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## The Ins and Outs of Marriage: A Review of "Mutual by Design"

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## The Ins and Outs of Marriage: A Review of "Mutual by Design"

### Abstract

"*Mutual by Design: A Better Model of Christian Marriage* provides a broad overview of marriage, starting with Biblical interpretations on the idea of marriage and gender roles and ending with discussions on subjects like headship, abuse, and divorce."

Posting about the book *Mutual by Design* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/the-ins-and-outs-of-marriage-a-review-of-mutual-by-design/>

### Keywords

In All Things, book review, Elizabeth Beyer, Mutual by Design, model, Christian marriage

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# The Ins and Outs of Marriage: A Review of “Mutual by Design”

Erin Olson

**Title:** *Mutual by Design: A Better Model of Christian Marriage*

**Editor:** Elizabeth Beyer

**Publisher:** Christians for Biblical Equality

**Publish Date:** October 31, 2017

**Page Numbers:** 248 pages (Paperback)

**ISBN:** 978-1939971708

Marriage is one of the most sanctifying and complicated relationships two people can experience. What is the Biblical basis for equality in marriage? What norms exist when it comes to gender roles in marriage? How should the church handle abuse and domestic violence? Published by the Center for Biblical Equality and edited by Elizabeth Beyer, *Mutual by Design: A Better Model of Christian Marriage* provides a broad overview of marriage, starting with Biblical interpretations on the idea of marriage and gender roles and ending with discussions on subjects like headship, abuse, and divorce. Building on ideas about marriage from books like Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen’s *Gender and Grace*, the contributors of this book provide foundational and practical concepts applicable to strong marriages in addition to helpful advice for couples experiencing struggles.

The book is divided into three main sections—the first focuses on gender roles and male/female relationships before the fall; the second is a discussion about the “nuts and bolts” of relationships discussing topics like finances, communication, and forgiveness. The third section answers some tough questions about subjects that have historically been difficult for the church and Christian community. The book is published by the Center for Biblical Equality; therefore, the authors of each of the chapters are all operating from an egalitarian (as opposed to **complementarian**) view of marriage. These two perspectives—egalitarian and complementarian—are often seen as the only two ways to view marriage. You hold either one perspective or the other—there is no middle ground. While this book starts by advocating for the egalitarian perspective, the rest of the book contains important ideas even for those who might have a more nuanced view of marital roles.

The first chapter offers a new interpretation on what we can learn about gender roles from the Garden of Eden. Words and verses that were historically understood one way are now considered from a pre-fall/post-fall framework encouraging the reader to think through God’s norms and intentions for Adam and Eve’s relationship. The author of this chapter suggests that God’s intent was not for Adam to rule over Eve (or for men to rule over women), but that this relationship of dominance and subservience developed *because of sin and brokenness*: “*Mutuality in marriage was God’s design when the foundations of the earth were laid, and it remains God’s desire to this day. Let’s pursue God’s way with all our strength*” (15).

The greatest share of the book focused on walking the reader through specific topics that might be particularly troublesome in a marriage. The authors of these chapters site specific research and theories that have been found effective in promoting effective communication, healthy finances, and sexuality, as well as how to have a marriage based on friendship and intimacy (beyond just sexuality). These chapters seem like a crash course in marital counseling with some very useful information including specifics from the Gottman Institute on specific communication styles, techniques to use, and those to avoid—criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. A chapter on sexuality provides an opportunity to consider the importance of sexual intimacy in marriage. The authors of this chapter talk about the shame often tied to sexuality in Christian circles. Sex and the pleasure that comes from it have been considered sinful; however, this view taints the sexual experience God intended couples to experience in marriage. The authors give practical information on a wide variety of topics useful for couples who are considering marriage as well as those who have been married for decades.

The final section is on what one might call “touchy subjects” where the church and Christians in general have struggled to know how to respond. The topic of male headship and female submission is replaced with Biblical mutual submission. The book tackles head-on specific scripture passages that seem to counter this idea, providing opportunities to rethink and reconsider family leadership. What should the church do in instances of domestic violence or other types of family abuse? How should the Christian community respond if a couple wants to divorce? Is a divorced Christian resigned to living a life of guilt and remorse? *Mutual by Design* provides a refreshing and enlightening perspective on each of these difficult subjects. Church leaders, Christian counselors, and those living through these struggles will be encouraged by the freedom and security suggested by the book, while also learning how to approach someone in the throes of a struggle with empathy rather than judgment.

I would recommend this book for anyone working with married Christians. Pastors and other church leaders will receive practical and specific ideas on how to reconsider the idea of marriage. Those helping couples through any type of struggle will find useful tools that can be used across a variety of contexts and settings. Married couples or those considering marriage can learn how to establish good communication patterns, a marriage based on friendship and intimacy, and solid financial habits. *Mutual by Design* is not only for those who are coping with marital struggles, but it is also for couples with healthy and thriving marriages to glean useful ideas and perspectives.