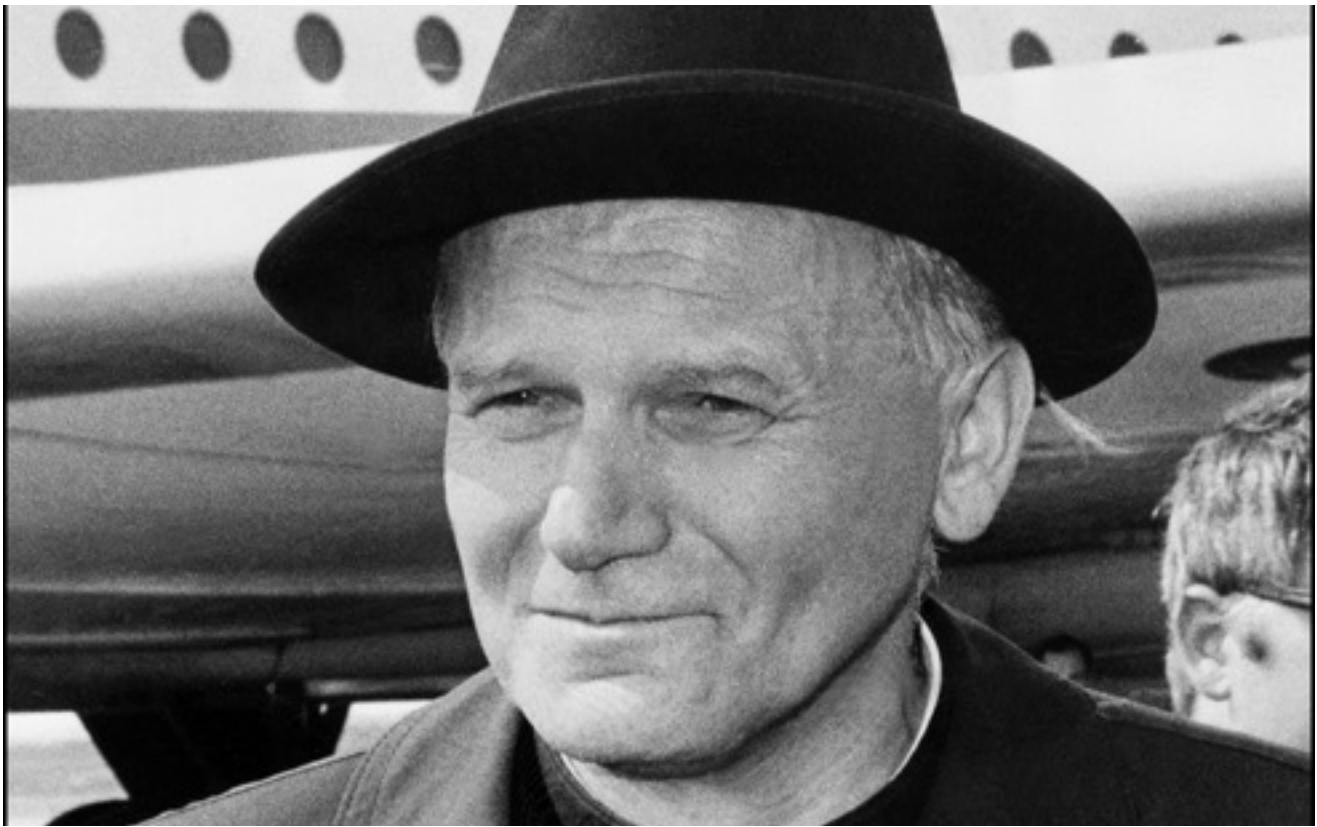

LOVE FINDS A WAY

(The maxims of a remarkable marriage)

DAN LAWSON

**If you are what you
should be,
you will set the whole
world ablaze.**

St. Catherine of Sienna



Forward

Over thirty years ago, Pope St. John Paul II addressed the world, saying,

“Love the family! Defend and promote it as the basic cell of human society.”

*This book is an effort to repair the cell of the family by working to **transform Catholic marriages** by addressing some deeply human problems that we all struggle with in our married lives.*

God made Catholic marriages to shine in the dark, not to be lost in it. Nothing is more attractive than real authentic holiness.

Let's start at home.



*This book is dedicated to all the husbands and
wives that have had the courage to continue
loving their imperfect spouses...especially my wife.*

*May we work to transform our culture and restore marriage
and family life in our world so as to create a civilization of love.*



**It is dangerous to pour
from an empty cup.**

The First Maxim

“You are responsible for your own happiness.”

This lies at the heart of so much of our dissatisfaction in our relationships and marriages. Somewhere along the way we fell victim to the misguided idea that something or someone outside ourselves can somehow be responsible for our happiness. It creates reactivity and induces fear.

With this mindset *our happiness remains outside our control.*

In truth, happiness is a side effect of giving our lives to something greater than ourselves. The degree of our happiness is actually dependent upon our self-possession, or what others call discipline.

In learning to say “no” to ourselves, we learn how to say “yes” to our lives, most especially our spouse and family.

At the heart of pain in many marriages is our lack of discipline and inherent default into selfishness. Sadly, the more we experience pain, the more likely we are to become selfish.

Therefore, happiness requires the regular practice of self-denial to prepare us to give the gift of ourselves to the adventure that is our life.

[Try This: Begin finding small ways to say *No* to yourself in order to increase your self-denial and increase discipline. They need not be dramatic or profound.

For example: Deciding to get up 15min earlier than normal, or offering to have your spouse or child choose what you watch on TV or what movie you see.

Remember: The goal is to increase your inner freedom and willpower by becoming more comfortable with the uncomfortability associated with sacrifice.]

I always get asked
what I think produces
all these psychological
problems for people.

My answer is
rigidness.

Milton Erickson MD

The Second Maxim

“Expectations Kill.”

Years ago, I took a family vacation to a family cottage in New England. As my wife and I drove up the coast to our destination, I fantasized about seeing my extended family, recreating childhood memories, emerging myself in the lush outdoors, and endless consumption of seafood.

When we arrived I found my wife in the bedroom and upon seeing me, she burst into tears. There was no hot water, the living quarters were much smaller than I had remembered, and there were ants throughout the cottage. It was not what I expected.

My expectations sent me into a rage and my frustration took me away from my family. I was unable to enjoy the vacation, ultimately ending my trip early in order to return home. -Back to my expectations.

Real life is unscripted. It requires flexibility to deal with the constant flux in daily life. Your spouse will not always be who you want them to be. Having expectations kills the spontaneity as well as the romance.

If you generate expectations, how can anyone surprise you? How can you surprise them? Expectations are the limits we place on our relationships, marriages, and the love we share. It also creates a rigidity that makes dealing with “changes in script” painful for us.

The counterpart to our expectations are our assumptions. Please realize that it remains impossible to “know” and be curious at the same time. That means that when you stop asking questions and stop actively learning about your spouse, you cease to know them. The other danger in doing this is that we create a limited template in which our spouses can interact with us.

Question: Were the best dates with your spouse extensively planned, all the way down to the most minute detail?

Or did those most memorable moments “break the script” with their spontaneity and organic romance?

Without a mindset of possibility we are unable to enter a love story, forgive, heal, grow, and change. Placing heavy expectations on our spouses also places a heavy burden on ourselves. Remember that we are not vehicles to make others happy.

Neither are they.

[***Try This:*** Instead of placing expectations on yourself, your spouse, or your experience, see everything as an adventure. Instead of trying to *make* things happen, by attempting to please yourself or your spouse, seek ways to *serve the moment you are in*.

Try asking: “What is this moment asking me to do?” and participate with the answer that comes. Effective participation provides us with new experience. Those new experiences produces new insights into our lives.]

**You become what you
focus on.**



The Third Maxim

“Whatever You Focus on Gets Bigger.”

If you want to feel attractive and remain attractive to your spouse throughout your life, ***focus on the good and beautiful.***

Time spent in awareness of the good, is time spent with God.

Everything that is good points to God.

Only God makes us holy.

Nothing is as attractive as real holiness.

That said, remember that whatever you focus on within your marriage will get bigger.

Marriage is like a garden, ***we want to water the flowers, not the weeds.***

Whatever gets our attention will grow. It can grow arguments or excitement, passion or rejection, loneliness or connection, hope or despair.

Since our attention is a limited resource, we need to spend it wisely.

This can be a difficult task because our brains initially developed with a heavy emphasis on survival. That means that it is always on the lookout for “potential threats.” These potential threats include anything seen or understood to be negative or dangerous.

Left to its own devices our “survival brain” will fixate on the negative within our marriage and family, thinking that ***“If I can see more bad things, I have a greater ability to stop them from happening.”***

This sounds like useful programming initially. However, the reality of this mindset is actually more tragic as it quickly darkens our minds, inducing pessimism and greater conflict in our relationships.

If we rely on our negative assumptions for too long, we become like the moles underground, we lose our sight and ability to effectively navigate in the world. Our new “blindness” makes us unable to recognize the good in our homes and marriages.

[Try This: To enhance awareness of the goodness in your marriage and family life, during shared mealtime, share three things you are grateful for, and three things that you accomplished that day. This has been clinically shown to enhance our mood and attitude toward those in our lives. Encourage your spouse to do the same. If possible, involve your children.]

Demon/Daemon;
comes from the Ancient
Greek word δαίμων,

Meaning: Divider
(of fortunes or destinies)

The Fourth Maxim

“Your Spouse is Not the Enemy.”

Do you ever wonder where a lot of the pain we experience comes from? Our minds search for an explanation, a source, a culprit. Who is causing it all?

Often times we can end up viewing our spouse as the cause of our pain, especially in our marriage.

BUT YOUR SPOUSE IS NOT THE ENEMY

Pain is a pretty old experience, it seems to be as old as human beings are, dating all the way back to the time of Adam and Eve. Remember those cliché names you learned way back in Sunday School?

I'll admit I am not a Scripture scholar, but I always enjoy a good story.

So the story of Adam and Eve goes like this: “God creates Adam and Eve, and they live in utter bliss in the garden of Eden.” The Bible infers that in this garden there was no pain, death, or suffering of any type. Doesn't that sound pretty good to you?

Eve was then “tempted” to eat the “forbidden fruit” of the tree of knowledge and shared it with her husband. Then sin, death, pain, suffering, entered the world.

Sounds like they had a pretty good deal here initially. Walking with God in a magical garden rid of pain, playing Dr. Doolittle with the animals. So why on earth would these two hippies decide that they wanted to mess it up? How could they have been duped to give it all up?

That question bothered me as a kid, I would ask Sunday school teachers and my parents questions like “Why did those people throw away paradise for some stupid fruit? Was it a starfruit? What kind of fruit was it anyway?”

We all know that it wasn't a banana. Nobody is going to sacrifice paradise for a banana.

But that's the story of our fall from grace. Over the years, this is what I believe happened off camera.

Scripture says that the serpent tempted Eve. Must have been a really good temptation. Actually I think it is a really common one, still in use today. Remember, *evil is never creative*.

I believe that little serpent told Eve, "You aren't enough. God can't really love you. You're not enough like him. You're just another creature, like that bird over there. You need to become like him to really gain his love."

And it worked, both of them gave everything up and ate that fruit in hopes of becoming ENOUGH.

Since that time, the forces of darkness have been saying to man, "You are not enough" and it continues to this very day.

SATAN IS THE ENEMY (that's actually what the name means).

His tactics are fear and shame. Our pain is a result of sin.

If you don't believe me, watch TV. You don't have to watch long to get involved in the myriad of commercials and shows that communicate things like, "You're not wealthy enough, you're not thin enough, you're not attractive enough, you don't have enough kids, you're not smart enough, you're not holy enough." The list goes on and on.

This shame induces a form of *amnesia* in us.

Meaning:

When we forget who we are (that we are lovable and created by God)
We become who we aren't.

Remember this the next time you feel hurt by your spouse.

The ancient temptation of *original sin* is still in play today; we give up our peace in search of something to make us feel “enough.”

[**Try This:** Instead of paying attention to the things that irritate you about your spouse, spend one whole day ignoring those things. Instead, attempt to catch your spouse doing things correctly. When your spouse does something correct/pleasing, communicate that you appreciate what they have done.

This helps to combat the shame that plagues our lives and restores our identity as good and lovable people.

Remember: *If you don't talk about the good things in your marriage, they don't exist.*]

0+0=

?

**When you
add the zero's,
what did you get?**

The Fifth Maxim

“Fear does not communicate love.”

When we calculate and tally up all the absences, and grievances in our marriages, there is still nothing there. Our marriage becomes devoid of a love story. What replaces it is a ghost story.

There is an old legend about Christ’s encounter with the adulterous woman from St. John’s Gospel. If you remember from scripture, the scribes and Pharisees brought her to Jesus in hopes to trap Him. They wanted Jesus to judge her and have her condemned to death under the Mosaic Law.

Christ responds saying,

“He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her.”

Then, one by one the mob drops their stones and leaves Christ and the woman alone. He tells her to “Go and sin no more.” However, according to the legend, an unnamed disciple is said to have confronted Jesus after their encounter, having watched the whole scene from a distance.

He gets upset and angry at the Lord for failing to punish this sinner saying,

“Why did you not stone that woman, she was an adulteress? She deserved to die!”

Christ smiles saying, ***“Because love changes things, and stones don’t.”***

It is the same with us today. We struggle to understand God’s mercy and love for us. Too often we prefer rocks, insults, and judgements. We bring these weapons into our marriage and conversations.

Now there is genius in kindness, but our desire to be right is human, and rooted in fear.

As our fears grow, so does our need for control. However, our perspective shrinks as our worries gobble up all our attention. We become less interested in our spouse and his or her needs. Our priorities erode without our conscious awareness. We say, "How did all happen? I don't know how it got that bad."

Ben and Rosamond Zander call the communication that occurs at these fear infused times *downward spiral talk*.

Speaking from a downward spiral puts limits to what we can do and change. **We talk in absolutes.** It enhances our fear and decreases our participation in creation of a solution. We also project our fears onto our spouse and limit the abilities that they have.

To familiarize yourself, the below statements illustrate downward spiral talk.

"He's just not romantic."

"Our schoolchildren don't learn anything today since the government has an agenda for everything."

"The country is falling apart."

"Pro-Lifers just don't understand what feminism truly is."

A downward spiral is what happens when we focus our attention on obstacles. When we do, the obstacles increase dramatically because we create a *closed loop* where no opportunity for change exists.

Far better to speak from a place of possibility.

Our God is a God of possibility.

The "glass half-full" mentality, despite what naysayers say, is actually a measurement of "presence" in life. We can do something with presence, not so much with absence.

It's important to attend to the "real" things in life.

There is a reason why Martin Luther King's most famous speech isn't called the "I Have a Fear" speech.

What we say creates a reality. The way we define things sets a framework for how things will unfold.

When we open our mouths to speak to our spouses do they experience the love that St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8?,

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

[Try Asking: Before you say or do anything, "Which place am I coming from- LOVE or FEAR?"

Try This: *Replace your fear with curiosity.* When you feel yourself getting upset because your fear is rising, ask more questions. Questions slow us down and provide us with more information. Information reduces our tendency to mind-read and decreases the likelihood things will turn into an argument.

Try This: Increase caring experiences between spouses. Each day sincerely ask your spouse, “Is there anything that you need from me today?” It may seem like a simple question, but we rarely communicate on a level of legitimate needs.]

There is no antidote for
love
but to **love more.**

Henry David Thoreau

The Sixth Maxim

“There are always unresolvable problems.”

In every life and every marriage there are always unresolvable problems. We experience great suffering when we encounter them.

The in-laws that will never approve of your parenting style.

The spouse addicted to pornography, gambling, alcohol, or drugs.

Our disabled child.

The promotion you didn't get, from the boss that will never like you.

That illness you just didn't see coming.

The affair

Our aging parents who won't let us care for them.

Your spouse's lack of organization skills.

Your quick temper.

The miscarriage that we don't talk about.

These problems produce so much pain, not just in themselves, but rather in our approach to handling them. Let me explain.

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Years ago I had the honor of being the best man at a friend's wedding and had the privilege to give the celebratory toast before dinner. I attempted to condense all my wisdom down to two short questions, telling the newly married couple if they wanted to remain happily married they had to make a crucial decision:

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***"Do you want to be right?      Or do you want to be kind?"***

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This question demonstrates the two games central to all our lives. The question on the left side of the page illustrates what Professor James Carse calls “Finite Games.” These are games that have a winner/loser outcome. They elicit shame and control through ongoing competition based out of fear.

The question on the right reflects what Carse calls, “Infinite Games.” These are games whose purpose is to essentially keep the *play* going. There is no win or lose, black or white, right or wrong, quality to these games. That means no shame is produced and no fear builds.

Instead, when you play an infinite game the tension dissipates and peace takes over. The knots produced by our addiction to competition loosens. We experience a string of miracles instead.

Haven't you ever wondered what allowed the saints to carry their crosses so effectively?

**Here's the answer:**

Every saint that has ever lived played an infinite game.

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### Some Popular Saints and the Game They Played

## St. Teresa of Calcutta

### Game: LOVE

## St. Maximilian Kolbe

### Game: LOVE

**St. Joseph**  
**Game: LOVE**

## St. John Paul II

### Game: LOVE

## St. Maria Faustina Kowalska

### Game: LOVE

**St. Padre Pio**  
**Game: LOVE**

## St. Kateri Tekakwitha

### Game: LOVE

## St. Francis of Assisi

### Game: LOVE

## St. Margaret Mary

### Game: LOVE

As you can see, regardless of what is going on in our lives, nothing can prevent us from practicing virtue.

Whenever we enter a fight with an unresolvable problem, feeling those old knots starting to tighten around our heart, remember that's a response to the game you are playing. You can always start playing an infinite game.

[**Try Asking:** “What kind of game am I playing right now in my marriage?”]

**Hint:** If I feel like a loser sometimes, it's probably a finite game.

**Try This:** Start playing an infinite game. Stop worrying about being a perfect spouse, parent, professional. Stop focusing on externalized success. Instead, commit yourself to pursuing a virtue.

For example, if I want to practice patience, I play the game of looking for ways to constantly be useful to my children, spouse, work, and community ]

**YOUR CHOICE:**

**Change the world,  
or  
have the world change  
you.**

# Epilogue

## (Start a brushfire)

There are two types of culture that generate change in our world. The first type is what most of us are familiar with, general societal culture also known as *popular culture*.

The second type of culture is ***personal culture***. Although we speak less about it, personal culture is what produces larger cultural changes throughout our society and the world.

Personal culture is defined as the set of behaviors that happen around a certain individual. Our personal cultures are formed by our core values. Our core values are the one or two things that we will suffer for in our lives.

Once you start paying attention to personal culture and core values you will notice two things:

1. Everyone has a god (something they suffer for)
2. Everyone practices a religion (rules by which they sacrifice for their god)

To illustrate my point, recognize that certain things will happen if you are around Jay Z for a day. They're probably things that don't normally happen around you. Here are a set of familiar individuals and their corresponding core values.

Martin Luther King Jr.  
Core Value: Human Dignity

Kim Kardashian  
Core Value: Celebrity

Bernie Madoff  
Core Value: Wealth

St. Teresa of Calcutta  
Core Value: Obedience

*The world around each individual is altered according to the individual's core values because...*

***Our core values inform every decision we make.***

**What are your core values as a married couple?**

**Have you claimed them?**

**Or are you looking to this culture to provide them for you?**

As you decide to live some of the wisdom in this small book, see it as a way to change the culture in your home, community, and the world.

**Let the genius of Catholicism start a cultural brushfire.**

In the beginning it's just a smolder on the edges of the field. Soon it grows and has the power to consume whole communities. Your marriage is the key to changing the world we live in.

Blaze on.



**Go get to work.**