



Study Guide

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in *Every Reason to Leave*! I am excited to begin this journey with you. If you are reading or thinking about reading this book, perhaps you are in a challenging marriage or have a friend in challenging circumstances. My hope is that my story will encourage you or your friend to stay in your/their marriage while seeking God for answers.

The following questions are for your study, either alone or in a group, and are intended to help you reflect on the topics in this book.

Here we go!

1. What were your expectations for marriage? If you are comfortable, share this with your group. If not, write a few notes in a journal.

2. What is the climate in your marriage?

3. On a scale of 1–10, where would you rate your level of satisfaction with your marriage? Why?

4. Consider these words from Gary Thomas: “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” Does this thought make you uncomfortable or does it make you hopeful? In what way(s)?

5. Are you willing to let go and ask God for the desire to have your marriage repaired His way?

CHAPTER 1 IN THE BEGINNING

This chapter tells the story of Billy's and my childhoods. Here are a few questions to answer about yours.

1. List some of the differences in the ways you and your spouse grew up.
2. What are some of the other differences between you and your spouse?
3. What childhood dreams are propelling your choices in your life and marriage? What about for your spouse?
4. What are some of your childhood disappointments? Have you shared these with your spouse?
5. What are you consciously or unconsciously doing to "be strong" in the midst of any trials you may be facing?

CHAPTER 2

I, VICKI, TAKE THEE, BILLY

As we share more of our story, and the ways we used “life” to ignore our problems, think about some of your own coping mechanisms and how they have brought you to where you are today.

1. Have you ever pretended that all was right with the world when in fact things were falling apart? And if yes, what were some of the things you did to cover up the truth? You can share these with your group, or make a journal entry.
2. If you are comfortable, share honestly with your group (or your journal) any unhealthy dependence in your marital relationship.
3. When you said yes to marriage and “I do,” what were you hoping for?
4. Describe your wedding day.

CHAPTER 3 AND BABY MAKES THREE

Our story continues as I persist trying to “fix” my life.

1. What is your commitment to your marriage? Are you in it until “death do we part,” or are you thinking of divorce as an escape from the challenges you are facing?
2. Do you have children? Did you hope that by having children your marriage would improve? Share or journal your thoughts.
3. Perhaps you have suffered a miscarriage, as I did, or maybe you are struggling with infertility and can’t have biological children. Maybe you have even lost a child. Have you grieved your loss, or sought a godly, biblical counselor to help move you through this difficult loss? Your pastor or other church leader can give you a recommendation.
4. Fear robs us of joy and causes us to act out in various unhealthy ways. List some of the things you are afraid of. What kind of role does fear play in your life and marriage?

CHAPTER 4 A TOUGH DECISION

As we continue to share our journey, we encourage you to ask yourself these questions and to respond with total honesty.

1. Are you on the “volunteer at everything” track to keep busy? What are you avoiding?
2. Are you able to communicate with your spouse? If not, are you willing to seek godly counsel to learn this important marital skill, even if it means going alone?
3. Have you ever felt empty and lonely and thought, “There has to be more to life than this”? Are you at that point now? What role does God play in your life? Journal your thoughts or share in your group.
4. Is there a problem of addiction, such as drugs, alcohol, pornography, or activities like shopping, in your marriage? Is there codependency? Have you acknowledged this or are you walking in denial?

CHAPTER 5 ON MY OWN

Separated from Billy and on my own with the children, I began to look at my own part and to see the level of discontent I brought to our failed relationship.

1. If you are in a relationship with an addict or alcoholic, or ever have been (parents, siblings, grandparents), have you acknowledged your own issues, one of which may include codependency? Have you found a twelve-step program you can attend? You can Google Celebrate Recovery and Al-anon to find meetings in your area.
2. Do you believe that God has plans for your life that are good? See Jeremiah 29:11 and share your thoughts.
3. If your marriage is in dire straits, do you feel like a failure, as I did? Are your feelings jumbled and are you full of anger, and love/hate? As you journal your thoughts, ask God to reveal Himself to you.

CHAPTER 6

NEW LIFE

Finally, I found the answer to all my questions in the person of Jesus Christ. Through reading the Bible, the emptiness and discontent were replaced with joy and fullness by God Himself.

1. Maybe you are uncomfortable with talking about God, as I was. Have you also come to the end of yourself and your own efforts at a meaningful and purposeful life? Are you willing to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, turning away from self-sufficiency, receiving Him as your all-sufficient Savior? Please turn to Appendix 4.
2. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Do you believe this truth? What have you thought about the Bible in the past? If you have not read it before, will you read it now? Try beginning with the New Testament book of John or the gospel of Mark.
3. The Bible says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). If you have prayed and asked Jesus into your life, you are a new creation. Another translation says it this way: “behold, all things have become new” (NKJV). Do you hear that? The old things in your life have passed away—all things in your life have become new. You are given a fresh start in Jesus Christ. Please share your thoughts about this incredible truth!

CHAPTER 7

WRESTLING WITH HARD TEACHINGS

As the direction of my heart changed course, and I began to read and apply the Bible to my daily life, and began to pray, I started to learn that the hard is what makes it great.

1. Is there any area in your life today that you are demanding your own way? Read Genesis 25:19–34. Can you relate to Esau, who was willing to do whatever it took to get his own way, even if it meant stealing from his own twin brother? What other choices might he have made? Share or journal your thoughts.
2. Are you at a crossroad in your life or marriage? What are some of the choices you can make? Are they self-centered or God-centered?
3. Prayer is simply talking to God. Do you spend time each day talking to God?
4. Describe an area of your life about which you can say: “the hard made it great.”

CHAPTER 8 FORGIVENESS AND PROVISION

As I asked myself, “can I forgive Billy?”, and began to earnestly pray for him, my heart softened and I became open to hearing God’s direction and willing to obey.

1. What expectations are you fueling for your marriage? List these and ask God to help you let go of all expectations and to put your hope in Him.
2. Do you have conflicting emotions about your spouse? Are you willing to pray and ask God to lead you to full surrender to His will regarding your marriage?
3. Forgiveness is one of the most important ingredients in a great marriage. Where are you in the process of forgiving your spouse? Are you willing to ask God to cause your heart to forgive?
4. How do you spend your spare time? List anything you would be willing to eliminate in order to spend a daily time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer.

CHAPTER 9 REUNITED

And so, after five and a half years of separation, we were reconciled. That's when the real work began . . . and the realization that it takes time.

1. If you have been separated and are ready to reconcile, list two or three steps you personally might take to prepare the way. For example: alter your expectations, seek godly counseling, pray. Plan your follow-through.
2. Are you still angry with your spouse? Be honest. Find an older (either older in years or older in years knowing Christ) godly woman to meet with regularly to pray about your anger and the issues you face in reconciling.
3. Biblical marriage takes time and work. It doesn't just happen by reading books on marriage. Take some time with your spouse to discuss this and agree on one or two things you can do together to build oneness. Suggestions: a weekly date night (children excluded), read a book on prayer together, read through the Psalms together, take ten minutes at the end of each day to process the day's events and emotions with each other.

4. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33) God has taught us the number one most important principle for a God honoring healthy marriage is that each spouse must seek God first, because only God is all-sufficient. Only He can meet each of our needs, including those that are emotional and spiritual. No human being can meet all of another person's needs. God did not create us to do that. He created us with a need for Him first and that's why He tells us to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." What are you expecting from your spouse that you need to seek God for?

5. Choose two or three other verses (see appendix 1) and cling to these promises when times are difficult. Are you believing God can bring healing in your relationship?

CHAPTER 10 OVERCOMING EXPECTATIONS

My expectations surfaced again and I was anxious I wouldn't get what I wanted. This chapter looks at some useful tools to overcome expectations that will enhance your walk with the Lord and your marriage.

1. Reading the Word daily revives our souls and brings joy to our hearts and helps us overcome expectations. Will you commit to this practice? Do this with your spouse or a friend for accountability.
2. Choosing to study the Bible with a group is a great way to grow in your walk with Jesus and strengthen your marriage. Will you find a group that works with your schedule: i.e., young mom's daytime, with child care, or an evening study after work, or a couples study on the weekend or in the evening?
3. This chapter encourages you to seek God, bathe yourself in His Word, hold fast to His promises, and pray according to His will. Which of these are you already doing because it comes naturally to you? Which challenges you? Will you begin to work on that one? Share this with your group or your spouse.

4. How do you counsel your heart? With Scripture and the truth or with negative thoughts and complaining? Choose two or three verses of your own or use the ones in this chapter; put them on 3x5 file cards, carry them with you, and counsel your heart and your mind with these truths.

5. In this chapter, it says, “Praying God’s Word for our spouses is the most powerful tool we have and the greatest privilege.” Will you take time today and begin to do this daily? Share with your group and your journal the results of practicing this habit as you begin to see God answer prayer and change your heart. Be specific!

CHAPTER 11

THE MARRIAGE BATTLE

This chapter discusses the very real spiritual battle we are in for our marriages and some of the tools to overcome our enemy, the devil, with the Word of God and prayer.

1. If you are married and a believer in Jesus Christ, there is a battle being fought by our enemy, the devil, Satan, to destroy your marriage. Discuss with your group your thoughts on this topic, and share the weapons and tools you use to fight back.

2. First Chronicles 5:20 says: “They were helped in fighting them . . . because they cried out to Him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in Him.”

Do you spend time each day crying out to God in prayer for your marriage? Share with your group or in your journal some of the verses you pray. Is there a format you use to pray? One model is ACTS: Adoration (praising God), Confession (confessing your sins to God), Thanksgiving (thanking Him for everything), and Supplication (asking God your requests). What are some other ways to pray for your marriage?

3. See appendix 1 and read and pray these verses for your marriage. Discuss them with your spouse. Memorize the ones that most challenge you.

CHAPTER 12

A PRAYER IS ANSWERED

This chapter tells of an answered prayer that moved the Rose family to Florida.

1. In Chapter 12, it says: “I have seen God do ‘immeasurably more’ in my life.” These words refer to Ephesians 3:20:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Discuss this verse with your spouse. Journal this verse and ask yourself: do I live and pray in a way that demonstrates I believe this verse?

2. Vicki’s father-in-law prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior at age 100. Make a list of people in your life who need to know Jesus and pray for them at least once a week. And don’t give up!
3. Prayer is mentioned frequently because we are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray continually: Do you pray about everything? I encourage you to pray about anything and everything! And to keep a journal of your prayers so that you can record how and when God answers!

CHAPTER 13

THE PAINS OF CHANGE

Change is rarely easy. As this chapter looks at sibling difficulties exacerbated by a long distance move, counseling, prayer, and fasting are all discussed.

1. Before making any major changes, are you seeking God to make sure this is His “call” for you? And then, when hard times arise, will you go back to the “call” and rest in knowing this is where God led? Share with your group, or journal your thoughts.

2. If you have children, are you experiencing difficult times with them? Will you seek the Lord through fasting and prayer for His intervention, wisdom, and direction? And will you seek godly counsel, from a counselor, a pastor, or an older godly couple?

CHAPTER 14

A YEAR OF JUBILEE

A year of Jubilee and taking our youngest to college collide to help Vicki learn that significance comes from God alone.

1. One of the benefits of a daily quiet time with God is that you know what you are going to do the first part of every day. Is this how you begin your day so that you can receive your marching orders from God instead of from your to-do list? Do you have a daily quiet time? If not, it's never too late to begin this practice. Start with fifteen minutes, ask God to give you a hunger for Himself and His Word, then journal the results after one week, one month, six months, and a year. Share these results with your spouse, your accountability friend, or your small group.
2. From where, or who, or what do you find your significance? Is it from your job? Your home? Your looks? Your husband's job? Your children? Your clothes? Or do you find your significance in the Lord who created you (Psalm 139:13) and gave you specific gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12), and a purpose (Phil. 2:13)? Please spend time praying and asking God to show you if there is any area of sin that needs repentance.
3. Contentment comes from a heart in agreement with God. Discuss areas of your life where you are and are not in agreement with God over your circumstances. Be sure to journal these thoughts.

CHAPTER 15 IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

As the Roses faced Billy's chronic illnesses, they discovered a deep trust, peace, and comfort resulting from their many years of marriage.

1. Perhaps you too are facing the chronic illness of a spouse. This is definitely challenging. Do you, the healthy spouse, have a prayer/accountability partner with whom you can share your burdens? Are you journaling your thoughts and applying Scripture to each of your challenges?
2. What's in your heart (Jer. 17:9)? Do you like what you are discovering and if not, are you ready to ask God to change it?
3. Have you ever found yourself in the place of divine discipline? (See Hebrews 12:5–13.) Are you praying for God to reveal to you what He wants you to learn through this process? Share with your group your thoughts, fears, and needs. Journal these thoughts as you are able.
4. We have the option to view suffering as an opportunity to grow in Him. Share with your spouse or your group if you are able to agree with this view and what God is teaching you through your suffering.

CHAPTER 16

AN ISSUE OF RESPECT

Respect and submission in marriage are further discussed in this chapter: “When I respect my husband, I am also showing respect for my Lord.”

1. Respecting your husband is a choice. Are you making that choice to build up your marriage? If respecting your husband seems impossible, read *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerich, either by yourself, or together with your mate.
2. Respect is an act of the will. If you want to make this choice, but don't know how to begin, go to www.ReviveOurHearts.com and take the “Husband 30 Day Encouragement Trial.”
3. God commands wives to respect their husbands (Eph. 5:33). Memorize Ephesians 4:29, asking God to enable you to obey this verse.

CHAPTER 17

MARRIAGE GOD'S WAY

This chapter discusses five principles for a godly marriage. Seeking God first, reading the Word daily, prayer, submission, and forgiveness all contribute to marriage God's way.

1. Share with your group or your spouse your thoughts on marriage God's way. Which of the five principles most challenges you? Which one comes most naturally?
2. In what ways this week have you used the Bible as your "how-to" manual for your life and your marriage?
3. Take time this week to make your own list of verses to pray for your marriage and then pray one verse each day.
4. Regarding headship in marriage being assigned to the husband, Vicki states in the book: "God is the author of marriage and He gets to determine what marriage looks like." Talk this over with your spouse and look up verses on marriage so that you both understand and agree that your husband is the God-appointed head of your marriage. (See Gen. 2:15, 18; 3:16b; Eph. 5:22)

5. When you struggle to forgive your spouse, remember that you have already been forgiven everything. Ask God to make you willing to forgive, and then to help you to forgive. Do you take captive your thoughts (2 Cor. 10:3–5), and not allow yourself to rehash the offense? And, are you willing to ask God for forgiveness for your own unforgiveness? (1 Jn.1:9)

CHAPTER 18

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

A godly, Christ-centered marriage does not happen overnight. Each person needs time to mature in his or her faith individually.

1. Have both you and your spouse committed to your marriage until death? Please take time to share with each other your thoughts, and then please make this commitment!

2. Jesus tells us He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28). This is the attitude we each must have in our marriage. How are you serving your spouse? How could you be more of a servant? Journal your thoughts.

3. Marriage is hard work. What are some of the choices you are making daily to build your marriage? Share these with your group.

AFTERWORD

God's purpose in blessing one is to bless many. As with Vicki and Billy's story, believe that God wants to bless your marriage as well.

1. God is the One who restores marriages. Do you believe He can restore yours? If you struggle to believe that He can restore yours, will you ask Him for faith and courage?

2. Will you dare to believe God strengthens those whose hearts are fully committed to Him (2 Chron. 16:9) and then give Him the time to work in your marriage?