

**REAL
MARRIAGE**
THE TRUTH ABOUT
SEX, FRIENDSHIP
& LIFE TOGETHER
MARK & GRACE
DRISCOLL

BOOK REVIEW: Mark and Grace Driscoll's *Real Marriage*

by Tim Krueger

Let me tell you about my car. It's your typical sedan. It doesn't have many special features, but I honestly appreciate what it offers (all-wheel drive). The trouble is, when the mercury drops below zero, which happens all too frequently in Minnesota, it probably won't

start. But it will toy with me, turning over just enough to inspire hope. Sadly, it rarely comes through for me. It's the kind of car you don't drive if you have a better option. But if you have to drive it, you'll survive, as long as you can manage its many problems.

Mark and Grace Driscoll's new book, *Real Marriage*, is a bit like my car. It's what we've come to expect from Christian dating and marriage books. It will lift your hopes and then disappoint you when it counts. The Driscolls are honest and vulnerable, and they clearly want the best for their readers. Still, I wouldn't recommend their book if you have better options, which you do. When it comes to Christian relationship books, *Real Marriage* doesn't stand out.

Though I've seen reviews that say the contrary, I see little that's unique in content. You'll find many of the same good, sort of vague themes we find in many pop-Christian books—"your identity is in Christ, not other people," "Make God the center of your relationship," and so forth. Through an account of their own marriage and ministry, the Driscolls focus on two themes:

1. God-centered friendship is the central pillar of a successful marriage.
2. Sex is a good gift from God, not to be idolized or disdained.

Neither of these ideas strikes me as new. Still, fresh or not, I agree with Pastor Mark and Grace that they are important messages.

Their raw honesty is admirable, as is their commitment to making marriage work despite some very intense issues. They examine topics ranging from practical friendship advice to pornography to what the Bible allows in the bedroom. I'm optimistic that maturity, honesty, and good premarital counseling could spare many couples from repeating the Driscolls' mistakes. However, I applaud their willingness to let us learn from their struggles.

Unfortunately, like my car, *Real Marriage* fails to deliver in some key situations. The Driscolls' use of Scripture misses the mark, some of their real-life examples of biblical concepts are hard to accept, and their skewed understanding of God's design for relationships between men and women is disappointing, to say the least.

Real Marriage features a combination of good biblical insights and alarmingly creative exegesis. Mark's comments on the Song of Solomon are graphic (p. 171-175), and, while I appreciate his attempt to remove the veil of euphemism and portray the Bible as the scandalous story it is, his treatment of the

book as a sex manual goes too far. I'm also troubled by an allusion to God walking Eve down the aisle (p. 108) and perplexed by an interpretation of Genesis 2:24—that a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife—as a directive for a man to move into his own place and become financially secure before marriage (p. 108). This reflects neither the context of the passage, nor the Hebrew culture in which it was written.

Through their real-life examples, the Driscolls teach a mistaken understanding of how God has designed us to live in relationship. For instance, while stressing the importance of intimacy, Mark recalls, "My pregnant wife came home from a hair appointment with her previously long hair (that I loved) chopped off and replaced with a short, mommish haircut. She asked what I thought, and could tell from the look on my face. She had put a mom's need for convenience before being a wife" (p. 11).

I like to give people the benefit of the doubt. Mark absolutely loved Grace's long hair, and now it was gone. He felt like she hadn't considered how much it meant to him. I'm grateful that my wife considers my wishes before making decisions that greatly affect her appearance. And she's grateful when I consider her desires before I put on that comfy—"ratty and disgusting," as she calls it—shirt I've had since middle school. Mark was probably wishing Grace had done the same, and I do credit them for emphasizing, later in the book, that both spouses should make an effort to remain attractive to each other (p. 170-71). Mark even shares two great pieces of advice he learned later on in their marriage: that a man's standard of beauty should be *defined* by his wife (p. 109), and that a wife has the final word on whether her husband's actions are loving (p. 63-4). Still, did Grace fail as a wife in chopping her hair? Did her desire to simplify her busy life really warrant repentance? It is alarming that this incident would, years later, still represent a significant breach of intimacy in Mark's mind. This is one of several instances that illustrate the Driscolls' misconstrued concept of a biblical woman and wife that overemphasizes physical appearance, submission, and respect toward a husband.

As expected, *Real Marriage* is permeated with complementarian perspectives, arguing that men and women are equal in value but different in roles. And, as is typical of Mark Driscoll's teachings, if you want to find a provocative quote, you won't be disappointed. A favorite of mine illustrates Mark's bewildering concept of biblical manhood. Mark lists five pillars of manhood which include: "1) leave your parents' home; 2) finish your education or vocational training; 3) start a career-track job, not a dead-end-Joe job; 4) meet a woman, love her, honor her, court her, and marry her; 5) parent children with her" (p. 42). How Mark can claim these have been the five events that have signified manhood for "most of human history... [until] the fools' parade hijacked the march to manhood" leaves me baffled.

These trends that Mark uses to define manhood are thoroughly Western and modern. Even a cursory knowledge of history reveals that for *most* of history and across *most* of the world, people have

lived in multigenerational homes, had little or no education, and did not choose a career, but inherited one. Wives were chosen by one's parents or bought for a price, and love was rarely involved. Jesus himself didn't even meet all of Mark's criteria for manhood, yet I think it is safe to assume Mark considers Jesus to be a man. These "pillars" are used by sociologists to *describe* modern, Western culture's rites of passage, not by Scripture to *define* manhood.

Despite a clear failure to grasp biblical manhood (if there is such a concept), the Driscolls, to their credit, do strongly emphasize the fact that male domination of the wife, pornography, and any kind of abuse are decidedly anti-Christian. Similarly, they teach that a wife who is silent when her husband violates Scripture is not living up to God's standards. This to me is emblematic of the ways "biblical" patriarchy has been softened and reinvented over time to look more and more egalitarian in practice. In *Real Marriage*, this results in a definition of male headship that is illogical and difficult to discern.

The Driscolls advocate for a form of male headship so focused on serving that its element of authority is virtually invisible in practice, while also arguing that male-only authority is indispensable to a healthy marriage or church. They insist that both a father and mother are crucial to the well-being of the family, but then assert that the man (somehow) bears more responsibility (p. 64). And, they cite a study showing that wives in egalitarian marriages are no happier than wives in complementarian ones (p. 61), but highlight several examples from their own marriage that demonstrate how replacing one-sided authority with mutual submission produces greater health and happiness.

In a cautious embrace of mutuality, Grace reflects on the current state of their marriage by writing, "I feel safe again, knowing we are both working on the friendship and building trust. It is easier for a woman to think of doing life with a friend than with a dictator or unemotional ruler" (p. 25). While she is quick to follow it up with the reassurance that the husband is still the head, she calls it "a 'loving her as Christ loves the church' head—a considerate friend." In another instance, Mark (while reminding us that Grace should never pastor a church) writes of the time he realized his male tendency toward self-reliance would no longer do. He needed someone to keep him accountable—someone who knew him completely. Thus, he asked Grace to be his "functional pastor" at home (p. 34). It may not be apparent to those who have not read their story, but these examples mark significant progress from where their relationship began.

It's ironic that even the Driscolls have learned through experience that the more egalitarian they are, the better their relationship. But, like many Christian writers on marriage, they haven't yet taken the step of fully embracing what Scripture, prayer, and experience confirm as true. Maybe one day that will change. But for now, we will safely leave *Real Marriage* on the shelves.



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BOOK REVIEW: Scot McKnight's *Junia is Not Alone*

by Liz Sykes

"Let me be clear once more. The editors of Greek New Testaments killed Junia. They killed her by silencing her into non-existence" (p. 14).

Such strong words are echoed throughout this short e-book from Scot McKnight, illustrating how a historical person was systematically eliminated from Bible translations. The record of how this happened is detailed very clearly in *Junia is Not Alone: Breaking Our Silence About Women in the Bible and the Church Today*—Scot McKnight has definitely done his homework.

The title of this e-book introduces the reader to the fact that Junia is not an isolated case of forgetfulness. Women throughout Bible narratives—such as Huldah, Phoebe, and Miriam—have been intentionally ignored and even willfully dismissed throughout the centuries, to the point that their voices are foreign to many today.

In addition, McKnight relates the stories of three women from Christian history whose remarkable achievements for God have been deleted from our awareness. He withholds these women's names until the end, cleverly drawing readers in and highlighting just how unfamiliar most of us are with their stories.

McKnight's passion for this subject may surprise some readers, but he perceives this silencing of women as a deep injustice which has been perpetuated up to the present time. Consider the response of a male reader, who questioned why Scot used only examples of

women in a particular chapter of his book *Jesus Creed*: "I don't identify with women as much as I do with men," the man complained. Scot replies by saying, "The man who thinks he doesn't identify *with* women needs to see that this is what males have done *to* women for the better part of two millennia" (p. 26).

We hope the very bold statements by this popular author will reach and inspire a large audience and have the impact he intends. This e-book is a quick read and will be of immense encouragement to women who want to serve God but have been hindered along the way. Leaders of churches and theological institutions should read this excellent resource, which has the potential to open eyes that have been unwilling or unable to recognize the unbiblical restrictions on the callings of women. "It is our calling to let freedom ring—to let the Spirit use people whom God chooses" (p. 26). Amen!



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