

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SACRED MARRIAGE*

# Cherish

THE ONE WORD THAT CHANGES

EVERYTHING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE




Cherish





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GARY THOMAS

WITH BETH GRAYBILL

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*Cherish Study Guide*

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# Introduction



Whether you were married inside a beautiful church, a spectacular event space, the local fire hall, or outside in a country meadow, one thing you share with your group members is that you exchanged some version of wedding vows on that special day. You may have written your own vows that you crafted and carefully designed to reflect your unique personalities. Or you may have said more traditional vows that went something like this:

I take you to be my wedded husband/wife,  
To have and to hold, from this day forward,  
For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
In sickness and in health,  
To love and to cherish, till death do us part,  
According to God's holy ordinance;  
Therefore I pledge myself to you.

Millions of married couples have repeated these same vows year after year, ceremony after ceremony. In fact, the oldest version of these traditional marriage vows can be traced all the way back to the medieval era. In 1549, these vows were printed in the first Book of Common Prayer that was used by the Church of England.



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Today, as Christians, we often revisit these vows when we talk about what it means to *love* our spouses. In fact, most marriage books challenge us to explore a biblical view of *love*. But how often do we stop to think about what it means to *cherish* one another? In this study, you will explore the biblical view of what it means to *cherish*. You will be challenged to take your love to a new level—an “upstairs” level, as one writer puts it—by learning what it means to truly *cherish* your spouse.

My perspective, after years of marriage ministry, is this: *Love is the athletics of marriage, and cherish is the ballet of marriage.* Cherish introduces us to *artistry* in a way that love introduces us to *endurance*. We cannot cherish our spouse without love, and we cannot take our love to a new level without cherishing one another. Studying how to cherish one another, with all its special qualities, puts a polish on love, makes it shine, and adds a special sparkle to our lives and marriages.

Together, during the next six sessions, we will explore the differences between loving and cherishing and take a deeper look at what it means to continue cherishing our spouse “till death do us part.”

# How to Use This Guide



The *Cherish* curriculum is designed to be as personal as is it practical. Each session begins with an opening “icebreaker” question followed by a reflection from the Bible. You will then watch the video with your group and jump into some directed small group discussion. Note that even though there are multiple questions and activities available for your small group, you don’t need to feel as if you must use them all. Your leaders will focus on the ones that resonate most with your unique group and guide you from there.

The final component of each session, the *group activity*, is where *Cherish* might diverge from other studies you have done in the past. In this part, each couple will engage in a hands-on exercise that will seek to move the focus of the session from your head to your heart. Think of this time as an answer to the question, “What am I supposed to *do* with this message?”

The group activity is intended to be completed during your meeting time—and it will be what you make of it. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating with your spouse, it will be less likely you will find what you’re looking for during this study. But if you stay open and take a gamble, you may discover what so many others have already found to be true: faith comes alive when we take holy risks for God.

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Now, if the thought of *risky* activities make you feel anxious, that's okay. If you fall into this category, just read ahead to each group activity section, and you will know not only what's coming up but also how to prepare yourself accordingly. Finally, remember that none of these exercises or experiences involves anything inappropriate or embarrassing. They are just hands-on opportunities to keep you open to God's love and help you learn to cherish your spouse.

Following your group time, there will be three more opportunities during the week for you to engage the content of *Cherish*. Each of the between-sessions activities is based on the understanding of what it means to cherish and be cherished. A complete understanding of this concept includes recognizing how you want to be cherished, how best to cherish your spouse, and how God has cherished you. The challenge is to do at least one of these activities between sessions and to *use this study guide to record what you learn*.

Starting in session 2, there will be time before the video for you to check in about the previous week's activity and process your experiences as a group. Note that if you could not do an activity the first week, or if you are just joining the study at this point, you don't need to worry. Just hearing what others have learned will be enough at this stage.

Finally, remember that this study represents an opportunity to discover a new way of relating to your spouse. The videos, discussions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so that you are not only open to God's love but also start letting it change you from the inside out. Just consider what God could do with a group of people who were not

only cherishing their spouses but also cherishing one another together in biblical community. Let's jump into *Cherish* and find out.

### Note

If you are a group leader, additional instructions and resources for leading the group activities are included in the back of this book. Because some of the activities require materials and setup, make sure to read this information before the session begins so you will be prepared.



## SESSION 1

# To Love and to Cherish

Love is the muscle of marriage.  
Cherish is the heart of marriage.

GARY THOMAS



*To love and to cherish . . . till death do us part.*” How many of us said these vows on the day we were married? Whether we spoke with a nervous, shaky voice or a confident, exuberant promise, most of us—if not all of us—said something to this effect on that special day at the altar. Since then, we might have read marriage books, gone through couples studies or couples counseling, and perhaps had numerous conversations about what it means to love one another. But rarely do we talk about what it means to cherish one another.

To *cherish* something means to protect it, respect it, notice it, honor it, show gratitude for it, and hold it dear. Think about this for a moment. If you had a Tiffany engagement ring, would you put it in a shoebox? If you had a painting by Rembrandt, would you place it in a Popsicle stick frame? If you had an autographed document from George Washington, would you use it

## Cherish Study Guide

as a coaster? (If you *would* do these things . . . well, that's for a different study.)

When we *cherish* something, we put energy into showcasing it and protecting it. The same is true of marriage. When we cherish our spouses—as opposed to just *loving* our spouses—we strengthen, enrich, and deepen our relationships. We take our marriages to the “upstairs level” of living—the level where we are the truest versions of ourselves, feel most comfortable to see and be seen, and are our most authentic, honest, and real.

Of all the metaphors that could be used to describe cherishing in marriage, perhaps the best is what happens in a ballet. In the *pas de deux* of ballet—the couples' dancing—the male dancer showcases the beauty, grace, strength, and coordination of his partner, the female dancer. It's the dance behind the dance. It's the intentional, meaningful, and purposeful choice of the male dancer to showcase the female. In doing so, the male supports and stabilizes the female as she lifts and turns, allowing her to perform feats she could never do alone.

In this first session, we will examine how marriage really takes off when we get some of our highest pleasure from seeing others honor, appreciate, and admire our spouse. This is one step above even selflessness. We're not merely serving; we're showcasing. That changes our heart toward our spouse and makes him or her feel even more cherished. And cherished spouses tend to thrive more than those who believe they are a colossal disappointment or embarrassment to the other person.

Let's get started.

## Welcome and Checking In

*Go around the group and invite the members to introduce themselves, and then discuss the following questions:*

- How did you meet your spouse?
- What stands out to you from your wedding day?
- What are you hoping to get out of this time together as an individual, as a couple, and as a group?

Take a few moments to share your expectations with the group.

## Watch the Video

*Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.*

### Notes

Love is the athletics of marriage, but *cherish* is the ballet—the wonder, the art, the mesmerizing aspect of romance. Cherish provides the artistry in marriage.



Ballet is woman, and all my life I  
have dedicated my art to her.

GEORGE BALANCHINE



# Cherish Study Guide

Some of the differences we find in the Bible between *love* and *cherish*:

| LOVE<br>(1 Corinthians 13) | CHERISH<br>(Song of Songs) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|                            |                            |

Wives want to be more than *loved* by their husbands if you define love as commitment or “hanging in there.” Husbands may be uncomfortable with the word *cherish*, but they certainly want the concept of what this means. Cherishing will motivate you to pursue each other.

Rather than having our love diminished by each other’s imperfections, we can cherish each other’s gifts and showcase our spouse’s abilities. As George Balanchine said, “The beautiful becomes yet more beautiful.”

Marriages will change for the better when we start to focus on showcasing and supporting the other person.

I believe cherish to be a  
higher plan within the context  
of love, something like the  
upstairs level in a home.

JAN KARON



God uses stories of couples who struggle, persevere, and come out on the other side. But we also need in the church today stories of couples who cherish each other—who find the sweet happy spot of marriage.

We don't want marriages where we just grit our teeth and vow to tolerate each other because the Bible says we don't qualify for a divorce. The good news is that we can learn to cherish one another, even if we've stopped doing this in the past.

Cherishing is not based on infatuation but authenticity—on knowing someone, preferring someone, and choosing someone above all others. This is why cherish can take your marriage to a new place.

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Cherish looks at the idealized form of marriage—how we can have the type of marriages that inspire others.



### Group Discussion

*Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.*

1. Before everyone shares in the large group, turn to one or two people next to you and finish this sentence: “After watching the video, one question I now have is . . .”
2. What stands out to you from the video teaching: a story, a quote, a thought, an idea? Explain.
3. Other than your spouse, whom or what do you cherish? How would your spouse answer that question for *you*?

4. Read **1 Corinthians 13** aloud, several volunteers taking turns reading a few verses each. According to this passage, what does it *look* and *feel* like to be loved?
  
5. Now read **Song of Songs 1** aloud, choosing three volunteer readers for the various “speakers” in the dialogue. According to this passage, what does it *look* and *feel* like to be cherished?
  
6. When was a moment in your life when you remember being cherished by your spouse, a family member, or a friend? How have you felt cherished by God?
  
7. Read **Psalms 139:1–18** aloud, again using volunteer readers. What does this passage say about the way God loves us and cherishes us?

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8. What is one action step you could take with your spouse as a result of this session?

### Group Activity

*For this activity, each participant will need a piece of paper and a pen to record ideas.*

Part of understanding and exploring what it means to *cherish* one another is verbalizing what it means to be cherished. This may seem simple for some, but for others, it will require thought and maybe a few examples. So, take a few minutes as a couple to talk about *what makes you feel the most cherished by people in your life*. Is it a phone call or a message from a friend during the week? Is it sharing pieces of your story as you relate to another person? Is it spending time together outside of group time or sharing a meal together? When everyone is finished, share your best idea as a couple with the group.

### Closing Prayer

*Take a few moments to pray together in some of the following directions:*

- Ask God to show you ways that he's loved and cherished you as individuals and as couples.
- Ask God to allow this message of how to cherish to sink

deep into your hearts and minds as you seek to deepen your love for your spouse.

- Ask God to show you what it really looks like to cherish your spouse.
- Ask God to open yourselves up to authenticity, honesty, and vulnerability as you spend time together as a group.
- Thank God for his presence in your lives, for the people in your group, and for the opportunity to cherish your spouse in new ways as a result.

# Between-Sessions Personal Study

## SESSION 1



Explore the material you've covered this week by engaging in at least one of the following between-sessions activities. (Some are stand-alone; others are connected to a prior activity.) These activities are meant to provide additional opportunities for you and your spouse to climb the staircase from the “ground floor level” of love to the “upstairs level” of cherish. After doing an activity, be sure to reflect and make a few notes in your guide about the experience.

### Day One: Understand Your Spouse

Take a few moments this week to have a conversation with your spouse. Ask your spouse, *“What are some things I do that make you feel cherished?”* When it's your turn to answer, be realistic and be honest. Your spouse cannot read your mind, nor can he or she make all of your dreams come true every day. However, you and your spouse *can* learn to start cherishing each other in ways that will be most meaningful to both of you.

Read **Philippians 1:9–10** as a couple and make it your prayer today: *Lord, I pray that our love will overflow more and more, and that we will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. We want you to teach us what really matters, so that we may live pure and blameless lives before you until the day of Christ's return.*

## Day Two: Cherished by Your Spouse

Based on your answers to the first activity, take a few moments to individually write down two or three ideas about how you could cherish your spouse this week. Then share those ideas with each other. If you've "missed the mark" with your ideas, revisit the first activity, seek to listen to your spouse, and try to better understand how your spouse wants to be cherished.

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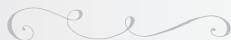
Read **Ephesians 4:2–3** as a couple and make it your prayer today: *God, we want to always be humble, gentle, and patient with each other. We want to make allowances for each other's faults because of your love. Help us to be mindful of your love for us and your peace that unites our hearts together. Thank you for being with us in our marriage.*



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The way we treat something acknowledges whether we cherish it or hold it with indifference or contempt. To truly cherish something is to go out of our way to show it off, protect it, and honor it. We want others to see and recognize and affirm the value of what we see.

CHERISH, PAGES 16–17



### Day Three: Cherished by God

Think about past moments in life when you felt cherished by God, both as individuals and as a couple. *What was the specific situation? What happened to make you feel cherished? How did that change your life?* Write down those moments, and then share them with each other. Make sure you listen to your spouse without interrupting as he or she shares.

Read **Psalm 139:1–6** as a couple and make it your prayer today: *You have searched us, Lord, and you know us. You know when we sit and when we rise. You perceive our thoughts from afar. You discern our going out and our lying down. You are familiar with all our*

*ways. Before a word is on our tongue, you, Lord, know it completely. Thank you for your presence in our marriage and for wonderful understanding that comes only from you.*

## Day Four: Cherish in Action

Set aside some time today to take action on one of the ways you previously identified as how your spouse feels most cherished. If possible, cherish your spouse *and* allow your spouse to cherish you in ways that are most meaningful to both of you. Remember, this is about cherishing your spouse, not about being the “kind hero.” Take a few moments to journal your thoughts after your cherish activities. Ask yourself: *What was it like to cherish my spouse? What was it like to be cherished? What was difficult about doing this?*

Read **Proverbs 4:8** as a couple and make it your prayer today: *Lord, help us today to cherish your wisdom as we cherish one another. We want to embrace your wisdom so we will honor one another and exalt you in all we say and do toward each other. Continue to show us what it means to cherish, embrace, and honor each another in the days, months, and years ahead.*

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Beautiful, harmonic marriages are like the ballet and symphony. They're not just one dancer or one note. They are built by asking ourselves on a regular basis, "Am I trying to showcase my spouse, or am I fixated on how my spouse is not showcasing me?"

CHERISH, PAGE 49



### Day Five: Carrying a Burden

Yesterday, you and your spouse took action on cherishing one another. Today, the goal is to cherish your spouse in a practical way by taking on a task that he or she normally does. Begin by asking each other, "How can I support you today? How can I make your day better? Is there something I can take on for you that would show the way I cherish you?" Write down your spouse's response in the space and how you will address it—and then go do it.

Read **Galatians 6:2** as a couple and make it your prayer today: *Father, today we want to demonstrate our love for you, and for each other, by carrying one another's burdens. Please help us as we continue to grow in understanding of what it means to cherish each other. Thank you for always carrying our burdens when we come to you in prayer.*

## Further Reflection

If you would like to dig a bit deeper into the idea of how to cherish your spouse, read chapters 1–3 in the *Cherish* book and reflect on the following questions:

- Which story in these chapters stands out to you most? Why?
- What steps will you take this week to make your spouse feel as if he or she is “the only man or woman in the world”?
- Think about your spouse’s unique personality and gifts. What is the best way you can draw on these characteristics to “showcase” your spouse?

Use the space below to write any key points or questions you want to bring to the next group meeting.

