

Prayer: The Secret to Transforming Your Marriage

I am always stunned when I hear someone say, “Well, I guess the only thing left to do is pray.” My goodness, I’ve even been shocked to hear the words come out of my own mouth. Prayer should never been seen as a last resort but as a first line of defense. No matter what condition your marriage is in today, prayer will make it better.

God can make a bad marriage good and a good marriage great. God’s answers to prayer healed the sick, fed the hungry, stopped the rain, kept the earth from revolving on its axis for an hour, divided the Red Sea, poured forth water from a rock, opened wombs, confused enemies, opened jail doors, made leprous skin reform, caused the lame to dance, gave courage to the fearful, and raised the dead. Jesus said, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

I know there are many of you who are reading these words with hurt in your hearts. You may be wondering, how did my marriage drift so far from where I hoped it would be? How did my marriage get to this state of desperation, mediocrity, frigidity, mutual tolerance, and co- existence? Is it too late for me? Is it too late for us?

Friend, the answer is no – it is not too late. I have good news for you. God’s specialty is resurrection. He excels at bringing life from death. Nothing is too hard for God, my friend. Absolutely nothing. He raised Lazarus, the widow from Nain’s son, and Jesus Christ from the dead. He even took a bunch of old dried up bones and brought them back to life and formed an army (Ezekiel 37:5, 6). He opened the dead womb of a 90 year old woman, Sarah, to conceive. “Is anything too hard for the LORD,” God asked (Genesis 18:14). Nothing, dear friend, absolutely nothing, is impossible for God.

Jesus said, “All things are possible to him (or her) who believes” (Mark 9:23). A baby is born to a dried up womb, fingers and toes materialize on numbs on a lepers hands and feet, sight is given to a man blind from birth, a son is raised right in the middle of his own funeral procession, the earth stops revolving on its

axis for a few hours in battle, the Red Sea is parted and thousands walk across on dry land. Now, tell me, is there anything in your life too hard for a God like this?

I have so many stories of how prayer has changed men's lives, but let me tell you about a man named Allan. Allan was raised by a single mother with five other siblings in eastern North Carolina. His own father died when he was five-years-old, and his country mother had the daunting task of raising her six children during the final years of the Great Depression.

As a young man, Allan worked at a small town lumber company driving a delivery truck. He graduated from High School at seventeen, became a soldier in the Korean War at eighteen, became a husband at nineteen, and became a father at twenty. Over the next thirty years, Allan moved from driving a delivery truck to managing a prosperous building supply company.

He and his wife, Louise, had another child when he was twenty-five and then another when he was twenty-eight. Financially, life was moving along quite well for Allan and Louise, however, there was a secret in their household that very few knew. Allan had a severe drinking problem. He didn't drink everyday, but when he did, the alcohol consumed him and transformed him into a vicious man. Most of the time, his violent outbursts were aimed at his wife. Unfortunately, his children watched in terror as he broke furniture into pieces, hit their mother with his fist, and cut the family to pieces with harsh and cruel words.

Alcohol was not the only vice in Allan's life. While it was never discussed in their home, his bouts with gambling, pornography, and other women, were the unspoken reality.

But something amazing happened as Allan approached forty. His fourteen-year-old daughter befriended a woman in her neighborhood who introduced her to Jesus Christ. His teenage daughter fell in love with Jesus. He wasn't quite sure what to think about her new found faith. "Oh, it's a phase," he told her. "I'm sure it will pass. Just don't go overboard."

Through the years, Allan's wife, Louise, had become a very bitter woman. As you can imagine, living with a man with such a reputation was enough to destroy any woman, but for some reason, she never left. Louise became intrigued with her daughter's new found faith but had a difficult time trusting in a God who had allowed such heartache in her own life. Their daughter began to pray for both

parents to come to know Christ as their Savior and after two years, it seemed her mom's cold heart was beginning to melt.

God did answer the young girl's prayer and her mom accepted Jesus as her personal Lord and Savior. This is where I want to bring you dear friends. Yes, God intervened in a young girl's life. Yes, He saved her mother as well. But could God get a hold of Allan's heart? A drinker, carouser, womanizer, gambler, just to name a few of his more colorful attributes? Could God do that?

Part Two

Louise and her daughter began to pray that God would soften Allan's hardened heart. For years they prayed and little by little they witnessed God chisel away at his tough exterior.

"I'll stop drinkin'," Allan said one night, "but I cannot become a Christian. I've done some terrible things in my life and I don't think God could ever forgive me. I could never be good enough."

"Oh, daddy," the young girl replied. "God will forgive you just as soon as you ask. Besides, we can never be good enough. If we could, Jesus wouldn't have had to die for our sins on the cross."

As God began to soften Allan's heart, he did indeed stop drinking – cold turkey. That in itself was a miracle. But there was still a volcano of anger that always rumbled just below the surface and Louise never knew when that anger would erupt and spew the lava of hatred and bitterness in their lives. She continued to pray for her husband and believed God for a miracle.

Three years after Louise had given her life to the Lord and begun her journey of praying for her husband, Allan experienced a symphony of twists and turns that only God could have orchestrated. He resigned from the company where he served as manager to begin his own building supply business with four other investors. However, his previous employer sued him and held him to a restrictive covenant contract that forbade him from working within a sixty-mile radius in a company that would be a competitor. He was facing court; exposure for God only knew what, and ruination in the small town in which he lived. Buckling under the pressure, Allan was heading towards a nervous breakdown and total loss of control.

Now God had him just where he wanted him. He hit rock bottom and the only place to go was to reach up. Louise had gone to a business meeting in Pennsylvania and Allan desperately needed to be with her. He drove 500 miles, but didn't go to her hotel. Instead he drove to a church and begged for someone to pray for him.

"What denomination are you?" the receptionist asked. "I don't know," he replied. "Here," she said as she jotted down directions on a piece of paper. "Our pastor isn't in today, but I happen to know that Clyde Barnes, pastor of the Baptist church down the street is out doing some construction on their new church building. Why don't you drive on over and find him. I bet he can help."

So Allan hopped back in his car and drove to a church in the country where he found a man with a hammer in his hand and Jesus in his heart. "What can I do for you?" the pastor said. "I need you to pray for me," Allan explained with tears running down his weathered face. "Let's sit down here on this log and you tell me what's going on."

So for several hours, Allan sat on a log with a fellow builder and told him all he had ever done. Amazingly, the very things Allan had felt God could never forgive him of, this pastor had done as well. So after five years of a young girl's prayers for her daddy and three years of a wife's prayers for her husband, Allan knelt in the woods and asked God to forgive him of all his sins, and received Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. That day, Allan became a new creation in Christ – and it all began with prayer.

Later he explained. "I told that man all I had ever done and he said he had done the same things. I figured that if God could forgive him, and even let him be a preacher, then he could forgive me too." Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. For me, this is a sweet story. It is a miraculous memory. Allan was my daddy. Friends, I have seen the power of prayer change lives. It all began right there in my own home as a teenage girl. You know, my mean ol' dad became one of the sweetest men I've ever known. He died from Alzheimer's Disease at the age of sixty-six and his caretakers were always amazed at the smile on his face and the sweetness of his heart.

Let me encourage you today...don't stop praying for your husband and your marriage. Your job is not to change your husband. That's God's role. Your job is to love him and pray for him and leave the transforming power to God.

