

DAVE HARVEY

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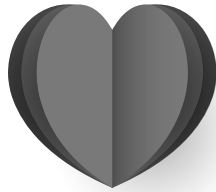


Growing Closer and Stronger
through Life's Defining Moments

STUDY GUIDE

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*Growing Closer and Stronger
through Life's Defining Moments*

DAVE HARVEY



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Harvey, David T. (David Thomas), 1960– author. | Harvey, David T. (David Thomas), 1960– I still do.

Title: I still do study guide : growing closer and stronger through life’s defining moments / Dave Harvey.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019035661 | ISBN 9780801094446 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Harvey, David T. (David Thomas), 1960– I still do. | Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity—Textbooks.

Classification: LCC BV835 .H36853 2020 | DDC 248.8/44—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019035661>

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Portions of this text have been taken from *I Still Do*, published by Baker Books, 2020.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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STARTING T♥GETHER

Your Journey through Defining Moments

When Kimm and I were first married, I remember being baffled by the ways I behaved and the conflicts we experienced. I remember thinking, “What’s happening here? Am I possessed? Or wait . . . is *she* possessed? Oh Lord, is our marriage cursed?”

Over time we discovered that saying “I do” is a defining experience.

I Still Do, p. 16

Kimm and I didn’t have much preparation for marriage. In the old days, when men sported pocket handkerchiefs and women rode sidesaddle, marriage preparation seemed to be condensed into one awkward conversation with a parent before your wedding night. Nowadays, such classified information is available instantly on the web. So conversations that were once pre-wedding have been moved up, essentially, to pre-school.

As for pre-marriage training, now the awkward conversations often take place through the tag-team efforts of parents, pastors, physicians, and other counselors. Sometimes the preparation is pretty thorough. At other times it’s more like a sparkler—lit just

long enough for an engaged couple to note the sparkle and sizzle before it quickly sputters out. Kimm and I had premarital counseling of this variety. And honestly, I think we missed the sparkler part.

Our premarital care consisted of one session before our wedding, and that one session was focused almost exclusively upon sex. There was no discussion of the delights or complications of sex. We were simply told that we needed to talk about it. Then our well-meaning counselor handed us a crate of cassette tapes containing messages about sex in marriage and urged us to listen. With the best intentions we could muster in the frenzy of our wedding arrangements, we promptly pitched the cassettes into the boot of our car. We figured if we had any problems with sex, we'd pop the trunk. One day, nine months later, the counselor asked for his cassettes back. No problem! They were right where we left them—sitting next to the spare tire, unopened and unused.

It's unsettling to think how unprepared we were as we began marriage. The number of surprises we've encountered along the way should come as no surprise. Getting married is a defining experience. It certainly opens our eyes to things we cannot see until after we utter "I do." For one thing, marriage exposes our sin. It shows us our need for God to become man and spill his blood as our only remedy. But marriage helps us to see so much more than our sin. As Kimm and I have stacked up more and more anniversaries, we've begun to see other influences on our marriage—factors to which we were blind and matters for which we were woefully unprepared.

I'm not mentioning this to lament the past. My goal is more forward-looking and strategic. Over the years, Kimm and I have had some marriage-defining moments where we just didn't know what to do. Those experiences have often determined our progress and sometimes, quite honestly, have marked points where we've plateaued. We learned that falling in love is easy; remaining in

love is something entirely different. Kimm and I have often looked back and thought, *Gee, it would have been really nice to know that sooner!*

This study guide, in conjunction with the book *I Still Do*, is intended to help you identify some of the blind spots in your marriage relationship. My goal is to talk with you about some of the defining moments—the life-defining experiences, events, and decisions—that God uses to open our eyes. God presents these sorts of moments as invitations in the life of every couple. They become the doorways to new insights or trailheads that redirect our paths. How we respond to these moments in marriage determines whether we stumble along blindly or move forward toward maturity.

Reading

Chapter 1 of *I Still Do*

Genesis 2:18–25

Ephesians 1:15–23

Reflection Questions

Here is a selection of reflection questions and activities designed to fire your affections and get you thinking deeply about the truths presented in this chapter. Grab your Bible and a pen. Write out your answers and reflections and then share them with your spouse.

1. Defining moments are experiences or seasons in life when God . . .
 - presents a decision for truth
 - requires a cost
 - offers a Christ-exalting opportunity

- grows the soul
- determines our destination

List out one moment for each of these descriptive phrases. For example, having a child that is born with a disability may be a moment that grows the soul. Moments like these often fit more than one category, but try to list five different defining moments if you can. Now think back through that list of defining moments from your life. What has God taught you through those moments?

2. In the section “She Married a Harvey,” I wrote about how my childhood home was a powerful shaping influence upon the way I process emotions. Often when we encounter weaknesses or personality differences in marriage, we instantly moralize them. But there are profound factors in our marriage that can’t be so easily traced back to sinful desires.

What weaknesses or limitations do you have that have been shaped by your upbringing or life experiences?

3. John Calvin wrote, “Marriage is not a thing ordained by men. We know that God is the author of it, and that it is solemnized in his name. The Scripture says that it is a holy covenant, and therefore calls it divine.”¹ Not only is marriage ordained by God, but all the defining moments throughout marriage are God-things as well.

Take some time to thank God for your marriage and for each of the defining moments you journaled about in question 1 above. We all have trouble understanding why God ordains some of the defining moments in our lives. He may not reveal his reasons to us in this life. However, pray that God would use these moments to grow your soul and help you to exalt Christ.

Prayer Based on Ephesians 1:18

Lord Jesus, enlighten my heart that I might see the hope you offer to those whom you have called. Open my eyes and help me to see the blind spots in my marriage—those things I’m currently unaware of. Use the time I’m devoting to this study to grant me hope in you and power for a durable marriage. Amen.

Group Discussion

Small groups reading *I Still Do* together can work through each of the reflection questions above. In addition, I’ll provide a group discussion question or activity at the end of each chapter.

1. Quoted in John Witte Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 484.

Starting Together

Think back through the list of defining moments you journaled about in preparation for our group discussion. As you encountered each of these moments, what blind spots did the Holy Spirit expose at each juncture? Share your reflections about how your eyes were opened to your own sin or weakness.