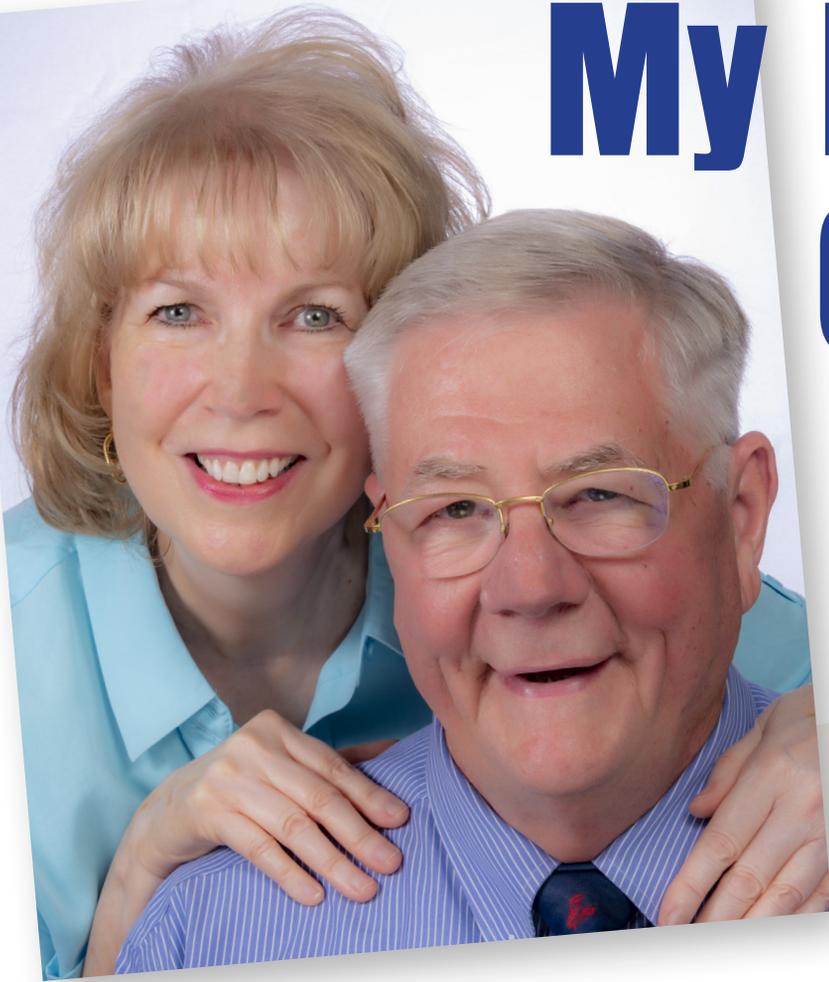


My Husband Gave Me 30 Days



Father, I need a miracle.

Every time he listed a reason, the knot in my stomach grew. My face turned hot as my eyes filled with tears. Unable to meet his angry glare, I stared at my lap.

For years, I'd been praying for God to intervene in my marriage. Six years ago, on Easter Sunday, I prayed even more earnestly for God to give our marriage new life. I got up from my prayer time and knew without a doubt that God had heard my prayer. What happened the next day, however, painfully contradicted my expectations.

Bert had never come home in the middle of a workday, but on April 1, he did. "We need to talk." Taking a deep breath, he added, "I want a divorce."

His words sliced through me, and a hard knot formed in the pit of my

stomach. I could tell from the look on his face that this was no April Fools' joke.

Bert stood in our den and counted on his fingers the reasons he could no longer tolerate being married to me. "I'm tired of your nagging, Sheryl! I'm sick of hearing what I should eat or how much I should read my Bible." His voice grew louder as he continued, "And I'm tired of trying to follow all the rules. Good gosh, Sheryl! What does it matter if the silverware faces up or down in the dishwasher. And I don't want to squeegee the shower door every time I shower!"

While Bert counted each of my faults on his fingers, I remained seated. Normally I would have returned fire by getting into his face and spouting off my list of reasons for hating him. But I couldn't stop thinking about my Easter prayer. So with tears pouring down my cheeks, I answered, "You're right, Bert. I do all of those things. I'm so sorry."

Bert lowered himself into his favorite recliner and leaned forward. In a kinder tone, he told me his plan: We would stay in our house (but in separate bedrooms) for one month. During that time, I was to find an apartment near my children in Louisiana.

Then suddenly, the talk was over. “Don’t wait up for me,” he said as he stalked toward the door.

I began to question my behavior as a Christian—an imitator of Christ. For some time I’d noticed how critical and angry I’d been. The more Bert put his work and his needs ahead of mine and our relationship, the worse my behavior became. I felt rejected, and I wasn’t shy about letting him know how I felt.

Justified or not, this was not the kind of person I wanted to be. In response to my prayer, God gave me grace to see beyond my husband’s shortcomings to my own sinful behavior. I wasn’t blind to Bert’s faults. My eyes were opened to my own.

After so many years, however, was it even possible to change? I had only thirty days to become the wife I desperately wanted to be. *God, please change me!*

Later that evening, with more tears filling my eyes, I said, “Bert, I know I’ve messed up. I’m not asking you to change. Right now, let me do all the changing.” I was shocked to hear those words coming out of my mouth. More evidence that God was already at work.

The next day, during my quiet time, I cried into my hands as I repented again for my angry, spiteful, and self-righteous heart. Before the day ended, I made Scripture memory cards with verses on love, humility and forgiveness.

I also began to behave and think differently. Instead of nagging Bert to eat healthily, I bought food I knew he liked. Instead of lecturing him about going to church or having a quiet time, I held my tongue and prayed for him. And though I had always had a difficult time keeping up with the house, I now made an extra effort to keep it neat and tidy. When he came home (later and later each night), I made sure I looked pretty.

To my sorrow, my repentant ways seemed to have no effect on Bert. His heart seemed as hard as ever. Determined, I asked God to help me forgive Bert for his failures and continued to take responsibility for mine. I didn’t do everything right, and sometimes I would slip back into my bad habits, but my repentance was real. I prayed constantly and kept my Scripture memory cards nearby so I could meditate on them throughout the day.

God’s presence continued to penetrate my sadness, even at night—when I cried alone in our bed. His love for me calmed me. I began to understand that my significance was in Jesus, not in Bert’s opinion of me. Because of this dawning awareness, I was better able to resist temptation and behave like the wife Bert thought he had married.

As my 30-day deadline drew near, I knew I had to begin making plans. I had resisted calling family and friends, but now it was time to make some phone calls.

I picked up the phone. “Bert, I’m going to call my sisters so they can help me pack up my things. . .” My voice choked.

Bert sat up in his chair, “Wait! What are you doing?”

“I’m calling Karen—”

“Why?”

“Because the month is almost up. I thought you wanted me out by the 30th.”

“Wait. Let’s talk about this.”

Startled, I put down the phone. Afraid to hope, I held my breath and waited.

Bert approached me. Tears shimmered in his eyes. “Sheryl, I’ve never had anyone love me like you do. I’ve never had someone who was willing to stay with me in spite of my selfish, self-centered behavior.” He reached for my hand and pulled me close. “Will you forgive me?”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I covered my mouth with my hands and laughed—and cried! Is this really happening?

Bert walked to the guest room and came back holding his wedding ring. He slid it onto his finger and said, “I’ll never take it off again.” More tears filled his eyes.



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Or we might say, “God, I wish it would rain.” We’re not praying. We’re using God’s name for emphasis to make a point or express a desire.

Or we say in exasperation, “I swear to God!” Is this expression acceptable to God? Is it necessary?

Why do we tolerate this disrespectful habit? Could it be that we’ve lost our sense of awe and reverence for almighty God? We’ve become flippant and casual in our relationship with Him, or we may have a low view of God.

How to Stop

How do we retrain our mouths (and our minds) with regard to respectful speech? Only with God’s strength and a commitment to fulfill Ephesians 4:29, “Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according

to their needs.” With God’s help, we can overcome our thoughtless, inconsiderate speech. We can ask Him to help us recapture a healthy fear of God because we love Him and want to please Him in all we do, including our speech.

Will you join me in making every effort to delete these casual and disrespectful expressions from our vocabulary? It may sound corny, but what’s wrong with just saying “Oh my goodness!”? **ROC**



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I buried my face in his shoulder, trying to control my crying. But this time, it was a good kind of crying.

“I know I’ve been distant and not there for you, Sheryl. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, Bert. I’m sorry, too, for the ways I’ve been treating you. I will honestly try to be more respectful – even when you’re not perfect.” We both chuckled through our tears.

My husband pulled me toward him again, and we held each other for a long, long while. What an incredible turn around – due to an incredible God. I shudder to think how differently it could have worked out had Bert asked for a divorce before I’d prayed that Easter prayer.

Today, while Bert and I continue to take responsibility for our own behavior, we know our marriage is far from perfect. We occasionally fall back into our old ways, but when we do, we don’t stay there nearly as long.

And now, every April 1, Bert comes home in the middle of the day. But instead of telling me why he no longer wants to be married to me, he takes my hands in his, looks me in the eyes and says, “Please don’t ever leave me.” **ROC**



Sheryl H. Boldt writes fiction and non-fiction for children and adults. Her weekly devotions have appeared in newspapers across the South. Sheryl stays busy mentoring ladies by way of email and accountability groups. Visit Sheryl’s blog at www.TodayCanBeDifferent.net. Reach her at SherylHBoldt@gmail.com.