

TALK ABOUT IT

What is one way you and your spouse are fundamentally different, and how has God used this to grow the character and heart of Jesus in you?

DVD DISCUSSION

1. According to Gary, neurologists have discovered that the average woman processes complex emotional data up to seven times faster than the average man. What challenges might this bring to a marriage, and how have you seen this live itself out in your own?

2. What are some of the common motivations people have for getting married and how do these match up with what you have discovered to be the realities of the marriage relationship?

DVD TEACHING NOTES

Introduction: His brain, her brain

How the marriage relationship can teach us to love

- Marriage addresses our deepest needs ...
- Husbands: to overcome our selfishness
- Wives: to overcome our disappointment
- My "soul mate" or my "sole mate"?

The story of Brian and Haley

Common Motivations to Get Married	Reality You Have Experienced

If God's design for marriage is to teach us how to love and be less selfish, you can see how our desires and God's desires might conflict. Until we align ourselves with God's purpose for marriage, we may not only resent our spouse, we might ultimately resent marriage itself because it seems designed to put us in situations where our selfishness is confronted.

3. When a couple realizes that much of what they had hoped to get out of their marriage relationship turned out to be a mirage, what possible courses of action are available to them? How have you seen people respond when they came to understand that marriage will not provide all they had dreamed it would?

4. Gary tells of the time his wife wanted to visit some "cute shops" right when he wanted to watch a big sports event on TV. Husbands, in all honesty, what would be your typical response to this kind of request from your wife? *Wives*, how might you react to his response? How can such situations become a laboratory for learning love, for both a husband and wife?

When we grow in our commitment to serve each other, we become more like Jesus who said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28).

5. Read Ephesians 5:25. Gary says that God's design for marriage helps us confront our fundamental weaknesses, one of which is selfishness. How is marriage a perfect laboratory for learning to overcome our tendency to be selfish, and what is one story that illustrates this from your life?

6. Many people today believe there is one perfect person out there for them — a soul mate. Gary asks, "Do you really believe that God would base your future happiness and a lifetime of fulfillment on your ability, in your early to mid twenties, to find the one person out of over six billion people on the face of this earth with whom you can be successfully and intimately matched for the rest of your life? Do you think God would base your happiness on something that precarious? Does that sound like God to you?" What is the heart of the issue here, and how would you respond to Gary's questions?

Instead of looking for our "soul mate" I like to talk about our "sole mate." If marriage is about learning to love, it's about learning to walk out the biblical mandate to grow in love.

7. Often an engaged person will speak of their soon-to-be spouse in glowing terms—all they are and all they do. On the other hand, married people can be prone to speak of their spouse in terms of what they are *not* and what they *fail* to do. Why do you think this is, and how can we work against such negativity when speaking of our spouse?

"Lord, how do I love my spouse today like they've never been loved before and never will be loved again?"

8. Gary closed with the story of Brian and Haley. How does this true-life example of devotion and love put marriage into perspective?

9. As this study of *Sacred Marriage* comes to an end, what is one new outlook or action you will take away in terms of your marriage relationship?

CLOSING

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

- Creator God, you made men and women gloriously different. Teach us to see these differences as a gift, not a curse.
- Spirit of God, let our marriage be a laboratory for you to work in each of our lives, and teach us to love and serve like the Savior who gave himself for us.
- Give us eyes to see our spouse as you do, and not from our limited perspective.
- Lord Jesus, show us the folly of dreaming about some nonexistent "soul mate" and instead teach us to invest our heart, service, and love in the "sole mate" you have already given us.

IN THE COMING DAYS

COUPLE'S CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Take time after this 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. Consider how you can grow in your ability to humbly serve each other.
- **Pray About It:** Pray together for hearts that are willing to learn love in both good and hard times. Thank God for how he has forged you through your marriage relationship. Surrender your future together to God and ask for the strength to be devoted to your spouse for the rest of your life.
- **Read and Reflect:** Read John 19:1 - 37, one gospel writer's account of the ultimate example of service - Jesus' death on the cross. Talk together about how the sacrifice of Jesus can be an ever present reminder of how you are to love and serve one another.

ACTIVITIES

Try one or more of the following suggestions:

- **Personal Exercise:** Review the lists you created in response to question two (page 71). If you identify any unhealthy motives on the list that reflect your heart, identify how you need to adjust your perception of marriage with God's understanding of marriage.

- **Journaling Exercise:** Take time to review your journal entries from sessions one through five, add any new insights, and highlight the three or four biggest lessons you have learned during the Sacred Marriage study (a page has been provided at the end of this session). If you've committed yourself to any new attitudes or actions, share these with your spouse and ask them to hold you accountable.

- **Personal Prayer:** Pray that the lessons you've learned over these six sessions will not be a short-term topic to think about, but will lead to a lifelong commitment to a biblical model of marriage.

RECOMMENDED READING

Finish reading the book Sacred Marriage, by Gary Thomas, if you haven't done so already.