

PRAISE FOR *Cherish*

Cherish is full of wisdom, practical advice, and candor on a subject so personal and sacred—how to live the marriage you want every day. Gary Thomas brings truth and reminds us of Jesus in the midst of our earthly relationships.

JENNIE ALLEN, author of *Nothing to Prove*
and founder of IF:GATHERING

Many of us vowed “to love and to cherish” when we married. We hear a lot of good advice about loving our spouses, and that’s certainly important—but there’s more. Gary Thomas shows us how to put love into action through cherishing the one we love.

JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

Gary Thomas has given a deep understanding and application of a key biblical concept that is sure to take any married couple who applies it to the next level. A must-read for every couple who wishes to grow their relationship.

DR. TONY EVANS, president of The Urban Alternative

Sacred Marriage has become a classic, must-read book. Now Gary Thomas has written another wonderful book, *Cherish*, that focuses not just on loving your spouse, but on cherishing—treasuring, honoring, holding dear with tenderness, protecting, nurturing, and wanting to showcase—your spouse. This must-read book will be a tremendous help and blessing to couples and their marriages.

SIANG-YANG TAN, PhD, professor of psychology at
Fuller Theological Seminary, and author of *Counseling
and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective*

Two words come to mind every time I pick up a book by Gary Thomas: *profound* and *practical*. I often cover relationships on my radio show, and nobody articulates God's deepest desire for our relationships quite like Gary Thomas does. He's both convicting and encouraging, challenging and empowering. If your marriage feels dull and lackluster, read thoughtfully and prayerfully through Gary's new book, *Cherish*. You're only pages away from a new day and a new way of relating to your spouse.

SUSIE LARSON, talk radio host, national speaker,
and author of *Your Powerful Prayers*

Every married person desires to love and cherish their spouse. Most of us have a sense of what it means to love well. Few of us have a vision of what it means to cherish our spouse. Gary Thomas paints a vivid picture of what it means to truly cherish another human being. This book reveals new pathways to grow a healthy, dynamic, and life-giving marriage.

DR. KEVIN G. HARNEY, pastor, author, and
founder of Organic Outreach International.

There is nothing more beautiful than to be in a relationship with someone who is supposed to love you . . . and they actually love you. *Cherish* helps bring home that sweet, happy spot in marriage.

DR. TIM CLINTON, president of American
Association of Christian Counselors

Get ready to be inspired! This book is sure to lift your marriage to a higher level—that's what it did for us. But Gary does more than inspire. He equips. He shows us how to lovingly care for and treasure our spouse like never before. Don't miss out on this incredibly practical message. Your marriage will never be the same.

DRS. LES & LESLIE PARROTT, #1 *New York Times* best-selling authors of *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

Gary Thomas has done it again! He has a way of shifting my marriage paradigm to shed brilliant light on what it means practically to honor God in my marriage. By bringing to life one little word, *Cherish* will do the same for you.

DR. JULI SLATTERY, president of Authentic Intimacy

Every couple gets married with great intentions for their marriage. Their marriage is going to be different; it's going to be special. But many couples lose their purpose, and life gets busy, hardships come, and the marriage they have isn't the marriage they wanted. Every couple wants to improve their marriage, but many don't know where to start. That's what I love about *Cherish*. Gary Thomas gets to the heart of marriage. Soak in his wisdom, apply these principles, and watch God transform your marriage relationship into something you cherish.

JUSTIN DAVIS, pastor of Hope City Church, founder of RefineUs Ministries, and author of *Beyond Ordinary: When a Good Marriage Just Isn't Good Enough*

I've always been a huge fan of Gary Thomas's books, but *Cherish* is special. It shows couples how to turn disappointing marriages into delightful ones. I especially appreciated the chapter on honoring each other. As I work with couples in not just disappointing marriages but destructive ones, dishonoring is a significant issue. I'm grateful for Gary's validation of the fact that regularly withholding cherish in one's marriage can rise to the level of emotional abuse.

LESLIE VERNICK, licensed counselor, relationship coach, and author of the bestselling *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

Also by Gary Thomas

Authentic Faith

Devotions for a Sacred Marriage

Devotions for Sacred Parenting

Every Body Matters

The Glorious Pursuit

Holy Available (previously titled *The Beautiful Fight*)

A Lifelong Love

Not the End but the Road

Pure Pleasure

Sacred Influence

Sacred Marriage

Sacred Parenting

Sacred Pathways

The Sacred Search

Thirsting for God



Cherish

THE ONE WORD THAT CHANGES
EVERYTHING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE



GARY THOMAS

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To Skip and Lucy

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It may sound weird to say this upfront in the acknowledgments, but from the landing of the idea to the daily process of writing, God has felt like an ever-present partner in this book. On days when I needed an illustration for one specific point, a couple “just happened” to recount the perfect illustration during a spontaneous meeting. Many days of writing felt like straight-out worship. I am enormously grateful to serve a living God who I believe is eager to see his church grow. To say “I couldn’t have written this book without him” would be the understatement of my life. To me, at least, it felt like God was all over it.

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I am very grateful for the many friends and readers who graciously shared their own stories. Some have had details changed to protect their privacy; many allowed their lives to be shared unaltered. This book is a collection of the life experience of Jesus at work in marriages and the church.

My editor, John Sloan, pushed me pretty hard on this one, for which I am very grateful; his work has made this a much better book. I am grateful to the entire Zondervan team: David Morris, the publisher, has been an active and enthusiastic advocate. Tom Dean, my marketing director, has been patient and

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tireless, and Brandon Henderson and Robin Barnett have provided outstanding marketing and public relations support. Dirk Buursma's faithfulness in copyediting sets the standard for the rest of the publishing world.

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One of the things that has given me freedom to focus on writing is having children who follow the Lord and make great choices. My son, Graham, and his wife, Molly, inspire me with their love. Allison and Kelsey are a daily delight. I've seen so many parents weighed down with anxiety over their children that I feel particularly blessed to be inspired by these four amazing young adults.

And as always, I feel blessed beyond measure by the support I receive and the community I experience in Houston, Texas, that goes by the name of Second Baptist Church, and my wife, Lisa, who has taught me the joys of cherishing and being cherished every day.

Foreword



BY LISA THOMAS

I know what it feels like to be cherished.
A warm hand covering my cheek, maybe with a little eye contact

A gentle back rub

A cup of coffee by my bedside when I wake up in a hotel room

Words of affirmation, beyond what I deserve, sometimes even spoken in a room full of strangers

A hand pressed on the small of my back

A gas tank that remains miraculously full

Soft words when a harsh response might have been justifiable

Some of these things might make *you* feel annoyed rather than cherished! Cherishing takes on different forms for each of us, but for me, it is the little acts that leave me feeling adored, safe, worth the effort. Just hearing the word *cherish* makes me want to hug Gary, give him a kiss on the cheek, and say thank you.

My friend asked me recently what book Gary was working on. I told her it was a new marriage book called *Cherish*. She instinctively grabbed her husband's arm, leaned into him, and let out a delighted "aaah." Just the word elicited that response. I am confident this book, written by one who excels at cherishing, will help you learn to cherish well.

CHAPTER 1

To Love and to Cherish

A cherishing attitude will
enrich, deepen, and spiritually
strengthen your marriage



Khanittha “Mint” Phasaeng’s life changed dramatically in 2015 when she was crowned a Thai beauty queen. Her pageant win, according to the *Daily Mail*, led to lucrative film, advertising, and television contracts. Shortly after returning to her hometown, Mint became an Internet sensation when she was photographed showing honor to her trash-collecting mother by kneeling at her feet.

Mint’s mother literally collects and sells trash for a living, so that’s why Mint found her in front of trash bins when she returned from her triumphant win—still dressed in the tiara and colorful sash that marked her as one of Thailand’s new celebrities.

The photo of a glamorous young woman kneeling on the dirty pavement in front of a trash collector wearing plastic shoes evokes a wondrous gasp. Without shame, Mint called her

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mother's trade an "honorable profession" that kept their family from starvation, and she praised her mother's commitment and care.

One week before Mint's win, her mother was all but invisible to 99.999 percent of Thailand. But when she was cherished by a suddenly famous daughter, millions got to hear her story and learn of her character and her worth.

This is a picture of what happens when we cherish a loved one. Mint didn't just send her mother a thank-you card. She didn't just give her mother a halfhearted hug. She got her dress dirty as she dropped to her knees in a place where people throw their garbage and bowed down to a woman in common dress.

This sign of respect, adoration, gratitude, and honor—going out of your way to notice someone, appreciate someone, honor someone, hold someone dear—in such a visible way, even kneeling at their feet, is a picture of what we could call "cherish." Mint felt something in her heart, believed something in her mind, and expressed something physically by dropping to her knees.

She cherished her mother.

Ever notice how our attention is drawn to something whenever we see that it is given special care? When you're walking around Washington, D.C., and a police motorcade of black SUVs escorts a car with tiny United States flags on it, you know the person inside must be important.

They're being protected, after all.

You don't put a Tiffany engagement ring in a shoebox. You don't frame a Rembrandt in a Popsicle stick frame. You wouldn't use a genuine George Washington autograph as a coaster.

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 that we see.

Just as an art collector will survey many frames and attempt many different lighting angles and then consider many different walls on which to showcase a particularly valuable piece of art, so when we cherish a person, we will put time, thought, and effort into honoring, showcasing, and protecting them.

Cultivating a cherishing attitude toward your spouse will elevate your marriage relationally, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically. You will set different goals for your relationship. You will look at your marriage from entirely different angles. While cherish may seem to start out as an internal reality, it will always be reflected *by what you do*, and it can revolutionize your marriage.

The Neglected Word

Millions of couples getting married have pledged “to love and to cherish, till death do us part.”

Most of us understand and get the love part—commitment, putting the other person first, service—but what does it mean to cherish our spouses? Is that word just an add-on? Why do we say it once at the wedding and then rarely even mention it again?

Exploring and understanding what it means to cherish each other will enrich, deepen, and spiritually strengthen our marriages. Cherish isn’t just a throwaway word, but an idea that helps us better understand what we are called to do and to be in marriage. Learning to truly cherish each other turns marriage from an obligation into a delight. It lifts marriage above a commitment to a precious priority.

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Cherish is the melody that makes a marriage sing.

Sadly, the word *cherish* is more popularly used for things and memories than it is for people, but such common uses can help us understand what the word means. To cherish something means we want to *protect* it (you don't leave a \$100,000 Mercedes out in the street with the door open and the keys in it), *honor* it ("come and see the new car I got!"), *treat it with tenderness* (avoiding streets filled with potholes), *nurture* it (oil changes and tune-ups), and go out of our way to *indulge* it (frequent washes and wax jobs).

To cherish something is to *hold it dear*. That means you think about it, and when you do, you feel great pleasure. You have great affection for it.

If you cherish something, you go out of your way to show it is important to you and thus you *showcase* it. How many times does a newly engaged woman show off her engagement ring to friends and coworkers? How many times does an excited new car owner ask his friends to come outside and see his new "baby"?

Applied to relationships, when we cherish someone, we naturally want to *protect* them—it could be physical protection, but also protection of an emotional or spiritual sort, or their reputation or health. We'll *treat them with tenderness*, because they matter so much to us. We will look for ways to *nurture* them and at least occasionally go out of our way to *indulge* them. If we cherish someone, we will *hold them dear*. That means we will purposely think about them, and when we do, it will bring us great pleasure. The thought of them will make us smile. When we cultivate such an affection toward someone, we naturally want others to see their worth so we find ways to *showcase* our

spouses to others, so others can take the same pleasure from our spouses' excellence as we do.

In one sense, love is the nurturing aspect of marriage, while cherish is the “tasting” aspect of marriage. Love meets the need; cherish tickles the tongue.

“She Is So Cherish”

The urban dictionary uses the word *cherish* to describe someone who is unbelievably amazing: “She is so cherish!”

That sentence—“She is so cherish!”—is the style in which Song of Songs is written. Indeed, as love is known by 1 Corinthians 13, so cherish is captured in Song of Songs.

- Love is about being gracious and altruistic.

“Love is patient, love is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

- Cherish is about being enthusiastic and enthralled.

“How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice” (Song of Songs 4:10).

- Love tends to be quiet and understated.

“[Love] does not envy, it does not boast” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

- Cherish boasts boldly and loudly.

“My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand” (Song of Songs 5:10).

- Love thinks about others with selflessness.

“[Love] is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).

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- Cherish thinks about its beloved with praise.

“Your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely” (Song of Songs 2:14).

- Love doesn’t want the worst for someone.

“Love does not delight in evil” (1 Corinthians 13:6).

- Cherish celebrates the best in someone.

“How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!” (Song of Songs 1:15).

- Love puts up with a lot.

“[Love] always hopes, always perseveres”
(1 Corinthians 13:7).

- Cherish enjoys a lot.

“His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely” (Song of Songs 5:16).

- Love is about commitment.

“Love . . . endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:7–8 ESV).

- Cherish is about delight and passion.

“Your name is like perfume poured out” (Song of Songs 1:3).

Love and cherish never compete—they complement each other and even complete each other. At times, they certainly overlap. By pursuing cherish, we’ll become better lovers as well.

Men, your wives don’t want you to just “love” them in the sense of being committed to them; they want you to cherish

them. They don't want us to stop at, "I will be committed to you and never leave you"; they want to hear:

- "Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women" (Song of Songs 2:2).
- "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Songs 4:7).
- "You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes" (Song of Songs 4:9).

And women, you'll discover that a cherished husband is the happiest of husbands. A friend of mine asked seven male friends, "Do your wives love you?" and every one of them answered yes. He then asked, "Do your wives like you?" and every one answered no.

All seven husbands feel *loved*, but none feel *cherished*.

Husbands want to hear their wives say, "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men" (Song of Songs 2:3).

Cherishing your husband will motivate you to pursue him and thus raise the temperature of your marriage: "I will search for the one my heart loves" (Song of Songs 3:2).

Cherishing your husband will help you dwell on his most excellent qualities, giving you greater satisfaction in marriage: "His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, this is my friend" (Song of Songs 5:16).

The good news is that cherishing your spouse is something you can learn to do. It's not just a feeling that comes and goes; there are spiritual and relational practices that generate feelings of cherishing your spouse as you act on them so you *do* hold

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them dear in your heart. Learning to cherish actually *creates* joy, fulfillment, happiness, and satisfaction. It's one of those spiritual realities that may not make logical sense, but when you take it by faith and put it into practice, it works.

It just does.

Learning to take our marriage from polite coexisting or even just basic friendship to the much higher spiritual call of learning to truly cherish each other is what this book is all about. It's a spiritual journey before it's a marital journey. God's Word will instruct us; we'll need his Spirit to empower us and his truth to enlighten us to shape our hearts in such a way that we are able to cherish those who "stumble in many ways" (James 3:2), even as God cherishes us as we stumble in many ways. If you believe your marriage has all but died or even just gotten a little stale, the hope behind learning to cherish each other in marriage is found in this: *God is more than capable of teaching us and empowering us to treat and cherish our spouses the way he treats and cherishes us.*

You've been challenged to love in many marriage books. This book will challenge you to cherish, which will take your love to an entirely new level. Through the biblical act of cherishing, we can empower our spouses to become who they are called by God to be, and in the process to become more of who we are called to be, creating a marriage that feels more precious, more connected, and more satisfying.

I am not in any way diminishing love as the main qualifier of a biblical marriage. Love will always be the backbone of biblical relationships. But studying cherish, with its special qualities, puts a polish on love, makes it shine, and thus adds a special sparkle to our life and marriage.

A Higher Vision

“Sometimes I feel guilty that we have it so good.”

Jaclyn and Donnie have been married for eleven years. They own two businesses and have three daughters, ages ten and under.

The way these two cherish each other is infectious. I spoke to them on March 21, which they affectionately call “Jaclyn and Donnie Day” because it’s the anniversary of their first date. They describe their marriage as “all about the dance.” Because their kitchen is so small, they have to navigate with the precision of the Blue Angels at high speed, but somehow they still manage to get everything done in a small space without tripping over each other. “That’s the best picture of our life together,” Donnie says.

Both Jaclyn and Donnie are lastborns with “peacemaker personalities” (their words), and they go out of their way to stay connected. They never watch television alone—and that involves compromise. “If I have to watch *Nashville* with her, she watches *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* with me,” Donnie says. They don’t want individual hobbies to pull them apart. In fact, they don’t even let work pull them apart; they work out of the same office.

It’s the way they are so in tune with each other that marks them as a “cherishing” couple. Donnie is a master at reading Jaclyn’s mood and silently pouring her a glass of wine or bringing her a chunk of chocolate before things get critical with the kids or the work/life stress sours her mood. During fifteen-minute breaks while volunteering at a church service, they find each other. If they’re walking next to each other, they’re touching—holding hands or linking arms. Their language is intentional; several times a day they say, “You’re my favorite. Can I keep

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you?” They protect each other and appreciate each other in ways you’ll see described throughout this book, but I’m introducing them at the start so you can see that the kind of marriage I’m talking about is possible.

We need stories of couples who struggle, persevere, and come out on the other side; I recount a lot of those kinds of stories in *Sacred Marriage*. But we also need stories of couples who find the “sweet, happy spot” of marriage. Those are the marriages *Cherish* seeks to inspire.

There’s a parallel in the art world. First-century Roman art is marked by its lifelike realism. In early Roman sculpture, the generals and women have real bodies and even, in many cases, wrinkles. The subjects might be bald, pockmarked, chubby, or short. That’s because the sculptures depict real citizens with real images.

Greek sculpture from the same time period is more idealistic. Because the sculptures so frequently depict gods and athletes, they tend to be more exalted, trying to exhibit the ideal of ultimate fitness, chiseled strength, and perfect beauty.

My first book on marriage, *Sacred Marriage*, caused a bit of a stir by admitting and addressing the difficult realities of marriage—we looked into the wrinkles of marriage and the occasional ugly realities of relating as two sinners. *Sacred Marriage* was thus a “Roman” book. *Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage* is a bit more of a “Greek” book. We’re looking at the ideal, knowing it is so wonderful that we may never achieve it fully, but believing that pursuing it leads us to a place so beautiful that the journey is well worth taking. Knowing that such a marriage exists inspires us to reach just a bit higher.

Sacred Marriage was about how God can use the difficulties inherent in every marriage for a good purpose. *Cherish* is about how God can give us hearts to delight in each other so we can enjoy a marriage where we sometimes even feel guilty because we have it so good.

Most of us don't want marriages where we grit our teeth and tolerate each other just because God's Word says we don't "qualify" for a divorce. Most of us don't want marriages where our spouses really don't like us, much less respect us. We want to be cherished, and we want to be married to someone we cherish. And I'm suggesting it's possible to get to that point if we want to, even if we've stopped cherishing each other.

Doesn't cherish seem more pleasant, enjoyable, and fulfilling than hatred, indifference, or mere tolerance? Why wouldn't we want to grow in cherishing each other? What keeps us from cherishing each other? What is the road back to learning how to cherish someone who has hurt us, disappointed us, frustrated us, and angered us? Can we look past that and still cherish an imperfect spouse?

Let's focus on this oft-forgotten second word in the marriage vows—what it means to cherish.

CHERISHING CHERISH

- In our marriage vows, we promise to love and cherish each other, so why do we talk so much about love and so little about cherish?
- Cherish means to go out of our way to notice someone, appreciate someone, honor someone, and hold someone dear.

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- When we cherish someone, we take pleasure in thinking about them, and we want to showcase their excellence to others.
- In one sense, love is the nurturing aspect of marriage, while cherish is the “tasting” aspect of marriage. Love meets the need; cherish tickles the tongue.
- Love is celebrated in 1 Corinthians; cherish is showcased in Song of Songs.
- The theme of this book is this: through the biblical act of proper cherishing, we can empower our spouses to become who they are called by God to be, and in the process can see ourselves becoming more of who we are called to be, creating a marriage that feels more precious, more connected, and more satisfying.
- The God who cherishes the imperfect us can teach us and empower us to cherish our imperfect spouses.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think we talk so much about love and so little about cherish?
2. Describe a marriage where one or both partners practiced cherishing their spouse. What did it look like? How did it inspire you?
3. What struck you most about the contrast between love and cherish from 1 Corinthians and Song of Songs?

4. How does love help us understand cherish, and how does cherish help us understand love?
5. Describe a season in your relationship when you felt especially cherished. How did it affect the way you looked at yourself and your relationship?