When Sinners Say I Do: The basic premise is how the gospel must be present in marriage – concepts such as forgiveness, grace, sin, and conflict are discussed.

Primary Takeaways:

- A great marriage – one that is a God-glorifying, soul-inspiring, life-enduring union stems from the conviction that we are sinners. Romans 7:24.
- When we acknowledge the painful reality that each of us can say, “I am a sinner,” good things happen:
  - We are in good company with the heroes of our faith.
  - We acknowledge what everyone around us – especially our spouse – already knows.
  - Christ and His work become more precious to us.
- Acknowledging and dealing with our own sin will lead to oneness, greater joy, and sweetness in our marriages and relationships with Christ.

Reading Schedule:

1. Session 1 – Preface & Chapter 2
2. Session 2 – Chapter 3 & Chapter 4
3. Session 3 – Chapter 5 & Chapter 6
4. Session 4 – Chapter 7 & Chapter 8

Prior To Each Group Meeting:

1. Complete the assigned reading
2. Go over the homework questions with your spouse and discuss your thoughts on the book.
3. Review the discussion questions and be prepared to discuss your answers during the group meeting.
Session 1 | Preface, Chapter One & Two

Key Points: Preface

- **Truth:** A great marriage – one that is a God-glorifying, soul-inspiring, life-enduring union stems from the conviction that we are sinners. [*Romans 7:24*]
- The reality of marriage is not a romance novel – it involves two people who come together with their own luggage from life, which always contains sin.
- When we acknowledge the painful reality that each of us can say, “I am a sinner,” good things happen:
  - We are in good company with the heroes of our faith (see the Old and New Testament)
  - We acknowledge what everyone around us – especially our spouse – already knows.
  - Christ and His work become more precious to us.
- **Purpose:** Acknowledging and dealing with our own sin will lead to oneness, greater joy, and sweetness in our marriages and relationships with Christ.

Key Points: Chapter One | What Really Matters in Marriage

- What people in this most significant of relationships long for is a marriage that will thrive and grow even in hard times.
- What we believe about God determines the quality of our marriage.
  - It governs how you think, what you say, and how you act.
- God created the marriage “program,” wrote the “operating manual,” and is faithful to explain it. He is the one and only reliable and trustworthy authority on the subject of marriage.
- The bible is the foundation of a thriving marriage
- Marriage was designed by God from the beginning to be a picture or parable of the relationship between Christ and the church.
- When a man and woman are joined in marriage, a new and lifelong model of the relationship between Christ and his church is launched.
- The focus of a thriving marriage is the glory of God

Key Points: Chapter Two | Waking Up with the Worst of Sinners

**Key Idea:** until sin be bitter, marriage may not be sweet.

- Why is it easy to treat the people we love the most like we don’t love them at all?
• **Paul’s Confession:** Paul’s awareness of his own sinfulness caused him to magnify the glory of Savior.
  o In *1 Timothy 1:12-17*, Paul describes himself as the foremost of all sinners. He also describes God as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God…” and worthy of honor and glory.
  o Without an accurate understanding of ourselves as sinners, we will not be able to see God for who He really is.
  o Part of understanding who we are is paying attention to the desires and impulses that churn within us.

• **The Biblical Reality of Joyful Wretches**
  o God’s holiness and mercy come together in the cross – the just penalty of sin with the amazing grace of God.

• **Rob, Sally and the Rest of Us**
  o Without a realistic understanding (the “full acceptance” Paul talks about in *1 Timothy 1:15*) of our own sin, we will experience a lack of intimacy with the Lord, and place unrealistic expectations on our spouse.
  o The cross makes a stunning statement about husbands and wives: we are sinners and our only hope is grace.
  o When I find myself walking in the shoes of the worst of sinners, I will make every effort to grant my spouse the same lavish grace that God has granted me.

• **The Worst Thing About Sin**
  o The big deal is that my sin is not first against me or my marriage. **All sin is first against God.**
  o The Bible describes all human beings as sinners. *(Ps 51:5, Rom 3:23, 5:12)*
  o Our sin affects those around us, but it is primarily an offense to God.
  o Acknowledging our sins before God leads to true sorrow, a heightened awareness of God and His mercy, and greater clarity in our marriages.

• **Worst of Sinners-Best of Worlds!**
  o Remember who we are in Christ despite our sin:
    - Treasured children of the Father
    - Loved by the Father so much He sent His only Son to suffer the punishment for our sins
  o Remember that God is at work in you; conforming you to be more like Christ.
  o Appreciate the hidden gift of humility that comes as we see ourselves as the worst of sinners.
Key Points: Chapter Three | The Fog of War and the Law of Sin

Key Idea: No matter how intense your battle with sin may rage, you fight as a forgiven sinner. You fight on the side of God, and God always wins in the end!

- The nature of sin is war. Sin creates war – war with God, war with others, and war within yourself. In marriage, this means you have two sinners, each with the potential for war constantly lurking within them.
- Our goal is to defeat the sin when we are first tempted. However, if we don’t, and sin breaks out into the battlefields of our marriages, we are called to be peacemakers, and end the fighting. The New Testament provides hope and instruction for how to battle that sin.
- Fighting for Freedom in the Clash of Desires
  - The two sides in this war are not husband vs. wife but the desires of the flesh against the desires of the Spirit. See Galatians 5:17.
  - The purpose of your flesh (and your spouse’s flesh) is to keep you from doing the things you want to do for God.
  - Married people sometimes assume that the cause of some of their wrong behavior is their spouse.
- So How Did This Fight Get Started?
  - The cause of our marriage battles is not our marriages, nor our spouses – it is the sin in our hearts. See James 4:1-3.
- The Fog of War
  - The law of sin wants to take you captive to sin, and despite your assurance of salvation in Christ it is imperative to remember that any sin can be enslaving and all sin does damage.
  - All sin has been paid for by Christ when He died on the cross.
  - However, the influence of sin still remains in us; it targets our desire for anything holy.
- The Betrayal of Sin
  - Sin is crafty.
    - Though we depend on God for our very lives, sin would have us see God as accountable to us to give us what we want.
Though we have been blessed by God, sin would have us think of ourselves as victimized by God.

- Sin is alluring.
- Sin betrays us.

**Dancing on the Field of Victory**

- If we do not fight the battle with sin, it will overrun us.
- **But the good news is the battle has already been won, and we are on the winning team.** See Romans 8:1-4
- This means that, no matter what:
  - We are forgiven.
  - We are welcomed as righteous.

Knowing the true nature of sin does not end our marriage battles, but they become no longer merely something to fight our way through; instead, conflicts become redemptive possibilities because the war with sin is won in Christ.

**Key Points: Chapter Four | Taking it Out for a Spin**

**Key Idea:** God’s grace at work in us compels us to not just sit behind the steering wheel, but to put what we know into gear.

- God’s grace at work in us compels us to not just sit behind the steering wheel, but put what we know into gear.

- How do we do this in our marriages? By seeking and applying the wisdom of God in our lives. 1 Corinthians 1:30, James 1:5

- Here are four roads of wisdom to put this into practice:
  - **First Gear: In Humility, Suspect Yourself First**
    - True humility is living confident in Christ’s righteousness, and suspicious of our own.
    - To be suspicious of my own heart is to acknowledge two things: that my heart has a central role in my behavior, and that my heart has a permanent tendency to oppose God and His ways.
    - Sinners who are humble are growing more knowledgeable about their hearts, realizing that there is no righteousness apart from the gospel.
  - **Second Gear: In Integrity, Inspect Yourself**
    - Jesus tells us that our own sin necessitates our primary focus before looking at your spouse’s sin. Matthew 7:3-5
To do this with integrity combats hypocrisy.

Maybe you are able to be more objective about your spouse’s sin than he/she is, but **even your objectivity is tainted by sin.** You must bring an awareness of your own sin to these conversations.

- **Third Gear: Admit that Circumstances only Reveal Existing Sin**
  - It’s easy to shift the blame of our own sin onto our spouses. Cf. **Gen 3:12**
    - The answer to blame-shifting is to be **honest** with ourselves, our spouses and God.
  - To try to justify ourselves is to deny our guilt before God.
  - Often, our spouses will be used by God to expose the sin that is already in our hearts – our spouse is not responsible for putting it there. If we are wisely honest we will realize that God is behind it all, revealing the familiar sin so that it might be overcome by grace.

- **Fourth Gear: Focus on Undeserved Grace, Not Unmet Needs**
  - According to Scripture, the source of conflict is not unmet needs, but unmet desires. Cf. **James 4:1-2**
  - Lurking beneath our unmet needs are desires demanding satisfaction.
  - It’s not wrong to desire appropriate things like respect or affection from our spouses. But it is very tempting to justify demands by thinking of them as needs and then to punish one another if those needs are not satisfied. The road of unmet needs leads to nowhere.
Session 3 | Chapter Five & Chapter Six

Key Points: Chapter 5 | Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

**Key Idea:** Mercy sweetens marriage. It is meant to be both given and received.

- Jesus commands us to be merciful towards each other. *Luke 6:27-36*
- **Giving Shape to Mercy**
  - God’s mercy means His kindness, patience, and forgiveness toward us; it is His compassionate willingness to suffer for and with sinners for their ultimate good.
  - God is calling you to see your spouse as God sees him/her – through eyes of mercy.
- **Pass it Along**
  - Marriage is a place where two sinners become so connected that the masks fall off. With open eyes, we can see wonderful things we never knew were there. We can also see each other’s weaknesses.
- **Mercy in Real-Time**
  - Mercy does not change the need to speak truth. It might be expressed in having to remove yourself or children from an abusive spouse.
- **Mercy Before the Fact: Practice Kindness**
  - God’s call for us is to practice a daily lifestyle of mercy and kindness, which come as a result of receiving both mercy and kindness first from Him. *Luke 6:36, Romans 2:4, 11:22*
- **Mercy Under Attack: Do Unto Others**
  - In *Luke 6:31*, Jesus tells us to treat others the way we would desire to be treated. This is especially challenged when we feel attacked and/or affected by our spouse’s sin.
  - Practical ways we can show mercy when we’re under attack:
    - Remind yourself that your greatest enemy is your own sin.
    - **When you are not in a conflict with your spouse**, ask your spouse, “What behavior of mine expresses anger or lack of love for you?” Attempt to do the opposite of his/her answer when you feel sinned against.
    - Study [1 Corinthians 13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13), and learn to love in that way. Memorize [James 1:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1:19-20).
    - Know when to bring in the counsel of your community who can help.
• Mercy After the Fact: Cover Sin
  o The Bible teaches a concept called forbearance. It is a choice to overlook an offense against us and wipe the slate clean. It is preemptive forgiveness, freely and genuinely bestowed. See Proverbs 19:11. Forbearance is not ignoring the sin or condoning it.
  o Forbearance gives you the freedom to choose to overlook small offenses so you can focus on big issues as a couple.

• Mercy Defeats our True Enemy
  o We all have tendencies towards self-righteousness, a sense of moral superiority that appoints us as prosecutor of other people’s sinfulness.
  o Questions to ask to gauge the self-righteousness in your heart:
    ▪ Am I confident I see the “facts” clearly?
    ▪ Are my questions partial to what I see as right or impartial and objective?
    ▪ Am I overly concerned about who is to blame for something?
    ▪ Am I able to dismiss questions like these as irrelevant?

• Mercy Triumphs over Judgment
  o The good news is that mercy triumphs over the judgment that is often motivated by self-righteousness. In Luke 6, it’s clear that mercy does not guarantee a certain outcome. But it will lead to a deeper relationship with our Father in heaven.

Key Points: Chapter 6 | Forgiveness, Full and Free

Key Idea: Forgiven sinners forgive sin. (Matthew 18:23-35)

• The goal of forgiveness is to unite what sin has separated.
• The central passage for this subject is Matthew 18:23-35.
• Extending true forgiveness is clear and persuasive evidence that we have been forgiven by God. The bottom line is that forgiven sinners forgive sin.
• When in marriage forgiveness is expressed according to truth, there may be no greater agent for change and hope.
• Forgiveness Reckons with the Holy God
  o When we compare our sins to our spouse’s and think one is worse or better, it leads us to think my problem with God can’t be so bad. Don’t miss the lessons of the parable in Matt 18, and the heart of the gospel.
The “size” of a sin is not ultimately determined by the sin itself, but by the one who is sinned against. Sin is infinitely wicked because it rejects the one who is infinitely holy and good.

We all need someone to stand between us and the justified wrath of God. Jesus paid our debt and gave us His perfect standing before His Holy Father.

**Forgiveness is Costly**

- Sometimes forgiveness costs more than we think we can give.
- True forgiveness sees another’s sin for the evil that it is, addresses it, then absorbs the cost of that sin by the power of God’s grace.
- There is nothing in us that would naturally choose the way of full, biblical forgiveness. So why do we do it? Because full and free forgiveness was given to us through Christ’s death on the cross. Forgiven sinners forgive sin.

**Forgiveness Releases the Old to Build the New**

- Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel and therefore is to be a defining characteristic of every believer.
- The goal of forgiveness is unity among believers, especially in marriage.
- Where forgiveness is employed, and repentance is lived out, it transforms.
Key Points: Chapter 7 | The Surgeon, the Scalpel, & the Spouse in Sin

Key Idea: A good surgeon displays wisdom, courage and meekness.

• God pursues sinners with His relentless love, and He uses sinners to pursue sinners. See 2 Samuel 11-12, and Nathan’s role in David’s life.

• The Need for a Nathan
  o We have been given the ministry of reconciliation, and part of that is a ministry to other believers for their own growth. We all need a Nathan in our lives – someone to look us in the eye and tell us of the sin in our lives we cannot see on our own.

• Beyond Self-Examination
  o Removing my sin grants me the perspective and clarity that comes with humility.
  o Self-examination alone cannot produce a sweet marriage, but only self-examination can provide the humble clarity of sight I need to serve my spouse.

• The Work of Grace and Truth
  o We can love our spouses well by applying grace through speaking truth.

• The Surgeon and the Saint in Sin
  o Reproof is a lot like surgery. Both require care, wisdom, and precision, as well as a delicate and determined hand.

• A Good Surgeon Displays Wisdom
  o A wise surgeon chooses the right time.
  o Wisdom includes being clear about the nature of the sin and who bears the blame.

• Patients Should Know They Need Help
  o An excellent and humble way to demonstrate you are willing to be corrected is to pursue it regularly from your spouse.
  o Never Cut Blindly: Before admonishing your spouse, ask yourself these questions:

  • Have I prayed for God’s wisdom and acknowledged my need for His help in serving my spouse?
  • Are my observations based upon patterns of behavior or merely a single incident?
  • Am I content to address one are of concern, even if I’m aware of several?
  • Am I committed to making incisions no larger than absolutely necessary?
• Am I prepared to humbly offer an observation rather than an assumption or conclusion?
• Is my goal to promote God’s truth or my preference?
• **A Good Surgeon Displays Courage**
  o Two kinds of courage are necessary; the courage to start and the courage to keep working through to the finish.
• **Courageous Surgeons Encourage Repentance**
  o Repentance is becoming so aware of God, His character, and what He has done that we actively seek to turn from sin and pursue righteousness. Helping to cultivate this attitude in your spouse should lead any confrontation you have with him/her.
• **A Good Surgeon Displays Meekness**
  o Meekness is power harnessed by love. It is an expression of humility that will not bristle or defend when challenged about motives.
  o The goal of meekness is Christlikeness, for you and for your spouse.
  o Your spouse’s sin is not first about you. It may affect you, but most importantly it reflects your spouse’s relationship with Christ.

**Key Points: Chapter 8 | Stubborn Grace**

Key Idea: Sanctifying grace is good news. It’s the news that God gives persistent grace to run the race.

• **Persistent Grace to Run the Race**
  o See Titus 2:11-14. The grace that justifies becomes grace that sanctifies.
  o They are the same grace, just looks different in our lives.
• **Grace: the Power to Renounce the Old (Titus 2:12a)**
  o Grace teaches us how to deny, reject or refuse sin. Grace meets us right where we are, to take us to where God wants us to be.
• **Grace: the Power to Live (Titus 2:12b)**
  o Maturity comes not just from knowing what to avoid, but what to pursue. Grace teaches us what to embrace instead of sin.
• **Grace: the Power to Wait (Titus 2:13)**
  o Grace gives us power to wait for Him to subdue sin, strengthen weakness, and create unity in marriage.
Waiting works things into our souls & our marriages that nothing else can.

- **Grace: the Power to Want** *(Titus 2:14)*
  - Grace transforms us from within to change what we want in life.

- **Exporting this Grace**
  - We are called to point our spouses back to the grace of God through encouragement. As you do this, keep these four things in mind:
    - Your spouse is inclined to drift from grace to self-effort.
      - Preach the gospel to your spouse.
      - Encourage meditation upon the riches of the gospel.
      - Encourage resting in God even as the battle rages.
    - Your spouse may tend to become discouraged. Remind them God is at work, celebrate what you do see, fight with them.
    - Your spouse can lose sight of the ultimate goal.
    - Your spouse must be pointed to the one from whom all grace flows.

- When a spouse communicates grace, we move beyond mistakes and the journey becomes enjoyable.