



— MEMOIR —

BEYOND ORDINARY

when a good marriage just isn't good enough

— JUSTIN & TRISHA DAVIS —

PRAISE FOR *BEYOND ORDINARY*

What a moving and inspiring testimony! Justin and Trisha Davis are powerful examples of God's ability to breathe new life into a marriage that seems to have reached the end. With scriptural insights gained through the Davises' own fight to save their marriage, *Beyond Ordinary* encourages every couple to believe that their relationship can become truly extraordinary.

JIM DALY

President, Focus on the Family

Justin and Trisha have lived through extreme difficulty and brokenness in their marriage, but the Jesus we follow loves to take broken things and put them back together. That kind of deep healing has been part of my story, and it's the story of so many of the children Compassion is blessed to serve every day. I hope that as you read these pages, you'll find a deeper understanding of how complete dependence on God is the only way to fully live.

DR. WESS STAFFORD

President and CEO of Compassion International

Ordinary marriages are only one or two steps away from destruction, which is so unfortunate because the God of the universe designed marriage to be far from ordinary. In this book Justin and Trisha share a story of struggle and hope as they pull back the curtain on what was almost a tragic marriage, which turned into triumph because they were both willing to deal with the heart rather than simply trying to repair external issues. I am

so thankful that they wrote this book and believe it will help people to stop fighting *in* their marriages and begin fighting *for* them.

PERRY NOBLE

Senior pastor of NewSpring Church

Justin and Trisha share their story with transparency and courage. But this book goes beyond just storytelling. They provide practical and powerful teaching that is applicable to every couple—newlywed or veteran. This resource will greatly strengthen your marriage. I can say that honestly, because it's done it for mine.

NATALIE GRANT

Five-time GMA Female Vocalist of the Year

Everyone likes a good love story. But many of us spend our lives slightly disappointed in the love story we're trying to live. *Beyond Ordinary* is what you've been looking for if you want to ignite your relationship to become what God intended for you to have. The practical advice and engaging writing will make you turn to this book's wisdom time and again.

LYSA TERKEURST

New York Times bestselling author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

My favorite thing about this book is that it's not a book on how to have a perfect marriage. It's a book about having a real marriage. And the difference between those two things is monumental. Honest, insightful, and helpful, this is an awesome resource.

JON ACUFF

Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *Quitter* and *Stuff Christians Like*

Justin and Trisha Davis have given every married couple a gift on the pages of this book. Their refreshing honesty peels back the layers of marriage to reveal the real challenges we all face. Their story will help you examine your marriage and learn what it takes to move it from ordinary to extraordinary!

JILL SAVAGE

CEO of Hearts at Home and author of *No More Perfect Moms*

Beyond Ordinary is raw, painfully honest, and wildly hopeful. Its rawness will cut to the depths of your heart. Its honesty will shock and shake you to your core. And its hopefulness will give you the gospel-empowered resources to have an extraordinary marriage and life. This book should be required reading for every Christian college student and church staff. It's that's good.

DERWIN L. GRAY

Lead pastor of Transformation Church

Beyond Ordinary is a great resource for any married couple. Justin and Trisha are courageously transparent as they expose the intimate details of their marriage in an effort to help others face their own marital struggles without being burdened by the overwhelming thought that they are all alone. There is a perfect balance of storytelling and biblical application that is sure to encourage every couple to strive for an extraordinary marriage!

JENNIFER SMITH

Author of the Unveiled Wife blog

In this book of searing honesty, Justin and Trisha remind us that marriage, like any other good and beautiful thing, is worth fighting for and cannot be won or kept without the desire

to fight for it. In their story you will find your story, or you will find hope for a story that needs healing in its own way.

JOHN ORTBERG

Author of *The Me I Want to Be* and senior pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

Justin and Trisha Davis have given us a profound gift of transparency and practical hope in *Beyond Ordinary*. Through their own journey they point the way to better relationships and healing for all of us, whether we are struggling or striving. This is a great, realistic book filled with life lessons we all need to apply.

JUD WILHITE

Author of *Torn* and senior pastor of Central Christian Church, Las Vegas

Justin and Trisha Davis' story is more than just inspiring, it's evidence of truth. *Beyond Ordinary* gave us hope for something bigger than "ordinary" in our marriage and gave us the tools to see that hope turn into a reality.

TIFFANY LEE

Lead singer of Plumb

Beyond Ordinary is an inspiring marriage story that gives hope to those who want an extraordinary marriage. Justin and Trisha Davis fought for their marriage and won, and you can too.

KEN COLEMAN

Host of *The Ken Coleman Show*

As a pastor, I'm often asked what is the most important issue facing the church today. There are many, but in my opinion, it comes down to marriage. When marriages fail or stagnate, there is a ripple effect for years to come. Sadly, this is the usual,

ordinary story being told today. That's why *Beyond Ordinary* is so important. Justin and Trisha are real people with a real story of extraordinary hope and healing. It's why this is no ordinary book.

JEFF HENDERSON

Lead pastor of Gwinnett Church

What an honor it is for me to be able to endorse a book I know will change so many marriages. As a friend of Justin and Trish, I have had the opportunity to see the way their teaching has spoken wisdom to so many others. I have also witnessed what a beautiful, strong relationship they share with each other. It is clear from my time with them that they love the Lord and seek to glorify Him even through their own brokenness, and I just know how many men and women will be blessed through their soul searching and solid, biblical teaching. I hope many people buy this book and move one step closer to that which the Lord desires of us: true restoration.

ANGIE SMITH

Author of *What Women Fear* and speaker for Women of Faith

We all want a life that's more than ordinary, especially when it comes to our relationships. But few of us are willing to pay the price, to do the work and go through the pain. Justin and Trisha show you what it takes—through their painful but beautiful tale of love and loss—to have an incredible marriage, life, and faith. Reading this book just might save you a few scars, but be prepared: it will also call you out of complacency and into something extraordinary.

JEFF GOINS

Author of *Wrecked: When a Broken World Slams into Your Comfortable Life*

Beyond Ordinary is the best marriage book I've ever read! Justin and Trisha not only share their heartbreaking yet redemptive story, but they explain how they landed in an ordinary marriage full of devastation. They share godly wisdom and practical advice that will benefit *all* marriages. Today, their marriage résumé has *betrayal* listed on it, but you'd never know it. They have leaned into their heavenly Father and allowed, even begged Him to take their once mediocre, deficient marriage and not only give them a new, improved, extraordinary marriage, but help you have one too. And you will, if you read this book.

CINDY BEALL

Author of *Healing Your Marriage When Trust Is Broken*

With touching transparency, practical wisdom, and biblically based advice, Justin and Trisha Davis provide a compelling look at the ways a couple can see their marriage renewed and transformed. *Beyond Ordinary* offers proof positive that even the most struggling marriage can be resurrected into a thriving relationship that glorifies God.

ESTHER FLEECE

Assistant to the president for millennial relations,
Focus on the Family

This is a game-changing book on marriage by Justin and Trisha Davis. Finally, a Christian resource for couples that preaches personal responsibility, facing conflict, and living with a sense of purpose and intentionality. This is a book that I will continue to draw on not only for my own marriage, but for the hundreds of couples I work with in my therapy practice.

Thank you for writing this book and sharing so authentically your story of how God refined your marriage.

RHETT SMITH

Licensed marriage and family therapist and author of *The Anxious Christian: Can God Use Your Anxiety for Good?*

Justin and Trisha demonstrate how to achieve the dynamic marriage God intends for us—whether we’re experiencing catastrophe or just caught in the grind of the ordinary life. Every married couple should read this!

SHAWN AND TRICIA LOVEJOY

Author of *The Measure of Our Success* and senior pastor of Mountain Lake Church

Justin and Trisha Davis have an honest and heart-wrenching story about what happens all too often in today’s marriages. However, their commitment to faith and forgiveness is so incredibly rare and *beyond ordinary* that it’s an inspiring testimony of hope to any marriage in any condition. Learn from their painful mistakes, heed their practical advice, and inherit God’s powerful grace through their story. This book will absolutely transform your faith in God and the future of your marriage!

RORY VADEN

New York Times bestselling author of *Take the Stairs*

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When a Good Marriage Just Isn't Good Enough

JUSTIN & TRISHA DAVIS



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CONTENTS

Foreword xvii

Introduction xxi

CHAPTER 1	No Ordinary Beginning	1
CHAPTER 2	No Ordinary Battle	27
CHAPTER 3	No Ordinary Honesty	47
CHAPTER 4	No Ordinary Journey	65
CHAPTER 5	No Ordinary Contract	81
CHAPTER 6	No Ordinary Crossroads	99
CHAPTER 7	No Ordinary Dependence	115
CHAPTER 8	No Ordinary Confession	133
CHAPTER 9	No Ordinary Forgiveness	147
CHAPTER 10	No Ordinary Healing	169
CHAPTER 11	No Ordinary Sex	187
CHAPTER 12	No Ordinary Marriage	205

Acknowledgments 221

Notes 227

FOREWORD

SOME TEN YEARS into my marriage, I found myself asking a question I never imagined I would ask. With haunting regularity, my wife, Brandi, and I were asking, “Why are we married?”

Several events had occurred that forced this question to the forefront of our marriage. We had several close Christians friends who were divorcing. Someone we really looked up to was caught in an affair. In our own relationship we realized that marriage hadn’t taken away all of our problems; it had even added a few along the way.

Beyond that, I had bought into a damaging illusion that was eroding the very foundation of our marriage and causing immense damage. I knew you had to study hard to make it through college. I knew that if you were going to climb the ladder in any professional arena, it would require hard work and dedication. But somehow I thought that if you truly loved someone enough to marry that person, your marriage would just work without your effort and you’d live happily ever after.

So while I focused on trying to build a great church, I also unknowingly communicated to Brandi that I was perfectly okay settling for a mediocre marriage. And if I’m honest, that’s exactly what we had.

I'll never forget the humbling moment when I realized that while I had helped bring Brandi some of her greatest joys, I had also contributed to her deepest pain. I don't know why I didn't see it earlier. I mean, think about it. Can you name any area of your life you can neglect and then expect to see improvement?

Does this work with your body? Nope. Ignore it, and you'll get fat.

Does this work with your business? Nope. Ignore it, and it will crash.

Does this work with your yard? Nope. Ignore it and, it will be overrun by weeds.

So why in the world do we think we can put our marriages on autopilot and they will still be what God wants them to be?

Marriage is deeply satisfying. Marriage is incredibly fulfilling. Marriage is loads of fun. Marriage is full of joy and hope and laughter. But marriage is not easy. Not even close.

Maybe you have picked up this book as a preemptive move. You're not in crisis mode. In other words, nobody is threatening to call a divorce attorney . . . but you know you're stuck. You realize that you and your spouse are losing ground. You're starting to neglect your marriage. There's distance setting in, a little hostility beginning to show, and you're not making any progress. You're tempted to resign yourself to the idea that this is the best your marriage can be.

But there's a little voice inside whispering, *You'd better do something*. I want to commend you for being obedient to that voice and picking up this book.

Maybe you are beyond "stuck" and feel like your marriage is on a respirator or maybe even flatlined. You feel out to sea with no shore in sight, and you have no idea which direction to head. As Justin and Trish are fond of saying, "There is a gap between the marriage you have and the marriage you thought you'd have," and the gap seems insurmountable.

But you don't want to give up. You haven't given up. It's why you've picked up this book. And I'm so glad you did.

Let me give you one word of warning: this is not a safe book. I know Justin and Trish. I know their heart. I know their mission. And with no apologies they're about to disrupt and challenge everything you've ever thought about improving in your marriage. At times this book can be painfully honest in its authentic portrayal of what can happen to the best of marriages when left to drift.

As soon as I started reading the manuscript that led to this book, I realized just what an amazing resource Justin and Trish are sharing with us. Tears welled in my eyes as I read, knowing this is not just a book that will help you discover an "extraordinary marriage"; it will actually tell you how to achieve it.

Much of the genius of this book undoubtedly lies in the reality that Justin and Trish have lived these principles themselves. I've had the unbelievable privilege of doing life with Justin and Trish over the past twelve years, and I am better for it. I can tell you firsthand that if you'll listen to the God-given wisdom they share in this book, your life and marriage will never be the same.

I am deeply grateful for the transformation that has happened in my own marriage as a result of the wisdom in this book, and I hope most earnestly it will be so for you as well. May the God of grace lead and guide you through each chapter.

Pete Wilson

Senior pastor, Cross Point Church

INTRODUCTION

A FEW MONTHS AGO my wife, Trisha, and I (Justin) found ourselves at the starting line of the Indianapolis mini-marathon. If we could finish the 13.1 miles, it would fulfill our three-year goal to run the race together. Trish had been training about three times per week, working her way up to longer runs. I had been training sporadically at best. I was counting on the adrenaline of being with thirty-one thousand running mates to carry me farther than my training could.

As we approached the four-mile marker, I got a huge smile on my face. We were running at a ten-minute-mile pace, and I felt really good. I said to Trish, “This is amazing. I’ve never run beyond four miles at one time before!”

“What!” she said. I could tell she was more concerned than impressed.

“I ran three times a week for the last month, but I only ran three miles each time. Every step we take past four miles is a personal best for me.”

“You’re crazy!” she said.

I preferred to think I was brilliant. “Think of all the time I saved not doing those long runs on Saturdays,” I said.

Famous last words.

As we approached mile ten, I could feel my legs tighten with

every step. I kept waiting for what everyone calls “the runner’s high” to find me, but it never arrived. When we crossed mile ten, I went down. My quadriceps were balls of tightness, and I couldn’t bend my legs or take a step without piercing pain.

My in-shape wife was just hitting her second wind but was gracious enough to stop and help me stretch. As I lay on the ground in pain, I said to her, “I don’t understand why my legs are cramping up so bad. I drank water all along the way. I stretched out. I felt great just ten minutes ago.”

“Justin,” she said, “you don’t train for the first ten miles. You train for the last three.”

For the next three miles, we walked, kind of ran, and stopped to stretch when I needed to. Trisha could have gone ahead of me and finished in good standing, but she sacrificed her half-marathon time to stay with my ill-trained, broken-down body. We finished in just under three hours.

When most of us get married, we think we are ready for the race before us. We are optimistic. We are in love. We have a plan and a dream. We’ve dated for a year; we went to premarital counseling for a month; we read at least half of a “preparing for your marriage” book. We’ve trained. We’ve prepared. We’re ready.

What most couples don’t realize is that we don’t train for the first ten miles of marriage; we train for the last three. Seemingly without warning, many marriages fall down in the middle of the race. Marriages that seemed fine a few months or years earlier fall victim to the grueling difficulty of the marathon. Couples who had every intention of finishing their race together either run at different paces or quit altogether.

Beyond Ordinary is written by two fellow runners. We’ve tripped and fallen along the way, but by God’s grace, we’ve found the “runner’s high” in the marriage marathon. This book is a reminder of just how amazing the journey together can be.

Beyond Ordinary is designed to help you along the way. It will stretch you. It will challenge you. It will inspire you to keep run-

ning. It will ask you to help each other up and to run with grace and purpose. To leave ordinary behind as you race toward extraordinary.

Ordinary is the biggest enemy of a great marriage. Ordinary is characterized by dissatisfaction, misunderstanding, and stale love. Ordinary is the birthplace of adultery. Ordinary is a place where divorce looks better than staying together. Ordinary is the subtle trap that convinces you that your marriage is as good as it will ever get. Ordinary marriages lose hope. Ordinary marriages lose vision. Ordinary marriages give in to compromise.

The way to an ordinary marriage is the path of least resistance. If you want an extraordinary marriage, you will have to choose it.

This book is a weapon designed to wage war against ordinary. It isn't about communicating better or learning what planet your spouse is from or what love language he or she speaks. Instead, this book is a transparent look into the lives of two people who have journeyed from extraordinary to ordinary to nightmarish—and back again, by God's grace. This is a book about the heart: our hearts, your heart, and the heart of every marriage.

If you're looking for a book that lists five easy steps to a great marriage, go back to the bookstore. But if you remember what extraordinary felt like and are determined to do whatever it takes to get back there, keep reading.

There will be times when it will feel like it's over, but it's not over. There will be times when you will be tempted to throw this book across the room. Go ahead—it can handle it! This book will challenge you to ask questions about yourself and your marriage that will be uncomfortable to consider. Embrace those questions and be honest. It is as we face our fears and learn to tell the truth that we begin to leave ordinary behind in our relationships with God and in our marriages.

Ordinary will be defeated with each turn of the page and with the belief that God is fighting for you more than you are fighting for yourself.

Welcome to the movement beyond marriage as usual.

1.

NO ORDINARY BEGINNING

FOR MANY OF US there is a gap between the marriage we have and the marriage we thought we would have. Sometimes that gap is created by unrealistic dreams and expectations. But more often that gap is created by a subtle equation that defines many marriages:

Time + unintentionality = ordinary marriage.

It isn't that we intend to drift away from our spouses, but over time it just happens.

Do you remember the hope you had the day you got married? Do you remember the vows you made—"in sickness and in health," "for better or worse," "till death do us part"? Your marriage was going to be different. Your marriage was going to be special. Your marriage was going to be anything but ordinary.

Is your marriage extraordinary today? Or are you miles away

from those early feelings, hopes, and dreams? Even the healthiest marriages have the potential to drift.

You may not be sure how it happened, but over the course of time, your marriage may have become ordinary. You are not the spouse you imagined. You don't have the marriage you dreamed of when you said, "I do." Words that once defined your relationship—intimate, fun, exciting, romantic, growing, loving, patient, forgiving—now seem to describe another time and a different couple.

It isn't that you wanted a marriage of mediocrity; it's that you've drifted into it.

Do you remember what it felt like the first time you met your spouse? How about the late-night conversations and the crazy things you did to impress him or her? What was your first kiss like? Can you picture the backflips your stomach was doing before you asked her to marry you, or while you were waiting to be asked? No matter how long you've been married, there is something special about remembering the extraordinary beginning of your relationship. It takes you to a place of hope, allows you to remember your dreams, and reminds you why you chose to commit the rest of your life to your spouse in the first place.

JUSTIN:

When I started college in 1991, I had my life and my future planned out. I had played basketball in high school, and Lincoln Christian College in Lincoln, Illinois, was only a temporary stop on my way to greatness. My plan was to go to Lincoln, play basketball for a year, take some core classes, and then transfer to a bigger, better school and play basketball on scholarship. I wanted to be a teacher and a basketball coach, and Lincoln wasn't where I wanted to be for the next four years. I was a late bloomer in high school and didn't get really good until my senior year, so my freshman year at Lincoln would serve as a nice prep year for bigger and better things.

A few days after I arrived on campus, the local paper did a story

on Lincoln's 1991 freshman recruits. The article described each new player, calling me "the Cadillac of the recruiting class." That statement summed up how I felt about myself. I was the Cadillac of this little campus. My playing for them was a gift.

My attitude toward God was similar to my attitude toward the school. I was a Christian and went to church, but my life was pretty compartmentalized. Basketball had its place, dating had its place, and God had his place in my heart. I knew what I wanted to do with my life, and God could come along for the ride, but *I* was in the driver's seat. I had a plan.

Basketball season started, and I performed as expected. Lincoln had won eight games the year before I arrived. My freshman year we won eighteen games. At the end of my first season, I expected offers from bigger schools to come flooding in. I led the team in scoring and rebounding as a freshman; I thought that should be impressive enough. No offers. My plan wasn't working out.

I went home for the summer feeling defeated. It seemed that I had failed and didn't have a backup plan. I would have to go back to Lincoln in the fall. I started work a few days later as a cashier at Walmart in my hometown, Crawfordsville, Indiana.

As I was working one afternoon, a familiar face came through my checkout line. Kurt was a few years older than me, and his dad ran the church camp I'd attended as a kid. We recognized each other, and I asked him what he was doing in town. He was a pastor at a small church about ten miles south of Crawfordsville.

Then he said something that changed the entire trajectory of my life: "Why are you working here at Walmart when you could do something great with your life?"

My first thought was, *Dude, step off, this is only a summer gig.* I looked around to see where my boss was before I answered. "I don't know. I've never really thought about it."

"You should come be my youth pastor," he said. "I'll pay you a hundred dollars a weekend to teach Sunday school and children's church and to start a youth group."

Was this guy crazy? How did he get in my line at Walmart? I had no idea what a youth pastor was supposed to do, but a hundred dollars a week for a few hours of work sounded like easy money.

I went through the formality of meeting with the leaders at the church, and a few weeks later I started as their weekend youth pastor. My first Sunday I had eight kids show up for youth group. They ranged from fifth to tenth grade. I had prepared a message (my first), and it covered Genesis all the way through Revelation. The message lasted almost an hour. I didn't want to leave anything out!

At the end of the talk, I closed by saying, "Okay, if you don't want to go to hell and you want to invite Jesus into your heart, raise your hand." Kyle, one of the younger teens, raised his hand. I didn't know what to do at this point. I never thought anyone would raise their hand, so I hadn't thought through what to do next. Awkwardly, I said a prayer with Kyle, dismissed the kids, and then went to Kurt's house to make sure that Kyle was saved, because I didn't know what I was doing.

God used that moment to open my heart to his plan for me. I suddenly realized that I could partner with God to change eternity. I had never thought about that before. Over the next year, I would come back to that church each weekend the basketball team wasn't traveling, and God would use the church youth to mold me more than he used me to mold them.

My sophomore year, I didn't fall out of love with myself, but I fell more in love with Jesus and his church. I came to terms with being at Lincoln and changed my major to Christian education. Reluctantly, I was opening myself to God's plan for my life and surrendering parts of my plan to him. God was preparing me for the plan he had in mind.

That plan began to unfold in the fall of 1993, when Trisha and I met. I was a junior and she was a freshman at Lincoln. After one of our first chapels of the year, my friend Kenny asked, "Have you seen the hot girl with the bright red lipstick?"

I hadn't . . . yet.

I have to admit something: I am not proud of the story I am about to share. I wish that the details weren't true, but unfortunately, they are.

Kenny and I walked from the chapel over to the cafeteria, and there Trisha stood—big 1993 hair coupled with bright red lipstick. She was indeed hot. I wanted to make a big impression, so I approached her with confidence.

“Hey there, beautiful. I don't think we've ever met.” She smirked with what was either charm or disgust. So I continued to wow her. “My name is God, and—” pointing to Kenny—“this is my son, Jesus Christ.”

I don't really know what I was thinking with that introduction. Maybe because we were at Bible college, I thought it would be both spiritual and endearing. Trisha thought it was neither.

I thought it was money.

Trisha reluctantly shook my hand. “I'm just kidding,” I said. “I'm JD, and this is my buddy Kenny. You should really get to know us.”

Honestly, I don't remember what Trisha said at that point because I was so impressed with my introduction.

I knew I had made an impression. Kenny begged me to set him up with her, and the next morning, I saw Trisha walking out of the cafeteria. I approached her believing I could convince her to go out with Kenny. After all, I was a well-known junior all-American basketball player, while she was a freshman who, by now, had probably heard all about how great I was.

“Hey, Trisha,” I said. “I'm sure you remember me from yesterday. I wanted to talk to you about something.” She looked annoyed, but I wasn't fazed. “It's really early in the semester. Having been here a couple of years now, I wanted to let you know how dating works here at LCC. This is prime time because there are a lot of dating options right now. Those options tend to get less attractive as the semester goes on.”

She looked at me as if I had a third eye.

“My friend Kenny that you met yesterday—”

“Jesus Christ?” she interrupted.

“Yeah, Jesus Christ. He may not be the best-looking guy, but he is really nice. You should consider going out with him.”

Obviously this wasn't the best way to set someone up, but I was expecting that she wouldn't be interested in Kenny. I wanted to ask her out, but I couldn't do that to my good friend . . . until he was denied, that is.

“Sorry,” she said. “I'm not interested in going out with Kenny. I have a boyfriend back home.” “Boyfriend back home” was often code for “not interested.” She wasn't interested in Kenny, but I walked away with an assurance that given some time, she would be interested in me.

I called her the next day to ask her out. Her roommate answered the phone.

“Hey, this is Justin Davis. Is Trisha there?”

I could hear her roommate whisper, “It's Justin Davis. He wants to talk to you.” I was expecting Trisha to be excited to talk to me, but she sounded more confused than excited. Maybe she was just intimidated.

“Hey, Trisha. It's Justin Davis. I wanted to see if you'd like to grab some dinner, maybe go to a movie this weekend.”

“Do you remember yesterday when I told you I had a boyfriend back home?” she asked.

“Yeah, I vaguely remember,” I admitted.

“Well, I have a boyfriend back home.”

“Oh, you were serious? That wasn't just because you weren't interested in Kenny?”

“I was serious.”

“So me asking you out doesn't change your ‘boyfriend back home’ status?” I pressed.

“No,” she said, and that ended the conversation.

She said no? I thought. What just happened? Maybe she hasn't heard about how great I am.

What she didn't know was that I had three guys from the basketball team in my room when I asked her out, since I was going to show them how to capture the heart of a lady.

I'm competitive, I don't like to lose, and my pride was hurt a little by this rejection, so I made a bet with one of the guys in the room that I could get Trisha to go out with me by the end of the semester. But even after my friend gladly pocketed my fifty dollars—way too many rejections later—I continued (unsuccessfully) to ask Trisha out.

But Trisha had made a fatal mistake in her strategy: she became a cheerleader. And since the cheerleaders traveled with the basketball team to away games, naturally, we began to spend a lot of time together.

TRISHA:

In 1993 I found myself, as if beamed from another planet, in the middle of a cornfield attending Lincoln Christian College in Lincoln, Illinois. It was a far cry from the hustle and bustle of living in the inner city of Joliet, just south of Chicago. It makes me chuckle when people talk about the “inner city” as this dark place in need of rescue. From my point of view, this poor little town in the middle of nowhere was in desperate need of some rescuing. For example, how can a respectable town have only two fast-food restaurants and one gas station?

I came from a high school with rich culture in which fashion trends were an eclectic mix of Salt-N-Pepa meets Nirvana. When I came to LCC, I definitely represented a fashion style the campus had never seen before. Cross Colours clothes and bright red lips were the norm back home, but it was apparent that Wrangler jeans and clear lip gloss ruled here. What else could these people wear when the only place to shop for clothes was the farm goods store?

I was the first in my family to go to college. I had no idea what

I was doing, and the fact that I stood out like a sore thumb didn't help. As I sat in my dorm room terrified, I thought, *I'm so out of place. I don't belong here. But I'm from Joliet! I'm strong and street smart. I. Can. Do. This!* So I stood up and went to the dorm room next to mine.

My introduction to a group of girls huddled together on the floor talking—who I assumed had all just met—didn't go so well. I was greeted with a look of “What in the world is this girl doing?” Apparently they *did* all know each other, and I had just interrupted their conversation.

“Hi, I'm Trisha Lopez!” I said. Why I felt the need to share my full name is still a mystery, but I continued, “Are you guys freshmen too?”

Crickets.

In my desperate need to fill the awkward air, I kept going with the questions. “Where are you guys from?”

Giggles. One of them blurted out, “Effingham, Illinois!” Now I'd lived in Illinois my whole life and had never heard of Effingham, which sounded to me like they were trying to say a bad word in code. I stood there speechless.

Eventually Jodi (who had more energy than all of us combined) spoke up and introduced me to the rest of the group. Angie, Jodi, Brooke, and Beth became not only my best friends but Justin's, too. Without my knowledge this crew became “Team Justin,” his partners in crime to convince me to date him.

It started with plans of attack like Justin's driving to my hometown to a party that he wasn't invited to. Then there was the day he talked Team Justin into breaking into my dorm room to get my dirty laundry so he could wash and dry it for me, underwear and all. I was mortified!

Justin was the big man on campus. *Everyone* called him JD. Girls would rub his bald head and say, “Hi, JD!” So I called him Justin. I thought he was an arrogant country boy who considered himself the Michael Jordan of our campus. He definitely wasn't the guy you wanted washing your dirty underwear.

But something was changing in our relationship. The more time we spent together, his need to be “JD” melted away, and I was given a view into his heart that he’d never shown to another girl before. What he didn’t know was the grander the view he gave me, the more my heart was falling in love with his. Team Justin was starting to win.

We started to share about our families. Justin was the oldest; I was the middle child, yet we both played the role of the peacemaker in our families. Our dads were both the blue-collar, jack-of-all-trades types. Our moms had both worked hard to advance in their careers. Justin’s mom was a teacher’s aide but earned her college degree to become a special education teacher. My mom was a paralegal who landed a job in downtown Chicago at one of the largest law firms in the world. There was so much we had in common.

Yet Justin was bold; I was timid. He could sell a used doughnut; you might buy one from me out of pity just because I lovingly offered it. He was book smart; I was street smart. My very first test at LCC was writing the books of the Bible in the correct order and *spelling* them correctly. It might as well have been the bar exam! Justin, by contrast, could glance at a textbook’s table of contents on his way to a test and ace it.

The once-arrogant jock who relentlessly got on my nerves was now a friend I started to miss when we were apart. Rather than dreading his calls, I anticipated them. After turning him down fifty-one times, I was praying for the fifty-second!

I will never forget coming back to the dorm after my first official date with Justin. Team Justin was waiting for me in my dorm room. As I entered, we all giggled, and Angie, who was never shy with words, spoke up. “So . . . *what happened?*”

“We kissed!” I said as I slid to the floor with my back against the door, my eyes closed as if I were back in that moment. “When he kissed me it was like fireworks!”

Team Justin had won, and I’m so glad they did!

JUSTIN:

When Trisha and I were away on basketball trips, we would sit together on the bus and talk, hang out in the lobbies of hotels and talk, and sit on the bleachers and talk. We talked about everything: our families, relationships, God, ministry, our hopes and dreams, and everything under the sun. There was a natural flow to our conversation. Perhaps because dating initially was not an option, I felt a freedom to relax and be myself, and soon we became best friends.

The semester ended, and we both went home for Christmas break. We missed each other. When we returned to school in January, there was a sense of romance and attraction in our relationship that hadn't been there before. (It had always been there for me, but Trisha was now open to reciprocating.) Approximately the fifty-second time I asked Trish out, she finally said yes.

We went to Bennigan's on our first date. I felt like a kid on Christmas morning. I had a 1988 Ford Taurus, but I didn't want to drive that on our first date. I borrowed a friend's beat-up, run-down Chevy Cavalier convertible instead. It was January in Illinois, so we wouldn't be riding with the top down anyway, but for some reason, the convertible made the date more romantic. Trisha ordered a grilled chicken salad and didn't eat more than two bites. She was nervous; I was nervous. But despite our nerves, it was easy to be with each other. I had never gone out with someone who already knew me so well. When we got back to campus, I asked if I could kiss her. She said yes, and I'm not going to lie, it was amazing!

We couldn't talk enough. We'd stay up late at night talking on the phone. I was never much of a breakfast person, but I started getting up so I could see Trish in the cafeteria before her classes. We spent most nights studying together. We just loved being together.

A few months after we started dating, Trisha came home with me for the weekend. She was excited about meeting Kyle and some of the other kids at the church where I was a youth pastor. I could

feel myself falling in love with Trisha before, but seeing her interact with the kids and share the love of God with them made me fall head over heels. We started to serve together. She sang and led worship for our little youth group, and I taught. God had created us to complement each other in an amazing way.

Not only did we fall in love with each other, we fell in love with the vision of what God could do through us as a couple. We fell in love with the thought of serving God—together. We fell in love with the idea of changing the world—together. God had brought us together and given us the same desire to serve him, the same desire to serve students, the same desire to help people find the way back to God through a personal relationship with Jesus. It was amazing. I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with this woman, and I wanted to serve God for the rest of my life with her.

I proposed to Trish on July 5, 1994. We had been dating only a little over six months, but we had been looking at engagement rings and dreaming about life and ministry together. Trisha was living at home for the summer, and I came up with a plan to surprise her. I drove about three hours to her house. I rented a limo and was going to pick her up from work.

Trisha worked at a Christian day camp for third- and fourth-grade kids. I got dressed in the only suit I owned; the limo came to Trisha's house to pick me up. I had purchased two dozen roses and had them in a vase ready to greet her in the car. As the limo drove me from her house to the camp, I cued up an audiocassette of our song: "I Swear" by All-4-One. This was going to be an *incredible* proposal.

I had called the camp director and asked that he keep Trish in his office until I showed up. He was glad to help me pull off the proposal. I rolled up in the limo, stepped out of the door, and the camp director walked Trish out of his office and into the parking lot. As soon as I saw her, my nerves went into high gear. I had made reservations at Michael Jordan's restaurant in downtown Chicago. My plan was to propose to her with our song playing as we drove to the restaurant.

Trisha was caught totally off guard. She was muddy and dirty and wet. I had had no idea that on this particular day the camp had gone creek walking. I was undeterred. I asked her to get in the limo. I was shaking as I pushed the tape into the tape deck and we pulled out of the parking lot.

I had my speech planned out. I had envisioned this moment my entire three-hour drive to Trisha's house. As I began, the driver took a sharp turn, and the two dozen roses fell off the seat, spilling onto the floor. The water from the vase filled the floorboard and covered our feet.

I was flustered. I dropped the ring box into the water. By this time, our song had played all the way through and a different song that had nothing to do with swearing or "better or worse" or "death do us part" was playing. Now *I* was ready to swear, just in a different way. As I scrambled to pick up the ring and soak up the water, we came to a dead stop in Chicago rush-hour traffic.

There was no going back. Despite the soggy conditions, despite the wrong song playing, despite my nerves and my unmet expectations of how this proposal would play out, I got on my knee in the back of the limo and asked the most beautiful woman I'd ever known if she would marry me.

Given how many times I asked her out before she said yes, I was a little nervous. But before I could even finish, she was crying and screamed, "Yes!" By the time we arrived at Michael Jordan's restaurant, we were engaged. It wasn't exactly storybook, but it was our story and we loved writing it together.

We were married in July 1995. After all that God had done and the plans that we knew God had for us, how could our marriage be anything but extraordinary?

TRISHA:

All girls dream of their wedding day from the time they know how to dream. One day they dream about the ceremony being inside at

night with candles ablaze, the bride wearing a simple gown. Maybe the next day, month, or year they decide that an afternoon garden wedding with an elaborate, over-the-top dress is more fitting. By the time they grow into young women, they pretty much have the wedding planned before they ever meet the groom.

As soon as Justin and I were engaged, I put my plan for our wedding into place. I knew exactly what I wanted. I had envisioned every detail, from the ceremony to the reception, and as far as I was concerned, I had an amazing vision for my—I mean *our*—wedding day.

I am Hispanic. My father is Mexican, and my mother is German and Irish. Even though my immediate family celebrated only a few Mexican traditions, friends whose families celebrated all of them surrounded me.

One of my favorite Mexican traditions is a Quinceañera, the celebration of a girl turning fifteen. Traditionally, it's a ceremony that has many of the same customs typically found in a wedding reception, including a big, pretty dress. I love big, pretty dresses, and although I never expected to have a Quinceañera, I knew I would get an opportunity to wear a big, pretty dress for my wedding!

I envisioned marrying a handsome, tall man, and I never really cared what color skin God gave him because Alex P. Keaton, Ponch, and Theo Huxtable were all cute. I just knew he needed to be *tall*. My mom was about the same height as my dad, and she rarely wore heels. My man needed to be tall because wearing heels on my wedding day was a must. My tall groom and I would get married at the church I grew up in with flowers cascading over every nook and cranny. My dad would have to take one for the team and wear some type of shoes to make him taller so I wouldn't look like bridezilla next to him as he walked me down the aisle. My husband and I would drive off into the sunset in a convertible or maybe on horseback—as long as the groom was tall, this detail didn't matter.

Without realizing it, I did get the tall man of my dreams and

the big, pretty dress to go with him. Imagine Cinderella meets '90s pop culture: the puffiest, most bedazzled dress ever created. Unfortunately, it wasn't just my dress that was over the top. My veil was so grand that at first glance, it looked like a bearded dragon. The man of my dreams could barely get close enough to kiss me without poking himself in the eye!

It was 1995, and that year the Chicagoland area experienced one of the worst heat waves on record. Still, despite the heat, Justin and I were set to get married on July 15 in Joliet, Illinois, at First Baptist Church, the church where I grew up. We were too broke for cascading flowers, so we cascaded cheap tulle instead. Our mentor, pastor, and friend Lynn Laughlin officiated for next to nothing, and my brother and two friends sang for free. Our wedding wouldn't be complete without Team Justin, who tearfully read Scripture and who ironically all wore black in protest that I was leaving them.

Even with the heat, I insisted on wearing my big, beautiful, and long-sleeved wedding dress and bearded-dragon veil. That would have been a very normal and appropriate desire for a bride had my church been air-conditioned. But it wasn't. A bride in a huge, long-sleeved dress in a non-air-conditioned church sanctuary with groomsmen wearing tuxedos and grandmothers on the verge of passing out didn't exactly live up to the vision I'd had as a little girl.

Thankfully, the reception venue had air-conditioning. During the reception, our moms spent most of the evening opening the cards we received, counting each check and ten-dollar bill in hopes that we'd have enough money to leave for our honeymoon. While they counted, I excitedly anticipated the very last detail I had dreamed of—the dance of the bride and groom and the father-daughter dance. Everything happened just as I'd imagined. Justin wasn't just tall; he was gorgeous inside and out. He took my hand, held me close, and danced me in a circle over and over and over again in the only way he knew how. It was endearing (and a little nauseating).

When it was time to dance with my dad, I realized I had never taken the time to think through what this dance would mean.

This would be the last time my dad would take me into his arms and dance with his baby girl. I had been so busy planning that I wasn't ready to say good-bye. I was barely twenty, and my heart ached for how I would miss not only him but my mom; my sister, Julie; my brother, Frankie; and my four-month-old niece, Kylie. Dad buried his head into my cheek and shoulder, and I cherished every second he danced with me—a moment in time that this girl had never thought to dream up.

As the dance ended, our moms were in a puddle of tears, not crying just at the scene before them but that we were given enough money to leave on our honeymoon. Justin and I were college students—broke ones—and we'd put every dime we made into our big wedding. Being told we had enough money to leave on our honeymoon allowed the sorrow of leaving my family to be replaced with gratitude that we were able to go.

We left the reception in a brand-new 1995 Astro minivan. Justin's parents graciously allowed us to borrow it. We had hoped for something a little sportier, but it was nice. As we drove onto the interstate, horns blared congratulations all around us. Exactly forty-five minutes later, we came to a standstill—one that lasted three hours.

Six hours after leaving our reception, we finally arrived at our hotel. We were simply exhausted. The carry-me-over-the-threshold tradition was abandoned, and all I wanted was to be carried to bed. As soon as we arrived at the hotel, "that time of the month" arrived too. This was definitely not what Justin expected! Instead of romance, he found himself making a trip to Walmart to purchase feminine products he had never purchased before. I was asleep when he returned, and being the gentleman that he is, he climbed into bed, kissed my forehead, and passed out.

We woke up the next morning believing that things would be better. Justin and I both grew up in lower- to middle-income families. Going on vacation seemed to us a once-in-a-lifetime experience. So getting to go to Holden Beach, North Carolina—

even though it took twenty-five hours to get there—was a dream come true. We'd finally arrived.

Although we needed a redo of our first night together, we thought we'd hit the beach first. The beauty of the ocean was overwhelming, and even more enjoyable was watching my newly married husband. Justin spent hours pretending he was dead in the water, allowing the waves to push him onto the shore like a beached whale. It was hilarious watching people freak out for a split second thinking that he was dead, only to have him pop up like a kid playing a trick.

We were so excited to be at the beach that neither one of us thought about sunscreen, nor did we, in the midst of having so much fun, think to keep track of the time. I was officially sunburned. Not just sunburned, *blistered*. We were on track to have the worst honeymoon ever.

Have I mentioned we still hadn't had sex? When your husband is calling his dad, asking what to do when you haven't had sex yet, you can be sure this is not the honeymoon he had in mind!

The last day of our honeymoon, I had healed enough to go outside and not feel as if the sun were going to melt my skin off. We decided to rent a Jet Ski. Yes, a Jet Ski—in the saltwater ocean. Justin was in the driver's position, and I held on for dear life in the back. To Justin's delight, we quickly approached a yacht that was creating some intense waves. He yelled over his shoulder, "Hold on!" I wanted to ask what for, but he immediately put the Jet Ski in full throttle and aimed to hit the wave dead on.

As I flew twenty feet *over* Justin, I heard the people on the yacht shouting, "Oh my . . ." I landed in full belly-flop position, and as I came up out of the water, the blisters on my face popped, skin was hanging everywhere, and I looked like a battered wife, not a newlywed on her honeymoon.

There is no question that our wedding and honeymoon were not as spectacular as either of us had imagined. But we were young and in love, and what brought us together was not only a love for

God and each other, but a shared vision to change the world for Christ. In the grand scheme, there was still so much life to live, and we were ready to start living it together.

JUSTIN:

When we returned from our honeymoon, I still had one year of college to complete, and Trisha was starting her sophomore year. She had taken a year off of school to save for our wedding. Trisha and I first moved into a cheap and roach-infested apartment, but we decided this was too much to bear despite its \$150 price tag, so we moved into a tiny house. It was actually an old garage that had been converted into a house. It wasn't that attractive, it wasn't that nice, but the rent was \$225 per month, which fit well into two college students' budget. And there were no roaches.

Shortly after the fall semester started, we found out that Trisha didn't have the flu as we'd thought. She was pregnant. The honeymoon was *definitely* over. We were four months into married life, learning to live together and to balance school, work, basketball, and college life. Our differences began to rise to the surface. Those little things that were so cute when we were dating all of a sudden weren't so cute: they caused conflict. I was a night owl; Trish was a morning person. I was a hit-the-snooze-button-multiple-times person; Trish was a get-out-of-bed-two-minutes-before-the-alarm-goes-off person. I spread things out on the desk so I could find them; Trish stacked things up so they looked organized.

One of the biggest fights our first year of marriage came the day we celebrated our first Christmas as a married couple. We were going to see our families for Christmas break, so we made plans to meet at home after class and open gifts before we left. Trisha had to be at work that day before I had class, so she got up first, got all of the gifts she had purchased for me out of the closet, and laid them beautifully under the tree. I woke up and saw the gifts under the tree, taking that as a cue to get ready for our gift exchange.

I went to the closet, grabbed the gifts I had purchased for Trisha, and put them in a pile on the couch. I made a nice little sign that said “Trisha’s Gifts” and placed it on top of her pile. I grabbed the gifts that she had purchased from under the tree, placed them in a pile on the recliner, and made a sign that said “Justin’s Gifts” for my pile. I felt a sense of pride in the accomplishment that I had organized our Christmas presents and they were now ready to be opened. I got ready for my last day of class and went to campus.

Trisha came home from work to find the presents she had meticulously placed under the tree stacked up in a pile on the recliner. She had no idea what happened. This was before cell phones and text messaging, so there was no convenient way to communicate to me, “What in the heck were you thinking, moving my beautifully placed gifts?” So she took both perfectly stacked piles of presents and repositioned them under the tree. She then left for campus to take her last exam.

You can see where this is going. I came home from class, saw the gifts back under the tree, and was totally confused.

Trisha came home from class, and I said, “Why are all the gifts under the tree? I took the time to stack our gifts in piles and to make signs labeling your gifts and my gifts. Why would you move them? That isn’t how we do Christmas!”

“I don’t understand why all the gifts are on the chairs,” Trisha shot back. “The presents stay under the tree until we’re ready to open them!”

“That’s not how we do it in my family.”

“What kind of family just stacks the gifts in piles? That’s silly.”

I then did what no man should ever do. “You’re just angry because your pregnancy hormones are out of whack.”

Trisha ran to our bedroom and slammed the door, crying. We were only a few months into our marriage, but we had quickly developed the skill to say things we knew would hurt the other person.

“You are being way too emotional!” Trisha called out to me.

“I can’t believe you would get so bent out of shape over Christmas gifts.”

“You’re acting so immature!” I yelled.

“I can’t believe you are so insensitive. How could you not even think about my feelings? You are so inconsiderate!”

“Inconsiderate! How am I inconsiderate? I bought you gifts that we don’t have the money for so you can insult me about how we open them! That’s *real* inconsiderate!”

“I hate you!” she screamed, and locked the door.

Hate me? I thought. *She hates me? How does she hate me? Don’t we have to work our way up to hate? We can’t start at hate! It should take years for her to hate me. Where do we go from here?*

The conversation was over. I didn’t know what to do, so I took the opportunity to restack the gifts into piles to prepare for opening. It would be a few hours and many apologies before we were in a place to open gifts, but they would be ready when we were.

In this ordinary moment, gifts that were bought with love and thoughtfulness were now a visible reminder of the vast differences between us. There was a huge gap between the relationship we’d thought we had just four months earlier and the relationship that rose to the surface in the face of conflict.

JUSTIN & TRISHA:

GOD HAS A VISION FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

When a man and woman first get married, they don’t yet know what they don’t know. In fact, it would seem that most of us who get married think we know it all, right at the beginning. Trisha and I (Justin) certainly held the belief that our marriage would be different. That we would overcome the issues that plagued other couples. That we loved each other more than most couples. After all, we talked about our family differences. We could talk about anything. We knew each other better than anyone else knew us. Our marriage would be different.

There is no doubt that we all want our marriages to be anything but ordinary. The great news is that God has a vision for our marriages as well. God longs for us to see and experience the vision he had when he created marriage. Look at his vision:

For Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

GENESIS 2:20-25, NIV

God's idea is completely wild: “They become one flesh.” We don't usually say “one flesh” in our world today, but God's vision for our marriage is *oneness*. What God calls *oneness*, we call *intimacy*. Often when we think of the word *intimacy* we think of it in purely sexual terms. Yet the word *intimacy* literally means “to be fully known.” Intimacy, as God envisions it, is to be fully known by our spouses—emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

This passage reminds me that our vision and dreams for our marriages aren't too big; they are actually too small. We can't out-

dream our Creator when it comes to our marriages. We often settle for ordinary when God longs for us to experience extraordinary. Genesis 2 shouts to us, “You’re not crazy!” The longing we have for a rich and fulfilling marriage has been given to us by God. Our desire to be fully known and loved comes from a God who knows us fully and loves us anyway. This passage is a mandate for us to not settle for anything less than extraordinary:

ex•traor•di•nary

a: going beyond what is usual, regular, or customary

b: exceptional to a very marked extent

Maybe you’re asking yourself, *What on earth does it mean to have an extraordinary marriage?* What sticks out to Trisha and me in this definition is the phrase *going beyond what is usual*. That most likely describes what your dating life was. A man might open the car door, think up unique places to eat, and always plan ahead to create time together that was even better than the time before. A woman might surprise her man by cooking his favorite meal, buying him tickets to his favorite game, or choosing to go to an action movie rather than a chick flick. Couples often wonder why it was so fun to date each other but why that same excitement feels so unrealistic for married life.

Where would you rate your marriage in the area of *extraordinary*? Can you think of a recent time you had an extraordinary experience with your spouse? If yes, what made it feel extraordinary? If your answer is no, what comes to mind as to why extraordinary experiences don’t happen for you?

**GREAT AT FALLING IN LOVE,
ILL-EQUIPPED TO STAY IN LOVE**

We are really good at falling in love. But what we see reflected in the divorce rate is that we are really bad at staying in love. We know

how to get married happy; we aren't really good at staying happily married. There are a few reasons why over time we tend to drift into unintentionality.

The first is familiarity. Think about the car you drive today. Do you remember when you first bought that car? No one was going to eat in it. You were going to change the oil every twenty-five hundred miles. You washed it twice a week. You made the kids sit on plastic so they wouldn't mess up the pristine seats. But after a period of time, without even realizing it, you treated your new car as you did your old car. You stopped washing it twice a week and just waited for it to rain. The kids now eat snacks from yesterday's leftover McDonald's off the floor. Once the shine wears off, the glitter fades, and the familiarity sets in, you treat things differently. We do the same with our spouses.

The second reason it is hard to stay in love is that we live at a point of exhaustion. As we get older, our energy levels go down while our responsibilities go up. Marriage takes a lot of energy. It takes energy to listen. It takes energy to resolve conflict. It takes energy to put someone else's needs ahead of your own. It takes energy to raise kids. Because we are exhausted, we think we can neglect our marriages and stay in love.

But remember the equation we gave at the beginning of the chapter: time + unintentionality = ordinary.

NEW & NOT IMPROVED

We mentioned before that one of the things that helped us develop in our dating relationship was traveling together. Not only did we travel for sports, but each weekend we would travel to a little church in Indiana and lead youth group together. We logged a lot of miles. The drive from central Illinois to central Indiana in the winter is flat and open. There isn't much to see while driving back and forth. There are just miles and miles of cornfields between cities.

One Sunday while we were driving back to school, I (Justin) was not paying close attention to the road, and we drove through a flock of birds taking flight. Birds surrounded the car, and I found myself ducking (as if one were going to hit me). As I ducked, a bird flew right into the windshield and splattered feathers, poop, and blood all over. Now Trisha cares deeply for animals. She cares even more deeply for animals that die a violent death right in front of us. She immediately started crying, and I panicked. In a moment of insanity, I simply turned on the windshield wipers. That only smeared what was on the windshield, and Trisha cried harder. I tried to use the windshield washer fluid to remove what residue I could, and we drove back to campus in silence.

I bring this story up because it illustrates some moments we all face in our marriages: those moments when things beyond our control hit the windshields of our lives, when circumstances crash into our marriages and we don't know what to do. In an effort to make our marriages better or to make our issues simply go away, we turn on the windshield wipers, which really only make matters worse. It is easy to offer simple solutions for marriages that attempt to merely wipe away what is visible.

People are so much better at medicating symptoms of their marriage issues than at diagnosing and treating the root causes of marriage problems. We work on communicating better. We read books on anger management. We try to understand love languages. We listen to sermons on marriage. We go to marriage conferences. We try to wipe away all that is visibly wrong and fail to go deeper into the heart of our relationships. Yet we experience only incremental, inconsistent improvements in our marriages.

And we do the same thing in our relationship with God. So often, we would rather have God medicate the pain in our hearts than do what it takes to bring complete healing to us. So we learn to live with spiritual illnesses while looking for ways to make ourselves feel better. We go to church. We sing the songs. We pray the prayers. We join small groups or Sunday school classes. We may

even give regularly. Yet we experience only incremental, inconsistent growth in our relationship with God. We do a lot; we just change very little.

The goal of this book is to move beyond the windshields of our marriages, to uncover the heart behind why the marriage you have maybe isn't the marriage you desire. Trisha and I want to help you see that the marriage you have is perfectly positioned to become the marriage God has in mind.

A lot of marriage resources focus on behavior modification. Communication. Anger management. Work/life balance. Money management. Improving your sex life. And we agree that these issues matter. It isn't that they aren't important issues to deal with, but most of the behaviors we struggle with are tied to broken parts of our hearts, and if we focus on the behaviors and not the root cause, we are not dealing with the issue, only smearing it around on the windshield. More information doesn't guarantee heart transformation.

We work really, really hard to improve our marriages by improving our behavior, and while these changes might last for a few weeks or a few months, we end up right back in the same rut. Even worse, we try really, really hard to improve our marriages by forcing our spouses to improve their behavior, and we end up frustrated and exhausted; and our spouses feel like they never do anything right.

Those in ordinary marriages believe behavior modification will solve their problems, that spouses can behave their way to an improved marriage. But you can't behave your way to an extraordinary marriage.

God doesn't want to improve your marriage; he wants to transform it. God doesn't want to modify your behavior; he wants to change your heart. Extraordinary comes when you, as a husband or wife, invite God to change *you*.

It is a dangerous prayer to pray—*God, change me*. You know why it's dangerous? Because this is a prayer God will always answer.

God longs to transform you. As much as you want to change your spouse, as much as you try to modify your behavior, God wants to change your heart. This prayer is where lasting change starts.

Will you pray this prayer? That is the question you will have to ask yourself before moving forward. Will you stop settling for ordinary and trust God for extraordinary? That is the journey Trisha and I want to go on with you. The great news for each of us is that God doesn't promise *improved*; God promises *new*.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the vision you had for your marriage when you got married. How close are you to that vision today?
2. What are your expectations for this book? What do you hope changes for your marriage after reading this book?
3. What comes to mind when you hear the word *oneness*?
4. Are you more likely to pray, "God, change my spouse," or "God, change me"? Why?