

A rustic still life composition on a dark wooden surface. On the left, a large, round loaf of bread with a cracked, golden-brown crust sits on a light-colored cloth with blue stripes. In the center, a white ceramic cup filled with a golden-brown liquid, likely tea, sits on a matching saucer with a blue floral pattern. To the right, a small bouquet of purple and white flowers is visible. The overall mood is warm and inviting.

THE *Life* GIVING HOME

CREATING A PLACE OF
belonging & becoming

SALLY & SARAH CLARKSON

The Lifegiving Home

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The Lifegiving Home: Creating a Place of Belonging and Becoming

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix
THE ADVENTURE BEGINS xi

PART ONE: Thinking about Home

1. A LIFEGIVING LEGACY (SALLY) 3
2. MADE FOR HOME (SARAH) 13
3. A SYMPHONY OF GRACE (SALLY) 23
4. THE RHYTHMS OF INCARNATION (SARAH) 33

PART TWO: Seasons of Home

JANUARY 43
Creating a Framework for Home: Rhythms, Routines, and Rituals (Sally)
FEBRUARY 59
A Culture of Love: Growing Lifelong Relationships (Sally)
MARCH 79
The Art of the Ordinary: Finding Beauty in Your Own Backyard (Sarah)
APRIL 101
A Heritage of Faith: Engaging with God's Story (Sarah)
MAY 119
Days to Commemorate: Marking Growth with Celebration (Sally)
JUNE 133
Times of Delight: Creating a Value for Play (Sally)
JULY 149
A Heroic Heritage: Engaging with Story and History (Sarah)

AUGUST	165
<i>The Story of Us: Shaping and Celebrating Family Culture</i> (Sally)	
SEPTEMBER.....	179
<i>When Seasons Change: Gathering In for Home and</i> <i>Soul (Sarah)</i>	
OCTOBER	193
<i>Home Is Best: Serving Life within Your Walls (Sally)</i>	
NOVEMBER	213
<i>Blessed and Blessing: Grace, Gratitude, and Generosity</i> (Sarah)	
DECEMBER.....	229
<i>The Rhythm of Celebration: Seasons of Rejoicing in</i> <i>Family Life (Sarah)</i>	
NOTES	247
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	249

— The Adventure Begins —

THE ADVENTURE STARTED ON A WHIM. With a suitcase in my left hand, a laptop case and tote on my shoulder, and the luggage cart dragging behind me, I stumbled against the door of suite 209 and pushed it open with my shoulder. The cart lurched over the doorstep, propelling me farther into the room as I grabbed for the door, laughing at my decidedly ungraceful movements. With one toe balancing the cart and my finger just on the doorknob, I held the door open for Sarah, my nineteen-year-old daughter, who was lugging the laundry basket of extras we had thrown in for our week of retreat—electric teakettle, printer, candles, chocolate—all the necessities!

When she was safely inside, I gratefully dropped a few bags on the couch and breathed a sigh of deep relief. We were finally, blessedly here. After several months of planning, several more months of crazy living, and a four-hour drive through a mountain pass, we had finally arrived.

We had come here to Asheville, North Carolina, to write a book together. With my husband, Clay, busy with his own project, Joy, my youngest, off to a favorite auntie's house, and my two teenage sons away at camp, Sarah and I had decided to escape for a rare writing getaway. We were excited about this week of “girl time” and writing time in our favorite town.

Asheville, as I describe in the next chapter, is nestled in the arms of the Blue Ridge Mountains and has an air of mountain coolness that we absolutely love. Though it is famous for the incredibly beautiful Biltmore Estate nearby,

it is also graced with dozens of lovely little shops, delightful cafés, and an excellent tearoom—just the places we would want to go in our moments of relaxation in between long hours of writing. Instead of holing up in the usual small motel room, we had even splurged and booked a suite complete with kitchen and a living room at a well-known hotel chain. We wanted everything to be beautiful and cozy as we sequestered ourselves away to do our work.

But now, as we stood in our suite with all our excited expectations chattering in our minds, we peered around, searching for the expected coziness. We had yet to see any sign of it.

First of all, as we approached the registration desk, we'd had to walk alongside construction tape that kept us out of a work area. Just as we initialed the final form, a jackhammer had begun to pound away so that we had to shout to each other to be heard. And as to our accommodations—well, the kitchen and living room were definitely there, but that was about all that could be said of them. The floor was covered in stained, thin, nondescript gray-brown carpet, with a large wet spot in the middle that smelled of Lysol. A cheap, stiff couch with nary a pillow was pushed up against one wall. Old, torn wallpaper covered the kitchen walls, and the unmistakable smell of strong cleaning solution from the sink assaulted our noses.

A sudden silence fell. It didn't last long, though, for we quickly realized our room was right next to the elevator. A metallic *ding, ding* sounded every two minutes or so, and through the paper-thin walls we heard the voices of the maids chattering in the laundry room next door.

I plopped down on the couch, a huge sigh rising in my throat, and looked at Sarah. Weariness seemed to hover as a cloud around both of us, and I let the sigh out with a sort of groan attached.

Well, I thought, trying desperately to be optimistic, maybe if we light a candle the smell will go away, and if we borrow some pillows from the bed . . . Then I just gave up. There wasn't much chance of making this room cozy. The excitement of the last hours suddenly drained from me, and my body and mind both went limp. Just sitting in that room made me feel lonely and depressed, neither of which is a good condition for writing a book on life-giving. From the look on Sarah's face, I knew she felt the same way.

Now, you must know we are not picky people. In fact, traveling has made us quite flexible and resourceful. This room threatened to overwhelm our

usual resourceful optimism. But what else could we do? I knew nothing of the other hotels around town, and I really wasn't sure this one would release us from our reservation. I reached up to my temples, trying to rub away an emerging headache.

Then it popped into Sarah's mind that we had passed a bed and breakfast on our way into town. Though our family had traveled extensively, we had never stayed at a bed and breakfast because they're rarely set up to handle six people at a time. But there were just two of us now, so maybe we could find a more personal and comforting atmosphere at a convenient B&B.

On this impulse, she grabbed the nearby phone book and flipped to the bed and breakfast section of the yellow pages. She picked three with large ads that were located in the part of town we knew best. Then we took turns dialing.

The first two were dead ends. As Sarah dialed the third, I kept trying to imagine five days in that barren, smelly room. *Please . . .*

The phone rang several times before the man on the other end picked up.

"Hello, I just arrived in Asheville this afternoon . . ."

"Well, congratulations!" said the friendly voice on the other end. With his deep voice, the man sounded like a radio host.

This is more like it.

"We need a place to stay and work on a project. Do you have any rooms available?"

We discovered, to our excitement, that he had a suite—a large bedroom with a small workroom attached. I explained that we needed a place to work on a book.

"So, you're writers," he said.

"Yes," I replied. "Actually, we're in Asheville expressly to get started on our book."

"In that case, you have to stay here!" he said. "This is the Wright Inn, and the room I have available is the Wright Suite—the perfect place for writers, don't you think? We're located in an old, quiet neighborhood, and once everyone is gone in the morning, you'll have practically the whole house to yourselves. Oh, there's a nice, big front porch as well."

(No, I didn't use writer's license to make any of this up! Every part of it actually happened.)

I think we were sold right then and there, but the proprietor said we could

come and see the space first to make sure it was adequate for us. The dismal vision of five miserable days was fading fast away. Before we left, we checked at the front desk of our current hotel and found they would graciously release us from our reservation. (Others had also canceled their reservations because of the noise and dust from the building project.) So with a sense of new freedom dancing around us, we hopped in the car and zoomed to the downtown neighborhood where the Wright House was located.

The streets were narrow, shadowed by the branches of tall, old fir and oak trees that had watched a hundred years or more pass in those quiet lanes. The houses were a century old as well, with heavy wooden front doors and tall windows with antique panes gazing out from beneath deep covered porches that held rocking chairs and baskets of flowers. We rounded a corner and the Wright House came into view, a dignified, three-storied mansion surrounded by a small lawn, tall trees, lots of maroon and yellow mums, and some red roses having their last fling on that October day. We walked up stone steps onto a deep, rambling porch with white wicker chairs set in cozy corners.

The innkeeper, Mark, welcomed us at the door, carrying a silver tray with two crystal glasses of sparkling apple juice, as well as a plate of whole grain crackers, sliced cheeses, and Concord grapes. “Sparkling juice or a small bite for your refreshment?” he asked, ushering us through the front door.

I felt as if I had somehow jumped back one hundred years. Candles flickered on the mantle of a fireplace. Rich rugs and intricately carved furniture adorned the common rooms. And just beyond them, a tall, dark wooden door stood invitingly open.

“This is the Wright Suite,” Mark said as we stepped through that door into a spacious room that glowed with soft light from the big windows and lamps on the bedside tables. A big Victorian bed was piled high with pillows and a comfy-looking duvet, the high windows peered out into a garden spot where squirrels played in the pine branches, and a beautiful fireplace occupied the left wall. A patterned rug covered part of the gleaming wood floor, and gilt-framed pictures hung against pale gold wallpaper patterned with yellow rose bouquets.

Beyond the bedroom, another tall door opened onto a little nook of a room with a small table and two deep chairs perfectly suited for a pair of lap-top computers. I couldn't help but notice the many candles around the room

and the CD player with a stack of instrumental music beside it. Beyond our nook was one last door that led out onto our own little stretch of porch with a view of the lovely autumn garden.

I honestly don't know if anything could have been more perfectly arranged for us. There was no question of whether or not we would take the Wright Suite—in my mind the *right* suite for *writing*—for the conviction was growing in our hearts that all this had somehow been arranged, that care had been taken to prepare a place for us, a rare and generous treat.

Now I am propped up on that high Victorian bed, writing this introduction, utterly surrounded by beautiful things that give life to my soul. We have been here for two days, and I can guarantee that you will be reading a much more inspired book because of it.

The air is chilled today, so our fireplace is filled with cheery, crackling flames. The candles are lit, a piano is playing in the living room, and there is a sense of warmth and beauty all around. The very richness of this room brings life to my soul, and that is what this book is all about—how to create a home that nourishes, nurtures, and sustains life and beauty. It is all about how to order your living space and what happens there to embody the joy and beauty of God's own Spirit.

In the end, God used our little adventure as a living illustration of what my daughter and I want to share in this book. We want to show women (and men, if they're interested) how to create a space that supports vibrant, joyful, productive living and supports growth of body, soul, and spirit. Sure, people can survive in the barren sterility of a chain hotel room, but the impact of such a place is soul deadening. Home was intended to be so much more than just a place of bare essentials.

If we look at the lovely world that God designed for us, we can see a pattern for what He has always intended for us—a home environment filled with color and creativity and order, a welcoming provider of laughter and refuge, a space where memories are made and shared. Instead of creating us to live in a house of weariness and colorlessness, God has made us to live in a home full of soul-beautiful elements.

I have a sneaking suspicion that these new discoveries of loveliness as I research and prepare this book will change me, you, and even the world because of lives that will ultimately be changed within a real, God-honoring, vibrant home.

That Was Then . . .

I wrote all of the above twelve years ago! That’s how long this book has been on my heart—and how long it has taken for it to become reality.

Despite the loveliness of that week in Asheville, other projects and commitments soon took over, and *The Lifegiving Home* languished on the back burner. But those twelve years were not wasted. They gave my Sarah a chance to grow up and me a chance to grow as a wife and mother, a teacher and a writer, a woman of business and a woman of home. They gave us many Sunday afternoons to thumb through *Victoria* magazines over steaming cups of tea, to attempt new recipes and spring them on the family, to visit a variety of countries and stay in all sorts of homes all over the world.

Over those years, we invested countless hours talking, dreaming, and planning how to “make home” in a way that would minister beauty and rest, inspire study, stimulate conversation, and celebrate relationship. We also collected stories from our life together—stories that began on that profound moment more than thirty years ago when I held my newborn daughter in my arms.

The Story of Home

Dark blueberry eyes gazed intensely up at me, and I couldn’t tear my own eyes away. I was starstruck with my first beautiful baby. And in a moment of startling clarity, I had a vision of the home I wanted to provide for her.

Truly, for me, it was a defining moment. My mind was suddenly filled with images of what home could be. I found myself dreaming of the kind of environment I wanted Clay and me to provide for this little seven-pound gift. I wanted us to do whatever we could to shape the potential locked in the heart, soul, and mind of this little one. Together we would create an environment that nurtured her and helped her grow.

No, we didn’t know what we were doing. But with God’s help, we were determined to try. So that’s where our shared story began. With a baby . . . and a dream.

Before Sarah turned five, she had acquired two brothers—first Joel, then Nathan. Quite a few years later, little sister Joy came alone. Our work took us to Vienna, Austria; California; and sixteen other places in between. Our home became noisy, messy, and full of life as our family began to celebrate

what it meant to be Clarksons together. The vision of home that began in me the day Sarah arrived grew clearer and more compelling, and Clay and I worked to make our home into a place where our little ones felt a sense of belonging. We did our best to give them roots through creating and honoring family traditions, encouraging celebration, teaching them to cherish the ways and beauty of our God, and learning what we valued as a family.

Others began to step into our home. Single adults from divorced families who found themselves lonely and isolated in professional jobs and wanted a place to be in community. Married couples with houses full of children but no support systems. International diplomats who had never known the love of God. Teachers and musicians seeking kindred spirits. Folk who were broken emotionally or just longing for a place to be welcomed. We learned how to welcome them—how to help them *feel* the welcome.

Because I knew what it was like to live in a foreign country as a young, lonely missionary without a familiar place to go to when weary or overwhelmed, I wanted to provide a space of rest and refreshment for those who felt that way too. So we began to expand our understanding of what a life-giving home could be. With each new friendship, I had a deeper sense of the need for a place that “knows” us and welcomes us, with a family—genetic or otherwise—who will love us and be our companions through the ups and downs of life.

People from all over the world passed through our doorways and stayed in our beds and feasted at our table over the years. Hosting literally hundreds of people as guests each year, we cultivated our rooms into refuges for weary ones and places to celebrate births and weddings, to give solace to the sorrowing, to nurture and sustain those who were ill or overcome with grief, and to offer love, friendship, and even counseling for those who needed it. Our home was the venue for feasts, Bible studies, concerts, holidays, birthdays, and intimate times with friends. In the process, our home began to have a story of its own.

Years passed, and our children grew through each season of life. At times, we pulled in together behind closed doors to deal with heartaches, disappointments, abandonment of friends, or church splits—though we also celebrated joys and had lots of fun. At these times, home grew into a place of refuge, comfort, familiarity, safety, pleasure—a port to keep us safe through the storms.

During these years, God seemed to whisper to me in my quiet times, *Give foundations of strength and inspiration to these precious ones, but give them wings as well. Prepare them to take risks, to live by faith, so that they can take the messages and cherished values they learned at home and share them with a hurting world.* And so our home became a launching pad, a place of blessing, as we sent our beloved children on their way—hopefully strong, whole, and secure in the ideals, faith, and values that truly matter.

They were taking His light out into the darkness. But our home remained the lighthouse they could return to for rest and restoration in between the adventures that took them into the world.

This Is Now . . .

As Sarah grew from child to teenager to best friend, she began to catch my vision for sharing the adventures our home had lived to tell. She graduated from high school, became an author in her own right, and traveled the world. Now she's studying theology at Oxford University in England, far from our family home. But she probably won't be alone for long; Joy, our youngest, is considering doing her master's in the United Kingdom. Our two boys have landed in Philadelphia and New York for now.

And yes, there are days when Clay and I feel like we're rattling around in an empty house—but not often, because that house is still home base for our family. It's the hub to which we all return to refuel before venturing out once more. And it's the headquarters for ongoing works of collaboration—such as this book, which is finally coming to fruition after all these years.

You see, we never lost the vision that sent us to Asheville twelve years ago. If anything, the years have sharpened and deepened our convictions and our desire to share them. Finally, despite crazy schedules, hundreds of life interruptions, and chronic lack of time, we decided to make *The Lifegiving Home* a reality. We felt the world needed this book, and our publisher agreed it was a good idea.

So I decided to travel to Europe during one of Sarah's school breaks so we could do the bulk of our writing together. Joel was interviewing for a job in England and said he would love to tag along. Because international travel and living have been such a part of our lives, I found a lovely little apartment for rent just east of Paris, with a full kitchen and living room, for less than two hundred dollars a week.

The three of us landed there and immediately started making it home for our week together. Tramping through light rain to the closest village grocery store, we loaded up on crusty bread, local cheese, berries, yogurt, a sparkling bottle of juice, and three small quiches. Back home, we lit candles in our small living room, wrapped a scarf around a small jar of roses I had bought, and arranged our recent purchases on the table. We relished celebrating “home” together in this different place—the sense of familiar belonging, with a small feast laid out in the peaceful twilight. What a joy to be with those we know and love so well!

The next day, Sarah and I got to work—sharing ideas, outlining possibilities. And because we are a highly collaborative family, Joel joined in with many of our discussions. In a sense he is a third author of this book because he contributed so many ideas and stories. (Eventually he became coauthor of the companion planner, *The Lifegiving Home Experience*.) When it came to actually putting the words together, Sarah and I divided up the chapters. I wrote half, and she wrote half; then we responded to each other’s offerings.

I hope you’ll keep this collaborative process in mind as you read this book. Sarah and I have very different writing styles, and our perspective, of course, is different. I write as a mama who developed my home ideals through the years and applied them with trial and error and lots and lots of grace. Sarah writes as a young adult who grew up in our home and is learning to create home for herself. But the two of us (and Joel!) shared the same family culture and share much of the same vision.

You’ll find that some themes will be repeated more than once because they reflect the same unique home environment and because each of us wanted to give our own impressions of what we valued. So you’ll read a lot about tea-times (can there be too much mention, ever, of teatimes?), books and stories (again, never too much mention!), traditions, spiritual rhythms and practices, feasting, celebrating life, and understanding the importance of beauty to satisfy our souls. We hope you’ll bear with us through this repetition and enjoy the dual perspective.

We also hope you will take the time to visit our dedicated website, www.lifegivinghome.com. We had so many ideas to share that we could not possibly fit them all into this book, so we have put them on the website. There you will find lists and links for books to read, movies to watch, resources to

gather, and things to do with your family—plus a place where others can contribute their own ideas. Look for our website prompts throughout this book.

For the record, we did do everything this book recommends—at least once! Many of the practices were ongoing—we did them every year, no matter what. Others were enjoyed for a year or two and then abandoned as our family evolved. Some practices were suspended during times of stress—moves, illnesses, traumatic circumstances, or just the need to simplify. But others were what kept us sane during those same times of stress.

I suspect you will find the same is true of you. Don't hesitate to make adjustments and keep on learning as you and your family journey together. But always keep in mind that wherever you are, you can create a lifegiving home that will become a significant part of your family's story. How we need more "homemakers" so that all who live in this transient, contemporary world might have a place to belong, to feel loved and valued, to serve and be served, to give and receive and celebrate all that is good.

So make a cup of tea, light some candles, and sit down in your comfiest chair as you begin to journey with Sarah and me through the ideas and possibilities that take you right into the center of your own heart and home.

May God's richest blessings be with you as you dream, create ideas for your own family, and flourish in the creativity of mind and soul that comes with being God's child, made in His likeness, and destined for an eternal home with Him.

—PART ONE—

Thinking about Home



I

A LIFEGIVING LEGACY

(SALLY)



*The wise woman builds her house,
But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.*

PROVERBS 14:1

LEAVES OF CRIMSON, GOLD, and brown drifted down upon the roof of our car as we slowly meandered on the winding road, gazing out at the mysterious woods on either side of us and the flowing stream that seemed to follow our course. The sweet, melancholy notes of a Celtic CD streamed through the car as each of us lost ourselves for the moment in our own dream worlds.

In that season of my life, as the mother of three teenagers and a bubbly little seven-year-old girl, I rarely had a quiet moment. This drive provided a soothing moment, a badly needed opportunity just to breathe. The soft music lured me to a secret escape inside, while the pathways leading through shadowy woods captured my imagination, providing a momentary break from mundane reality. And how I needed that! My heart was desperate for some new inspiration and rest from my draining and demanding days. Would I find it on this trip?

All six of us Clarksons had piled into our van to get away to Asheville, North Carolina, for a weekend of family adventure and escape. Now we were approaching the Biltmore, the famous home that George Washington Vanderbilt II planned and constructed more than one hundred years earlier.

We rounded a bend, and a stand of tall, shimmering ash trees opened up to a breathtaking view. The grand tree-lined entrance in front of us led to a four-story French château-styled structure. Designed as the dream project of Mr. Vanderbilt's life, Biltmore stood with castle-like grandeur against a dramatic backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Completed in 1895, Biltmore was (and remains) the largest residential dwelling in the United States—with four *acres* of floor space and more than 250 rooms. In its heyday the estate covered most of four counties. Although some of the land has been sold since then, the house itself looks almost new, without the slightest evidence that the years have weakened or diminished the structure in any way.

Driving up toward Biltmore on that first visit, we found ourselves awestruck by the sheer size and beauty of the place in its breathtaking mountain setting. But as we toured the house and learned a little more about it and its creator, we came to appreciate the family dwelling and its builder even more. For Biltmore is more than just a big, elegant house in the mountains. It is the embodiment of one man's vision of home and his determination to make that dream a reality.

As the youngest of eight children, George Vanderbilt gleaned ideas for home design from his older siblings, from the family home in New York where he had grown up, and from prominent historical places he had visited in America and abroad. His vision for crafting a home grew over time, and by the time he got around to actually building his dream home, he knew exactly what he wanted—a solid structure built to last, a family home whose halls and rooms were filled with lively, rousing conversations; jubilant dances; and sumptuous feasts—a meeting place where friends he had met from all over the world could join him.

George Vanderbilt's monument of a lifework will last for generations, as it was built on solid foundations with good materials. As I walked its halls, I learned more and found my soul awakening, my imagination rekindling as I pondered my own dream of creating a lifegiving home, a legacy that would speak into generations to come.

Vanderbilt dreamed of designing a place that would be a haven for all who entered and a resource for the greater community. His family dwelling place would be a sanctuary for all who came upon it, crafted to meet the needs of people who longed for the solace of a peaceful life away from the demands of everyday living.

He especially wanted his home to provide a retreat for budding artists and musicians so they could create their works of art in peace. Vanderbilt dreamed of providing these folk with a place where they could find rest and renewal, then continue working on their art.

His remarkable success in achieving that dream was obvious with every step of our tour. Uniquely decorated guestrooms on the second and third floors were earmarked for friends and aspiring artists, authors, and musicians. A library of thousands of books stood at ready to support disciplined and curious minds—and prompted my own reflections as well.

How can I do that in my own home? I found myself pondering. In what ways can I make room for those needing a place to be creative?

Multiple living rooms were designed to provide his family and guests with privacy, companionship, and entertainment. Each featured a variety of cards and games, books piled high for escape and study, groupings of chairs where many friendships were forged in front of roaring fires, lit nightly for warmth and atmosphere. Guests delighted to congregate in these rooms to engage with new ideas, share stories, and enjoy one another.

How can I group chairs, couches, and tables in our home in a way that encourages people to spend time together?

A massive kitchen in the basement ensured that the dining and serving needs of all who stayed in the home would be easily met. Here elaborate feasts, elegant tea parties, enchanting birthday celebrations, and magnificent holiday celebrations originated. (Even the servants and their families were treated yearly to a grand Christmas party, and each child was presented with presents chosen just for him or her.)

How can I use my own kitchen and the rest of my house to meet both the physical and emotional needs of my family and those who might not have as much? What events can I dream up that help us celebrate life and make memories through meals and learning how to cook for groups with simplicity?

Culture and travel were important to George Vanderbilt, and he planned his house to reflect those interests. Art treasures and artifacts from all over the world, mostly collected by Vanderbilt himself, transformed each room into a visual feast. Beautiful, interesting objects adorned each corner and wall—robust statues, hundreds of pen-and-ink sketches, classic oil paintings, European tapestries, a grand organ, musical instruments, rare books, and fascinating relics. Each was carefully chosen to add beauty and interest, to capture the imagination and stimulate the flow of creative juices.

How can I arrange my own little treasure trove of items collected from the

many countries where we've lived to refresh our decor and provide something interesting to see, read, or enjoy in every corner of my house?

Designed to Design

As I toured Biltmore, my imagination and vision were once again piqued by the idea of intentionally making my home a holding place for all that is beautiful, good, holy, and foundational to life—a place where those I love always feel like they belong, a place of freedom and grace that launches them into the persons they were made to be, a place of becoming. In the midst of demanding, constantly pressured lives, we all need refresher courses from time to time about what we are building and why we must be intentional about doing it.

My mom used to put it this way: “All people need a place where their roots can grow deep and they always feel like they belong and have a loving refuge. And all people need a place that gives wings to their dreams, nurturing possibilities of who they might become.”

Creating such a place does not require building a mansion as Vanderbilt did. We are all capable of creating a lasting legacy in the form of a home that gives life to others who come under its roof.

A home that serves all who enter.

A home that reflects our own tastes and the values we treasure.

A home that meets the needs of family and visitors alike, that fosters beauty and creativity.

A home where the atmosphere, traditions, and celebrations give life to the hearts, minds, and souls of those inside its walls.

A home that provides a lifegiving legacy that will last for generations to come.

I believe God has designed us to do just that.

It was through the structure of home and family that God first gave men and women a chart for all of life, when it was perfect and untouched by sin. Adam and Eve received God's blessings and a mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Family was God's original organization scheme for society, and home was the laboratory where human beings could learn to glorify God through the work,

relationships, and purposes of their lives. Home would be the place where love for God and commitment to His purposes would be passed down from one generation to another.

A Homeless Generation?

Thousands of years later, in a world that rebelled against God's original intention, too many are left with no understanding of the Genesis mandate or the importance of home building. Broken families, divorce, abandonment, passivity, and abuse have plagued family history and have left scars on the hearts of children grown into adults. The vision of home as a place to flourish and grow fully into healthy persons has too often been lost in the busyness, distraction, and brokenness of both our secular and our Christian cultures.

Add to that the impact of technology in recent years, as social media tends to elevate *virtual* relationships over real-life, face-to-face encounters. Tweets, profiles, and statuses have replaced personal conversations. Gathering around the table for food and family discussions, lingering on front porches for long conversations over coffee, whiling away evenings with family and friends—all these have been replaced with quick trips through the fast-food drive-in or fifteen-minute meet-ups at a local coffee shop. There is little time or space for instruction about life or discussions about truth. Our souls seem to be filled with the sawdust of a lost generation.

Corporate moves have displaced people from their relatives; megachurches have replaced local congregations; and so many of us have become accustomed to growing up without a physical, local community of friends with whom we share life every day and who hold us accountable. Neighborhoods have become merely places to hold the dwellings where we sleep, grab food on the go, and meet our bare needs for existence. Sometimes we are lonely, and we do not recognize what has been lost.

As a result, in so many ways, we have become a homeless generation.

I am not even speaking of the poor who actually lack a place to live—though that in itself is a tragedy. I'm referring to a different kind of homelessness, one that is spiritual and emotional. It's the homelessness of those who have their basic needs for housing, food, and clothing met but do not have a sanctuary designed to preserve all that is precious in life.

People may have dwellings—apartments, flats, houses, dorm rooms. They may have roommates or husbands or wives or children or parents. They may even have architects and decorators. But so many do not have a place of refuge, a harbor for their wandering souls, a place where all that is precious about life is preserved, protected, and cultivated and the daily needs of their hearts and souls are satisfied.

More important, they have no idea how to create that kind of home for themselves and those they love.

What Makes a Home?

Each of us longs for a place to belong, a connection that gives roots to our wandering lives. Our hearts hunger for a community where we are intimate members, a sense of belonging to people who love us. Our souls crave a purpose bigger than our jobs, a connection to a sense of meaning. We yearn to know that our own stories have significance in the grander scheme of God's megastory. All of these may be found in home—a place to belong, a people to be a part of, and a purpose where God's righteousness and design are celebrated and cherished in community every day.

That's not to say the home or the people in it have to fit a certain mold or look a particular way. Whether single or married, parent or childless, student, missionary, working away from home, traveling as a way of life, or in between places while being transferred—anyone can “make home” amidst the ever-changing circumstances of life. But it won't just happen by accident. Homemaking—not in the sense of housekeeping, but in the broader sense of cultivating the life of a home—has to be done on purpose.

The essence of home, you see, is not necessarily a structure. What makes a home is the life shared there, wherever that may be. And cultivating the life of home requires intentionality, planning, and design. There must be someone (or several someones) to craft the life, the beauty, the love, and the inspiration that overflows from that place.

An architect who desires to build a distinguished edifice must start with a vision and then translate that vision into a blueprint that documents the design and placement of the structure's foundations, boundaries, facades, and enclosures. One cannot build what has not been imagined. And one cannot bring a vision to life without a plan.

Early in the life of our family, I realized I needed that as well. In order to build a vibrant, rich, lifegiving home, I needed to clarify my vision and construct a detailed plan for our own unique community called “Clarkson.” As I pondered what I wanted my home to become, I jotted down thoughts in my journal. These became the essence of the Clarkson blueprint, my vision for what home is and should be:

- *Home is the haven of inspiration where the art of life is expressed and taught.* Color is strewn into every corner; delectable food is tasted; art, books, and other sources of beauty are strategically placed throughout its rooms and walls. Nature is observed from each window—flowers, plants, rocks, shells. The works of the Master Artist speak of the work of His hands.
- *Home is the place where the whispers of God’s love are heard regularly.* The touch of His hands is given intentionally throughout the day, and His words of encouragement and affirmation lay the foundation of loving relationships.
- *Home is the place where stories of heroism, sacrifice, love, and redemption are heard, embraced, and celebrated.* These shape the dreams of the souls who live there.
- *Home is a place of ministry.* Redeeming words, thoughts, and actions are shared and taught, the wisdom and instruction of God is passed along, and God’s love is offered to all who come under its influence.

My immediate motivation for building such a home, of course, was my family, especially my children. From the moment that newborn Sarah was placed in my arms, I felt the profound urge to create a safe and nurturing environment where she and, later, her brothers and sister could grow and thrive, where their spirits could be fed and their souls enriched.

But I needed that home for my own soul as well. I craved a place to belong amidst our nomadic lifestyle, a refuge from the draining practicalities and spiritual warfare I encountered out in the world. In order to thrive, I needed a place to be loved and restored, to find inspiration and purpose. The constructing of such a place was a way of seeing that my own heart, mind, and

soul were filled up on a regular basis so that when I emerged from my home, I had resources to cope with the demands of my life.

Because of our missionary, job-oriented lives, Clay and I knew from the beginning that we would probably not have a static homestead where we could congregate over our life as a family. So we focused on creating home out of less tangible materials—traditions, habits, rhythms, experiences, and values. It was in the love and acceptance we shared, the comfort and warmth we enjoyed together, the spiritual and intellectual connections we fostered, and the traditions we celebrated together that we found both refuge from the world outside and the strength to engage it creatively.

We ended up moving seventeen times—six times internationally. We lived in a variety of houses and apartments—small and large, rural, suburban, and downtown. When we finally did move into a more permanent home in Colorado, our choices still reflected the values that already said “home” to us. And those invisible threads still tie our hearts together so that wherever in the world we are—and our bunch is likely to be found almost anywhere around the globe—we are united by the choices and experiences that knit us together as a family and define our very beings.

Today, as I observe the lives of our children, now adults, I see the construct of a palpable life we celebrated together. In their dorm rooms, hotel rooms, apartments, and cottages far away, they carry with them the life we shared, the traditions celebrated, the spirit of hospitality. No matter how small the place, how different the dwelling, the spirit of home is still alive in them. They, too, are intentionally creating lives that reflect God’s beauty, the vast dimensions of the joys of life to be celebrated there, and the possibility of unconditional love made flesh. And they are learning, as I learned raising them, that to craft a truly welcoming, truly lifegiving home is a deeply satisfying work, one of the great glories of any life.

What greater joy can there be than to create a holding place for all that is sacred in life: faith, love, God, purpose, beauty, relationships, creativity, fun, the art of life, safety, shelter, feasting? To foster education in many realms of interests, a classroom of life where foundations of morality are taught and modeled and wisdom is learned. To build an environment that contains everything necessary for people of all generations—from babies to the elderly—to live healthy and well in community.

Building well is a long process. None of us will ever be perfectly wise or mature or loving. Creating a lifegiving home, then, is a long process taken one step, one season at a time. In the process, I've found, the home itself becomes wiser and more valuable.

This idea of being a home builder has drawn me forward, encouraging me to invest in worthy thoughts and practices. The intentionality of seeking to build my home piece by piece, day by day, has moved me and my family toward the goal of creating a great legacy of healthy people who live and grow within its walls.

Home should be the very best place ever to be. And the gathering of all of us together, including friends and those who would share our belonging together, should be the place we feel most at home. And whether or not you ever meet another person who has this kind of home to welcome you, *you* can create that sort of refuge for others. Not many in my life even invite people into their homes anymore, but I have found that almost everyone loves to be in a place that says, "Welcome! You will be cared for here!"

It is our privilege—and our God-given mandate—to make it so.