BECOMING ONE

How GOD Preserved Our Covenant

BY
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Dedication



This book is dedicated to four women whose love, wisdom, and presence have profoundly influenced both of our lives and strengthened our marriage.

To Mrs. Linda, my oldest sister, whose love and honesty shaped my journey, and who embraced Tameka not only as family but as a true friend.

To Ms. Lottie, Tameka's mother, whose nurturing spirit and steady wisdom not only formed her daughter but also spoke into my life at the right time, calling me to reflection and change.

To Ms. Alice, my mother, whose example, discipline, and faith laid a foundation in me, and whose voice, carried through my brother, confronted me with truth and responsibility.

To Mrs. Diane, my stepmother, who has always loved me unconditionally and whose love and acceptance were evident from the very beginning, I express my deepest gratitude for welcoming Tameka into our family and showing her genuine friendship.

To those who are now asleep in JESUS, your legacy lives on in us. And to the one still with us, we remain grateful for your continued love and presence. We honor what GOD has done through each of you and hold to the promise that one day, we will all be together again.

Foreword

Our love story is not conventional. It does not follow a Hollywood script for actors to portray on the big screen. It does not match the dreams of a young girl playing with her dolls, imagining herself as a bride and mother. Neither does it mirror the stories told in romance novels.

Our love story is real.

It is the story of two people longing for understanding, support, patience, and kindness—things we both felt were missing in our first marriages. We entered this relationship willing to go the distance, determined to give our all to each other…forever.

Did we make mistakes along the way? Absolutely. We did not always make the best decisions for our marriage or our family. But GOD.

I am so grateful that I serve a GOD who knew we would fall short, yet still made provision for us through His Word. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we are given a

clear picture of what love truly is—and what it is not. Love requires surrender. It calls us beyond our selfish desires and invites us into something greater. And in the end, we are reminded of this truth: love never fails.

The scripture from 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 was our wedding Scripture. What I did not realize then was how deeply we would be tested in nearly every part of it. There were moments when we were not patient or kind. There were times when we were prideful, easily angered, and kept a record of wrongs. But GOD. Through it all, we are still here, standing together.

I never doubted that Earl was meant to be my husband. GOD made that clear to me, even during some of the most difficult seasons of our marriage. What I experienced during those moments was confirmation of something He had already spoken to me when I was 19 years old—that I would marry a minister.

Still, unresolved trauma found its way into our relationship, and we found ourselves in a fight for our lives. What I did not understand at the time was that this fight was not only about our marriage—it was about my healing too. Counseling and recovery programs became tools GOD used to restore what was broken.

What makes our relationship what it is today is our willingness to be uncomfortable. We chose to open our hearts to one another and confront the parts of ourselves most people avoid. We talked about the pain, the trauma, and the broken places we carried from our past. We allowed ourselves to be vulnerable so that we could heal—together.

We have worked through wounds from our childhoods. We have forgiven each other for the mistakes made during our marriage. We have apologized to our children for what they witnessed, and we have learned how to extend grace—not just in words, but in how we live.

Paul reminds us that no matter how gifted or accomplished we may be, without love, we have nothing. The greatest of all things is love—the kind of love that reflects CHRIST's love for us. That is the love we continue to grow into.

We may not be the model for marriage, and that is okay. Our marriage is ours—marked by imperfections, mistakes, growth, and grace. Our journey has been one of self-discovery, maturity, and deeper awareness. Looking back, I can see that every part of it was necessary. GOD has stripped away the old and clothed us in something new.

Today, we lead with grace and kindness, and our love reflects who GOD created us to be.

We are two imperfect people who, by GOD's grace, are perfect for each other.

In this book, Earl shares our story from his perspective—the good, the bad, and the difficult. Some may judge the choices we made, and that is to be expected. But what I know is this: GOD is a Redeemer. He renews minds, restores hearts, and transforms lives when we seek Him, confess, and turn back to Him.

This is a story of redemption—of love, hurt, betrayal, and forgiveness. And through it all, we give GOD the glory.

What you will read in these pages is only a portion of what we have lived through. My prayer is that as you read, you will see how GOD can truly transform a life from the inside out.

Tameka Hudson
Lithonia, GA

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Introduction: Brokenness to Grace



When people see a marriage that has lasted for many years, they often assume it was built on constant harmony, natural compatibility, or some secret that made love easier. What they usually do not see are the difficult conversations, disappointments, misunderstandings, and years of learning what it means to remain committed when love requires more than emotion. From the outside, a long marriage can appear settled and secure, but what appears steady today was shaped through seasons of joy, failure, grief, recovery, grace, and rebuilding.

This book is about a covenant shared by two people, but I can only truthfully tell the part of the story that belongs to me. Some of what happened between Tameka and me can only be fully understood through both of our perspectives, and her story is hers to tell. My responsibility is to speak honestly about my choices, what those choices revealed within me, the lessons I learned, and the grace GOD extended to us along the way.

Our marriage began with two people who loved each other, made a covenant, and stepped into that covenant carrying more than either of us understood. We were sincere in our commitment, but we had not fully considered how our past experiences would affect our future together. Looking back, I can see that I brought patterns, assumptions, insecurities, and unresolved issues into our marriage that would eventually test what I believed about love, faith, responsibility, and covenant.

Before many of the struggles described in this book came to light, I was serving in ministry and preaching regularly. I had spent years studying Scripture, teaching others, and helping people navigate their spiritual journeys. From the outside, my life appeared stable. I loved GOD, believed His Word, and sincerely wanted to live faithfully. Yet I was beginning to discover that understanding spiritual truth did not mean I had fully examined my own life. There were areas where I knew what was right but had not consistently allowed that knowledge to shape my decisions.

Even after my salvation and answering the call to ministry, there were things within me I had not learned to examine honestly. I often believed my struggles were connected primarily to circumstances, relationships, or stress.

What I did not understand was that some of the patterns shaping my responses had developed long before I recognized them. I understood sin theologically, but I had not fully considered how desires, insecurities, emotional habits, and ways of thinking could continue influencing my decisions. Much of what needed attention remained hidden beneath the routines and responsibilities of everyday life, including ministry.

For years, life seemed manageable, and I assumed certain struggles had been resolved because they were no longer present. I gave little thought to what might remain unaddressed beneath the surface. Eventually, circumstances would expose things about myself that I had never taken the time to understand. Some of the most significant battles in my life had been developing long before I recognized them.

This book is not an attempt to justify my choices or soften the reality of what happened. Marriage has a way of bringing things to the surface that might otherwise remain unnoticed. It reveals strengths, weaknesses, fears, expectations, and patterns that can stay concealed for years. What was revealed in our marriage affected both of us, but I re-

main responsible for my own decisions and the consequences they brought into our lives.

With time, I began recognizing things I could not see clearly during those earlier years. There were moments when I knew I was wrong and continued anyway. At other times, I avoided confronting what was happening because doing so would have required admitting truths I was not prepared to face. Some decisions should have been made sooner, and conversations I avoided might have prevented further pain. My choices carried consequences that reached beyond anything I anticipated. Yet despite everything, our marriage survived, and looking back, I can see that GOD was sustaining us even when I did not fully recognize His work.

At the time, I did not understand that grace was already present. I assumed it would come after the lessons had been learned and the problems had been solved. What I eventually discovered was that GOD was working long before I recognized His presence. CHRIST was not waiting for me to fix myself before extending grace. He was confronting what needed to change within me while providing an opportunity for healing and restoration. That grace

never excused my actions or removed my responsibility to address what I had done.

While GOD was dealing with me, Tameka was walking her own journey of faith, endurance, and growth. We were not carrying the same responsibilities or facing the same questions. She was dealing with the consequences of decisions I had made, and I was learning to acknowledge the damage those decisions had caused. Neither of us would remain unchanged by what followed. Some changes took years to recognize, while others became visible as we learned to relate to one another differently.

If you have read Lessons From Ms. Alice, you already know something about the foundation on which I was raised. My mother taught discipline, responsibility, consistency, order, and perseverance through her words and example. Those lessons shaped me in meaningful ways, which made one question difficult to avoid: If I had learned those lessons so well, how had I still made the choices I made?

The answer was uncomfortable because it required me to acknowledge the distance between what I knew and how I lived. I could understand the importance of responsibility and still avoid accepting it when doing so was difficult. My

failures did not mean my mother's lessons were wrong. They revealed that I had not consistently applied what she had taught me, especially when obedience required putting aside what I wanted.

Over time, I also came to understand that becoming one is not confined to a wedding ceremony. Our vows established a covenant, but learning to live within that covenant would take years. Marriage revealed things about my character that I had not fully considered, and those discoveries required more than good intentions. Recovery, honesty, and responsibility became part of the work GOD used to reshape how I understood myself and my commitment to Tameka.

Some parts of this story are mine alone, and I will discuss them openly. Other parts belong to Tameka, and I will speak of them with care and respect. I do not intend to assign blame or settle old accounts. My purpose is to tell the truth about what happened, acknowledge my responsibility, and share how GOD worked through circumstances that could have brought our marriage to an end.

If you have ever begun something out of order, justified a decision that later required confrontation, or struggled with parts of yourself you did not fully understand, you

may recognize something familiar in these pages. Our circumstances may be different, but the experience of confronting what has been hidden is something many people understand. Sometimes the most difficult discoveries involve truths we have known for years but have not been willing to apply to ourselves.

One of the lessons that took me the longest to appreciate came from something my mother often said: “The blessing is in the cleanup.” As a child, I thought she was talking about dishes, laundry, trash, and keeping our home in order. Years later, I realized her words reached far beyond household chores. Relationships can become damaged through choices that cannot simply be ignored or explained away. Addressing that damage requires honesty, responsibility, and a willingness to face what has been avoided. The blessing is not found in the mess itself, but in what becomes possible when we confront the truth and participate in the work necessary to make things right.

What follows is the story of a marriage tested, a man who had to confront himself, and a woman whose strength I did not fully appreciate at the time. It is also the story of a GOD whose grace proved greater than either of us could see during the most difficult seasons of our lives. Becom-

ing one has required years of truth, forgiveness, responsibility, recovery, and learning how to live faithfully within our covenant. Our story has brought us to a place neither of us could have imagined when we made our vows, and as GOD continues giving us life together, we are still becoming one.

PART I — BEFORE WE KNEW WHAT WE WERE CARRYING



Love often begins with hope before it fully understands what each person brings into the covenant. Before Tameka and I made our vows, our lives were already shaped by past experiences, family histories, sincere intentions, and choices that would later require deeper reflection.

These early chapters trace the beginning of our journey together: the circumstances that brought us close, the relationships that slowly began to heal, the day we made our vows, and the early years of blending our family. At the time, we believed love, commitment, and faith would carry us forward. In many ways, they did, but beneath the surface, there were still patterns, assumptions, and unresolved places we did not yet know how to name.

Chapter 1: Before the Vows



The relationship between Tameka and me did not begin on holy ground. We met while I was still married. Looking back, I do not believe my divorce was in keeping with what CHRIST taught about marriage, and I take responsibility for the choices I made during that season. At the time, I was unwilling to sit down with my wife and honestly tell her that I wanted a divorce. In my mind, the marriage was already over. Rather than addressing the situation directly, I allowed my actions to speak for me. A physical separation followed, although the divorce itself would take much longer to become final.

During that same period, I was serving in ministry. I preached, taught, and spent much of my time helping others navigate their spiritual lives. From the outside, my life appeared stable. I was working, serving, and fulfilling responsibilities that suggested everything was moving in the right direction. Yet I was making choices that contradicted what I believed and taught. I loved GOD and wanted to

serve Him, but there were areas of my life where I was unwilling to obey what I already knew was right.

Tameka was also involved in ministry, and our paths crossed through church life and the work we were doing. Neither of us had entered that environment intending to pursue a relationship with the other. What developed between us happened gradually, making it easier for me to justify what I was allowing to take place.

One afternoon, Tameka came by my office for something related to ministry. It seemed like an ordinary day, and nothing about her visit suggested that something significant was about to happen. When I opened the door and looked into her eyes, I kissed her. I still remember that moment and the feelings that accompanied it, but what concerns me now is how easily I allowed those feelings to influence my decisions.

At the time, I convinced myself that the kiss was simply an unexpected moment of attraction. I thought I could dismiss it without giving much thought to what had happened. Instead, I allowed the relationship to continue developing while avoiding the responsibility of confronting what I knew was wrong. I had already decided in my mind that my first marriage was ending, and I used that deci-

sion to justify what I wanted before the marriage had legally ended.

As Tameka and I spent more time together, our conversations became increasingly meaningful. We laughed together, shared our faith, and discovered how much we enjoyed one another's company. She understood parts of me that I sometimes struggled to explain, and I appreciated the connection developing between us. What had begun as an attraction eventually became a relationship that we imagined continuing into the future.

Our involvement became both emotional and physical before my divorce was final. We understood the circumstances and knew that our relationship had begun in a way it should not have. Although our feelings for one another were genuine, those feelings did not make the decisions right. That is something I understand more clearly today than I was willing to acknowledge at the time.

Eventually, my divorce became final, and I believed that closing that chapter would allow Tameka and me to move forward without the complications of the past. I expected the tension surrounding my earlier decisions to fade once the legal process was complete. What I failed to recognize was that the divorce decree did not settle the questions

surrounding how I had conducted myself. I had moved forward without fully confronting what my choices revealed about me.

Tameka and I began making plans for our future. We talked about marriage and the life we hoped to build together. Our faith remained important to us, and I believed that standing before GOD and exchanging vows would establish the kind of stability I wanted. I thought the most difficult part of our journey was behind us, although some of the people closest to me understood that things were not as settled as I believed.

My oldest sister, Linda, was among those who struggled with what had happened. She had always supported me, encouraged my ministry, and spoken honestly whenever she believed I needed correction. Linda knew about my divorce, my relationship with Tameka, and the circumstances surrounding both. Although she loved me deeply, she was troubled by the decisions I had made.

One Sunday evening, I was standing at the front of the church preparing to welcome a visiting women's ministry. Linda was among the women arriving for the service. When we came face to face, neither of us spoke. There was no greeting or embrace, and neither of us attempted to

explain what we were feeling. We looked at one another briefly before turning and walking in opposite directions.

That encounter stayed with me because silence was unusual between Linda and me. She had always been willing to encourage me, correct me, or simply ask how I was doing. That evening, she said nothing. I told myself she needed time to come to terms with everything that had happened, but I also understood that her response reflected concerns I had not honestly addressed.

I knew Linda loved me, and I never doubted that her concern came from that love. What troubled me was knowing that someone who had supported my calling and ministry could see something in my decisions that I was still trying to explain away. I wanted her approval, but I had not given sufficient attention to why she was struggling with the direction my life had taken.

Even with those unresolved concerns, Tameka and I continued preparing for marriage. We were building a future together and believed that our love, shared faith, and commitment would carry us forward. We could not yet see how much we still needed to learn about ourselves or how deeply the covenant we were preparing to make would eventually be tested. At the time, we knew that we loved

one another and wanted to spend our lives together, but there were matters from the past that I had not fully confronted.