

**Radical Love...Forever Changed**  
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## Introduction

### “I’m Sick of Myself!”

This is a book about love. Before you close it and reach for something else, please stay with us for a moment. You see, we can assume you were going to put this book down because we would have done the same.

We live in a culture obsessed with love. It’s everywhere! Movies, song lyrics, books and plays, all portray love in as many varied ways as there are stars in the sky. There are almost 100,000 books in Amazon.com’s Self-Help section; many of them either have “love” in the title or are sub-titled as addressing an aspect of love. So why would we endeavor to write yet another book on love?

Because even with all of the information available to us on love, there are still too many Christians who say, “I’m sick of myself!” Too many people are going through life trying to be one person on the outside, with a wilted soul on the inside. People who know in their heads they are supposed to love others like Jesus loves, but feel hopeless when it comes to living out that command.

The root of this problem is deception. This book was written to free you from the deceptions keeping you from experiencing God’s radical, life-changing love.

*Without the power of the Holy Spirit, radical love is not possible.* We believe Satan would like you to camp out in one of two places of deception:

1. Belief that you have received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, when in reality you have not.

-or-

2. If you have received the Holy Spirit, Satan would like you to believe that God’s Holy Spirit does not have an important function in your daily life.

Either way, whichever camp you might be in, if you are not fully engaged with the Holy Spirit, you will **not** be able to experience God’s radical love. You will find yourself in a place of fear, misery, bitterness, anger or frustration.

It is time to stop living your life trying to be one person on the outside, with a wilted soul on the inside. It is time for you to stop wishing things would be different and for things to start being different.

The people around you, your life situation, your job, your kids, your spouse, or your family do not have to change at all in order for **you** to be different. It begins with learning the truth about your relationship with God and the truth about love.

## Donna's Story

I am a hopeless romantic. I "love" watching the W Channel; especially curled up with a warm blanket on a cold winter day. I prepare for my experience with some freshly popped corn (dripping in butter, of course) and a warm frothy drink. Then, I settle in with my favorites; perhaps a good Julia Roberts double-header that kicks off with *Pretty Woman*. You know those type of movies.

I always envisioned what it would be like when my "Once Upon a Time" day came. I just knew that my knight in shining armor would show up and rescue me from the mundane world. *Then* I would start my *real* life. Imagine my surprise when I married my Prince, and he wasn't so charming, and my happily-ever-after never arrived.

I have been married for 20 years. There were times that I wrestled with the question, "What if I married the wrong man?" Comparing my man and my marriage to what I saw in other relationships led me to conclude that I had "settled." As sick as this makes me feel to recall, at times I contemplated divorce because of what I *believed* love was *supposed* to be.

Statistics from The Barna Research Group<sup>1</sup> report that between thirty to thirty-five percent of Christian marriages will fail. In Dave Carder's book, *Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs*<sup>2</sup>, Carder notes that adultery and divorce rates in the evangelical population are nearly the same as the general population in the United States. Within the first three years of Christian marriage, a large percentage of women will have an affair because of the disillusionment in which they entered marriage.

*Marriages and other relationships fail every day because of disillusionment about love.*

One day towards the end of 2008, a verse from Scripture seemed to leap off the page at me. It was 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" I felt the need to spend some time studying it. In doing so, I realized God wanted me to apply the truth in this verse to my life in a unique and personal way in the upcoming year.

When I noticed this scripture (that I had read many times before) seemed suddenly *more* noticeable, I did some serious study on these words and their context. In doing so, I had two strong impressions on my heart.

1. God was commanding me to live as a new creation, and
2. Living as a new creation was only possible if I was walking in the Holy Spirit's power.

Basically, God was telling me I needed to get to know His Holy Spirit better.

Oddly enough, from the time Kim and I first met, God consistently teaches us similar lessons in our personal lives. (I've been reminded more than once of how Jesus sent the 12 disciples out in pairs.) Around the time I received the command and promise of new life through my 2 Corinthians verse, without the full realization of what we were doing, Kim and I had embarked on one of the most critical "search for truth" excursions in our entire faith lives to date.

We have spent the past year uncovering what I would call the worst conspiracy ever contrived. You might ask, "What could be worse than the shameful atrocities led by Hitler or the attacks of the Al-Qaeda network in 2001?" Certainly, the schemes orchestrated by those people killed millions. So what could be worse than the death of millions?

Here it is: Many who consider themselves to be saved - are not. If you consider yourself to be a Christian, it would be safe to say you believe that on the day of your death you will find yourself in heaven. What if, on that day, you find yourself standing in front of Jesus and He says to you, "Depart from me, I never knew you?"

*My heart aches to ensure that we shine light on Satan's strongest weapon...deception about your eternity.*

Now just to be clear, Kim and I weren't "the" ones who first discovered, or even exposed, the truths we present in this book. The truth is thousands of years old. However, many in this generation have been and continue to be greatly deceived.

A new creation is, indeed, being formed in me. I am learning to love through the example of my Christ. I have realized that although I cannot make the salvation decision for my children, or for anyone else, through example and my testimony I can show the narrow path; the one that leads to eternal life with Christ.

By the grace of God I did not end my marriage. Divorcing my husband would have been a huge mistake. Kelly is a good man and I love him with all my heart. This is not a book about marriage, but if you are married, I pray that at the end of these pages God will do a transforming work in your heart and your marriage will be impacted.

## **Kimberly's Story**

I began gymnastics classes when I was 3 years old. By age 9, I was labeled the "superstar" on our team and started training seriously, with Olympic dreams appearing very real to me. A major injury at age 15 ended those dreams. At the time, it felt like incredible failure. Had I wasted the past 12 years of my life and countless dollars striving towards something that would never come to be? It was extremely disappointing. Even though the decision to stop the intense training in my sport was mine, I felt like something was taken from me.

Shortly after my accident, I received a call from the gymnastics coach at my high school. She heard that I was no longer training for USA Gymnastics and asked if I

would consider competing on the high school team. “High school gymnastics?” I remember thinking. It was a huge step down from the level of competition I was used to.

My failed expectations of my gymnastics career initially clouded my enthusiasm for deciding to compete for my high school. Looking back, pride and vanity were likely fighting for position in my young, teen-aged brain. However, I could not be more thankful to Coach Malunowe for making that phone call. In addition to developing life-long friendships with terrific people, by keeping up my gymnastics skills throughout high school, I was awarded a full athletic scholarship to Penn State University. Penn State is a place I would not have been able to go without having the scholarship.

*The outcome of my gymnastics career wasn't at all what I had expected.*

A number of years later, my husband and I celebrated the birth of our first son. I previously had a miscarried pregnancy, so when this baby came out with his 10 fingers and 10 toes, I rejoiced that all was well. But all was not well. By the time he was 16 months old, we recognized some significant developmental delays. We began to see doctors and specialists. At age 3 he was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

*At that point and every day since, our lives as parents have taken a very different path than what we had expected as we began our family.*

I give you these two examples from my own life to get you thinking about your own expectations. Has your life ended up somewhere that you never expected? Has it left you feeling ripped-off, bitter and frustrated? You are not alone.

The word *expectation* means ‘having a strong belief’ that something will happen.

Expectations can be wonderful when they are fulfilled, or devastating when they go unmet. When we talk about love, automatically we start forming images in our mind. Those images are often based on our past experiences, combined with what we believe to be true about love. Quite simply, we have expectations about love, don't we?

It is likely some component of your expectations, fulfilled or not, that would cause you to want to run from this book. We truly hope you don't. Donna and I come from very different backgrounds, have different life experiences, and are created as uniquely as any two of God's creations can be. Yet, over the past two years, we have been on a very similar journey. One that has ignited within us a flame burning white hot with a need to bring truth to the deceptions that cause Christians to miss out on the radical, life-changing love that God planned from the beginning of time.

## **Lay Down Your Expectations**

We are going to ask you to do something that may be slightly unfamiliar to you. As you travel through the pages of this book we ask that you suspend all of your former thoughts for a while. Pray, and ask God to keep your mind open to *anything* He might

want to say to you. In Jeremiah 33:3 God urges us saying, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.” God can’t tell you something you do not know if you already think you know it.

This is NOT another “how-to” book. The journey God has planned for you as you wrestle through the very truths we have wrestled through will be your unique journey. One thing you can trust is we believe that truth in this world comes from having a personal, loving, very real relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Our only truth comes directly from the Word of God. Therefore, we ask you to test everything you learn here against the Word of God.

We do not believe in any magic formula, but we do believe in hard work of the soul. If you bear emotions and behaviors that do not resemble love; if you find it downright exhausting to try and keep up the facade of loving others; if you are wilted inside - then we invite you to join us for a radical journey.

Allowing God’s Holy Spirit to guide and direct you is the only way to true and lasting change. He has never allowed us to teach something we have not first learned and experienced ourselves. We are continually amazed that as different as we are, He has brought us together to experience His radical love and has enabled us to deliver this message to you. A message that we pray will leave you forever changed.

## **PART 1: Foundational Truths**

## Part 1 Introduction

### The Spicy Meatball

Anyone up for some meatballs? We are! We aren't talking about the kind of meatballs you serve up with your Monday-night spaghetti dinner; we are talking about spicy meatballs that will make your head spin and your throat feel fiery!

Tuesdays are by far the greatest day of the week for us. Our Tuesdays begin at 5:30 am, gathering for prayer with two close friends. The four of us greet the sun and the new day by praying for our families, our city, our nation and whatever else is laid upon our hearts. Later in the day, after the kids are off to school, we reconvene at one of our homes. We spend a few hours talking about what God is doing in our lives. During our time together on Tuesdays it is not uncommon for one of us to come with a question or statement that is what we like to call a "spicy meatball."

A spicy meatball is a something for which there is no easy, pat, run-of-the-mill, answer that can be given. Wrestling through a spicy meatball requires some tough spiritual work. Spicy meatballs don't go down easy.

During the course of this book, we suspect some of the things that you are challenged with might seem very much like a spicy meatball to you. We address deceptions, and you might find you have fallen under their power. This can be tough to digest. The good news is that lies will be replaced with biblical truth.

*It would seem pretty hopeless to learn you have been deceived if you did not have truth presented in its place.*

In Part 1, we address some big meatballs regarding the foundations of our faith. What you hold to be true about the answers to the questions presented impacts your ability to experience God's radical love *and* your ability to give that love to others. Nervous? Don't be. In our experience, when God has taken us through the hard work of tackling a spicy meatball, there has always been growth and freedom on the other side.

1. "Do you believe God speaks to you?" Notice the question isn't, "Do you believe God speaks to others?" It is important to know if you believe He speaks to you. To be quite blunt, there is no way you can learn how God wants you to love others if you do not believe that He speaks to you. Together we will look at how we know this to be true, and break some deceptions regarding God's communication.
2. "Does God have an individualized, detailed plan for your life that you are searching for?" Many people spend their entire lives searching for God's specific plan for them. If this describes you, then you need to know that you are probably wasting your time. In doing so, you absolutely are missing out on the fullness of God's love for you in the present. We will see what His Word reveals about this issue.

3. "Do you understand the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in your life?" From the beginning of creation, God's Holy Spirit has had a critical role as a provider of life and the only agent through which change can take place. If you desire to change your behavior to that which reflects God's love, *you need His Holy Spirit.*
4. At the end of chapter 4, you will find yourself face to face with one simple question. "Are you saved?" Is it possible to have a head knowledge of Jesus, even recognize Him as the Messiah, but not receive the gift of eternal life? The deception we examine in this chapter is perhaps the greatest deception Satan could possibly have someone under. The deception that his or her eternity is secure.

Your answers to these questions will prove foundational for the transformation that will or will not happen in your heart. You can then move confidently into the second part of the book, where we work through what God's love looks like in action and examine what holds you back from being able to love others in the radically different way He desires. Will your change be radical?

### **Why Radical?**

Merriam-Webster defines the word **radical**<sup>1</sup> in this way:

- a** : marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional : extreme
- b** : tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions
- c** : of, relating to, or constituting a political group associated with views, practices, and policies of extreme change
- d** : advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs

We did not simply select the word radical to describe God's love because we liked the way it sounds. We have personally been shaken up, turned upside down, knocked flat on our faces, been held close, and then shaken up some more through the transformation of our own hearts. We have realized the word radical perfectly describes God's love. When you have it, you will know it and you won't be able to stop it. You will be radically different.

You may want to have your Bible and a notebook handy as you read through this book. We expect God will challenge you with your own spicy meatballs as we get down to business.

In our ministry, we have heard women say things like, "I want to change, but...

...you don't know my husband."

...you don't know my circumstances."

...my kids are too far gone."

... \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your own reason why change is tough for you)."

We said it in the introduction and it bears repeating because this is one truth you MUST grasp hold of if things are ever going to be different for you.

**The people around you, your life situation, your job, your kids, your spouse, or your family do not have to change at all in order for you to be different.**

Right now, today, you can begin the process of transformation from someone who is called a Christian but certainly doesn't feel the joy of Christ, to someone who is living out your salvation with the abundant joy that Christ came to give.