GARY THOMAS

SACRED MARRIAGE

WHAT IF GOD DESIGNED MARRIAGE TO MAKE US
HOLY MORE THAN TO MAKE US HAPPY?

SESSION 1

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MARRIAGE: MORE THAN WE IMAGINE

God desires that we use the challenges, joys, struggles, and celebrations of marriage to draw closer to him and to grow in Christian character.

Introduction

This DVD study series, based on Gary Thomas's bestselling book of the same name, points beyond marriage. It is really about spiritual growth. Marriage is one powerful context in which God shapes us more into the image of Jesus.

Some people see marriage as a romantic fusion of souls and bodies. Others see it as a responsibility or a chore ... a commitment to perform a series of duties for another person. Still others see it as their best highway to happiness. In this session we will discover that God's design for marriage is richer and deeper than any of these perspectives.

Marriage has a sacred purpose. The intimacy and closeness of two married people creates a perfect setting for growth, maturing, and lessons in holiness. If we approach marriage with the right perspective and attitude, it can be one of the most glorious pursuits in all of life. If we come with the wrong outlook, it can quickly deteriorate into a place of pain, frustration, self-centered loneliness, and deep brokenness.

Building a strong marriage is one of the greatest challenges in the world. Yet, when we listen to the wisdom God has to offer, it can be a satisfying

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

SESSION ONE

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?

DVD Discussion

1.	When a couple is married and live in continual close proxim-
	ity, the littlest and strangest things can cause irritation and petty
	frustration. Tell about a time in your marriage when something
	small or strange happened that stripped away the well-designed
	façades to expose the real and sinful you.

2. What is one virtue or character quality you realized needed to grow more in your life once you got married?

3. Most of us get very little training to prepare for marriage. When it comes to the spiritual dynamics of marriage, there is often no preparation at all. What do you wish you had learned before taking your vows and beginning your marriage relationship?

If you are afraid to face your sin, don't get married because this relationship will expose your sin like nothing else.

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 everincreasing 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?

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.	as	ary says marriage can be an ideal place to learn lessons such forgiveness, patience, and understanding. Tell one story, as a uple, about how God has grown one of these characteristics in ur lives because you are married to each other.		
wil	ll pr	ole get married for a reason as trivial as a romantic high, they obably end up getting divorced for something as trivial as the fromantic 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?

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.

Journal