

*Marriage on the Mend* has been extensively used at Jonesboro First Baptist in marriage conferences and has been adapted as a discipleship course. The Braggs use biblical truths from Nehemiah to help couples build, or rebuild, their marriage upon a firm foundation. By understanding the role of prayer, maneuvering through road blocks, avoiding pitfalls, dealing with ruins of the past, and guarding the gates, I have witnessed many couples find hope for the future. Clint and Penny have lived these truths in their own marriage and graciously share these great tools for others to use. In a day of marriage confusion, this is a timely message firmly rooted in God's truth."

**Dr. Mel Blackaby**, Author and senior pastor of  
First Baptist Church, Jonesboro, Georgia

"We encourage couples to read this book, no matter where they are in their marriage. Clint and Penny Bragg are trusted marriage champions, having served couples in our church and trained marriage ministry leaders in our community. We are confident that God will use this book to strengthen marriages and families."

**Bubba and Cindy Cathy**, Owners of WinShape, Rome, Georgia

"From marriage enrichment to marriage crisis, *Marriage on the Mend* has the tools all couples need! Practical, easy tools that any couple can implement right away to make a difference in their relationship."

**Eric and Jennifer Garcia**, Cofounders of the Association of  
Marriage and Family Ministries

*Marriage on the Mend* is a unique and long-overdue book for any couple who wants to strengthen their relationship and put it on the road to healing, peace, and joy. Penny and Clint Bragg know the truth of every word in this book because they've lived it. They know the hopelessness of a marriage lost—and they know the delight of a marriage restored. And the beautiful part is that out of their experience comes a passion to now help other couples realize and uncover the extraordinary potential in their marriages. The Braggs are the real deal. And this

book should be required reading for any couple who wants not only a restored but a *thriving* marriage.”

Ginger Kolbaba, author of *Surprised by Remarriage* and former editor of *Marriage Partnership* magazine

“Clint and Penny are part of an amazing story of God’s commitment, grace, and redemptive glory. They are devoted servants of Christ and marriage missionaries. Their story will inspire and encourage you, and grow your faith in a God who is for marriage and never gives up!”

Robert S. Paul, Vice president of Focus on the Family’s National Institute of Marriage

“Marriage is a wonderful, miraculous, supernatural gift from God. It is at the heart of family, and the family advances God’s kingdom in the world, generation upon generation. Because of this, Satan and the demons launch some of their fiercest attacks against husbands and wives! Is your marriage in trouble? You don’t need a few tools and tips for better communication; you need a miracle from God to change your hearts and transform your relationship. The Scriptures that Clint and Penny share in this book have the power to make that miracle a reality!”

Dr. Rob Rienow, Founder of Visionary Family Ministries

“At last! Here is a book for couples who want to put their marriage back together and find healing but don’t know how to do it. Chapter by chapter, *Marriage on the Mend* walks a couple through the process of reconciliation so they are able to pick up the pieces of a broken marriage and build a strong and joy-filled relationship. Clint and Penny Bragg know what it takes to get past the roadblocks, triumph over traumatic triggers, rebuild trust, and find forgiveness. They use their own amazing story of restoration and the stories of others, as well as scriptural insights and practical strategies to help couples finally achieve the marriage they’ve always wanted.”

Linda W. Rooks, Author of *Broken Heart on Hold: Surviving Separation*

“I have known and coached many marriages needing a blueprint to mend. And I know Clint and Penny Bragg. The book you are holding is a solid, biblical blueprint for bringing hope, restoration, and biblical truth to your marriage. Chapter 6 alone, ‘Rebuilding on the Ruins of Your Past,’ is worth the price of the book. Read it, pass copies on to others, and hold onto your copy as part of your legacy of restoration and gratitude!”

**Dr. Gary and Barb Rosberg**, Authors of  
*6 Secrets to a Lasting Love* and cofounders  
of America’s Family Coaches

“Clint and Penny Bragg are truly marriage missionaries. Their book, *Marriage on the Mend*, focuses on tools that help every marriage. God gives us marriage as a chance to love, know, and follow Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This book helps us do that!”

**Jeff and Cheryl Scruggs**, Authors of *I Do Again*, and  
their family’s book, *Still LoLo*, and cofounders of  
Hope Matters Marriage Ministries

“There are many marriage books written by wise and gifted professionals. But what Dave Ramsey says about finances we believe is also true about marriage: ‘It’s twenty percent knowledge and eighty percent behavior.’ That behavior and how to achieve it is what Clint and Penny Bragg offer in this book. Real life. Real practices. Real emotions. The reality of what happens behind closed doors aligning with God’s plan and purpose for marriage. We work with couples in the midst of adultery recovery. Clint and Penny offer them the next steps to keeping the marriage they’ve saved healthy. Although their testimony alone blesses many, we believe what they’ve learned and shared within these pages will bless innumerable more.”

**Gary and Mona Shriver**, Authors of *Unfaithful: Hope &  
Healing After Infidelity* and cofounders of  
Hope & Healing Ministries, Inc.

“As a couple, Clint and Penny Bragg are uniquely qualified to help any marriage in need of restoration. Just reading their story will inspire faith in your heart that God can fix your marriage. But *Marriage on the Mend* offers so much more than inspiration. It’s a wonderfully practical and relevant book filled with insights and specific guidance, enough to help any couple find their way back to that narrow road that leads to life.”

**Dan Walsh**, Award-winning fiction author of ten novels  
including the best-selling Restoration series  
coauthored with Dr. Gary Smalley

“We know Clint and Penny and their story. The reconciliation tools they teach are not based on head knowledge. They are based on real-life experiences that were learned during one of the most amazing saved marriage journeys we have ever known. Any couple who is serious about making their marriage work will benefit beyond their wildest expectations when they follow the principles in this book.”

**Joe and Michelle Williams**, Authors of *Yes, Your Marriage Can Be Saved*  
and cofounders of Marriage 911 God’s Way

Marriage  
on the Mend



# Marriage on the Mend

Healing Your Relationship After  
Crisis, Separation, or Divorce

CLINT *and* PENNY A. BRAGG

 Kregel  
Publications

*Marriage on the Mend: Healing Your Relationship After Crisis, Separation, or Divorce*

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*To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant,  
and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a  
better word than the blood of Abel.*

HEBREWS 12:24



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## A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s

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Heartfelt gratitude to our loving families who sacrifice our presence in California so families across the nation and abroad can find healing.

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## I n t r o d u c t i o n

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Every broken marriage has the hope of becoming a saved marriage. Why? Because there is *no* relationship in such a state of ruin that it remains beyond God's reach. In our ministry to couples across the nation and abroad, we conclude our testimony by sharing this truth: "If God can reconcile *our* marriage, He can reconcile yours." This is our message to you as well.

There's no way we ever should have reconciled. Pronounced dead in 1991, our marriage was lowered into a grave and buried in the dirt for over a decade. Enter God.

With one mighty breath, He raised our relationship from the dead in 2002, and He's been breathing new life into us ever since.

God can save your marriage too. Perhaps there's so much rubble in your relationship you find that hard to believe. That's okay. Resurrection has a history of being quite unbelievable. But we must ask you to consider this: What if it's true? What if He can?

It is upon this premise that we've written *Marriage on the Mend*. God desires to completely heal every gaping wound in your marriage. What if you allow Him to do the very thing His heart longs for?

One letter, written years ago, started the restoration process in our marriage. It is our earnest prayer that this book will do the same for you.





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## Chapter 1

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# Honoring the Process

We are living proof that, against all odds, God can mend a marriage. Originally married to each other on September 2, 1989, we sailed through our first year together without incident. But by our second year of marriage, irritations and differences that were once fairly benign began to create a steady stream of conflict. Our prayers for a permanent solution—or at least a quick fix—remained unanswered. Before long, we couldn't agree on anything, including the source of our discontent. Something was definitely broken, and try as we might, we just couldn't fix it. To complicate matters, we were too proud to tell anyone that our relationship was on the rocks. As a result, the emotional, physical, and spiritual breach between us only widened.

The fragile state of our marriage created the perfect scenario for me (Penny) to start looking elsewhere for comfort. Clint confronted me about his suspicions regarding an affair, but I vehemently denied his accusations. The tension between us mounted, until one balmy evening just prior to our second anniversary, I packed a few things into a suitcase and rolled it out our front door. The last time we saw each other was the day our divorce papers were notarized, citing that “irreconcilable differences have caused the permanent breakdown of our marriage.”

Fast forward eleven years, three thousand coast-to-coast miles, and a series of divinely orchestrated events. On August 17, 2002, we were married again in front of our family and friends. Throughout the remainder of this book, we'll share more of our story. What's important for you to know right now is that even though God reconciled our marriage, we incorrectly assumed the hard part was behind us. Shortly after saying "I do" for the second time, we discovered that nothing could be further from the truth.

This is just one of the unique scenarios couples initially face after deciding they want to make their marriage work. Depending on the history of the relationship, other complications also enter in and cloud the mix, such as past betrayal, financial deficits, lack of intimacy, and the unsupportive opinions of others. The emotional pain of such things feels unbearable. Learning to love the same person anew is daunting, and attempts to toss in the towel can unexpectedly resurface. We know this place of despair, and if any of what we've described sounds like your situation, we know the intensity of your pain.

Marriage is messy, and reconciling a relationship after a crisis, separation, divorce, or all of the above is even messier. You will face problems, old and new, along the way. But you are not alone. We had our fair share of troubles too, just like every other couple we've met. People often tell us that the problems contributing to the fragmentation of their marriages are far too ugly for repairs *ever* to be made. They aren't ready to get real with God or each other; therefore, they seriously doubt their relationship can be mended. That is a lie. If you sincerely want to get well and you want your marriage to get well, then you're already on the road to wholeness and healing.

Depending upon your marriage history, the rebuilding process may seem complicated right now. That's normal. Make no mistake: the restoration of a marriage is both incredibly euphoric and agonizingly painful. Expect the process to take time and hard work. Unfortunately, it's much easier to fight than to forgive.

There were many times when we honestly disclosed our mistakes before God and each other and wept over the consequences of our sins and shortcomings. During those times, we wanted nothing more than to cover our heads, tuck our respective tails between our legs, and part ways again in sulking defeat. However, engaging in the hard work of reestablishing our marriage covenant has yielded rewards beyond anything we ever thought possible. The shedding of Christ's blood—combined with our own sweat and tears—has resulted in wholeness and healing that is incomparable in worth or measure.

The same can be said of your marriage. Your restoration begins with your answering yes to the two questions we ask all the couples who contact us for help: Are you at the bottom of the bottom? And, do you want to get well?

### Would Our Marriage Make It?

According to a study conducted by the Barna Group, "Among those who have said their wedding vows, one out of three have been divorced at least once."<sup>1</sup> National divorce rates are said to be on the rise, but statistics are sketchy at best regarding the percentage of couples who successfully reconcile after a crisis or separation, or who remarry their former spouse after a divorce. It's safe to assume that couples who reconcile definitely do not have the odds stacked in their favor. Neither did we.

"Our marriage has to make it this time!" I (Penny) cried as we stood arguing in the kitchen shortly after remarrying each other. Our honeymoon high had lasted about as long as our wedding day. Once the reception was over and the guests had gone, we hit conflict. The source of our disagreement paled next to the stark realization that our marriage would fail again if we didn't get some help. We loved each other and God, but our first marriage had proved those things alone simply weren't enough.

“Are you going to leave me again?” Clint asked with tears rolling down his cheeks. The honesty and vulnerability of his question bowled me over backward. Of course I wasn’t going to leave him again, but that first disagreement after remarrying triggered some painful memories of previous conflicts, and neither of us knew what to do about it. It took days to sort through the clutter, expose our true feelings, and acknowledge our fears.

“There has to be another way to do this,” I sobbed as we sat down to sort things out several nights later. As Clint and I discussed what had led up to our disagreement, we realized that God had captured our full attention during the standoff. The source of our conflict centered on something rather trivial, but it wasn’t the magnitude of it that mattered. The real problem was that we had no proactive plan to resolve conflict—large or small—inevitable in every normal marriage. What made matters even more challenging was that our marriage was far from any norm we’d ever known.

We’d never heard of anyone whose marriage was successfully mended after spending as many years apart as we had. In vain, we began to search for resources that specifically spoke to the unique challenges of restoring a broken marriage. That desperate search is what, years down the road, has led us to write this book. It is the culmination of everything we learned about restoring our relationship during the first five years of our remarriage. Every tool we share is one we faithfully practice in our own marriage to this day, and each one is designed to help you navigate the troubled waters that accompany your decision to reconcile.

## True Restoration Takes Time

In our current work as full-time marriage missionaries, we travel across the nation on 40-Day Marriage Mission Trips, sharing our testimony of reconciliation and assisting couples who have lost all hope of healing. Not only have we experienced the full restoration

of our own relationship, but we've also witnessed countless other couples who have overcome the odds.

Our own testimony is quite extraordinary. In this chapter, we share a small portion of it with you to emphasize this important fact: true restoration takes time, and you must honor your unique process. Eleven years may seem a bit extreme, but our story illustrates that God's processes and timelines are as important, if not more important, than the final outcome. During our years apart, major overhauls had to happen in our individual hearts. After we finally remarried, we had yet another long road ahead.

Once a couple decides they want to work things out, there is a sense of urgency to immediately "fix" all the problems from the past. However, you must be willing to respect *whatever* timelines God uses to heal your relationship and to entrust the entire process to Him.

Consider this: it probably took a while for your marriage to get to the point of crisis, separation, and/or divorce. Troubles in a marriage rarely surface overnight; your difficult circumstances and conflicts have most likely mounted over time. It will likewise take time for your relationship to heal. But no matter what your situation is today, if you accept that it will take ample time to get the relationship properly realigned and back onto the road, you can make significant progress at an early stage.

Perhaps you have experienced such repeated discord that you separated. Some of you may have even gone as far as divorce, like we did. There is hope! Even the darkest detours of your relationship (i.e., infidelity, addiction, abuse, bankruptcy, etc.) can be completely transformed when you're both willing to submit your hearts to God. If you truly want to get well, God will do His part as you do yours.

However, before we continue, let us clarify an important point: While every marriage can be saved, there are extenuating circumstances that must be acknowledged when safety is a concern. If you,

your children, or any member of your family is in physical danger as a result of your spouse's behavior, get law enforcement and other necessary professionals involved immediately. Your safety and that of your loved ones supersedes everything else.

Once we realized it was going to take time for us to restore our own relationship, we made a very important agreement that we'd like you to consider for yourselves. It was this: during our first year back together, we consciously made the restoration of our marriage our top priority, second only to our individual relationships with God. We wanted God to know we were serious about devoting quality time to healing our marriage. We hadn't been intentional about our relationship the first time around; this time we would be.

Because we both tended to overcommit our schedules, our agreement ensured that we weren't running ahead of God. We agreed not to take on new responsibilities or endeavors during that first year of remarriage and restoration. Promotions, projects, or leadership opportunities, no matter how exciting or noble, were turned down or put on hold. Our agreement also included not accepting offers to serve in any ongoing roles at our church. If that seems selfish, consider: we knew that if we didn't get intentional about mending our marriage, we would be of no service to God or our church.

Instead of balancing a bunch of new responsibilities, we attended church, worshipped God side by side, listened attentively to our pastor's sermons, and talked to couples we could trust. We attended marriage conferences and workshops we knew would benefit us. We also committed to reading and discussing several Christian books together. This intentionality had a profound impact on our restoration. In hindsight, we could have helped our cause more by explaining our priorities to our pastors, family members, close friends, and colleagues. Then they would have understood the importance we were placing on our marriage this time around. Please learn from our mistake and communicate the emphasis you're placing on

your marriage to the people who are close to you. Doing so will strengthen your support system and alleviate misunderstandings about the choices you make.

During the coming months, you'll need guidance as you reassess, regroup, and prayerfully rebuild your relationship. There are many ideas in this book that will help you gain and maintain perspective. Although the drama of marital conflict may differ drastically from one couple to the next, the time and tools it takes to mend marriages are very similar.

Woven throughout this text is sound advice from couples who have done (and continue to do) the hard work of restoring their marriages, as well as helpful bits and pieces from our own experiences. While each couple featured is unique, all have several things in common. Most importantly, they know that God saved their marriage. Also, they came out on the other side of their crisis far more spiritually and relationally wealthy than when they entered it.

While these couples share similarities, every marriage survival story is unique, depending upon the nature of the crisis (or crises) that contributed to its breakdown. The ways in which God restores one relationship may not be exactly the same ways He restores another.

### Learning from the Past

None of the examples in this book should take precedence over the truths in God's Word. In light of that, written accounts from the experiences of Nehemiah are threaded throughout almost every chapter. Although Nehemiah's task of rebuilding the war-torn walls of Jerusalem clearly was not recorded with troubled marriages in mind, it is a perfect biblical parallel for restoring your relationship.

At the opening of Nehemiah, a representative remnant of the Israelite nation had just returned to Jerusalem after seventy years

of Babylonian exile. God sent them prophets and leaders to restore their community, which included rebuilding the massive wall surrounding the city. Enter Nehemiah. Against fierce opposition, social and economic devastation, threats of attack, chronic sin, and evildoers who repeatedly attempted to stop him, this persevering leader succeeded in completing what God called him to accomplish. You'll discover principles in Nehemiah that, like the Jewish people rebuilding their city, can help you rebuild your relationship.

There is no set pace for proceeding through this book and the tools we share. Remember, true healing in all broken relationships takes time. So resist the temptation to skip over implementing the tools or rushing through the pages. At the end of each chapter, you will find a prayer to help facilitate your healing.

Be sure to complete the exercises and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Also, use your smartphone to scan the QR codes embedded within the text. These codes will link you to our free video podcasts that expand upon the tools in this book. If you don't have a QR code reader, you can access the videos via [inverseministries.org](http://inverseministries.org). These videos and extensions are designed to help your relationship become more resilient. Repeat any of these exercises and watch the videos again as time passes and your relationship changes. Trust this book's advice the way you would a wise mentor. We'd like nothing more than to walk beside you through each page. It is a humble privilege to use our past to help change your future.

Before you continue to read any further, take time to pray. Ask God to help you get the most from what we've written. Ask Him to help you learn from your past as well as from ours and the other couples in this book. Let Him know you're willing to be participants in this process. Acknowledge that He is in total control of both your ruins and your restoration. What's happening in your marriage right now is far greater than just the two of you. Your children, extended family, and friends are significantly affected as well. Never minimize



the magnitude of what you are about to begin. Restoring your relationship will undoubtedly impact the current generation as well as generations to come. The reconciliation of one marriage under God possesses the power to change families and even nations throughout the world, alter the course of human history, and ultimately, increase the population of heaven. That's what matters most.

In order to effectively maneuver around the roadblocks you'll encounter together, make a conscious and irrevocable decision to choose reconciliation each day for the rest of your lives, especially amid the trials and turbulence that occur as a natural part of mending your marriage. In the next chapter, we'll help you recognize specific roadblocks that may be threatening to impede your progress before you even get started.



Introduction to the Series • 4:29 minutes

## Prayer for the Process of Restoration

Teach us, Father, to place all our demands and desires for the restoration of this relationship in Your hands. Transform them into the desire to be strong and steadfast in You. When we are weak, You are strong and You receive the glory. Be the Lord of what's left of our time together. We relinquish all of our hours and expectations for this marriage to You. Help us not to hoard time in order to serve our private agendas. We cannot condemn anyone, including ourselves, for the time we've lost, and we let go of the time yet before us. We place You in charge of our ruins and their restoration. And we let go of hurriedness in order to truly experience Your healing. We want to get well, God. Heal us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## For a Marriage on the Mend

### *Make a Timeline*

Create a timeline of your marriage that spans the last five years. If you haven't been married very long, modify the timeline to fit your needs. (Option: you may want to start your timeline on your wedding day and work forward from there. The choice is yours.)

Begin by drawing a horizontal line across a large piece of butcher paper. Above the line, list the major physical, emotional, financial, logistical, and spiritual life events that have *positively* impacted your relationship. Below the line, list the major physical, emotional, financial, logistical, and spiritual life events that have *negatively* impacted your relationship.

It's normal for spouses to differ regarding what each one considers a positive or negative life event. As a result, the same event may be listed in both the upper and lower sections of the timeline. For example, a husband feels his job promotion was a positive life event, while his wife feels it was negative because he was often away on business and she was left to care for the children.

Completing this project will take more than one sitting as you think about all of the life events in your marriage history. As you remember more details, add them to the timeline. This timeline will serve as an insightful way to trace some of your current conflicts back to their original sources. See the sample to help get you started.

### *Questions to Consider*

1. What did you notice about your relationship after reviewing the major life events on the timeline?
2. While creating the timeline, were you in agreement about which things you viewed as positive and negative? Why or why not?

3. What else did you notice as you looked back over the events/ years?
4. Can you see how events or changes might have led up to a crisis in your relationship?
5. Read Nehemiah 1–2. What did you notice about his approach to rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem? How did Nehemiah set out to deal with the restoration process, and how does this relate to your marriage?

