



Hope for Families Everywhere

China—A Family Transformed

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China: A Family Transformed

by Mr. Duan, translated by Will Brown

We have been married for over sixteen years now, and it is only by God’s grace that we are still together. Before I trusted in the Lord, many times the thought came into my mind, “I want to divorce my wife.” Even though I had these thoughts often, I never mentioned them; I only sought to force myself to maintain an unsatisfying marriage.

After eleven years of marriage, my wife and I began to argue more and more, and we began to experience more and more isolation and non-communication. Often I was inclined to just ignore her. I felt like she never listened to me or heard me. I would

belittle her, and my attitudes toward her were very cold. Thankfully we shared a son together; he seemed to be holding our relationship together.

Although I had my own work pursuits, I wasted lots of time filling in the loneliness of my heart. Some people fill their loneliness with affairs, liquor, cigarettes, or drugs. But I chose to fill my lonely heart with mahjong, online games, and TV. I would go and play mahjong with friends, starting on Saturday morning and playing until Sunday. I felt easily bored and was constantly switching between different kinds of entertainment.

At that time, it wasn’t just when I was alone that I played these games; I would play at night while my kid was doing his homework. I wouldn’t let him watch me, but of course, he would sneak looks at my games. When he started looking at my games, I would yell at him loudly, and sometimes when he wouldn’t listen to me, I would hit him. To sum it up, we were a family of three, and I had a bad relationship with my wife and with my kid.

In October 2016, my wife notified me through WeChat that we ought to just get a divorce. I thank God that while our marriage was broken, God began to move and save our marriage.

China—A Family Transformed continued



The Duans with FamilyLife representative Will Brown

On November 18, 2016, my wife invited me to attend a couples retreat sponsored by FamilyLife, a Weekend to Remember. That night was a turning point for my life. I returned home with this thought in my mind: “I want to believe.” It was so moving that I couldn’t sleep. The next morning, the pastor gave a talk called “The Power in Marriage” and at the end asked who was willing to trust Jesus. I had been pushed to make a decision for Christ before, but this time was different. It was from within me that I wanted to believe in Jesus.

In the afternoon, we had a time when we stood up and made a vow to each other to commit to our marriages. We stood up and faced each other as a couple and completed these vows together and cried. It was at this point that our marriage began to be restored.

After we returned home and ate

supper, we went to bed early and talked until about 3:00 a.m. This was the first time I said “I’m sorry.” A few days later I also apologized to my son. After this, it was like magic—I was suddenly completely attracted to God, slowly learning to pray and read the Bible. We began to have a Sunday night family worship time. We led our son in reading a book to help him prepare for adolescence. My wife and I also led a couples small group. Eventually I was leading my son in reading the Bible every morning for thirty minutes and praying for him. I began to love more and more reading the Bible and praying.

There have been many changes in my habits: No more playing online games; after forty years of drinking liquor, I have stopped. My bad temper has slowly changed, and I rarely lose my temper. My wife is more gentle, submitting. My son feels safer now,



Mr. Duan enjoys a day of fruit picking.

and he is more willing to submit to his parents. Now our family has a feeling of love to it.

I thank the Lord for His calling on me. After trusting the Lord, I sensed the Lord calling me to study in seminary. Another area I am thankful for is this: This year God has gifted us with a new baby. Our son is fifteen years old, and I am fifty years old. God’s grace is enough for us, and He has given us courage to be able to accept this gift.

These things all occurred because God willingly pursued us, loved us, prepared salvation for us, and moved us to believe Him. We still have many areas of weakness; we still have differences as a couple and conflicts with our son. But we believe that our marriage and our family will more and more become pleasing to God.

Latin America: Paying it Forward

by Jayna Richardson

Eduardo and Diana Rivadeneira never could have predicted the path God had planned for them. After ten years of marriage, their relationship was broken. Years of alcohol, drugs, and infidelity had led them to separate. But everything changed when they turned to Jesus in the midst of their hopelessness and placed him on the throne of their lives. After God restored their marriage at a Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway in Ecuador, they made a pact to help as many other couples as possible, and they're experiencing the joy of being used by God to make a difference.

That first Weekend to Remember was the spark that led to more than twenty years of serving as volunteers for FamilyLife. Over the years, the Rivadeneiras have used FamilyLife tools such as small-group studies, Art of Marriage®, and Stepping Up® to reach out to Hispanic communities in the US and Latin America, and they've been trained to speak at FamilyLife events.



“God placed in our lives FamilyLife’s tools, which led to the restoration of our marriage. This, in return, stirred up a passion in us for helping couples and families who have suffered and are going through what we went through,” says Eduardo.

Over the years, God gave them many opportunities to minister to hurting couples, and they saw Him restore relationships and families time and time again. One couple whose marriage was turned around told them, “You are an essential part of the process that God has used to restore our family.”

After twenty years of volunteering, Eduardo and Diana felt God leading them to an even higher level of commitment: raising support to join FamilyLife as full-time staff.

“At first, we wanted to trust our own abilities and strength. Oh, how wrong we were! We planned our best human strategies... but it yielded very little results. Then we understood that it had to be God’s way, in His strength, in His time. We learned to do our part and wait on Him.”

The process of raising enough monthly support to join full-time staff took Eduardo three years (Diana is still working toward this goal), and it wasn't without plenty of challenges. But it also came with happy surprises as God brought certain donors that the Rivadeneiras never would have expected.



When asked what they envision for their future plans as FamilyLife international representatives, Eduardo replied, “We have learned not to plan for ourselves because experience has shown us that our plans are limited, but God’s plans always exceed our expectations. What we are aware of is that we have to be prepared, ready, and willing for what He calls us to do.”

However God chooses to use the Rivadeneiras, they are passionate about God and about pointing every couple who comes across their path to Him.

Eduardo and Diana never imaged that when God restored their marriage more than two decades ago that He would have so much more planned for them than simply having a better marriage. Their gratitude gave rise to a hunger for sharing His Word and seeing others experience the same miracle. As Eduardo says, “God’s plans are always perfect!”

“God’s plans are always perfect!”

2022 Events Calendar

Please note that events may be cancelled or delayed due to COVID-19

Europe (Eastern)

- Romania Mar 11-13, 2022 Weekend to Remember Predeal
- Slovenia Feb 4-6, 2022 Marriage seminar Veržej
- Slovenia June 24-28, 2022 Men's hiking retreat
- Slovenia June 27-July 1, 2022 Men's hiking retreat
- Slovenia July 25-29, 2022 Men's hiking retreat

Europe (Western)

- Germany Feb 5, 2022 Marriage Mentoring Training. Bietigheim-Bissingen
- Germany Feb 7-8, 2022. Marriage Mentoring Training. (online)
- Germany Feb 19, 2022. Marriage seminar Heinebach
- Germany Feb 19, 2022. Marriage Mentoring Training. Nuremberg
- Germany Feb 26, 2022 Marriage seminar Lörrach
- Germany Mar 11-13, 2022 Weekend Getaway Trippstadt
- Germany Mar 19, 2022 Marriage Mentoring Training Berlin
- Germany Mar 26, 2022 Marriage seminar Belgium
- Germany May 7, 2022 Marriage seminar Breitscheid
- Switzerland Feb 18, 2022. Prepare/Enrich seminar Zurich
- Switzerland Mar 12-13, 2022 Weekend Getaway Zurich
- Switzerland Apr 29-May 1, 2022. Weekend Getaway A-Imst
- Switzerland May 14-15, 2022. Weekend Getaway Zurich
- Switzerland May 20, 2022. Marriage course
- Switzerland July 2-3, 2022 Weekend Getaway Zurich
- Switzerland Sep 8, 2022 Parenting course
- Switzerland Sep 16, 2022 Marriage course
- Switzerland Sep 16-18, 2022. Weekend Getaway Wildberg
- Switzerland Sep 19, 2022 Prepare/Enrich seminar Zurich

Middle East and North Africa

Due to sensitive nature of these countries, please contact global@familylife.com for further information.

North America

United States—Phone 1-800-358-6329 or www.familylife.com for a complete listing of conferences.

- Canada Feb 25-27, 2022 Weekend to Remember Victoria, BC
- Canada Mar 4-6, 2022 Weekend to Remember Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON
- Canada Mar 25-27, 2022. Weekend to Remember Waskesiu Lake
- Canada Apr 1-3, 2022 Weekend to Remember Lake Louise, AB
- Canada Apr 22-24, 2022 Weekend to Remember Montebello, QC
- Canada Apr 24-Jun 5, 2022. Marriage course (online)
- Canada May 13-15, 2022. Weekend to Remember Moncton, NB

From a recent event in New Zealand:

“We arrived in the throes of breakdown. This course forced us to examine why we are even here. I guess you could simply say it has given me hope. Thank you.”

“Caused me to stop and confront issues instead of avoiding issues. Healing.”

“Our second conference. You saved our marriage.”

“I’d say we were in the natural drift to isolation—the retaliation state. I now feel hope and renewed vision for the future. We really needed this investment into our marriage.”

New Resource

What's the Point?

Asking the Right Questions About Living Together and Marriage

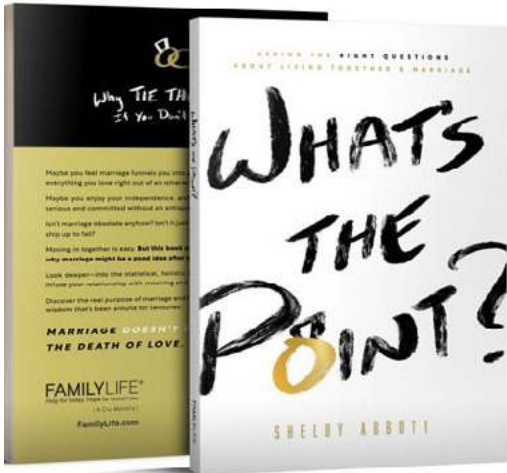
By Shelby Abbott

Marriage doesn't have to be the death of love.

Maybe you feel marriage funnels you into a traditional norm—one that will suck everything you love right out of an otherwise healthy, happy relationship. Maybe you enjoy your independence, and you're convinced you can be 100% serious and committed without an antiquated institution.

Isn't marriage obsolete anyhow? Isn't it just an expensive way to set your relationship up to fail? Moving in together is easy. But this book explores the side you might not hear: why marriage might be a good idea after all.

Look deeper—into the statistical, holistic offerings of marriage and how it can infuse your relationship with meaning and value. Discover the real purpose of marriage and how your life together can thrive using wisdom that's been around for centuries.



To learn more or order, visit <https://shop.familylife.com/p-5899-whats-the-point.aspx>.

Canada—Marriage Mentoring

by Jayna Richardson

After thirty years of listening to couples and working with pastors, FamilyLife Canada recognized a common gap in marriage ministry. Many churches offer both pre-marital counselling and crisis intervention, but little is offered for those in between who could use encouragement, wise input, and practical help. That's where Marriage Mentoring comes in!

More than 2,000 people have gone through FamilyLife Canada's Marriage Mentoring training, which is a three-hour training, available online. After completing the training, a couple is ready to mentor another couple,

meeting once a month for a year. During these approximately ninety-minute meetings, they lead the mentee couple in having guided conversations on essential topics using FamilyLife Canada's Conversation Guide.

The curriculum tackles issues that especially trip up marriages in the early years. Couples often think their challenges are unique and can feel alone in their struggles. Through a series of 14 focused conversations, marriage mentoring normalizes those issues and knits couples more closely into church community.



One couple named Mark and Val were struggling in their marriage; they'd have arguments that went on for days and really felt they were drifting apart. They signed up to be mentored by a couple who had gone through the

Marriage Mentoring training and met with them over the course of a year. They put into practice the things they were learning. They started praying together at night and learned ways to resolve their conflicts. And their marriage improved so drastically that they decided they wanted to pass on what they learned to other couples. So they went through Marriage Mentoring training and are now mentoring other couples, and they even serve in a mentoring ministry within their local church.

One mentor couple said, “We have

been encouraged by the process of mentoring to realize that our marriage itself is a tool in God’s hands.”

A mentee couple said, “We got wisdom from a couple who are more seasoned in marriage. We will cherish the lessons we learned and the friendships we obtained!”

Who is qualified to become a mentor? As the FamilyLife Canada team says, “If you have a healthy marriage and a heart for others, your life experience qualifies you to be a mentor. You don’t need a perfect

marriage, just a willingness to share your story with another couple and listen to theirs.”

Marriage Mentoring has caught on in other places around the world too, including the United States, New Zealand, and China. This simple concept of couples mentoring other couples is being used by God in powerful ways to strengthen marriages everywhere.

To learn more, visit <https://www.familylifecanada.com/become-a-mentor/>.

Central America—Training Men who are Stepping Up

by Jayna Richardson

When the Church of God denomination in Central America began looking for materials to strengthen their outreaches to families and men, they came across FamilyLife, and an effective partnership was formed. Within the last nine months, around 300 men in leadership within the Church of God in seven Central American countries have been trained by FamilyLife leaders to use

FamilyLife resources in their church and community. With trained leaders now in place spanning from Panama to Belize, FamilyLife in Central America is in a position to reach many more struggling families—and they’re already starting to see God at work through this partnership.

This strategy of training church leaders throughout Central America began

with Stepping Up®, FamilyLife’s video resource that empowers men through gospel-centered living to be true heroes in their families and communities.

As men in leadership in the Church of God in seven countries (Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) were trained to use Stepping Up for outreach, they





discovered the resource was having a positive effect on their own lives and families, too.

One pastor in Panama said, “Stepping Up has helped me a lot... to analyze and form myself based on the Word of God, to move forward and continue believing in the promises of God in my life.”

Another attendee said, “The Stepping Up seminar has been a great blessing to my life and my family. I learned what it is to be a brave man—a man who faces challenges and difficulties in life. It has helped me to grow. I know that it has also been a blessing for many other

men. I thank God for all that He has done and will continue to do.”

The men were blessed by the Stepping Up material and were excited to consider the opportunities to help spread the message of biblical manhood to others. Leaders in Honduras, Panama, and Costa Rica have already held additional events, and more outreach opportunities are planned for 2022.

“We expect 2022 to be a full year of movement for [men’s ministry],” said Orlando Madrigal, FamilyLife leader in Costa Rica.

In addition to working alongside the

Church of God denomination, the Assemblies of God in Costa Rica and Honduras have also shown interest in partnering with FamilyLife and using Stepping Up. Twenty-five leaders attended a training in the fall, with more to come.

Only God knows how these church leaders and laymen throughout Central America will go on to impact their own families, churches, and communities, but one thing is certain: They are stepping up to God’s call on their lives and experiencing the blessings that come with walking in obedience to Him.