

There Is No *Yet*



A Devotional for Couples Raising Children with Special Needs

RISING  ABOVE
MINISTRIES



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There Is
No Yet

About the Author



Jeff Davidson
1967 - 2017

In 2010, God gave Jeff Davidson a clear vision and calling to expand Rising Above to a national ministry. He and his wife Becky stepped out in faith to devote themselves full-time to the ministry. Rising Above began producing small group curriculums for parents of children affected by special needs. These curriculums are now being used in churches and groups around the world. It was an earth-shattering loss when, in May of 2017, Jeff passed away unexpectedly. Jeff lived his life in service to the special-needs community and even now his message continues to impact families. His legacy lives on in all that Rising Above does.

How to use this resource?

This resource can be used as a small group curriculum or as a personal reflection and study.

If you are utilizing this as small group curriculum, you can download and print a copy for everyone in your group. You can read the devotional content together or individually before you meet.

Then, your small group leader can walk you through each of the discussion questions.

"The Next Step" is meant to be a way for you to go deeper. You can work on the Next Step as "homework" or complete the assignment with your small group.

We would love to hear your feedback. Email us at info@risingaboveministries.org. Thank you and we hope your small groups are filled with a deepening of your relationships with one another and with our Heavenly Father.

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For many years, Jeff Davidson shared wisdom and insight from his unique perspective as a special-needs dad on his blog, GoodnightSuperman.com. The writings contained in this study were first published there, and we are excited to make them available in this format for special-needs parents around the world. Jeff's conviction was that each parent of a child with special needs was called to and chosen for their role, and it is our hope that these sessions will inspire men and women to pursue that extraordinary legacy in their individual families.

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If you are interested in reading more encouraging insights from the heart of Jeff Davidson, his book ***Common Man, Extraordinary Call*** can be found on Amazon or anywhere books are sold. This book will challenge, equip, and inspire fathers of children with special needs to embrace the calling God has given them to be the committed men their families need.



Session 1

The Gospel of John



Originally published April 1, 2009

John and Ruth had been married for 62 years.

Their son and daughter-in-law had been friends of ours for many years. We knew their son, their grandchildren, and even recently their great-grandchildren.

We didn't know John and Ruth until they moved to Cookeville a couple of years ago and began attending our church. Ruth was in bad health so they had moved to our town to live near their son and daughter-in-law who could help care for them.

Every Sunday, John would meet her at the nursing home and drive their van up close to the front door at church. I would watch them come in as John pushed Ruth's specially-designed, wheelchair-type apparatus. They would sit in the back so as to be comfortable, have room, and not be a distraction.

I would watch as John doted on Ruth and attended to her every need. He would smile at her and touch her lovingly even though her health made it difficult if not impossible for her to respond.

I was moved by his affection and love for his wife of sixty-two years. I was captivated by the dignity and grace he displayed with her.

Clearly he loved her with an everlasting love.

The other day Ruth went home to see Jesus. He, too, had loved her with an everlasting love.

At the funeral home, I spoke to John about how much I admired him for the way he cared so much for his wife in her latter years as I had watched the two of them. "I took a vow," John told me. "In sickness and health, I promised."

By the way, when John made that vow he had no idea that for 50 of their 62 years together, Ruth would suffer from multiple sclerosis.



For 50 years, Ruth's health would be afflicted and ravaged by MS. John walked through it side-by-side with her because as he said, "I took a vow."

Every day, I see couples on the verge of packing it in and giving up on each other. People are losing their jobs, their retirement, their homes, their faith, and their hope. Every day we, like so many other special-needs families, struggle to cope and survive together with the unique challenges we face.

I counsel couples whose marriages are on the brink after only a few years together. I see so many couples who just can't commit to or grasp the idea of dying to themselves. I see the stress of raising a child with special needs tear apart or threaten to destroy marriages. I see people just walking away.

Then, every once in a while, you'll meet a John and Ruth.

Sixty-two years of marriage. Fifty years of disease.

Sixty-two years of love, joy, devotion, compassion, and kindness—all to the very end.

Because John "took a vow."

And that's the gospel according to John.

Thank you John. We needed that.






Discussion

1. Have you witnessed a marriage relationship similar to John and Ruth's? Do you feel like marriages like these are common or rare in today's culture?
2. Another word for a vow is "covenant". Read Genesis 9:11, Exodus 19:3-6, Deuteronomy 7:9 and Luke 22:20. Do covenants (vows) seem significant to God in scripture?
3. Read Matthew 19:4-6 and Ephesians 5:25. If marriages are meant to be living examples of how Christ loves the church, how significant does that make the vows husbands and wives make to one another?
4. Read Isaiah 54:10. What is your response to knowing that "though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed" God does not break His "vows?"

The Next Step

With your spouse, think back and remember the vows you made to one another on your wedding day. What phrases meant the most to you then, and what phrases mean the most to you now?

If you do not already have them written down, consider writing your vows in a journal or in an easily accessible place where you can meditate on them more often.



For Prayer & Journaling

When I remember saying my vows to my spouse, what brings me the most joy is...

When honoring my vow feels difficult this week, I will meditate on this encouraging truth...

Father, when I think about Your covenant with me through the blood of Jesus and my own marriage covenant with my spouse, I struggle to believe...

Father, I thank You that You are the perfect covenant-keeping God, even when, in my flesh, I fail to keep the covenants I have made. Help me to remember my vow to my spouse when...

Session 2

Sometimes Better Follows Worse



Originally published May 15, 2014



“No deposit, no return.”

My father-in-law whispered those words to me as he gave me his daughter’s hand at our wedding.

This Sunday will be our 23rd wedding anniversary.

Ironically, we will spend it leading a marriage retreat for couples raising children with special needs.

I don’t know if I believe in love at first sight, but I do believe in love at two weeks. We had only been dating for two weeks and I knew Becky and I were going to get married. I tested the waters by whispering; “I think I’m falling in love with you.”

I threw that, “I think” in there to give myself a little wiggle room, an escape route if necessary, but I knew.

We went to a fireworks show casually with a group of friends one night right after we met. They tell me the show was spectacular. I don’t remember anything about the show. The fireworks in my head and heart drowned out the fireworks show.

We got engaged in three months. I kind of failed to tell my parents I was dating anyone until we took them out for dinner and I introduced them to her and said we were getting married.

Probably should have thought that one through a little more.

Twenty-three years.

A lot has happened since that Saturday afternoon on May 18, 1991.

When we got married, we planned on me having a successful business career climbing the corporate ladder. Becky was going to teach school for a while. Then when the time was right, she would stay home to raise our children and we would live in a big house in the suburbs.

We would lead a perfect life in a perfect world as the perfect family and she would be the PTO president.

It was, in fact, a perfect plan in my eyes, because I came up with the plan.

I had written the story of my life, but I didn't realize at the time that the story to be told wasn't about me.

When you recite traditional wedding vows, there is always that phrase, "for better or worse." We took that vow as part of our wedding ceremony. Like everyone else though, we only focused and assumed on the "better."

Have you ever noticed the "better" always gets mentioned first?

The "worse" is almost thrown in like an afterthought.

Since that day 23 years ago, my plan has been totally thrown upside down.

We lost our first child.

I was across the country on a business trip when it happened and unable to be home when my wife needed me the most.

Our second child Jon Alex has profound special needs. His cerebral palsy, seizures, and autism have left him a 16 year old boy completely non-verbal, unable to walk, and utterly dependent upon us 24/7.

He requires our absolute constant attention and care for everything. Over the course of his life, he has never been able to say even one word.

No one can prepare you for the grueling, exhausting, draining task of caring for a child with profound special needs. You will never attempt anything harder in your life. It will affect everything about your life- emotionally, financially, spiritually, relationally, and mentally.

The toll it takes on your marriage is staggering. It's intense and even brutal. But we had taken a vow. Our marriage was based on a covenant, not a contract.

We learned a whole new vocabulary- sensory processing disorder, occupational therapy, physical therapy, quadriplegia, and so forth. We learned a whole lot of new acronyms as well like, IEP, AFO, and CFGF.

Then, there was the night I died.

Five year ago, I stopped breathing. A health incident left me in a coma on life support for several days with only a slim chance of a full recovery. I spent months in a wheelchair requiring 24/7 care myself now. I had to have help bathing, eating, moving around, and learning to walk again.

For months, my wife had two special needs individuals requiring her constant care and attention, as she took care of our son while nursing me back to health.

That's when I realized I had married Wonder Woman. And I wonder every day why God chose to bless me with her as my wife.

I am not the easiest man to love even under the best of circumstances. I've got my quirks, my hang-ups, and my character flaws.

I'm not exactly an "off the rack" type of guy. I'm a high maintenance, custom job type of guy who deep down struggles with insecurity and pride at the same time. Do you see what I mean?

Without the grace of God in my life, I would be a train wreck.

At the age of 40, a lot of men realize half of their life is over and begin to take stock of their life. I did that too.

But instead of buying a convertible, a boat, or dying my hair- I did something more drastic.

I quit my six-figure income job.

I made us sell our 4,000 square foot home, both our SUVs and half a house full of furniture.

I took a 75% pay cut, cashed in my paltry savings, moved us out in the country, and changed my life's vocation.

Most importantly I changed how I kept score.

I told Becky God was calling me to leave the corporate world, and start a ministry for special-needs families. She asked when we could start.

She could have called me "crazy."

Instead, she called me "chosen."

She could have said you can't do that to our family.

Instead she said, we would do this together.

Nothing has gone according to my plan. But everything has gone according to God's plan.

Our 23 years of experiences, 16 with our son with special needs, have been richly rewarding, richly enriching, and left us richly blessed.

We are stronger, more determined, more together, and more incredibly blessed through our life than we can imagine.

What should have divided us has instead united us.

What was intended to harm us, has once again by God's grace and plan, been redeemed and reclaimed for good according to His purposes.

Turns out that God's plan was the perfect one. He's just using us to tell His story.

For all of you in the midst of the struggle... for all you special-needs moms and dads about to throw in the towel and quit... for all of you ready to just give up and walk away... for all of you wondering if it ever gets better... for all of you struggling to find anything good about your circumstances...

Sometimes "better" follows "worse."




Discussion

1. What expectations did you and your spouse have when you got married? How have those expectations been met and how have they *not* been met during the years of your marriage?
2. Take some time over the next few days to read the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. What parts of his story do you think he might not have expected? Are there examples in his story of how sometimes "better follows worse?"
3. Read Genesis 50:20. Here Joseph declared, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." What circumstance in your years of married life can you declare the same words about?
4. Have you had situations and circumstances in your marriage, specifically in parenting a child with special needs, that have united you instead of divided you? What about the opposite?

The Next Step

Meditate on Proverbs 16:9 together: *"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."*

How did your hearts "plan your way" in the early days of your marriage, and how has the Lord "established your steps" since then? Spend some time allowing yourselves to be honest about disappointments, but also praising God for His faithfulness and provision.



For Prayer & Journaling

It is *easy* for me to persevere in love and grace toward my spouse when...

It is *difficult* for me to persevere in love and grace toward my spouse when...

Father, when I think about Your perfectly persistent love and grace toward me, I struggle to believe...

Father, I thank You that You never stop persevering in your love for me. I thank you that your faithfulness is never threatened by circumstances, sickness, or challenges. Help me to persevere in love and commitment toward my spouse especially when...

Session 3

There Is No Yet



Originally published July 22, 2016

She sits quietly in the chair beside his hospital bed.

The same chair where she has sat all night long for the past week while her husband lies in the hospital. Again.

She is beyond weary. Beyond exhausted. For the past week, she has desperately balanced having her husband in the hospital with the demands of also being the mother of a child with profound special needs.

She alternates her time between the hospital and home where her family is assisting with the care of her son. To say she is sleep deprived would be a huge understatement.

It's his fourth time to be hospitalized in three months. She is tired of sickness, tired of chronic disease, and tired of trying to balance the needs of two family members.

This is not the life she expected or dreamed of when they got married all those years ago. She never imagined she would raise a son who requires 24/7 care with his every need. And then to have a husband struck by a chronic illness in mid-life. It is overwhelming at times.

She cannot remember the last time she slept through the night. She cannot remember the last time she did anything for herself.

Compassion fatigue is real and it's emotionally crippling. She wants to cry but there's no time to really process what all is going on in her life.

The social worker from the hospital slips into the room to discuss his care when they leave the hospital. "Who will take care of him when you return home?"

Quietly she chuckles and says, "I will. We've been married for 25 years and I'm not going anywhere."

The social worker turns to her and says, "Yet."

In a voice that leaves no doubt or equivocation, she turns to the social worker and says, "There is no yet."

Twenty-five years. Sickness and health.
Better or worse.

Because we took a vow.

A covenant before God. A promise that
didn't include the word "yet."

No one can prepare you for the
grueling, exhausting, draining task of
caring for a child with profound special
needs. You will never attempt anything
harder in your life. And it will affect
everything about your life-
emotionally, financially, spiritually,
relationally, and mentally.

The toll it takes on your marriage is
staggering. Then throw in a spouse
living daily with a chronic illness. It's
intense and even brutal. But we had
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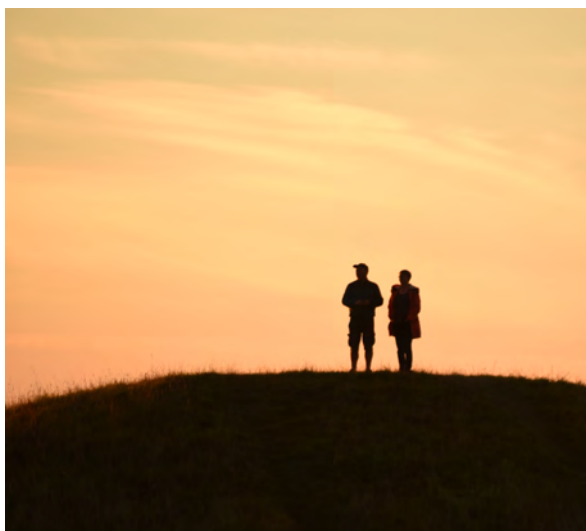
Right now, there are many of you
ready to check out. You feel like you've
reached your breaking point in your
marriage. You're ready to walk out the
door on your marriage any minute.

For all of you in the midst of the
struggle... for all of you struggling to
find anything good about your
circumstances...

There is no "yet."

The battles, the struggles, the trials,
they can serve to unite you instead of
divide you. But it's your choice.

Let God use the pain to draw you
closer to each other, and in turn closer
to Him.





Discussion

1. In your own life, what differences have you seen between the way the world views commitments and how Christ-followers view commitments?
2. Read Romans 5:3-5, James 1:12, and Galatians 6:9. In light of these scriptures, what do you think Christ-followers' response should be to trials, changes in circumstances, sickness, and challenges in marriage?
3. Read Hebrews 12:1-2. How can keeping our eyes on Jesus and His response to trials give us courage in the face of our own hardships?
4. Art Rainer said, "Marriage is a sacred union that, when following God's design, screams the Gospel to the rest of the world." How do you see this as being true during the most difficult seasons of a Christian marriage?

The Next Step

Consider this week how persevering through the hardships, challenges, and trials we face in our marriages can actually be a testimony to the watching world of a sacrificial Savior.

Think of one area of your marriage where perseverance in grace and love for one another is particularly difficult for you and your spouse. Pray Colossians 1:11 over one another: *"May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father..."*



For Prayer & Journaling

The hardest circumstance we have ever faced as a couple has been when...

When I think about that circumstance, I can declare, "There is no yet, even if..."

Father, when I think about these difficult circumstances surrounding us sometimes I struggle to believe...

Father, I thank You that Your Word tells us that Jesus is the "author and finisher of our faith"... I am not the finisher of my faith and neither is my spouse. When storms rage and circumstances overwhelm, please keep my eyes on Jesus. I pray that our marriage would "scream the Gospel to the world" even when we are struggling with...

Session 4

There Was No Yet



By Becky Davidson - February 12, 2021

In June 2016, my husband Jeff published his blog entitled, "There Is No Yet". In that post, he shared the words I spoke to a social worker at the hospital during his illness, and he summarized the belief I held that there would be no *yet* in our story.

I believe that "yet" is the emotional equivalent of leaving the back door open in your marriage; it's keeping an escape hatch within sight in case things get too hard. In any committed marriage, both partners must honor each other and the vow they have taken before God. This means we wipe any double-mindedness out of our minds. We focus our hearts on the sacred vow we have made, and look for ways to strengthen and encourage each other.

If things get hard, which they will, we humbly ask God for help, we are proactive and intentional to guard our marriage, and we hold the needs of our partner in our full attention. When we grow weary, which we do, we step back and refuel, knowing that we must care for ourselves as well as serve. We accept that our daily path is one ordained by God; one that He will help us navigate and one that will lead us to something good.

The path may be hard. It may be more difficult than we ever dreamed possible, but in our heart we can remember the truth of Romans 8:28, that God works all things together for good. So we actively look for the good and fix our gaze on that!

In the months following the publication of "There Is No Yet," Jeff's health continued to decline. As I watched my husband suffer through unspeakable pain and discomfort, the words I had spoken to that social worker months before became something of a mantra for us. No matter the discouragement or difficulty a day might bring, we would look at one another and say with confidence, "There is no yet."

Our circumstances might have been more overwhelming than they had ever been, but we were more committed to one another than we had ever been.



Those words remained true even until Jeff's final breath on earth. Tragically, in May of 2017, Jeff passed away. My last words to him, whispered in his ear, were, "There was no yet."

The vows we took so many years before, entering into a covenant with God and with each other, held fast through sickness and health, through better and worse. In the end, there truly was no yet for Jeff and I.

As you and your spouse together raise a child with special needs, you will undoubtedly encounter struggles, challenges, and obstacles. On this journey, you will most likely face circumstances that you never would have envisioned as you stood together repeating your vows. Yet because of God's gracious covenant with you, His unchanging grace, and His steadfast love, you can persevere together in love and commitment toward one another - through sickness and health, through better and worse.

My prayer for your marriage is that you will decide now, as a couple, that there is no yet in sight, today or ever. I pray that the Lord will strengthen your resolve to honor your marriage. And I pray that someday you both will be able to look back and say with gratitude and joy, "There was no yet."

Discussion

1. Read John 13:1. How is Jesus' example of "loving His own until the end" an encouragement for us to do the same?
2. Read Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5-6. We have a God Who has promised never to leave us or forsake us - *there is no yet* with Him if we call Him our Savior and Lord. How can this encourage us as we commit to saying "there is no yet" with our spouse?
3. Read Matthew 28:19-20. What does it mean to you that Christ promised His presence until the end?
4. In relation to the verse above, John Piper said, "When the impossible day comes that Christ breaks his vow, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age,' then, on that day, a human being may break his marriage covenant." As Christians, how is our marriage covenant made weightier by Christ's covenant with us?

The Next Step

As we end this series, take some time to reflect with your spouse on how you can view your marriage with an eternal, covenant perspective. Verbalize your greatest challenges in your life as special-needs parents, or in any other area, and commit to saying "there is no yet" in every one of those circumstances. Take time to write out a commitment together and put your thoughts into words.



For Prayer & Journaling

As a couple, we struggle most to remember that Jesus will "never leave or forsake us" when we are faced with...

When I think about our future, years down the road, I hope to be able to say, "There was no yet, even when..."

Father, I am so thankful that there is no yet with You, even when...

Father, I thank You for Your constant presence, Your never-ending covenant, Your perfect and faithful love. As we end this study of covenant and commitment, we ask that the Holy Spirit will give us new affection for Jesus Christ, new confidence in His sacrifice, and new hope in Your goodness. As we end this series, we are thankful for...



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