

NO MATTER HOW BROKEN YOUR MARRIAGE SEEMS, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE OVER!

GUESTS

Dale and Jena Forehand

(the following write up was from Dale and Jena's interview on the 700 CLUB)

The 700 Club

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The authors of *Stained Glass Marriage* discuss their bitter custody battle and divorce prior to marriage reconciliation.

CBN.com – **Expectations**

As a college student, Dale first saw Jena in church in the choir loft and knew she was special. They had a mutual friend, and that first church yard meeting was special. They married in June 1988. Both were raised in church and came from fine Christian homes; they felt pretty secure about entering their married life. But by 1996 their marriage had reached an all-time low. "There was no love, no joy, no relationship," they say. Throughout this time, both were very active in church – Dale a deacon and Jena a wonderful singer. They taught a young married Sunday School class. From the outside, they seemed to have a perfect marriage. Looks were deceiving. The Forehand's marriage was riddled with anger, fights, and a struggle for control. Dale had a problem with anger. Looking back, he says his anger stemmed from the fact that he sought answers in his marriage that couldn't be found there. Jena admits that she had problems with self-esteem, looking to Dale to fulfill a need in her that he was not equipped to do. Their unmet expectations meant two very unhappy people who took out their frustrations on each other. Caught in the middle of this tug-of-war were two young children, son Cole and daughter Jorja.

The Marriage Shatters

On a Saturday in July 1996, Dale walked into their home, packed Jena's bags, and told her to get out. The marriage was over. Their fight ended up with Dale grabbing the children and driving away as Jena stood sobbing in the driveway. He headed to the golf course and left the children with his mother at the pool. Jena got the children and headed to her sister's house, which angered Dale. "I called Dale and explained that I was afraid of him and wanted to stay away for a while until I felt safe to return," Jena says. Unbeknownst to Jena, Dale went to see a lawyer who said the children were just as much his as Jena's and told Dale, "If I were you, I'd go and get them." One week later at Vacation Bible School, Dale came determined to get the children. Panicked, Jena left Jorja briefly to run get Cole before Dale grabbed Jorja and ran to the car. Jena tried to comfort Cole. She returned to the gym where she met Dale's twin brother Dave, who pulled Cole out of her arms, knocked her to the ground, and ran to a waiting car. Jena sat confused and shocked at what had just happened; people quickly made themselves scarce. When her family arrived, Jena began reporting the incident, but the policeman said there was nothing he could do since Dale was their father. He advised her to call an attorney. Dale went to his parents' house, packed some bags, and disappeared for seven days. Unable to locate the kids, Jena finally called a lawyer, who advised her that the only way she could get the kids back into the state was to file for divorce. While in Tennessee Dale's employer notified him that he had received divorce papers. Both Dale and Jena wanted full custody of the kids, and both refused to leave the marital residence. The judge was left with no choice but to place them back into the house pending a divorce trial. It was an in-house prison. "For 15 months we lived in the house together, awaiting the trial date. The house that used to be a home became a prison," Jena says. They lived separately and fought over everything. Many nights Jena cried herself to sleep in Cole's room while six-year-old Cole patted her on the back. Because of Dale's anger and desire for control, he withheld all money from Jena. They began conducting themselves as if the other did not exist. Most conversations escalated into full-blown arguments so heated that Cole would sit in the corner of the dining room and cry with his hands over his ears, begging for it to stop. "We threw things, pointed our fingers, and verbally abused one another," they say. Because of so much manipulation, the children learned to manipulate their parents as well. Per their spiritual life, Dale began sitting in the back of the church; Jena started attending another church. Their families took sides. All along their lawyers coached each of them on how to win. Their home became a war zone. Finally the divorce was over, but the elation was short lived as frustrations built over having to communicate with each other about matters with the children. "Every weekend, as we passed the children to the other, we felt as if our own hearts were physically being ripped apart," Jena says. The frustration, pain, and anger were indescribable.

Reconciliation

Four weeks after the divorce, Dale and Jena got into yet another argument, but this time Jena did something that was very risky – she let her guard down and let him see her heart. "Dale, what have we done? Why don't you come get me, and let's fix this thing," she said. Dale was caught off guard, and instantly said, "I can't look at the feet of our children without seeing you." Jena says that statement was like a bouquet of roses to her. The Holy Spirit began to "melt the hardened mess of our hearts." Within minutes they were sharing and sobbing uncontrollably. The Forehands spent the next four months in frequent, intentional marriage counseling with a godly Christian counselor who walked them through the healing process. Though they worked through some hard days, at the end of that time, they knew in their minds that re-marriage was what God wanted for them. "On December 21, 1997, we were remarried to the glory of God," they say. On the morning of their remarriage, Cole told them that since they were getting together with each other, he wanted to pray and get together with God. He gave his life to Christ.

Safety in Marriage

Upon hearing of their plans to remarry, many people questioned if the Forehands were doing the right thing, but after seeking the Lord, they knew what was right for them. They say it was God's amazing grace that enabled them to leave their old ways behind and submit their hearts and lives to Him. They now share with others the importance of keeping their marriage strong. Their first step toward reconciliation was to seek Christian counseling. As their marriage came together, they had to face their fears. "We were afraid to hurt again," they say. They were afraid to hurt their children, afraid what their friends might think, afraid of failing. At the end of their counseling sessions, they shared what led to the destruction of their marriage. Jena confessed she was afraid to put her heart in Dale's hands for fear he would crush it. This daring truth forced the Forehands to see that their marriage was no longer an emotionally safe place for either of them. Prior to reconciliation, Dale says one of his most piercing moments was returning home on a business trip with Cole. Cole told him, "Daddy, I'm mad at you for divorcing my Momma." "It tore me up," Dale says. Statistics show that Christians suffer bad marriages as much as non-Christians do. Every marriage can use a refreshing break where the couple takes time to look at and evaluate their relationship. There are key things couples should be aware of regarding making their marriage strong. Jena speaks from a woman's point of view. 1) You must recognize that your total satisfaction and security is found only in Jesus – not in your spouse. 2) Work out all of your issues in your past. Jena says she felt unworthy and was ashamed to show "the real me" for fear that "I may not be good enough." 3) After receiving Christ, realize it's all about Christ. Marriage can be fulfilling, but only Christ can fulfill the deeper need. Women love to talk, but 1 Peter 3:1 says the unsaved husband is won by the godly behavior of the godly wife. Dale says that for men: 1) Actions determine feelings. People often ask them, How did you get the love to come back? He says the love follows the actions of caring. 2) God has a plan for home and marriage. We serve a God full of grace and hope. He came to set us free.