



Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together

Mark Driscoll , Grace Driscoll

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Most marriage books assume the author did it right. Most marriage books barely mention friendship. Most marriage books use "intimacy" as code for "sex." This is not one of those books.

In Real Marriage, Pastor Mark Driscoll and his wife, Grace, share how they have struggled and how they have found healing through the power of the only reliable source: the Bible. They believe friendship is fundamental to marriage but not easy to maintain. So they offer practical advice on how to make your spouse your best friend - and keep it that way. And they know from experience that sex-related issues need to be addressed directly.

Five chapters are dedicated to answering questions like:

Should I confess my pre-marital sexual sin to my spouse? Is it okay to have a "work spouse"? What does the Bible say about masturbation and oral sex?

Stunningly honest and vulnerable, Real Marriage is like a personal counseling session with a couple you cannot surprise, you cannot shock into silence, who will respond to every question with wisdom, humility, and realism.

If you want to have a long-lasting, fulfilling marriage you should read this book. Wrestle with this book. Pray over this book. Share this book. And discover how God this book. Share this book. And discover how God can use it to change your life.

Endorsements:

"If you're married or plan to be someday, do yourself a favor and read every page of this book." -DRS. LES & LESLIE PARROTT authors of Love Talk

"Whether engaged, newlywed, or veteran, Real Marriage will serve as an invaluable resource. I highly recommend this book." -ANDY STANLEY author of The Grace of God and Senior Pastor, North Point Community Church

"One of my greatest concerns is that culture is going to continually define and redefine what marriage is and is not, and the church is going to simply sit on the sidelines and react rather than seeking to actually become proactive by confidently teaching what the Bible has to say about it. That is why I am so thankful that Mark and Grace Driscoll wrote this book. Their approach to marriage, its benefits and challenges are transparent and challenging and I honestly believe that every married couple who will work through what they lead us through in this book will not just merely have a marriage that survives in this world but rather thrives in it." - PERRY NOBLE Senior Pastor, NewSpring Church

"Our thanks to Mark and Grace Driscoll who have served this generation well by tastefully but boldly addressing the real issues facing real marriages. Taking the unchanging truth of God's word and sprinkling in is the story of God's mercy in their own marriage they have filled every chapter with real helpfulness. This

book is powerful, biblical, practical and healing for marriages that hurt. My wife and our adult children read it to great profit." - DR. JAMES MACDONALD Senior Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel and Bible teacher for Walk in the Word

Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together Details

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From Reader Review Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together for online ebook

James Lynch says

Some sections of this book were 5 stars ++, others were hardly 3. The friendship section was top-notch. The "what can we do in the bed" section, not so much. Driscoll fails to incorporate solid hermeneutics and a balanced understanding of Christian history and theology in a number of spots when writing on sex. Nonetheless, sections of the book have immense value and it would be a big mistake to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

J.R. Forasteros says

If Love Wins was the most controversial book last year, Real Marriage by Mark and Grace Driscoll is set to win the award this year. Mark Driscoll has long been in the public eye as a confrontational, no-holds barred pastor who likes to shout. Theologically, he's part of the New Calvinist movement and a staunch Complementarian when it comes to gender roles. It's this stance that's drawn him the most attention, from his popular, candid and sexy Song of Solomon tour to blaming Ted Haggard's public fall on his wife (because she "let herself go"), from claiming that stay-at-home dads in his church would be subjected to Church discipline to praising Jesus as a blood-thirsty, sword-wielding UFC fighter.

So when, in the wake of yet another controversy over gender, Driscoll announced that he and his wife would be writing a book on marriage, the Evangelical world was intrigued to say the least. So how is the book? Well, unsurprisingly, there aren't really any surprises. But in the preface, Driscoll makes a plea to us:

Don't read as a critic trying to find where you think we might be wrong. Although we seek to be faithful to the Bible, this book is not the Bible, and, like you, we are imperfect, so there will be mistakes. Take whatever gifts you find in this book, and feel free to leave the rest.

I suppose that's a fair request, and while it's not in line with the persona Driscoll is famous for, we can (and should) extend him this grace. And, all in all, it's a really good suggestion.

Real Marriage isn't all bad, however much Driscoll's critics wish it was. But there's plenty to be leery of. Early in the book, Driscoll comments:

For such a big issue, most teaching on sex inside the church is inadequate, and most teaching on it outside the church is perverted. Fortunately, God has a lot to say to us on the topic of sex and marriage.

This statement reveals major strengths and weaknesses of Real Marriage.

One thing the Driscolls do well is drag the issue of sex out into the harsh light of discussion. Much like the questions Bell raised in Love Wins, the topics Real Marriage addresses are being asked in our culture and in the Church (albeit behind closed doors). But most pastors won't touch them with a 10-foot pole. Like it or not, Real Marriage is going to remove the option to pretend sex isn't an issue.

The Driscolls are also very open and transparent. They deserve to be commended for this.

Both Mark and Grace share openly and honestly about their own stories and the struggles and victories in their marriage. They do not come off as people who've done everything right, or as people who have all the answers. And while we could (and should, as my new friend Dianna does here) critique the tone of their story-telling, the fact is they are very forthcoming in *Real Marriage*. And that takes a lot of courage.

But for all the good in *Real Marriage*, there is plenty of bad.

Mark and Grace speak for God a lot in *Real Marriage*. Their theology is readily apparent throughout the book, and what's presented isn't open for discussion. It's all take-it-or-leave-it. And it's all done with the characteristic New Calvinist disregard for interpreter's context.

Like many of his peers, Driscoll's handling of biblical texts suggest that he doesn't take into account his own cultural biases.

For instance, Driscoll includes a mini-commentary on a passage from Titus:

The Bible plainly says, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Now, since this is so "plain" to Driscoll, he goes on to blast men who do not work outside the home. He does make an allowance - sort of - for working moms:

Admittedly, a wife working before kids are born, or who finds a way to make money from home without neglecting her first God-given responsibilities of Christian, wife, and mother is acceptable. But men, you should make money. You should feed your family.

Driscoll's interpretation of this passage has been dismantled thoroughly elsewhere, but note that Driscoll's model of family assumes that "family" means the "Post-Industrial Revolution White Middle-class Nuclear" family. But such a family structure is totally foreign to the Biblical world. In fact, the type of marriage the Driscolls describe in *Real Marriage* isn't based on a single biblical couple. (To be fair, they do lean heavily on Song of Solomon. But assuming the author is Solomon as they do is problematic, since according to the Scriptures, he had over 300 wives, which makes him sort of a polygamist.)

Marriage for the Driscolls seems to be a reinvigorated idealization of the Leave it to Beaver family. And this family is every person's created intention. The Driscolls assume full personhood is found in marriage and childrearing. Anything else is sin. There's no picture of Biblical singlehood. Little discussion of how married and single person integrate into one larger whole in the Church.

What's problematic for me is that none of these commands the Driscolls offer us from the Bible are actually followed by Jesus or Paul.

Both men would, according to Driscoll's own criteria, belong in the "boys who shave" category. When your theology of personhood excludes the fullest picture of human personhood we've been given, you should definitely at least reevaluate your stance.

The most problematic aspect of *Real Marriage* is a total lack of a strong, clear picture of healthy Christian sexuality.

Don't misunderstand me. There's plenty of talk about sex. And like everything else in the book, it's an inseparable blend of helpful and hurtful. For instance, Mark makes this statement early on in the book:

The previous church I had attended was Catholic, with a priest who seemed to be a gay alcoholic. He was the last person on earth I wanted to be like. To a young man, a life of poverty, celibacy, living at the church, and wearing a dress was more frightful than going to hell, so I stopped going to church somewhere around junior high. But this pastor was different. He had been in the military, had earned a few advanced degrees, and was smart. He was humble. He bow hunted. He had sex with his wife. He knew the Bible. He was not religious.

It's a shame that the priest Mark knew was such an uninspiring person. I've personally known priests - and other single, celibate Christians - who live full and inspiring lives. Again, we're missing a compelling vision of sexuality that includes a place of honor for celibate persons.

But it's also weird, isn't it, that the other pastor's credibility stems in part from his apparently healthy sex life? Don't get me wrong, I hope everyone's marriage has a healthy sex-life, but that's not the vibe I get from Mark's descriptions of these two guys. It's more of a machismo vibe that's disturbing. I hope that I as a pastor don't have to prove my sexual exploits to my congregation for them to take me seriously as a man and a pastor. It's

Instead of a clear picture of healthy human sexuality, Real Marriage mostly offers us unfair assumptions, over-generalizations and unhelpful stereotypes.

If you're familiar with Driscoll, nothing in Real Marriage is surprising. The hyper-masculinity is in there. The demeaning language is there. The creepy preoccupation with sex is there. The love-it-or-hate-it "The Bible has a Context but I don't " approach to the Scriptures is there (I hate it).

But so is a real passion for healthy marriages. And it's clear that the Driscolls' passion is grown in the context of ministry. It's not abstracted - in fact, a little more abstraction might do their theology well.

At the end of the day, if all Christian marriages looked like the marriages the Driscolls describe in Real Marriage... well. The Church could do a lot worse. We are doing a lot worse.

Ultimately, this book will greatly please Driscoll's fans. And just like everything else he does, people on both sides will hate it for different reasons. Personally, I think the Driscolls' approach to the Scriptures is abhorrent. But literally thousands of people disagree with me on that. So a question I can't really answer is "Is this book good?" That's not really a fair question.

A question I'm more interested in is: Is this book useful for creating healthier marriages?

So as a person who is married, has many married friends and has lived through multiple failed marriages, I answer No, it's not. Real Marriage is a far too-mixed bag of good and bad to be something I would realistically use. It's more than an issue of skipping certain chapters. It's nearly a line-by-line analysis. I found myself murmuring "Oh, that's very good!" only moments later to toss the book down in disgust at the subsequent line.

The fact is, Real Marriage isn't the only marriage book out there. Not by a long shot. It's not even the only book to discuss sex both candidly and from an Evangelical perspective (Sheet Music by Dr. Kevin Leman, for instance, does so better and more affordably). Henry Cloud is an excellent psychologist who has several helpful marriage books. Rodney Clapp's Families at the Crossroads is a better theoretical look at what marriage and family look like as we move into the future. There are much better options for those wanting to prepare for marriage, grow in their marriages or find healing in or from a broken marriage.

Bottom Line: Though it's certainly not all bad, the helpful and the harmful in Real Marriage are too thoroughly intertwined to be helpful.

YOUR TURN: Have you read Real Marriage? What did you think? What other books on marriage have you

found to be helpful?

Jeff says

One of the reasons I liked this book so much is that it talks about an aspect of marriage that is rarely discussed -- friendship. Of the 187 books on marriage that the Driscolls read in preparation of writing their own book, not one of them had one chapter or section on marital friendship. And yet, the determining factor, by 70% according to one study, of whether husbands and wives feel satisfied with the romance, passion and sex in their marriage is the quality of the couple's friendship.

Here are some other insights:

- * Happy marriages are based on a deep friendship.
 - * To work on your marriage means to work on your friendship.
 - * You can have a back-to-back marriage, where you turn your back on one another. You can have a shoulder-to-shoulder marriage where you work together on projects, raising kids, etc. Or you can have a face-to-face marriage for conversations, friendship and intimacy.
 - * The road to the heart is the ear. What kind of conversations are you having in your marriage?
 - * There are three kinds of conversations: 1. Facts. 2. Opinions. 3. Feelings. Great marriages have conversations about all three, especially Number 3. As C.S. Lewis said, "Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship naked personalities."
 - * "If my words don't flow out of a heart that rests in God's control, then they come out of a heart that seeks control."
 - * "Couples don't fall out of love so much as they fall out of repentance."
-

Justin says

For another helpful review, see Denny Burk: <http://www.dennyburk.com/my-review-of...>

Marriage books tend to not go far enough. Whether they fail to face the realities of our brokenness or really address the meaningful questions married couples have when it comes to being sexually intimate, they often fail to address the real and felt needs of their readers. Mark & Grace do a good job of addressing both of these, but in doing so they also go to far in some ways. If it was just one or two concerns, I think I could have given this four stars, but the particular reservations I have about this book, while seemingly minor, actually contribute to an overall unease I would have in recommending this without some reservations.

But first, what was good?

1. The Driscolls address the real problem of pornography, its enslaving nature, its promotion of unrealistic sexual expectations, the damage it is doing to many women (and men)'s self image, and finally, the reality of pornography's contribution to the growth of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. These chapters are helpful and are highly recommended.
2. The emphasis of and need for friendship in marriage and the need to work on this regularly and faithfully.

What was not helpful?

1. Mark's asking his wife to be his "functional pastor" (34). I found this problematic because in his role as pastor of a large church he is dealing with a lot of crap and by asking her to take on this role leaves her without someone to talk to if there is some area that Mark is unwilling to go to anyone else about. Many pastors wives end up being their husband's nuclear dumping ground and they wind up resenting their husbands or the church. I certainly commend them for their desire to have real openness about their lives, but Mark's inability or unwillingness to pursue meaningful relationships with other men, to be pastored by them, is troubling.
2. An overreliance on traditional gender roles. Certainly there is biblical warrant for the husband as head of the home to make sure that his family is provided for, that he is working (rather than slacking) and that he is loving his family well. However, there is the assumption in this book that the man will be at work and the wife will be at home, doing much of the housework. How about talking about the problems of overwork by men and the underutilization of women and their gifts outside the home? Certainly if the man likes to cook, he should, he can help plan the meals and not just leave this up to his wife.
3. The "Can we ____?" chapter is odd, but understandable in light of our culture's obsession with sex and evangelicalism's oft aversion to talking about it. One particular area that I found unhelpful was the section on cosmetic surgery. Mark notes, "There are many reasons cosmetic surgery may be beneficial. It can make us more attractive to our spouses." (199) This not only perpetuates our culture's overemphasis on external beauty, but enslaves our wives (and in some cases increasingly husbands) to the notion that they need to go to extreme means to keep the interest of their partner. If it is medically necessary or would help my spouse feel better about herself following an accident or medical procedure, I could see finding it beneficial, but it is my job as her spouse to see her beauty regardless of what may have transpired over time. This was possibly the most disappointing thing in this book, as it reduced true beauty to something manipulatable.
4. Finally, while there seemed to be a desire to be open and honest about their struggles, but the tone of the book often drew Mark in a chauvinistic light, castigating Grace's deficiencies and failures and glossing over his own.

I would imagine marriage books are hard to write. However, with the exception of a few specific chapters in their book, I think that there are better books to recommend to both couples in premarital counseling and couples already married.

Lindsey says

Ultimately, this book was just kind of boring to read and I found myself skimming often. I suppose this book would be a good intro to anyone who doesn't have the time or motivation to read all the much better books that are referenced in this one, but there's nothing really new here that you couldn't find (and written much better) in other books. But then, I'm probably not the audience for this book. There wasn't much I'd disagree with in the first part; I've just heard it better elsewhere.

The controversy in this book is its discussion of sex, but the Driscolls make the assumption that sex hasn't been "addressed" well enough. Maybe this is true in some contexts, but that seems naive of the fact that it isn't too hard to find much better books on even this subject if someone would just take the time to look. And here, they seem to miss some of the bigger principles of sex and marriage to jump right into technical details. The whole section comes across as "tell me what I can get away with and still call myself a good Christian"; they don't adequately address the motivations of the heart as a far more important consideration than "does the Bible forbid it."

Lena says

I'm having a hard time knowing how to review this book. While I did find quite a bit of helpful points and appreciated the extensive use of Scripture, I have to admit that I struggled with some of the perspectives regarding a woman's responsibilities in a marriage.

Let me clarify- I have a very traditional view of husband/wife roles. I believe that God designed men and women differently (though they are equal receivers of God's grace and image bearers of God), and as a result, their duties and roles in the home differ. I typically have no qualms when Christian marriage books teach "wives submit" and "husbands love your wives," because those are Biblical principles. However, I felt that this book at times took steps beyond those principles and leaned heavily in favor of Mark's choices (even if they were bad ones) while frequently demonizing his wife Grace (many of her choices were bad, too, but she was not the sole perpetrator). I know they wrote this together, but it didn't really seem like it. I'm still confused why more of Mark's poor life choices before and during marriage weren't really addressed, while Grace's were discussed thoroughly.

One example in particular that was shared in the book (about a different couple) rubbed me the wrong way. It told of a wife who often would withhold from her husband physically just because she didn't feel like being intimate, and how it was because of her selfishness that their marriage was failing. While this may be true in their specific circumstance and maybe they just didn't provide all of the details, very little was said about the man's issues in the relationship. It almost felt like the Driscoll's were saying that the man could demand whatever he wanted whenever he wanted, and if his wife did not have the desire to be intimate, she was sinning. Like I said, maybe the circumstance had deeper roots, but I found the general message given in that example a bit disturbing.

I believe that both spouses are to selflessly serve one another whether they feel like it or not- and that includes in intimacy- but I believe that's for BOTH spouses. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

Anyway, I gave it three stars, because I do think overall the book did have helpful, practical tips on marriage. At times I felt the book was overly detailed about intimacy, but I did appreciate the practicality of it all.

John Vanbrunt, says

quotes that interested/inspire me:

"Marriage either gets bitter or gets better."

"It is common to hear married people speak of "falling out of love" with their spouses, and "falling in love" with someone else in adultery. In using the language of "falling" they are cleverly avoiding any responsibility, as if they were simply required to follow their hearts. But the Bible tells us not to follow our hearts, but rather "guard" them because they are prone to selfishness and sin"

"Husbands and wives who want marriage to be enduring and endearing must be friends."

"A lot of guys fight the transition from boy to man because they despise responsibility."

"Since a husband is one with his wife--who is not his opponent--her weakness is his weakness, which means he needs to honor and protect it rather than exploit it."

"A study found that couples who attend church together regularly were approximately 35 % less likely to divorce, compared to their married peers who rarely or never attended religious services"

Interesting-"One study showed that human orgasm affects the same parts of the brain that heroin and cocaine do."

-all couples should read.

Sally says

Good book with lots to think about. Of course, not all of it will apply to everyone but parts definitely had me nodding my head in agreement and identification.

I borrowed this from the library, but I'm thinking about purchasing a copy for our home.

Edit - I've just read some of the other reviews. (I try to avoid other reviews until I've finished reading and formed my own opinion.) I had no idea this book was considered so controversial. Wow. Some opinions seem to come from a non-Christian perspective, some think it's too much about sex, others don't see enough Biblical reference points. Wow.

At the end of the day, this is a Christian book from a Christian couple (whose preaching I have never heard) who are using their own experiences as a starting point. Since they've now been married a number of years and have five children it appears they have a good marriage. Let's look at the number of divorces in our culture. Chances are good we know at least half a dozen people who have been through divorce. Sounds like the Driscolls are doing something right in comparison.

As I said in my brief review, not everyone is going to agree with every single sentence in the book. But don't write it off because you don't agree with all of it. If you get ONE THING out of this book, then it has been a worthwhile read.

Daniel Henderson says

It seems every time Mark Driscoll gets up to speak, writes a blog post, or publishes a book there are droves of people who are against it even before viewing the content for themselves. While I agree that a lot of criticism towards him is warranted I do think a lot of it is unhelpful and presumptuous. The same has been true with *Real Marriage: The truth about sex, friendship and life together*. On the first couple pages we are presented with numerous glowing reviews from some of the big guys of Christianity (Celebrity Pastors), Andy Stanley, Darrin Patrick, Daniel Akin, James MacDonald and Wayne Grudem. I found helpful what

Wayne and his wife had to say about the book.

While some sections will be controversial, this book as a whole is a wise, insightful, biblical, and startlingly honest guide to happy marriage. Mark and Grace Driscoll rightly warn about the long-lasting consequences of sexual sin, point out the way to a very happy marriage in obedience to God, and bravely address questions that are rarely brought up in a church setting.

Real Marriage is divided into three main sections. Part 1 – Marriage, Part 2—Sex, and Part 3—the last day. I found the first section very helpful and applicable Chapter 2 brings to light a subject not found in most marriage books. Marriage is about friendship. The Driscolls spend chapter 2 unpacking for us how friendship is an integral part of a truly Christian marriage and a safeguard against emotional adultery. They share that in their marriage we have made the mistake of assuming we were friends and not working on our friendship as we ought. (page 27) I really liked the analogy used to explain how our marriage changes from being a journey between friends to a team of business partners trying to pay the bills etc. It proves the point that friendship in marriage does not happen, it takes intentional effort.

The chapter on Men and Marriage as recommended by Mark is for men only. He lays it down hard in his usual style on little boys and men stuck in adolescents. He does make some very strong points which I hope will wake up some of the tough chauvinists and tender cowards who may read the book. Near the middle of the chapter he gives a good wake-up call to all husbands;

There are too many guys who turn marriage into job descriptions. He does his responsibility, she does hers, and there's no emotional connection whatsoever. This is sin of omission. "I didn't hit her; I didn't yell at her." But you didn't love her. You didn't pursue her. You didn't encourage her. You didn't connect with her. So ultimately you failed her. (page 50)

I think all men could stand to take heed to this warning and I think a lot of marriages are in trouble because the husband isn't fulfilling his role as husband. As well, at the end of the chapter, he gives some very practical tips for men on how to lead in terms of leading their families.

Grace Driscoll took the keyboard for the writing of chapter 4, and she did a fantastic job. She addresses the issue counter-culturally. She has worked to establish her womanhood in the Bible and to bring honor to the Glory of God. In our culture today the man of the household is generalized as an overgrown child and the wife keeps him in check and order. (King of Queens is a good example of this) And the women's role in these shows is often to be critical and poke fun at his abilities or way of doing things. She deals very well with the issue of wives submitting respectfully to their husbands.

The natural outcome of godly male headship is female fulfillment, not denial of female rights. A wife flourishes with a loving husband, and husband becomes courageous with a respectful wife. (Page 83)

Here Grace really captures what it means for women to submit to their husbands and for men to love their wife as Christ loved the church.

For me chapter 5 was the most helpful, it lays out clearly the little foxes that spoil a marriage. I won't go into much detail but will list them separately. I think this is a chapter that is worth the price of the book.

Lack of Repentance

Lack of Forgiveness

Bitterness

And the keys to having a good fight.

Chapter 10 will be the most controversial and I will not address it in this review. What I will address is how I think it is helpful. For Christians reading the book, who have never had sex outside of marriage, never been exposed to sexual sin these may not be questions that are being asked. But, I think that people who have had multiple sexual partners and much exposure to sexual sin do have different questions regarding sex that deserve to be answered. Tim Challies as discussed much about the grid method suggested by Driscoll. I would recommend reading it along with book. <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews/...>

The last sections of the book look good, but it is mostly marriage seminar style homework.

Overall, I think the book is very helpful, maybe in varying degree to people from different backgrounds.

There are weaknesses like Mark reducing Song of Solomon to a book of sex. But, I think with discernment

there is something to be taken away from the book for everyone. Throughout the book I can clearly see their love for God and motivations to glorify Him through their marriage. My advice is, read the book, and if your not comfortable with chapter 10 don't read it. But do not discount the whole book because of that one chapter.

Josie says

I ended up skimming large portions of this book. I got sick of the stereotypes and a lot of the trite advice ("pray together!" "read your Bible!" "Bring your problems to God and He will help you!"). Unfortunately, so many peoples' problems are way more complicated. Yes, the overall message that you should put in effort and try to communicate is great...but generally two people who are willing to put in effort and communicate are going to be fine anyway. From my experience, the issues arise when one person isn't willing. And "asking God to change their heart" is cold comfort for someone who's been the only person trying for a long, long time.

In terms of the sexual side of things, it's good that there's finally a Christian book out there that actually discusses some (albeit shallow) sexual issues (masturbation, oral, anal, etc) and actually condones a lot of it...the problem I have is the old fashioned advice of waiting until marriage. And I don't have a problem with it because I don't believe it's biblical. I believe the Bible is very clear about waiting until marriage. What I don't like is that I have never met a person who handed out this advice who did actually wait until marriage. I want to read advice from a person who a) has had a fulfilling dating life b) has not had sex (of any kind) and c) is over 30. Because that person doesn't exist. You either hear from the people who married at 18 (wow, you waited through five whole years of puberty to have sex!), the people who had sex before marriage (but now regret it because they "shouldn't have"), or the people who don't date and have awkward social lives or no passionate interest in dating. None of these people help a modern Christian who may want to wait until marriage, and to me their advice is next to useless. Do-as-I-say, not as I've experienced or was able to do myself = no help. In this case, Driscoll and his wife both had pre-marital sex, making their advice to wait doubly hypocritical. Surely someone in the Christian community is bound to address this issue at some point...?? Except no one ever likes to own up to their own hypocrisy.

Scott says

Couldn't resist all the controversy so I had to just read it myself. Instead of doing an in depth review, I'll just say that I agree/support/affirm much of what Doug Wilson (natural law) & Denny Burk (poor exegesis of the taxonomy in Ch. 10) have said.

Instead, I'll do a classic pro/con list.

Pro: 1) the chapters on Men, Women, & Marriage were all excellent. Basically, for the entire first half of the book I can't see why anyone would have any real disagreements outside of a couple of things (which I'll get to in a second). Really, the Driscolls present a kind of "crash course" in complementarity, with a heavy emphasis on calling men to act. I think that I may start having college men in our church read the Men & Marriage chapter.

2) It's a relatively short book (I read it in 2 days) and thus is probably pretty readable for people who don't usually like books.

3) It's incredibly practical. One of the main critiques I heard by a reviewer was that it wasn't "gospel focused" which I didn't really buy into as I read. In the "head, heart, hands" diagram, this hits the "hands" portion really well (ie: examples, practicals, etc.) For theology nerdlings, I can see why'd they'd quib, but when you think about the intended audience (young, new Christians, etc.), it makes perfect sense

Con: 1) Probably the most disconcerting thing for me honestly was all of the "special revelation" type things that they'd say off the cuff. The "God told me", "God said", etc. is a pretty common theme throughout the narrative which, to me at least, seems potentially dangerous ESPECIALLY considering the crowd (new or young Christians) reading.

2) Honestly, the inclusion of the "Can We" chapter is a con for me not because of the reasons that everyone has already heard and fought over. For me, the reason why it's a con is that an otherwise respectful, solid book on marriage is derailed because of a chapter that hardly fits in with the flow of the text. Not only is it controversial, but it really doesn't make sense with its placement. To be honest, if they really felt obligated to put it in the book (which is fine), it should have just been an appendix. Appendix-ing the chapter would have cut down on so much fuss, but it is what it is...

To conclude, I don't know if I'll encourage this book as a whole to people or not. Some of it was really good but then some was probably, at times, a bit unnecessary. I pray that this book does alot of good in the lives of the people who read it. I am hopeful that it will.

Woowott says

Warning: Because the book is TMI, this review might be TMI.

I...can't even GIVE this any star ratings, it was so bad. So let it be known that, NO, I did not forget to rate it. That zero star highlighting IS my rating.

This was so bad, I wish I listened to my friend who told me not to read this.

I can't even begin...Grace needs to knock it off with the victim-blaming thing. She still feels guilty. They're obsessed with HER sin, what caused the (admittedly) unwarranted abuse, and also what she brought into her marriage, her hurting her husband because SHE had a problem. Oh, bloody...

And most things are fine to do in hetero-marriage, as long as they don't take the place of P-in-V sex. Right, because that's the most important kind. Heaven forbid a woman actually NOT like penetration, or the husband actually DOES! And is still STRAIGHT? NO! These people are so clueless. They generalize. They say stupid, sexist things. I can't even begin to use examples, because every other paragraph, I was freaking out about something absolutely asinine that they wrote. You think I'm exaggerating? I assure you, I'm not.

And the WRITING. They should never write. I've done editing for online copy. I've read people who can't write, who just rip things from Wiki. I swear, the Driscolls read JUST like those people. They can't write. If

they were in my freshman comp class, I would flunk them severely.

And what IS this obsession with sex? Masturbation? Porn? I think they might be a little TOO obsessed. What skeletons hid in HIS closet, I wonder? Ugh, such an ignorant person writing ignorant things.

And this whole anal sex thing? They have a special view. Apparently, it's more dangerous for the woman than the man? How? Does the man have a magical iron bunghole, or what? No, he does not. But apparently, a man can only receive anal via the wife's finger. But the wife has to take the husband's manhood in hers? Spare me. It's all about the almighty phallus, and their view of it is not what I would call healthy or equality-minded, despite their protestations. Bleah, bleah, and double bleah.

This book sucks. If you read it for marriage and sex advice, you deserve whatever happens. I wouldn't trust these winners, considering it took them well over a decade to learn that they might actually NEED to communicate with each other.

And this whole women can only be friends with women thing? Screw that. Same sex friendships don't guard against emotional adultery. I feel sorry for Grace. I almost want to write her a condolence letter.

Holly says

I don't quite agree with all the views in this book. I appreciate the authors backing everything up with how they've interpreted things, but I don't think everything they said quite has the backing for it. I don't think everything is quite in the same category of sex as they label it. With the way they choose to define sex you could almost make anything sex. Just because oral, and anal include sex in the titles doesn't make them actual "sex". This book makes the definition of sex, and virginity very confusing without the clear line of what it is.

As said though, I think the authors really try to address things with Biblical backing. They go over a lot of the basic questions that Christian couples will ask including what is right and wrong. The authors get very honest about their own lives to help people be open about their own lives also. Communication between a married couple is also highly encouraged, but it is advised to seek the way how each person communicates in the relationship. I think my favorite point above all is how someone won't change for you, but instead they need to feel conviction from God themselves before they actually change what you think they are doing to hurt your relationship. It was so strange seeing this after telling this someone a few days before reading it. Lastly, there is one huge negative about this book, and that is that Mark Driscoll forgets to stress understanding and care in probably one of the most toughest times of a woman's life, and that is when she is pregnant. He actually says that his wife chose ease and comfort by cutting her hair, over appeasing him with her looks. Seriously?! The woman is pregnant, and you don't care if she is comfortable? To me that was too chauvinistic, and shows he still has some learning to do about sacrifice, and compassion before writing a whole book for others to read.

Continuing on, I think the book could have covered a lot more than it did. The book says it will cover topics that no other Christian book has before, but I thought for the most part it read repetitively with other things I've heard, or read. Actually, if you are looking for a free resource that covers everything this book does, and goes into even further detail that is more helpful you can visit The Marriage Bed. They already beat the Driscolls to this "controversial" subject a while ago, and you don't have to spend all the money on the book to answer your questions.

Alexis Neal says

A day late and a dollar short is better than never, right?

Mark Driscoll, the shock jock of the Reformed world, waded into the marriage book fray earlier this year with *Real Marriage*, which is essentially his sermon series on the Song of Solomon distilled into book form. And not distilled all that well, honestly. I suspect many interns were involved, which may explain the rather scattered and disjointed feel of the book.

But let's be honest: Average-to-below-average writing is not exactly unheard of in the evangelical (or even the Reformed) world. And Driscoll's a preacher, not a writer. So let's cut him some slack on the presentation and dive into the substance.

The pros of this book, at least according to the many, many reviews I've seen, are twofold: 1) Driscoll sticks to his complementarian (albeit hyper-masculine) guns, and 2) he addresses the (heretofore largely unexplored) relationship between friendship and marriage. Fair enough, I guess.

Except I have the same issue with his discussion of friendship as I do with . . . a lot of his preaching, actually. Which is to say, he has some good things to say, but I question his exegesis. See, I don't think the Bible actually says much about friendship in marriage. There's not a lot of evidence of husbands and wives in the Bible really *being* friends. I suppose they may have been, but we just don't see it. Which makes a lot of sense--the culture certainly didn't encourage friendship between the sexes. They didn't really engage as peers, as equals. Not that I disagree with Driscoll's conclusions, mind you. In today's culture, things are different--husband and wives usually *are* friends, and it's very helpful to think about what that looks like. Which is where Driscoll's thoughts on how to love someone as both a spouse *and* a friend come in handy. But there's a world of difference between saying something is a good idea, practically speaking, and saying that it's biblical.

Oh, and the marriage questionnaire at the end of the book looked decent as well. Now, on to the cons.

The cons of this book pretty much all have to do with sex--most notably the infamous chapter entitled "Can We ____?" in which Driscoll addresses several fairly explicit marital activities that he's apparently been questioned about over the years. Some reviewers and pastors have objected the content itself, claiming that it's inappropriate and that such things shouldn't be discussed in a book (or possibly at all). I . . . sort of get the point, but I also get Driscoll's point that we shouldn't let the world's perspective go unchallenged.

Others are more disturbed by the rubric Driscoll uses in answering the chapter's title question, which essentially boils down to three questions:

- 1) Is X lawful? (read: is it explicitly condemned by Scripture)
- 2) Is X helpful?
- 3) Is X enslaving?

There is also a threshold question, which is mentioned but not discussed at length: Does X violate either spouse's conscience?

First of all, leaving aside the possible exegetical issues, I think this grid leaves out several other useful questions, helpfully described (albeit in a different context, though still an exposition of I Cor. 6:12) by Sinclair Ferguson: Is it beneficial to myself and others (two separate questions under Ferguson's analysis), is it consistent with Christ's Lordship (how do I feel about involving Christ in this activity), and is it consistent with biblical example? Tim Challies wisely raises the issue of motive, which Driscoll seems to ignore: Why do I want to do this thing? To honor my spouse or to gratify myself? Am I trying to express love for my spouse, or am I trying to use my spouse to fulfill a pornographic fantasy? Am I objectifying my spouse or respecting him or her as a person made in God's image? Is the husband seeking to love his wife as Christ loved the church--sacrificially and with an eye toward her sanctification? If the motivation is self-centered, then even an otherwise permissible activity can be sinful. Driscoll's analysis side-steps all these considerations, and is, as a result, rather incomplete.

However, my biggest issue here was with the threshold question of conscience, which was mentioned at the outset of the chapter, and then essentially forgotten. I think there is a very real risk that an objecting spouse may be reluctant to speak up, particularly when faced with a book that reiterates over and over the need to serve one's spouse sexually, and which insists that the Bible in no way condemns (and in fact, given Driscoll's interpretation of Song of Solomon, even celebrates) the behavior in question. It takes a fair amount of courage to say, essentially, "I know you really want to do X, and according to this respected pastor, there's nothing wrong with X, but it . . . makes me uncomfortable." (It is worth noting that Driscoll's 'conscience' objection focuses primarily on shame, not on unease or anything else that falls short of actual shame.) It is difficult to deny a loved one's desire based only on what is (at least to Driscoll) an unnecessarily stringent, or even weak, conscience.

While husbands and wives may both find themselves choosing between their consciences and their spouses, I am particularly concerned about the pressure this can place on women. We have been told time and time again that "men have needs" and if those needs aren't met at home, a man will be tempted to look elsewhere. So the question "Do you have a clear conscience about this?" can easily morph into "Are you sure enough about your conscience that you're willing to not do this thing that your husband wants to do, even though your refusal could lead him to seek satisfaction in pornography or even adultery?"

We are inundated with tale after tale of infidelity, and the fear our husbands will seek elsewhere whatever we fail to provide is, sad to say, very, very real. The world tells us marriage is a buyer's market, and we're the goods for sale, so if we want to keep a guy, we'd better put out. For Christians, the Bible's teaching on abstinence restricts the applicability of this principle to the marriage context, but the cultural imprint is still there, and is even echoed by teaching on the importance of sexual availability in marriage as a means of helping husbands resist temptation. And there's certainly some validity to this teaching. But if we're not careful, the loving admonishment of I Corinthians 7:3-5 can become infected by the world's attitude to become a threat hanging over the heads of Christian women: if you want to keep your man, you'd better keep him satisfied.

In light of this cultural (and sinful) bias toward the objectification of women, I think Driscoll would have been much better served to begin this chapter with a more serious treatment of conscience, including the importance of really examining your heart and your Bible and encouraging your spouse to honestly do the same. Driscoll could have provided guidance for asking good questions to really draw out your spouse's beliefs and opinions. He could have encouraged the Christian husband to reaffirm to his wife that she matters more than whatever this thing is, and that she is thus more than free to say no, without negative repercussions. (And vice versa.) As it is, I felt like the chapter endorsed more of a "Hey, honey, can we ____? Driscoll says it's ok" "Well, I suppose..." interchange, which can lead to, well, sexual bullying, even that's not the intent. After all, who wants to be a sexual conscientious objector?

It would be great if all women were confident enough to stick to their guns and hold to their beliefs, and if all men cared more about their wives' consciences than about their own sexual fulfillment. But we live in a fallen world, and I think all too many women are willing to sacrifice their consciences to keep their men; and all too many men are willing to let them. Driscoll had the opportunity to educate both men and women about how to care for each other well in marriage, not out of an attitude of entitlement and self-gratification, but out of loving self-sacrifice. But he didn't.

Granted, that topic could easily be a whole nother book (and honestly, not one I would trust Driscoll to write--a topic that sensitive has Paul David Tripp written all over it). And I know Driscoll wanted to focus on the 'can we or can't we' aspect of things. But still, the reference to conscience was so perfunctory, especially in light of Driscoll's 'do it do it do it' attitude about sex in general, that it seemed like a throwaway. Driscoll would have been better served to take the opportunity to flesh out his 'conscience' section to better protect his sisters in Christ.

(There are also those who question the propriety of the Driscolls' disclosures about their own marital (and sexual) sins, but I can appreciate the attempt to be transparent in confessing sin as a means to encourage the struggling reader, even if I think the execution was misguided.)

At the end of the day, there was some good stuff here, but not enough to make it worth recommending. You're better off reading Paul David Tripp's *What Did You Expect?* instead.

James says

In the Evangelical world, you would be hard-pressed to find a figure more polarizing than Mark Driscoll (except for maybe Rob Bell. Those crazy, Mars Hill Pastors!). Those of a more moderate or progressive bent, find Driscoll's theology too narrow, judgmental and misogynistic; Many conservatives stand with Driscoll in his theological commitments, but find his bombastic style, insensitivity and general jerkiness, off-putting.

Personally, I have some fundamental disagreements with Driscoll and concerns with his approach. Chief among these is my commitment to Biblical Egalitarianism and I find some of his comments are damaging to women, based in antiquated gender stereotypes (generally post-industrial, pre-feminist stereotypes), and arrogant. And so when Thomas Nelson, was offering his book free in exchange for reviews, I opted in just to see where the man (and wife) go amiss in their discussion of marriage; however, I found that while I disagree with the Driscolls in important ways, much of what they had to say here, was thoughtful, balanced and helpful. So read on Driscoll fans, I promise not to smear his (ahem) good name, but nor will I let him off easy!

Real Marriage is divided into three parts. In Part 1, the Driscolls address what makes a good marriage, discussing the roles of both husband and wife, their mutual responsibility to one another and ways to nurture their relationship. In Part II, they turn their attention to sex/sexuality (this is the biggest section of the book). Part 3 of the book consists of a single chapter, addressing how to 'reverse engineer your marriage' which involves casting a vision for the type of marriage you want to end up with and making a plan to get there. Part 3, despite it's brevity is quite good. Parts 1 and 2 are generally pretty good with some issues. As an outline for this review, I will explore the Good, the Bad & the Ugly (with apologies to Clint Eastwood). On to my fair and balanced review (Fox newsworthy):

The Good

For the most part, I liked this book and found myself liking Mark and Grace Driscoll a little more as I read. Mark and Grace shares vulnerably about their relational and sexual past, their marital struggles and offers advice they personally found helpful in their own marriage together. I was pleasantly surprised that their section on marriage has a chapter which underscores mutuality (showing how a good marriage starts with a good friendship). They also have good things to say about the gift of sexuality and do not pull punches in addressing sinfulness (i.e. abuse, pornography, selfishness). Things are said carefully here; I doubt that Driscoll will feel the need to recant or apologize for anything written here (as he has humbly done on occasion when he's shot his mouth off). Perhaps the addition of his wife, Grace, has made him more gracious in his presentation! The Driscolls dispense good advice about cultivating intimacy.

Also, while I hedge and differentiate my position from Driscoll, I respect his commitment to being Biblical in his approach. This is a commitment I share with the Driscolls and actually agree with them on good many things, though not without reservations and concerns. I am done talking about the good things. On to the bad!

The Bad

Beyond my fundamental disagreement with the Driscolls the thing that is done badly in this book is exegesis. Mark Driscoll has a Master's degree in exegetical theology and should be much better at this, but he's not (and yes I am singling out Mark on this one). This book is arranged topically and so doesn't explore any one text in-depth. Often Driscoll proof texts and occasionally just misuses passages. In the chapter entitled, "Can We _____?" Driscoll uses Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:12 as a taxonomy to apply to sexual questions (p.192): "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." From this, Driscoll proposes three questions: 1) Is it permissible? 2) Is it helpful? 3) Is it enslaving? (192).

I agree that this can be a useful taxonomy in assessing particular issues, but Driscoll's employment of it fails to account for the fact that Paul, in saying "All things are lawful for me" is quoting and rhetorically dismantling a Corinthian slogan. Someone with a master's degree in Exegetical theology, ought to take more care here. Elsewhere he handles scripture better, such as his explication of the Song of Songs, but this book is really inconsistent in regards to the Bible.

Take for instance how he handles 'submission.' Driscoll argues that it is the role of the husband to provide leadership to the household (and the church), it is the role of women to submit. They do balance this by addressing the limits of submission (women should not submit to abuse, or to commit a sin), but this is generally what they argue, for all cases regardless of personality, temperament and gifting of each spouse. The basis of their case comes from their reading of the Biblical household codes, particularly the one that we read of in Ephesians 5:21-33. Wives are told to submit (vs. 22) because the husbands are their head as Christ is the head of the church; Thus women submit, men lead.

But this is a skewed picture of this passage. The section on women submitting (5:22-24) is bracketed by two verses which the Driscolls quote but fail to adequately expound. 5:21 says "Submit yourself to one another." This sets this whole passage in the context of mutual submission (not just wives to husbands). In fact the word used for submit in this passage (ὑποτάσσειν), is said here, but not in verse 22, when Paul tells wives to submit. This reads literally "Submit yourselves one to another, wives to your husbands..." The context is mutual submission, not just wives to husbands.

The second verse they fail to properly expound is verse 25: "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." They quote this and talk about the husband's loving leadership, but not about what it means to love like the Jesus who laid his life down. The Driscolls and I can disagree on

egalitarian/complementarian concerns, but they need to trumpet the mutuality and shared submission more than they do here.

The Ugly

Finally, there is the ugly side of this book. The Driscoll's spend a great deal of their section on sex, talking about sexual responsibility and what can couples do sexually. They give the green light to just about everything from anal sex, cyber-sex, mutual masturbation, roleplaying, etc. Pretty much their modus operandi is if the Bible doesn't forbid it, and it doesn't involve anyone else but husband and wife, go for it (yes, they also ask if it is helpful or enslaving). They did not, here say women or men had to perform certain sexual acts they feel uncomfortable with, but they do imply that within the context of marriage, you should be open to experimentation.

While I agree that sexuality is a gift to be celebrated within the context of marriage, and there is some freedom in how it can be expressed, I think the level of detail here is unnecessary and unhelpful. What you can do sexually in marriage is the wrong question if you ask me. I like the title of one of Marva Dawn's books, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy*. I think the Driscoll's fetish with what you can or can't do sexually emphasizes technique, sometimes at the expense of intimacy. Healthy Christian sexuality is about mutually sharing, more than about experimentation.
