

Excerpted with permission from Metaxas, Eric. Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life. Penguin Group US.

GOD AND MARRIAGE

Perhaps the first story I thought about when I considered writing this book was the story of my very dear friends Paul and Lisa. It's a genuinely amazing story. I couldn't remember some of the details of the story, so I met Paul and Lisa at a restaurant in New Canaan on July 30, 2013, to hear their story again— this time to take notes. Although I had no idea, that date just happened to be their nineteenth wedding anniversary.

I first met them in the spring of 2004 in New Canaan, Connecticut, about twenty feet away from the restaurant where we had our lunch in July 2013. That 2004 dinner was at an evening event of something called the New Canaan Society, a men's fellowship I've been very involved with since 1995, when we started it— in New Canaan, Connecticut, hence the name. I say "we" generously— generous to myself, because it was really my friend Jim Lane who started it. It began as a small men's group in Jim's house. Jim had just returned from a few years in London, where he had been working for Goldman Sachs.

When Jim returned to New Canaan he wanted to have some kind of men's group— not necessarily a Bible study, but something where men could encourage one another. He knew that it should be as much fun as possible and shouldn't feel like some overbearing "religious" group, but should simply be a group of men with the common goal of wanting to be real friends. Of course, any real friendship would mean that we would encourage one another in our commitments to our wives and children. It so happened that there were lots of men looking for something like this, and the New Canaan Society, as it came to be called, grew and grew. Within a few months our number had grown to twenty and soon leapt to forty. We quickly outgrew Jim's family room and moved to his living room, which, given his position as a former partner at Goldman Sachs, was appropriately vast. Before our burgeoning numbers— and Jim's long-suffering wife, Susie— forced us to leave Jim's house for other spaces, we actually had two hundred men there every Friday. Those who couldn't fit into the living room sat on folding chairs in his dining room and foyer, and some gathered in his family room, watching on closed-circuit TV. We still laugh about that, but it's all true. It was around this time that Paul came to visit.

Paul was typical of the sort of person attracted to the fun and general bonhomie of NCS. He was a Harvard grad who was now a partner at one of the so-called white-shoe Wall Street law firms that cannot be named here, as the case may be (hereinafter designated as "the Firm"). He was also typical in that he was discovering that the tremendous worldly success he had dreamt about was now

his but was not delivering the happiness and satisfaction he thought it would when he started out after it so many years before. He had a spectacular home in Fairfield County and all of the professional plaudits one might have hoped for. His wife, Lisa, was beautiful and tremendously accomplished, and they had two wonderful children.

Then one day in the fall of 2003, all of these things were threatened. Paul had assumed everything was fine in his marriage before then. There had been a disconnect between him and Lisa for some time, but he rather cavalierly dismissed it as typical of marriages after a few years, where both partners are busy with life. It didn't seem to warrant serious concern. As he saw things, being a good provider made him a good husband and he was certainly being that. Paul usually left for work before his children had woken up and returned after they had gone to sleep, and he was so exhausted and distracted with thoughts of work at the end of each day that he had little capacity or desire to engage with Lisa. He remembered that his way of dealing with her periodic bouts of crying was to withdraw and simply hope it would go away. But this day Paul saw that something was a little more wrong than usual, and he at last felt obliged to ask Lisa about it. "Is something wrong?" he asked her. Her reply was a shock. In a cold and detached tone, she said, "I don't know where to start," and then proceeded to tell Paul that she was profoundly unhappy in their marriage. She said emphatically that she could "not go on like this."

Hearing these words from the woman at the center of the grand edifice of success he had been building all these years was a shattering blow. As he fully took it in, Paul came undone. He had been working so hard and so single-mindedly at building and maintaining this great edifice that he had no idea of his wife's feelings and the depth of their troubles. It was as if he were putting the finishing touches on the highest parts of that edifice and was suddenly being told that the base had begun to rot and it would all come down at any moment. Hearing Lisa's words and tone made him see this, that everything was collapsing. It was too much to bear, and Paul began to sob and did not stop for almost two hours. But Lisa, whose heart had been hardening over the last few years, said she was almost a distant observer. She could not feel any compassion or empathy. If there was any emotion, it was anger, as she wondered how this uncaring and unfeeling man in front of her could have been so incredibly and selfishly oblivious to her great pain.

But the devastating news that day led Paul to do something he had never done before. He viscerally understood that there was no human solution to this crisis, the crisis of his life. He was suddenly desperate and now, for the first time in his life he had no resources to draw on within himself. So he cried out to God, whom he had been ignoring since he could remember.

Paul and Lisa had no real relationship with God up till that time, but they were not atheists. They had both been raised in devout Catholic homes, but as life

progressed, they had slipped into being nominal “Christmas and Easter” Catholics. When their first child was born they felt some inchoate urge to do something “spiritual” and decided to go to a church in their neighborhood in London, where they were living at that time. They first tried a Catholic church but quickly became frustrated with their inability to understand the African priest. A few days after making the decision to try something else, Lisa was hailed in the street by a neighbor, a fellow expatriate and American, who introduced herself and that night left an invitation to a garden party being thrown by Saint Michael’s Church in Chester Square. Lisa went to the party and found that she liked the people, so that Sunday morning she and Paul went to the service. Lisa loved it, but Paul was so uncomfortable with it all that he never went back. The pastor at that time— and at the time of this writing— was a man named Charles Marnham. Unbeknownst to Lisa, he was no ordinary Anglican vicar. Charles and his wife, Tricia, had essentially invented the now wildly popular and successful “Alpha Program,” which has by now brought faith to literally millions around the globe. So at Saint Michael’s one found something far more powerful than the standard Church of England fare, and in a short time, Lisa was attending a women’s Bible study with the rector’s wife. She seemed on her way to a real faith.

Before this seed was able to germinate, however, Paul’s job called them back to New York. Just before they departed, Tricia Marnham told Lisa that in order to make sure her fledgling faith didn’t dissipate, she should find a solid “Alpha” church in the United States and read the Bible daily, which Lisa said she would do. But by the time she and Paul found their home in Fairfield County and got properly settled, she had become distracted by other important things, not least the birth of their daughter, just two months after they returned. She found herself missing the excitement of what she had at Saint Michael’s just before they had left. She and Paul were now living on a tony street in a very tony town, and there was a traditional church right across the street. Paul saw this as an opportunity to return to a style of service with which he was comfortable, and Lisa went along with his desire because it meant the whole family could be together in church. Since it was so convenient, it somehow seemed just the ticket, and Lisa soon forgot Tricia Marnham’s advice and her own good intentions. So it was in this upscale suburban environment that their marriage continued to fall apart and Lisa’s faith began to slip away.

During this period, Lisa spent more and more time at a local health club in an effort to medicate her unhappiness at home. It was there that she connected with a group of Fairfield County housewives who were either already divorced or wishing they were. As soon as they heard of Lisa’s growing unhappiness, they strongly encouraged Lisa to leave her out-of-touch husband for greener pastures. The constant drumbeat of this took its toll, until Lisa ceased caring about keeping her marriage together or trying to communicate with her husband about their troubles. So, unbeknownst to Paul, by October 2003, when she delivered her devastating answer to Paul’s question, it was all but over. Lisa hadn’t quite

thought through the next steps, but for her things were now moving decidedly in the direction of ending their marriage.

But something else was happening during this time too. The very week Paul and Lisa had their painful conversation, Lisa was volunteering at a book fair at their children's prestigious private school and was manning the sales table with a woman named Deborah, whom Lisa had never met before. But for some reason Lisa opened up to Deborah about what was happening at home. Deborah was a woman of faith, so she told Lisa that she would be praying for a miracle in Lisa's marriage, and she asked Lisa whether Paul would be interested in attending a Christian men's group called the New Canaan Society, which a friend named Rocky had been attending. The day after Lisa met Deborah, she and Paul bumped into Deborah again, this time in the middle of a crowd of hundreds at the school's homecoming football game. Deborah mentioned the New Canaan Society to Paul and even gave Paul the number of her friend Rocky. Paul was skeptical about attending a Christian men's group, but he nonetheless looked it up online. The only thing he found was the eulogy that Jim Lane had delivered at the funeral of David Bloom,¹ who had been an NCS member. One line jumped off the screen at Paul: ". . . it's about men supporting each other to be better husbands and fathers— men being better men." Paul knew he needed that. So he called the number Deborah had given him and learned that we all met at 7: 00 A.M. on Fridays at Jim Lane's house in New Canaan, just fifteen minutes away from his own home. That Friday, Paul drove there, ostensibly to meet Rocky. He walked into a house filled with about two hundred men. Paul saw the four hundred or so shoes of those men on the front steps and learned that Jim's wife had only two rules regarding Friday mornings: No food in the living room and no shoes in the house. Paul never found Rocky that day.

The speaker that morning was Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. Since my wife and I attended Redeemer at this time, I introduced Tim that morning. His message was titled "How to Pray," and like all his messages it was as impressive as anything one was likely to hear. After Tim's message, my friend B. J. Weber got up and invited new attendees to stay for a short introduction to NCS. In describing his own background, B.J. mentioned that he did marriage counseling. That was all Paul needed to hear. He grabbed B.J. and scheduled an appointment for the following week. Amazingly, for the next several months, B.J. met with Paul and Lisa every single Friday, right after the NCS meetings.

¹ David Bloom was the former NBC White House correspondent who in 2003 died of an embolism in Iraq while embedded with the troops to cover the war. My story about him and his involvement with NCS can be found at <http://www.ericmetexas.com/writing/essays/but-sweet-will-be-the-flower-the-life-and-death-of-nbcs-david-bloom>.

As is often the case with this type of counseling, progress is hard to measure. Lisa brought a boatload of anger to these sessions, but she didn't communicate this very much and somehow it was never really dealt with. On the surface it seemed they were making progress. In January of 2004 they all agreed that the marriage was over the proverbial hump and even hosted a dinner at their home to thank those who had helped them along the way, including Deborah, Rocky, and B.J. Soon thereafter, B.J. asked Paul to get up in front of the hundreds of men at the annual NCS retreat at the Mohonk Mountain House in upstate New York to tell the happy story of how NCS had saved his marriage.

But he had spoken too soon, because despite these outward appearances, Lisa's anger and resentment had continued. In the next weeks, they somehow got the better of her and undid any apparent progress they had made. So in April of 2004, after all that had transpired, she delivered a staggering bombshell. She told Paul she wanted a divorce. The news was, of course, unexpected and devastating. But Paul was prepared for it in a way he had not been the previous October. His faith had been growing steadily all these months, even if Lisa's had not. Five months earlier, on December 5, he had officially made a decision to hand control of his life over to Jesus and prayed to accept Jesus as Lord. So he now understood that he had a tremendous battle ahead, but he also knew that he had weapons with which to wage that battle, along with the faith and the will necessary. Paul also believed that deep down Lisa wanted their marriage to work but thought it an impossibility. Because she believed she had tried everything over the years to repair their relationship, Lisa saw only two choices: to remain in a hopelessly and desperately unhappy marriage, or to get out. Paul saw a third path: a restored and happy marriage. But he knew that it required nothing less than God's intervention.

Through NCS speakers like Tim Keller, Dudley Hall, and Jack Deere, Paul had learned about the verse in the Old Testament Book of Malachi where God declares that he "hates" divorce. He also learned that God would "never leave him nor forsake him," loved him "unconditionally," and would never give him more than he could handle, and that "nothing is impossible with God." Paul also believed that God's will was for his marriage to be saved, and he was determined to do everything in his power to stand for his marriage and to trust God to do the rest. He vowed to never take off his wedding ring and never stop telling Lisa that he loved her. Paul also vowed not to move out of their home, despite Lisa's strong requests that he do so. The first person Paul went to after October 5 was one of his law partners who had become something of a father figure to him. Paul knew the man had been divorced many years before. The man said that his wife had asked him to move out and he always regretted that he had done so, because it had made the process too easy. His one piece of advice to Paul was to stay at home. Though the man was not a Christian, Paul was sure God had sent him and others to guide Paul on his journey through this trial.

Paul had been developing close friendships at NCS— something he came to realize had been absent in his life. So the first thing Paul did was tell the news to some of these close friends. Although NCS typically took a break during the summer, this year Jim Lane had decided to organize the men into small groups that would meet weekly over the summer to talk and pray. This was the goal of NCS, to connect men with other men in friendships, and NCS itself was now far too large for that. Paul joined one of these first NCS “Energy” groups and shared his story. When he did so, one man in the group, named Preben, who was a big proponent of the idea that we are to take “God’s promises” in the Bible seriously, said that because God was for marriage and “hated” divorce, we could stand with God against divorce. He would be with us as we did so. So the small group agreed to stand with Paul in prayer and stand on God’s promise. All they had to do was believe and pray. Paul’s small group continued to meet every Friday, to share their stories and troubles and to pray. So during their time together and in their private prayer times throughout those weeks, the group stood with Paul in faith against divorce.

Practically speaking, Paul had decided that one way he would live out his faith in that Scripture was by doing nothing to cooperate with the divorce Lisa wanted. He didn’t fight her, but neither would he lift a finger to help it along. But in July Lisa filed for divorce and a state marshal came to their door to deliver the papers. As it happened, Paul and Lisa’s five-year-old son answered the door that day, so it was from his son’s hands that Paul received the divorce papers. He had no choice but to go along, but again, he would do all he could to work against it. Most important, in his eyes, was his and the group’s continued prayers against it.²

Being able to “have faith” that what God says is true can sometimes be difficult, especially when circumstances and emotions work against what it says. In Paul’s case, the outward reality of the divorce was overwhelming, but because of the encouragement of his friends in his small group he was able to stand firm in his mind against what was happening. In fact, it was in the small group that the

² This idea of “standing on God’s promise” or “standing on God’s Word” stems from the idea that the Bible is the “Word of God.” Although the New Testament Greek word “Logos” is translated in English as “Word,” with a capital W, the real meaning is infinitely richer. In a standard dictionary, like Merriam-Webster, the first definition of “Logos” is “the divine wisdom manifest in the creation, government, and redemption of the world and often identified with the second person of the Trinity [Jesus].” The second definition of Logos is “reason, that in ancient Greek philosophy is the controlling principle in the universe.” So the word means far more than just “word” as in “the words of the Bible.” It means God’s wisdom and God’s “ordering principle” for the universe. Furthermore, in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the “Logos tou Theou”— the “Word of God.” So if someone talks about “believing the Word of God,” or “standing on God’s Word,” they typically mean believing what God has declared in the Bible.

seeds of the miracle that took place on Friday the thirteenth, August 2004 were planted.

On the morning of August 13, just two days after Paul's forty-third birthday, Preben, who had introduced Paul to the concept of "standing on God's promises," took the idea a bit further. Many Christians believe God will sometimes highlight a particular passage of Scripture for someone as he is praying or reading the Bible, such that it has a particular and personal application. That day, Preben told Paul that he felt in his own prayer time that God had highlighted something in Jeremiah 24 as a particular verse for Paul. People often enough get wild notions that in fact have nothing at all to do with God. So one must always be careful about taking someone else's word for such things. This is why Preben told Paul that when he got home that day, after the small group, Paul should himself pray over that Scripture, to see if he too felt that it was meant for him, from God. But Preben said that if he did feel that, the following week the group would "agree" with God on it and "stand on it," knowing that if this was indeed what God had spoken concerning Paul's situation, it couldn't fail— if only he believed it and "stood on that belief."

The verses in Jeremiah 24 that Preben strongly felt God meant for Paul and his situation referred to the exiled Israelites, whom God would restore to their land:

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

Preben was saying to Paul that he felt that in his prayer time over this issue, God had told him that these verses were God's promise to Paul that he, God, would redeem the situation, would restore Paul's marriage, and would return Lisa to her relationship with God and to her marriage with Paul. So Paul should ask God if these verses really were for him and if he felt they were he must take this promise from God as a promise directly to him and must believe it and "stand on it."

Most serious Christians— much less nominal Christians or non-Christians— would think all of this a bit strange. But then Preben said something else that was stranger still. He asked Paul whether he'd ever invited Jesus into his home. Paul wasn't sure what Preben was saying. Did he mean this generally, or somehow more literally? Preben meant it literally. He told Paul that after he got home he should go to his front door and pray that Jesus come into his home and then open the door so that Jesus could in fact come in. Paul certainly thought this strange, but when one is desperate one often finds that one's faith is stronger than one's doubts and one can believe things one would scoff at when things are fine. Besides, what harm could there be in it? Even if it was nothing more than a symbolic gesture, it was a nice idea.

So after the men's group ended, Paul drove back to his capacious house. His children, five and three, were with their nanny³ in the home, and Paul immediately went to his first-floor office to read the verses in Jeremiah that Preben had indicated. He found Jeremiah 24 and in praying about it he did indeed feel that this was God's promise to him, for Lisa and for their marriage. He decided then and there that he would remember this promise in his prayers, and he would remind God that he was in agreement with this— that he was believing God would indeed restore his marriage and Lisa's faith.

After he was finished praying in his office at about nine thirty that morning, Paul suddenly realized he had forgotten about the second thing Preben had said, about inviting Jesus into his home. He hadn't attached any special importance to it, but wanting to dot every i and cross every t, he walked to the side door of the house, which they used more often than the front door, and he stood in front of it. But when he now closed his eyes to pray, something truly strange happened. Paul told me that with his eyes closed, he could somehow "see"— and what he saw was a bright white figure standing *on the other side of the closed door*.

He said he couldn't make out features, but it was an extremely bright white figure whom he immediately believed to be Jesus, and it startled him, as it would anyone. So he opened his eyes. But with his eyes open he saw only the closed door. Then he shut his eyes again to pray and again immediately "saw" the white figure on the other side of the door. Paul knew he wasn't imagining this, and he knew it was a miracle. So with his eyes closed, and continuing to pray, he opened the door and "watched" the figure walk into his home. What happened next is hard to fathom, but Paul said that with his eyes closed, he walked with this white figure into every room in the house, seeing everything. He kept his eyes closed and simply followed. Paul watched as Jesus lifted his hands and prayed over every room. They walked upstairs— Paul's eyes were still closed— and did this in every room there as well. Then they went downstairs again, and the last room they entered was Paul's office. After Jesus had prayed over the office, Paul knew they were done, and he finally opened his eyes. He was alone. Paul assumed that since they had now prayed over every room, their mission was evidently accomplished. So he sat down at his desk, trying to fathom what had just happened. It was not easy to do. And so Paul closed his eyes to pray once more. In the very moment that he closed his eyes he again saw the figure standing in the middle of the room, and this time, his presence was different. It was overwhelming— so much that Paul got off his chair and fell to the floor, weeping, and embracing Jesus's ankles, undone with gratitude and joy and surrender.⁴

³ Long after this, Paul and Lisa learned that their Honduran nanny, a woman of strong Christian faith, had known something was wrong and was praying daily over their home and their children during this time.

⁴ While this event was occurring, Paul believed it was Jesus who had come into his home in response to his invitation. He has since come to understand that the

Paul never had anything like that happen again. But it encouraged him in his faith dramatically, as one would expect. From that moment forward he persisted more than ever in praying for his marriage and in expecting God to heal and restore it.

Paul found that after this amazing experience, God would routinely encourage him through others and through things he read. One day in the Friday prayer group a man named David Wagner showed up. David is known for being gifted in what some Christians call the “Prophetic,” which means that he often hears things from God when he prays for people. David brought another friend, Len Ballinger, who had similar spiritual gifts. Len prayed and said that when he prayed over Paul a passage from the Book of Hosea kept coming to his mind. The verses he mentioned were Hosea 2: 6– 7.

Therefore I will block her path with thorn bushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.”

Len said that Paul should pray this prayer when he was praying for his wife and their situation. Over the next weeks, Paul did this faithfully, and continued to pray and “agree with” and “stand on” the verses from Jeremiah too. When praying, he actually pictured in his mind a hedge of thorns growing up around her to protect her from anything that would harm their marriage or family. He imagined it growing so tall and thick that she could only look up toward God.

During this period, someone else in the group gave everyone a copy of a marriage book by our friend Emerson Eggerichs, titled Love and Respect. Emerson had actually tested the material in the book at some NCS meetings a few years before. Paul devoured the book and was particularly struck by a chapter about what to do if only one partner in a marriage wants it to heal. It said he should look at his spouse as though Jesus were standing right behind her and love her out of obedience to Jesus, not because he felt like loving her.

That October Lisa had started seeing a therapist. It was not to help her with her marriage, which she had already consigned to the ash heap of her past, but rather to help her with the new self she was hoping to find to go along with her new life. One day the therapist, who was not a Christian, threw a monkey wrench into Lisa’s future hopes and plans. As he listened to her talking about herself and what she had been feeling, he advised her to take responsibility for her own anger toward her husband. He said that it was not healthy to blame her husband and that she must own up to her own part in feeling that anger. Lisa says that for

white figure, which had no visible facial features, may possibly have been not Jesus but the Holy Spirit or an angel of the Lord, who are often associated with the color white and often appear as “faceless” figures in dreams and visions.

some reason this caused the beginning of a shift in her view of everything. She began to look at herself and her emotions more critically, and for the first time it enabled her to simply stop blaming Paul and focusing her anger on him.

Nonetheless, she was still firmly resolved to “move on,” and although their marriage was not yet officially over, Lisa was living her life as though it was: She had not worn her wedding and engagement rings for months and had been sleeping in another room in the house. She had even begun looking for a place to move with the children. Although Paul had instructed his divorce lawyer to move as slowly as possible so that God had time to work, the legal process was moving forward and it would be only a matter of time before things were finalized and the marriage would be over officially and legally. But Paul was still standing on God’s promises and praying the Scripture verses from Hosea and Jeremiah, believing that God would protect Lisa from any adulterous links to other men, and believing that God could and would restore her to the marriage and to God himself.

Then one Friday morning that November— it was the nineteenth of the month— Paul returned from an NCS meeting to deliver some startling news. He told Lisa that Jim Lane, who was the head of NCS, had just checked into a rehab for alcohol addiction. Jim Lane was the head of NCS, which Lisa at this time thought of as representing Christianity in their lives, even though she wasn’t too excited about NCS or its particular brand of Christianity. So when Lisa heard that Jim had humbled himself in this way, had admitted his problem and had taken measures to deal with it head-on, she was deeply affected. The news hit her extremely hard. She remembered thinking that if this Christian leader had the courage to be that open and honest about his problems, and if he believed that God really could help him, then perhaps God really could help her too. But actually it wasn’t just the idea that God could perhaps help Lisa. It was a much more startling idea that perhaps God could help the two of them, Lisa and Paul, heal their marriage. The news about Jim Lane seemed to suddenly cause her to shift from believing her marriage utterly dead and hopeless to being somehow within reach of God. Although she wasn’t at all sure why— nor at all in touch with the feelings that were now unleashed— Lisa was completely and utterly undone by the news about Jim that morning, and about what she saw as its implications for her and Paul. Somehow she felt herself shift subtly toward God, toward yielding her will and her problems to his care. As a result of this slight but significant change in her heart and mind, the emotions that came out of her now were practically overwhelming.

But the famously buttoned-up Lisa could not at this time allow herself to be overwhelmed. She simply had too much happening that day especially to open herself up to her sudden emotions. What lay ahead required her undiluted attention. When Paul had returned from the NCS gathering, Lisa was getting dressed and preparing for an especially crucial meeting in Manhattan. In fact, she was about to drive to the Stamford train station when Paul returned. She was

taking the train into the city to preside over an important presentation at a fund-raising luncheon for the Bowdoin Alumni Fund. So Lisa pulled herself together now, drove to the station, and got on her train. But as she sat on the train, headed to her important meeting, the feelings that had threatened to overwhelm her when Paul told her about Jim began to make good on their threat. She hardly knew what she was feeling or thinking, but her head was swimming and her emotions were beginning to get the better of her. There was so much riding on her presentation that she simply had to get ahold of herself. She couldn't. No matter how she tried, she couldn't get the upper hand on her disorienting emotions, neither as she rode into the city nor afterward. As a result, she failed to deliver the crackerjack presentation she had hoped to deliver. In fact, it was close to a disaster. Type-A personalities like Lisa weren't used to failing. But there was no getting around it: She was a complete emotional wreck.

After the terrible experience of the luncheon, Lisa thought she could recover herself by going shopping with a few friends, so she contacted some friends and did go shopping with them. But even this shiny weapon in her Fairfield County arsenal failed to deliver. But Lisa had one more idea. She contacted some friends in Stamford and made plans to have dinner with them. That should do it. She went to Grand Central, got on her train, and met her friends in Stamford at a favorite restaurant. But somehow Lisa's feelings continued to get worse. She was even beginning to feel physically sick. So right in the middle of dinner, she apologized to her friends and excused herself, saying she didn't feel at all well and simply had to go home.

But just now, when she got in her car to drive the fifteen minutes to her home, the dam burst completely. As she drove, Lisa began sobbing uncontrollably and screaming to God. "Save my life!" she screamed. "Save my marriage!" She screamed these phrases over and over in a way that she described as raw and guttural and completely unlike her. It was such an extraordinary unleashing of emotions that Lisa said she stopped the car six times and pulled over. She was actually afraid she wouldn't be able to make it home. She would pull over and then begin again, all the while crying hysterically, screaming, begging God to help her. She said it was as if she were praying from and with her whole body.

When she finally got home, Lisa went straight to bed, hoping that in the morning she would be able to get a handle on whatever it was that she was feeling. But she awoke feeling just as out of sorts as ever. But again reaching into her arsenal of type-A weapons, she decided she would go to the gym and take two spin classes, back-to-back. Intense exercise could always be counted on to blow away the cobwebs and make her feel great. But before she walked out the door, Paul saw her and let her know that he would be willing to see her therapist with her as she had asked. He had previously refused to do so.

Near the end of her second spin class, Lisa was about as physically spent as she had ever been. But the intense exercise had failed to deliver on what she had

hoped. She knew that she was the same bona fide mess she had been when she began, and now the final burst of exercise proved too much. As soon as the last song was over she stopped, utterly spent, and leaned over the handlebars with her eyes closed. But just as she did so, Lisa had a sudden, vivid vision of Jesus hanging on the cross. "It was at dusk," she told me. "And there was light coming from behind him." Lisa had never had a vision before in her life, but there on the exercise bike, with her eyes closed, she clearly saw Jesus on the cross. She said that she then knew for the first time in her life that what he had suffered wasn't just a general thing for all of humanity. It was something that Jesus had done just for her, and the realization undid her. All day long afterward, she remained an emotional wreck.

The following Sunday was her son's sixth birthday, and Lisa promised that she'd spend the whole day with him, no matter what. For some reason, he declared that he wanted to go to church that morning and see the movie *The Polar Express*, an animated film featuring the voice of Tom Hanks, that afternoon. Paul had been regularly taking the children to church without Lisa for months. Lisa was terrified because she felt that the people in their church who knew what was going on in her life would judge her. She had good reason to worry, because it had been the "advice" of people in this same church that had driven her away months before. But to keep her promise, she went anyway, and was surprised that everyone that morning was especially kind and loving to her. Later that day, she and Paul took their son and daughter to see *Polar Express*. The movie is not in any way Christian, but the message of the movie—believe—felt very personal to her. "I knew it was God," Lisa told me. "He pierced through that movie, with a one-word message to me: Believe! I didn't need to know how or when to believe. The message was just that I must believe and he would take care of the rest."

The next day, Paul came home from work and saw that Lisa had her wedding ring on for the first time in nearly eight months. When he asked her about it, she told him that it was a sign of her commitment to God "and to our marriage." Needless to say, Paul was stunned and even confused by these words. Then the following day, after sleeping for the last eight months in another bedroom, Lisa moved all her belongings back into the master bedroom. That night Paul got home very late from work and when he went into the bedroom where he had been sleeping alone for the previous eight months, he saw his wife asleep in their bed.