

# When Sinners Say “I Do”

## Study Guide Questions

### What Really Matters in Marriage: Chapter 1

- 1) Prayer/ Welcome /Introductions. Tell us about how you met, where you went on your honeymoon and how long you have been married.
- 2) Another possible Icebreaker question for another time: If you had 3 hours and you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?
- 3) Since you first said “I DO” how has your marriage become stronger or better?
- 4) One of the foundational principles of the book is that What we believe About God determines the quality of our marriage. The first button of our marriage is theology. Theology is what we believe based on the bible.

P. 22 What does it mean that our theology determines how we live out our marriage? Explanation: What we think about God is our theology.

- 5) Why is a robust view of sin helpful to marriage?
- 6) How is the Christian mindset different than what our sinful nature wants to do?
- 7) Can you give an example from your marriage of choosing the Christian mindset instead of doing what your sinful nature wants to do from your marriage?

**Romans 12:9-10 “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ”**

- 8) Why is honoring one another above yourself so difficult?
- 9) What can you do this week to honor your spouse above yourself this week?
- 10) What is one present area you would like to see improved in your marriage?

## Waking Up with the Worst of Sinners: Chapter 2

- 1) What is one thing that you really love about our spouse and why?
- 2) There are of great one another commands in the bible: encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, accept one another...[discuss for a few minutes](#)
- 3) Last week we read Romans 12:10, about Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, HONOR ONE ANOTHER ABOVE YOURSELVES.

Can you think of something your spouse did for you this week that honored them above yourself? It doesn't have to be huge.

- 4) One of our goals in this group is to make our marriages better, and to learn more about how God can help us do that. There is an underside of marriage, which is the reality of living with someone day in and day out, in a fallen world. When you got married did you think it would be difficult? How has it been more difficult than you thought?

**1 Timothy 1:15, 16 : Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.**

- 5) What are the main points of these verses?
  - Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,
  - of whom I am the foremost.
- 6) Paul is Not comparing himself to other people. Paul is simply talking about what is going on in his own heart. Our sin is real. Sometimes one of us has sin that is more obvious, louder and angrier.

However, in the other person, they may be quieter, and sin is less obvious, but in their heart there may be stubbornness, pride, ability to shut the other out with silence.....

Sin looks different in each of us.

- 7) Do you think people see sin as the root of our personal problems? What are some common things people blame instead of sin for their marriage problems?

Childhood, personal circumstances. Inborn temperament, dysfunctional families, psychology

- 8) Why do you think it is important to see our own sin as the worst problem we face in marriage? How does that change your perspective?

Without a clear awareness of sin and our need for God's intervention in our responses, I just let myself go. The flesh corrupts the flesh.

- 9) Why does it help to see yourself as a sinner ...in your marriage?

It is good to ask, "What am I bringing into my marriage that is sinful and selfish?"

Who is my sin primarily against? HOLY God.

We may be works in progress who are painfully prone to sin, yet we can also be joyful works for the Lord, since He has saved us by grace through the death and resurrection of Christ.

As you look at yourself, you see you own sinfulness. As you look at God more, you see his holiness forgiveness mercy towards you. If we think lightly of sin, I'm not that bad, then we think lightly of His death on the cross for our sins.

- 10) Look at p 39-40 Read about this couple, Rob and Sally and see the pattern: What is familiar to you in this story and what would help them?

Marriage really exposed a side of me I didn't know I had. I have an ongoing, daily need for God's grace, because we are both sinners and our only hope is His strength to do the right thing.

Jesus came to rescue us from the penalty of sin, and is offering us an abundant life through His spirit. Once I realize I am the worst of sinners, then I realize that my spouse is not the problem, I am. I will make every effort to grant my spouse the same lavish grace that God has granted me.

- 11) What spiritual resources does God give us to make changes in ourselves and our marriages?
- 12) If I love my spouse, why do I find it so easy to treat them like I don't?
- 13) What are some strategies we talked about tonight, or something you read in the book, which can be helpful in your marriage?

**Psalm 40:1-3: I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.**

### **The Fog of War and the Law of Sin: Chapter 3**

- 1) What is the best way for your spouse to encourage you?
- 2) Can someone tell the story of the Battle of Bull Run?
- 3) First major battle of the Civil War Bull Run. People were up close, watching, and suddenly it was upon them.

Principle #1 from this story: You can't be close to a battleground/Sin and be safe from it at the same time.

Principle #2 You can't stand on the sidelines of warfare and merely be entertained.

- 4) Why can't you be close to sin and safe from it at the same time?

Let's review and summarize the primary message of the last 3 chapters

Chapter 1: having an accurate, biblical theology is of central importance to our marriage.

Chapter 2: Core truth of our theology is that each of us is in fact the worst of sinners. We must compare ourselves to the holiness of God, not to each other.

Chapter 3: We must understand sin and learn how we tend to respond to it.

- 5) Have you had any insights into our sin nature since you've been studying this book?

It is helpful to look at sin closely so we understand it when it is closing in on us. Let's read page 46 starting at the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph – the picnickers -ending at the last paragraph...the war of sin can sometimes engulf us when we least expect it

(Summary of this section: Sin creates war with 3 people)

War with God

War with others

War within yourself

Like the clueless picnickers at the Battle of Bull Run, the war of sin can sometimes engulf us when we least expect it. p 46

- 6) What are your thoughts about what we just read?
- 7) Why does it help to know sin can engulf us when we least expect it?

We can have control over this war of sin but that depends on what we choose to do. The book says battles can be fewer, shorter and even redemptive if we choose the right path.

Read the last paragraph on p. 46 and top of p. 47.

- 8) When we are 1<sup>st</sup> tempted to sin we must go on the offensive. Goal is to defeat sin, not let it break out.
- 9) We are called to be peacemakers: What does a peacemaker look like in a marriage?

THANKFULLY, the Bible provides both instruction and hope for how to battle sin. Because Christ has forgiven our sins and we now have a relationship with Him, we have His resources to change what happens.

Though Christ died for our sins, there is an ongoing war inside us.

**Galatians 5:17: The desires of the flesh fight the Spirit of God, the desire of the Spirit fight the flesh.**

The powerful active influence of sin is constantly warring against a happy, unselfish, God honoring marriage.

**Romans 7:21-24: So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.**

The law of sin wants me to do anything but the right thing.

- 10) In an argument what keeps me from saying, Ok, you are right. I'm sorry. What specific sins prevent us from apologizing?

The key is to spend dedicated and meaningful time with the Lord to build a spirit which is open to His direction.

- 11) What keeps you from spending time deepening your relationship with God?

Married people often assume that the cause of some of their wrong behavior is their spouse. A helpful saying is, "Where there is disappointment, there is blame." And people rarely blame themselves." Let's look at P. 49/50

- 12) Why do people blame their spouses for their own sin?

3 things to know about sin p. 55

- 1) Sin is crafty :
- 2) Sin is alluring
- 3) Sin is treacherous

13)What can we do right before trouble is about to start?

14)In romans 12:1, 2 we are asked to transform our mind by the renewing of the spirit, what does that mean?

15)How do you think that happens?

Paul wants us to fight for our freedom in Christ...there is hope and power in our relationship with Christ.

16)What are some common issues that generate conflict in your marriage?

17)What is your takeaway from this chapter?

## Taking it out for a Spin: Chapter 4

1) Which strengths in your spouse's life bring you the greatest satisfaction?

Tell us your story about when you learned how to drive a 4 speed/ Manual transmission. What was the hardest part?

When you begin to get angry, impatient, jealous, critical it becomes easy to blame the other person. This is your fault. You are driving me to this behavior. I may be angry, but you are making me sin!!!!

The book gave us some excellent strategies to put into place before you say or do something out of negative emotion:

### **First: In Humility, Suspect yourself**

When I am in conflict with someone: I should always be primarily suspicious and regularly suspicious of myself!

2) Why is being self suspicious a good thing?

**Jeremiah 17: 9: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**

I must acknowledge 2 things about my heart:

- My heart has a central driving role in my behavior
- My heart has a permanent tendency to oppose God and His ways.

I feel like I have good intentions, and I am completely right and you are completely wrong.

J. I. Packer said, "Our best works are shot through with sin and contain something for which we need to be forgiven."

### **Second: In Integrity, Inspect Yourself**

When our goal is to address someone else's sin, "fix that person" Jesus tells us, our own sin must loom large in our sight.

3) Can you tell us about a time you tried to fix your spouse? What happened?

**Matthew 7:3-5: Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**

God is calling for the inspection to begin with me. Jesus is not concerned which one of you is more at fault in a particular instance. His emphasis is your focus, what you find to be the most obvious fact to you whenever sin is in view. **We need to consider our sin in the situation, before we consider the other person's sin. I need to suspect and inspect the accuracy of my perception of what is happening.** Watch out for self righteousness and know the only sin I can really change is mine.

### **Third: Admit that Circumstances Only reveal Existing Sin**

When something happens that clearly reveals my sin, it is easy to shift the blame to someone else because I don't want to admit I am guilty of sin. Not a new problem. **BLAMESHIFTING** Started in the beginning when Adam said, "It was Eve's fault, she gave me the apple". There are some circumstances which leave you boiling like a pressure cooker and eventually what overflows is anger, selfishness, defensiveness, our own sinfulness. When we look at how Christ responded we see that he didn't respond sinfully to the circumstances in His life but with what was in his heart.....love, mercy, compassion, kindness. We need to immediately turn to Christ and ask Him for the response that reflects His power in our lives. He promises to give us the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

### **Fourth: Submit yourselves to Christ, and focus on our undeserved Grace, Not unmet Needs. What does that mean?**

4) Why can't your spouse meet all your needs?

Our self obsessed culture teaches us to focus on our unmet needs, and then to punish those around us who are not meeting them, yet scripture says the blame for conflict is my sinful desires .

**James 4:1-2: What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.**

In order to do any of these 4 steps we must first ask God to help us overcome our sinful nature and do what He calls us to do. There is no way to do this without the Lord's help.

Let us instead focus on the undeserved Grace that Christ has so generously poured upon us.

We often have people who are struggling in their marriages tell us they can't work it out and they want to give up.

5) What would you tell someone who says they are experiencing irreconcilable differences with their spouse?

**Ask the group to memorize this scripture and read it with your spouse every day.**

**Colossians 3: 12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

**Scripture is clear that God is calling us to forgive that person. Though it may seem impossible, Luke 1:37 says "For nothing is impossible with God."**

## **Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment: Chapter 5**

1) After reading this chapter how would you define mercy? What are some things you were intrigued by in the chapter?

**Luke 6: 27-36 “Love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your return will be great and you will be Sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”**

2) This passage in Luke is about enemies. What does it have to do with marriage?

Christ is showing the comprehensive reach of mercy. **When you know how to deal with your worst enemies, you will know how to deal with occasional enemies.**

In the final command, Christ is saying that it is all about Mercy (Page 79).

3) READ: what is the definition of mercy on page 79 ( pick someone who is shy and hasn't talked much to read scripture or a passage in the book.)

4) Describe a way you have seen mercy expressed in your marriage.

READ page 82. Mercy doesn't change the need to speak the truth. It transforms our motivation from a desire to win battles to a desire to represent Christ. The author calls it Open Warfare.

5) What does Mercy bring to a marriage? Mercy sweetens the bitterness out of relationships.

READ page 83. Mercy is given to be shared. Our eyes are opened after marriage. We see wonderful things....multiplied.... the other person's weakness is magnified.

READ Page 81 starting with Martin Luther: marriage is the school of character.

6) Why is it so hard to grant mercy? Why does it feel like we are losing? Pride makes it hard to give.

Let's take a look at Practical day to day mercy

### **1<sup>st</sup> Principle: Mercy Before the Fact: Practice Kindness**

God wants us to practice kindness every day. Make it a daily practice. Kindness is not a personality trait. It is a fruit of the spirit and an expression of biblical love.

Kindness is meant to lead us toward repentance. Romans 2:4

God determined beforehand to show his people mercy....and He never changed His mind.

7) What are some ways you can show kindness in your marriage? .

## **2nd principle: Mercy Under Attack:Do Unto Others**

The sin of the person is revealed in our relationship. I trigger it with my own sin. You can't stand next to a puddle without eventually being splashed by its mud. We will be splashed by the mud of our spouse's sin. How am I supposed to respond when I am being splashed?

How much mud am I slinging?

8) Why doesn't my mud seem so bad and there mud is worse than mine?

Each person has a unique weakness that is unique to them. It could be discouragement, anxiety, anger, insecurity, jealousy, money issue, etc.

9) Are we sympathetic to our spouse's weakness?

Give the same mercy you want your spouse to give you.

**Luke 6:31 "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Golden Rule**

READ Page 86. Assign 5 people to read the 5 ways/biblical strategies to show mercy under attack. Discuss each one.

## **3rd principle: Mercy After the Fact:Cover sin**

READ Page 88 on forbearance.

**Proverbs 19:11 "It is a glory to overlook an offense."**

Small sins are the fuel for most marital blazes.

## **4th principle: Mercy Defeats our True Enemy**

READ Page 90 on self-righteousness.

**Walk through the questions to ask yourself on Page 91-92.**

**Did I get the facts right?**

**Did I assign motives when I feel I have been wronged?**

**Did I build a case against them?**

**Am I overly concerned about who is to blame?**

10) Is there something in particular that you want to focus on this week or something you learned from this lesson?

## Forgiveness, Full and Free: Chapter 6

Share the story of God's forgiveness to you- how he saved you and extended his forgiveness to you.

1) What is the difference between forgiveness and mercy?

- a) Mercy can be extended to those who don't recognize it. (p 98)
- b) Forbearance is overlooking offenses against us for the sake of Christ, smaller offenses.
- c) Forgiveness is for sin that cannot be overlooked. It is most often a transaction between 2 parties.

Sometimes it seems my sins aren't that bad compared to other people.  
READ Matthew 18:21-35 and Page 98 and 99.

2) What things stood out to you in this story?

In the eyes of God, sin is sin and all sin is against God's limitless holiness (read Page 103).

- 3) Do you see your sins as 10,000 talents or 100 denari? By Jewish calculations,  
10,000 talents = \$10 million dollars  
100 denari = \$20 bucks

(read Page 104)

4) In this chapter we are discussing forgiveness that is required when sin is acknowledged and confessed. Do you agree that as the author says, "that forgiveness may be the greatest change agent in a marriage?" and if so "why is forgiveness the greatest change agent"?

Forgiveness is costly. Sometimes it feels like it costs more than we give. Let's talk about the 3 valves of forgiveness (Page 106-107). Later we will discuss which valve you find the most difficult to open.

Have someone read Valve 1.

1<sup>st</sup> valve is controlled by the one who sinned, repentance and a request for forgiveness.

5) What makes this valve so hard to do?

Have someone read Valve 2.

Mercy releases the person who sinned from the liability of suffering punishment for that sin. It shuts off the flow of bitterness by opening the flow of love.

6) What makes this valve hard?

Have someone read Valve 3.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> valve is about absorbing the cost of the sin and requires the willingness of the one sinned against to absorb the cost of sin.

7) What makes this valve so hard to open?

The most common outcome is the wishy washy middle ground.

8) What does the middle ground look like?

9) What is the problem with that?

**Matthew 18: 35 “If you do not forgive your brother from the heart.”**

There is nothing in us that would naturally choose the way of full, biblical forgiveness. (Page 108).

10) How do we get ourselves to a point of forgiveness?

Think. One of you hurts the other one, something significant.

11) What are the Practical steps to get to forgiveness?

Stop and pray. Take dedicated time to take this issue before the Lord. Remember how much the Lord has forgiven you. Meditate on a bible passage on forgiveness.

Remember that a forgiveness decision is first made between you and the Lord. Ask God for His power to give you the strength needed to forgive, even if the sin against you is horrendous. Move ahead in faith, knowing the Lord promises to you give everything you need to accomplish His will.

Action steps?

Any other thoughts?

## The Surgeon, the Scalpel and the Spouse in Sin: Chapter 7

Ice breaker: Ask if a few people would like to share how they came to Christ.

1) Do you have additional thoughts about the 3 valves of forgiveness or something else from the study this week?

In this study so far we have learned about giving mercy and forgiveness to each other. In this way we are imitating Christ.

READ 2 Samuel 12:1-25 The Story of David and Nathan.

Principle of the story: When someone close to you is running from the truth, love demands that you speak. Sometimes love must risk peace for the sake of the truth.

There are 2 truths in this story (Page 116).

1. God pursues sinners. God's love is relentless, even when we are blinded by sin. He refuses to let go.

2. God uses sinners to pursue sinners. Nathan was prone to the same temptations, failures and sins as David/

2) What is reconciliation? Turning a wandering believer back to God. 2 kinds of reconciliation

a) Reconciliation between a sinner and God

b) Reconciliation between a sinner and the one sinned against

6) James 3:18 says we are called to be peacemakers (Page 117). We are called to use relational ties to intervene and help our brothers live a life worthy of the calling.

Sometimes a spouse veers off in the wrong direction. Not always something big like adultery, could be worry, anger, as a result from moving away from God....spouse will usually see it first. The spouse must first inspect themselves..log in own eye, before removing speck in the other's eye.

Steps

1) Wisdom- choose the right time, pray first ; get permission from the spouse to talk about it. (Page 123) Look at (Page 124) for diagnostics pre conversation questions: 1) Have I prayed? 2) What are the patterns of behavior? ( the List Chris talks about) 3) Am I willing to address just one area of concern, NOT everything? 4) Am I willing to make a small incision....and not say more than I need to? ( Page 125) 5) Am I

prepared to offer an observation rather than an assumption or a conclusion? Not final judgment 5) Is my goal to promote truth or my preference/agenda? The goal is to lead your spouse to God's truth, not replace it with yours.

2) Courage and Boldness : loving honesty and courageous care Give it time Don't throw a hand grenade and run. The delivery should encourage repentance ...a desire to turn back toward God

3) Meekness and Gentleness but strong love.

Final thoughts?

## Stubborn Grace: Chapter 8

Let's review the 2 kinds of grace the author talked about.

### Grace: God's free and unmerited favor for sinful humanity

1. **Saving Grace** declares us holy in His sight
2. **Sanctifying Grace** Makes us ever more holy in daily life

1) What did you learn in this chapter about grace that you didn't think about before?

Grace is the

- the power of God to help us overcome sin
- a potent weapon in the fierce struggles of life with our sinful nature

READ Page 139, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph on Persistent Grace/

### Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

**It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,**

<sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Focus on vs. 12

What are the 2 things grace empowers us to do?

- 1) Grace gives us the strength to RENOUNCE UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY PASSIONS....such as when your spouse makes you angry and you have a passion for punishment :

#### **Turn from sin**

- 2) Gives us new desires to please God and live for His glory:

#### **Turn to godliness**

3) This takes time: read p. 144 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph

Grace is a weapon against sin.

**The author talked about 4 things to keep in mind when encouraging your spouse in the grace of God p. 146-149**

What did you think about that part?

How well do you do encouraging your spouse?

**1) Your spouse is inclined to drift from grace to self effort**

- Encourage meditation upon the riches of Christ
- Encourage drawing close to Christ as the battle rages

**2) Your spouse may tend to become discouraged**

- Remind your spouse that God works beneath the surface well before change becomes invisible
- Celebrate what you can see, even if it is not directly related to the area of desired change
- What actions does God want us to change? Spiritual disciplines, counseling, bringing another couple to help

**3) Your spouse can lose sight of the ultimate goal which is Becoming more like Christ**

**4) Your spouse must be pointed not to grace, but to the One from whom all grace flows**

Questions to ask:

- 1) What did learn in this chapter about grace that you didn't think about before?
- 2) Are there areas in your life where you are aware that God is coaching you toward godliness?
- 3) How well do you do encouraging your spouse>