

CHRIS & JENNI GRAEBE

*"A must-read
for any parent!"*

WILLIE AND KORIE
ROBERTSON

THE RHYTHM OF HOME

FIVE INTENTIONAL PRACTICES
FOR A THRIVING FAMILY CULTURE



One of the most important components of raising emotionally and spiritually healthy kids is to create a family environment that is filled with love and joy. In *The Rhythm of Home*, Chris and Jenni have given us a guidebook on how to cultivate a family culture where our kids can grow and thrive. If you are searching for guidance on how to forge healthy, deep relationships with your children that will last a lifetime, then this is the book you have been waiting for.

MELANIE SHANKLE, *New York Times* bestselling author

This is not a book of to-do lists but a warm invitation to consider how you can intentionally cultivate the home you truly want your family to flourish in. Chris and Jenni do that beautifully with simple rhythms and invite you to join them on the journey of creating the space where children are cherished and enjoyed, know they are deeply loved, and love coming home to.

JOHN AND STASI ELDREDGE, *New York Times* bestselling authors of *Wild at Heart* and *Captivating*

What I love about this book is the fact that it isn't just a concept that sounds good in theory; it is a practical, valuable approach that the Graebes share from experience. I've had the benefit of knowing their family outside of the book, and they're the kind of people you'd love to learn from. These words are your chance to do just that and to benefit from the patterns that shape our days. This book is approachable but also meaningful and Christ-centered. I'm happy to put my name alongside theirs, and I know you'll want to do the same as you read!

ANGIE SMITH, author of *Seamless* and *I Will Carry You*

Wow. If only this book had been published a decade ago—it would've saved us years of trial and error! This isn't your typical "how-to" parenting book—it's a manual on how to establish healthy habits for a vibrant family life. A must-read for anyone who wants to take their family to the next level.

JASON AND TORI BENHAM, entrepreneurs, speakers, authors of the bestselling marriage book *Beauty in Battle*

A book about how to do family life in the twenty-first century is certainly timely and necessary. Chris and Jenni have lived the highs and lows of family life and share them with us in this book. It will leave you with practical tools and loads of hope to build a healthy, godly home. The stories and examples will give you hope, warm your heart, and show you ways to be a healthy family, no matter how difficult the culture may be. If your family feels broken or dysfunctional, or you just need some help getting through the daily grind of life together, you will find the help you're looking for in *The Rhythm of Home*.

ANNE BEILER, author and motivational speaker, founder of Auntie Anne's Pretzels

I can't think of a better couple to write this beautiful book. As a mama to five boys, two of whom are now in college, I can testify to how quickly the years fly by, and how vital it is to be intentional with the foundation we lay and the time we have! The five practices found in *The Rhythm of Home* are a trustworthy road map to follow for creating the thriving family culture you desire.

JEANNIE CUNNION, author of *Mom Set Free*

For anyone who has never met Chris and Jenni Graebe and their wonderful family, you are in for a treat. They will warm your heart, stimulate your thinking, and inspire you as parents. *The Rhythm of Home* has the heartbeat of God to help us all rethink and reimagine what our own home could be. Their style is invitational, never with the taint of guilt or shame. The stories from their lives help us grab hold of the truths they share. With each chapter, the family map unfolds, leading us to the treasure of our own home and what we want it to be. Enjoy this new best book on the family.

MARK AND JAN FOREMAN, authors of *Never Say No*

This book is a *must-read* in the day we live in, teaching us to center our hearts on God and others. The rhythms and intentional practices taught in it are what make where we live not just a house but a life-giving, thriving *home*.

MESHALI MITCHELL, acclaimed photographer, visual storyteller,
faith-based speaker, podcaster

In life, we are unavoidably shaped by the unseen yet powerful rhythms that surround us. We might not always have a say in the circumstances and situations that impact our days, but we can choose the rhythms that inform our vision, our responses, and even our peace. Chris and Jenni are terrific guides to help us navigate and choose purposeful rhythms for our family. In this excellent book, they creatively offer hands-on, tried-and-tested tips to life-affirming practices, all from a place of honesty, insight, compassion, and love—the cornerstones of their own home and relationships.

KAY WYMA, writer, podcaster, author of *The Peace Project*

I've had the privilege of getting to see Chris and Jenni live this book out in the way that they steward and savor their family with such grace and intentionality. This book is brimming with wisdom and go-to rhythms that are approachable and attainable. How I wish that I had had this beautiful resource when I first embarked on parenthood! The life-giving truths and practices shared here are bound to reap a harvest in your family for years to come.

CHRISTY NOCKELS, singer, songwriter, author of *The Life You Long For*

Chris and Jenni have given us all a beautiful reminder of the remarkable gift it truly is to be a family. With grace and wisdom, *The Rhythm of Home* will ground you in the true purpose of parenting—to love and shape these incredible humans God has entrusted you with through the habits that fill your home. A must-read for any parent!

WILLIE AND KORIE ROBERTSON, stars of *Duck Dynasty*

CHRIS & JENNI GRAEBE

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FIVE INTENTIONAL PRACTICES
FOR A THRIVING FAMILY CULTURE



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The Rhythm of Home: Five Intentional Practices for a Thriving Family Culture

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CONTENTS

Introduction: The Sacred Journey of Parenting 1

PART ONE: THE FAMILY RULE OF LIFE 13

1. Building Your Family Table: *Starting with a Vision* 15
2. Warmth within the Walls: *The Power of Place* 31
3. It Takes a Village: *Building a Strong Community* 49

PART TWO: THE CORE RHYTHMS 59

4. Grace Is the Word: *The Rhythm of Speaking Life* 61
5. My Life for Yours: *The Rhythm of Serving* 77
6. Saying Yes: *The Rhythm of Slowing Down* 93
7. Life on the Edge: *The Rhythm of Seeking Adventure* 111
8. This Is It: *The Rhythm of Staying in Awe* 129

PART THREE: UNIQUE FAMILY RHYTHMS 151

9. Family Habits Inventory: *Examining Your Household Rhythms* 153
10. Family Values Inventory: *Evaluating Your Top Core Values* 163
11. Family Vision Inventory: *Naming the Life You Envision* 169
12. Putting It All Together: *Your Rhythm of Home* 173

Epilogue—Do It Anyway: *Grace for the Journey* 179

A Blessing for the Journey 183

Journaling Pages 187

Acknowledgments 193

Notes 195

— INTRODUCTION —

THE SACRED JOURNEY OF PARENTING

May you have the eyes to see
That no visitor arrives without a gift
And no guest leaves without a blessing.

JOHN O'DONOHUE

Take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 TIMOTHY 6:19

CHRIS —————

There are a handful of moments in your life that seem to stop time altogether—that somehow mark you forever and set your life in a new direction.

I experienced one of those time-stopping moments at the age of twenty-one. I was enjoying an ordinary Sunday at church when the pastor stepped up to the platform and said the words that would change my life forever: “Turn around and greet your neighbor.” I looked behind me to extend the customary

handshake of welcome, and life suddenly began moving in slow motion. I'm pretty sure an angelic choir began to sing and turned the heavenly spotlight to shine directly on . . . her.

She was *beautiful*—a stop-you-dead-in-your-tracks kind of beautiful. The kind of girl I'd only ever imagined meeting. Her name was Jenni. She was breathtaking, and I just couldn't take my eyes off her. Somehow I knew life would never be the same.

At first, we agreed to just be friends, but we quickly realized that wasn't going to last long. After a few months, we snuggled up close on a wooden bench in the courtyard of a hundred-year-old church in our hometown of Franklin, Tennessee, and began the journey of our relationship. We dated for five short months, were engaged for five extra-long months, and then, just five months after that blissful wedding day, we got a big surprise.

I'll never forget the moment it happened. We were visiting Jenni's family for the holidays. I was sitting next to Jenni in the back row of a dark theater, surrounded by my brand-new in-laws, as the opening scenes of *Meet the Fockers* began to play.

Within the first few minutes of the movie, Pam announces to Greg that she's pregnant. "How do you know?" he says. "I'm two weeks late, I'm nauseous, my boobs hurt, and I can smell *everything!*" she replies. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Jenni freeze, a handful of popcorn suspended in front of her lips. She turned to look at me, eyes wide. For just that second, time stood still once more. She had been mentioning those same symptoms to me for the last few weeks.

Sure enough, the next morning and four tests confirmed it: We were having a baby.

Jenni and I are both adventurers at heart, so at first, it all sounded pretty exciting, honestly. A baby? *Pssh*. How hard

could it be? But once the reality began to set in, we started to wonder, *Are we really ready for all this?* Jenni was still finishing up her last year of college. Not exactly perfect timing. We had absolutely no idea what we were doing or what to expect.

I remember anxiously calling one of our mentor couples to seek their wisdom and advice. As always, their encouragement was right on point. “Guys, listen. You’re never ready,” they assured us over speakerphone as Jenni and I sat on the floor of our living room, staring at each other. “No one is ever completely ready. God is with you. You have what it takes. He’s always been with you, and He always will be.”

Jenni decided to stick with the plan and finish her last semester of college. Our son was due in mid-August, so we said, “Perfect! He’ll pop out right before school starts, and Jenni can head right back to class!”

Our son’s due date came and went. Jenni had no choice but to waddle back to class that fall semester still ready to pop. (Her words, not mine!) Finally, the long-awaited day came. Jenni called me from class, saying that early labor had begun during her professor’s hermeneutics lecture. (I don’t blame you, Kaden. I’d want to get the heck out of that class too, bud.) I raced like a NASCAR driver to the religion building at Belmont University. Jenni’s kind classmates brought her out to me, and we headed for the hospital.

And there it was again—the sense that for just this moment, time stood still. I’ll never get over the deep sense of awe and wonder that washed over my heart as I watched our son come into the world. Suddenly he was here, our baby boy, our first-born. Nothing could have possibly prepared me for the moment when they placed him in my arms. He was breathtaking, and I

just couldn't take my eyes off him. Somehow I knew life would never be the same.

Something had shifted forever. Up until this moment, we had only been investing in a *rhythm of us*, and while our marriage rhythms would still continue to grow, a brand-new rhythm had just entered our lives. Our *rhythm of home* had begun.



Throughout the course of parenting, we experience quite a lot of “I’ve never done this before.” Never experienced this level of sleep deprivation before, never wiped poo off someone else’s rear before, never potty trained toddlers before, never had to choose the right elementary school before. As the years go by, we learn from our mistakes as well as from our victories, hoping that by the time the last child hits this or that stage, we’ll finally have this whole parenting thing figured out.

Alongside the unparalleled levels of joy we experience as parents come unparalleled feelings of doubt, worry, and fear. Finding our rhythm as a family takes a lot of time, a lot of trial and error, and a lot of leaning on the Lord to guide us. Perfection is never the goal, and it’s not even the point. Finding our rhythm of home is about being deeply connected as a family—filling our life together with the intentional rhythms that will lead us all to grow closer to God and to each other. It’s about crafting a vision that will serve as a guide, a framework to hold on to when we find ourselves in one of those inevitable “We’ve never been here before” moments. Our rhythm of home can help us navigate all the twists and turns that come our way on this journey called family.

It's not an accident that you and your family were placed in your home together. The Lord specifically chose to bring you all together for a purpose. Each person in your home is unique, with specific giftings and personalities they bring to the family table. Each one matters. Developing a rhythm for your home is about coming together to establish values and visions as a collective family unit.

God's vision for our families is greater than we could ever possibly imagine. *That* vision is what we chase after: His voice, His plan, and His purpose for our family. *His* rhythm for our home.

JENNI

As a young girl in college, I kept two pictures scotch-taped to the dashboard of my white Mustang convertible. Every time I glanced down at the dash to check the gas gauge or signal for a left turn, there they were, staring back at me. One was a scene of a boy kneeling before a girl, asking her to marry him. The other was of a group of little siblings, smiling and laughing and playing together on a sunlit playground. There was no such thing as Pinterest way back then. No Instagram or social media (if you can even imagine such archaic times). These visuals I'd clipped from a good old-fashioned magazine and taped to the front of my dash were my attempt to capture the specific stirrings of my heart for the season ahead. Cheesy, I know, but amid all the life-altering choices that lay before me as a young twentysomething, I knew I needed to lean on the Lord to guide me: I wanted to keep these visions continually

Each person in your home is unique, with specific giftings and personalities they bring to the family table. Each one matters.

before my eyes as a daily reminder to pray for the pieces of the future I longed for.

Fast-forward a couple of decades, and here I find myself smack in the middle of that young girl's dreams. Nearly twenty years in, happily married to my very best friend, with five precious children under our roof, deep in the golden years of marriage and family. This beautiful life God has blessed us with has absolutely blown every expectation I ever had for my future, exceeding every dream I ever imagined while driving around the back roads of Nashville all those years ago. I'm so grateful for every minute of it, and yet, like any parent, my days in this season look very full. The to-do list waiting for me as I wake up each morning never seems to run out. Around every corner there are always mouths to feed, heads to brush, clothes to fold, events and games to rush to, outcomes and hopes to pray for, and meaningful moments to savor. And underlying it all: a home, a life, and an incredible family to love, nurture, and grow.

Parenting, as many have said, will be the hardest yet most exhilarating thing you will ever do. And, I would also add, parenting is one of the most formative, meaningful roles of your life. I have had many roles over the years—daughter, student, friend, singer, wife, pastor, writer—and all have changed me in some way or another, but nothing has shaped me more than being a parent. As theologian Wendy M. Wright says: “If there ever was a school of love, it is the family—a school not simply in the sense of an environment where information is passed on but an environment that profoundly forms us.”¹

The gift of this life together is one of the greatest blessings I've ever experienced. And yet, as I'm guessing you may have

discovered along the way as well, dreaming of and praying for your future marriage and family is a lot easier than living out the daily work required to bring those dreams of a thriving family to life. Like anything of great worth and value, building a family and cultivating a thriving home takes a lot of thought, hard work, and intentionality.

What Chris and I both discovered throughout those early years of family life is that we won't get there by accident. We don't just drift our way into the life we long for. Building a healthy home requires developing intentional rhythms to guide us as we pursue a thriving family life.

In other words, we need to craft a rule of life for our family.

What is a "rule of life"? Stick with me; it's not as crazy as it sounds. (In our previous book, *The Rhythm of Us*, we explore this idea in relation to marriage. Beginning with your marriage is foundational—a first and important step to building a strong vision for your family is getting on the same page as your spouse.²)

A rule of life is a simple, helpful tool that absolutely anyone can use. Essentially, the ancient practice of creating a rule of life involves envisioning the person you want to become—spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically—and then crafting a set of personal life habits that will lead you toward becoming that future person.

For better or worse, we get to choose the rhythms that fill our home. Crafting our family's rule of life is a way to live with intentionality, a way to let our days be formed by the truth of the gospel. Rather than a list of rigid rules to follow, the rhythm we create for our family is more like a trellis supporting the growth of a budding vine. Not restricting us, but continually

pointing us toward the *best* way. I love what writer and professor Margaret Guenther says:

The vine must not be tied too tightly to the trellis, but just snugly enough so that it is supported and free to flourish. Like the vines, we too need to be supported but not constricted, held up but not rendered immobile.³

Our rhythm supports intentional growth toward the life we feel called to live as a family. For us, that has meant centering our family practices around the ways of Christ. In fact, the original idea of a rule of life emerged centuries ago out of a desire to organize life around the ways of Christ, based on the understanding that growth toward Him is not only possible but the

only true path to flourishing. As we center our family practices around the ways of Christ, we cultivate an environment where growth toward Him and a flourishing family life are possible.

For better or worse, we are all profoundly shaped by the rhythms we grow up in.

The truth is that the rhythms we live from today determine the kind of family we become tomorrow. For better or worse, we are all profoundly shaped by the rhythms we grow up in.

Saturday morning pancakes, camping trips in the fall, weekly time around the table. Whether we realize it or not, there is a regular rhythm unfolding every day in our home. The question becomes: “Is this the rhythm we *want* to create?” In other words, will these habits that make up our life together take us where we long to go? Are we creating a thriving family culture through the habits we choose to practice today?

It’s never too late to start new family rhythms. While those of

us who grew up with unhelpful or even harmful rhythms were of course marked by them, we don't have to remain trapped by them. We get a fresh start. We can actively choose, with the help of a wise and caring community around us, to reject old patterns and establish new, healthier rhythms.

Ultimately, we all want to root our kids and ourselves in a foundational sense of all that is good and right and true—to ensure that when our kids leave our home, they will carry with them a strong sense of love and security and a beautiful picture of the family life we shared. But how do we go about accomplishing that on a practical level? What are the rhythms that will carry us and keep us connected throughout these precious years under one roof?

One of the sweetest ways God has faithfully led me over the years has been by placing along my path older, wiser people just ahead of me on the journey to sit with and learn from. I've come to value seeking them out as often as I can. Ferociously when needed. What I have discovered is that while every family is unique, bringing its own set of personalities and dynamics to the table, the healthiest families seem to share the same basic rhythms. Of course, no single formula can meet everyone's needs, but there are a handful of core practices that *can* benefit anyone: rhythms of a flourishing home we can all practice and pursue.

Throughout this book, our goal is to pull back the curtain and take a deeper look into the rhythms of a vibrant family life. By sharing the trials and triumphs of our own experiences as well as what we've learned from flourishing families around us, we hope to give you some intentional handles to grab on to, a handful of key practices to try out in your own family life.

What we are not attempting to do is cover every single aspect of parenting and family life under the sun, presenting you with a long list of how-tos and schedules to follow. This is in no way an exhaustive parenting manual or an extensive look at eight hundred ways to connect with your kids. With five of our own still under our roof, we are very much right in the thick of family life, in desperate need of learning and practicing these rhythms just as much as anyone. Join us for the journey!

Our hope is to simply walk together through the rhythms that can lead *all of us* toward the thriving family culture we long for.

To fill our homes with the rhythms we value most and to be reminded of what a great gift it truly is to be a family.

To cherish every moment of this wild and precious season when these remarkable humans live under our roof.

It will be over before we know it. Those sticky fingerprints left on the wall, the pitter-patter of little feet coming down the stairs, shooting hoops for hours in the driveway—these will all soon be distant memories. We want to hold on as much as possible to the awe and wonder of these fleeting years, fighting with all we have against the monotony of the mundane that so often veils our eyes from the true sacredness of this season. The time and effort we invest working these healthy rhythms into the fabric of our family will shape each one of us and live on well beyond our years.

We hope this book will serve as a reminder to us all of the inherent sacredness of building a family. A celebration of the great gift of home. A compilation of the very best rhythms that carry us and shape us in the homes we build together. We will never parent perfectly. No one will. But when it's all

said and done, we will have had the unbelievable blessing of loving and shaping one another, under the same roof, for this specific amount of time. There will be crazy hard days, without a doubt. Excruciating trials, exhausting nights. Heartbreaking moments, for sure. But we will also experience delights and joys beyond our wildest imaginations. Our hearts will love at levels we never dreamed possible. Our lives will be richer, fuller, and more meaningful than we ever imagined because of the gift of loving these little ones and the blessing of becoming a family. There is nothing like it.

So we invite you to join us as we travel through five intentional rhythms of a thriving home. We pray that as we share these practices that have carried and shaped us, your own unique rhythms will also begin to emerge along the way. Write them down. Talk through them with your spouse and kids.

There are a thousand different ways we could choose to live our life together. Our goal is to intentionally center our days around rhythms that lead us toward loving God and loving each other.

When it's all said and done, what mark will we leave as a family? Did we delight in each other? Speak the words that bring life? Pour ourselves out for those around us? Did we say yes to the great adventures the Lord invited us into and cherish the great gift of life together with the awe and wonder it deserves? May this book remind us all of the remarkable joy of family, of the blessing it is to love and shape each other for this one sweet season. May it give you permission to notice and name what your unique family values most and to build your life around those rhythms.

Here's to the great gift of family.

Here's to celebrating all that is good and meaningful in the
time we are given together.

Here's to you. Here's to us.

Here's to the rhythm of home.

THE FAMILY RULE OF LIFE

AFTER WE HAD OUR THIRD CHILD, I (Jenni) remember feeling a growing frustration at the rapid pace of our life. Rushing from one activity to the next left me feeling too exhausted and hurried to savor any of it. I began to have this sinking feeling that life was slipping right through my fingers.

Up to this point, with the addition of each kid, though it took some time, eventually we had found our rhythm again. But as our family grew and grew, finding our new rhythm as a family was proving harder and harder. What were all those

wonderful things we used to love doing together? What was that one super important thing we always used to say? Our life was filled with new levels of joy and meaning from these incredible new blessings, of course, but our increasingly frenzied pace was beginning to take over, leaving us with little energy or space for what we truly valued most.

We began to talk with each other and other parents about the increasing pace of our schedules and our desire to live a slower, more intentional life. We began to take some time to notice and name the rhythms that drew us closer as a family and brought out the best in all of us. A lightbulb went off when we realized we could center our life around those things rather than constantly long for a window to fit them in. We decided to take back our time.

In this section, we'll discover the powerful practice of crafting a rhythm of life for our families. We'll envision the future we want for our families and learn how to cultivate a home and community that support that vision. We'll discover how to create regular rhythms that will help our values sink deeper into our hearts. When we intentionally make space for the rhythms we value most, the results tend to follow.

1

BUILDING YOUR FAMILY TABLE

Starting with a Vision

You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy.

PSALM 16:11, WEB

rhythm: a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement

JENNI

I've always been a sucker for high school graduation pictures. The flash from youth to adulthood gets me every time. But the closer my own kids get to that inevitable season, the more in danger I find myself of tearing up at any given moment. We are just 293 days away from launching our oldest kid out into the world, so in this season of life, nothing melts me faster than all the sweet pictures from families just ahead of us saying goodbye to their graduating seniors.

Graduation is often a time of looking back, of reflecting on

the long and short time of childhood, on eighteen years' worth of memories that have led to this one moment. Often graduation events include tables displaying the tangible images of those memories—favorite toys, beloved stuffed animals, tiny stamped footprints and baby rattles, playbills and vinyl records, a pair of old cowboy boots or faded summer-camp T-shirts. I'm always awed at the visual journey through a child's life. At one such event, as I took in each item representing the life of a young person on the brink of adulthood, I heard the Lord whisper, *What's on your table?*

I thought of all the tables I am filling and all the memories I hope to fill them with. When we launch each of our precious kids into the world, what pieces of life will represent their experiences here in our home? What do I hope to find on that table? What do you hope to find on yours?

OUR FUTURE TABLE

Before we can craft a rhythm for our home, we first must envision the kind of family we hope to become. What will the future us look like?

We all have tables we're filling. Our individual table, our marriage table, our family table. Stop for a moment right now, think of your future family table, and write down your vision. Get as specific as you can. Getting specific about our future pulls it out of fantasyland and into an achievable goal. Psychologist and author Dr. Henry Cloud describes crafting a vision as “defining a future that does not yet exist.”¹ God gave humans the unique ability to dream and envision a healthy, vibrant, rooted-in-God life, and He partners with us as we journey toward it.

When your friends and family gather to celebrate as you

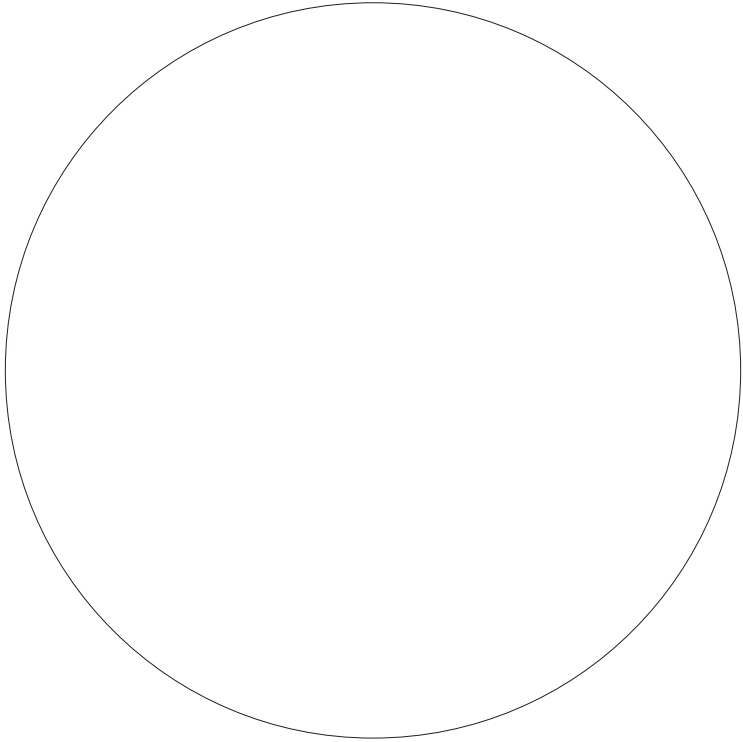
launch each child into the world, what do you hope to see on that table? When you gather with your adult children and grandchildren someday, what do you hope that experience will be like? What things do you hope will be said of you and your family? What do you dream of for your family life together?

As you seek to build your rhythm of home, to fill your future table, involve your family. Celebrate and consider each family member's strengths, ideas, and uniqueness. Each person deserves a place in your collective rhythm. To help you fill your table, take turns answering the following questions. Each person's vision for the future might be drastically different, and that's okay. As you discuss these questions as a family, you'll likely find areas of overlap across answers. Ground the discussion in the values that are most important for your family. Our kids will be much more excited to participate in bringing the family vision to life if we include them in the brainstorming and honor their thoughts and ideas. Try plotting your answers to the following questions in "Your Future Family Table" below.

Each person
deserves a place
in your collective
rhythm.

- What are our favorite activities to enjoy as a family?
- What words do we hope others would use to describe our family?
- What kinds of adventures do we want to experience together?
- What values are most important to us?
- Which weekly habits bring you the most joy?
- If you could fill a table with all your favorite memories of home, what would a few of them be?

Your Future Family Table



For better or worse, we get to choose the habits that fill our home. For these few short years that we have with these precious kids under our roof, what rhythms will we teach them? What practices are most important to us? What values will be written on our hearts and in our story? What do we want to invest our time in together? What images of us and our life together do we want to give our kids?

As professor Thomas Howard said:

You are the attendants at this shrine [your home]. See to it that what goes on here is a small picture of what ought to go on everywhere. It doesn't go on everywhere, but your task is to see that it does here. This is the spot allotted to your priesthood. Be faithful.²

As we move toward the future we long to cultivate, it's important to remember that life never goes exactly according to plan. There will be plenty of surprises and detours along the way. Keep filling your life with the rhythms you value. Trust the story that God is writing for you and your family. And remember, we are each a work in progress; perfection is unattainable.

Encourage yourself along the way. The fact that you picked up this book tells me you care deeply about your children and the home environment you are raising them in. Our job is not to worry about the results but rather to be faithful in the process. Trust the table that God is filling.

Before we can fill our home with the rhythms we value most, it's important to acknowledge the ruts that hinder us.

CHRIS

All change begins with honesty. Before we can fill our home with the rhythms we value most, it's important to acknowledge the ruts that hinder us. We need to take a good, hard look at the reality of where we currently find ourselves as a family.

If you're anything like me, you might be tempted to assess

your current reality based on where you *hope* it is, or maybe even where it *used* to be, rather than where it *actually* is. The truth is, though, that something shifts within us when we take the time to honestly notice and name what is happening in our life together. Taking a good, long look changes our perspective. Maybe you've been avoiding it, hoping if you ignore it long enough it just might change on its own. But only the truth frees us to walk in a different way (John 8:32). It's time to get brutally honest.

Think through the rhythms in your home. Are there habits that feel particularly heavy or draining? Are there routines that used to work for your family but don't anymore? When we take the time to notice where we've gotten into a rut and work to get out of it, we open up space for more life-giving family rhythms in the future.

Talk through the habits that are a consistent part of your family life. See which ones need to stay and which ones need to go. When we intentionally make room for the rhythms we value most, we move closer to the thriving family culture we long for.

Take some time this week to reflect on (and, if you're married, discuss with your spouse) where you feel you are as a family.

- What does our family table look like in this current season?
- Which rhythms are working well for us?
- Are there habits we've fallen into that we know need to change?

- Which rhythms from our future table are missing from our current table?
- Are there any habits we used to practice that we'd like to make room for?

INHERITED RUTS AND RHYTHMS

When we enter family life, we don't enter alone. We each carry with us a mixed bag of ruts and rhythms from our own years of growing up under different roofs. As we seek to create or sustain a healthy home life, it's important to take a good, long look at those inherited rhythms and decide for ourselves which need to stay and which need to go. In order to fill our lives with the rhythms we value most, we first need to make room for them by clearing out the ruts that keep pulling us off track.

An important part of any healthy family vision will include taking the time to evaluate the rhythms we each bring to the table from our own family of origin. Whether we realize it or not, habits from our childhood have a way of showing up when we least expect it. We have all experienced hearing our parents' words come out of our mouths as we become parents ourselves. ("Money doesn't grow on trees." "This room is a mess!" "Because I told you so!")

Some of us may have a hard time finding any rhythms at all worth repeating. If our childhood was particularly difficult, it can be tempting to throw away our entire bag of inherited rhythms. Others may have a hard time seeing any of their inherited rhythms as potentially harmful ruts to avoid or as simply not a good fit for their new family. What I have learned is that no matter what family you came from, if you look long

enough, you can always find at least a few good rhythms to hold on to with gratitude—and usually at least a rut or two it's time to let go of.

One of the ruts Jenni and I determined needed to be removed was fighting in front of the kids. Let me assure you: This is a rut well worth standing against. When we work to make our marriage a thing of beauty, most parenting issues will take care of themselves. Our silent example to our kids speaks more powerfully than any number of words ever will. Very early on we decided that our priority to our kids is to love each other. Not just pretend to, but actually love each other *well*. Trust me, kids know the difference.

One of the healthy rhythms we learned from my family was speaking life. My mom was always really good at doing this. She believed so much in my brother and me and told us continually that we could become anything we wanted to be. Eventually, I started to believe her. Jenni and I want to actively cultivate this rhythm of speaking life and courage over our kids as well.

We are profoundly shaped by the culture of the home we grow up in, and when we reproduce those rhythms in our family, we reproduce that culture. So start by honestly acknowledging what filled your table—the good, the bad, and the ugly—when you were growing up. Choose what you want to take with you, and leave the rest behind.

As you reflect on your own rhythms inherited from the family you grew up in, write down the rhythms you want to continue and the ruts you want to remove. Be as honest and specific as you can. This is just for you.

- Are there rhythms that need to be removed? Reordered? Repaired?
- What words would others use to describe our family in this season?
- What does our current table look like?

JENNI

Our children are great imitators, so give them something great to imitate.

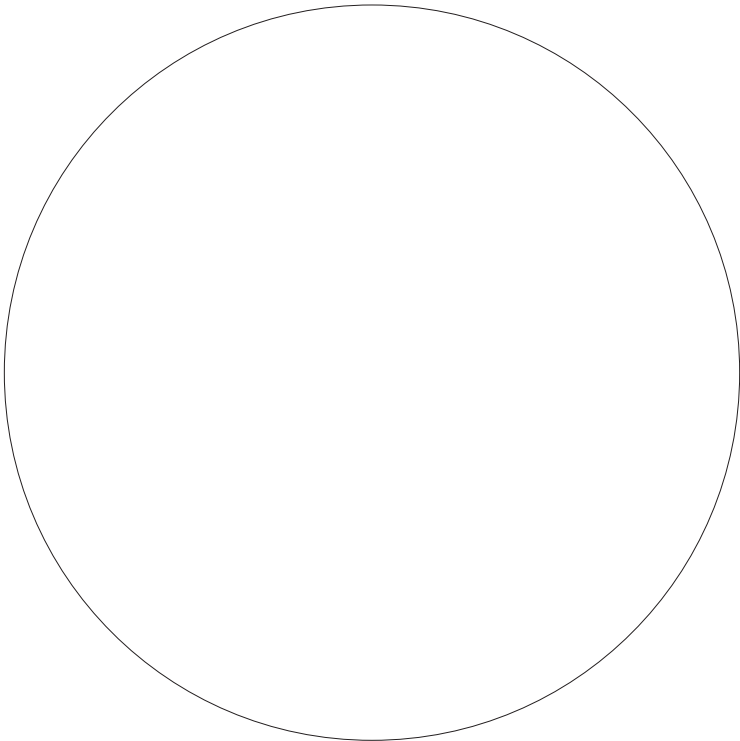
ANONYMOUS

When one of our daughters was very little, two or three even, she was sitting behind me in her car seat as we pulled to a stop at a traffic light with another car in front of us. Out of her sweet little mouth I heard the words “Go, dude!” I laughed to myself and thought, *Where in the world did she hear that phrase?* That’s when I realized: It was from me. I had never even heard myself say those words—until I heard them echoed by my own child. We have undoubtedly all heard words come out of our kids’ mouths and wondered the same thing.

If we allow them to, our children can teach us a great deal about who we are becoming and the current state of our own hearts. I love what Mark and Jan Foreman say: “Our children do us a favor: they shine flashlights into our souls.”³ For better or worse, our kids become little mirrors reflecting who we are. Each day, they are literally learning how to live as a human by watching us. Parenting offers a great opportunity to stop and ask, *What are the habits I am passing on to my kids? Do I like the person I am becoming in this season, and if not, how can I change?*

As you reflect on your current table, take a moment to reflect on any “back-seat habits”—alongside any activities you have named that you’d like to keep or remove—that you may be passing on to your kids. Write them down in “Your Current Family Table” that follows. Which ones do you want to continue to develop and cultivate? Which ones will you intentionally let go of? Resist any shame that may arise as you take inventory. There is so much freedom and hope in taking the time to notice and name the truth of where we find ourselves. Only the truth frees us to walk in something more.

Your Current Family Table



SURRENDERING YOUR TABLE

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7, NLT

As we work our way through the core rhythms of thriving families, you might notice that faith is not one of them. You won't find "Jesus" listed as a rhythm all its own. The truth is, He is the underlying foundation of *all* the rhythms. Christ is the source from which all healthy rhythms flow. His strength is what sustains us as we seek to build a thriving family. True change is only available to us through complete dependence on God. The deep, lasting change we long for begins and ends through connecting with God. A flourishing family life is only available by *His* strength. *His* wisdom. *His* guidance. There is no life apart from Him. He is the true Source of all life.

Family psychologist Ross Campbell notes:

In almost all families that have found contentment, satisfaction, happiness, and genuine thankfulness among all family members, the parents possess a similar priority system. Usually their first priority is of an ethical nature, such as a strong religious faith or moral code. . . . They use this stabilizing relationship to influence all other relationships. . . . Real happiness is found in family orientation—spiritual family, then

physical family. God, spouse, children. These are essential. The remaining priorities are important, of course, but these three must come first.⁴

So our first step toward building our homes is surrendering them to the Lord. We begin by acknowledging that without Him, there's no way we can move toward the family life we long for: "Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good" (Psalm 127:1, NLT). We begin to move toward the most beautiful life possible when we surrender to His leading, to His complete partnership in building our life together. I like that word: *partnership*. It reminds me that I'm not alone in this parenting journey. I have a partner to lean on every step of the way.

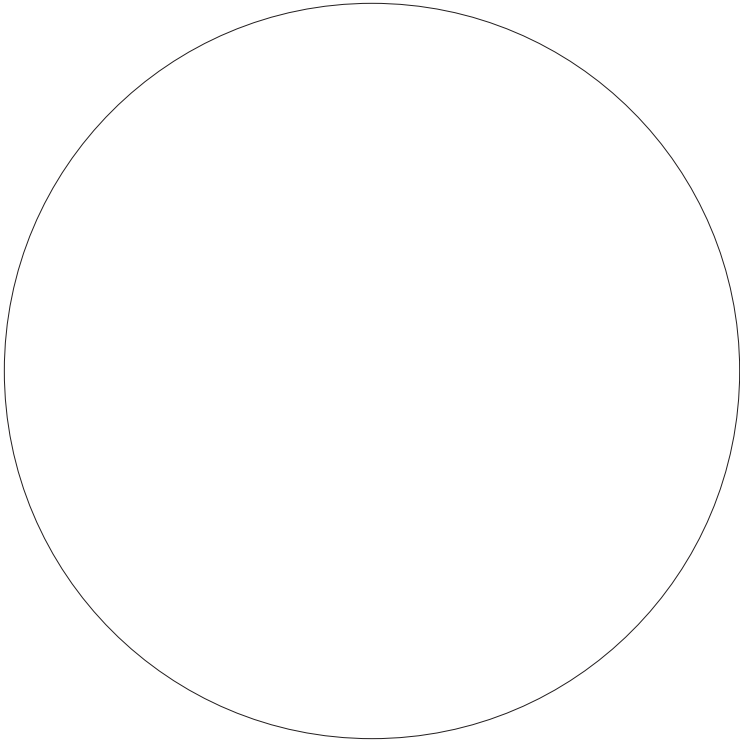
A life surrendered to God is one where strength flows freely. There's a notable difference between grinding life out in our own strength and discovering the power that becomes available to a heart fully surrendered to Him. As we read in Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD." The key to building a strong family is surrendering it to the true Source of life; loosening our grasp for control and letting Him grow the little lives within the walls of our homes as only He can.

Take a moment to pause and spend some time with the Lord. Thank Him for the incredible gift it is to be a family (see Psalm 127:3). For the honor of loving and leading the beloved humans He's entrusted to your care. Surrender the life you are building to His loving hands. And as you look ahead to the life

you long to build, ask for His wisdom, truth, and unfailing love to inform each rhythm that fills your home, for His strength to carry you as you practice each one, and for the life that is only available in Him to be the compass continually guiding your family.

On “The Surrendered Table” that follows, list the rhythms, habits, and family priorities you want to surrender to God, trusting that God will grow your family to maturity and flourishing.

The Surrendered Table



PRACTICE

- Name a few families you admire. What sets them apart?
- What healthy rhythms have you noticed in the families you admire?
- Write out a prayer of surrender for your family. Offer up to God the life you are building together, asking Him to lead you, as only He can, to the beautiful life He has for you.