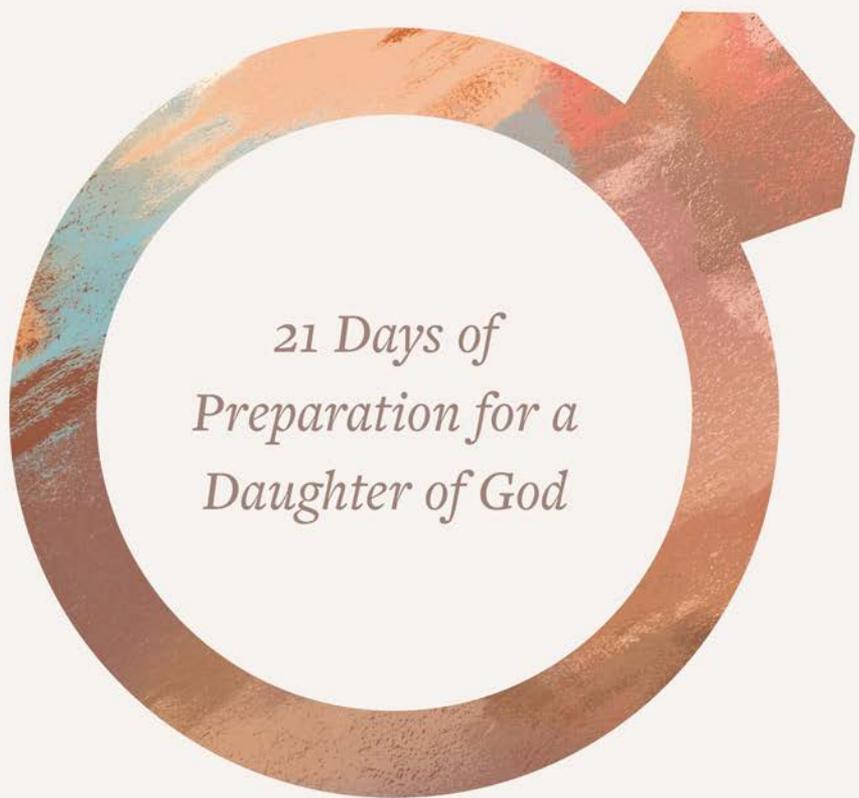


BECOMING



*21 Days of
Preparation for a
Daughter of God*

A WIFE

KAREN LEANN MURPHY

I'm privileged that I was given an early copy of this book and that I've known Leann and Mike for many years. The stories, lessons, and wisdom are real. This couple has a most unique human trait: honest transparency. This book clues us in on the issues and how to deal with conflict in a way that can bring better health and true intimacy to our marriages. *Becoming a Wife* will be an excellent read for newlyweds as well as us old-timers.

JONEAL KIRBY, PhD, marriage counselor and author

We've had the privilege of walking alongside Leann and her husband, Mike, through some of life's hardest seasons—infidelity, redemption, and the messy, joyful journey of raising children. Their story is one of God's grace, restoration, and resilience. In *Becoming a Husband* and *Becoming a Wife*, Leann offers wisdom forged over more than thirty-seven years of real marriage—missteps, growth, sins, and victories included. These twenty-one-day journals are deeply rooted in Scripture and honesty, helping men and women prepare not just for a wedding but for a lifetime covenant. If you want to build a marriage that reflects God's purpose and withstands life's trials, start here.

ALAN AND LISA ROBERTSON, speakers and authors of *Desperate Forgiveness*, *A New Season*, and *The Duck Commander Devotional for Couples*

Becoming a Wife

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FOCUS
ON
THE FAMILY.

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Introduction

Ever since our sons, Patrick and Colten, were born, my husband, Mike, and I prayed earnestly, first and foremost, that God would draw them to Himself. Second, we prayed that He would bring a wife into each of their lives who would love God far more than Patrick or Colten but no other person as much.

When we brought each boy home from the hospital, their maternal grandmother, Memi, gave him an heirloom handkerchief with a precious poem about how someday it could be given to his wife to carry on her wedding day. And God is faithful. There's no doubt that God answered our prayers with Alexa and Lydia. We love them, and they are both points of joy in our family.

Looking back on our marriage, Mike and I know it would have helped us a lot if we had begun with a better grasp of the work necessary to build a solid marriage, if we had gotten hold of some scriptural and fundamental truths about marriage that are completely counter to the world's view. We really needed someone to offer some suggestions and insights to prepare our hearts and minds for marriage. We found through the years that we didn't have the knowledge needed to be the spouses God called us to be.

In His grace, God has redeemed our sins, mistakes, and failures, but I wish we had fully understood that when you marry, you give up your right to self. We meant our vows, but keeping them seemed so much easier before the wedding than at any point afterward. I hope

this book will help you prepare now for those days when putting your husband first seems harder than you can even imagine.

Don't misunderstand; it will still be important for you to take care of yourself and for both of you to have some time for yourselves (as long as you work that out together). However, as God gives your fiancé to you in marriage, your life becomes united with his—and that's not all romance and joy. Your body belongs to him and his to you. You're making a covenant of mutual submission.

The world tries to get you to believe a lie—that being a wife is an inferior role. That lie, like all lies, comes from the enemy. You are called to be the source of help for what your husband cannot do for or by himself, to empower him to be his best. There's nothing inferior about that role.

He, in turn, is called to be willing to die for you. But you're called to be the one who meets him where he needs help, to empower him to be the man God has called him to be. You must be constantly, intentionally mindful of the role that puts you in. You must be purposeful in being his match, his support, and his partner and yet at the same time choose to let him lead.

The world tells us that that's inequality and should be spurned. The truth is that God's Word emphasizes that neither you nor your husband should seek equality. Rather, you're commanded to esteem the other person more highly than yourself. The equivalent of this book for husbands emphasizes to him that he's called to lay down his life for his bride. You're called to let him lead your family as he strives to live out that role of sacrifice just as Christ has done for the church.

Both of you are called to seek a supernatural relationship, not to follow the world's pattern of seeking fulfillment of your own needs. In a supernatural marriage, a Christian marriage, two people submit their wills and hearts first to God and then to each other.

I hope you find some help from the things Mike and I have spent more than thirty years of marriage learning (often the hardest way), messing up, repairing, and relearning. We haven't come close to

mastering any of this, but we would love to see you skip some of the mistakes we've made and avoid some of the heartbreak we've faced.

You've made the second-most-important decision of your life—to get married—and are rapidly approaching the second-most-important day of your life—your wedding. On the most important day of your life, you made the most important decision of your life, acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Savior and dedicating your life to Him. That commitment to Jesus makes this time in your life even more special, a celebration and a reflection of Christ's love for the church. You're on an exciting countdown to getting married!

This book is written for those women who have chosen Jesus, for daughters of God. It flies in the face of what the world believes. To truly live the will of God daily in your life will challenge you. But trust God, live like Jesus, and rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit.

I've written this collection of messages with the hope that you will commit to spending intentional time every day over the three weeks prior to your wedding reading each day's thoughts, writing your answers in the journal section, and then sharing those journal entries with your fiancé. Then I hope you'll return to this journal the month before your first anniversary, revisit each chapter, and spend some time writing anniversary reflections about your growth, challenges, and goals as a wife.

I trust that as you share this book and your thoughts with your fiancé he'll begin to discover even more deeply all the wonderful blessings God has given to each of you. Among those blessings: He led you to each other and gave you respect and love for your fiancé, and you're dedicated to walking through life by his side, helping him fully live as the man God created him to become.

DAY 21

Keep Christ Your First Love



Early in our marriage, Mike and I stepped into a marriage bear trap that kept us chained to a place of hurt for a long time. I had started a late-night discussion during a post-pregnancy time of insecurity about my own attractiveness, worried I was losing his attention. In the context of what he naïvely thought was an innocuous conversation about what makes a woman attractive to a man, I asked him something along the lines of “Like what women?” He answered with several names. That argument swirled into anger and unkind words lasting into the wee hours of the night.

In that moment, we both let Jesus slip out of first place in our minds and hearts. Mike’s justification of his answer and my refusal to believe he wasn’t showing lack of love for me were just two symptoms that we had put ourselves above each other and each other above Jesus.

Putting ourselves above our spouses takes Jesus out of first place because He, our example, told us to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, to give more than is demanded. The One we’re called to follow, even picking up our own crosses, washed the feet of His betrayer and prayed for the forgiveness of people as they crucified Him.

Had I kept Jesus first in that moment, I still would have cried. I still would have been hurt. I still could have been angry. But I wouldn't have stormed away as Mike had tried to apologize. I wouldn't have refused to listen to him explain. I wouldn't have lashed out in anger at the one I'm called to submit to as unto the Lord.

Had Mike kept Jesus in first place, he might have still given a dumb answer that deeply hurt me, but he wouldn't have blamed me for the misunderstanding. He wouldn't have gotten defensive and frustrated when I began to cry. He wouldn't have refused to give up a night's sleep for the one he's supposed to love as Christ loved His bride, laying down His very life for her.

The Alpha and Omega

Jesus is the beginning of all things, including offering insight into how to be a wife. As with every aspect of your life, you're called to follow Christ's model for your relationship. Keeping Him as your first love is the best step toward a lifelong marriage.

John 1:1-5 says of Jesus,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Jesus stands as the source of all from the beginning. He is the Alpha and Omega. He belongs in first place, but it's easy to *say* He's there while really meaning He just has a place of importance in our minds. It's likely that Jesus does hold a place of importance in your mind. But being important doesn't mean He's in first place.

We know that the life of a person who proclaims Jesus as Lord should look different from the life of a person who doesn't. We also

know that as we grow in our faith we should look more and more like Jesus. Sadly, we often fall short. Thankfully, His mercies are new every morning, so we continue to run the race.

Jesus has been important to Mike and me for most of our lives, but we had to make changes in our lives for Him to be put in first place. In fact, we must continually work to keep Him first.

Our commitment to that goal accounts for the fact that we're still married. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, in health—we've walked through all those stages.

While we start with that commitment, keeping Jesus there is a day-to-day choice that requires us to honestly assess and reassess our priorities and to make changes when our priorities slip out of order. Our marriage attests to that fact.

A strong desire to follow Jesus started for me when I was eight years old. I still remember sitting on the front pew of our modest church one Sunday morning. I vividly recall looking down at my little black Mary Janes swinging back and forth as tears rolled down my cheeks and plopped onto my lap. I knew, even at eight, as I waited to be baptized, that I wanted and needed Jesus to be the Lord of my life.

Mike was baptized at age twenty-four, months after we met and years after beginning his search to figure out exactly what his faith entailed. He had grown up attending a Presbyterian congregation and had gone through an intense formal study, a communicants' class, during junior high that had culminated in an interview with an elder and a public statement of faith.

Though we came from different denominations, we both believed in the authority of God, in the inspiration of Scripture, and that salvation is found only in Jesus. We both believed He should have first place in our hearts.

We made that initial declaration and commitment as a couple early in our marriage. However, we tended to view it a bit like our marriage vows—more a theoretical ideal or overarching concept than the driving force behind our day-to-day decisions and actions.

Time and Money

Two clear indicators of what holds first place in our lives are where we spend our time and where we spend our money. And of the two, time probably reveals more.

For the first three and a half years of our marriage, Mike and I had no children. We both worked, and that left about eighty waking hours per week. We viewed that time as ours to enjoy. Together, we spent time with his parents, double-dated with friends, played volleyball, went fishing, rode four-wheelers, and traveled. Mike worked out, played tennis, hung out with his buddies, and hunted. I read, shopped, worked out, and spent one weekend in my hometown in Texas with family and friends every month or so.

Almost every Sunday, we slept a bit later and struggled a bit more to get out of bed than on any other day. We attended worship services regularly, but almost every one of those Sunday mornings included one of us saying something like “It’s getting late. Are we going?” We sometimes read our Bible. We prayed together when we ate together. Occasionally we prayed together at other times. We prayed some privately.

During those pre-kid years, we didn’t earn a lot of money, but we had more than enough for the essentials and managed to go out for meals several times a month. We traveled a bit too. Most Sundays, we dropped a check into the offering plate after one of us nudged the other, who hurriedly filled out a check with an amount usually comparable to the cost of an average date night.

Contrast those norms with our church life today. Back then, we attended regularly, but more from obligation than true desire. Now we often arrive early enough to get to know people, help with some part of the setup, or pray. We look forward to worship, and we fully participate. We genuinely miss it when we can’t attend. The sermons and lessons touch us in a personal way. We routinely pray—at meals, in the morning, at night, when we worry about someone or something, when we get good news, and when we get bad news. We read

our Bible separately, and we read it aloud together. Waking hours focused on Jesus are double what they were early in our marriage.

Most important, our hearts have changed. There's no doubt about whether we're going to church or how much we're giving. Instead, we follow our commitments. Our online giving is automated so it happens even if we're not present. We agree on the amount we're able to give and review it at least once a year to be sure we're giving as we've committed.

Attending church and giving money don't prove faith or that Jesus reigns in our lives. Those two activities in our early years compared to today actually look similar from an external view, but the change in our hearts bears out the difference between when Jesus is just a part of our lives and when He holds first place.

Impact of the Fall

God built a deep longing into your very DNA for a relationship with Him. But since the fall, our sin has created a barrier. That first sin was a victorious initial foray of an enemy who wants to separate us from God, to tempt us into giving first place to anyone or anything other than God, to turn our hearts to idols. The father of lies tells you that you can give first place to yourself or to other people or activities—your husband, your future, your career, your children, sex, material wealth—and find fulfillment there. He's a liar bent on destroying.

When we give primacy to anyone or anything but God, we've created an idol. One of the biggest temptations will be to try to fill the deep longing for God with your marriage, to let your husband take first place. Don't allow your marriage or your husband to come before Jesus.

What It Looks Like

For Mike and me, our shared faith was a key part of our decision to date, get engaged, and marry. Throughout our marriage, we've

worshiped together, attended Bible studies, and even taught Bible classes together. Yet for years I felt embarrassed, grieved, and a bit ashamed that, in spite of both of us being fully committed to Jesus, we've had a lot of brokenness and sin in our lives.

On this side of the halfway mark of my life, I've come to realize that having Jesus as Lord doesn't keep us from sinning or from brokenness. We all sin. Nor does keeping Jesus first mean you have an easy life. We all face hurt and heartache. Jesus died so that my brokenness and sin will be fully redeemed and my story, even with all its mess, can be used to help others.

So, practically speaking, what else does keeping Jesus first look like in your marriage?

Keeping Jesus first can be seen in how you fight, forgive, and reconnect. You *will* fight with each other. You're two flawed human beings committing to live together for life. What other commitment begins with no end date except death? With whom have you lived for even as short a time as a school semester without disagreements? Which one of your siblings did you not fight with when you lived together? This is so important that several chapters in this book will be devoted to the subject of how to fight well with your husband.

Keeping Jesus first also means that when you feel used by your spouse, you measure it against Jesus' plumb line: Go the extra mile. Love as He loves: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Keeping Jesus first means you forgive as He forgives you.

When you sin and when life is hard, return to the foot of the cross and lay your sins and your heartache down. Lay disappointment and hurt and even your marriage—when it's bad *and* when it's good—there as well, because that's where He paid for it all.

When we lay our lives at the foot of His cross, then Jesus, who is no longer on that cross but has risen from the grave and ascended to heaven, will redeem and restore our lives and all the scars for His glory and our good.

