

THE *Life* GIVING HOME  
*experience*

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A 12-Month Guided Journey

SALLY CLARKSON  
*with Joel Clarkson*

*The Lifegiving Home Experience*



THE *Life* GIVING HOME  
*e x p e r i e n c e*



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# Introduction

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

PROVERBS 14:1

I love walking in old neighborhoods. Anytime I visit or move to a new town, one of the first things I do is locate the historical sector, which usually includes an area of delightful century-old homes. I relish the dormer windows, the charming front porches, the ancient trees that guard the lamppost-lined streets.

Every Saturday for eight years straight, my firstborn, Sarah, and I walked the streets in the Old North End neighborhood of Colorado Springs, taking in the beauty and tranquility. It became a rhythm that we practiced with gusto. Later we began to make an annual visit to Asheville, North Carolina, a lovely town tucked away in the Smoky Mountains. All the houses there are a little bit unique—decked out in different hues of vibrant paint, some with turrets or picture windows, most with expansive porches—all designed with the capacity to be inhabited by big, life-loving families. Unlike modern homes, many of which are built identically one after the other, these were constructed with the intention of expressing the creativity and joy of each unique individual and family.

And then, of course, there was Biltmore—the stunning estate outside of Asheville that I describe in *The Lifegiving Home*. Our entire family was captivated by the care and intention George Vanderbilt put



into creating a place of great beauty and uniqueness that would serve as a refuge and resource for all who lived and visited and worked there.

Building a home like that requires time and lots of hard work. A great structure never just accidentally comes into being. It starts with careful planning and prep work—acquiring permits, hiring professionals, sourcing materials and fixtures, drawing up blueprints. Then comes the hard work of construction—board by board, brick by brick, paint for each room, adding all the beautiful details that make the home unique. The entire process requires a dedicated intentionality of purpose.

The same is true for you as a home builder—and make no mistake, God designed you to be just that. You may never construct a physical structure to house your family. But you have the God-given call and privilege to plan and establish a home for yourself and those you love—a space and an ambience that serves and shapes the lives of those who inhabit it and those who visit.

A wise woman builds not just her home but also her family narrative, preparing a path of life that will uphold her descendants and give them a foundation of faith. An empowered spiritual home creates a story worth telling for generations to come.

Home building is a capacity God has granted each one of us who learns to walk in His wisdom and skill. However, this great work of home building is a long-term construction project that takes what sometimes seems like endless years of care and hard work. In particular, the formation of the children of a family—nurturing excellent souls, filling minds with truth, inspiring hearts with the purposes of God, instilling a taste for God’s goodness and beauty—requires planning and intentionality.

That is the purpose of this planner. Designed as a companion to *The Lifegiving Home*, a book I wrote with Sarah, it provides practical touchpoints for how to implement the ideas introduced in the book and a place to begin writing down your own plans and ideas. Following the pattern of *The Lifegiving Home*, each chapter

of this planner focuses on a different month of the year. Each contains the following:

- *A brief introduction* in which I share my heart about the theme for the month. My hope is that in sharing my stories and thoughts I will stimulate your own thinking.
- *At Home in the Word.* This Bible study section touches upon the monthly theme and poses practical questions to stimulate your thinking. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The study is intended to inspire your own ideas about how best to realize these precepts.
- *Bringing It Home.* Here I provide some snippets of our family's life over the years—books, movies, family events, and activities that have become part of the Clarkson family heritage. Once again, these are intended to stimulate your own ideas and values, not lay down concrete systems for you to follow. (For more guidance, ask friends for recommendations or refer to the Clarkson family online resource guide at [www.lifegivinghome.com](http://www.lifegivinghome.com).)

Notice that there's space in these chapters to jot down thoughts and plans. You can do this in a separate notebook or journal if you prefer. But I do hope you will read this book with pen poised to write and mind and heart focused to apply its principles to building your home. My heart in this book is that through sharing my soul meanderings about home, I will help you capture a vision and begin to shape a home according to your own convictions.

You don't even have to wait until January to begin. Any month can be your "January" as you renew your commitment to planning and intentionality in building and shaping your home.

I believe in God's willingness to speak into your life and to empower you to craft your home life into a beautiful heritage. May you be blessed as you enter into this journey. Know that I hold a deep thankfulness in my heart that you have decided to step out so bravely into the great beyond of homebuilding.

*January*

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CREATING A FRAMEWORK  
FOR HOME

*Rhythms, Routines, and Rituals*

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*Commit your works to the LORD  
And your plans will be established.*

PROVERBS 16:3

I can still remember the day. After much deliberation my husband, Clay, and I decided we were going to purchase an empty one-acre lot of mountain land nestled against the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Thus began the daunting but exhilarating task of constructing our dream home.

Our Rocky Mountain “Rivendell” would provide us with countless happy and meaningful memories during the most important years of our children’s youth. But many pieces had to be put in place before that could happen. We had to choose a contractor to oversee the job. Countless choices had to be made regarding paint, carpet, flooring, fixtures, and landscaping. And before we could make any of those decisions, we needed a plan.

When architects consider a house they want to build, they know they must start with a well-crafted, viable blueprint. The blueprint will guide them through all the stages of construction from laying a

strong foundation all the way through putting the finishing touches on the building. Even when plans must be changed—as they inevitably are during the process of construction—the blueprint helps guide the adjustments.

So it is with how we create home both physically and spiritually. If we don't have a plan, all the ebbs and flows of life will take us by surprise. All the resources we use to create a home environment will be used on the fly, without a sense of purpose and structure.

So what does a blueprint for a lifegiving home look like? What elements ought to be gathered and considered before setting forth on such a grand and daunting task? This process will look different for every home and family. Every family will set their own pace and find their own rhythms. But as I have observed my own family and the families of friends, I have recognized a few key elements that tend to emerge in every family—things that, if taken into consideration while making a plan, contribute significantly to a positive home environment and help us roll with the punches when changes happen.

First and foremost, figuring out how to manage individual family needs is paramount. It's easy to get caught up in the details and forget that the purpose of a lifegiving home is to nurture real human souls and bodies. Everything else is secondary to this cause.

God interacts with us relationally, as a Parent. He loves each of us and seeks a personal relationship with us. And the best way to create a vibrant life in a home is to do the same—to seek out each individual and relate to that person according to his or her hopes, desires, and needs.

Planning ahead is one of the best ways to ensure every person in the home receives a fair share of attention. Letting our days just happen not only leads to chaos but also increases the chances that what we value most just won't get done.

Certainly every personality interfaces with schedules differently. Some people write out every portion of their day; others take a more general approach. What's important is to invest in planning ahead

of time to create space for what matters and to allow for those unexpected moments that inevitably come along.

Managing time is especially important when it comes to creating spaces of calm and restoration. No one can indefinitely manage the whirring machine of the home without taking a break from time to time. Having a rhythm in the home implies that there are both ups and downs, and downtime is a vital part of keeping a good beat. God created the Sabbath as a time to put aside work and instead take a breath and consider Him and His goodness. Not only do we need this weekly Sabbath rest; we need other rest periods as well. For instance, I have found that I need my teatime every afternoon, even if it's only for five minutes. Everyone has a different way of refreshing and restoring their soul. But for most of us, unless we specifically schedule such times of refreshment, they will never happen.

One way to create more space for rest is to keep a close eye on the information that comes into the home. And please note that the issue is not just negative information, but the sheer *amount* of information. E-mails, newsletters, magazines, phone calls—all these things and more can quickly overpower and overwhelm any sense of order and create a sense of chaos. Especially in an era where most people have smartphones at the ready, it is imperative to find a way to limit the flow for both you and your family members. Constantly absorbing incoming information creates a habit of whirlwind living. The only antidote is to be aware of the potential downside of screens of all sorts and other streams of information and plan ahead to create spaces away from those sources.

Like information, *stuff* can quickly create a sense of disorder at home. Clothes, books, dishes, documents, toys, tools, and an assortment of other items pile up so easily in an active family. Modern culture is already bent toward consumerism, and it takes plenty of energy just to buck that trend, not to mention managing the unsightly clutter that results from it.

One great way to fight the clutter and bring more peace into your

household is to plan for times when the whole family can participate in straightening and cleaning up. I have found that if I set a timer for ten or fifteen minutes and send each of my family members on lightning cleanup tasks around the house, almost everything gets back to normal. It also helps to schedule an annual house-clearing day, when unused items are gathered and given to Goodwill or the Salvation Army. This is not only a great way to get your kids involved in meaningful giving—it can also make your home feel like a completely new place.

Adding such elements to your home blueprint can ignite an excitement for this stewardship opportunity God has given into your hands. But it's not enough just to plan for these life rhythms; you have to actually practice them, day in and day out. Give yourself grace as you learn new ways of doing life with the ones you love. Adjust your plan as needed and be sure to put your adjusted plan into practice as well. As you persevere, you will begin to see results and relish the world you have created with God's help.

God wants to take the blueprint you design with your family and create a beautiful home out of it. May you entrust yourself and your family to the master Creator, who always finishes the work He begins.

## *At Home in the Word*

- I. *“The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands” (Proverbs 14:1).*
  - a. What kind of “house” do you want to build in your life? This can be anything from your actual home to your spiritual heritage or even something personal to you. List at least three tools you have for constructing your spiritual/emotional home.

- b. What circumstances or commitments in your life might tempt you to give up or “tear down” your home?

2. *“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Proverbs 24:3-4).*

- a. What are the sources of wisdom that you can lean on in the creation of your home? Write down at least three ways you want to build wisdom, understanding, and knowledge into your home life. (Note that *wisdom* involves skilled living and could include abilities with relationships, money, time, work, food, decor, and other areas of life.)

- b. What influences in your life (foolish voices? temporal values? cultural pressures? old habits?) could potentially keep you from building your home with understanding and knowledge, keep you from gaining wisdom, or compromise your long-term, eternal values? What are the most effective ways to neutralize these influences?



3. *“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1).*
  - a. God tells us to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). How does this apply to the way you build your house? How are you investing in the Word of God in your home? How are you engaging in faith? Righteousness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Do any aspects of your life feel like they are out of control or could easily become that way? Write them down. Which of these can you intentionally surrender to God, knowing He will take better care of them than you can?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. *“Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).*
  - a. What does it mean to delight in God? Write out three ways that you can rest in God and enjoy His presence.

- b. What do you desire most? List some of your dearest hopes and dreams. How does your vision for your home connect with these deep desires?

## *Bringing It Home*

### WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR JANUARY?

January has always been a difficult month for me where we live in Colorado. Winter still holds us tightly in its grasp, and we have to endure blizzard after blizzard, awaiting the thaw of spring. To drive the cold away, we love to enjoy warm cups of hot chocolate and gather around the fireplace with a good book to read aloud.

Another challenge for me in January is the process of organization and decluttering I describe in *The Lifegiving Home*. Because I am easily overwhelmed by lots of details, the necessary act of planning for the new year can be daunting. I have learned to rely on Clay's help and support as I do my planning. I have also learned it is important for me to get away and have some quiet time alone during this season. If I make a point to make sure my needs are met during this time, I find the process of planning can be joyful and exciting rather than overwhelming.

*What do you struggle with in January? What are you doing (or could you do) to overcome that struggle?*

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## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES, BIRTHDAYS, AND HOLIDAYS

January tends to be a quiet time for us regarding family events—a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of Christmas. However, we like to make an event out of snow days and really take a break from the craziness of normal, day-to-day life. These are special times for making memories and simply enjoying one another's company.

*List your own family events for January:*

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## TO READ OR WATCH IN JANUARY

**Picture Books:** Oliver Hunkin's *Dangerous Journey* (1985) is an appropriate book for starting out the year. An illustrated adaptation of John Bunyan's allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it outlines the quest of our hero, Pilgrim, to find the heavenly city.

**Literature and Nonfiction:** *Little Britches* (1950) is Ralph Moody's quaint autobiographical tale of his early years on a ranch in Littleton, Colorado, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Movies and Series:** Every year for many years, we gathered as a family to watch the *Anne of Green Gables* (1985) and *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* (1987) miniseries. They are a lively retelling of L. M. Montgomery's tales about the mischievous, imaginative Anne Shirley

and her life growing up as an adopted orphan on Prince Edward Island in Canada. Separated into multiple episodes, the films can be spread out throughout the month.

Consider which of these or other books, television series, or films you could enjoy with your family in January.

### PEOPLE PRIORITIES FOR JANUARY

When January hits, most of my (grown) kids who came home for Christmas have returned to their homes and lives, so the house is quiet. As a result, Clay and I usually have a bit of extra time to enjoy each other's company and build into each other's lives. Because January is a time for regrouping, I also make time for those friends who encourage my heart and soul.

*What people do you plan to prioritize in January?  
What encouraging friends will you invite to your  
home or meet for a meal to start the new year off?  
Make this an every-January event. I do!*

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