

DISCUSSION GUIDE

RESPECTABLE
SINS

This discussion guide is designed to accompany the book *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* by Jerry Bridges. For best participation and life application, it is strongly recommended that every group participant have his or her own copy of both the book and discussion guide. Additional copies are available at your Christian bookseller or from NavPress (1-800-366-7788 or www.navpress.com).

DISCUSSION GUIDE

RESPECTABLE
SINS

CONFRONTING THE SINS
WE TOLERATE

JERRY BRIDGES

Discussion Guide by Stephen Sorenson

NAVPRESS®



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To fellow travelers everywhere — May we discover together the encouragement and hope that is ours in Jesus Christ and bring honor to His name as we face up to the “respectable” sins.

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P R E F A C E

Confronting the Sins We Tolerate

Some years ago a book was published with the title *I'm OK, You're OK*. In contrast to that book title, the attitude of many Christians seems to be "I'm OK and You're Not." That is, we seem to be good at seeing other people's sins but not our own. We see and bemoan the flagrant sins of our culture, and we're even quick to point out the sins of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are often blind to the more subtle sins that we tolerate in our own lives — those I call "respectable" sins.

You and I may actually be doing quite well when it comes to avoiding the more overt sins. But what about the more subtle ones — the "respectable" sins that can still hinder our walks with God and harm our relationships with others? God has made clear in His Word that He is as dishonored and displeased by our anxiety, unthankfulness, frustration, selfishness, impatience, and discontentment as He is by the overt sins we're so proud to avoid.

In an effort to help us face and deal with these "subtle" sins, I have written *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*. This discussion guide is a companion to that book. I commend it to you as invaluable not only for small-group interaction but also for your own personal study and growth in Christ.

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Through experience I have found that we often need more than to merely have our own sins — even the “respectable” ones that we tend to minimize — pointed out to us. We need encouragement and hope, and these come only through the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ *encourages* us in our personal struggles with sin because it assures us that in our standing with God, He has already forgiven our sins through the death of His Son on the cross. The gospel gives us *hope* because it also promises to us the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to deal with our sins. We need both assurances. We cannot effectively deal with the expressions of our subtle sins until we know they are forgiven. And we cannot effectively deal with our sins apart from the help of the Holy Spirit.

As you use this guide, you will find that I emphasize both of these gospel truths. So do not approach this study with the fear that it will only reveal sin and leave you to wallow in it. Rather, you will find both hope in the gospel and practical suggestions for dealing with your sins. And lest you think that I have written from the perspective of “I’m OK and You’re Not,” let me assure you that I must deal with many of these sins myself. So together let’s confront the subtle sins we tolerate in our lives and implement God’s wonderful plan for redemption and victory.

Jerry Bridges

U S I N G T H I S G U I D E

Tips for Personal and Group Study

This guide has been thoughtfully prepared to enrich your reading, discussion, and personal application of *Respectable Sins* by best-selling author Jerry Bridges. We call it a “discussion guide” because it stimulates meaningful interaction in small groups, Bible studies, and Christian growth classes, but it also encourages each participant’s individual understanding and application of the life-changing principles found in *Respectable Sins*. So the guide you hold in your hands serves three important purposes: (1) it’s a road map to enable the group facilitator; (2) it’s a reading and application guide for the group member; and (3) it’s a discussion guide to enhance the group-interaction experience.

IF YOU’RE A GROUP MEMBER

If you’re a participant, you’ll need your own copy of both the book and this guide. You’ll be prompted to read specific chapters of the book before each group session and respond to the “Think It Through” personal-study questions for that session. The quality of your personal reading and preparation will help to ensure quality interaction when you get together to discuss what you have read.

As you read *Respectable Sins*, keep pen in hand and feel free to

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underline passages or put stars or question marks in the margins, noting any principles or insights that stand out to you. We know you're going to enjoy the book and grow in your faith as you sit at the feet of one of the world's most beloved authors and Bible teachers.

After you've read the assigned chapters of *Respectable Sins*, you'll go to the second page of each session in this guide and respond to the "Think It Through" questions. These will help you process some of the key points you've just read. Some questions ask you to look up and respond to selected Bible passages. We strongly encourage you to engage fully with these personal-study opportunities, but if your time is limited and you're able to read only the book chapters before group time, you can come back to the "Think It Through" section later.

At the end of each session you'll find a page titled "Take It to Heart." This page is for you to journal your personal reflections, action points, and prayers in response to the week's reading and discussion. Following the group discussion, find a place of solitude, quiet your heart before God, and then write your responses to the guided Personal Reflection, Personal Action Points, and Personal Prayer prompts we've provided for you. You may find that these journaling exercises are the most meaningful to you of the entire study-and-discussion experience.

IF YOU'RE THE GROUP FACILITATOR

If you have the honor of facilitating this group-study experience, the rest of this section will help you guide your group through an enriching time of discovery.

First things first, you'll want to be sure each participant has his or her own copy of both the book and the discussion guide. In many small groups, participants are willing to pitch in for the purchase price, and the facilitator makes the actual purchase. A married couple may be okay with sharing a single copy of *Respectable Sins* between them, but as you'll soon see, the discussion guides are personal. Participants will be writing their own responses not only to study questions but also to personal-reflection

Tips for Personal and Group Study

questions. Be sure you've done an accurate head count, then visit your Christian bookseller (or contact NavPress at 1-800-366-7788 or www.navpress.com) for the necessary quantity of books and discussion guides.

Now for your road map to help facilitate each group session.

1. It goes without saying, but we'll say it anyway, that you should be thoroughly familiar with the material before each group session. This means you're committed to reading the assigned book chapters ahead of time, working through the "Think It Through" personal-study questions, and reviewing the "Talk It Over" discussion questions.

2. Bathe your personal preparation, and each upcoming group session, in prayer. Pray for God's wisdom, guidance, and sensitivity as you prepare and facilitate. Pray for His profound work in the heart and life of each participant.

3. Each session specifies the chapters in *Respectable Sins* to be read "Before Gathering." You'll want to call attention to the next session's assigned readings at the close of each meeting. Participants are also encouraged to work through the corresponding "Think It Through" personal-study questions in their discussion guides prior to each group session.

4. On the left page preceding each session of the guide you'll find a "Progress Report" box — a quick personal-application review of some of the key principles of the previous session. Start each group experience by posing these questions and encouraging participants to share their personal discoveries and/or spiritual progress. You'll all be encouraged as you hear what your friends are learning!

5. After the progress report, have everyone follow along as one group member reads aloud the "Get Focused" section. This underscores the importance of the chapters they've read during the week and sets the tone for the coming discussion.

6. Take a few minutes to ask for questions or insights participants may have gained in their study of the "Think It Through" section during the week. (Tip: Preselect a couple of the questions and insights to highlight in case people did not complete this section.)

7. Devote the bulk of the discussion time to the "Talk It Over"

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questions designed for group discussion. Vary your approach: For some questions you might pose the issue to no one in particular and wait for responses. For others, you might direct the question to a specific individual, let him or her respond, and then encourage others to respond as well. As much as time permits, encourage unrushed, multiple responses. Sometimes you'll discover deeper levels of insight as one participant builds upon the thoughts of another.

8. Encourage participants to take the time to enjoy the personal journaling experience provided at the end of each session. Responding to the guided prompts in these "Take It to Heart" segments will enhance their personal understanding and life application of the principles you've discussed.

9. Take a moment to point out the "For Next Time" assignments for the next session. For the best learning experience, we encourage participants to make quality time to read the assigned chapters and respond to the corresponding "Think It Through" personal-study questions. However, you may want to assure them that if they can read only the assigned book chapters, that's fine — they can dig in to the "Think It Through" section some other time.

10. Conclude by praying together. We've provided suggested topics under "Group Prayer" to get prayer time started. You can have one person pray or open it up for brief conversational prayers from anyone who wishes to pray aloud. (Tip: No one should ever feel pressured or obligated to pray aloud. It can help relax everyone if you assure them of this rule ahead of time.)

Oh, and one more thing. *Have fun!* Sure, it's a serious topic. And yes, you have a serious responsibility. But inhale, exhale, relax, and enjoy the experience. Approach your preparation as well as each group session with a positive, expectant spirit. Do your very best and leave the results to God. (Tip: *That's* when the fun really starts!)

May God richly bless you, and your group, as you read and discover His blessings together.

The Editors

Before the First Session

Prior to session 1, make sure each participant has his or her own copies of *Respectable Sins* and the *Respectable Sins Discussion Guide*. Encourage everyone to read chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the book and then respond to the “Think It Through” personal-study questions on the second page of session 1 in this guide.

If you are distributing the books and discussion guides at your initial group meeting, have someone read chapter 1 aloud as the group follows along. Encourage participants to point out insights or discoveries that stood out to them. Talk together about why it’s important to face up to the truth when it comes to the “respectable” sins in our lives. Pray together for open hearts and minds, and for a spirit of mutual encouragement, as you study and discuss the book during the coming weeks. Then assign the “Prior to Session 1” preparation (above) for your next meeting — the real “session 1” of this study.

SESSION ONE

Facing Up to the Truth

(*Chapters 1, 2, and 3*)

BEFORE GATHERING: Read *Respectable Sins* chapters 1, 2, and 3, then respond to the “Think It Through” questions that begin on the next page of this guide.

KEY VERSE: “Sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4)

GET FOCUSED

Some forms of cancer grow undetected until they reach a terminal stage. Likewise, sin — especially the so-called “acceptable” or “subtle” sins — can exist in our lives, virtually undetected and dangerous. We can be deceived into believing that such sin is not all that bad, into denying that sin is really sin, and into not thinking about sin. In fact, the word *sin* has virtually disappeared from our culture — and is even avoided in some churches. Well-intentioned believers find it all too easy to focus on the blatant sins of our “evil” culture while ignoring their own, more-subtle sins — “respectable” sins.

In contrast to the feel-good-about-ourselves philosophy of our day, Puritan believers in the seventeenth century had a different view of themselves and sin. They feared the reality of sin; they saw all sin as a diabolical force living within themselves. They recognized, like the biblical writers, that *any* sin breaks God’s law.

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During this session we will explore the impact of sins that Christians tend to downplay in their own lives — sins such as impatience, gossip, pride, resentment, and anger. These often become larger malignancies, cascading us into deeper sinfulness.

Yes, God sent Jesus to earth to take humankind's sins on Himself. But as long as we believers recognize our call to glorify God and become like Jesus, we will battle sin. To live as God's people includes facing sin — especially sin we don't recognize or we rationalize away. That's what this first session is all about.

THINK IT THROUGH

For Personal Study

I. WHAT IS SIN?

1. Why do you think it's important for us to understand what sin is and its impact on our lives and relationships?
2. What do James 1:14-15 and 2:10-11 reveal about the root of our sinful actions? About God's law and the consequences of breaking it?
3. In Matthew 5:22,27-28, what did Jesus emphasize concerning the seriousness of sin — of breaking God's law?

II. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WORD *SIN*?

1. What evidence do you see that the word *sin* has virtually disappeared from our culture? That awareness of personal sin has effectively disappeared from many believers' consciences? Explain your answer.

2. What impact do you think the “softening” of language regarding sin is having on our lives? On our churches?

What's Become of Sin?

The very word, *sin*, which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word. . . . But the word went away. It has almost disappeared—the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin?

KARL MENNINGER
*Whatever Became of Sin?**

3. Why is it often easier for believers to focus on the sins of unbelievers rather than on their own personal sins?

* Karl Menninger, MD, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1973), 14–15.

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III. “RESPECTABLE” SINS

1. List some common “respectable” sins. Why do you think we are more inclined to tolerate them?

2. In Galatians 3:10, what did the apostle Paul quote to emphasize the importance of obeying God’s law? What might this reveal about the consequences of tolerating “seemingly minor sins”?

3. Even though God always makes a decisive change in every believer’s heart, what does every believer face when he or she seeks to live in obedience to God? (See Galatians 5:17; James 1:14.)

4. Describe the choices Peter and Paul urge every true believer to make. (See Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:29; 1 Peter 2:11.)

IV. HOW OUR SIN AFFECTS GOD

1. Jerry writes: “When we sin we violate the law of God in any way, . . . we rebel against the sovereign authority and transcendent majesty of God. We commit ‘cosmic treason.’” It is indeed cosmic treason.” Do you agree or disagree with the concept of “cosmic treason”? Explain.

State of Denial?

Even though our [believers’] hearts have been renewed, even though we have been freed from the absolute dominion of sin, even though God’s Holy Spirit dwells within our bodies, . . . sin still lurks within us and wages war against our souls. It is the failure to recognize the awful reality of this truth that provides the fertile soil in which our “respectable” or “acceptable” sins grow and flourish.

Chapter 3, *Respectable Sins*

2. How much do you think God knows about our sin? (See Psalm 139:1-4; I Corinthians 4:5.)

3. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-10, where Nathan the prophet spoke God’s words to David, who had committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, and lived in denial of his sin. What do we learn about denial? About sin in relation to God and His law?

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4. What effect does sin have on the Holy Spirit — that is, God — who lives inside each believer? (See Ephesians 4:30.)

TALK IT OVER

For Group Discussion

1. Why should we take our “respectable” sins seriously?
2. How might we begin to see our own sins more clearly instead of focusing so much on other people’s sins?
3. What impact do you think the “softening” of language regarding sin is having on our lives? On our churches?
4. As we realize that our sin is not only rebellion against God’s sovereign authority but a despising of both His law and His person, how might we view sin differently?
5. How might what we learned today influence what we say, do, and/or think?

GROUP PRAYER

As a group, thank God for the opportunity to gather and explore this important topic. Ask Him to help you recognize “respectable” sins and to take them seriously.



FOR NEXT TIME: Read *Respectable Sins*, chapters 4, 5, and 6, then respond to the “Think It Through” personal-study questions for session 2.



TAKE IT TO HEART
A PERSONAL-GROWTH JOURNAL

PERSONAL REFLECTION

During this session, what discoveries, quotations, or verses especially connected with you? Why?

What “respectable” sins might you be tolerating in your life?

In what ways might these sins be affecting your life, your relationships, and your relationship with God?

What do you think God wants you to learn from that situation?

PERSONAL ACTION POINT

What one insight regarding “respectable” sins would you like to begin applying to your spiritual journey this week? Write it down and commit it to the Lord.

PERSONAL PRAYER

Write a brief prayer to God about sin’s lure and impact in your life — and your desire for Him to help you stand strong in the face of temptation.



PROGRESS

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T

What have you discovered this week about “respectable” sins?

As you have begun to apply what you learned from session I, what new choices have you made? What challenges have you faced?

In what ways has knowing God’s view of all sin — including the more “acceptable” ones — influenced you this week?