

TALK ABOUT IT

about a time in your marriage when you both discovered that your
desires, interests, or desires were dramatically different. How could these
differences create bumps along the road of marriage if you are not sensi-
tive to them?

DVD TEACHING NOTES

Introduction: Hawaii ... a laboratory for discovering differences

problems that arise in a need-based marriage

perfecting holiness and purifying ourselves

Loving each other out of reverence for Christ

The doctrine of God as Father-in-Law: the radical nature of God's love

As humans with finite minds, we need the power of symbolism in order to gain understanding. By means of the simple relationship of a man and a woman, the symbol of marriage can call up virtually infinite meaning. This will happen only when we use our marriage to explore God. If we are consumed with highlighting where our spouses are falling short, we will miss diving into the mysteries of marriage and the lessons it has to teach us.

DVD DISCUSSION

1. Think about a time in your marriage when your needs were not met and you responded by withholding something (communication, romance, intimacy, finances, affirmation, etc.) from your spouse. How did this "withholding" approach impact your relationship?

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:1 (it's on page 34 if you don't have a Bible handy). Little sins can creep into a marriage and we hardly notice them. A desire to grow in purity and to perfect holiness can shine God's light into the dark corners of our hearts and lives. Describe a time that the holy light of God's presence began to shine in your life and you saw a "little" habit, pattern, or behavior you had not noticed before. How has that habit, pattern, or behavior changed since God brought it into the light?

The apostle Paul is crystal clear: the first question we should ask ourselves when doing anything is, "Will this be pleasing to Jesus Christ?" The first purpose in marriage – beyond happiness, sexual expression, the bearing of children, companionship, mutual care and provision, or anything else – is to please God.

3. If our primary motivation to love and serve our spouse is based on how they have treated us in the past forty-eight hours, how might this impact the way we offer *one* of the following:
- Physical care
 - Verbal encouragement

- Acts of service
 - Emotional engagement
 - Some other aspect of the marriage relationship
4. If our primary motivation to love and serve our spouse is based on an authentic desire to show reverence for Jesus, how might this impact the way we offer *one* of the following:
- Physical care
 - Verbal encouragement
 - Acts of service
 - Emotional engagement
 - Some other aspect of the marriage relationship

5. Choose one or two areas of the marriage relationship (there are a few listed below) and contrast what this area might look like if a person is: self-centered, spouse-centered, or God-centered.

Area of Marriage	If a Mate Is Self-Centered	If a Mate Is Spouse-Centered	If a Mate Is God-Centered
How finances are handled			
How forgiveness is extended			
How communication is maintained			
How free time is used			
How family of origin issues are navigated			

6. Gary talked about the moment it hit him that God is not only his Father, but his Father-in-Law. If we lived with a profound awareness that our husband or wife is a precious and loved child of God and that our heavenly Father-in-Law cares deeply about how we treat them, how might this impact the way we care for our spouse?

Years ago Paul Simon wrote a bestselling song proclaiming "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover." A Christian needs just one reason to stay with his or her "lover": the analogy of Christ and his church.

7. If your heavenly Father-in-Law came to your group and told you about his love and affection for your spouse, what might he say? Remember, he sees them as his child ... his loved son or daughter.
8. How might loving your spouse out of reverence for God *stop* you from doing something you otherwise might do?

9. Read Luke 6:32 – 33 and Matthew 5:43 – 44. What do these passages have to say to those who give love to their spouse based on what they get from their spouse? How does Jesus blow up our conventional understanding of love being about what we get and how we feel?

Marriage creates a situation in which our desire to be served and coddled can be replaced with a more noble desire to serve others — even to sacrifice for others. This is a call for both husbands and wives. The beauty of marriage is that it confronts our selfishness and demands our service twenty-four hours a day. When we're most tired, most worn down, and feeling more sorry for ourselves than we ever have before, we have the opportunity to confront feelings of self-pity by getting up and serving our mate.

CLOSING

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

- Please teach me to center myself fully on you, dear God, even in my marriage.
- Dear Jesus, forgive me for the times I have been self-centered in my marriage. Teach me to serve my spouse out of reverence for you.
- Heavenly Father-in-Law, help me to see my husband/wife as your loved and precious child. Teach me to love them in a way that will bring joy to their Father's heart!
- You are holy, holy, holy! I pray that you will help me grow in purity and holiness in every area of life, including in my marriage relationship.

One of the reasons I am determined to keep my marriage together is not because doing so will make me happier (although I believe it will); not because I want my kids to have a secure home (although I do desire that); not because it would tear me up to see my wife have to "start over" (although it would). The first reason I keep my marriage together is because it is my Christian duty. If my life is based on proclaiming God's message to the world, I don't want to do anything that would challenge that message.

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. Also, brainstorm new patterns and actions you can infuse into your marriage that will show the Father that you love his son or daughter (your spouse).
- **Pray About It:** Pray together for a marriage that is not based on the needs of the other as much as it is based on reverence for God. Ask God to help you see, in the core of your hearts, that you will both be more loved and more satisfied in your marriage if each of you is God-centered more than spouse-centered. Thank your heavenly Father-in-Law for his child (your spouse) and lift up specific things about him/her that delight the Father and you.
- **Read and Reflect:** Read Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 2:16 - 20; Matthew 22:1 - 2; and Revelation 19:7. Over and over God uses the husband and wife as a picture of his relationship with his people. Why do you think God does this? What are some of the parallels you see between a marriage of a man and a woman and God's relationship with his children?

ACTIVITIES

Try one or more of the following suggestions:

- **Personal Exercise:** Identify an area in your marriage where you are withholding love, care, or something else because your spouse is not meeting your need or doing what you want. Now look at this same area through the lens of loving your spouse out of reverence for Christ. How might you adjust the way you are treating your wife/husband if your primary motivation is to bring glory to God?
- **Journaling Exercise:** Use Philippians 2:1 - 8 as a launch pad into your journal time. Read the passage, then record (either in a notebook or on the page provided at the end of this session) some of the ways your attitude and actions might change if you followed this counsel of the apostle Paul and the example of Jesus.
- **Personal Prayer:** Ask Christ to help you base the way you treat your spouse on your reverence for him, not on what your spouse does or does not do. Ask the Spirit of God to grow you in holiness and purity as you learn to love your spouse. Invite the Father to teach you to see your spouse the way he does, as a loved and cherished child.

RECOMMENDED READING

In preparation for session four, you may want to read chapter 7 of the book Sacred Marriage, by Gary Thomas.