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HUSBAND'S
GUIDE

DATE YOUR WIFE



JUSTIN BUZZARD

Date Your Wife

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FOREWORD



I was walking down a street in New York City last year when my good friend Justin Buzzard called to tell me that he was writing a book (in his exact words) on “how to date *your* wife.” Somewhat taken aback, I stopped walking and said, “You’re writing a book on how to date *my* wife?” He laughed and assured me that it wasn’t *my* wife he was trying to date. Rather, he explained that he was writing a book to help men think about how the gospel empowers them to be the romantic leaders in their marriages.

I know, I know. Why do we need another book on marriage? Why do we need another guy telling us already-struggling husbands what we’re not doing well? Telling me to do more and try harder only makes me want to do and try less. Been there, done that. Give me a break!

Ah, but this is the genius of Justin’s book—he understands and clearly articulates the radical difference between a religious approach to marriage and a gospel approach to marriage. A religious approach to marriage is the idea that if we work hard enough at something, we can earn the acceptance, approval, and life we think we deserve because of our obedient performance. Justin rightly points out that religion governs how most of us approach God and our wives: “If we live as a basically good person, we can earn God’s favor and get the decent life we deserve.

Foreword

If we stay committed to our wives and don't go anywhere, God will give us a decent marriage with decent sex in a decent American town with a decent church down the street." In other words, in arguing *for* becoming the romantic leaders of our marriages, Justin argues *against* a guilt-driven, performance-oriented, approval-seeking, "do-more, try-harder" approach to marriage.

Instead, he argues for a gospel-empowered approach to marriage. Justin writes, "A man comes alive when he finally feels in his guts that religion can't fuel his life or his marriage, when he makes the painfully sweet discovery that there is only one fuel source that can get the engine running again: grace." Right on! See, I told you he gets it. He understands that since we already have all the affection, approval, and favor we could possibly crave *in Christ*, we are now free to love our wives without fear or reservation.

Sadly, the fear that our love will not be reciprocated is something that paralyzes many of our marriages. It prevents husbands from loving their wives "as Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). We come to this conclusion: I will love you only to the degree that you love me. It's an attitude that enslaves us. But the gospel frees us from that.

I enjoy receiving love from my wife. I'm ecstatic when Kim loves me and expresses affection toward me. Something in me comes alive when she does that. But I've learned this freeing truth: I don't *need* that love, because in Jesus I receive all the love I need. This in turn liberates me to love her without apprehension or condition. I get to revel in her enjoyment of my love

without *needing* anything from her in return. I get love from Jesus so that I can give love to her.

This is what Justin is talking about. The gospel sets us free to become the romantic leaders of our marriages without fright or hesitation. Because we have been forever wooed by Jesus, we are now free to forever woo our wives.

This book is biblically sound, theologically rich, sensitively illustrated, and profoundly practical. If you read it prayerfully, God will show you his heart for you, which will in turn enlarge your heart for your wife.

Read it. It's good. It's really good.

Tullian Tchividjian

Senior Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church,
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida;
author, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*

PREFACE

Why You ~~Should Read~~ Want to Read This Book



I want you to do something. Make a list in your head of the marriages you've seen that you actually like. How many married couples can you think of that have a thriving marriage—a good, happy, alive marriage—the kind of marriage that makes other people want to get married?

How many marriages did you think of?

I've tried this question on many people. Most people can come up with only one or two examples of strong, lively, and attractive marriages. This book aims to change that. Things don't have to stay the way they are.¹

You know the statistics. Marriage is broken in our world. If your marriage isn't broken, the marriage of someone you know is. At the very least, your marriage isn't pulsating with the life and power it was meant to have.

But it's not too late. There's still hope for marriage—for your marriage, for your neighbor's marriage, and for marriages that haven't happened yet. Marriages can be jump-started; the sacred union between a husband and a wife can receive new life and power. I don't care who you are, who you've been, or what your marriage has been through—everything can be made new. It's harder and easier than you think.

Preface

Men, it starts with you. You and I and the men we know want something more. Perhaps you've settled for a marriage that looks like most other marriages. Perhaps you now look like most other husbands—ordinary, nice, confused. But what you really want is a marriage that feels like a mission, a marriage that's moving forward toward something exciting, mysterious, and grand—kind of like the way dating felt.

Men, this book is for you. Pick it up and read it.

WHERE MARRIAGES GO WRONG, PART I: THE HUSBAND



Once word got out that I'm writing a book called *Date Your Wife*, people began sending me advice to include in the book. So far it is all sex advice. And so far, these e-mails have all come from women. I don't know why all the e-mails are about sex and why they're all from women. (FYI, women don't normally e-mail me about sex, though I encourage my wife to do so as often as she likes.) Here is an e-mail I received last Friday:

Hi Justin,

I thought you might be interested to know I went to a Moms' homeschooling meeting last week and the topic was intimacy with your husband. Three different ladies presented on the importance of having regular sex with your husband: 3-day rule (never go 3 days without having sex) and 2x a week rule (have sex at least 2x a week). They all had experience and research to support how it benefits the entire family, and changed one family from almost divorced to happy as can be. I hope this is not too weird I am emailing you about this. Thought it may be useful for your book.¹

THE BAD

This e-mail shocked me.

You might be shocked by what shocked me. It all depends on how you handle sex in your marriage.

I was shocked to read that a group of wives are getting excited about the idea that sex with their husbands has many benefits and should be done twice a week. If we need to go to a moms' homeschooling meeting to learn that sex is really important in a marriage and in a family, we're in big trouble. I don't need to see any research about the benefits of sex for a marriage; I just know it feels really good and that when a husband and wife really love and like each other, they get naked and have a lot of sex. Back when you were dating your wife, as you were heading toward marriage, did you need anyone to tell you that you should have lots of sex together?

In our marriage we don't have a three-day rule, we have something called a three-day exception. Only if I'm traveling will we make an exception and go three days without doing what Adam and Eve did on their wedding day.² No one needed to tell Adam and Eve to have more sex. But, in our fallen world, some of us need reminding. Of all the issues that the apostle Paul could have addressed with the dysfunctional Corinthian church, he highlighted the importance of regular (I think, frequent) sexual intimacy as a central part of marriage, selflessness, and spiritual warfare.³

Taylor was as surprised as I was by the e-mail. She responded to the woman with an e-mail of her own:

Personally, I think the 2x a week rule and 3-day rule isn't frequent enough. I think aiming for every other day (4x a week) is

a healthier range. But, I guess this is a question our husbands can best answer, since they typically have the bigger “sex tank,” and we definitely don’t want to send them out into this sex-crazed world with their sex tanks on low. Satan is prowling. One other brief thought is that when I’m aiming for 4x a week, that doesn’t have to be roses, chocolate, and lingerie encounters every time. Quickies are an ace in our pockets. :)

Taylor⁴

Man, I love my wife.

Quick Survey:

1. Currently, how many times a week do you have sex with your wife?
2. Ideally, how many times a week would you like to have sex with your wife?
3. What needs to change in your marriage to bridge the gap between question 1 and question 2?
4. How would your wife answer these questions for herself?

What the two e-mails above have in common is that they’re both wife-driven attempts at sustaining and improving a marriage. Every marriage involves two people, so (except in the rarest of cases) both husband and wife are responsible for the problems in their marriage. And both husband and wife are responsible for addressing those problems and moving the marriage forward. But, this isn’t a book for women. This is a book for men. And this book is fueled by this conviction: if you want to change a marriage, change the man.

THE BAD

THE PROBLEM

Underline this next sentence. If you want to change a marriage, change the man. That's you. So, whether you've been following the two-times-a-week rule, the one-time-a-week rule, or the one-time-a-quarter rule in your marriage, don't rush to show your wife my wife's e-mail. That won't work. Your wife isn't the problem. You're the problem. I'm the problem. Men are the problem. If you want to change a marriage, change the man. If you want to change your marriage, you must first see that you are the main problem in your marriage.

I imagine there are exceptions to this, but you and your marriage are not the exception. There's probably one guy somewhere in Canada who can legitimately claim that most of the problems in his marriage stem from his Canadian wife. He's the exception. You aren't. The man who reads this book and disagrees, who thinks his wife is the main problem in the marriage, is the man who most needs to read this book.

What's wrong with your marriage? What's broken? Think back to some of your answers at the end of chapter 1. If you had to summarize it in a single sentence, what's wrong with your marriage? Write that sentence down.

Men across the globe just wrote thousands of different answers to that question. Men, that's not good. We don't need a sentence to answer the question. All we need is one word. And, men, we should all have the same answer. Let's try this again.

What's wrong with your marriage?

Me.

Me!

I am what is wrong with my marriage.

You are what is wrong with your marriage.

It's your fault. This is the second most important truth to learn from this book: it's your fault. You are the husband. You are the man. And God has given man the ability to be the best thing or the worst thing that ever happened to a marriage. Before you can be the best thing that ever happened to your marriage, you must see that you have always been the worst thing that happened to your marriage. If you want to change a marriage, change the man. Why? Because the man is what is wrong, and the man is what, made right, alters the course of everything.

THE JOB

Before God gave the first man a wife, he gave him a job. God took the man, put him in a garden, and there gave the man a twofold mission:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work it and keep it*. (Gen. 2:15)

Fundamental to his manhood, God gave Adam this double calling: work and keep. These Hebrew verbs can be better translated: cultivate and guard. God commissioned the first man to cultivate the garden and guard the garden. God gave the first man immense responsibility, immense power, to cause the garden to flourish or to fade.

God gave this to you, too. God gave you this same calling, this same responsibility, this same power. Your ancestry goes all the way back to Adam. We are all related to the first man. We

THE BAD

are men and, whatever garden God has put us in, we have been put there to cultivate and guard that garden. To be a man is to be entrusted with enormous privilege and responsibility. To be a man is to be a cultivator and guardian. To be a man is to know God put you on this planet to cause life to flourish.

God created Adam and God created you to cultivate and guard.

And Adam screwed it all up.

And so have we.

God gave Adam a job before he gave him a wife. So, when God presented Adam with his bride, what did Adam know he was called to do as a husband? If you had to summarize it in a sentence, what was Adam called to do for his marriage and for his wife?

Cultivate it and guard it.

This is exactly what the first husband failed to do. Adam failed to cultivate his wife—he didn't cause her to flourish. Adam failed to guard his wife—he didn't protect her from danger.

To date your wife is to cultivate and guard her. Dating your wife means to cultivate and guard your wife and your marriage.⁵ Cultivate it and guard it. You haven't done it. One way or another, you and I are just like Adam. We've failed to be the man that God has created and commissioned us to be.

What's wrong with your marriage? Until you can authentically answer, "Me," until you can feel that answer deep in your guts, this book won't help you or your marriage.

TAKE ACTION

1. Ask God to show you, very specifically, how you have been the biggest problem in your marriage.
2. Take your wife on a date and speak two powerful words to her: “I’m sorry.” Before this week is over, make time to confess your list to your wife, the list of ways you’ve hurt her and failed to cultivate and guard her. Ask for your wife’s forgiveness and God’s forgiveness. Cultivate a new habit of being the first person to say “I’m sorry” in your marriage. This can only be done through God’s grace and power, so rely on God’s strength, not your own.
3. Make love to your wife.
4. Repeat steps 1–3 for the rest of your marriage.

An Intensely Practical Guide for Husbands Looking to Strengthen, Save, or Spice Up Their Marriage

Most men don't know how to date their wives. They did it before, but they've forgotten how, or they're trying but it just doesn't seem to be working. Justin Buzzard helps men re-learn this all-important skill from a position of security in the gospel of grace. As a father of three boys and husband to a happy wife, Justin offers guys a helping hand, good news, and wise counsel, along with:

- 100 practical ideas for how to date your wife
- Action steps at the end of each chapter
- Personal stories and real-life examples

All types of marriages—good ones, mediocre ones, and bad ones—will experience a jumpstart as a result of hearing, believing, and living the message of *Date Your Wife*.

"Finally, here is a book that will not make men feel guilty."

GARY CHAPMAN, *New York Times*
best-selling author, *The Five Love Languages*

"Whether you've been married a few days or 50 years, this is well worth the read."

JIM DALY, President, Focus on the Family

"A must read for husbands who long to raise the communication and intimacy levels in their marriage."

MIKE SINGLETARY, NFL Hall of
Fame Linebacker

"Offers the practical help, grace, and encouragement men need to live out the vows they've made."

ELYSE M. FITZPATRICK,
counselor; speaker; author, *Because He Loves Me*

JUSTIN BUZZARD is founder and lead pastor of Garden City Church, a new church plant in Silicon Valley. Buzzard has been dating his wife for nine years and is the father of three young sons. He earned an MDiv at Fuller Theological Seminary and is the author of *Consider Jesus*. He speaks widely, writes at JustinBuzzard.net, and is on Twitter @JustinBuzzard.

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