

I Do Again *Daily Guidebook*

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How to Use This Book

Welcome to the *I Do Again Daily Guidebook*.

We hope you enjoy digging deeper into the questions raised and insights gained from our journey. We wrote our book and this guide specifically to help you in your own marriage, and it's our joy to see God redeem and transform couples as they begin to understand the truth of love.

To do this guide, all you need is a journal, a pen, and some regular time to read and ponder the sessions. But there are also many ways to apply it.

Do I have to read the book first?

While it isn't necessary to have read the book to put this guide to use, you'll get the most out of it if you start by reading our story and using it as a launch pad for exploration and discussion.

Do I have to use this with my spouse?

No. It isn't essential to involve your spouse, but you may want to have a partner—a mentor or trusted friend—to help you growth through the material. A big part of anyone's growth is the willingness to do the harder thing and accept help.

Do I have to take 8 weeks?

There is no perfect pace to go through the material. We've designed it to be used over the course of 8 weeks, but you may find some sections more applicable than others. Feel free to skip around if you like, but take the time you need and don't rush.

Can I use this in a book or discussion group?

Absolutely. In fact, we recommend it. Even if you're only intending to use the guide as a personal study, you'll get more out of the questions and exercises if you take the time to share with a group over the course of 2 months. Set up a group yourself or with a friend and invite people. A group of 2 or 3 couples would be ideal, but separate groups for husbands and wives would work as well. Have everyone bring their own journal to the group and share as they feel led.

Where can I get more help like this?

We run a small Christian counseling center called Hope Matters Ministry in Plano, Texas and we'd love to hear from you! Our website and book have several resources for you to check out as well. Get support from those around you, stay encouraged and remember that no struggle is too big for God when you're submitted to his will! He can do it!

Week 1
Dreams & Expectations

“Prior to marrying Jeff, I’d never given much thought to what kind of husband he would be (he is amazing), or what his character was like (he is awesome), or what his thoughts on God were (he had plenty). He never gave much thought to any of this about me either. So there were entire levels of ourselves on which we hadn’t connected....What more did I want? What did I expect out of life anyway?”

pages 16, 23

Dreams & Expectations

Where you start in marriage largely determines where you'll end up. How can we expect marriage to fulfill our dreams and expectations if they aren't articulated or well defined? The process of investigating and sharing our deepest desires for marriage is on-going. But we can make significant progress and possibly avoid conflict if we spend some time thinking about what we hope(d) for most at the start.

1. Why do you think Jeff and Cheryl didn't talk about their expectations earlier in their marriage?
2. Is there a place for secrets in marriage? Why or why not?
3. Cheryl and Jeff thought they knew each other well. But as time passed, they realized they didn't know each other that well. Why do you think that was?
4. What could they have done to know each other better?
5. What have you done or seen others do to get to know each other well and stay connected?

Digging Deeper

"You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain." –Psalm 139:1-6

1. How well do you know yourself? How well do you want your spouse to know you? How well do you want to know your spouse?
2. When you think of the intimacy marriage requires, what do you feel—excitement, anxiety, fatigue, fear? What are your worst-case and best-case scenarios for how your spouse might respond to your deepest self? What do your spouse's scenarios look like?
3. Do you prefer more transparency or more mystery in your marriage? What about your spouse? What reasons can you give each other for why you feel the way you do?

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." –1 Corinthians 13:4-7

4. This passage could be seen as God's dream for you—to experience this kind of love. Do you share this dream? Have you ever experienced such love?

Reflect

For this first week, go on a mental exploration together to think about the dream you had of what marriage would be like when you were a child, teenager, or even as an adult. What expectations did you have? How have those changed since you were married? What specific ways could you make your near future relationship better match your previous idea? Would that involve more connection, time together, connecting with family or shared friends, mutual pursuits, deeper discussions? When you assess your marriage a year from now, what might you hope to understand better about your spouse today?

Journal

Write a letter *from* God to your marriage about how he sees you and your spouse together? What are his hopes and dreams? What does he expect of you, based on who you are separately, and what you might create together? Strive to become more aware of the scope and size of his vision for your union as you join him in his dreams for you.

What do you think is most important to him for you to *learn* together? How do you think he might want to teach you those things?

Apply

Write down any ideas you get for acting on God's dream for you this week, month, and year.

God's dream for your marriage is ever-unfolding, so it's essential to consistently evaluate how much of it you're currently seeing. Have you made it a goal to carve out specific time to dream with your partner? What can you do to develop that practice more?

*God, you have big dreams,
far bigger than ours,
about how you want our marriage to speak to others.
Help us to be mindful of the specific ways
you are working in us already to demonstrate your love
and let us feel your excitement
at seeing the dream come true.*

In Jesus' Name, Amen

Week 2
Living in Love

“I woke each day to the expectation that today would be the day Jeff and I deeply connected. I patiently waited for it to happen but found myself falling into bed each night to hide my face in my pillow...The awful part was getting my hopes up each day that ‘today would be different,’ that he would walk through the door, drop his briefcase, pull me to him, give me a passionate kiss, and say, ‘Hi, baby, I missed you today.’ It just never happened.”

pages 24, 27

Living In Love

In the early days when you were first married, did you think you'd have a perfect love automatically? Why do you think this is such a widespread misconception? Experience tells us it's harder than we think. As we grow in love, eventually, we realize our initial ideas about love and marriage must be replaced with biblical truth.

This week, we're going to take the opportunity to connect and discuss our misconceptions.

1. Connecting is nothing more than meeting your spouse where he or she is. Would you say you have taken the opportunity of your spouse's misconceptions to connect with him or her?
2. What misconceptions do you think you or your spouse still might have about marriage? How are you working together to overcome those?
3. How good are you at remaining open to new information or experience that might expand your understanding? How has your spouse helped you, and vice versa?

Digging Deeper

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." –1 Corinthians 13:11

What "childish ways" have you put behind you in your relationship? Ask God to show you other ways of childhood that may still remain in you.

In John 8 verse 32, Jesus tells the Pharisees, "the truth will make you free." Conversely, misconceptions lead to bondage. Are there places in your marriage where misconceptions have produced bondage? Ask God to reveal these as well and remain open to his leading in your time with Him and with others.

Reflect

This week, explore your ideas about how you connect with your spouse using the questions below. You can ask the questions of one another whether you're in a group or meeting one-on-one with a friend. If possible, choose some suitable times for discussion with your spouse, maybe even 2 or 3 times during the week.

What areas of disagreement or difference do you have in connecting with each other? For instance, do you both need the same amount of time alone to process thoughts and emotions, or are you both verbal processors? How well do both of you express affection? Do you know your love languages (See *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman)? Do you see your spouse as a partner or are you typically trying to get him or her to see your side of things? How much selfless compassion would you say exists between you? Have you explored early experiences together and understood your love styles (See *How We Love*, by Milan and Kay Yerkovich)?

Your partner's ideas about communication, conflict resolution, parenting, spirituality, roles, sex, physical affection, finances, and myriad other things were determined long before you came on the scene. But most couples never deeply explore these concepts intentionally. You might start by thinking about how some of your concepts of these areas have changed since you were younger or since you were first married.

What specific ways could you make your future relationship better match your previous idea? Would that involve more connection, time together, connecting with family or shared friends, mutual pursuits, deeper discussions? When you assess your marriage a year from now, what might you hope to understand better about your spouse today?

Journal

As your discussion unfolds over the week, talk to God through your journal about ways your spouse is helping to reform your thinking about marriage. Thank Him for that and ask Him to guide your discussions in the future toward greater compassion for one another. Commit to nurturing His dreams for you which you wrote about last week, even as you continue to nurture your spouse's. As you do, your own hopes and dreams will begin to manifest and become real as well.

Apply

A great advantage of marriage is there are always more opportunities to connect in new ways. There will undoubtedly be more to share, discuss, and discover together over the coming weeks. We'll talk more about *how* exactly you pursue that in Week 4 on communication. But for now, commit together to remaining open to opportunities to meet your spouse where he or she is, and to establish and protect those times.

And if you struggle like most people to find time and opportunities to really connect, don't worry. Keep at it! And get creative! Eventually, you'll find the right balance of meaningful time that works best for you.

For divorcees or those considering divorce, we recommend you find a trusted friend to talk about these things with, maybe a counselor or pastor. Discovering what views you and your partner have in these areas is an essential element of future reconciliation.

*Keep us seeking, Lord,
when we need understanding.
Come and show us how you love
simply by listening,
giving us your full attention,
and being patient with us as we grow.
Help us to do the same for each other,
even when it's hard.
Show us how to live in fuller truth with each other.*

In Jesus' Name.