SESSION 1

# SERVICE

## Marriage Isn't about You

# HOME STUDY

*The Home Study provides you an opportunity to reconnect with the ideas from the most recent session and to prepare for the next one. Your experience in Group Time will be greatly enhanced when each person completes the Home Study between sessions.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*The Personal Reflection is designed to help you process what you are encountering during your reading and discussions. Read the following excerpt from* The Meaning of Marriage *and then answer the questions provided.*

There, then, is the message of this book—that through marriage, "the mystery of the gospel is unveiled." Marriage is a major vehicle for the gospel's remaking of your heart from the inside out and your life from the ground up.

The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope....

The gospel can fill our hearts with God's love so that you can handle it when your spouse fails to love you as he or she should. That frees us to see our spouse's sins and flaws to the bottom—and speak of them—and yet still love and accept our spouse fully. And when, by the power of the gospel, our spouse experiences that same kind of truthful yet committed love, it enables our spouses to show us that same kind of transforming love when the time comes for it.

This is the great secret! Through the gospel, we get both the power and the pattern for the journey of marriage.

*The Meaning of Marriage*, pp. 44–45

1. Where do you stand in relation to the Christian faith commitment? At this point do you fully believe the gospel message, as described in this session? Are there any questions you have about the gospel or its implications?

2. In the video, Tim said Christianity is an identity and that "if I believe in the Christian gospel, I realize I am living by the commitment of someone who sacrificed for me. So how dare I live on that and accept that and not give it to anybody else?" In light of this session, do you sense anything you need to adjust about the way you are approaching your spouse and others in your life?

## READ FOR NEXT TIME

Read chapter 3, "The Essence of Marriage," and chapter 5, "Loving the Stranger," in *The Meaning of Marriage* along with the letter to the Ephesians found in the New Testament. Also read the Introduction to the next session, "Covenant: Created to Make Promises."

# MARRIAGE PLAN

*To be completed as a couple between group sessions.*

This entire study is designed to be a tool to help strengthen marriages. When you complete *The Meaning of Marriage* curriculum, you will have the beginnings of a marriage plan you can begin to pursue as a couple. These conversations are best to have while out on a date so you can avoid many of your normal distractions. Here is your exercise for this week:

## HOW CAN I SERVE YOU?

Our (Spence's) church recently went through a focused season on marriage, during which we were confronted with the selfless love of Christ as the model for how spouses are to love one another. Christ not only submitted himself to God the Father when he came to earth, but he also seemed to place himself in a posture of always serving the disciples. The most poignant example—when Jesus washed the disciples' feet—is a major reinforcement of the simple truth he proclaimed that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). So, as a church, we crafted the simplest of exercises that has greatly benefited my marriage and many others. Here it is:

Step 1: Ask your spouse, "What can I do to serve you?"
Step 2: If within reason, do what your spouse requests.
Step 3: Repeat often.

This simple question "What can I do to serve you?" will feel a little forced and silly at first. But if you play along, eventually it can be one of those small steps God uses to unlock the power of the gospel in your marriage. So, while out on the date, discuss the following three questions:

1. What can I do to serve you this week?

2. What can I do to help you love God and be refueled in his love this week?

3. Are there any big-picture areas in our lives where I can serve you and our family?

# HOME STUDY

*Read the Introduction in preparation for the Session 2 Group Time. Also read chapter 3, "The Essence of Marriage," and chapter 5, "Loving the Stranger," in* The Meaning of Marriage *and the New Testament book of Ephesians if you haven't already.*

## INTRODUCTION

When the dust settled at the end of the Revolutionary War, the American colonies found themselves trying to figure out how to build the free country they had fought so hard to attain. Though Francis Scott Key wouldn't coin the phrase "land of the free" until 1812, the ethos of freedom was absolutely central to the new America of 1776.

In order for America to be a free and prosperous nation, her citizens had to commit themselves to a new form of governance. Unless they gave one another the mutual trust needed to submit to a new governing system, the fledgling country would be unstable, fair game for any faction to rise up and overtake it. It was, ironically enough, their voluntary commitment to binding laws that set these new "Americans" free and made their union strong.

Many people in our day look at the marriage commitment as restrictive to their individual freedoms. Once married, your new spouse becomes "the old ball and chain" who will shackle you from experiencing the full enjoyment the single life once offered you. Yet the biblical perspective on marriage portrays this commitment as essential to finding deep freedom. In fact, it is the binding promise, or covenant, that creates the freedom people search for. By looking closely at the marriage covenant, this session intends to upend the common contemporary view of marriage as confining and archaic, and to unveil the great hope and freedom marriage offers.