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THE HERALD

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My Brother Saved My Parents' Marriage

by Caitlin Nunery

We approached the Golden Arches on Ann Arbor Road, and Dad turned on his blinker. Each Wednesday night after youth group, the high schoolers met up at McDonald's. I didn't yet have my license, so he drove me. As I went to open the door, he tried to start a conversation. "Caitlin?"

"Yeah?" I responded, eager to get out of the car and join all my friends inside.

"Sweetheart, we know why Mom has been so sick."

At this my heart beat faster. For several years my mom had suffered with health issues, and recently she'd been bedridden. We didn't know what the problem was. I nodded, urging him to continue. "We're pregnant."

I couldn't have heard him right. "You're what?"

"I know, it's a shock to us too. We're pregnant." My mind raced. I should feel happy. Mom's okay; we're going to have a baby in the house. I love babies. But all these thoughts were mired in embarrassment: Now all my friends would know my parents were having sex! I was mortified.

End to Slumber

Beyond the horizon of my adolescent embarrassment, greater tragedies loomed. Due to an earlier operation, doctors had thought it was impossible for my mom to become pregnant. Now they informed her that, due to complications, they didn't consider the pregnancy viable. She would likely miscarry, and if she didn't, the baby would have disabilities.

"They want me to 'take care of it,'" she told my dad one night. "But I saw the heartbeat on the monitor. I can't do that. I won't."

My dad, on the other hand, was increasingly fearful about the possibility of having a child with a slew of problems. My parents were already struggling relationally. Their marriage was not strong; in fact, it was on the brink of collapse. To add a child with special needs on top of everything else seemed too much to bear.

As they were going to bed that evening, my dad told my mom that, since the doctors were telling her she would almost certainly miscarry anyway, maybe they should just "take care of it" as the doctors advised. (He couldn't bring himself to say the word "abortion.") They were exhausted, both from fighting for their marriage and also fighting over this pregnancy. My dad was at his wit's end and didn't know what to do. He tried praying. He cried out for help to a God he didn't know too well. He told my mom it was her decision and went to sleep having placed the full weight of

responsibility on his wife's shoulders. That night he awoke with a start at 4:30 a.m. A reference reverberated through his mind: Proverbs 6:16, Proverbs 6:16, Proverbs 6:16.

Having never experienced anything like this, he dragged himself out of bed, found a Bible, and turned to the table of contents. His index finger traced the thin page down to Proverbs. He flipped to the verse and read: "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood" (Prov. 6:16–17).

Hands that shed innocent blood. His heart pounding, he woke up my mom in tears. "Honey, I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry. We're going to have this baby. We will have this baby. I'll never question it again."

Hard Blessing

To the doctors' surprise, the baby's heart kept beating, month after month. And on November 25, 2003, five weeks before his due date, my brother Brett was born.

I remember being at the hospital with all its beeping machines and sterile smells when the doctors told my parents Brett would never respond to us. He wouldn't smile, or walk, or talk. They told us his brain hadn't developed properly, and they'd never seen a case quite like him. "It's a miracle he was born at all," one said. A miracle.

Brett stayed in the neonatal intensive care unit while we learned more about his condition. Born without a corpus callosum (the connector between the brain's right and left hemispheres), he had congenital blindness and would never see. He had cerebral palsy and epilepsy, among other abnormalities. In short, Brett would need full-time care for the rest of his life.

We were devastated. We knew he was going to be atypical, but we had no idea how bad it was going

to be. This seemed downright impossible. I remember people saying, "He's such a blessing," prompting an internal conflict in my then 17-year-old self. A blessing? This is just so hard, I thought. A hard blessing.

Divine Design

A hard blessing is exactly what we were given. My parents, who were nearly empty nesters, were now caring for a child full-time—indefinitely. Hopes of easy getaways and weeknight dates were dashed. And their marriage, already on the rocks, now faced a trial like no other.

Yet Brett surprised us again. Or perhaps I should say, God surprised us through Brett.

When my dad awoke in middle of the night, he was awakened to the sovereignty of God. He's been a different father to me ever since. In fact, he would say he became a believer in Jesus only after that encounter with the living Word.

Not only did he become a different father, he also became a different husband. As he went to bed that memorable night, he placed the onus on my mom—it's your decision. After he woke up, however, his language indicated a shift—we will have this baby. The "we" communicated unity, a step toward one another.

Fourteen years later, my parents are still married. They realized they were on the same team, fighting for one another and fighting for their family. Despite being a teenager himself, Brett still functions about the same as a three-month-old: blowing raspberries, lying on the ground and kicking, relying on others to feed and change him. In fact, we still call him "Baby Brettski." But Brett has been a miracle baby in more ways than the doctors described.

God used Brett to save my parents' marriage. One might have thought a great marriage counselor or lavish family vacation would've been a

more obvious way to rescue my family. But as God so often does, he used what is considered lowly and weak to bring about his restoration. He used a baby to heal a marriage. He used what would've been thought to be a terrible inconvenience as a vehicle for transformation.

A hard blessing, indeed. Praise be to God.

“Love Like You Mean It” Marriage Cruise

A Testimony by Judy Hostetler

Michael and I had the amazing opportunity to go on the Family Life Today “Love Like You Mean It Marriage Cruise”. We wanted to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary in a unique way and reconnect as husband and wife at the same time. This 6 days/5 nights in the Caribbean to Cozumel and Progreso, Mexico, was the perfect fit! This was more than just a vacation. Family Life Today charters a Carnival Cruise Ship and essentially takes the ship over. From the announcements, the teaching, the entertainment and shows...it is all Christian based!

What was it like being on a ship with 2,700 other married folks?? Amazing! It was faith building to see so many people there with the same agenda: to grow in their role as man and wife as God intended it to be. In addition to all the perks of being on a Caribbean cruise, we were challenged each day with teaching sessions and concerts.

To give you a peek into our week, here is a rundown of some of the great things we learned. Kevin DeYoung reminded us that the key to a happy marriage is to make your marriage about God and not about your happiness. He preached about what real love is and God's plan for it. Dave and Ann Wilson broke it down by showing us the

difference between men and women and their needs in marriage. They taught us how to love your spouse without ever touching. H.B. Charles, Jr spoke about God's good plan for husbands and wives. He reminded us that children are a fruit of the marriage –not a part of it. He also said this in regards to headship...”Nothing can live without a head and anything that has two heads is a monster.” What a great visual reminder of God's ordained headship for the man. Ladies...you create the monster when you take over leading! Paul Tripp spoke about getting to the root of the problem in your marriage. Profound and simple it is this: “You are the biggest problem in your marriage.” He stated that the DNA of sin is selfishness. When you live for yourself, there is no grace in your marriage.

Dennis Rainey wrapped up the final session with his message, “20 things I've Learned in 40 Years of Marriage and Why it Matters.” The thing I took away from this session was my husband. Literally. Rough seas sent me to my cabin and my knight took care of me all evening. Even though we missed the session, the vow renewal ceremony (complete with wedding cake), and our final night of concerts...we were living what they were preaching. We were loving each other above all others. We were putting our spouse's needs above your own (at least Michael was). We were cherishing the mundane and for Michael-loving me in sickness and health.

We came away from our week feeling reconnected, recharged, refocused and renewed. So, here's the skinny folks. If you're reading this and you are married, take a good hard look at your relationship. Is your marriage a mini picture of Christ and the Church? Are you showing the Holy Spirit in you by how you talk to/about your spouse? The marriage relationship is the most important human relationship you will have while on this Earth. God intended it to be magnificent. Is yours?

Not everyone on the ship was “with it” or “all together.” In fact, I think if you would have polled the crowd, everyone would have said that they had things to work on. We saw couples there that had only been married less than a year to a couple married over sixty. You are never at a point where you cannot improve something.

Let me share this testimony with you. The couple that stayed in the cabin next to our stateroom fought. They fought a lot. They fought loudly. We decided to pray for them and their marriage. We did not meet them all week until our last day. He was in a wheelchair and was there in the “Wounded Warrior” program—helping veterans and their wives reconnect. This couple had been married for 31 years. When he found out we were next door, he apologized for the fighting that had been going on and mentioned that Satan was attacking them. We were on the elevator with him at the time and didn’t have the opportunity to talk more at that point. Later, Michael reconnected with him and let him know that we had been praying for them. Tears came to this man who hadn’t known what it was like to have someone praying for his marriage.

Michael relayed this meeting to me in the food line. (Did I mention that you eat and eat and eat and eat some more on the cruise?) As he was telling me, the man behind us struck up a conversation. He was telling Michael that he has been married for 43 years and that he and his wife had come on this cruise with the intention of getting a divorce when they returned home. He then went on to say that God used the teaching, specifically Paul Tripp’s message, to save their marriage. Divorce plans are off...praise God! This is just a sample of how people were affected.

The best investment you can make in your life is getting saved. The next best thing is making time to pour into your marriage. If you feel the

need to supercharge your marriage, we would love to give you more information on next year’s cruise or a Family Life “Weekend to Remember.” Next year’s cruise leaves Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and sails to the Bahamas, Dominican Republic and Half Moon Cay. Seven Days and Six nights to invest in your spouse. Today is always the best day to make a change. Your marriage is worth it!

FUNNIES

A girl was in line at the grocery store with her mother, when she pointed to a man two customers ahead and said, “Look Mother, he doesn't have a single hair on his head.”

“Shhh!” her mother responded, “He might hear you.”

To which her daughter responded, “You mean he doesn't know it already?”

A Sunday School teacher said to her children, “We have been learning about how powerful the kings and queens were in Biblical times. But there is a higher power. Who can tell me what it is?” Tommy blurted out, “I know, Aces.”

Eight-year-old to teacher: “I don’t want to scare you, but my daddy says if I don’t get better grades, somebody’s gonna get spanked!”

The Sunday School teacher was describing that when Lot's wife looked back at Sodom she turned into a pillar of salt, when Bobby interrupted. “My mommy looked back once while she was driving,” he announced, “and she turned into a telephone pole.”