

Foreword

I first met Jill when she came to speak at the Inspire Women's Conference in Houston, Texas in 2002. Over that weekend, I came to know Jill as a vibrant speaker, rooted deeply in the Scripture yet speaking easily to the hearts of those fortunate enough to listen. In the years since then, I've learned that "speaker" is just one of the many hats that Jill so gracefully wears. She is, among many other things, a faithful Christ follower; a loyal wife; a caring mother; a discerning author; and, most personally to me, an incredible mentor, lifetime spiritual mother and friend. I am daily in awe of God's amazing grace, through which He has allowed Jill's continued presence in my life, and I am especially excited to give some words of introduction to her book *Fight for the Family*. Her insight and timely message resonate as particularly relevant with me.

The majority of my family life has been, in one way or another, one of recovery. From the aftershock of my mother's choice to take her own life, to the further unraveling that followed my father's attempts to find closure in the sanctuary of a new marriage, I have spent many years reeling from the absence of a strong family structure. Sometimes it takes not having

something to truly know how important it is; and for me, it was only by personally living through family dynamics God never intended that I was able to appreciate the vital importance of cultivating a family modeled after God's Word.

Now, years later, my children are grown and preparing to embark on families of their own. At a recent baby shower for my younger son's firstborn, my husband was asked to share something that he wished to pass down to the new parents. He said, "Always give your children a moral compass from which they can make decisions in life. You don't know where God will take your children or how long you can be in their lives, so it's vital to give them a compass from which they can make the right decisions."

As I sat there celebrating the introduction of a new life into our family, I thought about what he said and how much we were able to impart that compass into the lives of both of our boys. While my younger son is now facing his new role as father, my older son is on a work assignment in Japan. Immersed in a totally different culture and with distance separating him from his roots, I celebrate how he is soaring above the changes. The stark contrast between how *I* felt when I was uprooted from my country to come to America and how *he* is thriving while uprooted from his home and living across the Pacific is a testimony to the greatness of God who can redeem any family history through His power.

With *Fight for the Family*, Jill has written a book that is essential because nothing is more important for our future than strength in the household and for families to fulfill the purpose for which God designed them. The dynamics in a family have the potential either to destroy the next generation or to

empower it to fulfill God's plans. Some people are fortunate to have grown up in a godly family. Most are not. Today, at Inspire Women, I get to serve thousands of women—to uncover, rescue and restore potential. Though amazing in their service, I witness regularly the emotional triggers in leaders who survived families that wounded them. How many years have we spent recovering from wounds inflicted on us by our family when God designed family to be a blessing? What is happening with families everywhere not only impacts the dynamics within individual families but also has rippling effects into our communities, cities and world. Jill has observed the continuing breakdown of the first social structure designed by God to fulfill His purpose, and she is sounding the trumpet to protect the family.

Fight for the Family resonates with God's heartbeat because God fought for family when He sent His one and only Son to die for us so that we could one day have the biggest family reunion ever—in heaven! Is it any wonder that the devil will strike at the family, seeking to destroy the social unit that is closest to God's heart? In this day and age, with darkness creeping more and more into all aspects of our life and society, it has never been more important to uphold godly values—beginning with our own family. Drawing on both biblical wisdom and stories from everyday life, *Fight for the Family* demonstrates not only the importance of family but also a road map for making yours strong. I trust you'll enjoy reading it as much as I did!

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Author of *A Daughter's Destiny:*

Finding Redemption in the Midst of Broken Dreams

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Introduction

At one of the lowest times in their history, the children of Israel languished in exile, and the Holy City of Jerusalem lay in ruins. But after seventy years of estrangement from all that they held dear, they had been permitted to return to their homeland and encouraged to rebuild their city, its temple and their whole culture. The returning exiles faced a mammoth task of reconstruction that was exacerbated by the constant opposition of the local people. Nehemiah stepped up as a leader. It is fascinating that the Old Testament book bearing his name notes how when faced with a rebuilding enterprise of huge national, civic and religious dimensions, Nehemiah focused on what many people acknowledge is the fundamental building block of society—the family. He wrote:

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things

were going in Jerusalem. They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.” (Neh. 1:1–3)

In God’s plan Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to exhort Israel to rebuild the walls. He said, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!” (4:14). In other words, they were to “fight for their families!”

When I sat down to write my book *Fight for the Family* nearly forty years ago, I did so out of a deep concern for the erosion of family life that was so evident in all aspects of our society. And I used the story of Nehemiah, his problems, his struggles, his strategies, his motivation and above all his faith, as a metaphor for what I saw in our culture more than three decades ago—a struggle for family life.

My concerns have only increased in the intervening years. When I again took up my book, I was aware that much of what I had previously written was not only still relevant—it was perhaps even more relevant than when it first saw the light of day. So in this revision I have retained some of the original quotations and illustrations while simultaneously introducing more material that hopefully will encourage people in our day to “fight for the family.”

1

The Wall Has Fallen Down

Count if you can the homes that lie in ruins, the children who cry for their fathers, the wives who gaze in terror around the corner of tomorrow wondering how they will ever cope alone to face the foe. Like the ancient city of Jerusalem, the walls have fallen down around our families, and it is time for those who care to “rise up and build” (Neh. 2:18, KJV)!

Listen to the words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah.

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.” (1:1–3)

Nehemiah was engaged in a slightly dangerous occupation, to say the least. He was the king's cup-bearer (see 1:11), a job that meant tasting his majesty's brew to find out whether or not it had been poisoned. If Nehemiah dropped dead, everyone would know that it had been! He was also expected to smile happily throughout this extremely hazardous duty, since people apparently thought that even a slave could not fail to be charmed while serving the king. After receiving the bad news about the plight of the families left in Jerusalem, Nehemiah "sat down and wept. . . . For days [he] mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven" (1:4).

Who Will Fight?

In those days, a city without walls was not the sort of real estate people were looking for; without adequate protection, a town was vulnerable to anyone who wanted to march in and carry off a wife, rape a maiden or steal and plunder people's possessions. It was obvious to Nehemiah that the city must be rebuilt, beginning with the walls. God's family was in jeopardy and God's name was at stake. "Those who returned," Nehemiah was told, ". . . are in great trouble and disgrace" (1:3). God's reputation was on the line, for it was His city that lay wasted, His gates that were burned, His laws that had been forsaken and His promises that had been ignored. Someone needed to fight for the family.

One of the most frightening aspects of the disintegration of the family in our day and age has been the way God's people have begun to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The statistics have come to church. Maybe last Sunday

you even sat next to a new statistic and shared your hymnbook with him or her. Many of us have acclimated too quickly to the chilling wind of changing values and have simply buttoned up our topcoats of indifference to prevent the icy blast from touching our hearts. My question is this: When is someone going to get angry enough to do what Nehemiah did—fight for the family? As we see the walls falling down around us, we certainly should mourn this carnage of human relationships. But there is another factor that ought to move us to action: God’s reputation is at stake. As believers’ divorce, children rebel and the family disintegrates, God’s good name is brought into disrepute.

Faith as a Weapon

Nehemiah must have felt deep frustration when he heard the bad news his brother brought to him. I can see him wondering desperately what he, a mere slave, could do. He knew he wasn’t free to leave his place of “employment” and volunteer for foreign service. He couldn’t even show his deep distress in public, for to do so would mean certain death. But prayer and care can result in “dare”; and Nehemiah, albeit with a trembling heart, decided to trust the God of the miraculous to do the ridiculous and move the king’s heart so that he would grant Nehemiah’s petition—however wild it appeared to be. Believe it or not, Nehemiah decided to ask for a working vacation back home in Jerusalem—for an unspecified number of months! No wonder we read that he was “terrified” (2:2) when the king interrogated him about his fallen countenance as Nehemiah handed him his wine.

The king asked him, “Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.” Then said

Nehemiah, “I was terrified, but . . .” (2:2–3). The “buts” of the Bible are often beautiful bridges used to cross from the depths of despair to the mountains of hope. In this instance, Nehemiah’s “but” was the bridge from the fear of his earthly monarch to faith in his heavenly King! “But I replied, ‘Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.’ The king asked, ‘Well, how can I help you?’” (2:3–4). Oh, joy! Who is more than a conqueror now? The slave free in his heart because he is a slave to his God!

The Bible tells us that at this point Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven. You bet he did! Wouldn’t you have prayed harder and faster than you ever had in your whole life? Aren’t you challenged by Nehemiah’s daring spirit, regardless of the consequences to himself, and by his determination to think big and pray for dreams mixed with faith to turn into glorious realities? God is still God and able to bring glory to Himself out of any situation.

Nehemiah received his vacation—a free trip home, letters of safe conduct for his journey, timber for the gates of Jerusalem and the house that he would occupy and even army officers and cavalry to protect him (see 2:7–9)! The powerful, earthly monarch proceeded to inquire humbly of God’s slave, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” (2:6).

When will you return indeed! Hear Nehemiah’s reply: “So . . . I set him a time” (2:6, κῆν)! said Nehemiah. “I” set a time! We must believe it really happened, for history tells us it was so. We must applaud the audacity of faith! Is not our God a marvelous Hearer of prayer and Worker of miracles? History is surely “His story,” and He tells it as He wills. You see, God’s purposes were

involved. He was committed to working out His eternal designs despite the crumbling walls of His city, the bands of rebels brandishing their little dust-covered fists in His face and one of His favorite children apparently confined to servitude. As Nehemiah explains it, “The king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me” (2:8). Nehemiah believed, as the Scriptures say, that “the king’s heart is like a stream of water directed by the LORD; / he guides it wherever he pleases” (Prov. 21:1). And so Nehemiah went to Jerusalem.

Where to Begin

At this point I can imagine many of you are saying to yourselves, “Well, that’s nice, but Nehemiah was Nehemiah, and I am just little old me!” Perhaps you’ve looked around and seen the walls crumbling around the family. You have kept up with the reports through the media and consider yourself conversant with the facts. You can even quote learned gentlemen like Nathan Ackerman, who has said pessimistically:

I am a psychiatrist who has devoted a lifetime to studying emotional problems of family living. I have pioneered in the field of family therapy. From where I sit the picture of marriage and family in present day society is a gloomy one. Family life seems to be cracking at the seams and an effective mortar is nowhere available.¹

He said this in 1958! Imagine what he would say about marriage and family today!

As you have received news of people's relationships in danger or in trouble, perhaps even in your own family circle, I'm sure you must have chafed and fretted, not knowing what you could do to change the situation. There may have been a rape, a bereavement or a divorce. In fact, the walls have fallen down! Like Nehemiah, you may live too far away to help, or you may feel the situation is so bad that all is lost and in ruins. You probably don't think of yourself as some great crusading Nehemiah anyway. Even if you did, you believe the people involved have become too embittered to listen to you. But don't you think Nehemiah felt like that? There may be another problem. If you are a Christian and the walls have fallen down around your own marriage, it may be that you cannot envision ever holding your head up high again, let alone rummage among the rubble for a brick. As you sit in the dust of your disintegrated relationship, a slave of your circumstances, fettered into immobility, you simply ask to be left alone to lick your wounds and relive the "invasion" of your land and personal property over and over again. But don't you think Nehemiah felt like that?

Listen as he prays to the Lord God about the situation and admits his own culpability.

I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses. (1:6-7)

From his own personal captivity, Nehemiah acknowledged his own iniquity and his family's failures. He knew that this great

disaster was a result of their rebellion against God. But that was where he started—not finished. That was the beginning, not the end.

Nehemiah was not going home to tell his people he would build the wall for them; rather, he would help them begin to build it themselves. He knew the only way to accomplish this was to mobilize and involve every man, woman and child in the land. There needed to be something for every member of the family to do. He would encourage everyone to build up the wall in front of his or her own house (see 3:23). And that is how it has to be for us as well. We must start where we are with what we have. If the walls are to be rebuilt, everyone has to help, from the youngest to the oldest, from the richest to the poorest. Whatever has happened to us in the past must not be allowed to paralyze our present or flaw our future—failure is never final if God is on our side.

A friend of mine, whose husband had left her after many years of marriage, was sitting among the rubble of her life and contemplating ending it all. How useless she felt. How ashamed. What a failure she believed herself to be. Sharing her despair with another Christian, she received the following advice, “If you take your life, you will have to face Jesus Christ; and when you face Him, you will have to say, ‘You weren’t enough.’” She decided that night she would rather stay and face the mess than face the Master and say, “You weren’t enough.”

In other words, she picked up a brick. She decided to stay and start to rebuild instead of disintegrating and becoming part of the rubble around her.

Surveying the Walls: Assessing the Damage

Once safely back in Jerusalem, Nehemiah found himself some four-legged transport and set out alone in the night to survey the damage. He found the situation every bit as bad as he had feared. “So, though it was still dark, I went up the Kidron Valley . . . inspecting the wall,” he writes (2:15). In some places the destruction was so bad that there was not enough room for his donkey to get through (see 2:14). This did not discourage Nehemiah. In fact, during his practical and realistic look at the situation, God put some things “in [his] heart to do” (2:12, KJV).

If we will walk around our marriage as openly as Nehemiah walked around the walls of Jerusalem, surveying the damage, assessing the breaches and examining the cracks, we can be sure our God will put some things in our hearts to do as well! The problem comes when we will not do them, or, worse still, refuse to even examine our marriage because we are scared of what we may find. It’s easier to bury our heads in the sand and play ostrich, insisting, “It will never happen to us!” Never say never! Take a trip with God around your relationships and ask Him to help you to see things as He sees them. What He tells us to do about our situation will undoubtedly be quite different from the things He told Nehemiah to do about his, but the principles will be the same.

Motivation

Returning to the people the next day, Nehemiah spoke first to the officials, priests and nobles (see 2:16–17) in an effort to arouse the leadership from their lethargy. He knew it was critical

for the nobles to set an example, for if leaders don't lead, the flock won't follow. "Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace," Nehemiah exhorted them as they stood together among the ruins (2:17). "Yes, let's rebuild the wall!" the majority of men responded enthusiastically (2:18).

There were, however, some among the nobles who "refused to work" (3:5). Cocking their noble noses in the air, they disdained the whole venture. We don't know why those particular men refused to help. Maybe their homes were complete and their families doing fine; maybe that is why they couldn't get too excited about getting their hands dirty. If this was indeed the case, they were extremely selfish and shortsighted. To live in a nice house with inadequate defenses was an open invitation to the enemy.

History has shown that society is strong only when the marriage bond is held in honor. We simply cannot afford to sit tight and do nothing because "our" home is intact. Whether you are a Nehemiah, a noble or a nobody, each and every one must rise up and build, that we will "end this disgrace" (2:17).

Models

As we begin to get busy outside our own front doors, we will discover we are not alone. We'll notice the family who is busy building right there next to us. What a relief to realize that they have to work on the walls as well! Down through the years others have allowed us to observe them as they learned to lay a firm foundation for their marriage. Because of this we have tried to possess the courage, confidence and honesty to let others watch us as well. We all need models of growth and learning—not models of perfection!

I remember one particular couple who encouraged Stuart and me immensely. Their marriage was solid, and the atmosphere of their home gave us a comfortable sense of security. They were two people whose “no option out” commitment had stood the test of time. Opening their hearts and home to young couples, they shared their love—letting us watch it all. I remember looking at the little plaque on our door that said GUEST ROOM and thinking that it should have read OBSERVATION POST, for that is really how we felt about our visits. We found ourselves assimilating their attitudes and influences into our own relationships. We couldn’t help but overhear the honest sharing of the truth about things even when a lie would have been so much easier to tell; and we noted their saving sense of humor as they refused to take themselves too seriously. Most of all, we found ourselves wanting to emulate their determination to “make it work” at all costs, because they loved the Lord and honored His name more than they honored their own!

I didn’t realize how fully I had absorbed their example until one day after Stuart had just come home from work. Taking off his coat, he asked me, “Did you call Mrs. Jones as I asked you to?” I had not! Caught off guard and not wanting him to know about my carelessness, I quickly answered, “Yes!”

As soon as it was out, my fertile and deceptive mind went to work, plotting a manipulation of my husband’s movements out of the kitchen and upstairs to his study so that I could call Mrs. Jones! Safely out of sight, I scurried into the living room to deliver the important message to the woman in question. She wasn’t home!

Standing in the middle of the kitchen, I realized I had told Stuart a lie! After a decade of missionary work, time spent in

the pastorate and years of marriage—yes, after all that practice time—I had lied to my husband! That is not to say there had not been other lies over the years. Some had been dealt with and some, alas, had not; but today was today, and all that I had, and I needed to decide what to do.

Appearing at the top of the stairs, Stuart inquired again, “Jill, did you call Mrs. Jones?”

“Yes,” I answered brightly.

My husband retired to his desk and its pile of letters. I knew that Mrs. Jones would soon be home, so Stuart didn’t need to know about my silly deception. Surely it wouldn’t matter if I just took care of it and continued on my merry way. But I knew better than that. It did matter. It mattered very much.

It killed me to do it, but after practically crawling up the stairs, I poked my head around the corner of the study and said, “Stuart, I didn’t call Mrs. Jones!”

My husband looked at me and simply said, “I know!”

We smiled at each other, and I retreated downstairs to make the call. I share this with you not because it makes me feel good to tell you I told a lie, and not because I’m smug about owning up to it, but simply because I want you to know that every Christian couple must learn the building trade. I tell you this because I want you to see me outside my own front door building up the wall.

One of the foundation stones of a good marriage is honesty—an attempt to always tell each other the truth. Lying about little things can soon grow into deceptions about big things, and this makes a definite crack in the wall! There is no such thing as a couple who does it all right, but there are couples who refuse to allow it to go all wrong!

“You mean you and Stuart squabble?” asked a friend incredulously as I recounted a difference of opinion we had had.

“Sometimes,” I replied.

“You mean you don’t agree on everything?” asked another.

“Of course not,” I answered again, recalling Ruth Graham’s succinct statement when asked the same question: “If Billy and I agreed on everything, one of us would be unnecessary!”

I thought of the time we had been staying in the OBSERVATION POST and our friends had butted heads about some irritating habit the wife had. Glaring at her husband over the kitchen sink she had come out with a quick flash of grim humor. “Harry,” she had said ominously, “you had all the world to choose from, and you chose me—now be satisfied!” She was right. He had had all the world to choose from and had freely chosen her as his life partner, for better or for worse—there was no argument about that! It was the “now be satisfied” bit that needed thinking about!

God Is on Our Side

If I call myself a Christian, I need to believe that there is “no option out” of my marriage. If I would seek to honor His name then I have to “work out” in my family what God has been “working into my heart.” God is on our side, you see; marriage is His idea, and therefore He stands behind it. Because that is the case, He has promised to make available to us the power we will need to “now be satisfied!” He will show us how to adapt, accept each other and work on our differences together.

I believe a Christian home should be like a womb, giving the growing embryo of our marriage a place to safely develop, a

space to move and stretch, to cry and struggle until finally our relationship is fully developed and mature. By the same token, I believe a divorce is like an abortion—a thing that never should be, an end instead of a beginning, a severing of life. God hates divorce (see Mal. 2:16), although He makes it a legal possibility for those who refuse to allow Him to deal with the obstinate hardness of their hearts. Thus, we have to face the faces. Marriages have fallen apart, but life must go on. So we have to clear up the mess the best we can and, God helping us, rise up and rebuild.