the art of ♥ marriage
getting to the heart of God’s design
## INTRODUCTION

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## THE ART OF MARRIAGE TEAM

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## NOTES

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This small-group study was designed differently from most video marriage curricula, and much effort has been made to pattern this study guide differently as well. What you are holding is not intended simply as a viewer’s guide; it’s more about giving you a place to process life and capture thoughts while you learn more about marriage.

It is also a place to find more resources for later use. Many people attend a small group, return home, and though they have good intentions of reviewing everything they learned, the book lands on the shelf, never to be opened again. Who hasn’t been there? But we hope there is enough in this study guide that you might even want to leave it out on the coffee table and occasionally thumb through it.

Inside, you’ll find highlights of key concepts from the video, related articles, group discussion questions, and date-night ideas to build on the big ideas from each session and to help personalize it to your marriage.

Marriage is truly an art. Whether you’re just about to begin or have been working on your canvas for years, we at FamilyLife believe that with continued effort and God’s grace, your relationship can become a masterpiece.
session one

LOVE Happens

God’s Purpose and Plan
“The first bond of society is marriage.”
—Cicero

the BIG brush strokes

- God designed marriage and has a great plan in mind.
- The primary purpose of marriage is to reflect God’s glory.
- It is important to receive your spouse as God’s perfect gift for you.
a kid’s perspective

Gwen, age nine: “When I get married I want to marry someone who is tall and handsome and rich and hates spinach as much as me.”

Arnold, age six: “I want to get married, but not right away yet because I can’t cross the street by myself yet.”

Steven, age ten: “I want to marry somebody just like my mother except I hope she don’t make me clean up my room.”

Bobby, age nine: “First she has to like pizza, then she has to like cheesecake, after that she has to like fudge candy, then I know our marriage will last forever.”

top reasons people marry

Love 91%
Companionship 88%
To signify a lifelong commitment 82%
Security for children 79%
To make a public commitment to each other 77%
Legal status or for financial security 66%
Because of religious beliefs 62%
Response to family pressure 50%
Desire for a special occasion 45%

Many people choose marriage for good reasons, yet the divorce rates are still high. Why? Some idealize marriage; others underestimate the amount of effort it really takes to make a relationship work. With so many marriages failing, an increasing number of people are wondering if marriage is even worth the trouble. According to a 2002 survey on marriage and cohabitation,

Approximately 28 percent of men and women cohabitated before their first marriage.

Among men and women who considered religion very important, more than 4 in 10 had cohabited at some time in their lives.
“My concept of marriage was totally distorted because of what I knew of the music industry. People get married and divorced all the time. . . . When we got married, we talked about it, and because I had been married once before and divorced, I wasn’t sure that I could be the husband I wanted to be. . . . I didn’t trust myself. [When] I mentioned that to Julie, I said, ‘Well, you know, we’ll give it our best, and if it doesn’t work, we’ll go our separate ways.’ And she [said,] ‘No! This is it; there is no other one for me. This is the one, and this is the only one.’ And I [thought,] ‘Wow, what a concept.’ It was completely new to me that there wasn’t any way out.”

—Paul Overstreet, songwriter and musician

If marriage so often ends in disillusionment and failure, why do people get married to begin with?

“[Because] we need a witness to our lives. There’s a billion people on the planet . . . What does any one life really mean? But in a marriage, you’re promising to care about everything. The good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things . . . all of it, all the time, every day. You’re saying ‘Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it. Your life will not go unwitnessed because I will be your witness.’”

—Beverly Clark, from the movie Shall We Dance?

“She’s got gaps, I got gaps, together we fill gaps.”

—Rocky Balboa, from the movie Rocky
“Marriage is embedded in the culture as a gospel testimony that is always making statements. The only question is whether it’s a good statement or a bad one.”

—Dave Harvey

The purpose of marriage

Marriage is not primarily about you.

It is just as important to BECOME the right person as it is to FIND the right person.

The myth of “The One” is not biblical. The one you married is the one with whom you are to make a life.

The ultimate purpose of marriage is to reflect God’s image.

Marriage reflects to the world God’s promise to be with us and to redeem us.

Marriage is a covenant—a permanent promise—not a contract.

Marriage is more than a device to suit our own needs; it exists for a bigger purpose.

“‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

—Ephesians 5:31–32
Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast [cleave] to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. —Genesis 2:18–24

Eve’s creation was different from the animals’ creation; clearly, she was special!

Ishah is the Hebrew word for “woman,” and ish is the Hebrew word for “man.” Adam made a distinction in his naming of Eve.

Just as Eve was a gift to Adam, your spouse is a gift from God to you.
What if I was previously married?

The important thing is not to be concerned with the state of any previous marriages but rather to focus on the strength of your commitment to the marriage you are in today. You cannot change what happened in the past, but you can begin transforming your present marriage into one that honors Christ.

receiving your spouse

“Receiving your spouse” means more than “accepting” him or her; it means you embrace the God-given differences He’s built into each of you.

It’s remembering every day that moment you joined together at the altar—each a special gift to the other.

Your spouse is not your enemy.

Receiving your spouse is a DAILY choice.

schulte’s tips on receiving

Look for the very tip of the ball, which requires focus and concentration.

“Look the ball” all the way into your hands, until you have it firmly grasped.

Quickly tuck it into the crook of your arm. Keep looking at it until it is fully tucked.

Finally, look up and get set to run! (If you’re not already smashed into the ground.)
staying connected in the valley

by Pam Mutz

The loss of a child, and other tragedies, can be very difficult to work through with your spouse. However, many couples find that the process of working through a tragedy draws them closer together. The following are a few ways you can stay connected to your spouse in the midst of heartache:

1) Spend time reading the Word of God both individually and as a couple, particularly the book of Psalms.

2) Pray together. Use scriptures to enrich your prayer time. Husbands, choose to initiate.

3) Journaling is a concrete way to express to God how you feel and helps a spouse understand your struggle.

4) Worship corporately with other believers, even when you don’t feel like it.

5) Join a small group so that others can support and encourage you as you walk through this difficult time.

6) Practice a family tradition that commemorates your loved one, such as releasing balloons into the air or writing a love letter to that person.

7) Choose to find joy in other areas of life, and verbalize a thankful heart. Make a written list of the things you’re thankful for. True joy in a family is caught, not taught.

8) Go away together as a couple and regroup. Some things can’t be sorted out in the midst of children, jobs, and routine. Take a weekend to process, cry, hold each other, communicate, and rest.

9) Embrace the Holy Spirit as your Comforter, and allow Him to work as you rest.

10) Verbalize your choice to make your attitude better, not bitter.

11) Ask for help from trusted friends or a counselor.
THEREFORE shall a MAN leave his father and his mother, and shall CLEAVE unto his WIFE: and THEY shall be ONE flesh.

GENESIS 2:24 (KJV)
What are the top three difficulties or problems you’ve experienced since you’ve been married?

1)

2)

3)

How have these trials affected your ability to continue receiving your spouse? To view him or her as God’s special gift to you?

Some couples, after facing greater problems and differences in personalities than they anticipated, begin to wonder, Did I choose the right person? They might think, Things would be easier if I had just married a person who better understands me.

But the question is not “Did I marry the right person?” Rather, one must ask, “Am I becoming the right person?”

“I have no way of knowing whether or not [you] married the wrong [person], but I do know that many people have a lot of wrong ideas about marriage and what it takes to make that marriage happy and successful. I’ll be the first to admit that it’s possible that you did marry the wrong person. However, if you treat the wrong person like the right person, you could well end up having married the right person after all. On the other hand, if you marry the right person, and treat that person wrong, you certainly will have ended up marrying the wrong person. I also know that it is far more important to be the right kind of person than it is to marry the right person. In short, whether you married the right or wrong person is primarily up to you.”

—Zig Ziglar, Courtship After Marriage
I must receive my spouse as God’s perfect gift for me.

I must choose to believe that my spouse is not my enemy.

I must renew my commitment to the permanency of marriage.

I affirm that the primary purpose of my marriage is to reflect the glory of God.
group discussion questions

1) What was the most thought-provoking concept you heard in this session?

2) Name several "good" reasons for getting married. Name several "bad" reasons.

3) On the video, after mentioning some of the reasons that people marry, the point was made that ultimately marriage should "tell the truth about God." Why is this important?

4) Read Ephesians 5:31–33. In what ways should a Christian marriage tell the truth about God (that is, reflect His image and love)?

5) On the video a distinction is made between "accepting" your spouse and "receiving" your spouse. Describe the difference and explain why this is important in your relationship as husband and wife.

6) Share with the group some of the ways that God is using the differences between you and your spouse:
   - to shape you as a person
   - to make your marriage stronger

Prepare for your next group meeting by looking over pages 16–26 in your study guide.
**after the session**

**Date-Night Ideas**

- Look through your wedding pictures. Also reread your wedding invitation and vows and talk about the meaning of the words.
- Eat at the restaurant that was your favorite when you were dating, or one similar to it.
- Re-create the day of your proposal as closely as you can.
- Watch your wedding video.

**Date-Night Discussion**

**Before the date, do the following on your own:**

1. Review the list of “top reasons people marry” on page 4. What were some of your reasons for getting married?

2. List a few of the specific things that attracted you to your spouse.

3. Read Genesis 2:24 (page 10). What do you think it means to “leave your father and mother”?

4. Do you feel like you really left your parents—emotionally, physically, and financially—and bonded with your spouse? If not, what steps can you take to do so?
5. What are some ways a couple can "cleave" to each other?

6. Part of cleaving is learning to receive your spouse unconditionally, as God’s perfect gift for you. Go to page 11 and complete the exercise Receiving Your Spouse.

7. Go back and read the article on page 9, "Staying Connected in the Valley." What one thing from this list would you like to begin practicing in your marriage?

On the Date:

1. Talk about your wedding day and the honeymoon. What are some of your favorite memories? Any funny moments? Anything you would do differently?

2. Talk about how successfully each of you has “left” your parents. Where do you need to make adjustments to continue “leaving” appropriately, in an honorable way?

3. Discuss your answers to question 7 above about “Staying Connected in the Valley.”

4. Take time to share your thoughts from other questions that you answered on your own.

5. End your time together by looking each other in the eye and reading the statements from “Completing the Picture” on page 12; then pray together for the wisdom and courage to fulfill any new commitments you’ve made.