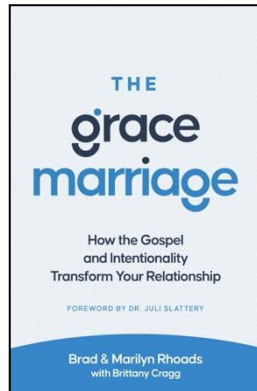


The Grace Marriage: How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship

by Brad & Marilyn Rhoads



Chicago, IL: Most spouses have a reactive approach to marriage and don't think about the condition of their marriage until they encounter turmoil or irreparable damage. Busy schedules, personal differences, unresolved conflicts, and external pressures can slowly unravel a marriage or create a complacent coexistence. To ensure a thriving, blessed marriage, couples need to build their relationship on the grace Jesus exemplified in His pursuit and sacrifice for the Church.

BRAD and MARILYN RHOADS wed after a brief courtship but were quickly confronted with intense marital challenges. As they began to prioritize each other with grace and intentional investment, God transformed their marriage from complacent to intentional...from reactive to proactive...from performance to grace.

In their book, ***THE GRACE MARRIAGE: HOW THE GOSPEL AND INTENTIONALITY TRANSFORM YOUR RELATIONSHIP*** (Moody Publishers), the Rhoads share biblical guidance, personal stories, and strategies to lead couples in transforming their hearts and relationships in a fulfilling godly marriage. Topics explored include:

- **Performance-Based Marriages:** Love is conditionally given or withheld by one spouse based on the other spouse's behavior. This is not the Gospel message and puts the marriage on a faulty foundation of condition. The spouses eventually grow apart and learn to tolerate each other instead of enjoying and appreciating one another.
- **Grace-Based Marriages:** Love (kindness, gifts, affection, service) is given freely by applying the same love and grace that God offers us. Their hope is in the perfection and grace of Christ, not the other person's behavior. They respond to conflict with kindness and resolve not punishment or detachment. Their priority is to pursue their spouse with kindness which leads to reconciliation.
- **Grace and Intentionality:** A vibrant marriage results from an intentional pursuit and investment in the marriage. We demonstrate our love through knowledge and action. When we actively listen to our spouse and retain meaningful information, we can express a deeper love because we understand our spouse better.
- **Grace in Crisis:** No one in crisis is their best self, but showing grace extends a lifeline to our marriage and our spouse's soul. We should pursue and serve our spouse as God does for us, not isolate from them. When we share our pain, tears, and thoughts, we find comfort knowing we are not alone and are able to better support each other.
- **Grace and Criticism:** The ability to receive criticism with humility rather than become defensive, which can lead to conflict and division, reflects spiritual maturity. We must listen to our spouse, learn from our mistakes, work on our shortcomings, and accept that we are not perfect. However, it is important to limit criticism and focus on the positive whenever possible.

Other chapters explore the centrality of grace in other marital aspects, such as identity, day-to-day life, communication, sex, money, and more. The authors remind us that grace does not involve tolerating abuse, addiction, or infidelity, and those circumstances require professional counseling and guidance.

Together, the Rhoads founded Grace Marriage Ministry to help couples and churches adopt a proactive approach to grow healthy and lasting marriages instead of reacting to crisis. The longing is for a complete change of how couples and churches do marriage in our society, homes, and churches.

In a culture where marital problems are often ignored, we can choose a grace marriage that embodies the vibrancy, creativity, and oneness that God intends for us. When we do so, we are reminded of the same grace Christ showed us, liberating us to walk in freedom, fulfillment, and the fullness of joy.

About the Authors



BRAD & MARILYN RHOADS founded the ministry of Grace Marriage in 2015 to help churches and couples prioritize marriage.

Before pursuing marriage ministry full-time, Brad practiced law for 22 years and witnessed first-hand the breakdown of the family. He serves as marriage pastor at their local church, where he noted a widespread absence of an intentional and ongoing approach to keep couples on a trajectory of growth. Marriage shepherding and discipleship were largely absent.

Marilyn holds a Masters in social work and worked at Counseling Associates before choosing to stay home with their children. Marilyn and Brad have been married 27 years and have 5 children.

The Rhoads continue to lead Grace Marriage, write curriculum together, speak at conferences, and work with couples.

To learn more about the Rhoads and the ministry of Grace Marriage, visit www.gracemarriage.com or find them on Facebook @gracemarriage and on Instagram and Twitter @grace_marriage.

SUGGESTED AUTHOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Share with us about your book, *The Grace Marriage*. What led you to write this book? How do you feel it differs from other marriage books?
2. How would you contrast a performance-based and a grace-based marriage? Explain what intentionality in a marriage looks like?
3. If a couple feels stuck, what would your advice be to help them get on a path of growth?
4. As a Christian, our identity is in Christ. What does it look like to exemplify a God-given identity that reflects in our marriages and our homes?
5. You share about your amazing courtship and engagement but then things shifted to a very different picture of your first year of marriage. Tell us a little about that?
6. Busy schedules, pressures of life and personal preferences can all create major discord for couples. What are practical ways to alleviate these stressors in order to help the marriage?
7. What does grace look like in a marriage if one spouse is not a Christian or a following a different faith?
8. How can grace free up couples to communicate more openly? How can learning to give and receive criticism grow a marriage in grace?
9. It is very important for couples to understand what grace *is NOT*, right? Some spouses deal with abuse, addiction, infidelity or manipulative or controlling behavior. Tell us what grace is NOT.
10. How can building marriage on the foundation of grace impact physical intimacy in marriage?
11. Financial perspective can create issues in a marriage. What is your advice on understanding and discussing money and finances?
12. Changing the *perception* of marriage starts with changing the *reality* of what Christian couples experience in marriage. How can the local church help couples experience this reality?
13. Where can we find more information about your ministry to help churches disciple couples and your ministry to individual couples? (gracemarriage.com)

Notable Quotes from *The Grace Marriage*:

Let love cover a multitude of sins.⁷ Move toward your spouse, praying to God in the moment for direction on how to love them well. Choose to put Jesus on display. Recognize your awesome privilege as your spouse's life partner to help in their sanctification. Point them to God as you love them unconditionally. And give yourself grace. Remember that your struggle is not against your spouse. You are contending against the dark powers and principalities that seek to destroy you, your spouse, and your marriage for the way it reflects Christ's love for His church.⁸ Loving this way is countercultural, and probably country. It's not natural. (p. 50)

Dating your spouse will feel much the same. Sometimes your dates will be great, other times not so great. On some dates, you'll bicker and feel like it was a waste of time, but that is so far from the truth. If you faithfully date your spouse, you will see your relationship grow. Dating is a long-haul investment. Because quantity time makes for quality time. The more you make time for connection with your spouse, the more opportunities you create for those deeply meaningful conversations that leave you both feeling heard, loved, and excited for a future together. (p. 68)

The purpose of intentionality is so much bigger than merely striving to have a good marriage. We offer each other grace and actively seek to love each other well in order to put Jesus on display to the world. He loves radically, so we do too. He gives His life for His bride; we die to ourselves for the good of our spouse. We are pursuing and investing and dating to bring glory to God. Our marriages should bear witness to His joy, love, and grace. And it is God's grace that empowers us to love, pursue, and invest as we ought. We don't do this in our own strength. Freely receive God's grace toward you. Meditate on His pursuit of you, His choosing you, His giving His very life to be with you. The more you receive from God, the more you will have to give to your spouse. (p. 72)

God appointed you to be your spouse's life partner. When you think of kingdom work, you should think first of this man or this woman, the most important relationship God gave you to steward. Encourage and affirm your husband or wife when you start to hear their negative self-talk. Be your spouse's chief helper against the onslaught of the world and the evil one. When your spouse struggles in sin or makes mistakes, don't join with the accuser, who is always seeking to destroy. Let the words you say be God's words, rather than parroting the disparaging words of the devil. Affirm instead of condemning. Pursue instead of withdrawing. Choose grace and truth. Step into your God-given role in your spouse's life and call forth their true identity. This may be some of the most important ministry you ever do. (p. 86)

Many days we feel we're doing all we can, and it still isn't enough. It's no wonder, then, that when our spouse adds to the pile of pressure we're under with their moodiness or nagging, we often don't respond like we'd like to. We snap outwardly with a hostile response, or buckle inwardly, withdrawing into ourselves. In bad cases, spouses are driven apart by the slow accumulation of discontent. When we choose to help each other and prioritize our marriage over other demands, we'll find that the daily onslaught of stuff to be done doesn't need to sap the life from our marriages. Instead, it can be the catalyst for growing stronger and having more fun than ever. (p. 111)

Grace in crisis is not just a gift to your spouse, or a cherry on top. Grace in crisis is a lifeline, for your marriage and for your spouse's very soul. No one in crisis is their best self; most of us are not even ourselves at all. What a gift of grace, then, is a spouse who comes alongside to help us carry our burden rather than adding to it. What a beautiful embodiment of Ecclesiastes 4:9–10: "Two are better than one, for when one falls, the other can lift them up" (paraphrased). God has given us to each other because we need each other. This is why it's so important—at all times, but especially in times of crisis—for us to choose a rescue mentality instead of taking offense. Choose to help and pursue. Don't pull away. Dig in and choose your spouse over yourself. This mindset will strengthen your marriage in any season, but in times of crisis, your pursuit may be the thing that keeps your spouse and your marriage afloat. (p. 123)

A lot of spouses and even many churches seem to be permanently set on reactive mode; marriages only get attention when there's a problem. Marriage can be so much more than a utilitarian partnership or a stable arrangement in which we do a nice job of tolerating each other. If God designed marriage as a witness to the love between Christ and the church, then it should be a union of astounding, magnetic, sacrificial love. In fact, apart from your union with Christ, marriage should be the relationship that you pursue most passionately—to grow in serving, blessing, knowing, loving, and in true intimacy. Grace is the message of the gospel. It is by and through God's grace we are saved. It is by and through God's grace that we extend grace to one another. (p. 201)