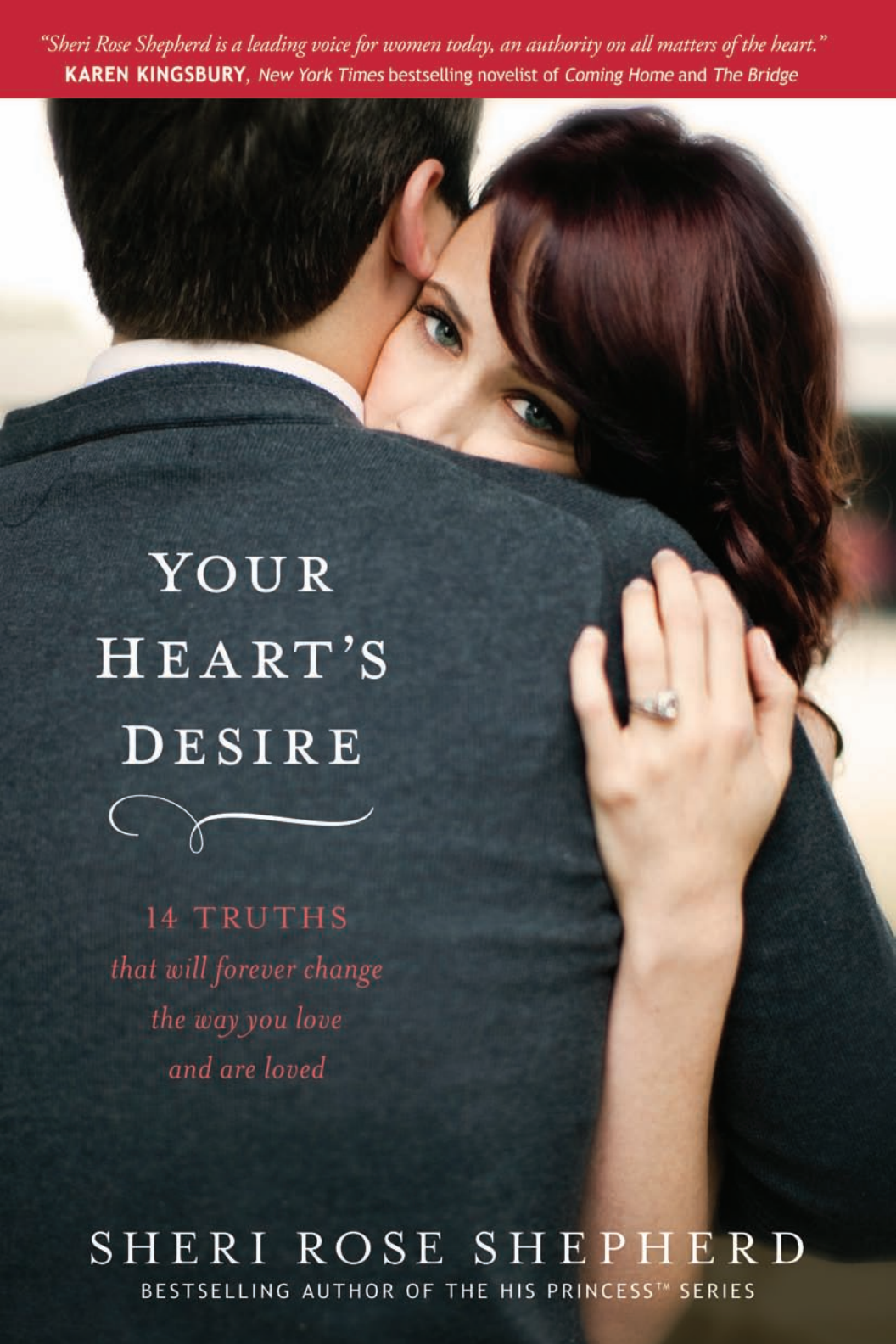


"Sheri Rose Shepherd is a leading voice for women today, an authority on all matters of the heart."

KAREN KINGSBURY, *New York Times* bestselling novelist of *Coming Home* and *The Bridge*



YOUR
HEART'S
DESIRE




14 TRUTHS
*that will forever change
the way you love
and are loved*

SHERI ROSE SHEPHERD

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE HIS PRINCESS™ SERIES

Your Heart's Desire





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.....
Sheri Rose
SHEPHERD
.....



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Your Heart's Desire: 14 Truths That Will Forever Change the Way You Love and Are Loved

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CONTENTS



From the Heart of Sheri Rose vii

Small Group Guide ix

1. DESIRING A "HAPPILY EVER AFTER"
Fighting the Temptation to Give Up on Love and Marriage . . . 1
2. DESIRING A GODLY MAN TO MARRY (FOR SINGLES)
Fighting NOT to Settle for Less than God's Best for Me . . . 15
3. DESIRING TO LEAVE A LEGACY FOR MY LOVED ONES
*Fighting to Give an Everlasting Blessing to My Broken
Family . . . 29*
4. DESIRING GOD'S DESIGN
THAT ME AND MY MAN BECOME ONE
*Fighting to Find a Heart Connection in Our Dramatic
Differences . . . 41*
5. DESIRING GOD TO GIVE ME THE POWER TO REMAIN PURE
Fighting to Find the Benefits and Blessings of Purity . . . 55
6. DESIRING TO GIVE AND RECEIVE LOVE
Fighting Feelings of Worthlessness . . . 67
7. DESIRING TO EMBRACE MY NEW LIFE IN CHRIST
Fighting the Enemies of Shame, Guilt, and Regret . . . 81
8. DESIRING TO BECOME A WOMAN MY MAN CAN LEAD
Fighting to Let Go and Trust His Leadership . . . 93

YOUR HEART'S DESIRE

9. DESIRING MY SON TO GROW TO BECOME A MAN OF FAITH
Fighting My Fears of Failing as His Mother . . . 107
10. DESIRING A MIRACLE TO BUILD
A NEW FOUNDATION OF LOVE
Fighting to Find a Renewed Passion, Purpose, and Plan . . . 121
11. DESIRING EXPRESSIONS
OF LOVE AND ROMANCE IN MY MARRIAGE
Fighting to Remain Faithful in My Heart . . . 135
12. DESIRING TO BELIEVE GOD CAN
CHANGE A MAN AND SAVE A MARRIAGE
Fighting to Forgive and Forget the Former Things . . . 151
13. DESIRING TO GLORIFY GOD
BY SHOWING HONOR AND RESPECT
*Fighting the Frustration Caused by Dishonorable Actions and
Attitudes . . . 165*
14. DESIRING TO SURRENDER MY WHOLE HEART TO MY LORD
Fighting to Give Up My Wants for God's Will in My Life . . . 181

Chapter Highlights to Hold On To 193

Your Heart's Desire 203

Closing Words from Sheri Rose 205

Endnotes 207

Scripture Index 209

More from the Author 211

1

DESIRING A
“HAPPILY EVER AFTER”

*Fighting the Temptation to
Give Up on Love and Marriage*



*Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful,
and endures through every circumstance.*

I CORINTHIANS 13:7

I BELIEVE WHEN a man walks down the aisle and says “I do,” his every hope and intention is that his marriage will be for life. He sincerely desires to understand and take care of the beloved bride he has chosen. He romanced her and worked hard to express his love so she would want to spend the rest of her life with him. He was determined to be her hero and lovingly lead her safely through life. The challenge for each man begins after the “I dos” because generally no one has taught him how to accomplish his God-appointed position in a woman’s life.

Eventually, a man’s attempts at love, leadership, and even heroism may miss their mark, and his beloved bride gradually

withdraws emotionally from the very one she hoped would give her happily ever after. Sadly, she often closes up her spirit in order to protect her heart from any more hurt.

The man she longs for ends up feeling frustrated and angry at himself, and he may give up trying. Their love story, which once fostered hopes of intimacy, happiness, and growing old together, withers into isolation, pain, and despair—sometimes even divorce. That was certainly what I saw growing up.

I was raised in a non-Christian home. My parents have each been married and divorced to three different people, so as part of several blended families, it was hard for me to understand what a healthy family is supposed to be. Needless to say, when I was growing up all I understood about marriage was “unhappily ever after.” So my heart’s desire was to find a godly man to love me forever and then to live with him in a lovely home with a white picket fence. To be honest, that white picket fence was almost as important as the man because somehow the fence represented the foundation of a stable family that I never had as a child and protection from heartbreak.

I gave my heart to the Lord at age twenty-four and fell madly in love with Jesus. A few years later, I met and married my husband, Steve, and we became the parents to a son, Jacob, and eleven years later to our daughter, Emily. Because of my love for God and my husband, I honestly didn’t think anything could shake my faith. Then in the summer of 2007, my happily ever after was wiped out and my faith was tested when all I feared about marriage became reality. All that I had

known to be true appeared to be a false hope. The foundation I had worked so hard to build and protect was almost destroyed, along with my ministry, in that season of my life. I truly believed that God had forsaken me.

I had just finished writing my book *Preparing Him for the Other Woman: A Mother's Guide to Raising Her Son to Love a Wife and Lead a Family*. It was one of the most difficult books I've ever written, but finally I had completed it and was ready to send it to the publisher. However, as I excitedly ran upstairs to my office to send the manuscript, I suddenly felt as if something dark hovered over me. My passion was drowned out by the fear of an attack from the enemy that could come against me and my family if I stepped on his territory . . . young men and their future marriages.

The reality hit me. I was putting a book out there that would shine some light in the darkness. After all, the devil has used many of his tools to destroy our young boys and confuse them about who they are and what their role is in a woman's life. I did not think I was strong enough to handle what could come if I stood in front of the giants in the land that were killing the confidence of our young men. I called the publisher and said I'd need to wait and pray for courage before submitting the manuscript.

I went to my husband and my son, who was eighteen years old and a senior in high school at the time. I told them of my fears and asked if they would stand by me no matter what happened. Then I looked at Jake and asked him if he had any plans of rebelling against his faith once he graduated

from high school. I told him I was willing to give him freedom to find his own faith in Christ, but I didn't want to put out a book about raising boys if my own son was going to walk away from the Lord. He reassured me that he was strong in his faith and that he felt I should publish the book. Three days later I decided to take the chance to make a difference and sent in the manuscript.

Several months later the book began climbing the charts, and everything seemed to be going well. I even began speaking with my son at conferences for mothers of boys. Then three months into my book tour, my fear of attack became reality. My husband had taken a job that we had both prayed for. This job appeared to be a blessing and gave him the opportunity to do what he loved. After he'd spent so many years working alongside me in my ministry, I looked forward to supporting him in his desired career.

Yet his new position required him to violate some of the boundaries we had put in place to protect our marriage, such as always attending evening social engagements together. While my heart was troubled by the compromises he had to make, Steve didn't see the dangers. He loved me and our kids, and he thought the boundaries, which we'd agreed on early in our marriage, were no longer necessary now that our marriage was strong.

Like many wives, I sensed that other women were coming after my man before my husband did. They were mostly attracted by how much he loved me. They wanted that kind of love. Because my husband was not the one pursuing any

woman, he thought he was safe. Sadly, we ended up separated. There I was in the public eye of ministry, fighting to save future marriages, and somehow my own marriage was falling apart.

My son was devastated by the division between his mom and dad. It was too hard for him to deal with all his confusion, pain, and anger. He was upset to see me unable to get control of my emotions and expressing doubts about my faith for the first time. Once Steve and I were living apart, he also felt pressured to become the “man of the house.” In despair, Jacob eventually took a break from his faith and began using drugs and alcohol to comfort himself.

Meanwhile, I hit the lowest point in my faith journey. Because of the upheaval in my home growing up, I had been through many horrible experiences. Yet when I rebuilt my broken life on Christ as a young adult, I assumed my life would never crumble again. I had been taught to run to God for cover when there was a great attack, but now I felt like He had left me alone on the battlefield to fight for myself. It appeared that all I had believed about God and all my effort to build a strong foundation for my own family had been shattered. My pain, my shame, and my life were an embarrassment. I felt as if I were battling an out-of-control fire that would burn up everything I loved and lived for.

Even worse was my fear of how this division between Steve and me would affect our seven-year-old daughter, Emily. I spent so many nights holding her while she cried and asked, “What happened to our family and why aren’t we

all living together anymore?” One night she asked, “Does God really answer prayer?” How I longed during that time for an answer that would increase her faith, but for the first time I had lost mine.

It's hard when you're in the middle of a war to find your peace or your purpose for fighting. I had thought I was fighting to further God's Kingdom on earth by equipping mothers to raise warriors, but it appeared I had lost the fight in my own life.

I moved in with a precious friend of mine who had a daughter Emily's age, and we lived in their guest room for most of the summer. Every night I would cry out to God as I questioned why He had not protected me while I was attempting to accomplish something for His glory. What I didn't know was that He was actually going to use this trial to unlock me from a greater fear and to free me from holding on so tightly to my family.

After weeks of anguish, I cried out, “How can I get through this and find a new foundation to build on?” It was in that moment I felt like the Lord asked me a bigger question: *Was My life given on a cross for you not enough for you to finish strong even if it means surrendering the life you wanted?*



For the first time I realized that my heart's true desire was to feel loved and secure, and yet no man on earth could love me the way my Lord does. It was in that moment of crisis that

I found the true meaning of following Christ. God had not forsaken me, but He had wanted to free me from depending on others to give me my happily ever after.

That night I gave my deepest heart's desire to God and chose to follow Him at any cost. In exchange, He gave me something so much better than a white picket fence. He surrounded me with His presence and gave me peace that was stronger than my circumstances. My faith was no longer in people; it was in Christ alone. Although nothing outwardly had changed yet, I had been changed. I woke up the next morning and let Steve and Jake know that I loved them, and no matter how our family worked out, I was going to finish the work that God had given me. Steve and I were sobered by the realization that we were in danger of throwing away everything we had built. Restoring our marriage, however, was excruciatingly painful and more difficult than either of us expected. For three years, we had to work through our anger and lay down our hurts for the greater good of our marriage. Even with intensive counseling, we separated and reunited a few more times as we dealt with the deep wounds we had inflicted on one another.

By God's grace, Jake eventually showed up at my door and chose to give his life 100 percent to God. He went to Los Angeles to be in full-time ministry and work on the streets with the Los Angeles Dream Center.

The ultimate payoff came when Steve and I attended our son's wedding together. We couldn't help but think how different the day would have been had we not fought for our

own marriage and for the legacy we would pass on to our two children. Jacob and Amanda's wedding not only marked the beginning of their life together, it also was the day Steve and I realized how much our marriage truly meant to us and others.

Today the foundation of our marriage is stronger than ever. Of course, there are still the challenges that come in every marriage, but we remain standing and have chosen to finish our lives together, for better or for worse, in times of trouble and times of joy, in times of sickness and times of health, until death do us part. Steve and I delight to watch our son and his wife work together to raise their new baby girl, Olive True, in the ways of the Lord.

As I think back on my own journey out of utter despair, I realize that even if reconciliation with Steve hadn't been possible, God would have enabled me to live out my faith with the right attitude so I could pass on a legacy of hope and joy to my children. As hard as this trial was, it taught me a valuable lesson: life may never become what we want it to be, but if we are committed to live driven by eternity, everything we do will become a reflection of God's grace and glory.

How tragic it would have been if I had walked away from all those years of ministry because of the actions of man. You may be thinking, *Sheri Rose, you have no idea what I have been through*. You're right—I don't and I never want to underestimate anyone's pain. Yet I believe the chapters to come will bring healing for your heart.

Let's take a moment and think about all the hardships so many of us have endured. It would be tragic to waste the painful

places we have walked. We can use our mistakes to make us wiser and our pain to make us passionate about devoting our lives to a purpose greater than our own personal happiness.

We can think about it this way: even if we have lost all faith in all men or the men we once loved, we shouldn't lose faith in our Lord, who loved us so much He gave His life for us on a cross and who longs to meet our deepest heart's desire . . . to be loved and to give love!



LOVE COACHING

I don't know where you stand today with the man you love or loved—or if you are single, divorced, separated, or widowed—but would you consider taking a step of faith with me and begin building a new foundation of love? I have discovered that healing begins and hope is restored when you and I use our pain to bring change and allow God to show us a picture bigger than our own desires.

 *Build from the wreckage . . .*

Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuilders of walls and a restorer of homes.

ISAIAH 58:12

Your heavenly Father knows how hard it is to find the strength to pour love and forgiveness into someone who

has caused you pain. He hurts with you, and He knows that when you and I are weak, we may have no idea where to find a fresh start. That is why we need a Savior. He is the author of a new beginning.

Regardless of the relational devastation you face, no one can keep you from finishing strong for God's glory. The way you fight and face your personal battles will become your mission statement. Look at what you can do for the sake of society and your children's future. Fight your feelings and work toward a future that will bring some relief and refreshment to this world. It is your life and it's your time. Do whatever you can to build a new foundation.

Even if there is no chance for reconciliation, don't add to the wreckage by giving in to despair. I know it is hard to believe one person's love and reaction to the ruins of relationships will help rebuild our broken society, but it's true. If you are unable to take the right action, pray hard and ask God to give you a right heart and attitude. If you have children, stand with honor for their sake and continue to pray that your man will step into his God-appointed position to become the man he was created to be. If you're single and see any marriage struggling, I encourage you to pray for that marriage because your prayer will be a part of the rebuilding of that marriage.

Our God can and will rebuild a beautiful life out of any broken heart willing to make a change. He will use one sacrificial choice, one act of forgiveness, one sincere repentant

heart, and one woman who is willing to step out in faith and start rebuilding with love.

 *Rebuild with your words . . .*

The words of the godly are a life-giving fountain.

PROVERBS 10:11

My son, Jake, has always been an excellent communicator and very relational. When he was eleven, I asked him an interesting marriage question. “Jake, how can I be a better wife to your dad?”

Without missing a beat, he replied, “Mom, you need to say fewer words and say nicer things to Daddy.”

I thought, *Wow, what wisdom coming from the mouth of a young boy who has never been married.*

God says our words can become a life-giving fountain. Have you ever noticed how rough stones can become beautiful when caressed by the gentle, consistent force of water running over them? Without water, they appear lifeless and rough. But in a gentle stream, even jagged corners are softened and sparkle with life. Our words can be just like that spring of water. Today I realize the Scripture is true: the power of life and death really is in our tongue (Proverbs 18:21).

I wish I could take back some of the things I said about Steve in front of Jacob during the worst days of our marriage. I now see how I allowed my frustrations to become a part of me instead of understanding that my anger and harsh words

made me part of the problem. Even though everything I was saying to my husband was how I truthfully felt, it wasn't fixing the problem or watering anyone around me.

I let my words increase the tension and tear down my family foundation without even realizing it. I had justified my actions by nurturing the disappointments I felt toward my husband, and gradually my daily words and my heart became stone-cold toward him. The truth is that what we feel eventually comes out in our words and then our actions. If we are not careful, the actions we take when we are hurting will eventually become our legacy.



LET US PRAY

Dear God,

I need Your power and grace to love the one who has hurt me. I confess I am angry and overwhelmed by the way things turned out. I invite You now to turn my heart toward heaven so I might live out the rest of my life for the greater cause of bringing glory to Your name. Help me leave a legacy of unconditional love. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

*I lift up my eyes—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

PSALM 121:1-2, NIV

His Love Letter to You

My Beloved Daughter,

I want to birth a new thing in your heart and bring forth the perfect peace and plan I have for you. I am asking you as your heavenly Father to look to the future and not to the past to find the path I have prepared for you.

I know it won't be easy, but it will be worth letting go of what once was to receive all I have for you. Your past has prepared you for your purpose, and nothing and no one can stop My plans for your life. Don't allow disappointment to direct your path. Now is the time to take My hand and walk out the rest of your days on earth with Me . . . your heavenly Daddy.

Love,

Your Creator of new life!



For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

ISAIAH 43:19



TREASURE OF TRUTH

REAL CHANGE HAPPENS WHEN WE BEGIN THE
CHANGE WE LONG TO SEE.



Love Questions for Your Small Group

1. What is your heart's desire for your relationship with a man?
2. Do you ever feel that God is letting you down in your key relationships? If so, how do you deal with your doubt and confusion?
3. Ask one another, "How can we pray for a man in your life?" Then set aside time to bring your requests and as a group lift up your men before the Lord.

Love Question Online with Sheri Rose



What if my husband has no desire to rebuild?

Snap the code with your smartphone or visit the link for Sheri Rose's insights.

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