

# He Said. She Said.

eight powerful phrases  
that will strengthen  
your marriage

Jay & Laura Laffoon



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# A Note from Jay and Laura

**A**s we speak to people about marriage, most are quick to agree that marriage is under attack. They agree marriage is the foundation of family, church, and community. They concur that we should be addressing marriage needs. But, when asked what is being done for marriage, they shake their heads and say “Nothing.”

We want to see couples go on the offensive. In this book, we have provided the tools married couples need to fight for their marriage and to help other couples do the same. We introduce eight phrases that will dramatically change the way you and your spouse see one another. Using these eight precision tools, we'll show you specific strategies to strengthen your marriage and our world. A thriving marriage reaches beyond the husband and wife to impact three critical arenas in our culture: our homes, our churches, and our communities.

## Our Homes

A recent survey conducted by the Associated Press and MTV asked nearly 1,300 young people between the ages of 13 and 24, “What makes you happy?” MTV expected answers like iPods, TV, Xbox 360, and money. Instead, they received this overwhelming #1 answer: spending time with Mom and Dad!

This survey points to the fact that kids are looking for a home that is a place of joy, peace, and contentment. When couples invest in marriage, homes are built where children and teens thrive.

## Our Churches

It is no secret that divorce is wreaking havoc on our homes, but we may not appreciate the effect divorce is having on our churches. An estimated 60 percent of Americans under the age of eighteen do not regularly attend a house of worship. Survey results published August 6, 2007, by *USA Today* show that “7 in 10 Protestants ages 18 to 30—both evangelical and mainline—who went to church regularly in high school said they quit attending by age 23, according to the survey by LifeWay Research.” The primary reason they are leaving is that they feel no “connection” to the larger body of Christ. Parents are key in helping teens make a connection to the larger body.

Sadly, most parents today are struggling in their own walks with Christ, which is reflected in their lifestyles and marriages. A survey conducted by the Barna Institute found that four out of ten marriages in the church will end in divorce, affecting one million children each year.

When parents disconnect through divorce, their children often disconnect from the body of Christ. By investing in marriage, we demonstrate to our children that staying connected is important. As a result, our churches will be strengthened.

## Our Communities

A report entitled “Marriage and Family Wellness: Corporate America’s Business?” from the Marriage CoMission, an Atlanta-based marriage strengthening advocacy group, demonstrates the impact divorces have on businesses. In the year following divorce, employees lost an average of four weeks of work. Lost productivity from marriage and relationship stress costs employers some six billion annually.

Talk about an economic stimulus package! When couples invest in marriage, they become healthier, wealthier, and more emotionally stable employees/employers.

## Save Your Marriage, Save the World

You see, we aren’t just talking about marriage. This book and the important phrases we explore go far beyond shaping marriage. As marriages change, a ripple effect will touch every home, church, and community. When you strengthen your marriage, you fortify the fibers of our society and impact every aspect of our culture.

## A Point of Clarification

The eight needs discussed in this book are needs that exist in every human being. Our experience has shown us that in general four of these needs are more prevalent in women and four are more prevalent in men. While you may be an exception to the rule, this book was written to give couples general ideas about their spouse’s needs.

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# The Power of Words

In his book entitled *The Great Crossover*, author Dan Sullivan shares his theory that there have been four “moments” in the history of words that literally changed the way we live.

The “spoken word” allowed humankind to communicate with each other. Then the “written word” gave humans the ability to record history and thought. Next the “printed word,” ushered in by Johannes Gutenberg’s amazing machine, brought the written word—and thus education—to the masses. Finally, the “digital word” gave humankind access to the knowledge of the world from the comfort of our laptops.

Our survey of over 1,800 married people reveals that words hold the same immense power in our relationships. In marriage, as in history, words literally change the way we live.

## Five Simple Words

Five simple words changed everything that Friday night. Laura and I had worked an incredibly hard week. My head hit the pillow at 11:00 p.m., and I was out like a light. At 11:06, Laura nudged me under the covers. Instantly, an unconscious smile appeared on my face. Assuming she was “making a move,” I didn’t care how tired I was, this was great news! Pleasurable thoughts raced through my mind as Laura whispered, “Jay . . . someone’s in the house!” I was taken totally off guard; I couldn’t comprehend what she was saying at first. Now I was wide awake but dazed.

I rolled my head over and peered through half-open eyes, hoping to get a clearer picture of what Laura was saying. She had the covers pulled up to her nose. All I could see were two eyes the size of silver dollar pancakes. She whisper-screamed at me: “Jay, someone’s in the house . . . go get himmmmm!”

Two weeks before this famed Friday night, three inmates from the federal prison in Atlanta had escaped: two rapists and a murderer. The rapists were caught the next day, but two weeks later, the murderer still eluded the authorities.

This fugitive’s mode of operation was to hide out in the woods of Atlanta during the day. Sometimes he would break into homes while the occupants were at work or school. During the day he would steal food and clothing. At night, he would make his way out of town under cover of darkness. The media was all over this story, tracking “sightings” of him around town. The sightings were making their way right out toward our little subdivision in Snellville.

Earlier in the week, Laura and I had come home to find police cars all over our street. Our neighbors had their home broken into . . . all that was taken was food and clothing.

I shot straight up in bed, my heart pounding out 145 beats a minute, fueled by the instantaneous flow of adrenaline now coursing through my veins. My ears felt as big as satellite dishes as I quietly turned my head back and forth waiting . . . waiting to hear . . . *Thump! Thump!*

Women just don’t understand men when it comes to crisis. Young boys dream about opportunities like this, that the newspaper headlines will tell the world of our heroic act of bravery. I knew two things:

This murderer was in my house.

He was going down!

Well, that was the fantasy. Reality . . . I was closer to Barney Fife than Rambo. I fell out of bed, shaking and stumbling around as I made my way to our closet. I did the one thing I told myself I would never do. I got out my shotgun.

Tiptoeing to the door of our bedroom, I chambered a shell. *Chechunk*. In the deepest, manliest voice I could muster, I said, “Laura, call . . . the . . . cops!”

I wanted this murderer to think I was a six-foot-eight, four-hundred-pound gorilla of a man coming after him with an eight-gauge elephant gun. In reality, I was a five-foot-nine pudgy wimp with a 4-10 my grandpa had given me when I was twelve.

We had lived in our trilevel house just over a month and a half. It was our first “home,” and we were proud as peacocks—though you couldn’t tell by the sparse furnishings. The top floor housed three bedrooms and two bathrooms. I searched all the bedrooms first. The bedrooms with no furniture, no pictures, no nothing. Poking the gun into each room, I simultaneously flicked on the light with the barrel and crouched into the ready position I had witnessed on so many of those TV detective shows.

No one in our bedroom or bath. No one in the first extra bedroom. The second extra bedroom was all clear. I got to the extra bathroom and noticed the shower curtain was closed. As the barrel of the gun whisked back the curtain, my heart raced from vivid memories of that *Psycho* movie. No one in the shower.

I stood at the top of the stairs for what seemed like hours. Five steps would take me down into the living room. If I crept down the stairs, the murderer could ambush me easily. I figured my only chance was a surprise attack. One, two, three . . . *ahhhhhhhh!* I hit the floor, did a perfect roll, and got up ready to shoot anything that moved.

The only furniture we had were hand-me-downs from our parents—the kind of castoffs Salvation Army turns away. In the corner of the living room was an old TV. Really old—the kind that used picture tubes. Remember how those old TVs would glow even after you turned them off? My mind didn't remember; it was telling me there was an alien in the corner of my living room. Luckily, a slow trigger finger saved the life of that old TV. I was ready to blow it away, right then and there.

I checked behind the couch . . . behind the loveseat . . . behind the old, black, duct-taped-together vinyl La-Z-Boy my dad had reluctantly given us. “That’s the best chair in the house,” he’d said as he pleaded his case to Mom. Mom won . . . Mom always wins.

I was so paranoid, I even checked up the chimney. I must have been thinking of the famed “San Francisco Santa Claus” murders or something.

Since we were living in a tri-level, I still had one more floor to search. A sharp turn around the corner and down five more steps would land me on the lower level in the dining room. I repeated my Rambo jump/roll move down the stairs and nearly concussed my head on a dining room chair. After I regained my footing, I checked the pantry and the fridge. Still in stealth mode, I made myself a quick snack before checking the garage. Nobody!

Coming down off my adrenaline high, I made my way back up to the living room. Passing by the big bay window in our living room, I had a perfect view of our neighbor’s front porch. As I stood at the window, I noticed they were having a party. The cul-de-sac was lined with cars. As guests got in their cars to leave, they slammed their doors shut. I picked up the familiar sound I had heard in bed. *Thump! Thump!*

For a moment, I was relieved. I stood there stunned at all the fuss. At that moment, my neighbors came out onto their porch with their last guests of the evening. Their eyes were naturally drawn to my fully illuminated house. We looked like the Griswolds in one of those *Christmas Vacation* movies.

I will never forget the look on that lady's face. Alfalfa from *The Little Rascals* is as close as I can come. Her hair looked like it was standing on end. With eyes as big as dinner plates, she was slapping her husband on the shoulder with the back of her hand. He just stood there, hands in his pockets, slowly shaking his head back and forth.

I realized the problem. All the lights in and out of the house were on, and there I stood in this big bay window, "Wid ma shotgun in ma hand!" I felt like a fool. A big, dumb, stupid fool. Trying to remain calm and cool, I slowly lowered the gun. At that moment, as the cold steel of the barrel hit my stomach, I realized that I was not only standing in this window with a shotgun in my hand, I was standing in this window . . . naked.

Instead of simply dropping to the floor, I spent about twelve seconds trying to hide behind the shotgun. Have you ever tried to hide a 210-pound naked body behind a shotgun? Don't!

Finally, coming to my senses, I dropped to the floor and did the "Bugs Bunny Slither" back up the stairs. I got to the door of our bedroom. "Laura, you are in deep weeds!"

We spent the next day laughing about our paranoia. Heck, we'll spend the rest of our lives laughing at that one.

Those five simple words, "Jay, someone's in the house," altered not only the course of that night but also our marriage forever. I think twice when Laura is convinced she's heard a strange noise. And when Laura nudges me under the covers, my mind takes an obligatory pause before starting its happy dance.

## Survey Says

Throughout the book we will present raw data from our survey conducted at Celebrate Your Marriage Conferences. From April 2008 through October 2008 we conducted a survey at our conferences and a more in-depth online survey asking married people to indicate the power of words in their relationship. Quotes that are sprinkled throughout every chapter were taken from our in-depth online survey. We were encouraged, as many people felt free to openly share from their own lives. Our hope is that as you read these quotes, you will identify with others traveling this journey of marriage.

## Scripture Says

Scripture continually reminds us of the importance of words. For instance, how did God do his creating? With words, of course! Genesis 1:3 states “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” The entire creation story is a tribute to words, as our Maker spoke the universe into existence.

Equally amazing is the power of words used by Jesus as he healed the sick, raised the dead, and calmed the seas. Jesus could have performed any of his miracles with the wave of his hand or the nod of his head. Instead, he chose words:

Rise and go; your faith has made you well (Luke 17:19).

Lazarus, come out! (John 11:43).

Quiet! Be still! (Mark 4:39).

Scriptural instruction from Proverbs illustrates the important role words play in our lives.

How good is a timely word! (Prov. 15:23).

The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry, and a wise friend's timely reprimand is like a gold ring slipped on your finger (Prov. 25:11 Message).

The tongue has the power of life and death (Prov. 18:21).

New Testament references provide us with more motivation to think before we speak.

Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen (2 Tim. 2:14).

Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift (Eph. 4:29 Message).

## One Woman's Words

Therefore encourage each other with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

While attending a Christian college, I (Laura) dated a Christian man who was studying to go into the ministry. I was sure he was "the one." During the three-and-a-half years we dated, I had many opportunities to be with his family. I loved his mom and dad as if they were my own and of course thought they would be someday!

His parents were very strong Christians, and I respected them immensely. I learned a great deal about real faith from these lovely people. I can vividly remember being at their home, sitting at the kitchen table with his mom. We were discussing my future, dreams for my life, and how I saw the Lord leading me. As I shared with her some of my aspirations, she very quietly and eloquently said,

“Laura, I don’t know if you and my son will get married, but I do know this: the Lord is going to do great things through you. I firmly believe the Lord is going to use you to feed his sheep.” Then she quoted, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you ask what you will and it will be done” (John 15:7 NASB). She encouraged me to claim this verse and live it.

That day is forever etched in my memory. I will never forget the words she spoke. Her words encouraged me, directed me, and changed me forever.

## A Hero

Jim Galvin was my (Jay’s) counselor at Honey Rock Camp in northern Wisconsin. During our two-week backpack and canoeing expedition, Jim and I got to know each other as only a camp counselor and a thirteen-year-old boy can.

While most of our time was fun and filled with adventure, one particular afternoon bordered on catastrophe. A fellow camper tripped and—with the weight of his thirty-pound backpack on his thirteen-year-old frame—lost his balance, falling headlong into a hornets’ nest. Immediately, hornets were everywhere. As campers scattered like marbles dropped on the floor, all I could see was this poor kid unable to get up because he was being stung repeatedly by hornets. Without thinking, I lunged toward him, pulled him from the nest, and literally swept him and his backpack away. To say it was the mother of all adrenaline rushes would be an understatement!

Twelve years later I was at a Youth for Christ staff training event. My small group leader was none other than my old camp counselor, Jim Galvin. Jim said he wanted to begin our time together talking about heroes because our work with Youth for Christ,

and evangelizing the lost, was spiritually heroic. Not because of our actions, mind you, but because of the Hero that paid the price for our sin.

Jim began to recount a story from his days as a counselor at Honey Rock Camp. Without using names, he vividly retold the story of a boy, a hornets' nest, and a hero. He then turned to me and in front of our small group, pointed to my face and said, "Jay Laffoon is that hero." I cannot describe the emotions that were running through me at that moment. The act I performed when I was thirteen years old was simply a reaction. Jim's *words* changed my life.

## Healing Words

There is healing in the words of the wise.

Proverbs 12:18 The Message

Jay and I had a whirlwind romance. Jay asked me to marry him a mere ten days after we were set up on a blind date. We went with our friends to a baseball game.

Since neither of us were big fans of "America's pastime," we did more talking than watching. Our disinterest in the game, combined with the fact that the couple who set us up were newlyweds and couldn't keep their hands off each other, gave us the opportunity to share a lot of details that night.

We talked about our lives, family, education, and dreams. I remember telling Jay that my dad had passed away a year earlier and we were coming up on the one year anniversary of his death in exactly a week. That next week, Jay and I ended up at the same Bible study. When Jay arrived, he came over to where I was sitting and asked, "How are you?" "Fine," I replied. Then

he said, “No, I mean, how are you *today*?” I couldn’t believe he remembered. I mean, the Bible study started at 7:00 p.m. and I myself hadn’t thought once about my daddy’s death that day. Jay’s words, spoken in genuine love and care, drew my heart to his in a way I cannot describe.

Jay’s love for me, expressed in a simple question, sent me reeling head over heels.

## More Than Words

Often in marriage it’s not just the words (text) that convey a message, but also the tone (subtext) with which the words are uttered. Our friend Chad reminded us of an exercise performed in college drama classes involving text and subtext. “Text” is the *words spoken* and “subtext” is the *underlying meaning* behind the text. For example, a student might be assigned to say the words “I love you” to others in the class. The assignment might be to say the same “text” with three different “subtexts”: to one classmate, “you disgust me”; to another, “I’m very nervous saying this”; and yet another, “I mean this forever.”

When I (Jay) say “I suppose,” spoken with an emphasis on the “*ose*” and a sigh at the end, this is really not the enthusiastic answer Laura is looking for when she asks if I want to go to the mall. I never want to go to the mall, and Laura knows this; but there are times she’s not going to the mall to shop, she just wants my company.

Almost without hesitation she’ll gently come back with, “You don’t *have* to go if you *really* don’t want to.” Her tone, and the emphasis on “have” and “really,” speak volumes and tell me that we are no longer talking about a trip to the mall. We have transitioned to a weightier discussion about my commitment to her

need for quality time . . . and my subsequent need for the good mood she's in when I do spend time with her.

I didn't begin to realize how important tone of voice was until I began disciplining our son, Torrey, as a toddler. I could literally make him cry with a stern word. The tone in my voice and "the look" communicate depths beyond the mere words I use.

On many occasions throughout our marriage, Laura has asked, "Why do you think I'm stupid?" "I don't think you're stupid" comes my quick reply. "Well, the tone in your voice certainly implies that I'm a downright idiot." You see, I can ask a simple question like, "Why are you doing *that*?" The words are harmless enough. But, my emphasis, tone, and facial gestures communicate to Laura that I'm really not asking a question at all. I'm letting her know that whatever she is doing, I think she is going about it in absolutely the wrong way.

Most marriages have at least one person with a tone of voice issue. It could be like mine, with the underlying implied message. Or it could be the "quarrelsome wife" Solomon wrote about in Proverbs 27:15: "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day." I am so glad my wife is not quarrelsome. So in gratitude, I work diligently to manage my tone of voice.

## Timing Is Everything

We men really have no right to say "We just had a baby!" Let's be honest—we have very little to do with the whole process. From the moment after conception until delivery, we're just a support system.

When Laura became pregnant with Torrey, we guarded our excitement at first. Laura had already experienced one miscarriage, and we didn't want to raise our hopes too high too soon.

The further along in the nine-month process we got, however, the more our joy understandably grew.

We busied ourselves creating a nursery and picking out names. We took the perfunctory Lamaze class and I learned the vital role I would play in the birth of our baby. I was ready!

Two full weeks before Laura's due date, she spent the night on the living room couch with what she described as "some pain in my lower back." Oblivious to the fact she had spent the night out of our bed, I flippantly remarked what a good night's rest I had. That went over well.

Though neither one of us thought she was in labor, Laura's significant pain merited a trip to the doctor. I threw my gym bag into the car, fully expecting to play basketball over lunch. Off we went.

When we arrived at the doctor's office, Laura was cheerfully greeted by three nurses, and I was unceremoniously ignored. Soon the nurses were asking Laura questions in rapid-fire succession. In unison they sung out, "You're in labor!" They looked at me, recognized my ineptitude, and said, "We'll get her admitted to the hospital; you just take care of yourself!"

Laura was admitted at 9:30 a.m. She gave birth to Torrey at 3:19 p.m. This six-hour window of time allowed for friends and family to stop by and wish Laura well. Meanwhile, I was feeding her ice chips and placing cool compresses on her forehead—anything and everything I could to make her comfortable as she gave birth to our son.

Around 2:00 p.m. the contractions started getting closer together. By this time, I was exhausted. I mean, all that coaching, and ice chips, and refreshing cool compresses . . . come on! A man can only hold on for so long.

So, I was taking a much-needed break, talking with Laura's sister Sandy and our friend Sue Stack. We were at the foot of the bed—and, yes, we were laughing about something—when, out of nowhere, a tepid washcloth hit me right in the face. Splat!

We turned to Laura, who said, "Giving birth here . . . could you freshen my compress?" To this day, Sandy and Sue laugh when they recall that washcloth clinging to my face.

Around 3:00 p.m. Doc Hall came in. "It's time." One thing you need to know about me is that I am easily excitable. I get downright giddy over a fresh cup of coffee. I explode with anticipation over certain TV shows. And if a buddy asks me to play golf, I have a hard time sleeping the night before. When I heard Doc utter the words "It's time," I couldn't contain myself.

I knew my position: next to Laura's left ear. I knew my word: push! And I knew I was going to say that word better than anyone had ever said it before.

December 7, 1990, at 3:19 p.m., Torrey James Laffoon entered this world. Later that night Laura told me she had never felt so loved—so cared for, so connected to another human—than when I was screaming that single word *push*. I had redeemed myself. Sometimes the right word, at the right time, makes all the difference.

## Sticks and Stones . . .

No one has a finer command of language than the person who keeps his mouth shut.

Sam Rayburn

As a young youth minister, twice I had words come out of my mouth that had a lasting impact—and they haunt me to this day.

Laura and I had our first ministry experience together with Youth for Christ in Atlanta, Georgia. We were assigned the task of starting Campus Life clubs in Gwinnet County high schools. At that time, Gwinnett County—suburbia north and east of I-285, Atlanta’s “perimeter”—was the fastest-growing county in the United States. We jumped in with both feet.

Our flagship club was at Brookwood High School. In our first year of ministry, we were busting at the seams with kids coming to our events. As a result of getting to know a lot of the kids, we had a strong core group of student leaders. One of those leaders was a freshman named Steve. Steve was a great kid who had a lot of enthusiasm for the ministry we were doing on campus. But Steve was one of those kids who easily got under my skin. He constantly teased me about being heavy. Growing up, I was always the “husky” kid. As our friend Thor Ramsey says, “If you are a heavy person, and have been a heavy person all your life, then you are not fat—you are *maintaining*.” I have since come to grips with my “huskiness,” but as a twenty-five-year-old youth minister, I had not.

At one of our events, where there must have been food present, Steve began riding me like a swaybacked mule. I reached my breaking point. I put an arm around Steve’s shoulder and said, “Yep, Steve, I’m heavy. The good news is I can change that. Steve, you are ugly, and that will never change.” We never saw Steve at another event.

A few years later, I was the featured speaker at a winter snow camp. The sponsor who had brought me in, Trip Butler, had used me numerous times. I was convinced my phone number would be on his “featured speaker speed dial” for years to come. On Saturday afternoon, we were playing some silly game in the snow. I can’t even remember the name of the game or how it was

played, but it *was* a game, which meant competitive Jay wanted to win. In the heat of competition, one of the counselors made an illegal move and subsequently knocked me out of the game. Angered and frustrated by his cheating, I yelled at the top of my voice, in front of dozens of students, and called him a name I can't bring myself to put into print. I never spoke again for Trip Butler.

Whoever coined the phrase “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” obviously never experienced the searing pain of hearing—or saying—words that hurt.

### Why Are You Such a Butt?

Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything.

Proverbs 13:3 The Message

People often get the impression that folks who write about marriage must have the whole thing figured out. Nothing could be further from the truth; no one has marriage figured out, and quite honestly we all stink at marriage from time to time. In fact, in our house, more often than we'd like to admit.

It was a month before Thanksgiving and all our relatives had decided to come to our house for Thanksgiving dinner. Laura was really beginning to enjoy cooking and was excited at the prospect of preparing a feast fit for a Norman Rockwell painting. She informed me there was only one issue: the stove. Our house still had the original stove, nearing twenty years old. One of the burners didn't work, another was temperamental, and the oven didn't heat evenly. *We* decided that a new oven needed to be purchased in order for Thanksgiving to be “perfect.”

I was a reluctant participant in the purchase but relented with one caveat: Laura would arrange for the disposal of our old stove. She cheerfully agreed. When the new stove arrived, the old stove was placed out in the garage and I was assured it would be taken care of at a later date. Thanksgiving came and went. Christmas came and went. Easter came and went. Memorial Day came and went. The stove stayed and stayed . . . taking up valuable space in my, er, our garage.

One Saturday in June, I was cleaning out the garage—trying to make room for our cars to be parked inside—when that blasted stove caught my eye. I'd had enough. I was dirty, sweaty, and frustrated. I burst into the house and shouted at Laura, “When are *you* going to get that stupid stove out of *my* garage?”

I don't know the full content of the heated dialogue that took place next, but it ended with Laura grabbing our fourteen-year-old son Torrey and saying, “Come on. You're going to help me get rid of this stove.” I watched—and laughed—in morbid delight as the two of them wrestled with the appliance, trying to maneuver it into the back of our minivan. “Stop it, stop it,” I finally said. “I'll go to Dad's and get his trailer. I'll take the stove to Goodwill.”

By this time Laura was dirty, sweaty, and frustrated. She said, “Fine, but I just have one question. Why do you have to be a *butt* about things like this?” Now both of us were hurt, angry, and frustrated. We spent the rest of the day working at various projects around the house without saying another word to each other. It was one of those days when the silence was deafening.

We had successfully avoided each other most of the day. That night we had dinner plans with our pastor, Steve Wimmer. We enjoyed fresh grilled hamburgers and a delicious fruit salad. After dinner I began to tell the story of our “fun” day around the house. Steve and his wife, Dawn, were laughing as I imitated

my poor wife and son and their futile attempt to load the stove into the van.

When I finished, our hosts could hardly contain themselves. Steve said, “Follow me.” He led us in to their garage to see—you guessed it—a stove. The Wimmers proceeded to tell us that they had a similar argument about their stove that very day.

As we headed back out to their patio for some ice cream, Dawn said to Laura, “Just one piece of advice, hon. Never ask the question, ‘Why are you such a butt?’ Instead make it a statement, ‘You are a butt!’ That way they don’t have an opportunity to respond.”

While Laura, the Wimmers, and I can look back on this day and laugh, often this type of discourse—filled with words that hurt—drives a wedge into a marriage. That wedge, left unattended, gets buried deeper and deeper, forming a rift that can take months or years to repair.

## Marriage According to Golf?

Billy Watchtorn was the PGA pro at Pine River Country Club in our hometown of Alma, Michigan, for a number of years. Billy’s laid-back personality and wry smile was a perfect fit for our small community. His knowledge of golf and ability to teach made him a favorite with high handicappers and scratch players alike.

One day I was talking with Billy about my friend Scott Davis, a very good player. I was sharing with Billy my amazement at the size of the divots Scott produces. Seriously, some of his divots are so big they resemble beaver pelts! (A divot is the piece of sod that is “cut” out of the ground by the club when one properly hits down on the golf ball.)

Without hesitation, Billy went into a lesson on the importance of properly replacing a divot. If the divot is replaced immediately, the ground will heal in as little as twenty-four hours. However, if an hour passes before the divot is replaced, it can take up to a week for the ground to heal. Finally, if that divot sits for a day, it becomes unable to reattach its root system. The ground can take up to a month to grow new grass.

Harsh words spoken in marriage leave scars in our spouse much like the golf club leaves a scar in the ground upon contact. We have received countless comments over the years on how “replacing verbal divots” has helped marriages tremendously.

When we realize that the words of our mouth or the tone of our voice has “cut” our spouse, then the sooner we address the issue, the more quickly the cut heals. When we admit our mistake immediately, the healing begins immediately. However, if we wait for an hour or two, often the healing takes longer. If we wait days—or weeks—to address the words of our mouth, the scar can be permanent.

No one gets this right 100 percent of the time. The key is to pay attention to the signs our spouses give that indicate our words have had a negative impact. I still deal with tone of voice issues, just like I’m still learning how to hit that low hooking three wood. But, just like I do with my golf game, I’m listening to the Pro and attempting to improve my “swing” when it comes to the words I have for Laura.

## Let’s Rewrite History

Adolf Hitler said, “If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it is true.” History shows us the unfortunate power of that principle. Likewise, if you repeat the truth often enough, people will believe it is true. Truth will change their lives forever.

This book is about powerful words that speak the truth to your spouse in ways they will understand. We all know men and women think differently. They speak differently and hear differently too. We are going to unlock the mystery behind your spouse's words as we share eight phrases that will revolutionize communication in your marriage. But before you turn the page, we want to tell you that these words alone will not improve your relationship. Rote repetition of these powerful phrases will not automatically make your marriage better. Communication is more than the simple "mechanics" of human conversation.

Discovering the phrases that will change your relationship with your mate is important. But equally important is speaking those phrases with your heart. Make sure your spouse hears your heart as well as your words. Marriage is about revealing to your spouse the depth of who you really are and how you really feel.

That truth will change your marriage forever.

## Questions for Reflection .....

- We have introduced the power of words in this first chapter. Take a moment and reflect on a time when words
  - encouraged or inspired you
  - hurt or harmed you
  - made you laugh
- In this book we are going to discuss four phrases that a wife needs to hear from her husband and four phrases that a husband needs to hear from his wife.
  - She needs to hear:
    - I love you
    - I respect you

- I desire you
- I cherish you
- He needs to hear:
  - I am proud of you
  - I need (*blank*) from you
  - I want you
  - I believe in you
- At first glance, which of these phrases do you need to hear the most? The least? Why?
- At first glance, which of these phrases do you think your spouse needs to hear the most? The least? Why?