

## SACRED MARRIAGE PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

and life-changing journey that shapes our souls and connects us with God and each other.

### TALK ABOUT IT

Before you walked the aisle and said, "I do," what was your perception of married life? How has that perception changed over the years?

### DVD TEACHING NOTES

Introduction: To be single or married? That is the question.

The contrast between seeing marriage as a romantic pursuit or a spiritual journey

The cultural development of romantic notions and expectations in marriage

Marriage for the glory of God

1.

2.

3.

A new mind-set: Do I need a new marriage or a new perspective on marriage?



## SESSION ONE

4. Gary suggests that marriage might be meant to make us holy more than happy. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

*The state of marriage is one that requires more virtue and constancy than any other ... it is a perpetual exercise in mortification.... From this thyme plant, in spite of the bitter nature of its juice, you may be able to draw and make the honey of a holy life.*

*Francis de Sales*

5. Some couples live with a conviction that their marriage relationship is designed to meet their needs, satisfy their hunger for ever-increasing romance, and fill the void they feel in their heart and soul. How do you see this concept being promoted in modern culture? What are some of the possible consequences of viewing marriage this way?

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6. When things get tough, why are many people swift to think they married the wrong person rather than concluding that their idealized notion of marriage might be inaccurate or unbiblical?

*If we find that the same kinds of challenges face every marriage, we might assume that God designed a purpose in this challenge that transcends something as illusory as happiness.*

7. Read at least two of the following Bible passages, then respond to the related question:
  - a. *1 Corinthians 10:31*. How might your marriage change if you believed you are meant to be married for the glory of God?
  - b. *Genesis 2:20 - 25*. How is marriage part of God's design and plan for people?

SESSION ONE

- c. *Matthew 6:33*. How can the focus of a marriage change if we seek God first and look for him to be the primary source of satisfaction and joy in our life?
- d. *Romans 8:28–29*. God is deeply concerned about conforming us into the image of Jesus. How can a marriage relationship be the perfect setting for God to do this?
8. Gary says marriage can be an ideal place to learn lessons such as forgiveness, patience, and understanding. Tell one story, as a couple, about how God has grown one of these characteristics in your lives because you are married to each other.

*If people get married for a reason as trivial as a romantic high, they will probably end up getting divorced for something as trivial as the loss of romantic intensity!*

CLOSING

Take time as a group (or as couples) to pray in some of the following directions:

- Father, teach me humility so that I can see how you want to grow me and shape me through my spouse.
- Give me wisdom to see when my view of marriage is based on a picture painted by the media or the world and not shaped by your Word and truth.
- Jesus, when I feel discouraged or disheartened, help me to remember all that you sacrificed for me. Give me strength to stand strong in my marriage, even when emotions ebb and frustration grows.
- God of hope, fill me with anticipation for all the good things you want to do in my marriage as we walk through this learning experience together.

## BETWEEN SESSIONS

### COUPLE'S CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Take time before your next group meeting to talk and pray together about one or more of these topics:

- **Talk About It:** *Talk with your spouse about one or two big lessons that hit you during the DVD and discussion time with your group. What was one way your understanding of marriage was confirmed and supported? What was one way it was challenged? Share one thing you are hoping and praying God will do in your life through this Sacred Marriage learning experience.*
- **Pray About It:** *Pray together for a renewed and deeper commitment to your marriage. Ask the Spirit of God to protect you from riding the roller coaster of a marriage based on how a spouse is feeling at any given moment. Ask God to help you live with a tenacious, joyful expectancy for what God wants to do in your life through your marriage. With anticipation, pray for God to use your spouse, in any way that would honor Jesus, to mold and shape your life.*
- **Read and Reflect:** *Read Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:20-25 as a couple. What do you notice about the way God made men and women? What was God's plan and design for marriage before sin came into the picture? Was there anything in these passages that struck you in a fresh or new way?*

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## ACTIVITIES

Try one or more of the following suggestions:

- **Personal Exercise:** Write a note to your spouse, expressing how you have seen them grow to look, act, and be more like Jesus. Also, write down one or two ways you have seen the marriage journey shape you more into the image of Jesus. Let your spouse know that you thank God for how he has used them in this refining and maturing process.
- **Journaling Exercise:** Identify one or two "little things" that tend to irritate and bug you. Then, either in a notebook or on the page provided at the end of this session, journal your responses to the following questions:

What are "little things" that tend to irritate me?

Why do these things bother me so much?

How can I release some of this irritation and learn to love and serve in deeper ways?

How can embracing this process make me more like Jesus?

- **Personal Prayer:** Invite the Spirit to search your heart and pray for the wisdom and self-control needed so that you will not spend the series nudging your spouse in the ribs with a sharp elbow. Pray that your focus, as you walk through this Sacred Marriage study, will be on what God wants to do in your life.

## RECOMMENDED READING

In preparation for session two, you may want to read chapter 8 of the book Sacred Marriage, by Gary Thomas.