

SAMPLE | CHAPTER ONE

THE  
grace  
marriage

How the Gospel  
and Intentionality  
Transform Your Relationship

FOREWORD BY DR. JULI SLATTERY

Brad & Marilyn Rhoads  
with Brittany Cragg

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CHICAGO

## Praise for *The Grace Marriage*

When couples hit a rough patch in their marriage, the tendency for most is to seek better ways of behaving and performing in order to improve the relationship. The problem, of course, is that outward behavior doesn't always reflect the true state of our hearts! In their new book, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads have extended a gospel-oriented approach to marriage that is rooted in the kind of love and grace Christ holds out to us.

**JIM DALY**, President, Focus on the Family

God's grace is freeing and transformative. This book will help you extend that grace to your spouse and set your marriage free to thrive.

**BOB GOFF**, *New York Times* bestselling author

I have been urging the Rhoads to write this book for fifteen years. Trust me when I say that *The Grace Marriage* is a must-read! This book has been life-tested in Marilyn and Brad's marriage, but also in years of counseling and teaching. Its gospel focus will shape your sense of identity and structure your expectations. It will help you see the trap of a performance-based marriage and the beauty of a grace-based marriage. The authors' self-disclosure in this book will model what it means to be complete in Christ. It is simple and accessible without being shallow. It is profoundly theological and yet eminently practical. May God use this book to transform marriages in the body of Christ to be like a "city on a hill" that cannot be hidden.

**TEDD TRIPP**, pastor emeritus, author, conference speaker

What a brilliant move to look at every aspect of marriage under the rubric of grace! Grace is lovely and precious; even more, it reflects the beauty of Jesus, which this book does as well. After reading this marvelous book, you will never look at your marriage through the same lens again.

**GARY THOMAS**, author of *Sacred Marriage* and *Cherish*

In our research, one of the most crucial factors for a great marriage is having grace with your spouse. In this life-giving book, Brad and Marilyn convey deep truths about *how* to do exactly that. Their everyday stories and illustrations will help you connect the truths they share to your own everyday journey with your spouse, no matter where you are in your marriage. We highly recommend that you read *The Grace Marriage*—with your spouse—as it will breathe hope and life into your heart and marriage.

**JEFF AND SHAUNTI FELDHAHN**, social researchers and bestselling authors of *For Women Only* and *For Men Only*

Brad and Marilyn are a couple that walks the talk. The message of *The Grace Marriage* is not just one they write about, it's one they live. I love their balanced approach of grace and truth, and their message of investing in your marriage will inspire and challenge you to do the same. It takes intentional work to move your marriage to a healthy place, and this book will help give you a practical plan to take those next steps.

**DEBRA FILETA**, licensed professional counselor and bestselling author

Brad and Marilyn's book is an honest, transparent, deep dive into the realities that married couples face every day. Their discussion transforms the trifecta of communication, money, and sex into a gentle conversation about God's grace. These potentially kryptonite issues can weaken the strongest marriages. Yet the Rhoads tackle each with courage, clarity, and biblically based strategies. I particularly love their reminder that "God uses marriage—and sometimes our spouse, specifically—as an avenue of grace to grow us more into His likeness." This book should be required reading for every marriage ministry and premarital program.

**ROD PATTERSON**, Executive Leader, International Christian Brotherhood; author of *Guard Your Gates*

I know of no other book that focuses more on living out the gospel in your marriage than this one. Readers with a shallow understanding of the gospel will strengthen not only their marriage, but their grasp of God's saving grace in Christ as well. Those with a clear understanding of it will see its practical implications for marriage as never before. The Rhoads have written this book in an easy-to-read style, amply illustrating their early naiveté about marriage and the resulting failures, along with how they learned to grow in their relationship by intentionally investing in it. I know Brad well. He's humbly transparent about both his failures (especially) and successes in his marriage to Marilyn. But I don't know anyone who prioritizes his marriage more than he does. The Rhoads won't give you the impression in this book that they have achieved marital perfection, but they will show you biblical reasons and real-life (with five kids!) suggestions on how they've dramatically improved their marriage and how you can too.

**DONALD S. WHITNEY**, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY); author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, *Praying the Bible*, and *Family Worship*

Brad and Marilyn Rhoads lead with their hearts as they teach us how to experience intentionality in our marriages. Consistently investing in and valuing our spouse is a transforming catalyst in our homes—and only achieved through the power of the gospel. What a valuable framework and guide they equip husbands and wives with!

**CARL CATON**, President, The Marriage Initiative

If there is one resource every family pastor and Christian marriage and family therapist should have on their shelf, it is *The Grace Marriage*. Brad and Marilyn have done a masterful job weaving personal stories alongside Scripture in order to make the gospel's relevance come alive with regard to marriage. The balance of wisdom, conviction, and tenderness are refreshing.

**NATHAN THOMPSON, LPCC**, Family Pastor, Southeast Christian Church

This will become *the* book for marriage. It's honest, engaging, and practical. You'll laugh a lot. But most importantly, it absolutely drips the grace and love of Christ.

**JAMUS EDWARDS**, Pastor for Preaching & Vision, Pleasant Valley Community Church

*The Grace Marriage* is an excellent book that holds the key to marriage . . . grace. It's the grace of Jesus that lays the firm foundation for everything in marriage. When spouses are intentionally extending grace to one another,

their marriage will flourish and can successfully navigate personality differences, financial challenges, and even marital crises.

**HOWARD DAYTON**, Founder, Compass – Finances God’s Way

Great storytelling. Humor. Strong truth. Practical application. There is perhaps no better way to learn about tough subjects. In *The Grace Marriage*, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads bring together all of these elements to help Christians gain a new perspective and strengthen their marriages. I’m recommending this book everywhere I go!

**JOSEPH SANGL**, President & CEO, INJOY Stewardship Solutions

When a book tells a fascinating story while exposing the reader to rock-solid doctrine, the heart of Jesus, and a revolutionary strategy for marriage, one can’t help but be enthralled. Not only will *The Grace Marriage* transfix you, it will transform your marriage while transforming your heart.

**RICK HOWERTON**, Pastor of Rockwall Groups, Lakepointe Church; author, *A Different Kind of Tribe: Embracing the New Small-Group Dynamic*

As we listened to the story of their marriage, and how God transformed their marriage, all of us wanted God’s grace for our own marriages! Brad and Marilyn point us to the grace of Christ and solid biblical principles that motivate us to “do marriage” God’s way. Thank you, Brad and Marilyn, for being transparent and honest with your own struggles and the joy you found in surrendering yourselves to God’s grace!

**GREG ALLEN**, Campus Pastor, Southeast Christian Church

We know that grace saves! In *The Grace Marriage*, the Rhoads help Christians see, in a real-life, practical way, how grace can play the definitive role in fostering healthy, Christ-centered marriages. This book will ignite a fire of renewal in married life across the country.

**J.P. DE GANCE**, founder and president, Communio

As followers of Christ, the grace offered by our Lord is our salvation and hope. Could this be any less true in our marriages? Certainly not! In this great book, Brad and Marilyn skillfully show us how to receive God’s grace, enjoy it fully, and effectively invest it in both our spouse and our relationship. The result is a divinely blessed, grace-filled life *and* marriage. Why settle for less!

**ROBERT S. PAUL**, Vice President, Focus on the Family Marriage Institute

As I talk to churches around the country, I continue to hear about the impact Brad and Marylin are having on couples. As you read this book, I am sure you will understand why!

**JOHN MCGEE**, Senior Director, Watermark Resources

Brad and Marilyn have written a fantastic book on marriage that centers around Jesus Christ. From the standpoint of the Word of God, their own experiences, and honest transparency and heart-driven questions, this book offers guidelines for couples to stay connected to each other. The book also addresses the major aspects of marriage through the lens of the gospel. I truly believe that your marriage will be transformed, enriched, and healthy after reading this book.

**JON BELL**, Campus Pastor (Aurora Campus), Harvest Bible Chapel

I am so excited about *The Grace Marriage* getting into the hands of married couples everywhere. Godly, Christ-honoring marriages are desperately needed in our culture today. I love how this book is rooted in a sound theological framework and applied very practically to every area of marriage. I highly recommend going through this book with your spouse.

**AFSHIN ZIAFAT**, Lead Pastor, Providence Church (Frisco, TX) and council member for The Gospel Coalition

This is an honest, touching, and real-life meditation on the meaning, methods, and manners of a grace-filled and Christ-focused marriage. By generously sharing their story of courtship, marriage, and parenthood—warts and all—Brad and Marilyn Rhoads teach us that marriage is a lifelong covenant of love and sacrifice, not a utilitarian contract of works and performance. The authors further show how a grace-filled Christian marriage practically and realistically plays out in marital communication, sexual exchange, household finance, children's upbringing, crisis management, and more. Wistful singles, courting couples, married spouses, marital counselors, and Christian pastors alike will benefit from this lovely book.

**JOHN WITTE**, Faculty Director, Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Emory University

In *The Grace Marriage*, Brad and Marilyn beckon us to the marriage-transforming power of God's grace in all its hope-bringing, pride-killing, Christ-exalting sweetness. This book is theologically rich, well-written, practically oriented, and much-needed today. Read to remember how truly you are known and how fully you are loved. Read also to recognize fresh ways to root your marriage in the gracious soil of the gospel.

**NATHAN TARR**, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology, Phoenix Seminary; Chaplain (Major), Air National Guard

The jury is in, and the verdict is clear. Most marriage partners are essentially incompatible according to the law. Thank God for grace . . . and for *The Grace Marriage*! As a professor and professional marriage and family therapist for over thirty years, I absolutely love this approach that weds grace and intentionality with smart training.

**SCOTT WIGGINTON, LMFT**, Professor of Pastoral Ministries & Counseling, Campbellsville University; Executive Director, Winterpast Counseling

This book gives us a clear reminder that the same grace that transforms our spiritual lives can also transform our marriages. God uses marriage to grow and mature us in ways that no other human relationship can. Brad and Marilyn's life and marriage are a testimony to the power of grace in action.

**DEREK IRVIN**, Marriage & Care Pastor, Northview Church

Brad and Marilyn don't just talk the talk, but they walk the walk. This book is not theoretical, it's full of practical and applicable coaching for all of us who want to glorify God in our marriages. I've seen them live it out in their own lives and highly recommend this book! Read it with your spouse!

**KENT EVANS**, Executive Director, Manhood Journey; author of *Bring Your Hammer: 28 Tools Dads Can Grab from the Book of Nehemiah*

# Contents

Foreword	11
1. Great Love Stories Can Have Ugly Beginnings	15
2. The Performance-Based Marriage: Where Your Best Is Never Enough	29
3. The Grace-Based Marriage: Where Love Covers a Multitude of Sins	41
4. Grace + Intentionality: Sowing Generously to Reap Abundantly	59
5. Grace and Identity: Who Do You Think You Are?	75
6. Grace and Expectations: What Did You Expect?	91
7. Grace in the Day-to-Day	105
8. Grace in Crisis	119
9. Grace and Communication	135
10. Grace and Criticism	151
11. Grace and Sex	163
12. Grace and Money	179
Afterword: Grace + Intentionality = Growth + the Gospel	199
Acknowledgments	203

# Great Love Stories Can Have Ugly Beginnings

On our twentieth anniversary, I told Marilyn, “This has been the best twenty years of my life.”

She responded, “It’s been the best nineteen of mine. There’s no way I’m giving you that first year!”

Decades of marriage and five children later, I’m thankful for God’s kindness to us in saving our marriage after a nearly disastrous beginning.

Our story begins in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1995.

I had just gotten back to the office where I was working as an attorney. I’d derailed my schedule by locking my keys in my car after meeting with a client in Waco (the one in Tennessee, not the one in Texas). Disheveled and harried, I finally dragged myself through the office door around 10:00 that night.

Then I saw her.

She was sitting in a paralegal’s office, working on her résumé.



Her long brown hair fell down around her shoulders, shining against the backdrop of a blue business suit. She was stunning.

She turned and looked at me as I walked by, and my feet almost involuntarily turned into that office. I chatted with her and the paralegal, who was her sister, for nearly an hour. I later learned that her sister told her, “I’ve worked here for three years, and that guy hasn’t talked to me for five minutes the entire time.”

I was smitten.

A few months later, I saw her in the office again, and this time, I was a little bolder. I said, “Hey, if you ever want to go for a run or something, give me a call.”

She paused, handed me her business card, and said, “If you ever want to go on a run, you give *me* a call.”

She later told her roommate, “I’ve met a really interesting guy, but he asked *me* to call *him* if I wanted to hang out . . . so he’s either cocky or he has a girlfriend.” And she was right. I was dating someone else at the time and was trying to assuage a guilty conscience.

After the other relationship ended, I decided I was not going to date for a year. But then I remembered Marilyn. *One date couldn’t hurt, right?* I called and asked if she’d still like to go on that run. We agreed to make it a hike instead so we could talk.

Given all I did wrong on our first date, it’s nothing short of a miracle that she ended up marrying me. After work that evening, she drove to my house to change clothes. When she went into the bathroom to change, it was so gross she dry-heaved . . . twice.

I told her we’d take my truck. Since I was an attorney at a big firm, she expected a nice SUV. Instead, she slid into my

dirty, turquoise, extended cab Ford Ranger. The interior was filthy; my black lab's hair was everywhere. She even found a dog hair in the ice cube in her cup. I didn't open the door for her, and had to scramble to throw out a beer can and cup of tobacco spit before she got in. On the drive home, my dog sat in the space behind the seat and hung his head over Marilyn's lap, showering her legs with slobber.

When we got back to my house, we decided to go out to dinner. Marilyn wanted to go home and change her clothes first, but I was hungry. So even though I took the time to change into something nicer, she had to go in the same shorts and T-shirt she'd worn on the hike.

After dinner, we hung out for a while with my roommate. She sat on one end of the couch, and I sat on the other. I was intrigued by how she looked right at me when I talked. My roommate even commented on it later. Guys like us weren't used to good eye-to-eye communication.

I think you're getting the picture. She was out of my league, in looks and in pretty much all levels of maturity. I was onto something really good, and I knew it.

Marilyn was everything I wanted. She was strong in her faith and bold in her moral convictions. Unlike me, she had a past to be proud of. Right away, I knew I would have to make changes if this relationship was going to have a chance. I stopped my bad habits immediately. I thought, *I am not going to lose the best thing that has ever happened to me for things that aren't good for me.*

For her part, Marilyn went home from our first date and

***Obviously, God had ordained that we should be together. There is no other rational explanation for why she didn't run the other way.***

(shockingly) told her roommate that it was the best first date she had ever had! Dog slobber and all. She was actually impressed that I didn't try to be impressive.

Obviously, God had ordained that we should be together. There is no other rational explanation for why she didn't run the other way.

Thus began our whirlwind courtship.



I (Marilyn) have to speak up here. We've had our marital difficulties—and we'll get to that later—but Brad was amazing at dating. He made me feel like the most special person in the world. He opened doors for me (after the first date, at least), bought me flowers, and paid a lot of money for small portions of pretty food because he knew it'd make me feel valued. We talked on the phone or in person every day. I never had to pry to get him talking on a heart-to-heart level. He was an open book.

We wrote love notes and hid them for the other to find, tried to outdo each other in planning fun dates, and surprised each other with gifts. I once left a note under his windshield wipers that said, "*You stumped me, Brad Rhoads.*" He wasn't totally sure what I meant, but I didn't know how to explain it. He was unlike anyone I'd ever met. We were absolutely crazy about each other.

At one point, we went out twenty-four nights in a row. Our relationship was booming while bank accounts and work production were going the opposite direction.

Three months after our first date, Brad asked me to marry him. It was a joy to accept.



I (Brad) remember checking my bank account before buying an engagement ring and realizing I was going to spend nearly all my money on her ring. No more emergency funds. No more savings. *Who cares? I get to marry Marilyn!* Nothing else in life seemed to matter.

During our engagement, we thought it would be a good idea to go to a marriage conference. We bought tickets with high hopes, but the first day, the speakers talked about how to navigate differences and struggles in marriage. It took us all of thirty minutes to realize the speakers didn't understand our relationship, so we left and did not return. Why spend two days listening to stuff that didn't apply to us? *We'd do anything for each other. We would never hurt each other!* But we agreed it was good they had stuff like that for people who needed it.

After a quick, four-month engagement, we were married. And we have had a fun and blissfully easy marriage ever since.

Just. Kidding.

We didn't learn how wrong we were about marriage until we got married.

## THE REALITY OF MARRIAGE

Due to our speedy courtship, neither one of us had the opportunity to really get to know the other, nor to observe how we behaved in real life. The rose-colored glasses fell off quickly. Marilyn first glimpsed grouchy Brad at our wedding reception when I wheeled around and snapped with sarcasm at the photographer (who was a dear friend of Marilyn's family) as we got in the car for our send-off: "Why don't we just stop here so you can take one more picture?"

As for our honeymoon, Marilyn tells people that the honeymoon was over before the honeymoon was over. We learned quickly that marriage is really nothing like dating; it's a whole new deal. Living together, sexual freedom, merged finances, annoying habits, and all our sins and struggles became an instant reality. For some, the first year is easy. For us, within six months, I went from Marilyn's favorite person to her least favorite person. Her perception of me went from "no one has ever loved me like this" to "no one has ever hurt me like this."

As Marilyn describes it now, I was great at dating, but pretty horrible at being married. For one thing, my creative energy for her immediately shut down, as I turned my attention away from her and toward building a law practice. Right away, I signed us up for a 35-week bowling league so I could meet people and get new clients. Marilyn hated everything about it. She hated bowling, our dorky, turquoise team shirts, and the building itself, which reeked of smoke. It didn't help that the team was really competitive and that she was not very good at bowling. When she'd throw a bad ball, no one on the team would even make eye contact with her. (One of our teammates asked her to work on her hand strength and gave her bowling videos to watch.) Immune to her distress, I continued to focus on expanding my clientele.

Not only did I ask her to spend her free time doing things she hated for my benefit, I filled any extra downtime with everything *but* her. I was obsessed with sports. On multiple occasions, I went to watch high school football games—where I didn't know anyone on either team—leaving her at home alone on a Friday night. Sunny Saturdays found me inside all day, watching sports on TV and simultaneously listening to sports

talk radio, while Marilyn mowed the lawn, tended the garden, or cleaned the house.

I was irresponsible on many levels. I was, to put it gently, a slob. I remember Marilyn telling me, “It’s one thing to leave the soap in the bottom of the tub, but the wrapper too?” She was gone for a week on a work trip once; when she returned, she knew every outfit I’d worn that week from the five different piles on our bedroom floor.

I didn’t steward her heart, or my own, very well. When she’d get upset, I’d tell her to go to the bathroom and look for the chill pills. Or I might engage her least favorite hand signal of all time: hands up in surrender, then slowly bringing them down while mouthing, “*Calm down.*” When we were looking for a new church home, she would meet with the pastors alone. I just told her I was okay with whatever church she liked best.

In dating, I had treated Marilyn like the most special woman in the world. I pursued her at every level. She knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she was my number one priority. Then, I took my foot off the pedal as soon as we got married.

Marilyn was struggling. She had made significant sacrifices for me. Just before our wedding, I had agreed to launch a branch office of my father and uncle’s law practice. That’s why, when our honeymoon was over, Marilyn and I came back to a new house in a brand-new town. Marilyn had to leave Nashville—a place she loved, a job she loved, and friends she loved—to move to Owensboro, Kentucky, a place where she knew no one, where there was little to do, and where, were it not for me, she would have zero desire to be.

She needed a caring, attentive husband to help her adjust. But she didn’t have one.

She vividly remembers asking the Lord at one point, “Am I sentenced to a life of this?”

Marilyn felt neglected . . . because she *was* neglected. I was aloof and preoccupied with myself. She was clearly unhappy with me and our marriage, but I couldn’t understand why. My staff liked me. My clients liked me. My law practice was growing. I was respected in our community. Hey, I even won the Volunteer of the Year award in our town. I thought, *What is her problem? Is everyone else wrong about me?*

I knew our relationship wasn’t doing well, and I blamed her. I truly thought our primary problem was a hypersensitive wife. I thought, *If she’d quit making such a big deal about everything, we’d be fine!*

For most of that first year, we lived parallel lives. I was building a law practice; she was getting a graduate degree. I didn’t realize how lonely she was, but I’d get glimpses of her deep sadness. When she would sometimes just start crying, I’d get frustrated with her: “Why are you crying? I didn’t do anything!”

That was the point . . . I wasn’t doing anything.

## A CHANGE OF HEARTS

Our marriage began to transform one night when Marilyn came to me and said, “We need to talk.”

Then it got worse: “Brad, I don’t need you.” That felt like a kick to the chest. My whole life hung on her next words . . . “I want to ask for your forgiveness. I have been asking from you what only God can give me. My joy and identity don’t depend on you. My fulfillment in everything only comes from Jesus. I will love you the way He is calling me to love you, but

I am off your roller coaster.”

Through spending time with the Lord over the course of a few weeks, she had come to a new understanding of the amazing sufficiency of Christ. God had been reassuring her that He was enough. She didn’t need me for happiness in any area of her life. She had everything she needed in Him.

It was freeing for Marilyn to realize that her joy didn’t hinge on how good of a husband I was, that it depended instead on the perfect, consistent, lavish love of Jesus. She learned she could be incredibly happy and content even if her husband was self-absorbed and clueless (my words, not hers).

In the following weeks, our marriage shifted from rocky to stable. I admired the new peace about Marilyn, a persistent light that brightened everything she did. Ours still wasn’t a great marriage, though, because it still had one huge problem in it . . . me.

Selfishness still blinded me. In fact, I was too blind to even know I had blind spots. I didn’t see a need to change.

My uncle saw it, though. He could tell I was succeeding in everything except what mattered most. He invited me numerous times to a men’s conference focused on marriage. Each time, I made an excuse. Finally, he called Marilyn and cleared the weekend on our calendar. Then, he called my office manager and cleared my schedule. He followed up by buying my ticket *and* inviting my father-in-law to come too. After all that, he called me. Every time I tried to make an excuse, he’d say, “I already checked. You are clear.”

By nature, I run high on energy and short on attention. Sitting through a one-hour church service can be rough. Eight hours of marriage “preaching” in a room with thousands of



other dudes sounded horrific. Besides, I didn't need marriage advice; I needed someone to tell my wife to relax.

Little did I know what God had in store for me.

I remember moments from that conference like it happened yesterday. Scripture is truly a double-edged sword, and I was cut to the bone. One of the speakers read Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"

*Little did I know  
what God had  
in store for me.*

and then asked, "How much do you give up for your wife?"

*Ummm . . . nothing.*

"Live with your wives in an understanding way" (1 Peter 3:7) was followed by, "Do you get into her world, listen to her, and seek to really understand and love her?"

*No, never.*

"Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (Col. 3:19).

*I am sarcastic and rude to her often.*

The realization struck me that I probably treated her worse than I treated anyone else.

On the long ride home, I reflected on how I'd left for the conference thinking I was a pretty great husband and was returning thinking that I wasn't doing anything well at all. I felt, with bittersweet gratitude, that God had given me discipline I hadn't known I needed. Although it crushed me to realize how I had treated an amazing daughter of God so terribly, I couldn't wait to get home and start loving her well. I was so thankful Marilyn was still my wife. I had time to make this right!

It was well into early morning hours when I got home. I

woke Marilyn and told her, “The conference was amazing, and I am so sorry for the way I’ve treated you. The only thing that is going to be different from here on out is *everything*.”

I was learning the truth of 2 Corinthians 7:10–11:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. (NIV)

I was eager to right all I had done wrong; I was ready to begin loving my wife as Scripture commanded me to. God wasn’t punishing me or beating me down; He had graciously revealed His truth to me so I could draw closer to Him and my wife.

The next morning at about 5:30, Marilyn got up to plant flowers before church. Although I had only been in bed a few hours, I thought, *it’s time to get started*. I walked outside, grabbed a shovel, looked her in the face, and asked, “Where do you want me to dig?”

She very nearly passed out. I had never gotten up early with her. I certainly had never offered to help her garden. I reminded her of my words in the middle of the night—things were going to be different.

“I’m starting right now,” I told her. “So, where do you want me to dig?”

## MARRIAGES NEED HELP AND HOPE

Since that morning in our front yard, things really have been different. Our marriage has not been perfect, whatever that means, but it has been pretty amazing.

Even with having five kids and multiple life crises, we have, almost without exception, gone on a weekly date for over twenty-five years. We keep short accounts (meaning we try to resolve conflict quickly), extend grace, and have a blast together. Now we get to spend our lives helping other couples experience this kind of transformation.

*How do we make our marriages better than “we’re all right; everything’s fine”?*

A quick look around shows that marriage transformation is sorely needed. Cohabitation is commonplace, divorce is prevalent, pornography is squelching the life and health from men, women, and their marriages.

Monogamy is even considered taboo in some circles.

The church is no exception. For many, marriage is something to whine about, not rejoice over. Even marriages that seem generally okay are also kind of stale. An affectionate, fun, life-giving marriage has been relegated to some cute anomaly.

Many churches have no dedicated marriage ministry. Those that do tend to relegate marriage ministry to either premarital or crisis counseling. There is a sore lack of outreach to marriages that are neither thriving nor in flames.

We all know this is not how God intended it to be. If God designed marriage, then He designed it to be very, very good.

How do we get there? What are we to do when we feel stuck in a rut of complacency? How do we make our marriages better

than “we’re all right; everything’s fine”? How can we show the world the beauty of God’s design for marriage—and have a lot of fun while doing so?

Grab a shovel. Let’s start digging.



### DIGGING IN TO GRACE + INTENTIONALITY

We’ve found that there’s often a disconnect between teaching and implementation. Great sermons, books, and conferences rarely translate into real, lasting change in how couples approach life and marriage. So, at the end of each chapter, we’ll provide some questions for your consideration and reflection as a pathway to implementation and growth.

We pray this space at the end of each chapter doesn’t feel like a quiz or a box to check off, but rather helps your marriage grow in grace and enjoyment.

**What characteristics first attracted you to your spouse?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**What do you remember about first meeting your spouse, or about your first date?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**What are some of the fun things you used to do while dating, or in the early years of your marriage, that you've stopped doing?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# We live in a performance-based world—but happy and hope-filled marriages thrive on grace.

*Marriage was God's idea, so we know He designed it to be very, very good. But why do most marriages look disengaged, unappealing, or at best a bit stagnant?*

For Brad and Marilyn, “the honeymoon was over before the honeymoon was over.” Both found themselves disillusioned and disappointed. In *The Grace Marriage*, the authors share how a revelation of God’s grace and fresh conviction of the need for intentional investment transformed their hearts and relationship. What does a grace marriage look like? This book invites couples to explore:

- **Grace and Identity**
- **Grace in the Day-to-Day**
- **Grace in Crisis**
- **Grace and Communication**
- **Grace and Sex**
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**Brad & Marilyn Rhoads**  
*founded Grace Marriage in 2015 to help churches and couples prioritize healthy, growing marriages. They author curriculum*

*together, speak at conferences, and work with individual couples. Brad and Marilyn are the proud parents of five amazing kids and live in Owensboro, Kentucky.*



**Brittany Cragg** *edits and authors marriage curriculum as the Director of Content for Grace Marriage. She has a degree in English Literature from Wheaton College and a law degree from Emory University. Brittany and her husband, Mark, live with their three children in Prosper, Texas.*

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