

WHAT

RADICAL
HUSBANDS

DO

12 STEPS TO WIN AND KEEP
YOUR WIFE'S HEART

REGI CAMPBELL

PR*in*SS

What Radical Husbands Do
12 Steps to Win and Keep Your Wife's Heart
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“When I think of my best days as husband, I find I was doing what Regi said in this book. *What Radical Husbands Do* is a practical book I can safely give any man who is struggling in his marriage.”

– **JOEL MANBY**, CEO of Herschend Family Entertainment, author of *Love Works*, and star of an “Undercover Boss” episode on CBS

“Guys, let’s face it. We’re good at winning a lot of things, but a woman’s heart? Where do we begin? Seriously, what does that even mean? That’s where my friend Regi Campbell’s wonderful new book, *What Radical Husbands Do*, comes in. This ain’t theory. This is a proven strategy (yes, strategy) for reengaging with your wife at a level you may not have known was even possible. Regi’s been teaching this material to our men for years. I’m so grateful he’s chosen to make it available to a broader audience.”

– **ANDY STANLEY**, Author, Speaker and Presenter, “Your Move” on NBC

“All husbands need men, who are a “little down the road,” to speak into their lives and marriage. That’s what reading Regi’s Campbell’s book, *What Radical Husband’s Do*, is all about. It is like sitting across the table from a wise “man’s man” who wants the best for your marriage. Through refreshing transparency, real stories, practical applications, hard truths, and amazing grace, Regi shows the real life way to your wife’s heart.”

– **TED LOWE**, Founder of MarriedPeople, co-author of *MarriedPeople, How Your Church Can Build Marriages That Last*

“Regi is a thorough and thoughtful companion in the inevitable tough places of marriage. His candid approach is brave and calls on the resilience of his readers. I look forward to recommending this for husbands who want a better marriage and are wanting wise, practical guidance.”

– **KATHY MALCOLM HALL**, Licensed Professional Counselor

“*What Radical Husbands Do* is the most practical book for rebuilding a marriage that I have ever read. It’s perfect for any man wanting to save his marriage.”

– **BILL JONES**, President, Columbia International University

“Regi is used of God to speak behind the masks men wear. He understands the lies we tell ourselves and shows us how we can allow others into that place to begin to alter the permission we give ourselves to fail. He teaches men, how to gain trusted permission, and how to speak with truth, grace and compassion. He directs men into true, life-giving freedom! I could not more highly endorse a book or friend more.”

– **JOHN LYNCH**, Author of *On My Worst Day* and
co-author of *The Cure* and *Bo’s Cafe*

“Direct, straightforward manual for identifying problems and concrete, doable steps for customizing solutions that will work. Non-sugar coated, “tell it like it is” book that will reshape and benefit many lives.”

– **BRENDA JONES**, Happily married to Ted for 36 years

“I first ‘met’ Regi through About My Father’s Business - a book that launched my faith at work. I later had the great opportunity to be mentored by him in one of his Radical Mentoring groups - where Regi impacted me, my wife and my children in a really meaningful way. Now Regi has distilled some of the most powerful and time-tested marriage lessons for today’s man in *What Radical Husbands Do*. I highly recommend this book to any guy looking for some practical advice on how he can ‘own’ the success of his marriage.”

– **DAVE KATZ**, SVP, Coca-Cola Consolidated

“A raw, witty life lesson on how to win a wife’s heart ... spoken by a true leader who missed it, then lived it ... no fluff, no quick tricks, but a fundamental choice to be different, a choice to excel at home, like he did at work ... spoken by a real man, for men. Are you ready? ”

– **PEYTON DAY**, CEO, ROAM Innovative Workplaces

“Finally a straightforward book for men who are serious about their marriage and not only want to be a better spouse, but a better man. Campbell provides a no excuses approach with logical and practical next steps. This book is a great tool for marriage counselors and husbands wanting to improve their marriage.”

– **RACHEL HOLCOMB**, Licensed Counselor,
Director of Mentoring Systems, NPCC

“When it comes to something as important as marriage it is vital to get it right! I found the message to be hard hitting, straightforward, honest and compelling. Not your average marriage advice book, this book is born of personal experience and built on practical advice. The application was clear and is drawn from the actual experience of the author. If you care about your marriage and family, you owe it to them and yourself to learn from someone who knows what he is talking about. And it might just **RADICALLY** transform your marriage... life... and future!”

– **DAVID SALYERS**, SVP, Chick-Fil-A and
Co-author, *Remarkable!*

“Regi’s passion for this subject and his experiences, both personal and those garnered through mentoring others, comes through in such a useful way. Impactful book; much of which I had to endure while wincing... “Thank you Sir, may I have another.”

– **ROCKY BUTLER**, CEO, Alliance Precision Plastics

“I like Regi’s writing style . . . honest, humble, real, practical, hopeful but it also does not sugar-coat just how hard this can be. I think this book will be an excellent resource for men with good marriages, bad marriages and everything in-between. I also like the fact that it is action oriented. When a man’s marriage is dying, he needs practical steps that he can immediately take, not a change of his character which could takes months or years to happen. The practical steps will hopefully provide the means for the change of character to happen and it can save (or at least improve) his marriage in the meantime.”

– **BOBBY REAGAN**, Principal, Reagan Consulting

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>1</i>
<hr/>
INTRODUCTION: How's your marriage . . . Really?	<i>5</i>
<hr/>
STEP ONE: Decide and Tell Her	<i>17</i>
STEP TWO: Burn the Ships	<i>25</i>
STEP THREE: Drop Your Expectations	<i>37</i>
STEP FOUR: Love What She Loves	<i>47</i>
STEP FIVE: Create an Environment of Acceptance	<i>53</i>
STEP SIX: Learn to Listen	<i>69</i>
STEP SEVEN: Give Up Sex	<i>81</i>
STEP EIGHT: Learn to Lose	<i>87</i>
STEP NINE: Set Her Free	<i>93</i>
STEP TEN: Think Long-Term	<i>99</i>
STEP ELEVEN: Stop Talking and Do Something	<i>111</i>
STEP TWELVE: Give Up	<i>119</i>
<hr/>
EPILOGUE: The Thirteenth Step . . . a Mentor	<i>129</i>
<hr/>
AFTERWORD: The Wife's Side of the Story	<i>133</i>

PREFACE



his is a book written to men. I'm a man, and what I have to say is to men.

It's a book about marriage. Your marriage. Not her marriage. Not their marriage. *Your* marriage.

What I have to say starts with a premise. Not everyone will buy into my premise but I'm okay with that. Here it is . . .

The man determines the quality of his marriage.

It's not up to your wife. It's not up to the two of you together. It's up to you.

Why? Because *you only control you*. You're the only variable in the equation you get to fill in. And you can't change the other variables. You can't change your wife, your mother-in-law or the past. You only control you . . . what you think, what you say and what you do.

Winning your wife's heart is everything. It is to marriage what the secret formula is to Coke. Win her heart and keep it and everything else is easy, or at least easier. You can substitute the word "desires" if you'd like. When you've won her heart, her "desires" are for you and your marriage.

It's up to you to win and keep your wife's heart. You can't trade for it. There's not a fixed amount of effort required. There's no way to "get there" and then quit. There's not even a guarantee you'll succeed, no matter what you do.

Every marriage has bliss. Days and seasons when it *just works*. You both get what you want, you talk about things, sex is frequent and fabulous, and you're as happy as a man can be.

Yet every marriage gets lost somewhere along the way. Some get found, some don't. It happens to everyone. You're frustrated, bored, seduced, angry, lazy or exhausted. You want out. You'd rather be alone than in this mess. When asked if she ever contemplated divorce, Ruth Graham (Billy Graham's wife) said, "No, I've never thought of divorce in all these 35 years of marriage; but I did think of murder a few times."¹ At some point in your marriage, it'll seem like anything would be better than this. If it hasn't happened yet, it will.

If you're lost, the first thing you have to do is figure out where you are. Being dead-level honest, *where is your marriage right now?* If it's working, it takes a nano-second to answer. Your question is, *How do I keep it going?* If it's bad, you also don't have to think very long. You're so frustrated, you may have no idea what to do next. For everyone else, it may not be quite so clear. You may be somewhere in the middle. . . . it's not as great as it once was, but not as bad as most of your friends' marriages.

This book will offer up 12 steps you can take to save your marriage if it's in trouble, to make it great if it's good, and to make it better if it's just okay.

Now, I don't have all the answers. I don't know your wife. Your past. Your specific situation. Your willingness or ability to adapt. Your level of arrogance versus your level of humility. I'm not a psychologist, counselor or a trained marriage expert, but I do know what worked for me. And over the past 13 years, I've watched it work over and over again as I've shared it with a bunch of other guys.

A WORD TO THE WIVES

I've been around long enough to know that women get real curious about books their men read, probably because we read less than you do. I have three

things to say to the “maverick” wife who might be reading this, especially if you’re a wife who is hanging by a thread on the other end of a failing marriage.

First, don’t give up and get out. If he’s been unfaithful, get out of the house or get him out. You both need space. You both need time to process what’s happened, and you’ll be hard pressed to think clearly in the same house with the same routine. My wife leaving was the best thing to ever happen to me. It was the wake-up call I needed. Her motive was pure. She didn’t leave to pay me back or get even or teach me a lesson. She left so she could think. Pray. Gain perspective. She didn’t leave as a first step toward separation and divorce. She left as a first step toward clarity for herself. But it gave me time to find clarity also. And that clarity led to my recycling. More on that later.

Secondly, know there are no such things as “marriage problems.” We have personal problems, revealed in the white-hot heat of marriage. He has some and you have some. If he’s coming to realize some of his “issues” . . . starting to accept them and take ownership . . . and there’s sincere humility and conviction in his heart, you’re an idiot to abandon this marriage. He’s on his way to becoming the man you wanted and thought you married to begin with. Give him some time and encouragement. What’s rewarded is repeated. You get what you glorify. So catch him when he does stuff right and brag on him. Baby steps can lead to giant leaps, given the right encouragement.

And you may need to get some outside perspective on your issues. Yes, you have issues, and some of them have helped make your marriage what it is. Do what you want him to do . . . get someone to help you see yourself, to help you open yourself up and look at what needs attention. The best way to heal your marriage is to find healing for yourself. And as I’ll say repeatedly to the men, whatever you do to improve yourself will pay dividends, no matter what happens in your marriage.

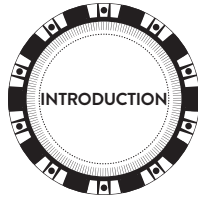
Finally, if your marriage is in trouble, know your challenge will be forgiving and forgetting. You may be totally justified in throwing the bum out or taking

off. What he's done, what he's said, his selfishness, his constant criticism . . . maybe all of the above . . . any rational woman would get out and start over. But now he's ready to try . . . really try to make things different. He's using different words. There's an earnestness that hasn't been there. If you see this kind of movement on his part, you're smart to move toward him and see what comes of it. After all, do you really want to start over and train another hard-headed man to be a decent husband? It's so much better for you, the kids, your folks, for everyone, if this marriage becomes rock solid.

SO GET READY MEN . . .

This is going to be straight-up, in-your-face and honest. Can you take the truth? Will you recognize the things that kill a marriage and make a real effort to go in a better direction?

Will you do what it takes to become a RADICAL HUSBAND?



HOW'S YOUR MARRIAGE REALLY?

"Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start."

— Nido Qubein



I'm a guy who's been hanging on to his marriage for almost 45 years — by a thread. If there were ever two people not prepared for marriage, it was us. Two twenty-year-old college sophomores, infatuated and hot for each other. Raised in homes where you only had sex after you were married and divorce was out of the question, we announced we were getting married in August. We had met the previous September and started dating in February. We tied the knot after dating for only six months. We hardly knew each other, and worse, the dense fog of intense infatuation veiled our deep differences.

We differed on everything — *everything*. She was a pessimist; I was an optimist. She was fearful; I was fearless. I was extroverted; she was introverted. I wanted to party; she just wanted to be with me. I was A.D.D.; she did one thing at a time. She cared immensely what people thought; I didn't give a rip! She enjoyed beauty and wanted to "smell the roses"; I was in a hurry and didn't even notice the dang flowers. She was a perfectionist; I did just enough to get

by. She loved houses and decorating; I couldn't have cared less. I could go on for pages about our differences. Those who know us, even today, say they've never seen two people more different.

Once we were married, the sexual pressure was released and things rolled along well for a while. Sex had been a dirty word in her house and her reluctance soon became apparent. My sex education had been, "Keep it in your pants, boy — until you're married!" Now that we were married and it was legal, I wanted sex all the time. And she yielded; for a long time she yielded. But there was less and less intimacy. More routine . . . and resentment.

Eighteen months after our wedding, she faced student teaching at the university. Her supervisor was so intimidating, Miriam literally fainted one day under the pressure. She went into survival mode, doing everything she could to please this supervisor and get through the semester. She had nothing left for me, but instead of rallying behind her, I turned on her. I interpreted the lack of attention (i.e., lack of sex) as rejection and I was angry. A pattern was set that carried on for the next 12 years.

Anger comes from unmet demands and the more she didn't meet my demands, the angrier I got. What's worse, I didn't release the anger; I harbored it. I kept it in the dark where it could grow. I quietly seethed. I loved her, especially when she did what I wanted. But when she didn't, I was manipulative, critical, sarcastic and downright mean. By this time, we were college seniors and had been social drinkers for a couple of years. I took it to another level, thinking I was numbing my anger, but actually making it worse.

The years went by. We morphed from college to career, marrieds to parents, and renters to homeowners. We made all the transitions couples make. From the outside, we looked like the happy little couple with two happy little kids. We went to church, took trips, worked in the yard. We looked like everyone else. But our relationship was steadily worsening. I wanted sex. She wanted intimacy. I didn't have time for intimacy; I was going to school at night,

working on my MBA, climbing the corporate ladder. I worked hard and wanted to play hard. She cared for two little kids all day, every day and wanted rest. (We had at least one in diapers for five straight years). She wanted the perfect house, with just the right tile in the bathroom. The tiles all looked the same to me.

Eventually, it all crashed.

I had married the wrong woman. The differences were just too great and she wouldn't even try to change. She saw me as a corporate "hoe," willing to sacrifice her, the kids . . . *anything* . . . to get ahead. She had submissively moved five times in nine years and the last one took a huge toll. I'd accepted a job far away from her hometown, her mother and her sisters, and I had done it without even talking to her. I simply announced it.

In a particularly lucid conversation one night, she looked at me and said, "Regi, we have different dreams." She was leaving me. "Get to know your kids," she said, and walked out the door.

Not once had I thought she might leave.

Stupid me.

That night, and over the next few days, I got clarity for the first time.

I had taken her *completely* for granted. I had assigned no value to what she meant to me. What she did for me, for our kids or for our home.

The old saying, "absence makes the heart grow fonder," is true.

Over the next week, I realized what I had. I looked myself in the mirror and didn't like what I saw. I saw an angry 33-year-old, drinking to hide his anger, married to a beautiful woman who simply wanted a home and a family. I

decided that if I could get a do-over, a second chance, I could be happy. And I could make her happy.

But there was a problem.

Twelve years of career worship, corporate moves, selfishness and insensitivity had driven Miriam away. I had created an environment of criticism and rejection — a place where she never measured up. I had subtly threatened to abandon her. I had been restless and unhappy. Now I thought I could be content. Now I wanted to commit to her. But she was gone.

Before she left, I had been a good dad. But now, having the kids all by myself, I fell in love with them all over again, and in a deeper way. I saw I could be a great dad and we could have a great family, if only she'd give me another shot.

In the loneliness of her leaving, I started thinking about all the good instead of the bad. I thought of all the things *she did* and started to forget about the things I'd "tried and convicted" her of *not doing*. I knew I could stop criticizing her. I was ready to accept her as she was and ready to stop trying to change her.

That was the birthplace of this book. Miriam did come back, agreeing to stay one day. She said, "You're saying different things, but your voice sounds the same." Interpretation? "You're saying words I haven't heard before, and there's a sincerity that's unfamiliar. But the sound of your voice tells me it's still **you**." She decided to come back and check it out. After that day, I asked if she'd stay another day. She agreed. Then another.

It's been 31 years now. I'm still on a day-to-day contract.

I had to take *radical* action. I had one day to win her heart. That "win" got me another day. Ever so slowly, she warmed up to me, and it got better and better from there.

You see, it was my chance to *win* her love for the first time. When we first met, it was easy. It was chemistry . . . infatuation . . . hormones. This time, it was going to take effort — second effort, third effort, endless effort. Even though the “day-to-day contract” has become a light-hearted euphemism, it reminds me that my marriage is up to me. It will become what I make it. I am responsible. I am the leader. Love isn’t a hole I fall into; it’s a choice I make.

YOUR STORY ISN'T MY STORY

That’s what happened to me. Not for a minute do I think your marriage is like mine. No way. But it’s not what I think that matters. The question is: “How do you feel about your marriage?” I want you to find the same clarity about your marriage as you find about your weight. Get up in the morning, step on the scales, stand still for a minute and you’re going to know your weight. You can lie to yourself about whether you ate one or “just a few” Oreos. About whether your last workout was a week ago or a month ago. But put your bare feet on the scales and the truth comes out. I wish there was a machine like that for marriages, one that would tell us where things really stand.

But since it hasn’t been invented yet, we’ll use a different approach. I’m now going to give you snapshots of different marriages and ask if you see yourself in any of them. You’ll need to be patient because a lot of these aren’t you . . . but stick with me. You might find something that hits close to home.

1. You wake up feeling lucky (or blessed, depending on your point of view) because your marriage is so good. You get along great. You talk things out. You believe the best about each other. You’re giving and getting focused attention. It feels good. Sex is frequent and there’s no pressure. There’s little criticism. When friends ask how it’s going at home, you answer, *Couldn’t be better!* . . . and you mean it.

It’s rare and it’s never permanent, but there are times when it’s just about perfect. As good as it gets. A husband and wife working together on their marriage and on themselves as individuals. It’s a season . . . a really good one, but still a season.

Here's what's going on when you're in that "good place":

- There's open communication, even about tough stuff like sex.
- Conflicts are resolved without a lot of emotion.
- You work together smoothly making plans, solving problems and making decisions.
- You have a shared vision for your marriage and family. You both know what you want it to look like, and you're willing to make individual sacrifices to make it happen.
- You've figured out your roles, with the "blessing" of the other. There's little conflict about who (normally) does what and a clear willingness to have each other's backs in emergencies.
- There's a healthy level of respect, never threatened by disagreements on small stuff. No one yells. No one pouts. You work stuff out.
- Each accepts the other *as he or she is*. No one's trying to change anyone. And each spouse tries to not take "personal" things innocently said. When feelings get hurt, you talk it through quickly, repair the relationship and move on. You don't hold grudges.

So how rare is this? There is not a marriage on earth that totally measures up to all that. There'll always be "soft spots" and things to strengthen. And people change. Sometimes we grow, sometimes regress, but we never stay the same. And while the stars can align for a while, it's nearly impossible to stay "great" all the time. Some would say it's not even healthy, but it sure sounds appealing, doesn't it?

If your marriage sounds like this, consider these 12 steps to keep it going and growing. Perhaps you'll see a few things to look out for . . . things you can do to avoid becoming overconfident, or going to sleep at the switch and sliding into "okay."

2. **Your marriage is “okay.”** Things are stable. Consistent. There’s general harmony, peace, cooperation and collaboration. There’s a routine to life together. Could be you’re both so busy, you don’t have time to think about your marriage as a “thing.” It “is what it is,” so why bother? *We’re making it. We’re getting by. My marriage is fine. We rarely fight. We love each other. We’re nowhere near the messy stuff you’ve described so far. There’s no war going on here.*

Be grateful you’re not at war.

But peace is not defined by the absence of war. Nor is a great marriage defined by the absence of conflict. It’s easy to take things and people for granted. Sometimes what feels like peace to you may feel like boredom to her.

Take the case of my friend who sent a document to the printer at his house. When he reached for the tray, a document was already there. He picked it up and it just about knocked him over. It was a copy of an email his wife sent to her mentor talking about him. She says she doesn’t love him anymore. She doesn’t “feel it.” She’s tired of being taken for granted and wonders what happened to the man who wooed her like the Queen of Sheba.

Or you might have a good marriage that never becomes great because you took it easy and settled for status quo. If you think it’s good just because you’re getting what you want, put a hold on that. Your wife might say your marriage isn’t anywhere close to where you think it is. In fact, surveys show

- Women are less happy in their marriages than men
- Women are more likely than men to see problems in their marriages
- Women are more likely to initiate divorce (women ask for divorce two-thirds of the time), and are more than three times as likely as their former husbands to have strongly desired the divorce ²

I don't want you to turn around someday and say: *Man, I wish someone had woke me up. I was asleep at the switch. There was a storm going on. . . . I just didn't see it.*

Here are a few more things that might happen in an “okay” marriage:

- You were invited on a marriage retreat, but you blew it off because you knew it would cost money and take time away from work. Your thought was, *Nah . . . we don't need that stuff. We're doing just fine.* You knew your wife wanted to go, but you passed. Refused to seriously consider it.
- For Christmas, your dad gave you a book about how to love your wife. You thanked him politely and then put it on the shelf beside the family Bible and the Encyclopedia Britannica. Other guys have suggested books to you. You don't even write down the titles. You don't need that crap; you're doing fine.
- You're so confident in your wife's love that you're ignoring her, putting everything into your work. For a little while, that was fine. But it's become standard. And you're into your work because you're getting strokes, bonuses and promotions. She likes the money part for sure, but if you asked, she'd rather have more of you. Because you're so confident in how great things are and you're afraid you'll have to do something different, you're not going to ask.

This is the stuff guys do when they see their marriages as “okay.” And I'd like to think this is where most of us are . . . right in the middle. But the divorce rate is 57%, and I keep getting blindsided by friends whose “okay” marriages are blowing up.

I want to shake you out of “okay.” To wake you up. To show you how to avoid being stunned someday when “okay” is replaced with “goodbye.” Let's take it the other way. Let's raise okay to *outstanding*.

3. **Your marriage is a struggle . . . or worse.** There's friction and frustration almost daily. You argue over big things and little things. The "d" word (divorce) comes up . . . a lot. Both you and she spend time thinking about what life might be like with a fresh start. You're struggling and have been for a good while.

It might have come to a head all at once, when she found out you were having an affair. She hates you. You've come to your senses, broken it off and realized what you have (or had). You want her. Bad. But the bridge is so burnt it appears impassable.

Or it might have been her affair that blew it up. Yes, she confessed to you. Yes, she broke it off and came crawling back. But can you ever trust her again? Can you ever love her the way you used to? She's "all-in" now, but can you "win her" so she never wanders off again?

Maybe it's over, but nobody's admitting it. You "grew apart." Her career has taken off . . . she's pouring more and more into her work, plus she's started taking courses at the community college and she's feeling "alive again." Maybe she's a stay-at-home mom who's decided she doesn't want to waste the years she has left doing your laundry and cooking your food. You've smothered her. She wants to breathe. Every day, there's more and more silence. Fewer friendly conversations. More anger. More frustration. Less patience. Less agreement — *on anything.*

So . . . how are you feeling? Uncertain? Uncomfortable? Overwhelmed? It's pretty hard for guys to step back and clearly see what's going on in their marriages. And it can be scary, even terrifying. But isn't it smarter to wade into your problems than to stick your head in the sand? Or run? Or get blindsided?

More big clues: You and your wife keep clashing over the same things . . .

- **Money.** Why can't she see what she's doing to you? To the two of you. So much debt you can't breathe. No appreciation for how hard you're working. Never satisfied. Never grateful. No encouragement. Never enough.
- **Sex.** Well, that's a sore subject. It's gotten less and less frequent. And more and more routine.
- **Friends.** Yours are yours. Hers are hers. You don't trust hers. You don't think they like you, and you're not sure they're good for your marriage. You wonder if they're advising her to leave you. You know yours are coaching you that way. *You're wasting your life, man, they say. Find somebody else. You guys just aren't happy. Get it over with and move on.*
- **The past.** Your ex-wife. Her ex-husband. Something from the past "owns" you. She won't forgive you. You can't forgive her . . . or yourself. Either way, the past keeps coming back to steal the present. And paint a hopeless future.
- **Other people.** There are some you don't want to disappoint — your parents, mentors and a few church friends. But most of your married friends will understand if you break up. They've seen things decline between the two of you. They want you to be happy, but wonder if you should stay married to each other.
- **Other women.** Maybe that's where things have really fallen apart. You've met somebody who's everything your wife isn't. You may not have moved on it yet, but you've had enough conversations to be emotionally connected to her. You can't wait to get free so you can really hang out with her. It's going to be complicated, no doubt. But it's going to be worth it to finally be happy again.
- **Other men.** You may be suspicious she's talking to someone else — or more than talking. She sure isn't talking to you. Nor is she the least bit interested in "physical" activities. She's cold as ice, but you know she's

not a cold-as-ice woman. You just know there's no heat coming in your direction.

- **Boredom.** You love her (yes, you do), but it's the same old, same old. You're getting older. She's getting older. You look around and see no heroes in your world, nobody whose marriage you envy. You don't know what you want or what it will take, but you're tired of this and you're ready to do something else, even if it's wrong.

I don't know which of these you may be experiencing. Any one of them can cripple or even kill a marriage. You're feeling you need to do something, even if it's wrong.

On one hand, you've tried for a long time and you're tired. She's not going to change. She's all but told you that. She's showing little or no interest in anything you offer. She's written you off, either consciously or unconsciously.

On the other hand, you're not a quitter. What about the kids . . . your families . . . hers and yours? There's the hemorrhage of money a divorce will cost, not to mention child support for the rest of eternity. You have all this history with her, and it wasn't too bad at first. It's not like you totally hate her. You're just tired of the battle. Tired of the disappointment. Tired of the criticism. Tired of feeling like a stranger in your own house.

SO . . . WHATCHA GONNA DO?

If I had picked up this book 32 years ago, my response would have been, "adios." I'd have put this book away, put the whole deal out of my mind (again) and gone to bed. But 31 years ago, after it all "hit the fan," I'd have lapped up every word. Why? Because my world was turned upside down, and I didn't have a clue what to do. I realized I was in deep trouble, and I had to do something drastic if I was to save my marriage and find happiness. "Business as usual" was not going to cut it. I was disrupted. Seriously disrupted.

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Since people don't buy solutions to problems they don't have, most of us won't change until we recognize a problem . . . until something or somebody turns up the heat. If you're not a little bit disrupted, a little bit shaken from your "homeostasis," you'll keep doing what you've always done and your marriage will stay where it is. My hope is you've read these snapshots and something's jacked you up! Whether out of fear or desire, you're ready to move. Ready to take responsibility and step up to win . . . and keep . . . your wife's heart.

It starts by going "on record" and letting her know that you're totally and irreversibly committed to her.

You may think it's silly.

But I'll bet she won't.



DECIDE AND TELL HER

Decide you love your wife, that you want to spend the rest of your life married to her, and then tell her — with downward voice inflection — say it and mean it.



Okay, so this isn't all that exciting. But it's necessary. And it's nonnegotiable. Everything else I'm going to suggest is useless if you don't do this one.

Why?

Because your heart won't be in it.

In choosing to stay married, you're choosing a path that's long and hard, longer and harder than any you've ever walked. You're going to be kicked in the groin, ignored, screamed at, rejected and stonewalled. You're going to feel disrespected and minimized as a man. Your needs are not only going to go unmet, they are going to be ignored at times. There will be more setbacks than advances, and it's not going to feel good most of the time. And if your marriage is at the bottom, put your big-boy britches on, because it's not going to feel good for a long time.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT LOVE

As I said earlier, love is a choice you make . . . not a hole you fall into.

Yeah, when you got married, you loved your wife. You felt it. You were all pumped up and teary-eyed. We all are when we see her walking down the aisle, beautifully adorned in a gleaming white dress. Intense. No doubt about it.

But whether you feel it or not, you've got to choose to love your wife. And I'm not just talking about a day, a week or a month. I'm talking about *choosing* to love her *until you die*. You have to choose to be kind to her, no matter what she says or how she treats you. You have to choose to serve her, no matter how little she serves you. You have to *choose* to get into her frame of reference, regardless of the fact she never gets into yours. It's a one-way street with all the traffic headed in her direction and none headed back your way.

Are you up for that? Can you handle it? Are you willing to give love and not trade it?

I'm going to put wheels on what I mean in the chapters that follow. And I'm going to give you practical things to make your love for her come alive. And there's a chance, over time, she'll love you back and it won't always be a one-way street.

But if you're not willing to sign up for this kind of one-way commitment, your marriage won't ever be great. If you're already in trouble, your marriage won't make it.

LOVE VERSUS MARRIAGE

Marriage is easy when you're feeling the love. But when you aren't, marriage feels like a cage: *I'm trapped in here with this woman I don't love. And she doesn't love me. I can't get out and neither can she. This marriage is holding both of us back from being happy!*

We think marriage is the problem, that it's holding us back from someone or something better.

But think about this: *What if the cage is there to protect us?*

If you were deep in the jungles of Africa and there were hungry lions, tigers, leopards, jackals — all kinds of hungry animals looking for fresh meat — you'd give anything for a cage. You'd gladly lock yourself inside.

Maybe that's why we have marriage. Maybe it's there to protect us from the dangers . . . temptations we're drawn to . . . things that will kill us if we're set free.

“SO WHAT” IF MARRIAGE IS AN “INSTITUTION”?

Think about why humans set up institutions. Institutions are set up to sustain important activities over time.

In years gone by, most small towns in the U.S. had a good-hearted doctor who took care of people in the community. When people were sick, he went to their homes and treated them. When they got really sick, he brought them to his house and looked after them until they got better or died.

What happened when the doctor died? Or when his house burned down? The whole community was out of luck.

So we created an *institution* to *sustain* the healthcare we all needed. The good-hearted doctor is still at the heart of it, but now connected to a hospital — an institution — a system that will carry on when he doesn't feel like being good-

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hearted, or when he's sick himself or when he's (ultimately) not around. Marriage is a system like that. It carries two people through when they don't feel love for each other. I say it this way . . .

Love *initiates* marriage. But *marriage* sustains love.

YOU HAVE TO DECIDE

It's like my friend Craig, who set out to run the Chicago Marathon. He decided he was going to finish no matter what. Sure, he wanted to finish in less than four hours, but his main deal was to finish.

It turned out to be “Chicago cold” the morning of the race. Undaunted, he set out on his mission. About eight miles in, he felt a weird pain in his calf. He kept running, albeit a little gingerly. At mile seventeen, he was in mortal agony. He kept running. At mile twenty-four, he was walking with a bad limp. When he crossed the finish line, he was dragging his bad leg and crying like a baby. But he finished.

That's the kind of commitment it takes to save a marriage or make one great. As leadership expert Andy Stanley says, “Somebody has to go first. By going first, the leader furnishes confidence to those who follow.”³ When you, the husband, lead with iron-clad commitment, you give confidence both to yourself and to your wife. But it has to be real. You have to make the long-term, irreversible decision — saying, “I'm all-in.” And then *be* “all-in.” Regardless.

A good friend of mine experienced what seems like the ultimate rejection for a man; his wife left him for a woman. He told me he was ready to hit the road and find someone else when we met for lunch. He was hurt big time, but he still loved her. I asked if he thought she would be open to meeting with me and he said yes. So I called her and, sure enough, she agreed to meet for lunch. Having a little bit of advance warning, I wasn't shocked when she revealed the nature of her extramarital affair. Actually, she was shocked I wasn't shocked.

I explained that who she had become involved with was irrelevant to the real question. “Did you mean it when you said, ‘Till death do us part?’” I asked. I guess no one had confronted her that way, distracted by her gender choice more than her marriage vow. She got very emotional as I cast vision for what their kids’ weddings would be like with multiple “moms” wearing expensive dresses and being escorted to the front. We talked for a long time, and she said she’d rethink what she was doing.

I got back with my friend and suggested he reach out to her. “If you love and accept her unconditionally, I think there’s a chance she’ll come back and recommit to you and your marriage. But if she doesn’t, you can go to your grave knowing you never abandoned her or broke *your* commitment. If she breaks it, she breaks it. But you’ll never have to apologize to your kids or feel like you didn’t do everything you could possibly do. You’ll feel good about yourself because you did the right thing.”

But it was too late.

Not because her reflection came too late, but because her husband, my good friend, gave up. He broke *his* marriage commitment and found somebody else.

Divorce. Baggage. No redemption. Blended families. Multiple “moms.”

Don’t let that happen to you without a fight. Make a decision. Make a commitment. Grit your teeth and decide you’re going to honor it and never quit. Never give up. If she leaves you, she’ll leave the kindest, most attentive, most loving man in the world. But it’ll be on her, not you.

YOU GOTTA TELL HER

One of my mentors taught me this . . .

“When people are telling you the truth, they telegraph it. When they don’t mean what they say, they telegraph that too.”

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If you make the decision to love her no matter what, to *never* give up on your marriage, to be willing to look hard at yourself in the mirror and open up to becoming the man you want to be, that's huge. You need to tell her. But you have to tell her in the cool of the evening, not in the heat of the battle. You need to be together and face-to-face. You need to let her know what you're about to tell her is important . . . the genuine, from-the-heart, bone-level truth. Most importantly, you must tell her you're making this commitment for *yourself*— *for your benefit* — *not to win her heart*. That will blow her mind. But it has to be the truth.

You need to tell her you love her and won't ever leave, no matter what. She needs to hear from your mouth and your heart that you're *in . . . all in*. You're willing and ready to work on stuff, and you'll never give up on your marriage. And you must say it like you mean it because you mean it. A woman's need for security is near the top of her list. Your wife *wants to believe you love her and you'll never leave*. You owe it to her to decide, and then tell her.

AND NOTHING WILL CHANGE — FOR A WHILE

Let me be clear. When you make up your mind and commit to her and to your marriage forever, nothing is going to change, at least not at first. Maybe she'll ruin her mascara, but don't think these nice-sounding words are going to work magic. She knows you. She's heard stuff like this before. She may even call you out with, *Oh, you're going to give me that line again? No way I'm buying that hoo-hab! And if she does, don't try to sell her or convince her. Just smile gently and say, You'll see. I'm doing this for me. I'm committing to grow up and become the man I want to be. And I need your help. I need some time and a little slack. It won't take long for you to see my commitment is real.*

The most important part of making this decision and telling her isn't convincing *her*. It's being sure *yourself*.

WHY IT'S THE BEST DECISION

George Washington Carver once said, “Anything will give up its secrets if you love it enough.”⁴ Before he died, he patented 268 different uses for the peanut.

The peanut didn't love him back. But because of his intense, unwavering, life-long commitment to it, amazing things happened. Millions of people have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every day. His one-way commitment changed the world. And your one-way commitment to your wife and marriage can change the world too, starting with yours, hers and your children's.

“No matter where you go, there you are.” It's an old psychologist's joke, but it's true. If you think you're going to find someone who's better, who'll love you more, who'll be more like what you want, remember your next girl still has to fall in love and *stay in love with you*. If you're like me and most men I know, *that ain't no picnic*. Most people who divorce once are likely to divorce again — sometimes twice more. What's the common denominator? *They are*.

Committing to your wife and making your marriage work is by far the least expensive choice you have. Divorce, alimony and child support — they'll ultimately double your monthly expenses. You're going to feel more pressure to perform at work to make enough money to take care of everyone. That's a cage you don't want to be trapped in.

When you bail on your marriage, you give your kids permission to divorce when they get married. You can't tell them not to do something you did. You'll have no moral authority with your kids on the subject. You'll have punted, and you'll be completely discounted when it comes to the subject of commitment and staying with something even when it's hard.

THE CAR ANALOGY

Imagine the car you have today is the only car you can *ever* have.

I mean *ever*.

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What Radical Husbands Do • 23

How would you treat that car? Would you take care of it? Would you invest in it, keep it serviced, and protect it from harm?

Would you abuse it? Take it for granted?

How much time would you spend looking at other men's cars online . . . or at new cars in the showroom?

Zero. None. Nada.

Because it would be a waste of time.

With no way to legitimately get another car, you'd learn to be content with yours. As a matter of fact, if you took care of it well enough, someday you could have a collector car that others would envy. Collector cars — really valuable ones — are cared for from the time they leave the showroom until they reach their ultimate destinations in museums. You may have already done damage to yours, but all that can be taken care of with time, effort and consistent "TLC."

So it is with your wife and your marriage.

If you'll commit to her forever, stop thinking about the woman you don't have, and give the one you have the time, warmth and love she needs, you might have a chance of pulling this thing out of the fire.

RADICAL HUSBANDS commit and stay committed.



BURN THE SHIPS

Eliminate all your escape routes. Whether they exist in your mind, on Facebook, in your address book or on the other side of town, you must seal off any open doors to other relationships. Your wife must become your only source of romance.



The second step on our list is to “burn the ships.” You have to decide to eliminate any alternatives to your wife. This isn’t a passive mental activity. It’s active. It’s actually *doing something* — *doing whatever it takes* to make your wife your only option, your only source of romance. Until she’s the only one, you won’t focus on her and do all the things you need to do. Until your wife is the only focus of your attention and romantic energy, you won’t have any chance of winning her heart or keeping it over time. Rock promoter Bill Graham said of the Grateful Dead, “They’re not the best at what they do, they’re the only ones that do what they do.”⁵ It’s called exclusivity.

The phrase “burn the ships” comes from the legendary story of Spanish Conquistador Hernando Cortez, who landed in Mexico in 1519 with a few hundred men, eleven ships, and plans to seize the great treasures of the Aztecs. Outnumbered by an army who’d turned back these kinds of conquests for six centuries, what would have to happen for Cortez to succeed where others had failed?

6 UNTIL YOUR WIFE IS THE ONLY FOCUS OF YOUR ATTENTION AND ROMANTIC ENERGY, YOU WON'T HAVE ANY CHANCE OF WINNING HER HEART OR KEEPING IT OVER TIME.

Out of the blue, he uttered three words that changed everything.

“Burn the ships.”

“*What? You gotta be kidding me,*” his men probably thought.

“Burn the ships,” he repeated.

Then he said this: “If we’re going home, we’re going home in their ships.” With that, Cortez and his men burned their own ships. When the ships were toast, the alternative was removed. They were *committed*. It wasn’t “win or go home.” It was “win or you’re never going home.” That’s different. There was no turning back. No alternative. No escape. No option other than to make it work.

All-in. 100-percent committed. Until-death-do-us-part committed.

If you want to win and keep her heart, you’ve got to burn your ships.

BIRTH OF A VISION

Human beings are smart. If there’s anything built in us, it’s the desire to survive. And to survive, we need hope. We need an alternative. A way out if all else fails.

When you said, “I do,” this might have been far from your mind. Maybe not even there. You were so optimistic, so positive she was perfect. She would meet all your needs. Exceed your expectations.

But as reality “bit,” you realized it wasn’t that way. She’s not perfect. She has a mind of her own. She wants to have her own life. She’s not as crazy about you as she once was. She’s not ready to have sex with you every time you want it.

So you conjure up alternatives in your mind. They're your second choices. Your escape routes. They're the grass that's greener. The DEFCON 5 alternative: *If she were to die, I'd probably* (fill in the blank).

These are men's ships. They're our way out if things really get tough. Or if she decides to bail, these are our fallback positions, our emergency landing strips. You may not think you have a ship, but if your marriage is in trouble, I'll bet you do. And things won't get better until you burn it. Eliminate it completely.

STANDARD OF COMPARISON

Author John Eldredge says men are born with questions burning in their souls: "Do I measure up? Do I have what it takes? Am I up to the task?"⁶ These questions lie dormant throughout most of our childhood, but as soon as we become self-aware, as soon as we bump into our first bully or figure out there's a bigger kid in our grade who can run faster, jump higher or throw farther, we start comparing. It's just in us. The scratch golfer with the liquid swing, the guy with the \$200,000 car, the beautiful woman in the low-cut dress on his arm. We want the best. We want what he has. We want it all or as close as we can get. *If I had someone like her . . . everyone would know that I have what it takes.* Without thinking about it, we've stitched together pictures of what we wish we had . . . of what would validate us. Those visions become our ships.

SO WHAT ARE YOUR SHIPS?

You can lie to everyone else, but try not to lie to yourself. Do you have a ship somewhere? Come on, be completely honest. When things are going okay, your ships sit in "dry dock" and get little thought or attention. But when a guy's marriage is in trouble, and he says, *There really isn't another woman*, I say he's usually lying. There is another woman. Whether she's real or imagined, there's a ship that beckons him, a ship that needs to be torched. Let's walk through the

**... MEN'S SHIPS
ARE OUR WAY OUT
IF THINGS REALLY
GET TOUGH.**

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shipyard and figure out which one might belong to you.

THE LIFEBOAT

Some guys go into marriage leaving open the possibility of an affair or divorce from the get-go. *I'll do this because it seems like the thing to do right now. It'll please her. It'll please my mama. But there's no way I can know this is gonna work out. And there's no way I'm totally committing, not knowing the future. I'm keeping my options open.* One man I know said he went into marriage thinking: "Three years. . . I'll give this three years. By then, it'll either work out or it won't." Another friend has always left the door open for an affair: "If this gets bad, I can always get 'supplemental love' on the side."

I think these are exceptions, but I can't prove it. It's hard to believe someone could go through the whole process of engagement, wedding, vows, ceremony . . . the whole she-bang . . . knowing they're lying, but these two confessed their half-heartedness to me personally. Both have come to see how having these "lifeboats" in the back of their minds kept them from experiencing real marriage. They were never really in the game until they burned their "lifeboats" and decided to go "all in" with one woman for all time.

THE OTHER WOMAN IN YOUR PRESENT

If a name has already flashed through your mind, then you have a ship that needs to be burned. The litmus test isn't whether you've slept with her or not. It's whether she has a name or not.

You see, marriage only works when it's exclusive. That means one woman is "in" and every other woman is "out." You can't share your love with anyone other than your wife. Period. A man can only love one woman at a time. If he divides his love, it dies for one and grows for another. Love is never stagnant — it either grows or dies. Always.

Here's a question, and it's a big one.

Does your “ship” know she’s your “ship”? Does the other woman *know* she’s the “other woman”?

This is a huge question you must answer honestly. Your answer drives what you must do to burn the ship. Other people’s lives and marriages are at stake, so you’ve got to be straight here.

If she knows you care for her, whether you’ve slept with her or not, you have to **destroy** that relationship. You can’t wait for your wife or her husband or anyone else to do it for you. And it can’t be a pseudo-breakup. It has to be a real, burned-to-the-ground, no-hope-remains-for-this-relationship kind of destruction. And if your wife knows about it — even if she just suspects — she has to know you’ve burned it to the ground. She has to smell the smoke and see the ashes.

A young friend is walking through this right now. He let himself get emotionally involved with a woman he met at work and ended up having one of those “my wife doesn’t really understand me” all-night conversations on a business trip. Problem is, his wife kept dialing his cell phone and, eventually, his hotel room. She figured out something was going on. Confronted, he confessed. All hell broke loose and she moved out. Then she moved back in and made him move out.

Twelve weeks later, through a lot of honesty, forgiveness and counseling, she invited him to move back in. The night before he was to unpack his suitcase, he left his iPad for the kids to watch movies. His wife decided to scroll through his emails and BAM! — she found emails between his “friend” and him. They were months old, but they busted the stitches and started the bleeding again.

My advice to him?

*“Write your friend a **final** email. Tell her that you’ve made a permanent, irreversible decision to end your relationship AND your friendship. Tell*

her you love your wife and family with all your heart and you'll never look her way again. Ever. Show the email to your wife, and if she wants to help you craft the words, let her. The goal is to burn the ship, to scorch the earth so you can't ever go back there. If your wife has words that'll help you, use them. Send the email. Then delete the address from your address book and delete every email from your history. Make her be gone. Erased. From here forward — nonexistent.

If she works where you work, start looking for another job. Your marriage and family hang in the balance. You can't trust yourself to never return to the ship. The ship has to be gone. It can't just be hard to go back. It has to be impossible to go back, at least in your mind's eye. And in your wife's.

While your concern isn't for the other woman, you've served her well by burning the ship. She now has clarity. You're not an option. Maybe she'll put her energy into her marriage or into finding a meaningful relationship with someone other than another woman's husband."

Strong stuff. You're going to need balls to do what RADICAL HUSBANDS do.

THE OTHER WOMAN FROM YOUR PAST

A friend of a friend reconnected with his high school sweetheart via Facebook. The conversation moved from the Internet to a coffee shop to a hotel to a divorce. This other woman had been in his mind for all the years of his marriage. She didn't know it — until he saw her Facebook page and asked her to be "friends."

Someone else I know had a high school sweetheart. There was no sex involved. It was a normal, healthy little dating relationship as kids back in the '60s. Eventually, they broke up and went their separate ways. But the guy never forgot this girl. In his mind, she was the *ultimate*, the one who got away. And she kept him in the same spot in her imagination. Years later, when both had been married for more than a decade, their marriages were in trouble. Where

did they turn? To each other. And it didn't take them long. They had lived separate lives. Moved to different places. Had kids and built families. And they'd considered themselves friends. He'd call her on her birthday just to say hello. Totally innocent. Completely platonic.

Legally, relationally, rationally . . . maybe even spiritually . . . there was nothing there. But psychologically, there was a vision. There was an imaginary wife who would have been perfect in every way. No woman could ever trump her, because she didn't exist in reality, only in his mind. Neither of them felt like they had "settled for less" when they first got married. The relationship was in the distant past.

But as things got rocky in their marriages, memories of the old flame came alive. Vivid minds and broken hearts took what was black and white and made it full color. Technicolor. None of the faults were there. Neither of them could remember why they broke up way back then. It was all kindness, perfume and roses. *She was the right one for me. He'd have loved me the way I wanted to be loved.* Legends in their minds.

Who can compete with a vision? How can you "win" when the alternative exists in someone's imagination? Never messes up? Never has bad breath? Never disappoints?

Imagine how it feels to be that guy's wife. You can never quite get it right. Never quite be lovely or lovable enough. No matter what she does or how hard she tries, there's a sense she's being judged, being compared to perfection. Never mind that "perfection" doesn't exist.

Is that guy you?

Is there someone like that running around in your mind? Have you built the perfect imaginary wife from memories of someone from your past? Do you look at her Facebook page? Still hold on to a phone number? Picture? Mailing address?

You've got to burn the ship.

THE NAMELESS OTHER WOMAN IN YOUR MIND

You may be thinking, *I'm off the hook. I don't have a real-time other woman. And there's nobody from my past I'm thinking about.*

But for most men, there's probably another woman hanging out there in their memory or imagination. You didn't go into marriage with a "lifeboat," but you've developed one since. In your mind, there's a better deal. There's got to be.

Everywhere we look, we see beautiful women. Turn on network television, anytime. Turn on a ball game — any kind of ball game — and within minutes, you'll see beautiful women dancing seductively with beer in their hands. Short skirts. Big boobs. Cleavage everywhere. Just waiting for you. Movies? Same. Magazines? Same. Websites? Same. And around the office? Eye candy left and right. On the street? In the grocery store? Unavoidable. Today's fashions, diets, plastic surgeries and the absence of modesty have created an R-rated world for guys. We don't get a choice. Sexy women are everywhere.

But the big one, the overwhelming thing that's creating the "other woman" in men's minds, is porn. Eighty-six percent of American men between 18 and 26 years old have used porn in the last year⁷. It's rampant. I just want to talk about what happens when we look at it. How our minds create imaginary ships, ships our wives can never compete with. Ships that change from imaginary to real . . . as real as divorce papers. Here's how it happens.

FOUR STAGES OF SHIP CONSTRUCTION

STAGE ONE: INNOCENT SNAPSHOT

Unless you're blind, you're going to see beautiful, sexy women. She's going to open her car door and swing her legs out. Her short skirt's going to leave little to your imagination. You're going to be watching

TV when a Victoria's Secret commercial comes on. Before you know it, you're going to see bras and thongs. You're looking for something on the Web and BAM! — there's an image you didn't ask for. Or maybe you did.



FOUR STAGES OF SHIP CONSTRUCTION:

1. INNOCENT SNAPSHOT
 2. INTENTIONAL VIDEO
 3. IMAGINING THE MOVIE
 4. DOING THE DEAL
-

Your ship is pretty easy to burn at this stage. Just look away and move on. You haven't done anything wrong. You haven't used any of your emotional or romantic energy. You saw something, but you didn't focus on it. You looked away and didn't linger. You're clean.

STAGE TWO: INTENTIONAL VIDEO

Let's say you don't look away. You keep looking. You watch the whole Victoria's Secret commercial. Or the whole show. You watch the girl in the short skirt get out of the car, and you even walk behind her into the grocery store, checking her out as she walks in and takes her cart. Or you linger on the website and click to a second page. Then a third. You hover.

Now burning the ship becomes a little harder. You feel guilty because you intentionally took the next step. You did something to keep looking. But you can still easily opt out. You decide, *Okay, that's enough. This isn't good for me. I'm done with this.* You've gone beyond innocence, but you opted out before you got to the next stage — imagination.

STAGE THREE: IMAGINING THE MOVIE

If you stay focused on these images, you're moving in deeper. Let's say you get your cart and stroll around the grocery store, watching

the short skirt, imagining what it would be like if she came over and said: *Hey, my husband's out of town. Would you come over and help me unload my groceries?* Or you close your eyes after the Victoria's Secret commercial. You visualize that beautiful young woman dancing in your bedroom. Or you stay on the porn site and watch the action, imagining you're the guy in the movie. Now you feel dirty. You took what was innocent . . . a glance at a woman on the produce aisle . . . and intentionally made more of it than it had to be. Then you went further, imagining yourself doing things with a woman who isn't your wife. You're building a ship.

When you look at women, especially on porn sites, you start building expectations for your wife. You start constructing a standard for what a woman should look like and what she should do in bed. In reality, that woman doesn't exist. The producers of porn create those images in studios with actors and actresses, lighting and makeup. They do takes and retakes. They make it as real as the Titanic in James Cameron's film. Problem is, Cameron's Titanic didn't really exist. It was fake — created for the movie. And so is that woman you see on your computer screen. She only exists in your head, in your mind's eye.

It's a lot harder to opt out now. You've created an imaginary ship, and it's one you can go back to. Whenever you go to the grocery store, you relive your imaginary encounter. You can go back to the imaginary woman you made love to on the Web. You've created another life in your mind and there's this beautiful woman in it with you. She's not your wife. She's younger. Fresher. More beautiful. And she never complains. Your wife doesn't know she exists, but she's there constantly — in your head. You're emotionally engaged with someone other than your wife. Your wife is doomed to failure, being constantly compared with a perfect figment of your imagination. You've abandoned your wife.

Do you see? You're wasting energy you could be spending on your wife. On the real woman in your life. Do you sense the abyss you're pouring your mental and emotional energy into?

But if you burn the ship now, you can avoid the pain that comes with the final stage.

STAGE FOUR: DOING THE DEAL

Simply stated, you put skin on the woman you imagined. You find a ship you can actually board. Yeah, she doesn't look *exactly* like the women you watched on your computer. But by now, you've cut your wife down so low in comparison, anybody's better than her. You're wide open to any willing woman who offers hope of being what your mind created. Opting out now is nearly impossible. Your ship now has a name. Burning it is going to be painful, with consequences. But it has to happen, and it has to be final.

BETWEEN YOUR EARS

Golf legend Bobby Jones said, "The game of golf is played mainly on a five-inch course, in a space between your ears."⁸ Marriage is similar. It requires exclusive and singular focus on one woman.

If you're to win and keep your wife's heart, you've got to burn the ships. With names, with skin, from the past, in your imagination — all of them. You've got to start bouncing your eyes and turning your mind away from anyone who can distract you from the single legitimate source of romance you'll ever have in this lifetime.

ONE MORE SHIP: YOU

Now you say, *I am off the hook. I don't have another woman. Not in reality. Not in my mind. Not on the Internet. None.*

You may be one of those guys (and I know a few of them) with the genetic makeup that makes it easy for them to be “one-woman men.” Swedish researchers looked at variants of a particular gene — the “monogamy gene” — that encodes a hormone called vasopressin. They found that one of these variants (or a lack thereof) is associated with a distinctive kind of pair-bonding behavior in men. The findings suggest an explanation for why some men commit to monogamous relationships while others have a hard time shaking their frat-house habits.⁹

Lucky you. But you're not devoid of ships.

Your ship may be your work. Or ESPN. Or golf. Or college football. Or the kids' sports teams you coach. Your ship is anything you engage with that *owns* you. Sucks all your emotional energy into it and away from your wife.

If you're going to be a RADICAL HUSBAND, you have to burn the ship. You have to make your wife your *single source of romance*, your marriage the *primary* focus of your attention and energy.

Sounds tough doesn't it?

It is, but it's worth it.



DROP YOUR EXPECTATIONS

You've created expectations for your wife. Not only has she not met them; she's done with trying. Done with feeling like a failure. Your only hope is to drop your expectations . . . all of them . . . and love her just as she is.



or the next few pages, I want to speak to the guy whose marriage is in trouble. (The rest of you might want to listen in.)

Let me start with a little confession.

After our first twelve years of marriage, I was done. I was convinced I had married the wrong woman. She wasn't romantic; she wasn't spontaneous; she wasn't any fun; she didn't want to go anywhere or do anything. All she cared about were the kids and how the house was decorated. We had "grown apart," as they say.

I was working a lot of hours, traveling a good bit and had lots of time around professional women who seemed to have it going on.

I wanted to fix Miriam, so I suggested we go to a marriage counselor. I'll never

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What Radical Husbands Do • 37

forget parading my wife in there like a broken-down Ferrari. “Here,” I was going to say, “help her see the error of her ways and get her on track.”

It was awful.

The counselor saw my selfishness as clearly as a big, smushed bug in the middle of a windshield. She started asking me questions like the ones I asked you a few minutes ago. I was humiliated — *embarrassed beyond belief*. I was humbled, to say the least.

Even though I “heard” the truth about what I was doing, it took Miriam leaving me a week later for me to get it, to feel it, to realize I was in a death knell of selfish expectations that was killing her love and our marriage. Only in the solitude of a house without my wife, with no promise of her coming back — ever — only then did I face myself and decide I had to change.

IF YOU’RE LIKE ME . . .

. . . you’ve put expectations on your wife, and she didn’t meet them. They didn’t seem all that bad at the time. You probably didn’t even realize you were doing it. But little by little, you created a win-lose situation. If she did what you expected, you were happy — at least not unhappy. But if she didn’t measure up, you weren’t happy and you let her know. Sometimes verbally. Usually nonverbally. The silent treatment. The smirk. The roll of your eyes. The look down or away. She’s smart, and she’s sensitive. She knows when she doesn’t measure up. Believe it or not, she wants to. Or wanted to, but never quite could. After a while, she gave up.

Oh, your expectations are totally justified in your mind’s eye. *Why shouldn’t a guy come home to a “refuge”?* Your mama didn’t expect your daddy to help her in the kitchen or play with the kids when he came home. He came home, fixed a drink for himself, sat down in his recliner and watched TV till dinner was ready. And so what if your mama didn’t work outside the home? *The roles are still the roles!*

Really?

You think: *What's up with all this mess around the house? Why can't she get her act together and keep things neat? She has all day.* It seems she could organize her time better and get stuff done. She's got time to talk to her mama, her sister and all those girlfriends. But she can't find time to pick the clothes up off the floor or get the spoiled groceries out of the refrigerator. Every time you look out a dirty window, you think how much better she could be.

You love to hang out with friends and stuff. She knows that, but it takes an act of Congress for the two of you to go out. She talks about not being able to find a babysitter. She talks about not having anything to wear. She talks about being tired. You hear complaining. She's telling you how she feels . . . that she'd rather go out with just the two of you or stay at home together. What happened to the dancin' girl who wanted to party? Where's the girl you fell in love with?

Or maybe it's the reverse. She wants to go out with her friends and their husbands, to get dressed up and spend a bunch of money on a fancy dinner. You'd rather stay home, watch a ball game and just hang out. That's not in her vocabulary anymore. She never seems to want to do what you want to do.

Speaking of love and things that are missing, what happened to your love life? Where's the "spunky monkey" who wore you out for the entire first year of your marriage? Now it's a tug-of-war to get her in bed. She wants things her way and only her way. So routine. Not bad, but routine. And so predictable, so infrequent, so more out of duty than passion.

A lot of the time, she's not even willing to hit the sack in the same time zone with you. You eat dinner, stick around till the kids are down, check email and get a little work done. By the time you're finished, she's fast asleep. If you skip the work and get to bed earlier, she's up doing chores or watching some inane TV show you have no interest in.

You remember when she used to dress up. I mean, she looked like a fashion model. She's let herself go, never lost those pregnancy pounds. She doesn't dress like she used to. You used to get pretty pumped just looking at her. Now she looks pretty much like every other woman in the carpool line.

Then there's her family. You'd think you never got married. She wants to go to her mother's for every freakin' holiday. It would seem by now we'd be a family, and she'd be satisfied being here. And your family . . . they're all werewolves. She has no interest or energy for them whatsoever.

You love your kids just as much as she does. In fact, you'd die for them. But they are *all* she cares about. All she thinks about. All she wants to talk about. There's never any bandwidth for you, for "us." It's all about the kids.

And then there's money. You work your butt off to provide; maybe you both do. But when it comes to spending, she just doesn't make wise choices. *How many chocolate bunnies do you need to make a good Easter basket? Are we dressing the kids for the playground or a magazine shoot? And do we have to have "organic" toilet paper?* Come on!

HAVE YOU BUILT A CASE AGAINST YOUR WIFE?

Little by little, you've built your case: *She didn't do that. She's not like this anymore. If she'd only be like this other woman I know at work.*

Now hear this . . .

Anxiety comes from unmet expectations.

Let me say it again. I'm saying it louder this time . . .

Anxiety comes from unmet expectations!

Your anxiety about your wife and marriage is coming from **your** unmet expectations.

Right now, you may have a ton of anxiety. This isn't what you signed up for. Your anxiety has turned to anger. Your expectations have become demands. You've become impatient, intolerant and less loving. Your words and demeanor have become downright mean.

People use anger to justify doing what they want to do. To give themselves permission to do bad stuff. You (or she) may have justified some really stupid decisions by blaming your anger: *Since you care so little about me and my needs, I'll go find someone who will. Anger towards a person says, You owe me, and since I'm owed and you're not in the mood to pay me, I'll find someone or something that will.* You've given yourself permission to do stuff that can blow up your marriage, all because your wife isn't meeting the expectations you created for her. Expectations she may or may not even know about.

So here are a few questions for you:

- What gives you the right to decide what another person should or shouldn't do?
- What gives you the authority to set up pass/fail standards for your wife?
- Just where did you get the idea that your vision of what she's supposed to do, or to be like, is right?

HOW DO I HOPE YOU FEEL RIGHT NOW?

Like a piece of "you-know-what"!

If that's how you feel, there's hope. If you don't, you may be beyond repair, at least right now. If your response to this rant is, *That's not me*, or *So what's wrong with that?* or any other response that starts with, *But what about . . .* or *I think I deserve . . .* it's game over, and you're not ready to be a RADICAL HUSBAND. Put this book away and get it back out when you've been humbled and broken, either through the end of this marriage or a future one.

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On second thought, keep reading. The answers are right here in this book if you'll just grab these steps and go with them.

THE PAINFUL, PRODUCTIVE ANSWER

I wish there were an easier way. I really do. But there's not.

You have to drop your expectations. Eliminate them. Completely.

Expectations are the enemy of intimacy. Stop putting expectations on your wife and watch things change. It'll blow you away. You have to decide that you're going to accept your wife just as she is, regardless of how you wish she were. It's a decision you'll make and make and make. You'll get it right once. Then you'll get it wrong twice. You'll ask forgiveness. Then you'll screw up and have to ask forgiveness again.

So repeat the "Happy Wife Pledge" after me:

My wife is more important than the house being messy. I will shut up and start helping out.

My working wife is my partner in life. I will collaborate with her in consistent respect for her wants and needs.

I will no longer criticize my wife about how she uses her time. It's her life to live.

I am grateful for a wife who cares about our kids. I will thank her and encourage her, never allowing myself to be jealous again.

I recognize that my wife was her mom's daughter before she was my wife. She has a right and a responsibility to be a good adult daughter and to honor her mother.

I will never again complain about the food in our house. Instead, I will offer to stop by the store and bring whatever we need without complaint.

I will never criticize my wife for her desire to be "just with me" versus

going out with friends. I will thank her and pour myself into loving her when we're together.

I recognize that my wife gets tired. I will drop all my demands and make "space" for her to rest, and I will not take it personally.

I acknowledge that it is difficult to identify, screen and coordinate schedules with babysitters. I will not criticize her or take her efforts for granted.

I will look for the good in my wife's appearance. If I can't say something nice, I will keep my mouth shut.

I will never again comment on my wife's weight. That is off-limits to me forever. I will love and accept her regardless. It is none of my business.

I will never say anything negative about my wife, even in a joking way, in front of any other person, male or female, friend or foe.


I will never bring up my wife's performance in earlier parts of her life. For example, I will never talk about how "she used to like to dance" or anything of that nature.

I will stop talking about sex. I will make no other comments, jokes, side comments or criticisms about the frequency, quality or any other dimension of our sex life. I will love her, and we will enjoy sex only when she is clearly in favor of it. I will put her first, be grateful for what comes my way and be content.

I recognize that my family of origin is just that — my family. I will drop my expectations for my wife to engage with my family. I hope she does, but I will not require it of her.

I will go through a complete review of our finances. I will make sure she fully understands our income, our budgeted expenses, our saving and giving commitments. And I will never again criticize her regarding money.

As you look at this list of pledges, can you see the expectations you've been putting on your wife? Can you grasp the relief she'll feel when you promise to do all these things and you actually do them? Can you sense the walls that will come down when you actually stop demanding things and criticizing her?



ONE OF THE THINGS THAT EXCITED ME ABOUT WRITING THIS BOOK WAS THE IDEA OF GIVING GUYS THINGS TO DO AND NOT THINGS TO BE.

BUT I'M NOT IN TROUBLE!

If I were a betting man, I'd wager the more of these pledge statements you live out, the closer your marriage is to being great. Even where things are just okay, you'll find guys who make fewer demands . . . guys who are a bit more "live and let live." But I don't want you miss out on the upside that can come from holding back on the expectations altogether.

Think about it. Who wouldn't want to be married to a guy who is sensitive and selfless?

Make these pledges, live them out and watch what happens. I predict you'll see your marriage transformed before your very eyes. And in less time than you'd imagine.

One of the things that excited me about writing this book was the idea of giving guys *things to do* and *not things to be*. It's really hard to change yourself and impossible to change someone else. But if you work at it, you can "move the needle" by not putting expectations on your wife.

Start with this. Listen to your words and thoughts. Start paying attention to what you're thinking and saying . . . words that subtly communicate an expectation . . . one that wasn't met or one you expect to be met in the future. The mind is sneaky. You'll hear yourself thinking (and saying) things like:

I know you're not excited about going to the ballgame next weekend, but I sure hope you decide to go.

I noticed you added a few things to that online order. Didn't we talk about that?

*It **is** date night, and I can't wait to get you home!*

Frank's wife really loves to dance. Do you think we could dance a few times tonight?

Behind every one of these questions or statements is an expectation. Behind every single one is the opportunity for your wife to fail. Do you think she doesn't know what you're really saying (or asking) with each of these statements or questions?

For the next week, wrestle your tongue to the bottom of your mouth and shut up. Listen for these kinds of statements and questions and arrest them **before** you say them. Your wife knows what you want...she knows what you expect. Give her a chance to speak and act on her own. You might be surprised just how many times she moves in your direction. And if she doesn't, she doesn't. She has that right. It's up to you to warm her heart toward you so she'll want to do some of the things you want to do. But you'll never know what she'll do, if you can't hold your tongue and keep setting her up on pass/fail.

DON'T SOLVE PROBLEMS, SET GOALS

This step might have been too much. Too familiar. Scary to think about what you've been putting on your wife. Intimidating to think what it'll take to stop. But like the old Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The first step here is holding your tongue and overhauling your attitude.

That's what it's going to take — a complete overhaul of you when it comes to your expectations. You're going to have to learn to accept her as she is . . . to accept what she does . . . and to be content.

We've all heard, "Don't sweat the small stuff." Well, it's all small stuff. In the context of life . . . compared to the significance of divorce, a broken home, latchkey kids and multiple mamas at weddings . . . it's all small stuff.

You can do this. RADICAL HUSBANDS drop their expectations.

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