

When Sinners Say
"I Do"

THE STUDY GUIDE

Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage



DAVE HARVEY

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“I Do”

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Shepherd Press
Wapwallopen, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

*T*his study guide is designed to help you think about and apply the material in *When Sinners Say “I Do.”* As I mentioned in the preface of the book, you might be curious about a guy who would write a book titled, *When Sinners Say “I Do.”* My name is Dave and . . . well . . . I’m a sinner. Saying “I do” twenty-five years ago to my beautiful wife not only didn’t solve that problem, it magnified it times ten. Engaged people can sometimes wonder whether “I do” holds a magical power that charms us into selfless and instinctively caring people. It doesn’t. Would I have said, “I do” if I knew what “I do” really meant? Without a doubt. Would the grin in my wedding pictures have been less self-confident and more, how shall I say it, *desperate*? Most assuredly!

What do I mean when I say I’m a sinner? Picture in your mind a guy in sackcloth and ashes, prostrate on the ground, throwing dust on his head in shame.

No, scratch that. Picture this instead.

I used to have a fail-safe system for vacuuming my car. Give me fifty cents and four minutes, and you could do surgery on my carpets. The key is mat placement, nimble feet, and doors ajar. Once the machine sprang to life, I would work like a human black hole, sucking everything into the vacuum that wasn't bolted down. Sure there was a cost—I lost important papers, checks and even a pet or two—but there are always casualties in the maintenance of an orderly system. It was my way. The only way.

Have you ever been so devoted to your way that it makes you, well . . . stupid?

I found a passage from the Bible that describes the biggest problem for me and the biggest challenge in my marriage. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:17).

What I love about this passage is not just that it describes my life so well; it's that it was written by somebody who you assume would have solved the sin problems of life. Isn't Paul the one who wrote, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). True, but he's also the guy who confessed, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). The Apostle Paul was wretched? How does that work? Man, he must have been really bad. But what if I told you that a great marriage—a God-glorifying, soul-inspiring, life-enduring union—springs from the conviction that we are sinners just like Paul. Would that intrigue you enough to go to the next chapter? That's where we are headed, if you have the courage to come. Curious?

To say “I am a sinner” is to stare boldly at a fundamental reality that many people don't even want to glance at. But when we acknowledge that painful reality in our lives, several great things become clear. The greatest benefit of acknowledging our sinfulness is that it makes Christ and his work precious to us. Like Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need for

a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32). Only sinners need a Savior.

That’s the beginning that leads us to grace. This is not a depressing thought. It recognizes that to get to the heart of marriage, we must deal with the heart of sin. A great pastor once said, “Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.” He was getting at a profound truth of the gospel. Until we understand the problem, we will not be able to delight in the solution. Grace is truly amazing because of what we’re saved from. There lies hope for sinners who say “I do.”

Part of learning about that grace is applying it to our marriages. This study guide is formatted in a way to help with personal application, conversation as a couple, and for small group discussion as well. We’ve included a one page summary of key points from the chapter so you can quickly remember the basic points in the book. The questions are designed to help individuals, couples and small groups wrestle with and apply the themes in the book to their own lives. There are different types of questions included: we call them Gospel Application and Gospel Interaction questions because we want to make sure the gospel is never far from our mind in either personal application or group discussion.

Gospel Application Questions

For Me Questions: these are questions designed to help an individual reader apply the book on a personal level.

For Us Questions: these are questions that a couple can talk about together.

Gospel Interaction Questions

Small Group Questions: these are designed for a small group to stimulate further conversation. If you are leading the discus-

sion, you can also bring in the Gospel Application questions as appropriate for use in your group.

My prayer is that as you work through this study guide, you will freshly experience the grace our Savior has for each of us. Before going any further, can I urge you to pray? Pray that God would help you and your spouse. Pray that God would give you much grace to see how his gospel is at work in your marriage and how his grace is at work to change you. Pray that he would provide his Holy Spirit to help you apply the truths of Scripture. May you find his blessing abundant!

Chapter One

What Really Matters In Marriage

Gospel Implication

*H*ave you ever buttoned your shirt wrong . . . you know, so the holes and buttons don't match up and the shirt looks like it was pasted on by first-graders? (Just a hunch, but this is probably a guy thing.) It recently happened to me. I got the first button in the wrong hole and kept going until I was sporting a fashion nightmare. Funny thing was, I thought I looked great—maybe I had an extra button at the bottom, but that was obviously a defect in the shirt.

Moments like this put my wife, Kimm, in an awkward position. *Should I fix him again?* she ponders, *or just allow the guys at the office to enjoy it?* This time she was merciful, and I had a properly-buttoned day. It's amazing how distorted and disheveled one can look from not getting that first but-

ton right. Start off in the wrong place, and there’s no way to correct the problem down the line. Getting the first one right is the key to getting everything else right.

Marriage is like that shirt. If you get the first things right, then the many other “buttons” of marriage—communication, conflict resolution, romance, roles—all start to line up in a way that works together.

Key Idea: *What we believe about God determines the quality of our marriage.*

In this chapter, we learn that we are all theologians—we all think about God. Let me take a moment to explain. Everybody views life from a perspective—what some call a worldview. Our worldview is shaped by many things: our culture, our gender, our upbringing, our present situation, etc. The most profound thing that shapes anybody’s worldview is their understanding of God. What a person believes about God determines what he or she thinks about how we got here, what our ultimate meaning is, and what happens after we die. So essentially our worldview, our perspective on life, is determined by our perspective on God. And when we talk about theology, all we are talking about is what we think about God. What you truly believe about God and what it means to live for God is your theology.

What kind of theologian are you? It’s not hard to tell. Whether we realize it or not, our ideas about life, needs, marriage, romance, conflict, and everything else reveal themselves all the time in our words and deeds, inevitably reflecting our view of God. If you listen closely, theology spills from our lips everyday.

The gospel is an endless fountain of God’s grace in your marriage. To become a good theologian and to be able to look forward to a lifelong, thriving marriage, you must have a clear understanding of the gospel. Without it, you *cannot* see God, yourself, or your marriage for what they truly are. The gospel is the fountain of a thriving marriage.

Gospel Application

For Me:

1. What is the gospel?

Take a few minutes to write it down in one paragraph as simply as possible; keep the paragraph handy so that you can look at it often through this study to remind yourself of the ultimate purpose of marriage.

2. Think about an ordinary experience from your marriage this week—a change in plans, a conflict, an unexpected surprise. How did you handle that experience (in words and deeds)? And what did that event reveal about your view of God in that moment?

3. In your own words, write out your goal for your marriage.

For Us:

1. How does the gospel give us hope in our marriage?

2. In what ways is our marriage on a solid biblical foundation? In what ways does our marriage need to change in order to align more fully with biblical teaching? Consider how you might work on those areas.

3. What is one way I can grow in helping you to experience the gospel in our marriage?

4. Write down one of the areas where you're aware of needing to grow in your marriage; also write down where you most struggle to trust God in these areas. What promises does God make in Scripture that you can meditate on to grow in bringing the gospel to bear in your marriage in these areas?

Gospel Interaction— Small Group Discussion

1. If you have worked on the *Gospel Application* questions above, share some of your answers with your small group.
2. How has your marriage become sweeter since you first said “I do”?
3. Think back to your wedding day. How would you have answered the question: “How do you know this marriage is going to work?” Do you identify with any of the answers going through the minds of the congregation at the wedding example on pp. 18–19?
4. Why is a robust view of sin helpful to marriage?
5. What is one present area you would like to see improve in your marriage?
6. As you begin to look at your marriage in light of chapter 1:
 - Where are you more aware of God’s grace and mercy in your spouse?
 - What do you think will be most challenging for you personally as you continue reading this book?

Responses:

Gospel Reflection

QUOTE: “What comes into our minds when we think about God, is the most important thing about us.”

—A.W. Tozer, p. 31

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 3:14-20

Notes: