

“I can only imagine the number of marriages that will be saved or strengthened by this helpful book. Grief pummels even the strongest marriage. I’ve felt it. My wife and I battled the waves of sorrow that kept crashing on our home, and I wish we had had this book, with its combination of biblical truth and practical counsel, as a resource during our painful journey.”

MARK VROEGOP, Lead Pastor, College Park Church,
Indianapolis; Author, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

“What a great gift for any married couple that experiences what one hymnwriter called the ‘frowning providence’ of God. From their own experience, Jeff and Sarah are able to show us that even on dark days God is good, and that he can be trusted.”

BOB LEPINE, Host, FamilyLife Today

“Jeff and Sarah have firsthand understanding of suffering and trials in marriage. Like dear friends, they offer words of deep sympathy and understanding for painful circumstances, yet bring hope through timeless biblical truth. Whether your marriage is in a season of crisis or you’re looking to fortify it for the unknown days ahead, this book is a gift.”

LAURA WIFLER, Co-founder, Risen Motherhood;
Co-author, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

“I’ve ministered to hurting wives for many years, desiring to encourage them with the gospel in the midst of painful marital storms. I’ve discussed a variety of books with them, but none have accomplished what Jeff and Sarah have done with *Together Through the Storms*. They have masterfully shared their story of incredible suffering in a way that leads the reader to feel they are trustworthy friends, wise alongside-you encouragers, and humble followers of Jesus. This book is a gem! Don’t just read it; savor it.”

ELLEN DYKAS, Harvest USA; Author, *Sexual Sanity for Women*

“Sarah and Jeff are writing while life is still hard, and they talk about *your* storms. The only problem is this: you will not be able to give this book to your friends because you and your spouse will keep going back to the prayers at the end of each chapter. If couples pray those prayers together, they will be transformed.”

ED WELCH, Counselor, CCEF; Author, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* and *Side by Side*

“Jeff and Sarah know what it is to live life under seemingly constant pressure. In this book they apply hard-won insights and biblical wisdom that will encourage you to cling a little tighter, not just to one another but ultimately to Christ. Reading it was a blessing—there was plenty of underlining going on!”

RACHEL WILSON, Co-author, *The Life We Never Expected*

“Jeff and Sarah Walton share their experiences with job loss, chronic illness, past emotional wounds, depression, intimacy, identity, and children, and show how God remains faithful through it all. The questions, prayers, and Scriptures at the end of each chapter will encourage open communication with your spouse and remind you that you are not alone in your storms, and to hold on to hope and stay the course. Your best days are ahead.”

KIRK CAMERON, Actor; Producer

“Marriage is a wonderful gift from God, but it can be a place of excruciating pain. Jeff and Sarah know what it is to find hope in the midst of heartache. The fruit of this hope is found in this extremely helpful book. In an honest, sensitive and biblically faithful way, they encourage us to find courage in God. Sooner or later you will face trials. This book will help you to put your faith in the right place.”

PAUL AND EDRIE MALLARD, Pastor, Widcombe Baptist Church, Bath, UK; Author, *Invest Your Suffering*

“This book does not offer an idealized view of marriage but rather a vulnerable account of failures, fears, and doubts, and a wonderful view of the God who strengthens us through them. This is remarkable wisdom that offers true help and hope for couples walking through suffering.”

VANEETHA RISNER, Author, *The Scars That Have Shaped Me*

“When we say our vows, we don’t really expect to face the tough part of the equation. So painful circumstances can cause stress fractures in even the strongest marriage. Jeff and Sarah know from experience what it is to walk this path. Their counsel goes beyond empty platitudes and points readers to a true source of help and hope. Wise, solid, and practical, this book is a lifeline.”

MARY KASSIAN, Author, *The Right Kind of Strong*

“This raw and vulnerable book shines such hope and truth into all our lives, and into our marriages and families. This will be a real blessing to anyone experiencing trials.”

PAUL AND RACHEL DALE, Senior Pastor,
Church by the Bridge, Sydney, Australia

“Sarah and Jeff invite us into their hearts in the most humbling and helpful way. Be prepared to see yourself in these pages and, more importantly, to see Christ.”

JON AND QUINA ARAGON, Co-owner, Native Supply /
Author, *Love Made*

“Fresh, insightful, and engaging. While still in the trenches, Jeff and Sarah have found hope and togetherness where others have been overwhelmed by division and despair. This book will help you to see what’s possible when two people facing troubles sincerely seek the help of Christ.”

COLIN S. SMITH, Senior Pastor, The Orchard Evangelical
Free Church, Arlington Heights, Illinois;
President, Unlocking the Bible

“A large part of marriage counseling is helping couples journey through suffering. The questions, prayers, and suggested Scriptures make this book a ready resource for anyone needing hope when the light seems dim.”

JONATHAN HOLMES, Pastor of Counseling, Parkside Church, Chagrin Falls, Ohio; Author, *Counsel for Couples*

“A phenomenal book that will encourage, challenge, and give hope. Every page will remind you that Christ is with you through rough waters. Every couple should have a copy!”

MARK AND LAURA PRICE, Four-time NBA All-Star, 1994 Dream Team II

“Offers sound scriptural wisdom for persevering through the hard things that come to every marriage at some point in the real world. Jeff and Sarah winsomely encourage couples to set a course for long-term joy in spite of sorrow, long-term contentment in spite of disappointment, and long-term hope in anticipation of ultimate restoration.”

NANCY GUTHRIE, Bible teacher; Author, *Even Better Than Eden*

“A rare gift—empathy, biblical insight, honesty, and practical help for trials. This is a resource every marriage needs.”

RUTH CHOU SIMONS, Author, *GraceLaced* and *Beholding and Becoming*

“A beautiful, courageous, and wise book. Whether you’ve had an easy marriage or a difficult one, please read this book! You won’t find easy answers, but something better—the inspiring story of a married couple determined to honor God and love each other through all of life’s hardships.”

GARY THOMAS, Author, *Sacred Marriage* and *Cherish*

“Honest and transparent, this unique book will support and strengthen any marriage that needs to weather storms.”

CAMERON COLE, Author, *Therefore I Have Hope*

JEFF & SARAH WALTON

Together
the Through
Storms

Biblical Encouragements
for Your Marriage
When Life Hurts

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Foreword

Robert Wolgemuth & Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

When I (Robert) and my late wife moved to central Florida, we quickly discovered that it's not a matter of if but when those dreaded seasonal hurricanes will hit. They can't be avoided. But neither do they have to catch us off guard. Bobbie and I learned how to take necessary precautions before the storms came, what to do in the midst of the high-velocity winds and torrential rains, and how to handle clean-up and any necessary repairs after the storm had passed through.

When it comes to the storms of life—whether literal or metaphorical—it's not a matter of if but when they will hit. We (Nancy and Robert) have seen this time and time again, both in our own lives and in the lives of others. Jesus himself told us this would be the case. The rain will fall, the floods will come, and the winds will blow and beat on our house and on yours (see Matthew 7 v 24-27).

When these storms assault those of us who are married, the structure of our relationship and home can sustain collateral damage—or, by the mercy and grace of God, it can become even stronger.

Thankfully, the One who created the rain and the wind—the One who commands and raises the stormy wind and who, when it pleases him, makes the storm be still (Psalm 107 v 25, 29)—has not left us to weather life's tempests on our own. He has given us everything we need to

build our homes on the kind of foundation that will keep them from falling when the storms beat upon them.

Over the course of sixteen years of marriage, Jeff and Sarah Walton have been pummeled by one storm after another; seemingly relentless gale-force winds and driving rains have whipped up against their family, causing them at times to feel tossed about and in danger of going under. But through those tumultuous times—in part, *because* of those storms—their faith and their marriage have become even more steadfast and secure.

From the crucible of their own story, this volume unpacks the unvarnished truth about dashed dreams and expectations, and, as you'll discover, about the hope that results from clinging tightly to Christ and his word, even as the storms lash against us from every side.

The book (or the electronic device) that you hold in your hand contains wisdom and encouragement that virtually every couple will need along the way—because it simply is not possible to be married for any length of time and not face, sooner or later, circumstances that threaten to overwhelm you. Jeff and Sarah speak candidly about disappointed hopes, depression, standing by each other when your children suffer, navigating the heartbreak of prodigal children, facing chronic illness, issuing forgiveness, embracing humility, dealing with the challenges that suffering can create with a couple's intimacy, and much more.

The essence of this book is relentlessly practical, yet these pages are filled with the overarching theme that a better marriage is not the ultimate goal. Knowing Christ more intimately is what Jeff and Sarah offer as the outcome supremely worth holding on for. We agree. In the midst of turbulent seasons, if we turn to Christ rather than turn against each other, then by God's grace our lives and marriages can be strengthened through the storms, rather than destroyed by them.

For us, one of the “money” paragraphs in this book (and there are many) is this:

Hard as it is to remember this when the storms hit, our suffering is never our greatest problem—our sin is. And our sin is what God has dealt with, fully and finally, through the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel—the hope we have not only for eternal salvation but for each and every moment of our lives.

With all the demands and obligations that you surely face in your marriage and (if you have one) your family, reading a book together can be a challenge. We get that. But we’ve done this a few times, and it’s been well worth the effort. If you’ll allow us to be so presumptuous, may we recommend that you and your spouse take the time to read this one—together. Our prediction is that you will be encouraged and blessed.

If you’re currently in the swirl of a stormy season, this resource may prove to be a life-saver. If you are in a season of relative calm, it will prepare you to face the inevitable storms that lie ahead. And if past storms have caused damage to your heart and your marriage, you will find help for the clean-up and restoration process, and for shoring up the foundations before further storms arise. There are no marriages we know about—including our own—that could not use this book to great advantage.

Thank you, Jeff and Sarah, for pouring out this “love offering” for friends like us, and for others who will read your words and receive an infusion of hope for the hard times.

And may God bless you, the reader, as you anchor your life and marriage on the solid Rock of Jesus Christ and his word.

Robert Wolgemuth & Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth



JEFF AND SARAH WALTON live in Chicago with their four children. They are members of The Orchard Evangelical Free Church in Arlington Heights. Sarah is the co-author of *Hope When It Hurts* and you'll find her online at setapart.net and [@Swalts4](https://twitter.com/Swalts4).

Introduction

We remember it like it was yesterday. The sun was shining, everyone was smiling, and, other than the fact that the DJ played the wrong song for our first dance (which we eventually laughed about), it was as close to a perfect day as it's possible to be. I was twenty-three. She was twenty. Sarah and I were young, we were in love, we were excited, and we were ready (or so we thought) to embark on a life together.

We didn't expect life to be perfect, of course—but we naturally assumed our marriage would be filled with more of the “better” than the “worse.” So with stars in our eyes and big dreams for what the future would hold, we confidently vowed:

“I take you ... to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live.”

That was nearly sixteen years ago. Little did we know that those years would bring chronic illness, financial loss, job loss, special needs, suffering children, overwhelming stress, and the marital strain that accompanies each. We never imagined that we'd experience so much of the “worse,” “poorer,” and “in sickness” parts of our vows.

The reality is that all marriages pass through storms; every husband and wife has a story to tell of a marriage that includes some happy parts, some funny parts, and some hard and painful parts. There are times of calm, when everything sails along serenely; and there are the storms, when you wonder how to keep the water out of your boat—or whether you'll even stay afloat. And we're guessing that you've picked up this book because you're either in a storm of your own right now, and maybe your marriage needs encouragement or help, or because you want to prepare your marriage for the storms that may lie ahead.

The great news is that no marriage (including yours) is beyond hope, and every marriage (including yours) can be strengthened—even by the storms.

We know this is true not only in theory but in reality—because it's our reality.

OUR STORY

Less than three years into our marriage, we excitedly welcomed our first child into the world. All was going well until he spiked a fever and was hospitalized with a severe infection at seven weeks old. After five days in the hospital with terrifying, inconclusive reports, we were sent home without answers. We thought it was an isolated incident, but over time it turned into years of life-altering neurological challenges that have forever changed our family's lives. Every day, we helplessly watched as our sweet, smart, funny little boy would turn into someone else, displaying behavior that was extremely difficult to control and navigate. Countless consultations, tests, and evaluations left doctors shaking their heads, and all we were left with in the end was an increased financial burden, a stressful home life, and growing fears for him and us.

Along with that, Sarah's health was rapidly declining, and with each of our four children that she bore, she was increasingly unable to function through her own chronic pain and illness. On top of that, an ankle injury that she sustained in high school has now led to five surgeries and an inability to do much of what she loves anymore.

As our son's disorder continued to intensify, and as Sarah grew sicker and our younger children began to exhibit their own chronic pains, my job as a consultant to orthopedic surgeons often kept me from being home. Our marriage began to suffer under the weight of it all.

In 2015, we were led to a group of doctors who connected Sarah's many symptoms to Lyme disease and, over the following year, the growing symptoms in each of our children led to testing that revealed the illness had been passed on to each one of them. The medical community gave us conflicting advice and very little support, but the growing neurological and physical ailments in each of our children were impossible to deny, and became increasingly confusing and expensive to navigate.

We were at our lowest point, and convinced that we couldn't endure anything else, and so it became clear that I could no longer sustain my on-call job. So I left it behind, along with half of our income. We sold our dream home and downsized to a smaller rental home.

A year later, my new company began to struggle and suddenly I was without a job—leaving us with no income at all.

Our family was in crisis. Most of our time spent together as a couple consisted of doctor appointments, navigating challenges with our son, soothing crying and hurting children, discussing what treatments we could afford, healing from each of the nine surgeries undergone between the two of us, dealing with Sarah's chronic pain, and stressing about our draining finances, all the while being too exhausted to

address the tensions that were building within our marriage. We were both broken and both wondering where God was and why he was allowing such deep and layered suffering. As we endured one loss after another, we found ourselves battling despair and hopelessness, and being confronted with deep questions of faith that neither of us had faced before. We were surviving, but we—and our marriage—were hanging on by a thread.

But we're still here. Still together. And, somehow, stronger for it all.

God held us up and enabled us not only to survive, but to see the good gifts he had given us along the way. Though it's been harder than we ever imagined, there have also been moments of laughter, sweet memories, and undeserved gifts. Somehow, in each moment of each day, God has helped us press on, has held our marriage together when we haven't had the strength to fight for it ourselves, and has taught us to find joy, even within the sorrow. And by his grace, he continues to hold us up each and every day, despite many of our circumstances remaining the same.

THE BIRTH OF A BOOK

A few years back, I (Sarah) co-wrote *Hope When It Hurts* while our family was enduring many of these same trials. By God's grace, it reached more people than we ever imagined it would, and changed more lives than we had dared hope. *Hope When It Hurts* dealt with suffering and faith on an individual level, but not with how suffering impacts our marriages, the relationship that can provide the greatest comfort and also cause the greatest pain. Despite being in the midst of our own storms, God put it on our hearts to write from this place of pain and hope to encourage other married couples who are facing storms of their own (or one

day will). We wanted to write to remind you, whoever you are and however you came to this book, that you are not alone, that there is more to your suffering than meets the eye, and that, through Christ, whatever has happened or may happen, there is always hope for your marriage.

As we prayed about embarking on writing this book, during one of the hardest seasons of our life, our wise pastor and friend, Colin Smith, encouraged and counseled us with these words from Psalm 118 v 13-14, which became a truth that we hope to communicate throughout these pages:

*I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.*

We, and our marriage, have been pushed hard—sometimes to the point where we have felt as though we we’re falling. In fact, many days we feel as if we’re falling once again. Our marriage has not been and is not perfect. We’re writing in the trenches, right there beside you, not from the mountaintop. But we have written these pages as a testimony to the faithfulness, goodness, and sustaining grace of Jesus. He has been and continues to be our help, strength, song, and salvation.

So this is a book about marriage, but it’s very different than most books on marriage. It’s for the storms—to prepare you for them in the future, or to help you navigate them in the present, or to help you deal with the aftermath of what you’ve just come through. We hope to encourage you by acknowledging many (though certainly not all) of the challenges that we can face when storms come into and against our marriage. That’s not because we’ve navigated our storms and safely reached the other side, but because Jesus Christ has been faithful to strengthen us, carry us, and change us and our marriage as we continue to weather them together.

Every marriage begins in the sun; every marriage must pass through storms. For you, maybe those storms have brewed within your marriage—from rubbing up against each other’s weaknesses, differences, and sins—perhaps from the pain of infidelity, addiction, hurtful patterns of sin, or an unbelieving spouse. Or maybe for you it’s been the storms of circumstances around your marriage: the experience of excitement over starting or growing a family becoming a deeply painful struggle with infertility, loss of a child, or special needs; or living with chronic illness, a life-altering injury, something that was done to you in the past, financial loss, tensions in your extended family, or a rebellious child.

Whatever your storms have been, or will be, these trials will inevitably cause you to wrestle with difficult and complex questions of faith—and they will either drive you closer together or further apart. It’s where and to whom we turn to for the strength and hope that we need to endure the storms that will make all the difference.

These questions and the answers to them are why we have looked to the book of Job as the foundation of each chapter. Job—the story of a man who lost everything—may seem like an odd choice for a marriage book! But it contains truths that have taught us to worship, hope, grieve, lament, confess, and wrestle, and ultimately to come to see Jesus more clearly and love him more dearly, growing us to see each other better and love each other more in the process.

You can read your way through the whole book or go through its chapters in any order; you can read one a day or go more slowly (or quickly). It’s written in such a way that it can be read as a couple or read on your own if that’s more appropriate right now. You can work through it individually or with a group, and spend time engaging with

the reflection questions, prayer, and further meditations at the end of each chapter.

Brother, sister, we wrote this book for you, not because we have all the answers but to point you to the hope you can have in Christ. It's through that hope, and the truths found throughout God's word, that you can find strength for the storms that come into and against your marriage. We're realistic. Storms will come. But we're full of hope. As we look to Christ and his word, we can, by God's grace, walk through the heaviest weather together—and find ourselves stronger in the storms.