

TALK ABOUT IT

What was one of the lines in your wedding vows that spoke of committing to your spouse no matter what you faced together? Why do you think most wedding vows include these kinds of promises?

DVD TEACHING NOTES

Introduction: Israel's sacred history and the journey of a marriage

Joy and celebration

Frustration and anger

Failure and brokenness

Excruciating times of silence and struggle

God's presence through it all

God's divine design

Characteristics of a good marriage and a good spiritual life

The value of perseverance

The fundamentals: The real-life story of John Wooden

DVD DISCUSSION

1. As you think of the history of God and his people as recorded in the Bible, note aloud some of the various seasons in the relationships — joyful times, frustrating times, broken times, even silent times. How does this mirror the journey of a husband and wife?
2. Why is it important to honestly acknowledge that every marriage will have seasons of incredible intimacy and painful distance, of romantic bliss and relational tension?

Whatever season of marriage we find ourselves in, we can profit from it because it so closely mirrors God's relationship with Israel.

3. For much of human history, due to short life spans, most marriages built a history that only spanned one to three decades. Today a couple can look forward to four, five, or even six decades of married life. What are some of the realities that settle in when a couple realizes they might just be spending half a century together?

4. Gary notes how recent studies of the human brain have taught us that it can take from a decade to fifteen years for a couple to truly create the deepest of bonds and have a sense of being one. If this is how God has designed the brain to work, how might this reality influence *one* of the following situations:

- A newlywed couple that is four months into their marriage and feels they might not be right for each other because they are still struggling with differences
- A couple that is dealing with the “seven-year itch” and wondering if the grass might be greener on the other side of the fence
- A husband and wife who have three kids under the age of five and can't figure out why they don't feel the same romantic intensity and sense of oneness they enjoyed when they started dating

Building a sacred history together teaches us to be persistent in doing good, even when we want to do something else. This commitment to perseverance teaches us the basic Christian discipline of self-denial.

5. The very things we need for a healthy marriage are what we need for a growing walk of faith: commitment, tenacity, loyalty, and willingness to hang in there when times get tough. How can a vibrant and growing faith in Jesus strengthen your marriage? How can an unyielding commitment to love and serve your spouse, even when things get difficult, strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

6. Gary cites a well-known Hollywood actress—a woman who has gone through a number of marriages, engagements, and boyfriends—whose philosophy of life is, “You have to be happy in the moment!” Read James 1:4. How does James’ teaching and the philosophy of this woman paint differing views of life and happiness?

- Years that you would love to have kids, but are not able to conceive

- Seasons of financial stress and strain when it is hard to make ends meet

- When you are raising teens and they are testing boundaries

- The empty nest years when kids move out and you have more time to look at each other than you have had in decades

- When your parents are getting on in years and need more of your help and support

9. Gary told the story of John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach at UCLA who was also an amazing example of devotion to his wife. Tell about a couple you have had the honor of watching write a beautiful sacred history together, and one lesson you have learned from this couple.

God knows how he has designed us and how slow the process of building true intimacy can be. That is why his plan is one marriage to one person for a lifetime.

7. In a case study, researchers worked with couples who described their marriage experience as “severely dissatisfying” or “very severely dissatisfying.” Five years later, most of the couples who chose to remain married described their marriage as “very satisfying.” Of those who pursued divorce, only 17 percent said they were satisfied with their current relationship. These objective findings fly in the face of conventional wisdom that encourages us to leave a challenging marriage so we can find true happiness. How would you explain these results?

8. Building a sacred history means hanging in there during the challenging seasons of marriage. Talk about some of the challenges a couple might face in *one* of the following seasons and how they can hold on to each other and the hand of God during these times:
- The years when children are born and you have a young and growing family

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. Review the history you have written so far. What were some of the wonderful times filled with joy, laughter, and great memories? What were some of the challenging times, and how did God bring you through them? How can you draw from the tough times in the past to be strong for what you might face in the future?
- **Pray About It:** Together ask the Holy Spirit to infuse you with tenacious perseverance and a growing commitment to your marriage, no matter what life throws at you. Thank God for the good times and acknowledge that these have been a gift of his grace. Pray for other couples you care about ... ask God to help them develop their own sacred history.
- **Read and Reflect:** Read Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 12:1-3; and James 1:2-8 as a couple. What is God saying about the place of perseverance in the life of a Christian? What lessons can you draw from these passages into your marriage as you seek to write a sacred history of your own?

WISE WORDS FROM JOHN WOODEN

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.

It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen.

There are many things that are essential to arriving at true peace of mind, and one of the most important is faith, which cannot be acquired without prayer.

CLOSING

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

- God, grow hearts of perseverance in each of us so we can write a sacred history with each other and with you.
- Help us, in the difficult times, to remember that this is part of the journey and you are always with us.
- Thank you for those who have been models of passionate perseverance and loving commitment in their marriage.
- Father, be with those we care about who are in a challenging season of marriage. Help them hold on to you and each other as they press through.

There are seasons of life that can rock your intimacy. Couples who persevere to the end discover an even deeper level of intimacy.

