

When Love Is Gone From Your Marriage

The night I met my husband, Danny Lotz, I was 17 years old and had just graduated from high school. Danny had been raised in a strong Christian home by a father who was a pastor of a small church in New York City.

Danny had received Jesus Christ as a young boy at his dad's church and had taken a strong, uncompromising stand for his faith since then. He was a young girl's dream, and 15 months later we were married in the same mountain chapel where my parents had married 23 years earlier.

We moved into a small house, and at 18 years of age, when my friends were well into their college studies and planning their careers, I was grocery shopping, cooking, mopping and decorating, as well as working part time. It was wonderful!

Ten years later, we moved to a city where Danny practiced dentistry full time. By then, we had three children, and I did volunteer work and taught a weekly Bible class that was attended by 500 women.

Without my noticing it, the busyness had overtaken me, and I awoke one morning to the realization that I was in a marriage in which the love had run out! I will never forget the panicked, trapped feeling I had as I knelt in prayer, desperately pleading with the Lord for help.

If you feel trapped in a marriage where the love has run out, praise God! There is hope for you just as there was hope for me. The first step in starting over is to invite Jesus into your marriage.

JESUS WAS INVITED TO A WEDDING John has given us glorious eyewitness testimony of the identity of Jesus Christ. Yet that identity

was limited by Jesus' humanity, which was like a house of curtains, veiling His deity. However, when He performed miracles or taught the truth, it was as though the curtains parted and the glory streamed through.

What a simple yet profound blessing it is to know that the first time the "curtains" parted and Jesus' glory was revealed was in a home as He celebrated a wedding! At the very start of His public ministry, the One who formed man and breathed His own life into him, the Son of God, was invited to a wedding. And He accepted the invitation! (See John 2:1-2.)

If you need a miracle in your marriage, invite Jesus into the relationship. You will be blessed by the knowledge that He is there when unexpected problems and crises arise.

JESUS WAS INFORMED OF THE CRISIS During the first century, when Israel was under Roman occupation, there was little cause for celebration. A wedding created an exception in that oppressive atmosphere.

It was to such a celebration in Cana of Galilee that Jesus, His disciples and His mother were invited. And it was during such a festive occasion that a crisis occurred—the wine ran out (see John 2:3).

In that culture and time, running out of wine would cause the newlyweds such humiliation that they would never be able to lift their heads in public again. This was a marriage in trouble almost from the moment it began.

Has the "wine"—that spirited, sparkling liquid that symbolizes passionate, affectionate love—run out of your marriage? The loss of love can occur gradually, similar to the way I expect that the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana—one glass at a time until it was gone.

When Mary learned of the crisis, she immediately informed Jesus, " 'They have no more wine'" (John 2:3, NIV). The crisis

was stated simply, without explanations or suggestions about how He might fix the problem.

Although kind and respectful, Jesus' response to Mary gives the impression that He doesn't intend to do anything about the problem (see John 2:4). Sometimes Jesus' answer addresses not only the specific need we have brought to His attention but also something deeper.

Apparently Mary wanted to solve the problem for the young couple, but she also had a hidden agenda (see John 2:4). She thought this wedding celebration would be a wonderful place for Jesus to begin letting people know who He was.

Are there hidden agendas in your prayers? Are you praying for God to save your marriage to avoid being humiliated or rendered financially devastated by divorce, instead of striving to glorify Him? Jesus understands the feelings associated with our trials, but glorifying God should be our bottom-line agenda.

Mary may not have known and understood everything, but she knew Jesus cared. And she knew that in order for Him to have the freedom to make a difference, she would have to place total control of the situation in His hands.

JESUS WAS INVESTED WITH FULL AUTHORITY After speaking with Jesus, Mary called the servants and instructed them: " 'Do whatever He tells you'" (John 2:5). She was confident Jesus could make a difference in the crisis.

Have you placed your marriage and your situation under His authority? Maybe one reason He has allowed you to be in your present crisis is to bring you to the point of complete submission to His will.

I believe that's what happened in my life. I remember getting up early one morning, slipping down on my knees and tearfully

asking God once more how I could fix my relationship with Danny.

I opened my Bible to 1 John 4. As I meditated, God began to give me specific instructions on what to do.

His words to me were: "You are to love Danny because I first loved you. If you say 'I love God,' yet you don't love Danny, you are a liar. Because if you don't love your husband, whom you have seen, you cannot love Me, whom you have not seen. So I give you this command: If you love Me, you must—it's not an option—also love Danny.

"Dear Anne, love one another, for love comes from Me. Everyone who loves has been born of Me and knows Me."

Through His gentle words, God laid out three very basic principles about my love for Danny:

- Love comes from God.
- Those who are able to love others, including their spouses, are those who have been born of God.
- Those who are able to love others, even when the love runs out, are those who not only are born of God but also know God.

Although God lives within me, His love for Danny is available to me only in proportion to my knowledge of Him. God made this clear to me by saying, "If you are not able to love Danny, it's because you do not know Me, because I am love."

I realized that knowing God is more than just being born again, just as knowing my husband is more than saying marriage vows at the wedding altar. Knowing God involves an intimate, personal relationship that is developed over time through prayer, Bible study, obedience and being filled by the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment.

I knew God had given me the key for changing my marriage—for

turning water into wine. The key was not to focus on my relationship with Danny but to focus on my relationship with God!

As I spent time with God, He would fill my life. And because God is love, His love would also fill me. Therefore, since God loved Danny, love for Danny would fill my life and overflow from Him, through me, to my husband.

It would be weeks before I could say honestly that the water had been turned into wine, but I was no longer frustrated, tense or worried. God gave me peace and joy within as I trusted Him to infuse my life and my marriage with His love.

When the shortage of wine first became known at the wedding feast in Cana, it seemed that Jesus would do nothing. But Mary knew He would act in His own time and in His own way.

I wonder what the servants were thinking as they obediently filled those jars with water. What did they think when He told them, " 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet'" (John 2:8)?

What made them risk their reputation and their jobs to carry out His instructions? It must have been something about Jesus Himself that thrust them out on the limb of risk-taking obedience.

I can imagine all the servants, jostling for position to get an unobstructed view of their co-worker as he made his way to the master of the banquet with the pitcher of water. I wonder, as he began to pour, if his hand jerked, spilling a few drops, when he saw that although he had put water into the pitcher, wine came out?

The water had been turned into wine! And the new wine was the best (see John 2:9-10).

It was a miracle! But it was such a quiet miracle—nothing

flashy that would have drawn attention to Jesus or announced that the Messiah had come. Just a quiet change that saved a young bridegroom's honor and a newlywed couple's marriage—and answered a mother's prayer.

Can you imagine the thrill those servants experienced? It's the same thrill I've experienced again and again as I have climbed down from a pulpit to a standing ovation, acutely conscious of the water I had put into the message—the interrupted prayer time, the scattered thoughts and the weak delivery. Yet wine had flowed out.

No one in the audience knew that water had gone in but wine had come out. And as I outwardly lift my hand in praise to God, inwardly I acknowledge that a quiet miracle has occurred.

And it's the same thrill I get daily when I look at my beloved husband and remember the water—and the wine! Though my marriage is far from perfect, God's love in me and through me for Danny is much deeper, stronger and steadier than the love I had on my own.

Are you desperate for a quiet miracle in your marriage or your ministry that would turn the water into wine? Then invite Jesus to come in, inform Him of the problem, and invest Him with full authority.

Jesus makes change possible even when the love has run out. He invites you to taste and enjoy the "new wine" as you thank God from your heart for giving you Jesus!

Anne Graham Lotz, the second child of Billy and Ruth Graham, is an acclaimed Bible teacher and the founder of AnGeL Ministries. She also is the author of books including *The Glorious Dawn of God's Story* and *The Vision of His Glory*, both from Word Publishing.