CHERISH

THE ONE WORD THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE
Cherish

The One Word that Changes Everything for Your Marriage

GARY THOMAS
Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................ 11
Foreword by Lisa Thomas ................................ 13

1. To Love and to Cherish ......................... 15
2. The Only Man/Woman in the World ....... 29
3. Marriage as Ballet .................................. 43
4. Your Honor .............................................. 55
5. When Cherishing Goes to War ............. 75
6. A Bride Made Beautiful ............................ 91
7. I Almost Quit ....................................... 111
8. Cherishing Words .................................. 115
9. Cherish Your Unique Spouse ................. 137
10. This Is How Your Spouse Stumbles ....... 151
11. The Art of Cherishing Your Spouse ...... 167
12. Easier to Cherish .................................. 187
13. Biblical Power to Keep On Cherishing .... 207

Epilogue .................................................. 225
Notes ...................................................... 231
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
Cherish

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.
Cherish

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 boastsboldly 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).
Cherish

- 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
Cherish

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
Cherish

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.
Ccherish

- 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?
The Only Man/Woman in the World

Cherish means learning to hold someone dear

Men, if you want superlative satisfaction in your marriage, if you would enjoy a love for your wife that has no compare, if you want to know what it truly means to cherish your wife, then go back with me to the beginning of time—when Adam walked the earth with God.

Learning to cherish our wives takes us all the way back to the garden of Eden.

Adam watched animals play, discovered a wide variety of plants, had trees to climb, and talked to a God who was beyond imagining.

But there was no one like him.

No one.

God then put Adam in a deep sleep. When Adam woke up, he could hardly believe his eyes. Before him stood Eve—like
him in the most important ways, but also so unlike him in even more important ways.

Those lips! Eyes that seemed curiously softer. Legs like his, but somehow, gloriously different.

Breasts!
Curves from shoulder to feet that, to this day, still make men sigh.
And she was his, as he was hers.
What made this moment especially powerful, momentous, enthralling?

There was no Holly, Shanice, or Sofia.
There was just Eve.

Adam couldn’t compare Eve’s back to Camila’s, or Eve’s legs to Emma’s. He couldn’t say, “Eve is kinder than Janet,” or “Eve isn’t as intelligent as Claire,” because there was only Eve in all her glory, the woman who defined “woman” to the first man. He couldn’t imagine any other woman, because there wasn’t one. He couldn’t wonder what it would be like if she were taller or heavier or slimmer or darker or funnier or more intelligent.

She just was.
The only woman in the world.
And Adam couldn’t have been happier.

If you want to be fully satisfied in your marriage, if you want your wife to feel cherished, then mentally treat your wife like Eve. Let her be, in your mind, in that way, the only woman in the world. Say with King Solomon, “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one” (Song of Songs 6:9 ESV).

Remember that day when your bride walked down the aisle and you lost your breath seeing your woman in all her glory, marching forward to give herself to you? No one else existed for
you at that moment. No other woman came to mind. Everyone else was background furniture compared to the glorious bride who was about to become your wife.

I've stood next to many men in that moment—one of them breaking down and crying in front of family and coworkers.

This doesn't have to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It can be a daily reality.

To cherish our wives this way, we have to mentally choose to not look at any other woman that way. If you compare a two-carat diamond to a three-carat diamond, it will look small in comparison, even though it's bigger and more expensive than 99 percent of the wedding ring diamonds out there. If you compare a comfortable three-thousand-square-foot home to a ten-thousand-square-foot mansion, the three-thousand-square-foot home may not feel so satisfying.

Pray a prayer that I refer to in Sacred Marriage, one I prayed early on in my own marriage: “Lord, let my wife define beautiful to me. Let her be the standard for what I find most attractive.”

God has answered this prayer, and it’s so affirming to my wife. However she is, is what I am most attracted to. She is the “plumb line” of beauty for me—a plumb line that ages with her.

It is stunning to me that recently, after thirty-one years of marriage, my wife was standing in front of me, feeling all stressed-out, talking about how tired she felt and how frustrating certain aspects of her day had been. While trying to respond with empathy on the outside, inside I was thinking, “She is gorgeous. Still gorgeous.”

We can't fill up our eyes with our wives if our eyes have been previously filled with someone else. One of the many dangers of
porn is that it neurologically trains us to find our wives less beautiful.

I was working with a young husband who struggled in this area. After just a few weeks of victory, he saw his wife sitting across from him at a restaurant, and he started beaming.

“What?” his wife asked, noticing his intense delight.

“You’re just so . . . gorgeous tonight.”

She didn’t yet know what I knew—his eyes had been retrained, and it was showing. He was almost giddy just talking about it.

He won, she won, and even God smiled, because that night his son was cherishing his daughter, just the way God designed marriage to work.

If I want to cherish my wife’s body, I have to guard against building an attraction to any other body. That doesn’t mean you can’t find others attractive; it does define how you look at them and where you let your mind go.

It goes far beyond physical appearance, of course. I don’t compare my wife’s occasional frustrations with another woman’s peace, just as I won’t compare my wife’s skill set to another woman’s gifts. If I want supreme satisfaction in Lisa, if I want to truly cherish her, she must become to me like Eve, the only woman in the world. The only one I will ever look at in that way.

I defy any man to honestly say he has derived any lasting, godly satisfaction from looking at another woman the way he should look only at his wife; after the short moment of excitement, there will be a much longer season of frustration and discontent, followed by anger and marital distance. Fantasizing about another woman is the highway to discontent and marital
distance. It never leads you to your wife; it carries you away from her at seventy miles an hour. That’s how you create discontent, assault any attitude of cherishing your wife, and ruin your own happiness.

Adam was so blessed—and so happy, accordingly—because there was literally no one else to compare Eve to. And while the world is now populated with billions of other women, we men can still make the choice to look at our wives as Adam looked at Eve, the only woman who matters in that way.

To fill up our eyes with only her.

To be so taken with her that there is no Juliet, no Jada, and no Anna.

Just Eve.

It’s a prayer first: “Lord, let me look at my wife as the only woman in the world.”

Then it’s a choice.

Then we guard our hearts and keep our focus.

It requires a recommitment when we stumble. We will have to go back and pray again. We will have to choose again.

But if we keep holding her dear, mentally reserving our focus exclusively for her, eventually it happens: our wives are cherished. Our wives aren’t just our first choice, but our only choice.

We become happy, satisfied, fulfilled.

Because your wife defines beauty for you, your picture of the most beautiful woman in the world ages with your wife. You won’t be a sixty-year-old man pining after a twenty-five-year-old model. Who wants to be that guy anyway?

You’ll eventually be a sixty-year-old husband who is enthralled with his sixty-year-old wife and still finds his heart skipping a beat when she smiles in her own particular way or
Cherish

stands in front of you in that dress and the sun hits her just right and you forget about everything else, including time.

You’ve taught yourself to cherish her, and it’s worked. You’ve become enthralled with her, as you are with no other woman.

You want this, men. Trust me. You do. It is one of the supreme blessings of marriage that is often overlooked.

Cherishing is about learning to hold our spouses dear, and this takes vigilance. It takes intention. It takes practice. But when it arrives—when your wife is Eve and there is no other—you will feel like the most blessed husband alive.

Your wife will feel cherished because your adoration will be as genuine as the beginning of time. Your heavenly Father will experience joy because he delights when his daughter is richly cherished. Your kids will feel secure because they spiritually feed off their parents’ affection.

Everybody wins. Everybody.

But Adam wins the most.

The Only Man in the World

Women, may I invite you to take the same journey back to the garden of Eden, to the door of true happiness in marriage, and suggest that the key to that door, to becoming the most pleased and happiest of wives, is to begin viewing your husband as Adam, the only man in the world?

Divorce statistics and personal anecdotes reflect that women tend to be more dissatisfied in their marriages than men. You may have to fight fiercely against the onslaught of disappointment, lest you be tugged toward frustration, collapse into bitterness, and find yourself a captive to contempt.
The Only Man/Woman in the World

How can you fight contempt? How can you learn to cherish your husband as if he were the only man on earth?

Here’s the spiritual choice you have to make: when any woman gets married, she agrees—consciously or not—to a “commitment of contentment.” She forever resets the boundaries for what makes her content. She doesn’t get to compare her husband to other husbands (critically comparing is what girlfriends should do with boyfriends, not what wives should do with husbands) because to her, he must become the only man in the world. “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3).

You’ve already made your choice. In your ideal world, you have no intention of ever starting over with someone else, so why not put your energy into and your focus on guarding that choice, building on the strengths of that choice, and making yourself ever more grateful that you made that choice? Think of yourself as Eve in the garden of Eden, standing before the first man, Adam. Eve didn’t have anyone to compare Adam to. She couldn’t think, His arms look below average, but at least he doesn’t have a unibrow. All she could possibly think was, This is what a man is like. This is what my man is like.

If you don’t do this, your husband will pick up on the fact that he’s being compared. Men notice what you notice.

Brooks was a champion high school swimmer in his high school and state, so successful that he was offered and took an athletic position in Princeton’s varsity swim program. His impressed girlfriend (who eventually became his wife) occasionally made an offhand remark when she saw a football player or a Hollywood type who was particularly “stacked,” muscle-wise. Brooks thought that must be what Shelby wanted, so he focused
more of his training on becoming stronger and stockier. The problem is that swimmers don't need the shoulders or chest of a bodybuilder. In fact, those things can make a swimmer less effective. So Brooks was inadvertently trying to become someone who would ultimately be less successful at what initially drew Shelby's attention.

Had Shelby known what Brooks was thinking, she would have been appalled. She wasn't expressing displeasure with Brooks's build when she admired other men; she was simply making offhand remarks without at all meaning to diminish her boyfriend’s strengths.

Unfortunately, most men hear everything with hypersensitive ears. We notice when a woman's eyes light up, and we notice when they don't.

No man can be everything. A successful long-distance cyclist can't be a bodybuilder (the only people in the world I feel okay comparing my arms to are those who race in the Tour de France). A handyman may be able to fix a lot of things, but he may view exercise or long talks as chores rather than something he relishes. Though there are exceptions, dedicating one's time to becoming exceptional at one thing usually means not being exceptional at a whole lot of other things.

Since no one man can be everything, one of the best gifts a woman can give a man is to tell him—with her eyes, attention, words, and acceptance—"You don't have to be anything other than what you are. You are my Adam, the only man in the world. I cherish you."

With such an attitude, anything your husband isn't becomes irrelevant—your guy isn't that, so you don't expect that, and there's no point in fretting over it. If you marry a guy who isn't
a handyman, you don't judge him for not being a handyman. If you marry a guy who is a bit silent, you don't brood over the fact that your best friend’s husband will sit and talk to her for hours. If you marry a guy who thinks exercise is picking up the video game controller, you don't think about what it would be like to marry a guy who does triathlons with you.

Instead, you think of your man as Adam—the only man in the world. You cherish him for what and who he is, don't expect him to be anything else, and never compare him to anyone else.

This may sound extreme to some of you, but tell me, what have you ever gained by comparing your husband’s weaknesses to another husband’s strengths? Has it ever made you happier or more contented in your marriage—or a more loving wife? Has it made you feel closer to your husband and given you more joy? Has it ever helped your husband become something he’s not?

Of course not.

Many wives have complained to me about their husbands dealing with the stress of unemployment by escaping into video games for hours on end; I completely understand how frustrating this must be. And yet there are numerous wives whose husbands work very hard but disappoint their wives in other ways. The fact that they work hard is completely discounted, however. It’s taken for granted. “That’s what a man does.”

Not all men, trust me. Not the ones playing eight hours of video games waiting for a potential employer to call.

The way our brains work is that we tolerate our spouse's strengths by assuming that’s the bottom line, the ground floor, so if you married a superlative husband, to you he’s just average and there are still so many ways he can disappoint you.

Some wives—if they were to wake up and find the bed
beside them empty because their husband had already left for work—would worship God for a full fifteen minutes.

*Finally! He’s working!*

Other women wake up in an empty bed and think, *I hope he doesn’t forget to pick up the dry cleaning on his way home like he did yesterday.*

At some point, if you want marital happiness, if you want to learn how to cherish a real man instead of longing for an imaginary composite, some “Frankenstein” husband who somehow has it all, then you have to own your choice and even learn to cherish your choice. “My vineyard, my very own, is for myself” (Song of Songs 8:12 NRSV).

I promise you that you will be so much happier in your marriage—you will become a much better wife—if you simply pray through the creation account in Genesis and begin thinking of your husband as Adam—the man who defines all other men for you—and then start treating him that way. It’ll take biblical understanding, then prayerful supplication to God (“God, help me do this”), then an intellectual consent (“I want to do this”), and finally a determined act of the will (“I’m going to do this”) to fully go through this process, resetting your brain to think of your husband as Adam.

Fight disappointment with biblical understanding—this book, I trust, will help you do that.

Fight frustration by asking God to give you gratitude for your man, to help you see your man as God does, as his son.

Fight bitterness with intellectual focus—you will think about his excellent qualities and talk to yourself about your husband’s excellent qualities instead of listening to yourself fret over his inadequacies.
If you do that, contempt will slowly give way to cherish. It’s not a one-time deal. You’ll catch yourself slipping back into comparison at times, and then you’ll have to go back to square one and set the process in motion once again. Over time, it will just become the way you look at your husband. Thinking of him as Adam will be your default mode.

When that happens, you’ll find that you cherish your husband instead of having contempt for him. You’ll discover that you are grateful for his strengths instead of bitter about his weaknesses. You’ll experience the joy of your heavenly Father, who delights in seeing his sons cherished, encouraged, and respected. You’ll be a strong witness to Christians and non-Christians alike. You’ll provide one of the best parenting role models a mother could ever provide for her children.

But just as importantly, you’ll find more contentment, enjoyment, happiness, and intimacy in your marriage. Your heart will swell with pride, and you will be the envy of all your friends—the one woman in their circle who is utterly and contentedly in love with her husband and can’t even imagine being married to any other.

That’s a very pleasant place to live.
CHERISHING CHERISH

• To make our spouses feel cherished, and for our own happiness and satisfaction, we must view each other as Adam and Eve, the only man or woman in the world.

• Comparing our spouses’ shortcomings to anyone else’s strengths never increases marital satisfaction, never helps our spouses grow, and only discourages us. So we should just avoid doing it altogether.

• Men need to pray that God would make their wives the very definition of beauty. They should preserve and protect that special moment of being enthralled with their brides as they walked up the aisle on their wedding day, wanting that to be a daily reality. Comparison of any kind will kill this reality.

• Women frequently struggle with disappointment in marriage. Viewing their husbands as Adam will help them overcome this.

• Making a marital choice establishes a new “commitment to contentment.” Once we make our choice about whom to marry, we have to own that choice, accept the consequences of that choice, and learn to build on the best aspects of that choice.

• Recognize that no one spouse can excel in everything; in fact, to excel in one area almost always requires making sacrifices in other areas.

• One of the best gifts we can give our spouses is to tell them with our words, affection, and eyes, “You don’t have to be anyone other than who you are. You are my Eve/Adam, the only woman/man in the world to me.”
Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Viewing your spouse as Eve or Adam is one way of describing the act of fully accepting the choice you made when you got married. Talk about what it means mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to finally and fully accept this choice, build on this choice, and eventually even revel in this choice.

2. Fashion a prayer you can begin using, asking God to make your spouse the very definition of beauty. Discuss why this is a spiritually healthy thing to do and how it will help you cherish your spouse more.

3. Why do you think it is more common for women to struggle with marital dissatisfaction than men? How should both husbands and wives respond to this tendency?

4. Just for fun, invite the men to discuss the ideal “composite woman.” Invite the women to talk about the ideal “composite man.” Notice how some ideals will directly contradict each other. What do you think God is teaching us by pointing us toward learning how to cherish a real man and a real woman rather than a composite?

5. What can you do in the coming weeks to assure your spouse that he is your Adam or that she is your Eve, the only man or woman in the world?
Famed Russian-born ballet choreographer George Balanchine once said, “Ballet is woman.” The best male dancers recognize that their role is all about showcasing the female dancer’s beauty, particularly during pas de deux—couples’ dancing. People generally go to the ballet to see the beautiful form, grace, balance, coordination, and strength of the female lead, but all of those qualities are even better showcased when the ballerina has a male dancer who can set her up, catch her, and support her.

As a former male dancer and later choreographer, Balanchine said his job was to “make the beautiful more beautiful.”

With a strong and gifted male dancer nearby, the ballerina can do more and attempt more than she could in a solo endeavor. In the words of Sarah Jessica Parker (who put together a documentary on the New York City Ballet), “When a male dancer is paired with a ballerina, he can support, stabilize, lift, and turn her, allowing the partner to perform feats she could never do alone.”
What if we considered that our job as husbands and wives was “to make the beautiful more beautiful”? By supporting, stabilizing, lifting, and turning our spouses to the “best sides” of their strengths and personalities, our spouses can become more and do more than they ever could on their own. We essentially affirm the beauty we see in them by helping them become even more beautiful.

Some of our spouses may not even realize they have a best side. It’s our job—and joy—to help them discover it. Others may have never allowed their best side to flourish—or even be seen—because they’re insecure. If that’s the case when we learn to cherish them, we will provide the support they need.

“Showcasing”—making the deliberate mental shift to cherish our spouses by highlighting their beauty to others in the same way a dancer focuses on supporting his partner—is an essential part of learning how to cherish our spouses. If two dancers are each trying their hardest to be noticed above or even by each other, the performance is going to be a colossal, ugly failure.

Husbands can take the attitude of male dancers, seeking to showcase their wives’ beauty. It may be the beauty of wisdom, so in social settings we do our best to ensure she is heard. It may be the beauty of leadership, and we support her so she can cast vision with others. It may be the beauty of hospitality, and we buy the things she needs and open up our homes (when we might prefer to be left alone) so her beauty can be on full display. We remind ourselves, “Today my job is to cherish her.”

Very few marriages would ever approach divorce if each spouse would make one of their first daily comments to each other be this: “How can I support you today? How can I make your day better?”
Marriage as Ballet

If wives adopted this attitude, supporting their partners to perform feats they could never do on their own, they might soon be married to “different” husbands with the same names—more confident, more at peace, more engaged at home. What if a husband knew—in the deepest part of his soul—that his wife was his strongest support, his most encouraging partner? What would that do to him? What if he was willing to risk failure out in the world or at home with his kids because he knew in his wife’s eyes he would always be her cherished champion? She supports him and stabilizes him, and when he fails, she binds up his wounds—spiritual and emotional—constantly turning and lifting him so his strongest side is always showing. What if every wife woke up and thought to herself, Today my job is to cherish him by showcasing his best side to others?

A Brilliant Match

Dr. Hugh Ross, a Canadian-American astrophysicist, captivated the attention of five thousand people at Second Baptist Church, Houston, as he made it seem patently ridiculous from scientific evidence alone to not believe in God. The ease with which he drew complicated numerical equations out of his mind—in response to spontaneous questions, not from prepared notes—left most of us feeling like we were thinking with a different species of brain. Yet, near the end of his talk, Dr. Ross confessed that he is “definitely on the autistic spectrum” and that if it wasn’t for his wife, Kathy, he’d be in a much different place.

While a continuous line of autograph seekers waited to get Dr. Ross’s autograph, Kathy told me her story of meeting a brilliant young Cal Tech researcher who was doing his postdoctoral studies while volunteering at a church.
Hugh was—and is—passionate about science and God; his intellect opened many doors that otherwise might have stayed shut, but his autistic tendencies were impairing his influence. As a friend, Kathy looked for ways to help him.

“What do I need to do?” Hugh asked her.

“Let’s start with the haircut. And then the clothes. Stripes don’t go with plaid, for instance. And you need pants that cover your socks, not to mention socks that match your pants. Try to use personal examples after you explain a spiritual/scientific principle so people can relate to what you’re saying. Oh, and Hugh, this is very important: look at people when you talk to them; it makes a huge difference.”

Kathy used a little more tact and grace than I’ve made it sound in this truncated form, but she remembers that Hugh literally took out a 3 x 5 card and jotted down notes as she talked. “Haircut. Clothes. Examples. Look people in the eye. Got it.”

Hugh went to Macy’s and asked the salesman to help him match clothes. He got a haircut, simply telling the hairdresser to make it look “normal.” He concentrated not just on what he was saying but also on how he was saying it—including looking people in the eye.

The level of his impact took giant steps forward, which made Hugh all the more grateful to Kathy.

Kathy began to feel her heart moving romantically toward Hugh, but she told me she couldn’t imagine that a man of Hugh’s intellect and impact would be interested in her. Besides, with all the autistic stuff, how would that work out? Her heart was set first and foremost on serving God. “Heavenly Father,” she had often prayed, “if I can help anyone come to know you, that’s what I want to do.”
That’s why Kathy was so drawn to Hugh; she saw what Hugh was already doing on behalf of God’s work on earth; but even more, she saw untapped potential if Hugh had just the right support. Perhaps she could reach more people helping Hugh than by sticking with her own ministry activities.

Hugh found his own heart yearning as well. In a matter-of-fact way typical of those on the autistic scale, his “romantic” invitation was as follows: “Kathy, I’d like to spend more time with you. With my studies and my work with the church, I have only one day off a week, but would you like to spend that one day off getting to know each other better?”

Believe it or not, that was enough to melt Kathy’s heart. They dated, got engaged, and have been married for decades, faithfully serving God together.

I described the “marriage is ballet” metaphor to Kathy, and her eyes lit up; it describes her life. She found a brilliant but socially awkward man. By supporting, coaching, encouraging, and loving him, she has showcased his brilliance to the world. Many have come to embrace the gospel because of Hugh’s witness and intellectual persuasion; others have had their faith solidified. And Kathy has been right beside Hugh the entire way.*

What makes the Rosses’ marriage work so well is that Hugh doesn’t fault Kathy for not being an astrophysicist, and Kathy doesn’t expect Hugh to act like a man who doesn’t have some lingering effects of autism. Hugh knows he wouldn’t be where he is without Kathy, and Kathy believes her life’s impact has been hugely enhanced by Hugh’s ministry, not diminished. She’s not

* If you want a picture of their impact, go to the website www.reasons.org.
embarrassed by his autism—she’s proud of how God is using him. She has devoted her life to showcasing him.

In short, this is a couple that cherishes each other and that builds each other up. Because they accepted what each other was and wasn’t, they actually became more than they would have been as individuals. They support, lift, turn, and showcase each other, allowing their partner to shine at what he or she does best.

Rather than having their love diminished by each other’s imperfections, Kathy and Hugh cherish each other’s gifts, showcase those gifts, and thus enhance those gifts. Together, they marvel at what God has done; the two of them have become far more as a team than either one ever would have been as an individual.

The beautiful has become yet more beautiful.
This is the power of cherish.

Making Music

When Leonard Bernstein, the famous orchestra conductor, was asked about the most difficult instrument to play, he surprised many by saying it was the second violin. “I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute, that’s a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony.”

Learning to cherish means learning to be content playing second violin. This is at its root a very biblical thing to do. Jesus alluded to this when he said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). If we want to be like Jesus, we have to look for opportunities to play second violin. And though Jesus isn’t explicitly addressing marriage in the
above passage, marriage is certainly an ideal place to cultivate this attitude.

Beautiful, harmonic marriages are like the ballet and the 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?”

The day you start thinking business success, ministry success, or personal happiness is more important to you than cherishing and showcasing your spouse is the day you stop cherishing your spouse and start feeling more distant from your spouse. *You’re essentially having a love affair with yourself*, and you can’t grow more intimate with your spouse when you’re cherishing someone else.

It’s spiritually impossible.

I want to make this clear: the more you focus on yourself, and have a love affair with yourself, the less you will cherish your spouse.

Imagine how silly it would seem if a newly engaged woman stuck out her left hand and said, “Don’t pay any attention to the ring; notice my knuckle!” That’s just how spiritually absurd it looks when in marriage we refuse to play “second violin” and put ourselves and our success over our love for our spouses.

**A Different Kind of Pleasure**

Learning to showcase our spouses in this way requires that we learn to appreciate a different kind of pleasure: our spouses’ above our own.

Showcasing is the exact opposite of being selfish.

Worldly love loves because of what we get out of it:
“I love you because you make me feel so good.”
“I love you because you make me happy.”
“I love you because you are so lovable.”

Infatuated couples don’t think like this, but they do feel like this, which is why they can become so bitter and resentful when the infatuation fades and they have to try to rebuild an intimate marriage based on authenticity and service.

Be very careful if you’ve read Hugh and Kathy’s story and your first thought was, Yeah, why doesn’t my spouse showcase me the way Kathy showcased Hugh?

Cherishing our spouses isn’t served by resenting our spouses but by showcasing them, which requires a certain self-forgetfulness and a corresponding determination to focus on our spouses. Another way to put it is that the call to cherish isn’t to appreciate being pleasured by your spouse but to take pleasure in the pleasure of your spouse. To cherish is to be filled with joy not because your spouse brings you joy but because you take joy in your spouse’s joy. You feel more elated over their blessings than even your own. To cherish is to almost desperately want others to see the best side of your spouse the way you do.

Picture a male dancer who has just supported, tossed, caught, turned, and showcased the ballerina, lifting her up for her final move—one that is so powerful and graceful and brilliant that when she lands in the spotlight, the audience leaps to their feet in a thunderous standing ovation.

And the male dancer slowly steps back into the shadows, his heart racing with exertion and pleasure.

The ballerina is adored, so his job is done. The standing ovation for her brings him great joy.
That’s what it means to cherish.

Here’s a curious truth some of you may find difficult to believe: the more you cherish your spouse, the more joy you’ll have in your relationship. When you see others adore and admire your spouse, it makes your heart adore and admire your spouse that much more. Showcasing may seem like a strange backdoor to happiness, but I’m telling you, it works. When you get your highest joy by giving your spouse joy, marriage takes off.

When my friends Dennis and Barbara Rainey had a private marriage retreat shortly after they became empty nesters, they planned to spend time discussing what this season of life meant for Barbara and what it meant for Dennis. They never got to Dennis but instead spent three days planning out the implications for Barbara’s new ministry opportunities.

Dennis is a busy man, the “top shepherd” in an organization with a budget in the tens of millions. But this man showed his integrity by agreeing to focus all their time on what his wife could do, discussing the support she would need in a new season of life. Dennis doesn’t just talk about marriage and family; he lives it.

How can you better cherish your spouse so he or she can become the person God made them to be? What do you have to do in private? What do you have to do in public? What’s the best way for you to showcase your particular spouse with their particular personality and gifts while helping them overcome their vulnerabilities and weaknesses?

If your spouse is an introvert, rather than push them onto center stage, it may mean making sure you stay by him or her in social situations because they need your support. You don’t resent this—not if you cherish your spouse. You find comfort in knowing your spouse feels comfortable.
Cherish

If your spouse needs time alone, showcasing may mean offering them opportunities to go off by themselves. You don't resent this or take it personally; instead, you find a quiet contentment knowing their needs are being met.

Showcasing is all about making the beautiful yet more beautiful.

In his book *Marriage Rebranded*, Tyler Ward writes, “If your spouse is not loved well, he or she may not live out their potential for good in the world . . . As we learn to love and therefore give to our spouse, we not only become the best version of ourselves—we offer our spouse the chance to become the best version of him or herself as well. Love, then, is giving for the sake of our spouse’s becoming.”5

*Love is giving for the sake of our spouse’s becoming.*

Probably 90 percent of the couples who ask for my counsel have, at its root, the problem that both of them want to play first violin. The concept of cherishing—valuing someone, holding someone dear, wanting to showcase their beauty the way a new fiancée shows off her engagement ring, taking pleasure in your spouse's pleasure—helps us recapture a better, more productive, and more intimacy-enhancing mind-set.

You can have everything else right in marriage—you can even be perfectly compatible—but if you stop showcasing each other, the marriage will eventually grow stale, if not downright miserable. It doesn't matter how strong a dancer you are, men; you could have the arms of an Olympic champion and quadriceps like tree trunks, but if you drop your ballerina instead of catch her; if you step in front of her instead of lift her; if you flex your muscles instead of showcasing hers, that's going to be one ugly ballet performance.
Romance is fickle, unpredictable, and fragile. It comes and goes, usually without warning, sending both partners on a furious chase to recapture the spark. Cherishing expressed by showcasing is deliberate and intentional, and it provides a consistent path to ever-increasing marital intimacy and happiness.

**Cherishing Cherish**

- Christian marriage is like “relational ballet.” By supporting, stabilizing, lifting, and turning our spouses to the “best sides” of their strength and personality, our spouses can become more and do more than they ever could on their own.
- A cherishing marriage is about learning to be content playing the second violin and making the beautiful yet more beautiful. We can’t cherish our spouses if we’re having a love affair with ourselves.
- The call to cherish isn’t to appreciate being pleasured by your spouse but to take pleasure in the pleasure of your spouse.
- Showcasing means highlighting a partner’s strengths in public—making the beautiful yet more beautiful—and nurturing them in private.
- The more you cherish someone, the more joy you get out of your marriage. When you get your highest joy by giving your spouse joy, *marriage takes off.*
Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Discuss the trust that must exist between ballet partners—the woman trusting the man to catch her, the man learning to turn her to the crowd and knowing she must trust him. How can that image impact the way you look at marriage?

2. Gary says that sometimes our spouses may not even realize they have a “best side.” What strengths or gifts might your spouse be unaware of that you can cultivate and bring out of him or her?

3. How does having a “love affair with yourself” make it impossible to fully enjoy marriage with your spouse?

4. Hugh and Kathy Ross are both realistic about each other’s strengths and shortcomings. Cherishing each other doesn’t call us to deny reality, but rather to accept and perhaps even improve reality (which we’ll discuss in later chapters). Describe what cherishing each other, at its highest ideal, would look like in your marriage. Be specific and personal.

5. How can you best “showcase your spouse’s beauty” in the coming month? Think of at least one or two concrete examples.

6. After reading this chapter, what do you think is the difference between cherishing your spouse and being infatuated with your spouse?