

## Introduction: The Restoration of a Marriage

Little did my wife and I realize that the couple sitting in our living room several years ago was less than 36 hours away from the end of their 10-year marriage. The divorce papers had been signed, the divorce had been granted, and all that stood between them and the end of their marriage was the 120-day required waiting period in the city where they had lived. **Paul and Mary** had already been separated for several months. **Mary** and the three children had been living in a different part of the country and she had returned to where she and **Paul** had lived for the past 10 years just to sign the final divorce decree.

**Paul's** most recent adulterous episode had been the final blow for **Mary** and she had been unable to forgive him for yet another betrayal. She was a committed Christian and did not believe in divorce. However, after repeated affairs and broken promises by **Paul**, she reluctantly concluded that divorce was the only way out of this hurtful and destructive relationship. They had tried overcoming their marital problems in the past but nothing seemed to work. Broken promises and repeated disappointments had destroyed trust. Hope had given way to despair and resignation. She had simply given up. Her marriage was over.

They had enjoyed several good years together as a couple, but things had deteriorated during the previous two years. **Paul's** job had taken him out of town and the ensuing temptations eventually took their toll. Alcohol, the bar scene, lonely women and his own loneliness opened the door for a series of wrong choices. Before long, he found himself drinking too much and involved sexually with other women. **Paul** had a Christian heritage and knew such actions were wrong but he had long before stopped attending church and had turned his back on the faith he had embraced as a young man. Instead of the fear of the Lord ruling his life, his own lusts and sinful desires took control.

His conscience had been weakened by his rejection of the truth but it had not been completely deadened. Eventually his conscience began to assert itself and **Paul** was feeling increasingly guilty about the secret life he was living. When he could no longer bear the guilt of his sin, he confessed to **Mary** what she already feared might be happening. They tried to salvage their relationship, but the depth of pain, anger, and sense of betrayal was more than **Mary** could bear, and the decision to divorce was made. It was the only way out...or so it seemed.

The divorce process was started and now the reality of losing his family was finally confronting **Paul**. In desperation, he reached out to the faith that had once been a vital part of his life. He found himself drawn to a Wednesday evening church that his aunt attended. As he sat in the service, the Holy Spirit moved upon his hardened heart and he began to weep uncontrollably, asking God to save both himself and his marriage. When the invitation to come for prayer was given at the end of the service **Paul** found himself standing up and walking toward the front. As he knelt at the altar, his aunt was kneeling on one side and the pastor of the church on the other. With sincere brokenness and sorrow for his sin this prodigal son returned to the welcoming arms of his loving heavenly Father.

**Paul's** life had been transformed and he knew it. God had answered his prayers and now he could only hope that it was not too late to save his marriage. The pastor of the church gave him our phone number since he knew that we worked with couples in crisis. The next day a phone call came to us from **Paul** pleading for help. He was not sure his wife would agree to a counseling session but if she would agree he desperately wanted to see us. I prayed with **Paul** on the phone asking God to open **Mary's** heart and then **Paul** contacted his wife.

**Mary** reluctantly agreed to attend that initial session, primarily because she thought it might look favorable in case of a court fight over the custody of the children, not because she was motivated to save

the marriage. They actually arrived in separate cars, sat on opposite ends of our living room and were extremely uncomfortable being in the same room.

It was obvious to my wife and I that **Mary** did not want to be there. She did not display any willingness to restore their marriage. Her mind was made up. She did not believe that **Paul's** repentance was genuine. She had heard all of this before and when she had given him a chance in the past, he had always taken advantage of her and betrayed her. She was not prepared to go through the pain and disappointment of trying again. She had no hope for change. Besides she felt she had biblical grounds for divorce since **Paul** had been sexually unfaithful, not just once, but several times. She had decided it was time for her to move on with her life. There was no point in discussing reconciliation, as far as she was concerned.

We focused our attention on **Paul** and challenged him to express repentance to **Mary** and to seek her forgiveness. We challenged him to take personal responsibility for his actions and to humble himself before the Lord and before **Mary**. We also challenged him about his motives and told him that he needed to focus on making changes in his life, regardless of whether or not those changes would result in his marriage being saved. We knew that if his motivation was just to save his marriage, once the marriage was restored, he would lose his motivation for change and would most likely return to his old ways. **Mary** had, in fact, seen this pattern before and she did not believe that **Paul** would remain faithful if she dropped the divorce and gave him another chance.

My wife and I told him he needed to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33) and leave the restoration of his marriage in the hands of the Lord. **Paul** accepted what he was being told and we felt that he had finally come to his senses and that his repentance was deep, lasting and genuine. The biggest questions we had were, “Was it too late?” “Was the breakdown of trust too great and the pain too deep for **Mary** to open her heart once again to this man who had repeatedly betrayed her trust in the past?” “Was this story going to end with **Paul** finally making the changes he needed to make, but losing his marriage because his changes came too late?”

During that initial session, however, **Mary** noticed that **Paul** seemed to be undergoing a profound and genuine change in attitude. (She did not, however, disclose this observation to either us or to **Paul** until much later). **Paul's** attitude and his response to us gave her enough hope, that she cautiously agreed to return for a second session.

By the end of the second session she sensed God prompting her not to give up on the marriage. **Mary** slowly opened her heart to the possibility of reconciliation and began asking God what he wanted her to do. She heard the Lord encouraging her to trust Him and to let Him do the impossible. His presence in her life became so real that she decided not to sign the final divorce papers, but rather to agree to a 30-day extension. She was not yet willing to fully forgive **Paul** and invite him back home, but she was willing to reconsider the divorce. She wanted to give her marriage every possible chance to be saved. She saw that God was working in a powerful way and she did not want to turn her back on what he was doing.

**Paul and Mary** continued meeting with us weekly and the counseling sessions focused on the changes **Paul** needed to make in his life. Five weeks into the counseling, however, **Mary** voiced to us that their marriage problems were not entirely **Paul's** fault. She acknowledged that there were some issues in her life the Lord had been convicting her about. She felt the need to ask **Paul's** forgiveness and she wanted to confront the issues in her own life. This step was a breakthrough in their relationship because, up until that point, **Mary** had placed all the blame on **Paul** and was unwilling to accept any personal responsibility for what was happening in their marriage. Healing and reconciliation was slowly beginning to take place. She also voiced a willingness to forgive **Paul** and to let go of the hurt and pain that had consumed her heart over the past several months.

The next breakthrough came when **Mary** invited **Paul** to live with her and their three children again. They had been separated for over six months at this point, so this was a significant step in their journey toward restoration. This step enabled them to begin the process of rebuilding their relationship and to gradually reestablish the trust that had been broken between the two of them. After several weeks of counseling and working on their relationship, **Mary** cancelled the divorce proceedings. **Paul** joyfully showed the cancelled divorce decree to us during one of our regular sessions with them. His heart was overflowing with gratitude to the Lord for what he had done. It was nothing short of a miracle that they were back together after being so close to losing their marriage.

**Paul and Mary** continued to meet with my wife and me for about nine months. The time between the sessions gradually grew longer as their relationship became better. With lots of perseverance, painful choices, support from others and a rich measure of God's grace, **Paul and Mary's** marriage was successfully restored. They have been back together now for more than eleven years. That 30-day extension of the divorce decree that **Mary** granted, turned into a new life together. It hasn't been easy for either of them since agreeing to reconcile. However, today they both enthusiastically testify to being happy, inwardly peaceful, closer to the Lord and closer to one another than ever before. **Mary** is quick to acknowledge that she hasn't forgotten **Paul's** betrayal, but the power of God's forgiveness has enabled her to forgive him completely.

Their children suffered tremendously during this painful season in their life. In fact, their two preteen daughters had secretly agreed that, if their father left their mother and ran off with another woman, they would do everything they could to break up that new relationship. They had even composed a letter to the other woman and had planned to give it to her if their dad decided to live with her. **Paul and Mary** were shocked and saddened to discover what their daughters had done, when they shared their plans during a counseling session involving the whole family. Their children were scared, hurt, insecure and angry over what was happening with their parents. **Paul and Mary** had no idea how aware their children were of what was happening. They did not realize the depth of the impact their separation was having on their children.

During that family counseling session **Paul** humbled himself and asked forgiveness from each of his children. He wept over them, hugged each of them, and asked God to heal their broken hearts. **Paul and Mary** acknowledged to their children that they had made some wrong choices in the past. They then told them that the Lord had worked in their hearts, and that they were going to stay together. In fact, they were planning to renew their marriage vows with a ceremony at their church and they wanted the children to be involved in the ceremony.

The two older girls cried, laughed, danced and hugged their parents when they heard this remarkable news. The children were overwhelmed with joy. Their youngest boy was too young to understand what was happening, but the older girls were fully aware of what was taking place. They were witnessing a miracle in front of their eyes. Their prayers had been really answered. The relief in hearing that their parents were staying together quickly began to heal the wounds inflicted on their tender hearts.

**Paul and Mary** did indeed renew their marriage vows a few months later, and it was a day of great rejoicing. Not only, did their family and friends rejoice at this occasion, but heaven rejoiced, as well. The devil's plan for this couple had been defeated and God's plan was being fulfilled. **Paul and Mary** decided to enroll their family in a five-month discipleship training program with YWAM, in order to have a new start in their marriage. They spent five months in this school drawing closer to the Lord and receiving deeper healing. They then traveled to a developing nation and spent two months serving the Lord on a missionary outreach. This experience gave them the opportunity to turn their focus from their own problems and to begin reaching out to others in need.

Upon completion of this training program they returned to their hometown and got involved in their local church. Today [Paul and Mary](#) are helping other couples that are struggling with the very things that once threatened to tear their marriage apart. God has taken their pain and turned it into a purpose. He has transformed their misery into a ministry. The comfort they received from the Lord in the midst of their troubles is now being used to comfort other couples who are in crisis. **(II Corinthians 1:3-4)** They are grateful for how God has redeemed them and are eager to bring the good news of restoration to others.

This has been an exciting and remarkable journey for this couple. God has done something extraordinary in their lives. [Paul and Mary's](#) story demonstrates God's heart for hurting and broken families. He is the God of restoration and healing. He longs to heal broken hearts and broken families.

He wants to heal your marriage and family also. He wants to bring hope into your life, where you have given way to despair and discouragement. He wants to **“bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion-to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61:1-3)**

I pray that hope will arise in your heart as you read about God's plan for marriage and family in this book. May freedom come to you as you discover the keys to building a healthy marriage and a godly home. May you realize that it is never too late for God to work a miracle in your family. He is the God of the impossible. Nothing is too hard for him. [Paul and Mary's](#) marriage seemed hopelessly broken, but God demonstrated his great love toward them and accomplished what they could not do by themselves. He can do the same for you.

As God brings hope and change into your life, may you be inspired and motivated to pass on a godly legacy to your children and grandchildren. Changes in your life can have an impact for generations to come. The important issue in life is not what heritage you received from your parents and grandparents; the important issue is what heritage you will pass on to your children and grandchildren. May it be said of you that you are one who **“will rebuild the ancient ruins and raise up the age-old foundations.”** May you be called **“Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.” (Isaiah 58:12)** May God, not only restore your family through what you learn through this book, may He also use you to restore and rebuild other families in your community, your nation, and the world.

### Application Prayer

Father, thank you for the transformational work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of [Paul and Mary](#). I pray that you would work in my heart and in my family, as I learn more about the keys to building a healthy family. I thank you that you are committed to restore marriages and families.

I want my family to honor you and to bring glory to your name. I want a marriage that reflects God's glory and that demonstrates the Kingdom of God. I commit myself to respond to the insights the Holy Spirit shows me, as I read this book.

I trust you to work miracles in my family, just as you worked miracles in this couple's marriage. Forgive me for the ways I have failed you and failed my family. I want to humble myself before you and ask you to change me. I acknowledge that without you, I can do nothing. I also declare that, “I can everything through him who gives me strength.”

I look forward with hope toward the future and I am trusting that my family will fulfill its God-given destiny. Thank you for what you are going to do. In Jesus Name! Amen.

\*Note: The names in this story and throughout the book have been changed to respect the privacy of those involved.