STUDY GUIDE

A Happy Marriage

Covenant Joy in a Fallen World



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Ligonier Ministries

A Happy Marriage Study Guide
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How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide includes a chapter synopsis, a lesson objective, key passages, key points, and discussion questions from each chapter in *A Happy Marriage*, as well as questions that focus on a relevant passage of Scripture from each chapter. Participants should first read each corresponding chapter of the book in order to make the best use of this guide.

Chapter Synopsis: This section summarizes the material in the chapter and provides a reminder of what the chapter covered. It serves to help readers remember what they've already read in the book.

Lesson Objective: This section explains the purpose of the chapter and the intended outcome of the study guide lesson.

Key Passages: This section quotes several passages from the chapter so that readers can remember some of the more significant things the author said. It can also serve as a starting point for discussion if the group leader would like to ask questions or provide thoughts related to excerpts from the book.

Key Points: This section outlines many of the basic ideas that the author mentioned in the chapter. It helps readers recall not just the big idea of the chapter but also its supporting ideas and their flow.

Scripture Reading: This section highlights one of the chapter's key points in God's Word. It helps readers identify the scriptural basis of important Christian doctrines and develops their ability to understand Scripture through questions about the reading. These questions are also ideal for group study.

Reflection Questions: This section provides readers with questions that could be asked of themselves or in a small-group setting. The questions are designed to help readers understand the chapter and apply that knowledge to their lives.

Prayer: This section closes the study with an opportunity to come before the Lord in prayer based on what readers have learned.

Introduction

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

In the world and even in the church today, we have normalized mediocrity, struggle, and unhappiness in marriage. This is not God's design. If marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, then that picture is incomplete without happiness. Marital happiness is not just a fairy tale or a myth; it is possible. We will not have a happy marriage by placing our hope in the marriage or in ourselves, because as sinners we will fail and disappoint each other. But when we place our hope in our Savior and our happiness in an eternity with Him, then happiness, faithfulness, and love will flow in our marriage.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

This introduction will acquaint us with the idea that God designed marriages to be happy and that marriage can be happy when we look to Christ and find our hope and fulfillment in Him.

KEY PASSAGES

Since the garden of Eden, Satan has been attacking God's plan for marriage. As the initiation of the world's fundamental social structure as well as a picture of redemption, God's best earthly gift is a target. (p. 1)

This is what Christian marriages and the surrounding culture need—to see the beauty and glory intrinsic to the closest of human relationships. (p. 8)

Happiness thrives when we understand the sufficiency of Christ. (p. 10)

Sanctification by the Spirit makes holiness—and real happiness—possible. (p. 11)

KEY POINTS

God Intended Marriage to Be Happy (pp. 1–3): Marriage is not just a tradition, something that can change from culture to culture. Marriage was created by God at the beginning and designed to be a good gift. In a fallen world, full of disappointment and sin, it can be hard to imagine a happy marriage. But because the Creator designed marriage to be something that is good and happy, we can have hope, not in ourselves but in God, that a happy marriage is not only possible but achievable.

Why Is Happiness Important? (pp. 3–5): Society today prizes personal happiness at all costs, even above faithfulness. Sadly, many churches have the opposite problem, prizing faithfulness above, or even without, happiness. This is not God's design. If marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, then that picture is not complete without happiness and faithfulness. They are not mutually exclusive; both faithfulness and biblically defined happiness work together to build a strong marriage.

Defining Happiness (pp. 5–8): It can be difficult to define happiness. It changes based on time, age, culture. It is also not dependent on pleasant circumstances. The word "happy" in Scripture is often linked to blessing, holiness, and the idea of living under God's covenant favor. Our salvation and relationship with God is the basis for marital happiness. Our sin, especially exhibited through selfishness, is the biggest obstacle to this happiness.

The Purpose of This Book (pp. 8–12): Many Christian marriage books have normalized difficulty in marriage. This book aims to reorient our thinking about marriage, to show us through Scripture that happiness is possible and to encourage us to enjoy God's good gift of marriage.

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 2:18–25 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken

from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- What does this passage tell us about God's design for marriage?
- How does this passage give us hope and encouragement for happy marriages?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some negative views that society has of marriage? How do they contrast with how Scripture portrays marriage?
2. How can a marriage be happy, even in the midst of suffering?
3. How does our relationship with God inform how we act in our marriage?
4. How can all people—single, widowed, or married—support marriage?

PRAYER

- Praise God for His beautiful design of marriage: that it is a happy picture of Christ and the church.
- Confess ways that you have not pursued God first in your life and have instead looked to earthly things as though they could bring true and lasting happiness.
- Thank God for the love that He has demonstrated through the sacrifice of His Son, which gave us the hope of salvation.
- Ask God to bless your study on marriage and that He would increase happiness in your marriage (if you are married) and in the marriages of those around you.

1

Exclusivity

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

From our culture's perspective, exclusivity in marriage seems to be a problem rather than a blessing. A lifelong commitment to another person, who will change in ways that we cannot anticipate, through circumstances that we cannot foresee, sounds risky and foolish to the world. For Christians, however, we can be confident that exclusivity in marriage is not only essential but also a blessing, because it is the way that marriage was designed. Ultimately, marriages are exclusive because Christ's marriage to His church is exclusive. Just as we serve the God of the Bible alone, so in marriage we are to be committed to our spouse alone.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

This chapter will explain why exclusivity in marriage is important and highlight various ways that we can honor our spouse through exclusivity.

KEY PASSAGES

The exclusivity of marriage reflects the exclusivity of the gospel. (p. 14)

Infidelity—via bed or screen—kills the happiness that God designed to accompany exclusivity. (p. 17)

Relational exclusivity brings the joy of being free and safely vulnerable to one person devoted to you, who wants to spend his or her life getting to know you better and love you more deeply. . . . Sexual exclusivity is a physical expression of this devotion. (p. 17)

If Jesus did not love His bride, then exclusivity would be irrelevant. Because He does, exclusivity is crucial. (p. 20)

KEY POINTS

Exclusivity Is Part of God's Design for Marriage (pp. 13–14): Because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, exclusivity is inherently part of God's design for marriage. Just as we are to be committed to God alone, and not to other false gods and idols, so in marriage we are to be committed to our spouse alone. Whether we are single, married, or widowed, we can all protect, preserve, and promote the exclusivity of the marriage.

Benefits of Exclusivity in Marriage (pp. 15–16): Even from a non-Christian standpoint, there are undeniable benefits to having an exclusive marriage. Marriages create stability, predictability, and coherence for society, and especially for children. Those who are married are typically stronger financially and, in some cases, physically healthier. On an emotional level, marriage is something that many of us crave: who doesn't want "a deep, unifying, whole-person friendship with someone who is all ours" and "a spouse who is eager to be with you for the long haul, through thick or thin, and make you the one special person in life regardless of what that life holds" (p. 16)?

Types of Exclusivity in Marriage (pp. 17–18): As Christians, we are expected to be exclusive in our marriages, but what does that exclusivity look like? Sexual exclusivity is likely the first thing that comes to mind. Infidelity, whether in person or through a screen, breaks the exclusivity of marriage and has dire consequences for one's spouse, family, and society, and even oneself. Having self-centered sex, instead of self-giving sex, also distorts marriage. Emotional exclusivity is also important. The level of privacy will vary for each couple, but overall, there needs to be some emotional intimacy between just the two of you. Beware of cultivating emotionally close relationships with members of the opposite sex, and consider what you share on social media.

Exclusivity in Marriage—and in Faith—Brings Joy (pp. 19–23): When we follow God's design for marriage and are faithful in the exclusivity of marriage, then we will find joy. God created marriage and our relationship with Him to be filled with happiness and satisfaction, but we can experience this only if we die to ourselves and give ourselves fully, and exclusively, in faith to Christ and in our marriages to our spouse. Through our selflessness, in faith and in marriage, we have true and lasting joy.

SCRIPTURE READING

Hosea 2:16–23 "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD."

"And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people';
and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

- How does God equate our relationship with Him to the relationship of marriage?
- Based on God's description of exclusivity in this passage, what should exclusivity in our marriages look like?

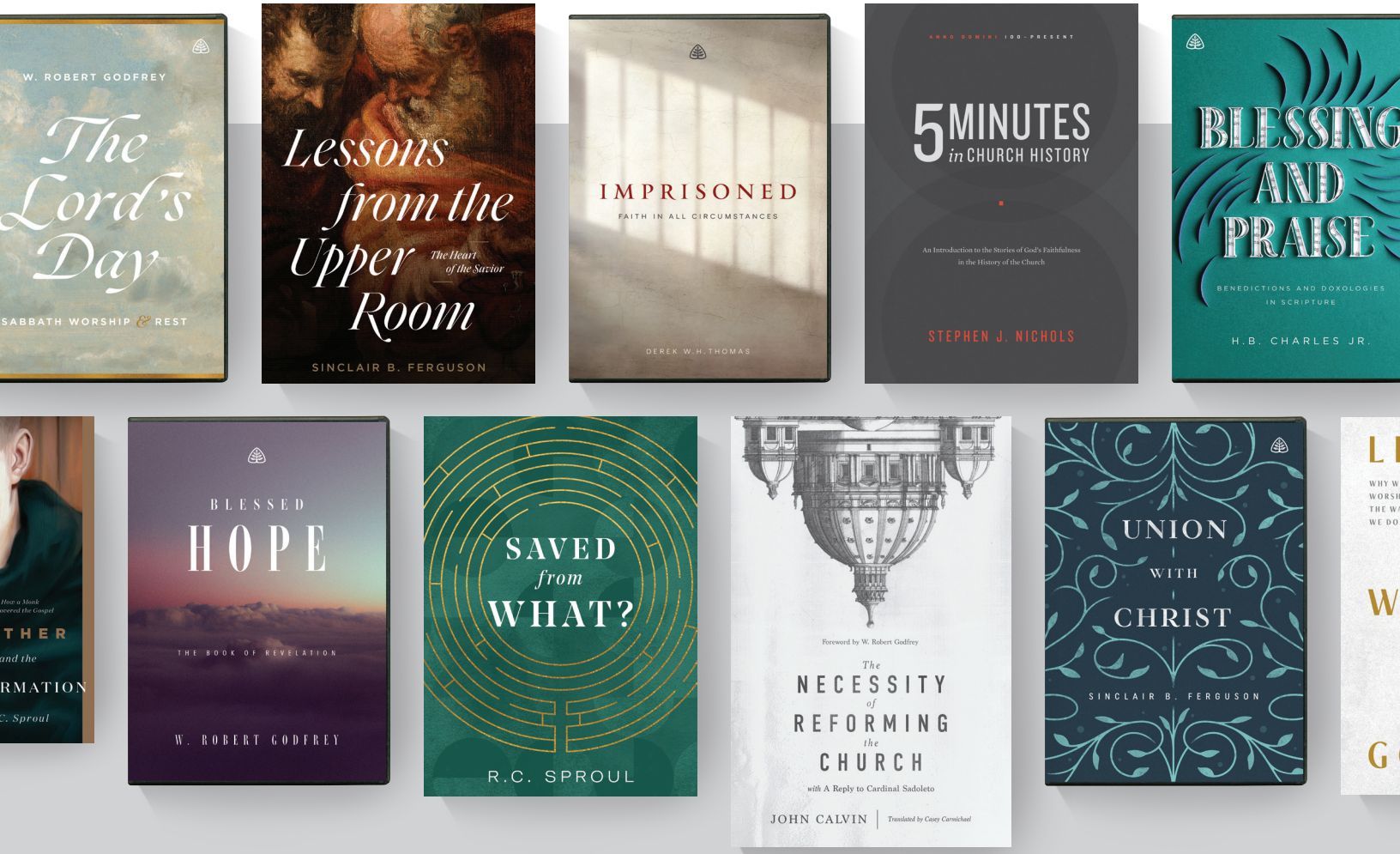
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is exclusivity a positive aspect of marriage, not a negative one?
2. How should the exclusivity of marriage affect our relationship with other believers?
3. Why is digital, not just physical, infidelity considered a sinful disruption of God's design for the exclusivity of marriage?
4. How does exclusivity in marriage help us put to death our own selfishness and instead live for another?

PRAYER

- Praise God for loving His bride, the church, and for redeeming her through Christ.
- Confess ways that you have not served God exclusively and have sought after other idols.
- Thank God for His constant fidelity to His people.
- Ask God for the Spirit's help to make you faithful to your spouse on earth, and faithful to Christ, our heavenly Husband.

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