions that I most clearly inherited from him. A wise and humble man, he has always been content to work in the background, while promoting the efforts of others. For all of these reasons, John, I admire and thank you. If you ever decide to write a marriage book, feel free to take back any ideas you entrusted to me—and freely refute any of mine!

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Thanks to my friends and colleagues at CCEF, past and present: Ed Welch, David Powlison, Paul Tripp, Tim Lane, Mike Emlet, Jayne Clark, and Bill Smith, all of whom have deepened my understanding of Christ and the importance of living out his love in the details of life. Thanks to everyone at CCEF, counselors and staff who labor diligently to make it a ministry where Jesus is known.

Thanks to the many couples who I've worked with over the years. Thank you for honoring me by opening your lives to me. Thank you for your patience and kindness as we've learned together how to walk down difficult paths through dark moments. You have all been a blessing, and I thank God for you all.

Thanks to dear friends who over the years have lived out their marriages with openness and authenticity that have encouraged Kim and me in our own marriage: Tuck and Stacy, Arlin and Cathy, John and Joanna, David and Wendy, Kris and Dave, Bob and Seanne. Your friendship is a treasure.

Finally, many thanks to New Growth Press. Thanks, Mark and Karen, for taking risks with untried authors like me. Thanks to my editor, Jonathan Rogers, for reading, editing, and crafting my ramblings. Thanks, Barbara Juliani, for your instincts as a writer and editor and for staying on top of this project.

SECTION ONE

God Is in the Ordinary Moments

In chapter 1 we learn that change requires seeing from a new perspective. We must realize that the hurts and frustrations in marriage that are common to the point of seeming ordinary are, in fact, opportunities to know and share God's extraordinary love.

Chapter 2 shows how God uses ordinary moments to help us see ourselves more clearly and recognize what obstacles to knowing and sharing his love lurk in our hearts.

In chapter 3 we see how all struggles to love stem from

problems of worship. We are transformed by God's love as we learn to build not just our marriages but our lives around him.

Chapter 4 reintroduces us to love itself—to Jesus. By learning love from him we are freed from distortions and misunderstandings and are empowered to love in new and surprising ways.

Finally, in chapter 5 we see that God's vision for marriage has always been grander than our own. All along he intended it to be nothing less than a celebration and a showcase of his love.

one

Marriages Change in Ordinary Moments

What You'll Learn in This Chapter:

- Our marriages are made up of ordinary moments, recurring irritations and disappointments. God doesn't seem involved in them, and we don't really expect them to change.
 - Ordinary moments become extraordinary opportunities for change when we realize that:
 - ~ God is love and is involved in every moment in which we struggle to love.
 - ~ Jesus empowers us and teaches us how to love in practical, concrete ways.
 - ~ Change involves making daily choices to love consistently, over time.
-

An Ordinary Moment

I COULD FEEL my blood pressure rising. With every passing moment I was getting more and more angry. It was 2:30. My son's baseball practice was at 3:00, my daughter had a birthday party at 4:00, and I had to lead a Bible study at 5:00. What's more, my wife was not answering her cell phone. I'd been calling her every few minutes since 1:00, and now it was almost 2:30. She should have been home long ago. She knew what was on the schedule, and she'd assured me she'd be home on time.

How was I going to prepare my Bible study with all this taxiing to do? Did she not care that I was juggling this all by myself? My anger mounted as I pictured her chatting with friends, while her cell phone, set to vibrate, hummed away unnoticed in her handbag.

I resigned myself to plan B: all three kids would come to baseball practice, and the girls would play in an empty part of the field, while I sat in the van and worked on the Bible study. There would be distractions. I would want to watch practice, and the girls would need to be watched. They would get bored and start asking for things. It was not ideal, but it would have to do.

I barked orders at the kids to get ready to go. There were a hundred questions:

"Where's mommy?" "Why do *we* have to go to baseball practice?" "Am I going to miss my party?" "Where are my shoes?" "Can we stop at the store and get a snack?"

Every question was a frustrating reminder that I shouldn't have to be dealing with this.

Just then the phone rang, "Win, have you been trying to call me?"

"Yeeeee," I replied, injecting as much sarcasm as possible into that one word. "I have to get Gresham to practice and Charlotte to her birthday party, and I'm not prepared for Bible study. Why haven't you answered your phone?"

"I didn't hear it ringing in my bag. I'm so sorry. I'll be home in a few minutes. I just couldn't get away as soon as I thought I could."

Instead of waiting for Kim to return and let her deliver our son to practice, I loaded the kids into the car and took them myself. When I returned home, fifteen minutes later, Kim was there wondering why I hadn't waited for her.

She retreated to a safe distance. I sat alone staring at the kitchen table. I was more than just annoyed; I was fuming. Beneath the anger I also felt embarrassed and ashamed. Part of me felt justified in my anger, while another part of me wondered why I'd gotten so worked up. Irritation would be understandable, but anger? My response was out of proportion, and I knew it.

I soon realized that part of my frustration stemmed from the fact that this feeling was familiar, even *ordinary*. How often have I been angry with Kim because I felt that she hasn't stopped to think about me? And how often have I had the same pouty reaction and witnessed the same destructive result?

I was tired of reliving this moment, tired of having the same old argument and getting the same old result.

What Makes Ordinary Moments Ordinary?

Every marriage has these moments—moments marked by frustration, disappointment, anger, or sadness—when you want things to be better but you've no idea what to do next or how to do things differently. We aren't perfect, and we don't marry perfect people.

Moments like these are ordinary in several other important ways.

Ordinary Moments Happen Over and Over Again

Maybe the exact thing happens over and over again. Maybe the same familiar thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions haunt every difficult situation. For me, there have been many times when I felt that my wants or needs weren't showing up on Kim's radar (though on many of those occasions that was not actually the case). The situations aren't always the same: it isn't always baseball practice or errands or

Bible study. It can be the way money has been spent, or the status of the laundry, or how long it has been since we've slowed down enough to connect. But there's a familiar pattern in it all. There's my sense of being forgotten, followed by her surprise, then my smoldering anger, then her retreat. It's just too ordinary.

In Ordinary Moments God Seems Uninvolved

Because these moments happen again and again, it may be difficult to detect God's involvement. Perhaps you've never even thought to ask God for help precisely because these moments are so ordinary. Why bother God?

No matter how spiritual we think we are, it's easy to find ourselves living as if God were far, far away.

Maybe you're afraid to ask God to get involved because you're ashamed. You should be able to do better. God must be disappointed in you.

Or maybe you asked God for help, but there was no answer. God's apparent silence after prayer is especially hard. He seems more than uninvolved; he seems to have abandoned or forgotten you.

Whether or not you've sought God's help, these moments feel ordinary because they aren't accompanied by miracles or dramatic changes; they're God-less moments. If you don't see—or can't see—how God fits into the picture, it doesn't really matter whether you consider yourself a religious person or not.

Recall my own frustration with Kim when I was being denied time that I deemed necessary to prepare a Bible study. My mind was engaged in trying to know God's Word so that I could help others, and yet my heart was far from him. In the moment, it didn't occur to me to turn to God for help or to believe that he was concerned or involved. No matter how spiritual we think we are, it's easy to find ourselves living as if God were far, far away.

We Don't Expect Ordinary Moments to Change

If you've experienced enough of these ordinary moments without sensing any change, you either become accustomed to the annoyance and indifferent to it or, worse, you abandon any hope for change. Indifference and hopelessness are both dangerous. The danger isn't simply that you're unhappy or that your marriage is less than it could be; it's that God becomes increasingly irrelevant to your marriage, the relationship that defines your life more than any other.

God, in his mercy, has prevented Kim and me from ever reaching that point. As I sat fuming at the kitchen table, God, as always, began to work in my heart, reminding me of important truths, softening me so that we could move forward. Knowing God makes ordinary moments extraordinary.

How Ordinary Moments Become Extraordinary

In marriage, the biggest obstacle to change is our attitude toward it. Often we expect change to be ushered in by a dramatic turning point that can forever be remembered as the moment things got better.

We wish this turning point—this momentous change—would happen for our spouse rather than for us, right? They're the ones who need an experience like Ebenezer Scrooge had. Your spouse goes to bed dour and embittered, three spirits (or a marriage counselor) visit in the night, and the next morning he or she wakes up generous and joyful.

Sometimes lasting change happens quickly and dramatically, but usually this kind of change requires deliberate, careful steps over a long period of time. People who insist on quick fixes and dramatic turning points often miss the path to real, lasting change. What's more, the longer path to change is what the Bible holds out to us as the more typical way that God works in our lives. Usually, change is more like the Israelites' long trek to the Promised Land than like the apostle Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus.

Staying on the long path to change requires understanding how God operates in the ordinary moments. The path to change in your marriage is built on this truth: God is involved in every moment of your marriage. In that sense, there are no ordinary moments, only moments filled with God's activity, of which you may or may not be aware and in which you may or may not choose to participate. God is the ruler of the entire universe, and yet, he has a special concern for you, and he wants you to see him act in the ordinary details of your marriage. More than that, he wants you to be a part of that work.

Active Ingredients

In his first letter, the apostle John explains how God wants to make a difference in our relationships:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

This passage identifies three ingredients necessary for the ordinary moments of marriage to become extraordinary moments of change. These are the three critical ingredients that this book will build upon.

1. *Marriages change when we recognize God's agenda for so-called ordinary moments*

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*” (1 John 4:7–8, italics mine).

“God is love.” We all want more love in our marriages. Who doesn't love love? For the most part, we marry because of love—or at least because we hope for love. But in the most difficult moments we don't feel loved, and we find it hard to love. God may not

} Having more love
in your marriage
means having
more of God
in your marriage. }

seem to make much difference in these moments; however, his involvement is crucial because God is love. When we find it hard to love, we need him all the more. A lack of love should prompt us to not just look more closely at our marriage but at our relationship with God.

The bad news: your love problems are bigger than you think because love problems are God problems. The good news: the solution is bigger than you think because God cares and is involved. Having more love in your marriage means having more of God in your marriage. Having trouble loving is evidence either that you don't know God or that something is interfering in your relationship with God.¹

As a little girl my daughter, Sydney, earned a reputation for being a picky eater. We even found it hard to entice her with fast-food burgers and fries! Once when my mother-in-law learned that we'd eaten at a McDonald's, she asked, “Sydney, what did you eat at McDonald's?”

“I ate a cheeseburger,” she replied proudly.

“You ate a cheeseburger!” my mother-in-law said with surprise. “I thought you didn't like cheeseburgers.”

“I just take off all the stuff I don't like,” Sydney explained. “First, I take off the pickles and the onions, and then the cheese, and then the ketchup and the mustard, and finally the *big round brown thing in the*

middle.” My daughter had discovered the secret to liking cheeseburgers: remove the hamburger itself and just eat the bread!

We can all be like Sydney. We may pay lip service to the notion that God is love and that we want to be more loving, but then we remove God from the discussion. If we believe that God is love, then he must be part of the solution. In fact, he must be the most important part—the “big thing in the middle,” if you will.

2. Marriages change when we’re willing to love in practical, Christlike ways, especially in the difficult moments

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10).

Ask ten different people what love is, and chances are you’ll get ten different answers. Love isn’t quite the mystery it seems. Based on what we hear on the radio, see on television, or read in magazines, we might get the idea that love is a wonderfully indescribable something that happens *to* us, an uncontrollable and unpredictable thing that comes and goes. That makes for great romance novels, but it doesn’t offer much hope for our marriages.

The Bible tells us specific things about love. In the passage above, we learn that love became a human being named Jesus who lived among us. While love can be exciting and feel wonderful, ultimately, love is a person, not an experience. When you need help loving your spouse, you don’t have to wait to feel loving or yearn for lost romance or guess what love is; you can look to Jesus and learn from him. Jesus, as love, took action. He spoke and acted in ways that made a difference, ways that made love visible among us. As we trust him and learn from him, we can *do* love too.

There are two critical ingredients to loving in a Christlike way. The first ingredient is connecting with and depending on Christ, not as a religious man who lived two thousand years ago, but as God’s own

Son who's with you and able to help you in the most difficult moments of your marriage. The second ingredient is knowing what love looks like in the details of the moment. Jesus doesn't just motivate us to love; he teaches *how* to love in the moment—what it looks like and how to do it.

Jesus isn't just an encouraging coach or an example to follow but our champion who's able to defeat giants we'd never be able to tackle on our own.

As a four-year-old, my son was enthralled with the Bible story of how the shepherd boy David courageously kills the giant Goliath, by striking him with a single stone flung from his sling. (Though David carried five rocks with him, he only needed one.) Pretending to be David, my son would run through the house with one of my socks wadded up and stuffed inside of the other, swinging it madly over his head looking for giants to slay. Hoping to help him reflect on the deeper meaning of the story, I commented to him once as he stalked giants, "David sure had a lot of faith to go up against that giant, didn't he?" Without a moment's hesitation, my son replied, "He had a lot of faith *and* a lot of rocks!"

Maybe you're facing giants in your marriage, and being asked to look to Jesus feels like being offered faith without rocks! Remember that faith is only a prelude to action. You need faith that Jesus will help you every step of the way, but you also need to take concrete action. In every area of marriage we examine, we will explore both the whys and the hows of love.

When the Bible tells us that Jesus is "an atoning sacrifice for our sins," that means that Jesus is able to remove from your heart all obstacles to loving others. Sin isn't a very popular topic, but we must take it into account. Some of the biggest giants in our marriages reside in our own hearts. As much as we say we want to love, sin squashes our best efforts. Jesus isn't just an encouraging coach or an example to follow but our champion who's able to defeat giants we'd never be able to tackle on our own. We will explore these giants in the next few

chapters, but for now understand that for love to make a difference it must be more than an emotional boost. It can only be found in Jesus and it has to show up in the details of your marriage.

3. Marriages change when we're willing to love consistently, over time, not because our spouses change but because we're in a growing relationship with God

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11–12).

If you aren't seeing miracles, it might be that you don't know how to recognize them. The apostle John tells us that learning to love each other involves at least two miracles: first, God lives in us, and, second, God becomes visible. “God lives in us and his love is made complete.” The invisible becomes visible. That is a miracle.

At some point in marriage, you have to realize that you can't make your spouse change. If your happiness hinges on your ability to control your spouse, you doom yourself to the frustration and hopelessness of trying to do the impossible.

God offers something much better than a changed spouse; he promises to change *you*. He gives himself to you. When you're tempted to believe that your spouse stands between you and all the joy you hoped to find in marriage, hear God's invitation to something far better. This doesn't mean that your spouse won't change; it means that whether your spouse changes or not, you're invited to become part of the most important program in history—the program of letting God live inside of you so that his love becomes visible in our broken world.

It may be that your spouse does begin to change once you stop trying to change him or her and focus instead on being all that you can be. Or maybe not. But your *marriage* will change when you make different choices and keep making those choices in light of your relationship with God—a relationship that's bigger than your marriage.

But how can my marriage change if my spouse doesn't change? Think of your marriage as a dance. Dancing is most enjoyable and beautiful when both dancers are hearing the same music and are in step with one another. When the dancers are hearing different music and don't know the steps, it becomes an awkward and painful ordeal. The dancers step on each other's toes as they stumble along. You can't make your *spouse* a better dancer, but *you* can become a better dancer. Even if only one partner improves, the dance improves. Your toes are safer, spills are less frequent, and you may enjoy the dance even though your spouse is never quite in rhythm with you. On the other hand, your spouse may begin to notice that you're becoming a better dancer and want to improve as well. When you're living for more than mere marital happiness, you have staying power. Rather than looking for a gimmick, you're willing to embark on a journey that lasts a lifetime but is lived one day at a time.

Where Are We Going?

The book is built around these three central ideas:

Section 1: God Is in the Ordinary Moments

This section makes the connections between the details of your marriage relationship and the reality of your relationship with God, so that you see a bigger purpose and new possibilities in the ordinary moments of your marriage. You'll be challenged to examine yourself to recognize how you make ordinary moments difficult. You'll learn how knowing and worshipping God transforms the details of marriage, and you'll learn how Jesus makes all the difference.

Section 2: Extraordinary Love in the Details of Marriage

This section gets practical. You need to know what love looks like in the details of the moment. You'll learn how honesty, conflict,

confessing wrongs, and forgiving can be expressions of love and a critical part of God's activity in your marriage.

Section 3: Staying on the Path

Whether your spouse changes or not, there are many joys and riches to encounter on your journey with God. In this section you'll be invited to understand how your story fits into the story of your marriage and your story with God. You'll be challenged to pursue the highest manifestation of love there is: loving when you're being wronged. You'll also learn how to cultivate hope.

Sometimes ordinary moments never become much more than regular irritations; sometimes they explode into angry tirades, shouting matches, or worse. But as ordinary as these moments may seem, they have the potential to radically change your marriage.

Think about It

- What are some of the ordinary moments in your marriage? What are some of the aggravations, conflicts, or disappointments that happen over and over again? Are there thoughts and feelings that are common to all of them?
 - Have you asked God for help? If so, have you seen any change? If you haven't seen any change, how do you make sense of that? Do you wrestle with feelings of abandonment, anger, hopelessness?
 - Think of one of the ordinary moments in your marriage. How might you change just one thought, attitude, word, or action to make God's love more visible? How might this ordinary moment be different if you realized in that moment that God was loving and supporting you as you worked to make his love visible?
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