

BUILT TO LAST

A book on God's design for marriage



REAL LIFE
MINISTRIES

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	
The Design: God the Creator	1
Chapter 2	
The Foundation: Set on Christ	9
Chapter 3	
The Walls: Mutual Submission & Sacrifice	17
Chapter 4	
The Roof: Spiritual Family	25
Chapter 5	
The Doors: Serve Others	33
Chapter 6	
The Inside: Moving Toward Oneness	39
Appendix	46
Acknowledgements	49



1

The Design: God the Creator

Have you ever built a house? Not necessarily with your own two hands, but you went through the process of dreaming, planning, getting permits, construction, and...waiting. Even if you haven't personally, you can imagine the process can be incredibly stressful. Deciding where to build, picking a lot, choosing a trusted construction company, navigating all of the options of blueprints, fixtures, finishes, and furnishings. There are so many choices and you don't want to mess any of them up! It is no surprise that there is significant frustration for many in this process.

Now, thinking of the importance and investment of building a house, would you pick someone without any experience or knowledge of the home building process to be a part of your construction project? Most likely, you would not. Because you know what you are building matters, especially if you plan to live in this new house for any length of time.

In reality, this is exactly what many couples do as they head into marriage and start a home. They never pause long enough to consider if they have the right design, blueprint, or builder. And, the statistics prove that most homes reflect this sad reality:

- Even today, almost 50% of marriages end in divorce in the United States
- Of those who remain married, marital satisfaction is at an all-time low

- An increasing number of marriages are scarred every year by affairs, addiction, and abuse

We need a better design and the right builder of marriage! But where do you start if you want to build a home that you intend to stand the test of time? Where do those blueprints come from? How do you create a home that is *Built to Last*?

Before we go any further we have to share with you our perspective, so you know what you are getting yourself into. We believe that in the beginning, God created humans in His image with intention and purpose. We read the specific account of man and woman in Genesis:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.' So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and He brought her to the man. 'At last!' the man exclaimed. 'This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame." - **Genesis 2:18-25 NLT**

Notice that from the beginning of time, there was a plan. God intentionally created man and woman to join in His beautiful creation. He intended that they would give Him glory and learn to live together. That they would become one. He didn't haphazardly or accidentally stumble across marriage, He designed it.

But, as you probably know, Adam and Eve strayed from God's direction to choose their own path. They fell from the perfect design. They chose sin which led to separation from God and resulted in death. The good news is that through Jesus, His son, God has given us a way to restore our relationship with Himself and our relationships with others. While we still live in a broken world this side of Heaven, we can reclaim His original design and live free of shame.

God has given us an incredible, beautiful, design for our homes. The only issue is that we have to choose it and build it with His plan, because: *"Unless the Lord builds the house, the work of the builders is wasted."* - **Psalm 127:1 NLT**

Think about that for a second. All of the self-help marriage tools will not matter if we don't build upon the Lord's design...it's wasted! Maybe you've been trying to fix your marriage without this key design and you're wondering why it isn't working. Maybe you just need a reminder of God's design. We can't wait to go on this journey with you.

This book will outline from God's Word what those components look like. And, just as you might expect, we are going to follow along with the design of a home as our blueprint. We are going to walk through the various stages of the construction process and parallel them with marriage applications. And with that, we are going to begin with what every home starts with: the foundation.

Skip & Cathy's Story:

For the last 50 years or so, we've been sticking our noses into some thoroughly troubled marriages. We sit down with this couple staring daggers at each other and politely ask: "What do you want in your marriage? What's the design? Where'd this thing go off the tracks?"

Then...it gets quiet. Design? What design? What tracks? It's here we find out that this couple, like so many couples, is clueless about God's design, or any design, for their marriage. It was built on hormones, emotions, an eye-popping ring, and even a storybook wedding. What could possibly go wrong?

About then it becomes obvious that this couple actually HAS been following a design for their marriage, brought to you by today's "me first" culture. It's no surprise to find that design is based on convenience, personal fulfillment, happiness, financial advantage, and perhaps even - children. This design shoots at the elusive target of "Happily Ever After" and, as statistics seem to indicate, this design fails to deliver at least half the time!

God's design, on the other hand, appears boldly in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 of His Word, your Bible. That design is built on eternal purposes: an IMAGE to bear, a MEANINGFUL TASK to perform together, a Jesus-reflecting RELATIONSHIP to display before a watching and hurting world (a world that is desperately seeking such divine intimacy), as well as the call and opportunity to raise your own family of image-bearing DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

So, the question is, and the decision remains - "Which design will you choose?" Those who choose wisely will profit delightfully as the following pages unfold that design.

Date Night Questions 1

***Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:***

- What was a fun memory from one of our first few dates together?
- What was something nerdy we did when we first started getting to know each other?
- What are the things you value most in our relationship today?
- What is something I do that blesses you?
- Does anything need to change to make our relationship even better?
- If we were to create a “mission statement” for our marriage, what would be on the top of the list?
- What do we hope our relationship looks like 10 years from now?

Small Group Session 1

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker - Do you use the instructions when you build something?
- Growing up, what examples of marriage did you have?
- Read ***Genesis 1:1-5, 2:18-25***
 - What are some intentional things you see of God's design?
 - What can we learn from the design of man and woman about marriage?
 - Why did God create marriage?
- What did you hear is the primary purpose of our lives?
- If you're married, does your marriage bring glory to God? What does that look like?
- Read ***Psalms 127:1***
 - What application does this have to your life?
 - What would you say needs to change in your life?
- What are the things you value most in your marriage?

Pre-Marriage Conversation 1

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- What do you remember about the first time we met? What attracted us to each other?
- What examples of marriage did each of us have growing up?
- Do you want something different than what you saw modeled to you? Describe.
- Do you believe God created and designed marriage? If so, what was His original intention for creating man and woman? What do you believe is God’s purpose for marriage? (Read Genesis 2:18-25, Genesis 1:27)
- How do you view divorce?
- What kind of marriages do you see stand the test of time?
- Do you have a marriage mentor or couple who is walking beside you to help? What are our expectations of that relationship? *If you are meeting with a couple for pre-marital guidance, talk about expectations at this time.*



2

The Foundation: Set on Christ

The single most time-consuming component to building any house or structure is planning and laying the foundation. In fact, it can appear in a new construction project that no work is happening for months while the foundation is being prepared and laid. For larger structures like skyscrapers the time spent on the foundation and sub-structure may be as long as the rest of the construction project itself. But (like any builder would tell you), if you get the foundation wrong, you get the whole structure wrong.

The same is true for our lives. The foundation of any home and family is the most important piece. Many homes have different shapes and sizes, but every home that is going to stand the test of time must have a solid foundation. We believe that a family and home built on Christ is one that is going to be *built to last* against the storms of this world. Jesus talked about the different foundations we could choose from in this well known scripture:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” - Matthew 7:24-27 NLT

The principle is easy to grasp: *foundations matter*.

So what does this look like in the homes we are to build? How do we build on a spiritual foundation that will weather storms like Jesus talked about? It starts with what we build our life on. If our lives are built on and centered on things that shift like the sand, they will surely not stand—at least not for long.

Many homes are established on temporary things like careers, entertainment, and satisfaction. It's even possible that some of the things people build on are well intentioned like achievement, relationships, or even children. But are those alone worthy of building on? When the wind and waves of life come, what will stand? What happens when we lose a job, lose a friendship, children rebel, marriages are strained?

If we want to build our homes on a foundation that can't be shaken, moved, or taken away, it must be built on permanent *eternal values*. We believe this is rooted in a faith in Christ discovered in the Bible. And upon this, we can rely on an unchangeable foundation.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ." - **1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT**

So what does it mean to build upon the foundation of Jesus in our homes? This is a great question!

It starts with making a decision to prioritize the place of God in our everyday lives, not just Sunday for church! This is a personal decision to trust, not in your own understanding, but upon the direction from God.

Practically speaking, in a home this looks like opening God's Word often to see what it says about life. Learn to study and discover what

God says about the world around you, and help others in your home do the same as you grow. When we bring life's challenges to God and look through His Word (instead of Google or YouTube), we are creating a life of stability. The more we build our homes on God's perspective and a relationship with Jesus, the stronger our foundation will be.

It also means learning to pray both *with* and *for* those you are close to. Colossians 4:2 reminds us to "Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart." Prayer can change our perspective and connect us like few things can! When you leave your spouse for work, pray for them. Before you drop off your kids at school, pray with them. Whatever dreams you have or issues you face, praying together helps us move from *worry* to *worship*. You might be thinking "I don't know how to pray." Good news: our God wants to talk with us, and it's as simple as starting a conversation. There aren't perfect words, just a heart submitted to know Him.

Another way you can anchor your home on a solid foundation is to firmly plant yourselves at a Bible teaching Christian church that stands on the same foundation. No church is perfect, because it is full of people! But, alongside a community of believers, we can strengthen the footings of our foundation.

Eric & Gretchen's Story:

I remodeled many homes and built some new ones, so the concept of a firm foundation is unmistakable to me. I remember working on a particular home that had horrific issues. Interior doors wouldn't close, drywall was cracked everywhere, and the floors were a roller coaster. Like treacherous serpents, tree roots had undermined the foundation and heaved it into destruction. The home might have survived this assault,

but the steel was missing from the foundation walls. Structural rebar had been left out due to the age of the house or neglect on the builder's part. It was really a total loss, all because the anemic foundation could not endure the onslaught of destructive forces.

Growing up without my own foundation in Jesus led me on a unique path of discovery, including being blessed with brilliant Christian men. These God-ordained sages spoke into my life with scriptural truth, lessons learned, and encouragement to run the race. When I met my future wife Gretchen while ministering at a college campus, my young spiritual soul had been enlightened with several immovable, spiritual truths: Warm a pew every Sunday service to hear God's Word. Dig into God's Word as it is no different than breathing air - devoid of either is death. Get on your knees, for spending time with the Creator of the universe is a privilege like no other. These are foundational essentials that Christ built my life upon and would be requisite for the future.

My wife Gretchen is an amazing person. Her foundation in Jesus started much earlier in life. When I stood at the altar, I told all witnesses that my life in Christ was better with her in it. As life continued, we found that we were very different people. Very. It is the foundation that we both live by that has made surviving those differences a possibility. Jesus has been the strong foundation that has supported the work that He wants to accomplish. Without Him and His immovable truth, the foundation of my spiritual house might have fared no better than those remodeled homes I viewed.

Now that we have children, we are faced with decisions on how to direct them towards Jesus. While the stories abound of what we wish we would have done differently, this truth is clear: build the foundation. We don't argue about going to church on Sunday morning. It's just an act of breathing to us. And talking to Jesus should be so "normal" that

there is never a hesitation in calling out to Him. Some might call this a formulaic attitude towards God. I call it hanging on for dear life and being disciplined! We try not to get wound up over little things. We just follow Jesus in these foundational areas and pray that He will take care of everything else.

Date Night Questions 2

*Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:*

- What has been your favorite place we've lived?
- What is a fun memory of our first home or apartment?
- What have been seasons of our marriage where you didn't feel solid footing?
- What are some things that have strengthened our relationship?
- What could we do to establish an even firmer foundation for our future?
- What is something I can pray about for you?

Small Group Session 2

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker: Tell about a time you built something and it didn't go well.
- Read ***Matthew 7:24-27***
 - What do couples tend to build their foundations on? Or What does the world say we should build our foundations on?
 - What are some examples of “wind” and “waves” in your marriage? How has your foundation held up in your life?
 - What action did you take when you discovered weakness in your foundation?
- What does a strong foundation look like in relationships: marriage, parenting, extended family?
- Read ***Colossians 4:2***
 - What does being “devoted” to prayer look like in your marriage?
- Where are there weak spots in your current foundation? What would your next step be?

Pre-Marriage Conversation 2

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- Describe your personal relationship with Jesus. How do you hear from God? What is He teaching you?
- How have our relationships with Jesus guided our decision to get married to each other?
- Was a relationship with Christ built into the marriages each of us watched growing up?
- Has anyone cautioned us about getting married to each other? If so, why?
- What are the godly qualities we see in each other?
- What do you believe about wedding vows and the covenant of marriage? What would break these vows and covenant?
- What part do we want God’s Word and prayer to play in our marriage?
- In our current relationship, do we believe that we are honoring Christ and His Word?
- If you have kids: How do we want to lay a foundation on Christ in our home?



3

The Walls: Mutual Submission & Sacrifice

After a foundation is laid, there is something that can be built upon. The structure begins to go vertical. Walls are raised and there is an appearance of shape to the construction of this new house. But what is the purpose of walls in a house? It may seem like a strange question, but it is worth asking for the sake of our analogy. In a physical house, walls create a boundary between the outside world and the life we will create inside of them. This boundary is one of the primary reasons we create homes in the first place. We need a place of protection, safety and comfort.

Two “walls” that we see in scripture that frame in our marriage are *submission* and *sacrifice*. You might hear those words and wonder how they can create safety. Neither one of these words has positive connotations in our world today. As a matter of fact, these words are often used in relation to control and manipulation. One of the issues we face is that there has been so much misuse of the words and concepts from their original meaning in scripture. To have an understanding, let’s go back to the original text from the book of Ephesians.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to

their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” - Ephesians 5:21-27 NIV

We start this conversation with “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” This is so important! Our submission is a *mutual yielding* out of our reverence for Christ. We understand what Jesus has done in our lives and we realize that we are sinners in need of grace. We don’t lord submission over one another, but lay down our lives for one another.

Next we see the statement “*wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands.*” And there is a connection between how Christ is the head of the Church and husbands are the head of their wife. To understand this, you have to understand what good leadership looks like. Leadership that is worthy to be followed, just like Jesus’ leadership of the church.

Now, before men get confused thinking that this role is one of privilege, we get to understand more of the job description: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” This responsibility given to husbands is to model Christ to their wife and family. That they would literally lay down their lives. This is the full picture that can’t be understood without grasping Christ’s overwhelming love.

Homes that embody submission and sacrifice are places of warmth and love. These “walls” create safety to grow, and are radically different from what the world outside looks like.

In terms of the relationships within the home, there is a give-and-take. We learn to yield to each other because of our love for Christ. We learn to model grace, forgiveness, and hope as Jesus did for us. This looks like

husbands taking up the mantle of biblical leadership: not out of being more important, but out of service and desire to point a family toward Christ. It means wives are to respect and follow their husbands as he learns to lead and follow Christ. When a decision needs to be made in the home, husbands and wives first come to each other to seek the Lord and pray. They mutually submit to each other, and ultimately the husband is given the responsibility of direction.

Now let's apply *submission* and *sacrifice* to two topics that have to be discussed for a healthy marriage: *communication* and *conflict*. It's important to understand that when we start from Christ's example, we get the best chance at both of these in marriage. When we see our spouse as God intended, we treat them like they have value and are worthy of being heard, understood and respected. We desire to learn how to speak their language and work at communication. Of course, conflict will happen. But, how we deal with that conflict is so important. All couples fight, healthy couples learn to fight the right way! Learning when and how to engage in disagreement is equally as important as what you are talking about.

It's worth acknowledging that most of us have not seen great examples of this kind of submission and sacrifice lived out. Statistically, most families are either led poorly or are broken entirely. And so we are clear, wives are never commanded to follow unbiblical or ungodly practices. This scripture we read speaks of leadership in a godly way. Many have abused this scripture, and this breaks the heart of God. We would ask that you seek biblical counsel and advice from trusted mentors on how to navigate destructive behaviors.

We pray that as families establish firm foundations and build walls of strength, we will start to see a change for future generations. We will see children that are raised in homes where they understand their heavenly

Father better because of the relationship they have modeled to them by their earthly parents. Can you imagine the strength of homes where both husbands and wives model the love of Jesus within those walls?

Matt & Denise's Story:

During the beginning of our marriage, we didn't change much. Denise was a servant to Matt all the time and a great wife, but Matt continued to live life the way he did prior to marriage. Our first son was born, and Denise adjusted to parenthood very well, but Matt still refused to reprioritize. This allowed Denise's parents into an unhealthy role in our family; they became an active part of childcare and child rearing, which wasn't very good for our marriage. After our second son was born, Denise became overwhelmed as our newest family member struggled to sleep due to ear issues, on top of needing to care for the rest of the family. This was the turning point in our marriage.

Matt began to understand that his role in the family was much more than just a provider. His understanding from watching his parents was that his job was only provider and playmate of the children, while the wife's role was taking care of the house and childcare. But, to have a successful marriage, both husband and wife must serve the family and make personal sacrifices to create a healthy, strong family. As Matt began to serve his family like Denise had been doing the entire time, there was a shift in the overall happiness of everyone in the family.

Through the years, as both Matt and Denise served and sacrificed for their family, it became the standard for their household. Now 30+ years later, Matt and Denise have a very strong, grounded, service-oriented marriage. and their children are all adults and have the very same mindset to serve their spouse and family. The generational shift of service and sacrifice was made early in our marriage and changed everything for us!

Date Night Questions 3

***Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:***

- What are some of the silliest things we have fought over as a couple?
- Do you remember any of the things your parents or grandparents fought over when you were a child? How did they resolve their issues?
- How have we grown in our disagreements as a couple?
- What are the best and worst times for us to bring up things to work on in our marriage?
- What is a practical area of submission or sacrifice you could grow in?

Small Group Session 3

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker: What are some random things your spouse does that you don't understand?
- So far we've discussed "The Design" of marriage and having a "Foundation" set on Christ. Today we talk about the picture and analogy of "Walls." What is the purpose of walls in a home? What do they do?
- Biblically, our marriages are framed in by two important areas as husband and wife: *submission* and *sacrifice*. Listen for these ideas as we read ***Ephesians 5:21-27***.
 - What are some words that stood out to you?
 - What is the significance of "*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*"?
 - What have you seen and experienced with *submission* and *sacrifice*? What was modeled to you by parents or grandparents? How have you seen abuse of these principles?
 - When practiced appropriately, what does "*wives submit to your husband as you do to the Lord*" look like in marriage?
 - When led well, what does "*husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" look like in marriage?
- How does *submission* and *sacrifice* help you grow as a couple in the area of communication?
- When you have conflict in your relationship, what are some ground rules you have (or desire to have)? How does *submission* and *sacrifice* help conflict?

- What is your biggest area of growth on this topic? Who is someone, besides your spouse, that could help you grow?
- What is something you could try to grow in this week?

Pre-Marriage Conversation 3

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- What was modeled to you growing up about submission and sacrifice?
- What do you believe about submission and sacrifice in marriage?
- What do you want communication to look like in our marriage?
 - When is the best and worst time to discuss challenging topics?
 - Are you quick to react, or a slower processor of information?
 - Do you first *think* or *feel* if there is a conflict?
- What are some things we have had conflict over in our relationship so far?
- What are the rules for a “good fight”? Where, when, how?
- Who are people that can help us process a fight with our spouse in a healthy way?
- What are some things you want to keep out of our marriage and home?



4

The Roof: Spiritual Family

After the foundation is laid and the walls go up, the next component to the design of our house is to add a protective roof. A roof's purpose is to shield the structure from the elements: heat, cold, rain, snow, wind, hail. You name it, a roof has faced it. And often a roof does its job so well we forget it is even there—that is, until there is a problem.

Have you ever experienced a leak in a roof? No matter how beautiful the home, one leak can cause tremendous damage and devastation. What might start as a slow drip can turn into a flood of issues. If you've seen a home affected by water damage, you know how much a well built roof matters.

In a family, the "roof" is vitally important. Every home needs protection over it. For the sake of our analogy, the roof applies to having a *spiritual family* or covering. Again, this is something that can be ignored, that is, until there is a problem. But, when our marriage is struggling, we need help, and right away. When our kids are hurting, we need support quickly. Where do we go?

Many who encounter a "leak" have no one around them to support and protect. They are forced to rely on people with little or no relationship to repair the problem. We see in Ecclesiastes a great picture of this principle:

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.” - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NLT

Did you see that? We need people who can help us succeed! It is only a matter of time until we face danger and fall. The person who falls on their own is in *real* trouble.

You might be thinking at this moment, “I don’t ever want to be reliant on others.” And while that might be true, in your current situation, it is short-sighted. Jim Putman often says it this way: “It is in times of strength that we prepare for times of weakness.” Having a spiritual family, or roof, is preparing for challenges in life we cannot predict or see at the moment, but we know they will come. Who will be there when challenges come to help you and your family?

Beyond the protection, having a spiritual roof has so many other benefits. When we have people to offer spiritual oversight in our lives, they can help us grow in areas we would struggle if we were on our own. One of the areas we have appreciated through our marriage is having Godly examples to surround us and learn from. When we were engaged, we had amazing pre-marriage mentors who helped us understand what going into marriage and the early years of marriage could and should look like. As we grew, had kids, moved into a new community, we developed new relationships that helped us navigate life changes. At each transitional season, we leveraged those who were further along to guide us: small groups, Pastors, and friends.

So, what about you? Who do you have around you right now who is offering spiritual protection and oversight? A great place to start is being connected to a Bible teaching Christian church and small group. Surrounding yourself with godly counsel is like adding ropes of support

to your life - a safety net. Ask someone to specifically “mentor” or “coach” you in your marriage. If you’re nervous about this, remember that people love to be asked for advice, and it’s an honor to be considered a mentor.

One last added benefit of spiritual protection is through a covering of prayer. Having someone pray for your marriage and family is one of the greatest blessings you can receive. We all need a spiritual roof. Who is yours?

Greg & Johan’s Story:

Johan and I, on separate paths, began our relationship with the Lord Jesus through the loving influence of Christian friends.

When I was in college, I was so appreciative of a young woman named Julie’s compassion toward my wounded warrior roommate that I wrote her a thank you note. That led to more conversations until one day she sat me down to watch Billy Graham and it was the first time I heard the gospel message all the way through and it was music to my ears. I started reading the Bible she gave me and it opened up a whole new world for me. As I got to know her family I remember praying “God, I don’t want to just be a recipient of this kind of love; show me how to love like these followers of you.”

Julie and I got married and raised three kids as I served in various ministries with kids, parents and families. But after dancing with her for 34 years, Jesus tapped me on the shoulder to cut in and He ushered her to heaven. It was then I experienced God as my Comforter.

Johan and her step family all made a decision to follow Jesus when she was young, but they moved away from that loving support. She walked away from her faith during high school.

While living in the world, she married an unbeliever and they lived a life according to the culture. She then landed in a Christian-owned company and it was the love of her coworkers that led her back to the Lord. But as she was drawing closer to God, her former husband withdrew from her, became unfaithful, and divorced her. It was then she experienced God as her Provider.

We both have lost marriages, one to cancer and the other to unfaithfulness, but God has given us a second chance at marriage when He brought us together. Now we get to come alongside other couples who need a second chance as we serve together as marriage mentors, facilitators of marriage small groups, hosting marriage retreats, and equipping others to do the same.

Date Night Questions 4

***Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:***

- Who were some of your family friends growing up?
- Early in our relationship, what was something we couldn't figure out and had to ask help with?
- Currently in our relationship, who do we look to when we need counsel?
- What is something my spouse is gifted with that they have helped me learn?
- What does the next season of growth look like, and who could we ask to mentor us?

Small Group Session 4

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker: What has been your most frustrating household catastrophe? (Water pipe, broken window, damage from tree, etc.) If you don't have any, what do you think would be your most frustrating?
- A roof is something that protects us from the elements. In marriage, a spiritual family operates as a protection from challenges that will come. Right now, how strongly would you say that you're family and marriage is protected? Strongly / Moderately / Weakly
- Read ***Ecclesiastes 4:9-12***
 - What did you see here?
 - Have you ever fallen like this scripture speaks of? What has been your experience?
 - Did you have someone to pick you up? What did that look like?
 - How does this apply to marriage?
- How do you do with being helped? How do you do with helping others?
- What would it look like for this small group to be a place that if you were to fall, we could help pick you up?
- Is there anything right now we could help each other with?
 - Physical Needs
 - Mentorship or Discipleship
 - Prayer
 - Other
- Have you ever experienced being discipled by someone? Describe that. Do you have someone doing that in your life right now?

- Do you think someone (or another couple) in this group could play a part in your spiritual growth? Ask them this week to meet.
- Pray over the needs shared tonight. Potentially break into men's and women's groups separately.

Pre-Marriage Conversation 4

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- What are the dynamics of our current families’ structures (each of our parents)?
- How are those relationships going to shift as “a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife”? What role does extended family play for our future? Is there unresolved hurt that needs to be dealt with?
- What kind of spiritual protection and covering do we already have, and what do we still need? Who will we go to for advice, assistance, guidance?
- What part does a discipleship focused small group play in our early years of marriage? What about 10 years in? If we move to a new city, what would we do to establish a new spiritual family?
- How connected in the church do we expect to be?



5

The Doors: Serve Others

If your house was built on a solid foundation, framed up by strong walls, covered by a roof, but it is missing a front door, it isn't a completed home. And, this structure doesn't have any real value because you couldn't access it! In fact, a building without a method to get in or get out isn't a home, but a prison.

And, as strange as this building sounds, it is how many build their lives - separated from the world and not contributing to anything. Spiritually speaking, our families were never intended to hide away from society. God desires our homes to impact the world around us, and be a part of inviting people in. Our homes need to have ways to invite people in, and be able to access the world with the hope we have received.

When we think of the life and ministry of Jesus, we see a perfect model: *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many."* - **Mark 10:45 NLT**

Even Jesus, the Son of God, came to serve and give His life, providing a way for restored relationship with the Father.

This has so much application to our life, but it starts with how we treat our spouse. When we turn our perspective from "being served" to "serve" it changes the way we view our relationship. Our spouse isn't there to be our servant or maid, but someone worthy to be loved and served.

How did Jesus serve His bride in the church? He laid His very life down! Sometimes we act like serving someone else is so sacrificial, until remembering that model...and we haven't died for anyone, have we? Do you have the attitude and mindset of Christ toward your spouse?

Next, this has application to how we serve those outside of our homes. In our homes, we can hide away in the comfort of our safety, or we can reach out and serve the world around us. When we begin to serve as Christ did, it allows two massive shifts to happen: internal and external.

Internally, when our lens changes from self-centeredness to others-centeredness, we begin to grow in gratitude for what is right in front of us. We see that there is a world in need of love and hope. Our perspective widens and reminds us of the many blessings we have. We are reminded how blessed we are as we look around.

Externally, we begin to grow in the mission Christ has given us. We start to understand that the most important things in life are not temporary, but eternal. We are reminded that this life on earth is only a glimpse of Heaven, and we begin to shift to a God-centered purpose. We begin to understand what discipleship looks like and why Jesus thought it was so important. And with those shifts we start to prioritize serving others in our life.

Every home and season looks different in how we serve the world around us, but even right now you can begin thinking of what those needs are around you and how your family could impact them. None of us can do everything, but all of us can do something.

Chris & Sara's Story:

We met on the first day of college in August of 2002 at Boise Bible College. We both were drawn to the school because of our desire to use our career and purpose for vocational ministry. At this point in our young adult lives, we had no idea what this would mean. Our relationship started as a friendship. We enjoyed each other and being together. We actually worked together at a local library, as our friendship was established. We also served together as volunteers in children's ministry at a local church, both sharing our passion for serving Jesus.

Slowly our friendship turned to romance. Our conversations turned toward the future and how God could use us together. It was as if God was intentionally placing us on a pathway together, helping us to see something we wouldn't see on our own. We believe that God brought us together for a purpose. On August 14th, 2004 we were married and began our life together as husband and wife.

So much has changed in our lives since 2004: moving to different cities, raising four amazing daughters, various ministries and staff roles. But one thing hasn't changed: our love for Jesus and desire to serve in His church. We believe He started our relationship with a purpose and vision. A larger picture than we had on our own if we were looking inward.

Our passion in ministry goes beyond being on staff at a church, but is more about following the model of Jesus in our everyday lives. We believe that when God's vision is front and center, we won't be distracted by unimportant things. It also reminds us that we are so blessed by a God who has given so much. We believe serving together has shaped our home and marriage in ways that not much else has.

Date Night Questions 5

***Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:***

- What are ways that we serve each other?
- What blesses you most when I serve you?
- Do we have margin in our schedule, life, finances to help those around us?
- What are some common passions we have?
- Is there anything we could do together to serve others?
- How could we teach our kids about serving and giving?

Small Group Session 5

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker: Describe the oddest roommate or neighbor you've ever had?
- No matter where we live, we cannot stay isolated in our own homes. God designed us to be in the world, but not of it. The "Doors" of a home emphasize that our homes are created to let people in, and to impact those outside of our home. Was the family you grew up in one that saw needs around you and helped?
- Read **Mark 10:35-45**
 - What stood out about this interaction?
 - How do entitlement and servanthood relate?
 - What is significant about this scripture?
 - How does this passage relate to marriage? What about parenting?
- In marriage, do you honestly have a "be served" or "serve others" attitude?
- How does your home become a picture of the Gospel to those outside of your home?
- What are you currently grateful for in your marriage? (Write down individually and share if you have time)
- What is a tangible need that has presented itself to you recently that you could play a part in? What is something you could do this week?

Pre-Marriage Conversation 5

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- What are the ways God has gifted each of us? Are we currently able to use those gifts to serve each other? What about serving others?
- Do we have expectations of chores for husband and wife? What did our parents do to serve each other?
- What are our love languages, and how can we each be best loved by our spouse? (Examples: physical touch, words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, receiving gifts)
- In our early years of marriage, do we plan to serve or volunteer in an organization together or individually?
- Are we on the same page about tithing (10% of our income) to the church? Are you currently doing this individually? What would it take to get to that spot?
- Do we see ourselves being a family that takes in other people to live with us in our home? For short seasons or long periods? What about adoption or foster care?



6

The Inside: Moving Toward Oneness

We know the final stage of a home project can feel overwhelming, tiring, exhausting. Think of all of the loose ends that have to be decided on to be able to finally move in. Color choices, furniture, decorations... and then finally you get to settle in. But what is the goal of all of those final touches and details? Why do we want to get it right? It is to create a space that we want to be in and enjoy. You want the inside of your house to be a place worth coming home to each night. A place of warmth, love, and a space to create memories.

We desire much of the same things in the homes we are building in our marriage and family: *a place of warmth and love*. A place where grace can flourish and we can grow. It means that we are on a journey of togetherness instead of independence and isolation. And human nature tells us that every one of us wants a place to be known, accepted, and loved. In marriage, the word is *oneness*.

Jesus spoke of this as He was questioned about marriage: “‘Haven’t you read the Scriptures?’” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ ” And He said, “‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.”” - **Matthew 19:4-6 NLT**

What a mysterious thing - two become one! It was a miracle in the beginning of creation, and it is a miracle today. We are no longer two

people living separate lives, but we are interdependent on each other before God. And, we are not called to simply be roommates sharing the same roof, but truly connected.

As we think about oneness in marriage, it helps to think of it in a few key ways: emotional oneness, physical oneness, and spiritual oneness. While they are slightly different, they all help us get a picture of this miraculous story.

Emotionally, God made us to share our burdens, hopes, and dreams with our spouse. To open up our head and heart to each other as we grow together. This emotional connection takes time and trust. It's not surprising that women have an easier time connecting emotionally. It is not to say that men won't or can't, but it is not as natural for most. This means an extra stretching and openness for men to open their hearts to their wife. To share what they are thinking, feeling and to be vulnerable before them.

Physically, God created husband and wife to connect through physical touch and sexual intimacy. We are wired to bond physically and sex is connecting in a deep way. In marriage, over time, we learn to understand each other's bodies and grow in this type of oneness. While this is a generalization, men are more wired and driven by sex than women. They connect and bond physically, and often this is how they open up emotionally. For women, this takes understanding that their husband is created differently. And men must understand that while they may be drawn to connect this way, their wife needs emotional connection just as deeply as he desires physical connection.

Finally, God also created this oneness to transcend the emotional and physical, and to enter the spiritual. While we each have a personal abiding relationship with Jesus, God wants us to seek Him, as husband

and wife, together! This is done through submitting our relationship to the Lord and asking Him to work in our marriage, just as He does with us individually. Saying to the Lord “use us for your glory” and following where He leads. When we seek God together as husband and wife, there is nothing this side of heaven more uniting and fulfilling.

Oneness in marriage is a profound picture of the Gospel: Jesus’ love for the church and willingness to lay down His life for her. God has beautifully created marriage to become a place of warmth and love that would be a model to the world around of His miraculous work. This is a home worth living in.

John and Jeani’s Story:

Married for 36 wonderful years...well that isn't exactly our story. Yes, we have been married for 36 years, but not all have been wonderful. About 5 years into our marriage, complacency and selfishness began to creep into our home and we took our eyes off Jesus and put them on ourselves. Raising our kids, success in our careers, and extended family issues began to take over our lives. It was clear to us that our personal values changed and what was inconceivable a few years back had actually become reasonable. Oneness in our marriage no longer existed.

We found ourselves distant, discouraged and dissatisfied. We kept up a good front, or so we thought for a long time. But eventually it began to become more noticeable and we knew something had to change.

Luckily we kept connected with our small group through church. Because we had godly friends who were allowed to speak into our lives, we began to slowly turn our focus back towards God and His Word. God broke through the hardness of our hearts and transformed us.

We now have such a passion for marriage, and we share the hope that with God, healthy relationships, and hard work, you can have a thriving marriage.

Date Night Questions 6

***Here are some fun questions to go deeper on a
date night with your spouse:***

- What is your favorite thing that we do together?
- What are things that make you feel most connected in marriage?
- Which of the three (emotional, physical, spiritual) do you have the easiest time with? Which is most difficult for you?
- How are you feeling about our pace and schedule? Are we able to grow closer in oneness or are we moving further apart right now? What needs to change?
- Is there any way our sex life could improve? How could we connect better?
- How are you doing emotionally? Are you stressed or fatigued? How could I help?
- What is our next step in the construction of our home from this book?

Small Group Session 6

***The following questions are designed to guide your
small group discussion***

- Icebreaker: Play the newlywed game. Each of you write your answer to the following questions on your own to see if they match. The couple with the most matches win.
 - Where was your first date?
 - Who initiated the first kiss?
 - What was the first movie you watched together?
 - Who is the worst driver among you?
 - What are you most likely to fight about?
 - Who makes the bed?
 - Where do you hope to go for your next vacation?
- After we've established the home design, built on the right foundation, raised the walls, put on the roof and framed the doors, we finally get to live in the house we've created: and move inside. When you think of the inside of your home, what describes the atmosphere you're trying to create for your marriage and family?
- Read **Matthew 19:1-6**
 - What is significant about this scripture?
 - What are the implications of two becoming one?
- What does oneness mean for you and your marriage?
- Becoming "one" is emotional, physical, and spiritual. Which of these areas is the most difficult for you to be united in? How would you take a step of growth in your marriage this week?
- Through this study, what is something you can see real growth in for your relationship? What are you grateful for in your spouse?
- How can you continue to build on the growth that you've taken?

Pre-Marriage Conversation 6

The following questions are to help you navigate what you desire for marriage before you say “I do.”

- **Emotional Oneness**

- When and how is the best way to share how you are feeling?
- When you've had a hard day, what does it look like to come back together as husband and wife?
- What does a great day in your relationship look like? How about for a working day? A day off? After having kids? When our kids leave the house?
- Is there a place for secrets within our marriage?

- **Physical Oneness**

- How does physical touch connect us in our relationship?
- What kind of sexual experience do we each bring into our marriage, and how do you see that effecting our future sex life? (Get it all on the table now!)
- How do you view a healthy sex life?
- How often do you think we are going to have sex per week?
- How do you want to talk about sex as we learn and grow in knowing each others' bodies?

- **Spiritual Oneness**

- How do we plan to seek God together once we are married?
- What do you see our prayer life looking like? (Together and Individually)
- What does studying God's Word look like? (Together and Individually)
- What's something about your future spouse you thank God for?



Appendix

Time for Remodeling

After all of this construction talk, many of you might be considering how far off your home is from the design we studied. You could look at this house design and be discouraged. You could say “I didn’t build on the right foundation. I don’t have the right shape of my walls. My roof is leaking!” It can become easy to compare and see the other houses on the block with envy or frustration.

Or, you could say: “Let’s do some restoration.” This is the amazing thing about our God and our faith. It is, and always has been, a story of redemption. God wants to restore us and help us rebuild on what matters. And if the wind and waves have wrecked your life, you have a chance to rebuild on a solid footing that can’t be destroyed. With God’s help, you can create homes and marriages that are *Built to Last*.

Strengthen Your Foundation

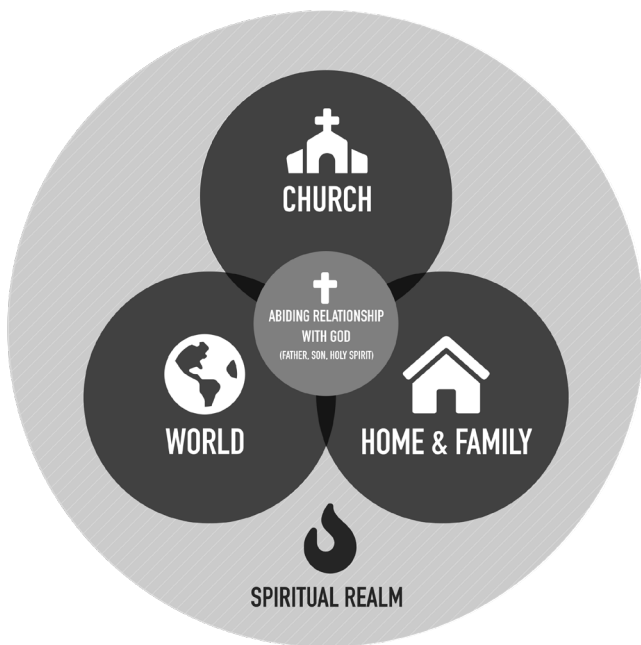
We hope this short book has helped you reevaluate the design of your home. Maybe through reading this you have even started some construction! But don’t stop now. We believe this is just the beginning of pursuing a biblical perspective on marriage and family. Spend some time studying and praying over these key marriage passages from the Bible:

- God’s personal value of the marriage relationship
 - Isaiah 54:5

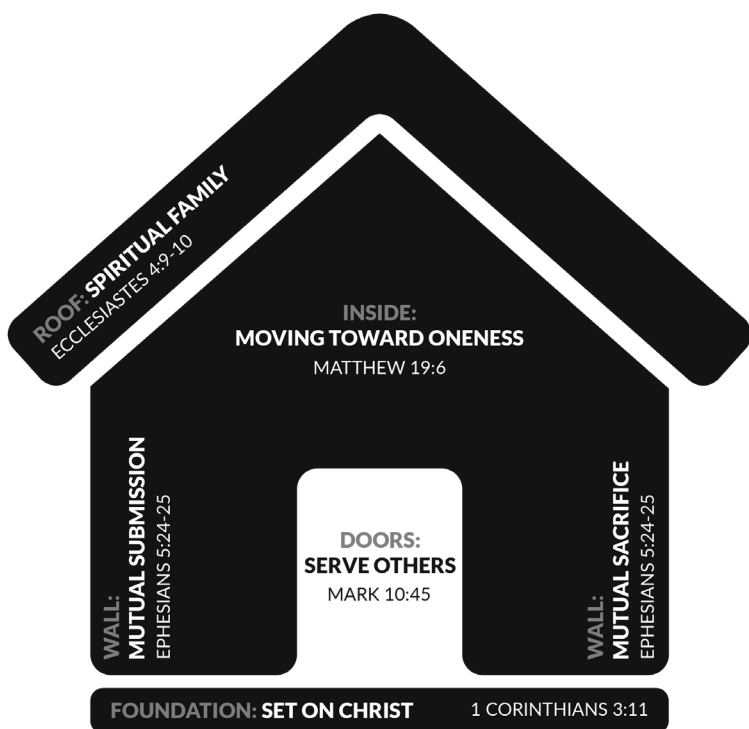
- Malachi 2:14-15
- Revelation 19:6-9
- Husbands' responsibility in marriage
 - Ephesians 5:25-28
 - 1 Peter 3:7
- Wives' response in marriage through Christ
 - Ephesians 5:22-24
 - Proverbs 31:10-12

The “5 Spheres” and How to Use This Resource

“Built to Last” is a resource focused on the Home & Family Sphere based on Real Life Ministries 5 Spheres Resources. It is focused on helping you grow in the specific area of your home as you grow as a disciple in spiritual maturity. Check out more resources from Real Life Ministries on our website: www.realliferesources.org



The *Home & Family* SPHERE





Acknowledgements

This resource is made possible by the combined effort that has come from months and years of dedicated volunteer leaders coming alongside marriages in all seasons. Our team, after seeing the destruction that has taken place in so many homes, felt it was their time to make known what they have come to see: there is a better way to build marriages that are Built to Last! This resource is truly a team effort and shared wisdom from some very godly couples.

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Real Life Marriage has a variety of opportunities to take advantage of. For more information visit: **www.reallifeministries.com/marriage** or call Real Life Ministries at 208-777-7325.



Chris & Sara Short are passionate about helping marriage become healthy. They are both on staff at Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, Idaho. They have been married since August 14, 2004 and have four beautiful daughters. There is never a dull moment in the Short household!