

# How You Can Change a Life

Twelve years ago, Steve and I did the most ridiculous thing ever and bought a giant fixer-upper of a house. It wouldn't be crazy for most people to do it, but it was crazy for us because we are decidedly NOT fixer-upper sort of people. I mean, we can paint and do surface stuff, but anything more complicated than that is beyond our ability and happiness. We consistently discovered that he would rather be golfing and I would rather be reading, and so most of our nonessential home improvement projects stalled out somewhere between Home Depot and the next good book.

In spite of our reluctance to tackle upgrades, we've always loved this house. It has five big bedrooms and an office that I adore and a big lot on a noisy street which I also love (is there any music more beautiful than the sounds of a city waking up?) As our children began to grow and move out, other people's kids moved in. Family dinners and noisy Movie Nights and birthday parties and baby showers all found homes in our big, un-Pinteresty home. It has been the joy of my life to be a place where people gather.

When Steve was diagnosed, my future in this house grew murky. Many reasons exist as to why, but one of the biggest was the feeling that I could never take care of this place on my own. I began to look around at condos and bungalows and quickly realized I didn't have the emotional fortitude to face that idea just yet. The real estate market in Bend is ca-razy and I have plenty crazy on my plate right now. So I settled into the home that I love and told Jesus I would trust that He had gone before me and would be there when it was time to figure out my next step.

And then, something crazy happened. I took a leave of absence in December and somehow I found a latent fixer-upper gene in my DNA! Turns out, all that time of actually *being* in my house

and in front of Pinterest inspired me to do a few projects. And you know what happens when you do one project? Landslide.

Each improvement makes the rest of the house look worse, so the list keeps growing. And soon the projects were moving beyond my skill level, requiring actual ... *power tools*. For so many years, I've convinced myself I couldn't do things like this.

I've even convinced myself I couldn't create a home that looked the way I wanted it to look. But I was wrong. It has been a lot of work and a a lot of asking for favors and a lot of watching DIY videos on YouTube, but now I know I can do it.

I can figure things out when I need to! I can use a power drill! I can brave the aisles of Home Depot without feeling like they're going to kick me out! So far we've redone our living room, dining room, one bathroom (with another in the works) and laundry room. I love this house more than ever and I also love the things I'm learning. And my point in this blog post (even though it's taken me 600 words to get here) is: Steve is to blame.

Steve is to blame for this change even though he didn't help with anything. In spite of the fact that he is unable to lift a finger, he is the primary human force behind every brave thing I do. For 30 years, he's been second only to the Holy Spirit in helping me tackle the hardest things. It's not that he says all the right things, it's that he *is* the right thing. His belief in me and his unfailingly gracious response to my (million!) failures through the years has made me believe that I really can try anything.

I probably can't *succeed* at everything, but I sure can try it, and if I make a terrible mess of it and everyone in this world thinks I'm a loser, there is one person who's convinced I'm not. One man who wouldn't want to be with anyone other than

me. I mean, it's astounding to me still. And his love has been my secret weapon for as long as I can remember needing a secret weapon.

Here's another thing I realized this week: For the past four years, I've been working in fast forward—trying to do all the brave things while I have him here with me. This has included things like traveling to Europe, writing books, reaching out in new ways to people who need me, Christmas tree shopping, learning to love running, going away for a night by myself and—yep—becoming a fixer-upper. These things have been possible because Steve is in the background telling me I'm smart enough and strong enough and scrappy enough to do hard things. To keep moving. To live large. It's amazing to me that a man in a wheelchair can be the driving force for a girl who has all her muscles. But it's true—for me and for countless others Steve has encouraged and believed in during his pilgrimage here on earth.

Of all the things in all this world that I treasure and wish I could keep forever, the way Steve has helped me escape the prison of fear is the most. The biggest. The best gift I've ever been given.

When I imagine life without it, I have to remind myself to breathe. And all of that gaping breathlessness has to be immediately turned toward gratitude or I will drown in sorrow. So I force my thoughts and words to thank our dear Father that I have Steve now and to thank Him that He will fill the gaps in the future.

Already, I have a handful of friends and family who uniquely possess the Gift of Steve. They are encouraging and inspiring and, while they will never take his place, I see God putting them in place as pillars in my life that I can lean on.

If you are blessed to have someone in your life who you know would believe in you no matter what, take a minute today and

thank God for that great gift. And maybe take a minute and thank them, too. Sometimes we assume people know how heroic they are, but then we discover that they're as filled with self-doubt as we are. I think we're created to need each other to be our best selves in the best possible way. I hope I help someone else fly someday. One thing is certain: I've learned from the best.

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