

Aaron & Jennifer Smith

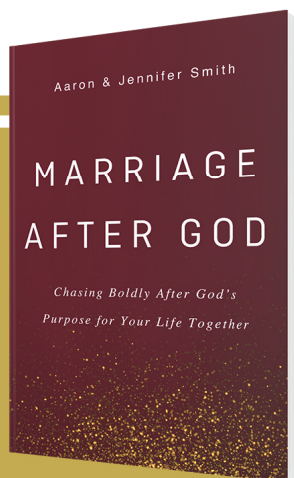
MARRIAGE AFTER GOD

*Chasing Boldly After God's
Purpose for Your Life Together*

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for Your Life Together

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Marriage After God

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Contents

Introduction

Section 1: What Is A Marriage After God?: The Definition

- 1 God's Purpose for Marriage
- 2 War on Your Effectiveness
- 3 Marks of a Marriage After God

Section 2: Building a Strong Foundation: The Preparation

- 4 Your Relationship with the Bible (Faith)
- 5 Your First Ministry (Marriage and Family)
- 6 Walking Autonomously Doesn't Work (Fellowship)
- 7 A Good and Faithful Steward (Finances)

Section 3: What's In Your Tool Belt?: The Equipment

- 8 Our Tool Belt
- 9 Your Marriage Is Unique
- 10 What's in Your Tool Belt? (The Equipment Defined)

Section 4: Dreaming Together: The Application

- 11 Take Inventory
- 12 God's Will for Your Marriage
- 13 Dreaming Together

Section 5: Your Marriage for God's Purposes: The Impact

- 14 Ordinary Marriages Doing Extraordinary Things
- 15 Stronger Together
- 16 Chasing After God Together

Introduction

What if I told you that your marriage has a purpose far beyond happily ever after? What If I told you that the unity between you and your spouse was created for something spectacular, something great, something extraordinary?

God, your Creator and your Savior, has created you and your spouse with complete and perfect thoughtfulness. God, your provider and your Heavenly Father, has unlimited resources and immeasurable creativity. God, who is patient and loving, is pursuing you and your spouse every single day, inviting you to participate in the extraordinary things He is already doing.

Do you believe God wants more for your life and marriage, just as you do? Do you believe God wants more for your marriage than to just make each other happy? Do you believe God can do anything, move mountains, open doors, and part seas to get you to the place where He wants you the most?

Belief is powerful. Belief propels people from a place of dreaming, to a place of doing. Belief in God is confidence and trust in Him. Believing God made you and your marriage with great purpose is the beginning of an incredible adventure you will never regret.

When Jennifer and I considered what spurred us toward a desire to serve God together, we agreed that it was our belief that God could and would use us as a team for His glory. That

belief, trusting in God and being confident in Him, gave us the courage to say yes to Him over and over and over again. Even and especially during the harder places in our story.

We said yes to God when we decided to stay together, when it felt easier to walk away. We said yes to God when we chose to love each other, when we didn't feel so in love. We said yes to God when He wanted us to build our marriage foundation over again. We said yes to obeying His Word when we did everything we could to get out of debt. We said yes to God when He showed us ways we could serve His body, and we said yes to God when He invited us to share our story. Not all of our "Yeses" to God were easy, however our mutual desire to please God is what helped us to say yes and to persevere.

When Jennifer and I got married we had a united desire to serve God together. We didn't know exactly what it would look like, but we were willing to explore the opportunities He had for us as a married couple. Throughout our time of dating and being engaged, we prayed we would have an extraordinary marriage. However, we didn't stop there. We didn't only ask God for an extraordinary marriage, we also prayed God would use our marriage to do extraordinary things to build His Kingdom.

Since we said "I do" and committed our marriage to the Lord, we have been on a journey of saying yes to God, a journey we both agree has been quite extraordinary. Not only because of the experiences we have had or the accomplishments we have reached, but because God is extraordinary. And He longs to bring His extraordinary into

our lives. He is the reason we have been able to endure this journey together. We have had moments of experiencing poverty and abundance, we have traveled to different parts of the world as missionaries motivated to share the gospel with others, we have started businesses and ministries, we have overcome destructive sin patterns, we have grown our family size intentionally striving to leave a legacy with our children, and we continue to participate in God's plan for our lives as He invites us to do all that He prepared for us to do, together. But it is all because of God. He gets the glory in our lives.

Our journey has not been void of the enemy's attacks to thwart God's purpose for our marriage. In fact, the enemy's flaming arrows, in combination with our own sin, almost destroyed our marriage. Pornography addiction, emotional eating, jealousy, foolishness, and constant battles of selfishness and pride have all been difficult areas of our marriage that we have had to honestly confront, as well as proactively protect our marriage against as the temptation to sin in these ways continue to this day to show up again and again. The hardships we have encountered in marriage have been painful. We have often wrestled with doubt and insecurities about our relationship with each other and with God. Yet, no matter what we have faced, and no matter what we will face in the future, our hearts are determined to continue our prayer, that God would give us an extraordinary marriage and that He would use our marriage for His extraordinary purposes.

In 2011, Jennifer and I launched our online marriage ministries (UnveiledWife.com and HusbandRevolution.com) to share with husbands and wives what God was teaching us

about marriage. When we began these ministries, we had no idea what they would become. Motivated by a perspective that our lives are a ministry for God to work through, we said yes to God when He invited us to share our story with the world in a way we were already familiar with, *blogging*. Through these two sites we share daily marriage prayers, encouragement, biblical teaching on faith and marriage, date night ideas, and reviews of Christian books and movies. We share personal stories of what we have experienced in our own marriage and how God continues to transform us into the husband and wife He created us to be. Since the first day we created these ministries our desire has been to encourage married couples to turn their hearts toward God and trust in Him with their marriage. With the few tools we had in our tool belt we got started, and this adventure quickly grew into an unimaginable reach into the hearts and homes of couples all around the world.

With the influence we were gaining in the lives of other married couples, we asked the Lord to use us to encourage them to be biblical men and women. We were confident that if we could inspire them and challenge them to be people who read God's Word and desire His will for their lives, that God would move in these marriages and use them for the marvelous work He desires His people to do. We imagined hundreds of thousands of strong, thriving marriages reflecting God's love story and impacting the lives of others as they faithfully live out all that God has called them to. We could see husbands and wives being unified in their relationship and in their parenting, full of joy and contentment. We could see communities being blessed by the examples these couples would be sharing. We

could see relationships being healed, needs being met, an increase of genuine kindness, talents being used to benefit Christ's body, businesses and ministries being started, and the lost being saved because husbands and wives said yes to God, working together to build His Kingdom.

Eager to see husbands and wives embrace what God has for them, we wondered how we could impactfully inspire them to start considering the purpose of their marriage and help guide them to set the foundation necessary to fulfill that purpose. We wanted to point them to the Word of God and prompt them to answer some challenging questions. We felt led to write two devotionals that would lead a husband and wife through God's Word and invite them to consider how they can actively pursue an extraordinary, God-centered marriage. We co-authored and self-published *Wife After God* and *Husband After God*, 30-day devotionals that have been read by thousands of men and women, plus countless more who are taking the challenge to do these devotionals every day.

No time had passed when we began receiving positive reports of the impact these devotionals were making in people's lives. We continue to rejoice in how God is using these books to inspire the hearts of His people to draw them closer to Himself and closer to each other.

We then began receiving messages from couples asking what they could read next to encourage their marriage journey. This is the seed that was planted in our hearts to consider what resource we could provide next to inspire husbands and wives to continue chasing after God. This is the seed that would grow into the message of Marriage After God. We knew God was

stirring in our hearts a message that couples would be moved by to pray the same prayer we have been praying, and to experience His extraordinary purposes for their lives. Yet, we believe it was also a message God wanted us to experience in our marriage for ourselves. He wanted us to mature in our relationship with each other and with Him.

We wouldn't say we are done experiencing what it means to have a Marriage After God. In reality, this will be a message we will continue to live out and pursue until Christ returns or we are called home. However, God has given us an incredible opportunity to present this message to others through this book, to inspire husbands and wives who want to chase after Him and to do His will together, and we are eager to see how God uses this book to do His work in all of our lives.

A Marriage After God is an extraordinary journey of making ourselves known to God, knowing God, and being willing to let Him use our marriages for His purposes. A Marriage After God is one that can faithfully say what the people of Israel said in Exodus 19:8, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." *Happily ever after* is a nice thought and a good thing to hope for, but it should not be your end goal. More than just living happily ever after, we want you to know that there is an amazing purpose for your marriage, more than just making each other happy. We desire you to pursue Kingdom purposes with your marriage that would be a testimony to others of God's love and amazing grace.

This world we live in has been tainted by darkness and you are called to be the light of the world! It is you and your

marriage that should be the light people long to experience. But you cannot be a light for others if you are allowing your marriage to be overrun by darkness. Those who belong to God have been created for so much more! You have been created for so much more! And your spouse has been created for so much more!

Our vision for this book is to get you and your spouse excited about using your marriage for God! We desire that you two experience the incredible intimacy of unity as you boldly chase after God's will and purpose for your marriage.

This book is for the marriages who are ready to finally see what God brought them together for. Maybe you and your spouse have been having conversations about what is next, what you should be investing in, or how you can be used by God to effectively fulfill the purpose He created you for, the purpose He brought you together for. You have been in a great place in your marriage and with God, but there is a tugging on your heart to do something more. You picked up this book because you don't want to be stagnant, you want to experience the extraordinary! Our hope and prayer is that this book takes you on a journey of discovery, inspiration, and affirmation as God invites you to work together as a team for His glory.

If you and your spouse are in a different place, a broken place where you are barely hanging on, our hope is that this book would be the very thing to convince you to turn your heart back toward God and have the courage to change your perspective of your spouse and your marriage. Maybe it will be the very thing your marriage needs, to push you closer to the only One who can help you put it back in order.

So, we welcome you, no matter what condition your marriage is currently in, and we challenge you to take this adventure with us to commit your marriage to God and see how He moves in your life, your spouse's life, and the many other lives He will impact because you were willing to say yes to Him.

Everything begins with a first step, reading this book, albeit scary and thrilling simultaneously, is your first step. We pray it won't be long that you and your spouse are running, with your hearts aligned with God's, toward the extraordinary good work God has already prepared for you to do.

You were created for this. Ephesians 2:10 confirms this by stating, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." You and your spouse were made by God and your marriage relationship was designed by Him to do good works for His name sake, works that He had in mind long before you were created. You can believe this truth and so be empowered to walk in the extraordinary purpose you have been uniquely created by God to do.

prayer

Our Prayer for The Couple Reading This Book

Dear Lord,

We pray for the husband and wife reading this book. May Your Holy Spirit use this book to inspire their hearts to boldly chase after You and say yes to the extraordinary invitations You have prepared for them.

We pray this couple will grow in their understanding of the power and purpose of their marriage. Reveal to them the specific plans You have for them. We pray You would use this marriage to do incredible work to build Your Kingdom. In this dark world, may You protect this couple from the attacks of the enemy. May You cleanse them from sin and continue to shape them into the husband and wife You created them to be. May they realize they bear Your image and that they are a light in this world and a beacon of hope to the lost and lonely. We ask You to guide this couple and unite them as a team to carry out the unique purposes You have for them in Jesus's name. Amen!

end prayer

Chapter 1

God's Purpose for Marriage

Dusk draped across the mountainous landscape, framed by an elegant floor to ceiling window. The snow-capped peaks above and the rushing river below created a peaceful backdrop for the opening session of the Marriage After God Gathering. I (Jennifer) stood at the large widow in the living room of the rustic lodge we had rented for this special event. I looked out the window in awe of God's creation, locking my eyes on the river running along the fringe of the property, mesmerized by the movement of the water. My heart was thankful for the opportunity to pour into the marriages that would be joining us for the Gathering that weekend. Aaron and I had prayed many times leading up to this moment that our time with these husbands and wives would inspire them to see how God is moving in their marriages and be an invitation for them to boldly chase after God's purpose for why He brought them together.

We gathered in the living room to begin our first session, buzzing with anticipation. Eleven couples showed up that weekend, twelve including Aaron and I. Unknowing how God would use this unique experience, we were all eager for

what He had prepared long ago for each of our marriages. Taking a few minutes to re-organize the seating arrangement in the room, everyone pitched in the effort to make a circle with the couches and chairs that had been scattered around the room. We learned a long time ago that a set-up such as this provides an atmosphere of immediate intimacy as everyone can be seen, and no one can hide. I sat beside Aaron, straightening the notes in my lap that would help keep us focused as we would teach the five sessions we had planned.

This gathering took six months for Aaron and me to prepare for as we considered every detail of the event like hand picking the venue, hiring a chef, and designing study guides for each person to use as they followed along through each session. Although this type of event could fall into the category of a retreat because each couple had gotten away from the familiarity of their lives for a weekend, Aaron and I felt strongly that this was much more than a marriage retreat and needed to be called something special. Hoping it would be an experience of closeness and comradery, we called it a gathering. To us this felt more unifying, more intimate, more intentional. There was still plenty of time to retreat, reflect, and be refreshed, however that was not our intentional purpose of *this* marriage gathering. We desired to have couples come and participate who were on a journey with God, seeking His will for their life and marriage, couples wondering and praying, “God, what is next? What can our marriage do for You?”

We were here, all of us in this circle, because we were all asking this question with open hands.

Aaron and I didn't know exactly how it would all turn out because we had never done anything like this before, but we said yes to God in faith that this vision was planted in our hearts by Him and we couldn't wait to see it fulfilled. The more we worked on the curriculum for this gathering, the more enthusiastic we became. We decided we would not shy away from teaching on sensitive marriage topics such as intimacy, finances, and the importance of community. But as we planned, the ever-looming question we had to answer was: *how we were going to open this gathering?* Out of all of the topics we were going to cover, we knew the content of the first session would be the most important. No other topic we could teach on made sense, nor would any of the other topics matter, if we neglected to start with the Bible. We felt this urge first and foremost to encourage every couple to persevere as faithful men and women who are led according to the truth of God's Word. We knew from our own experience of pursuing ministry as a team for God that laying the foundation for the importance of God's Word in our lives is crucial. We knew we had to start there.

Even though we were looking forward to this gathering with anticipation and hopefulness that God would reveal some extraordinary things to these couples, we were also terrified that God was using *us* to do it. We examined our notes and went over the content of our sessions several times in the days prior to the event, wondering if we had done enough or if we would embarrassingly fall short.

As each person took a seat next to their spouse, Aaron and I looked at each other with the same rushing feelings of

excitement and nervousness, which was noticeable to each other in our eyes. The dreaming together about the gathering had happened months ago. All the work for the gathering was done. The prayers submitting it all to God had been prayed. The people showed up. We had said yes to God to an invitation to do something together for Him, and now, the reality of the responsibility to lead them through the same message God taught us and desired us to share settled in our hearts. We glanced around the room at these eleven couples who expectantly waited for us to begin. There was a beautiful diversity within the marriages; some had celebrated many faithful years together and some had just begun their journey as one, some had children and some did not, some were already in the midst of pursuing ministry together and some were dreaming through what they could potentially do as a team for God. All different types of people with different experiences, a variety of giftings, passions, and resources, yet as a collective group, we were all unified in one mission, one mind, and one heart. Our sole desire was to honor God with what He had given to us. Each couple sitting around the living room that evening recognized the power of God in their lives, and they were sure God had even more for their marriages, a purpose that would have an unfathomable impact in the world.

That gathering and those couples were the catalyst for this book. The message we opened up with during that first session is the very same message we are going to open up this book with, because without it nothing else we shared with them, and what we are about to share with you, will matter at all. Chasing boldly after God's purpose for your life together, understanding that purpose, and fulfilling that purpose is all a

result of knowing God and submitting to Him in reverence. A marriage after God is a husband and wife who are obedient to fulfill all that God has called them to.

As men and women, husbands and wives, marriages that claim the name of Christ, and desire to walk in God's will and His ways, we must be, above all else, men and women *of the Word*.

It is God's Word and His Word alone that we, as faithful men and women, stand on. In fact, without the Bible, there can be no faith, salvation, maturity, wisdom, or knowledge of the Holy One, let alone a *Marriage After God*. The Bible is and must always remain our only source for defining what our life and marriages mean, and what they are meant for. God gave us His Word because He knew that His ideas, especially His creation of marriage, would be attacked from the very beginning. He knew that our hearts would be prone to wander far from His ideas and His ways. He knew that His enemy, and ours, would desire to destroy the very idea of marriage, doing anything and everything he could do to denigrate its meaning and purpose to us, the married, and to the world. Therefore, as the perfect Creator, God gave us His manual for life to follow. It is up to us to make the choice to follow it, walking out our faith through obedience, regardless of the resistance we encounter from our flesh and from our enemy.

From the very beginning, the enemy was at work deceiving and confusing man with a simple question, "Did God actually say . . . ?" (Genesis 3:1) and he hasn't changed his strategy. This enemy of ours has only come to steal and kill

and destroy, and he is still at work doing this by convincing husbands and wives around the world, in the church and outside the church, to ask the very same question, “Did God actually say . . . ?” This question has been hissed so many times now into the ears and hearts of husbands and wives that the Word of God is just not as important to them as it should be, it is no longer the authority of their lives. The “good book” is no longer good. Not that it has actually stopped being good, rather many people have lost their attraction to its goodness as doubt has permeated their hearts. Instead, the Bible has become the thing that people fear because of their own questioning of it. The enemy knows that if God’s people don’t believe or trust what God has said, then they will not read what He has said? And if God’s people do not read His Word or trust it, then why would they obey it? Let us not be deceived by the enemy or deceived by our flesh. Instead, let us heed the words in James 1:22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

This grave and certain reality that is leading many marriages to destruction, abuse, divorce, confusion, and suffering will only be overcome by men and women, husbands and wives, like you, as you choose to walk out your faith in obedience to God’s Word, trusting all that He has said. As you do this, your marriage will become the light shining into the darkness, an example to others of a worthy path to take. The Word of God is that light, just as Psalm 119:105 tells us, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

So, we would like to ask you, what is your relationship with the Bible? We want you to take a moment to consider and

discuss this question with your spouse, and then continue reading.

Before we start to talk about how the Bible defines us and our marriages, before we encourage you to use your marriage for God's purposes, and before we talk about what it actually looks like to have a marriage that is being used by God for Kingdom work, there must be a hard stance in your heart on what you believe about His Word. Everything we are discussing in this book is drenched in scripture and biblical principles. The Bible is our faith. It is the very substance of what we claim to believe. It is the very thing that the foundation of our life is to be built on. Romans 10:17 tells us, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." And as Jesus teaches us in Matthew 7:24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Let us build then, this picture of a marriage after God, with a solid foundation that is found only in the truth of God's Word.

So then, what does the Bible say about marriage? What does it say about your purpose and your calling? If you don't know the answer to this question, it is our prayer that by the end of this book you will know and trust that what God has said in His Word about you and about your marriage is true and worthy to live out. Our prayer is that you and your spouse would be inspired, encouraged, and no less than fired up for what the Lord desires to do in and through your marriage for His purposes and for His Kingdom.

In order to define what a "marriage after God" is, we need to know what "marriage" is. We're not talking about the

definition of marriage in the political sense, no, we want to know *WHY* God created this beautifully messy thing called Holy matrimony.

As Paul proclaims in Romans, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” The things God has made, all of it, everything, was to show the world who He is and what kind of God He is. Every star, every drop of water, every plant, each and every animal has been created with this purpose in mind. All light, sound, science, physics and biology, for His glory and His name sake. In addition to all of these things He also created marriage. Marriage is not humanity’s idea, nor is it anything humanity could ever define. Marriage is a heavenly concept with divine implications. Marriage was so important to creation that God didn’t waste a moment of history to introduce this powerful symbol to us. Right in the very beginning of the Bible, not more the twenty-six verses in and barely six days into history, God chose to unveil His divine masterpiece. Genesis 1:26–27 says this, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” In God’s infinite creativity and wisdom, He used marriage to masterfully paint for all the world a picture of His love and redemption plan.

Marriage isn't simply a part of God's perfect creation, it was a gift He gave to His favorite part of creation! Man and Woman. In fact, everything God created was for the benefit of the man and the woman. He gave it all to them for food, for pleasure, to cultivate, subdue, and rule over. It wasn't until man and woman were created that He said that His creation was *very* good. Do you see it? Are you beginning to grasp His grand narrative? Creation was only good until the introduction of man and woman made it very good. Our intention in pointing all of this out is to highlight just how much God values and cares for His children, how much he values and cares for you and just how much He values your marriage!

Humanity is God's greatest creation and His desire is to show us who He is. God's decision to bring man and woman together in marriage wasn't an afterthought, although it can seem that way when we read about Adam not seeing a suitable helper out of all the animals he was naming. On the contrary, marriage, Adam and Eve being united, was necessary for God's purposes to be fulfilled. God had a job for his two new children to fulfill and their marriage was the vehicle to accomplish that job. This job He had for them was simple, yet also profoundly mysterious. Simple in that they were told to tend to the garden and be fruitful and multiply, profoundly mysterious in that their marriage would be the shadow of Christ and the church as explained in Ephesians 5:32,

As we stand with the writer of Genesis and gaze down from the thirty-thousand-foot perspective he gives us, into the narrative of creation, we can begin to see God's divine definition of marriage emerge. Marriage is much more than an

earthly institution. It is not just a man and a woman coming together under the same roof with a legal document stating that the state recognizes this to be the case. Marriage is and always will be an earthly symbol of a heavenly truth. Marriage is a picture of Christ and His relationship with the church. This is what God created marriage for. The relationship between a husband and wife, when they operate in the obedience of God's Word, is the representation and reflection of the gospel, the redemption of man being reconciled through Christ to God. The symbol of unity within marriage has a greater purpose to serve than a husband and wife coming together for their own satisfaction or desire.

God reinforces the power of unity within marriage again and again throughout His Word by telling us that a husband and wife are one flesh. Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8 and Ephesians 5:31 all show us that marriage is the spiritual event of two separate creatures becoming one, or in other words, an entirely "new creation." This new creation teaches us and the world that God's plan for humanity is to make them one with His Son in an inseparable unity. What a wonderful and powerful way to show the ones He loves that, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38–39)

This new creation that a marriage creates, when two become one, is to show the world the supremely freeing truth that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things

are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

As the author of Song of Solomon expresses his love for his bride in Song Of Solomon 8:7, he makes a bold and powerful statement in essence that love cannot be purchased. The love you choose to walk in, in your marriage, is meant to show the world this same truth that God’s love is unearned and cannot be bought with anything you have to offer.

Our marriages are to be walking examples of God’s unending love, grace, and mercy. Whether we are being good examples, walking in the direction and command of the Lord, or we are being disobedient and rebellious to it, we are being a symbol to the world. What gospel is your marriage preaching to this lost and dying world? Is it proclaiming the never ending and ever patient love of God or something else?

Our marriages can and should bring glory to God and point outsiders, who are looking in, to a loving and redeeming God. Marriage was created by God, it is His, and He desires for it to be used His way and for His purposes. Your marriage is God’s and He desires for it to be done His way and for His purposes!

Are you ready for that?

Marriage After God

Aaron and Jennifer Smith

What if God has purposed your marriage for something so much more than happily ever after?

Since the very beginning, God's design for marriage is for husbands and wives to be ambassadors of holy love to a hurting world. Still, so many couples stop short at happy and wonder why they feel unsatisfied. Rather than "you and me against the world," God calls each couple to the rich and meaningful mission of "you and me for the world."

Aaron and Jennifer Smith, popular marriage bloggers at Husband-Revolution.com and UnveiledWife.com, transparently share their journey from a marriage in crisis to a marriage built on Christ's redemptive love. Through fresh biblical insight and intimate stories of their own struggles and victories, this book will guide you toward a God-centered, ministry-minded, and thriving marriage. You will discover the signature marks of a marriage after God, find principles for building an unshakable marriage foundation, learn how to let God's story take the lead in your love story, and recognize the tools God has already equipped you with for a missional life together. Filled with helpful illustrations, this thorough and practical book will empower you and your spouse to dream, decide, and do as you step hand-in-hand into God's ultimate purpose for your marriage.

Your oneness is also meant for witness. God has purposed your remarkable, romantic, and redemptive relationship to be a powerful light to a dark and hurting world. This is your invitation to marriage as God intended - a life-saving, hope-inspiring, and transforming force of God's love.

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