

Building Your Family to Last

By Kari Torjesen Malcom | Reviewed by Kelvin Belfon

In July 2006, I welcomed the reprinting of this marriage classic. Kari Torjesen Malcolm is an expert on the subject of marriage and family. Born of a Norwegian missionary couple in China, Malcolm later served as a missionary to the Philippines for fifteen years with her husband and two children. *Building Your Family to Last* was written to help individuals build lasting families by putting Christ first in their lives (9). Christian married couples and single readers alike will find her message relevant, precise, provocative, and biblical.

Malcolm begins by reflecting on her family tradition, journey of faith, and personal passion for families (ch. 1). She states, “Today, many families are in trouble because their goals have been misplaced . . . which tends to split the family apart, not draw it together” (9). Chapter 2 discusses the wrong reasons couples marry and the difficulties they later face as a result of unrealistic expectations. In chapter 3, she tackles the subjects of sex, power, and money that keep the family apart. Chapter 4 is the heart of the book; it highlights the responsibility of Christian parents as the primary educators of their children. Practical guidelines for parents are provided in chapter 5 for implementing spiritual disciplines. Some of these disciplines include time with God, confession, family worship, guidance, and celebration.

Chapter 6 covers nurturing the identities of children. Parents are cautioned in chapter 7 to avoid “majoring on the minors” when disciplining during the teenage years. In chapter 8, the importance of the extended family is explained. Chapter 9 discusses the missionary role of the family. She writes, “When the family prays for and befriends a hurting world, the home is doubly blessed” (120). Chapter 10 emphasizes the need to discuss the coming of Christ and the reality of heaven in the home. Malcolm concludes her book with a short list of sources and credits.

Quite remarkable in this book is Malcolm’s uncompromising stand for a Christ-centered lifestyle as key to a healthy family. It is her conviction that an individual commitment to God is directly linked to the quality of the marriage relationship and child rearing (59–61). Malcolm reflects heavily on the example modeled by her parents during her formative years. She is realistic, understanding that every marriage will face times of conflict and that “there are no guarantees in child rearing” (51). However, a parent’s commitment to Christ and the teaching of God’s word in the home highly increase the probability that a child will grow up in the faith, or, when straying, will “be caught by God along the way” (51).

Parenting is not just seen as a maternal task. A co-parenting model is deemed necessary for a successful home. Malcom asks, “Why not return to the biblical mandate of both parents being responsible for their children’s upbringing and Christian formation?” (40). Similarly, as with young boys, Malcolm stresses the need to encourage girls to develop their gifting and God-given

mission rather than relaying the “unspoken message that their sex appeal is their greatest asset” (82).

Single readers will find *Building Your Family to Last* a timely resource for premarital or preventative counseling. Malcolm challenges the reader to rethink marriage and the reasons for entering it. Likewise, married couples can find hope and practical advice to transform their existing marital relationships. Optimistically, she contends that marriages “can be saved in this age of divorce and disillusionment” (9).

As one reared in a non-Christian single-parent home, I found Malcolm’s message inspiring and redemptive. She summons extended families and the Christian community to the aid of those facing the hardships of divorce or separation from a loved one (111). Further, Malcolm encourages Christian spouses living with an unsaved husband or wife to be the first in starting a Christian dynasty that “will grow like the sands on the seashore” (115).

Perhaps the greatest strength of this classic is the rich multicultural perspective offered by the author. Malcolm identifies the individualism and me-centeredness in our Western culture as a sin that we must abandon (32). Far too many Christians sacrifice their children’s spiritual and emotional needs to the drive for success and materialism (9, 38–39). In response, readers will find an emphasis on the priority of family throughout the book.

Malcolm also believes in the missional aspect of the family: serving others (9). This is achieved by showing hospitality to strangers and compassion to the downtrodden (120). Finally, Malcolm believes that attempts should be made to raise children with a multicultural worldview where possible. She claims, “one of the great gifts we can give our children from the start is friendship with people from all different races, countries and walks of life” (125). I recommend this book without reservations.

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