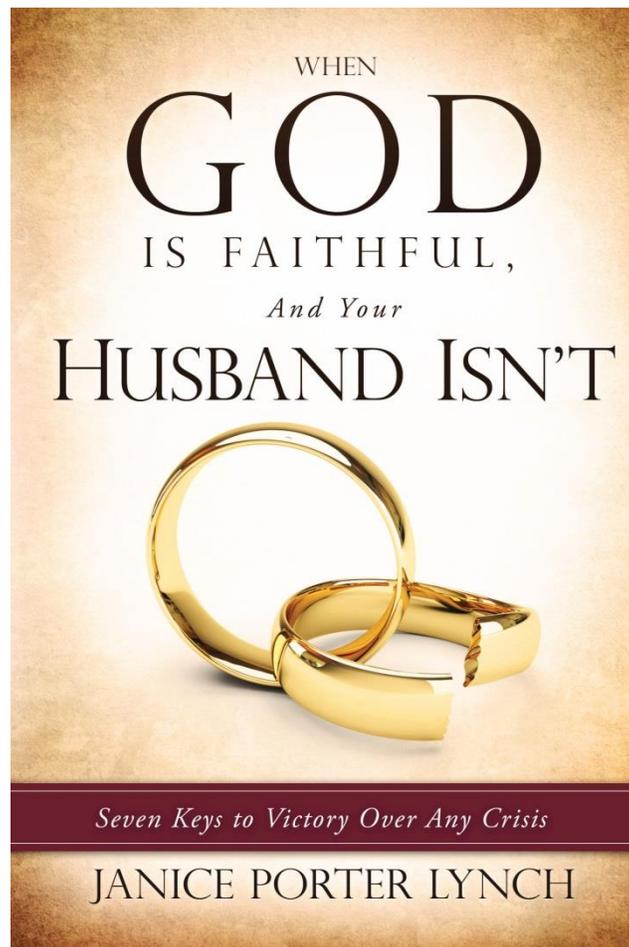


When God is Faithful, And Your Husband Isn't

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Chapter 2

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First Glimpses of California

July 1996

“Babe!” Kirk shouted to me almost giddy with excitement from the tip on the mountain rise where he stood. I sat and waited with baby Meaghan in the car. “Babe, *you’ve got* to see this!”

We’d pulled over along the curvy, windy roadside to where water trickled over a rock about the size of a bassinet. It spurted out of a natural spring.

Having been raised in suburbia on the East Coast, it was surprising that *just anybody* could stop here and collect some drinking water from a natural spring. I’d only ever seen spring water sold at the grocery store.

The mountain breeze tenderly combed my hair as I climbed out of the rental car and unhitched our four-month-old from her carseat in the back. My husband scrambled back down to me to take hold of my hand and pulled me along up to the rise to where he’d been standing.

I caught my breath when the scene came into view. Layers and layers of mountain ridges covered in trees, and beyond this, the Pacific Ocean, frothy and wild. *How could I have not known before how beautiful Northern California is?*

“Babe,” he said, holding me around the waist, standing behind me, and squeezing me tight, “There are so many spectacular places here, and I can’t wait to show you them all!”

Being three thousand miles away from family and friends and relocating to a whole different world was as breath-taking as the view. But with my much-loved husband’s strong arms around me and his familiar aftershave lingering in the air, I felt safe and secure.

I looked forward to our new home in California and hoped for better hours at his new workplace.

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California, except for being far away from our relatives, seemed like a dream. Every day was sunny and one could count on it. Every day was comfortable, mild, and pleasant – out with all our heavy winter clothes needed back East.

That is why the hills outside the city ‘beamed with gold,’ our realtor tried to persuade us. “No, they are not brown,” she corrected, “they are golden,” she insisted, nodding again at the barren land.

Kirk and I eyed each other and smiled in amusement, observing her face, unmoved. Kirk sat sideways in the front seat with his back to the door of the car so that he could hold my hand where I sat in the back beside our tiny little girls in their carseats. Our hands exchanged the three short squeezes that we knew stood for the words, *I love you*.

And the realtor drove us on, continuing to expound on the golden hills of Northern California located outside of the city.

Soon giant, white bodies came into view with only three spiked-ends on the wheel, some spinning, some still. Others were shorter, with a stick pointing up, and oval bended ends on each side, spinning like tops side-to-side.

Against the brown dirt landscape, it was eerie – I felt like I was on the set for Star Wars. “What are those things?” I asked Kirk.

“Probably the largest windmill farm in the entire world,” he responded. This was the Altamont Pass.

Things in California were so different. This land had so many surprises in store.

The windmills were not the only unique objects in the California north. There were also the trees: the huge, monstrous, big-enough-to-fit-inside-of Sequoias. Visits to the national park, Muir Woods, became a regular favorite family outing.

And California quickly filled with friends.

From the outset, Kirk had settled us into a local church of about 500, only blocks from our home. Here we were soon taken under wing by the main church secretary, Emilie, because she had drawn my name from a hat for the annual secret sister program.

Donald and Debbie, the assistant pastor and his wife, along with their two young children, also became fast friends.

I'd discovered the local Women's Aglow chapter before we'd even moved from the temporary suites that Kirk's company had provided and into our new home in Hillside.

In addition, a new preschool playgroup was quickly formed with our two small daughters. Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) meetings began, as well as weekly church Bible Studies.

Promise Keepers, a praying men's group that met early before work, asked Kirk to join. Though he'd been part of this organization before we'd moved, Kirk declined. "Because," he said, "I have to work at those times."

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Late June, 1998

It was late in the afternoon and I read a book while laying down on our bed for few moments. The girls, ages four and two, still napped and Kirk would be home from work soon.

Rays of setting sun penetrated through the sliding glass doors of our bedroom, warming me like a blanket.

In moments, the front door opened and closed, my dark-haired husband strode into our bedroom, gave me a kiss, and then turned to undo his tie, hanging it on the rack in the closet.

That's when he made his remarkable statement:

"You know what, Babe?" he waited for me to look directly into his face, "I think I'm ready to have another baby."

I stared back at Kirk, trying hard not to miss the words that he was saying.

My mind flipped back through the pages in time to when we were living across the country on the East Coast, to the birth of our second child over two years before. I'd lain in the hospital bed waiting to hold my precious second daughter right after she'd been delivered, but the team of specialists still checked her lungs.

I'd become a Christian at the age of fifteen, but it had certainly not been often that I'd heard the Holy Spirit speak to me in such a clear, distinct, obvious voice. But, as I'd laid there, He'd done just that.

The next time it will be David Michael, I'd heard from an inward depth as clear and understandable as could be.

At first, I'd rejoiced. But then I began to wonder. Why would God speak these words to me? After all, I was not disappointed at all to have a second daughter; I'd not preferred either a boy or a girl for my next child.

Feeling that my husband should know what the Holy Spirit had spoken so precisely, I'd shared the words and the experience with Kirk after we'd returned home.

His only response had been, "Two children are enough." He made the statement, turned, walked out of our bedroom, and closed the door as he left the house for work.

Surprised by his curt response, I began to adjust to this new information. Previously, we'd both talked about having more. *Maybe*, I'd concluded, this was the reason why God had spoken to me – to reassure me that I would have another child.

I was to find that these eight words would indeed be extremely comforting – but not for the reasons I had suspected.

Now here in California, two years later, I continued to gawk at my husband, my mouth falling open.

"Yes, I *really am* ready to have another one," he repeated to my hushed, shocked face. Then, he turned to walk back down the hallway into his office.

Astounded at his change of heart, I continued to rest on the bed, not moving a muscle.

Joy gradually began from the tips of my toes and I wiggled them. The tingling sensation climbed all the way up to my mouth. "Wow, God," I prayed, beginning to feel quivers of excitement, "Thank You, God! Thank You!"

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*Late Night, August, 1998*

I lay in the bed by myself, waiting. The girls had been asleep in their room for hours. Dozing off did not seem probable, no matter how hard I tried to do so. I could not, because Kirk had not returned home yet.

It was a Friday night and he'd had an office party. I looked at the digital clock; it read 12:01 AM. *Where could Kirk be? How late could this party go?*

I recalled a recent one that I'd been invited to also: Kirk's boss had taken those in his department and their significant others out 'to the finest food in San Francisco.' Afterwards, a surprise limousine pulled up for our party of fourteen and we'd toured the city at night. It stopped in front of a theatre, and inside we were treated to a performance of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Spectacular evening.

But Kirk had said it was just a casual outing tonight with co-workers at a local restaurant.

Rolling over, I grabbed the phone on the night table by my side of the bed. I punched in the numbers again, paging Kirk. I'd already tried three times. *Why had he not answered?* The room remained silent.

Scenes of an ugly car accident entered my mind. Was Kirk alright? What if I were left a widow? And then, what if I found out that I was also carrying Kirk's third child? How would I break the news to the girls? Would the police be the ones to call me instead of Kirk?

"Oh God!" I pled aloud. "Please protect Kirk. Please help him to be alright. Please let him phone me and tell me that everything is okay." News headlines flashed in my mind: *Engineer Drives Off Cliff – Doesn't See Side of the Road.*

Anger rose in me. If he is fine and he just didn't bother to call me! In every minute that lapsed, I waffled between anger and fear. "Oh God! You see where Kirk is – please tell him to phone me."

I tried to sleep more. I tossed, I turned. I kept opening my eyes, and seeing the red numbers on the clock: *12:13 AM; 12:17; 1:20 AM; 2:10 AM; 2:55 AM.*

I missed Kirk's arms around me; I missed the way he always held me as I slept.

I was so tired but I punched the redial button of the phone that I now slept with, and tried paging Kirk, again.

*3:03 AM.* I heard a vehicle outside. I heard the key in the door. I lifted my head now, fully alert. I heard Kirk shuffle down the long hallway into our bedroom. He walked with slow steps.

"Hi," he whispered, "I was trying not to wake you."

Sitting upright in bed and flipping on the lamp, I exclaimed, "Trying not to wake me?!!" I raised my voice, "Where have you been?!! Why have you not answered my pages?" Mad and relieved all at once, tears sprinkled my cheeks.

Kirk looked at the floor. "I'm sorry," he said, speaking softly. "I guess that I just shouldn't go to parties after work."

"I'm so mad at you!" I cried. "I think you should just stay away!"

Without hurrying, Kirk changed his clothes. "You don't really want that, do you?" Kirk asked.

"No!" I admitted, punctuating the word, still angry, but more relieved that he was now home safe.

He crawled into bed.

Reluctantly, with mixed feelings, I draped my arm over his chest and I placed my nose up against his shoulder. I relaxed now. As I fell asleep, did he sniffle? His breathing seemed different. His chest rose and fell. Did I feel a tremor? Could it be that he wiped his eyes? I was so tired and I felt so groggy. It was so late.

Very soon it was morning.

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Late September, 1998

The two lines really did turn pink. I kept looking at the stick. And they'd done it right away. I kept looking at the stick. Pink.

"Babe!" I called to Kirk, my voice rising even though it was early and the girls still slept.

It took only a moment for him to stride the few steps from his home office to where I stood in front of our vanity, wearing fuzzy rose slippers and matching bathrobe.

I still stared at the two pink lines that had appeared on the stick. "I'm pregnant," I breathed. "Kirk! We're pregnant!" I said, looking up and reaching over to embrace my husband.

"Wow," Kirk answered, standing there, surprised. "That was fast." Kirk gave a smile and returned to his office.

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A family meeting was soon called in the hallway outside of Kirk's office. Nicole and Meaghan stood before us waiting for us to say something.

"Guess what girls?" I said, bouncing in place. "We are going to have a baby!"

Matching my excitement, four-year-old Nicole jumped and flew to my side. "I know what the baby is going to be, Mommy! It is going to be a boy! Last night I asked God for a baby brother!" She beamed, all thirty-nine inches of her radiating.

Yes, I pondered her words in my heart; how interesting that God had given her that desire and that prayer. I couldn't help but remember the words again from over two-and-a-half years before – *The next time it will be David Michael.*

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Handpicked friends from the Lord are like a bouquet of flowers on the table enhancing the décor, adding sweet aroma, and boasting a pretty picture to be thankful for every time they come into view.

So it was with Kayla and Ginny. Since we'd moved to California two years before, they'd been a part of the scenery, planted in my life specifically by Him.

I'd met them at Women's Aglow – a monthly gathering of Christian women.

Kayla, fair-skinned, strawberry-blonde, and tall, young mother of seven, and now our president. And Ginny, who mirrored both my short, dark brunette hair and stature, still yet to have children, and now in charge of leading Aglow's worship.

Meeting on Wednesdays during my daughter's naptimes, the Lord's presence enveloped us as we worshipped Him and prayed together. We'd seen God answer significant prayers of business opportunities in both Kayla and Ginny's life, and both Kayla and I were able to get into homes which had seemed far out of reach.

Often God gave us words or pictures to share with one another as we interceded. Refreshed, we left our meetings amazed and rejuvenated at all that the Lord had done during our time.

During today's prayer time, Kayla began to intercede for Kirk who was scheduled to go away on an upcoming business trip that weekend. "And please God," she prayed, "help Kirk to make right choices while he is away on this trip. Let him not turn to the right or to the left, or have anything to do with any other woman."

"Where did that come from, Kayla?" I asked, opening my eyes and looking at her.

"I don't know, I don't know," she said, flustered a bit. "I know that Kirk is nothing like that. I just felt led to pray that way."

That seemed out of the blue, I thought, not taking the idea seriously at all.

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It was a Monday night in the middle of January and I'd set up a babysitter for the girls. Kirk drove us to the annual Young Life fundraiser banquet on the outskirts of town just like we'd done the year before.

Dressed couples and people of different generations dined at round tables decked out in tablecloths and fancy place settings. The meal finished, Kirk and I turned our chairs to face the platform where the speaker would soon address us.

I felt the baby kick; it was my 23<sup>rd</sup> week of pregnancy.

“Kirk,” I pulled his hand over to rest on my protruding womb. “Feel the baby moving?” I looked into my husband’s face, excited.

He smiled back briefly, but his hand did not linger.

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February, 1999

It was the morning after Nicole’s 5th birthday party – one with a clown theme. Some guests had spent the night. Brother and sister, Derrick and Donna, the children of one of our pastors, lay in sleeping bags in the living room along with our own children, beginning to wake up to the aroma of the steamy, hot pancakes. Their parents would be by soon to pick them up for church.

“Kirk, I love this,” I smiled from the kitchen, happy to flip another pancake onto the stack growing high on the plate.

“What?” he asked, looking up at me from the old, blue couch.

“Just, everybody being here, you know. All of us having so much fun together. I love living just blocks from the church so that we’re so convenient for everyone to pick up and drop off. Maybe we should have an Everyone-Is-Welcome-For-A-Pancake-Breakfast-Party more often! What d’ya think?” I asked, taking a short break from the hot griddle to bounce over to him, belly growing, pancake flipper in hand, to plant a firm kiss on Kirk’s lips.

Kirk turned to help Meaghan with the bow on the back of her dress. Then the doorbell rang.

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Each year Hillside hosted a large home show at the fairgrounds with many vendors sporting their goods. At this fair, Kirk and I had met a man working a machine that could do amazing crafts. It was a scrollsaw. With it one could cut not only wood, but also glass and coins, and, it seemed, any other material imaginable into fine and detailed shapes and sizes.

The demonstration, which I’d seen the previous couple of years, always thrilled me. *Oh, what I could make with that machine!*

The only problem was the price: \$1500.

In our marriage, I’d always managed the finances because my father had trained me to do so and because I liked it. Kirk was happy to let me have the job.

This year, I felt we could squeeze out the money for the scrollsaw. After all, normally we were so careful and frugal with our finances. We’d even waited six months when we were first married to get our first real bed, just so we could avoid the debt.

“Kirk,” I asked one day, “do you think I might be able to buy the scrollsaw this year?” I guessed he would be agreeable because he’d spent money on his fiddle and on lessons, and now we still had money available. I was already dreaming of all the crafts I would make and sell.

“What?” Kirk asked, looking up from his desk. “Don’t you think it’s too expensive?”

I felt surprised by his hesitancy; it wasn’t like him. I explained all the reasons why I thought it was a great idea.

Reluctantly, he’d agreed. But I still hadn’t made the purchase. I had the phone number of the dealer and could call him anytime, but I felt a restraint inside of me that kept me from doing so.

So it was that one day while I was driving around doing the errands and still praying about it, that I had an inspiration. *Why not give away the \$1500 to God instead of purchasing the scrollsaw?* The more I thought about doing this, the more filled with joy I became.

“Kirk,” I came to his office that evening, “Kirk, I’ve been thinking about the scrollsaw thing.”

He looked up at me from his computer. “I’ve been thinking that I’d like to give the \$1500 I was going to spend on the scrollsaw to God instead.”

“What?!” Kirk asked, scrunching his face together more than I’d ever seen. “What do you mean?” he said, giving me his full attention and looking straight at me.

“Well,” I tried to explain, “I know you said that I could spend the money, and I’m grateful. But I just feel restrained from doing so whenever I pray about it. But when I think about giving it away to God, I get filled with joy, you know?”

Kirk looked at me with disbelief, then turned back to his computer. "Do what you want with the money."

"Okay," I said, turning back into the hallway, relieved and excited.

Little did I know at the time that God knew something about my life that I would have never expected.

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*"Give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use,
it will be measured to you."*

Luke 6:38

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I remember it so clearly because it was so unusual.

It happened as I walked the hallway down into our bedroom, located at the back of our house. The girls were napping in the afternoon and I was tiptoeing softly, trying to accomplish as much work as possible.

"*Will you serve me, even if Kirk does not?*" The Holy Spirit whispered inside of me, with precise clarity.

Baffled, I thought *that was a strange question*. But, I wanted to give the Lord an answer.

"Lord," I said quietly, "I will, if You will help me."

I still thought the idea was surprising as I reached the night table.

Picking up my Bible, I sat down on the edge of the bed, and fingered through it. Maybe the Lord just wanted me to get back into regular quiet times, I thought. I'd been trying to hold back, not wanting to outrun my husband. I had wanted him to take the lead.

Now I breathed in deeply because I felt the release to enjoy Him. I sat down and read the Word all afternoon.

I didn't know it then, but I had an especially great need to be anchored in the truths of God's Word.