

Naked

reviewed by Kate Wallace Nunneley

Naked is a marriage book thoroughly steeped in egalitarian theology and completely free from gender stereotypes and tired “male headship” language. Tim and Anne Evans bring decades of counseling and ministry experience to their work, and the result is an extremely helpful and approachable guide for married couples.

This book is presented in three parts, the first of which presents a healthy theology of sex and counsels the reader through deconstructing any unhealthy views of sex they may have learned throughout their life, whether from church, family, or culture.

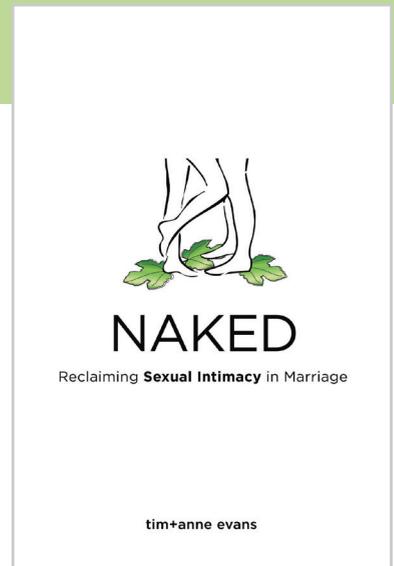
Part two of *Naked* helps reconstruct the reader’s views of sex by addressing sensitive topics that desperately need to be addressed. The authors do not shy away from many complex and controversial topics in this book, and although this may make some readers uncomfortable at times, each one is intentionally thought out and approached with grace.

Part three helps the reader take practical steps toward building greater intimacy in

their marriage. This section brings hope, empowerment, and guidance to the reader as they begin to apply this knowledge to their everyday life.

Naked makes readers feel as though they are sitting down to coffee with the authors. Personal stories from the authors help to make the material accessible and relatable. I especially appreciate the care taken in including things not normally found in marriage books, like the assertion that marriage is not the goal of the Christian life, and that the church is responsible for many of our misunderstandings about sex.

I believe this book would be helpful for any couple wishing to grow in sexual intimacy or who simply want to better understand the role sex plays in their marriage. *Naked* comes with a companion journal, making it useful for engaged couples wanting to have a healthy view of sex before entering into marriage. *Naked* is a book I can confidently recommend to others, knowing that it will help them develop a healthy and egalitarian view of sex and intimacy.



Kate Wallace Nunneley is co-founder of The Junia Project and associate pastor at Wellspring Free Methodist Church in Bakersfield, CA. A committed Christian and feminist, Kate enjoys writing and speaking on the intersection of politics, religion, and gender. Her favorite theologian is Gilbert Bilezikian, and she holds a master of science from London School of Economics and a bachelor of arts from Azusa Pacific University. Kate is currently pursuing her master of divinity at Azusa Pacific Seminary.

Making Marriage Beautiful

reviewed by Amy R. Buckley

A few months ago, an acquaintance confided that her marriage is in trouble. She asked about egalitarian marriage resources, and I enthusiastically recommended Dorothy Greco’s new book, *Making Marriage Beautiful*.

The book’s eleven chapters survey a range of topics, from managing expectations to navigating in-laws, gender roles, communication, conflict, abuse, addiction, community (outside of marriage) and healthy response to external challenges and crises.

Drawing upon twenty-five years of marriage to her husband Christopher,

Greco offers full disclosure of the struggles, failures, successes, and transformation they have seen. With refreshing self-awareness and humor, Greco serves less as an instructor and more as a fellow traveler. Gary Chapman explains this in the book’s forward: “In *Making Marriage Beautiful*, Dorothy Greco vulnerably shares the journey she and her husband have traveled from brokenness to beauty.”

A variety of readers will find helpful wisdom in Greco’s work. Those considering engagement will find a realistic view of what a healthy

marriage requires. Couples at all stages of relationship—whether newlyweds or those facing rough patches—will find a wealth of suggestions and encouragement. Those in mature stages of marriage will find resources for cultivating continued depth and growth. Greco shares stories of multiethnic couples, highlighting the unique challenges of marriage in different cultures and in inter-cultural marriage. Those looking for a book to study as a couple or small group will benefit from the discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

Like any marriage book should, Greco's work deals with expectations, communication, and conflict.

Greco challenges men and women to "ferret out unhelpful expectations" at the heart of disappointment. She writes, "What if rather than blaming each other for our disappointments, we confessed our failures and owned our areas of weakness? What if we looked under the disappointments to discern if they revealed any egocentric expectations, disordered attachments, or misplaced hope?" (p. 79). Instead of letting go of expectations, she encourages us to shift from blame to self-awareness. Greco reveals the painful process she went through of learning to let go of an unrealistic expectation harming her marriage. She models the difficult and messy process of "holy resignation." As we live and move and have our being in Jesus, it's possible to love our spouse without demanding change.

Greco urges couples to deal squarely with anger. She encourages us to give up toxic behaviors that harm a relationship (defensiveness, moralizing, manipulating, withdrawing, and lashing out). An emotionally healthy practice of anger requires keeping reactions in check as we balance self-control with self-expression. Greco explains how to change this dynamic, allowing us to appreciate each other more fully and give of ourselves more freely.

To those wrestling to forgive a spouse, Greco offers healthy perspectives of confession and forgiveness—what they are and aren't. She reminds us the stakes are high when we fail to confess our sins or forgive one another. She encourages us to look to the One who brings us together and remember that Jesus makes us one. Only in that place will we see the goodness God is able to call out on the other side of suffering.

On the topic of communication, Greco reminds us of the profound human need for meaningful connection. She urges us not to allow technology (cell phones, Skype, email, etc.) to encroach on couples' time alone. Setting aside

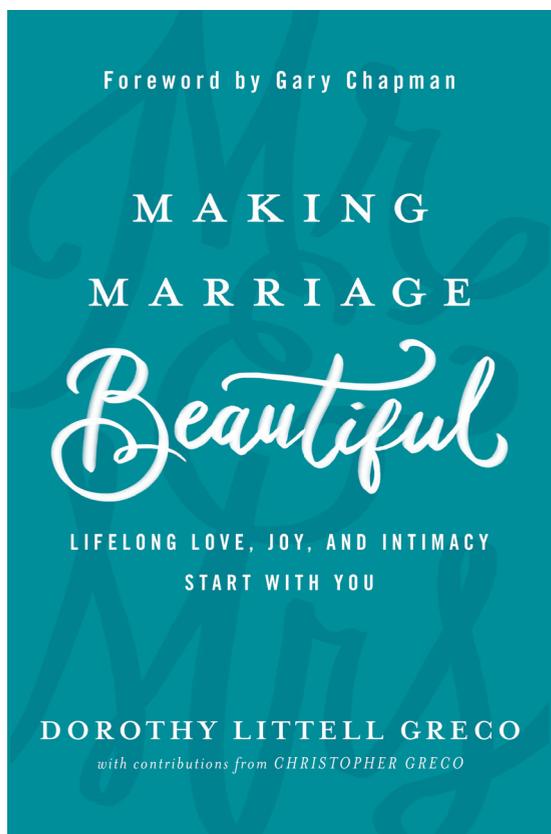
distractions opens the way for deepening relational and sexual intimacy. "Good listeners," she writes, "make better lovers." Couples will benefit from practical suggestions for building a deeper, stronger relationship.

More than a few marriage books fall short in their treatment (or lack thereof) of gender stereotyping, addiction, and abuse. Greco provides a much-needed correction.

Greco unpacks cultural stereotypes and expectations that society and faith communities so often place on men and women. At the same time, she acknowledges that sex-related variables often play into marriage dynamics—

for better or for worse. She shares how she and Christopher learned to embrace their unique designs rather than suffering shame for failing to conform to pink or blue expectations. Rather than buying into simplistic gender roles, Greco encourages couples to navigate the mysterious waters as different genders and unique people. She urges readers to consider how gender expectations may be harming their marriages.

For spouses navigating the thorny ground of addictions, Greco explains the source of disordered attachments and addictions that so often devastate marriages. Vulnerably, she and Christopher share the ups and downs of their journey to freedom. To those who feel isolated, ashamed, and hopeless, they extend wise encouragement without sugar coating the process. Change is possible as we lean into the One who lived and died and rose again. No matter how discouraging or hopeless our circumstances, no matter the condition of our relationship, Jesus is with us, ready to make all things new.



Far from giving tidy answers, Greco addresses the tragic issue of intimate partner abuse and violence. She reminds us that safety is tantamount. Jesus lived and died and rose again for all things to be new; but enduring abuse is never part of God's plan. Knowing that issues of power and control drive abuse and violence, Greco wisely points victims to professional abuse counselors.

Throughout her work, Greco reminds us of the importance of choosing joy, and the beauty of journeying that road together in the One who makes marriage beautiful.



Amy R. Buckley is a writer, speaker, and life coach. She has published articles in a variety of publications, and contributed to *Dating During the Apocalypse*, *and Other Conversations On God, Sex, and Life* (Cru Press); *Overcomer: Breaking Down the Walls of Shame and Rebuilding Your Soul* (Zondervan); and *Strengthening Families and Ending Abuse, Churches and Their Leaders Look to the Future* (Wipf and Stock). Read more at www.amyrbuckley.com.