



## SESSION

# 1

# HOPE AND VISION

What would it look like for the two of you to find *your* way to something beautiful?

Don't start with, *How can that happen? How* will come in time; we can help you with how. You have to begin with *desire*. Start with what is written on your heart. What was it that you once dreamed of as a young man or woman? What was it you wanted when you fell in love?

### PERSONAL PREPARATION

*Love and War* is a twelve-chapter book. This guide and the video have eight sessions. So, in a few cases, we've combined chapters from the book to fit this study. This week, read chapters one and two in *Love and War*, and answer the following questions before your group time.

❖ It is always good to start with a first reaction. Was there something that touched a chord, brought an “aha” moment, something that stood out in particular? (Often this is the very thing the Lord is using to speak to us.) What struck you in chapters one and two?

Maybe we ought to just start this book here: Marriage is fabulously hard.

Everybody who's been married knows this. Though years into marriage it still catches us off guard, all of us. And newly married couples, when they discover how hard it is, they seem genuinely surprised. Shocked, and disheartened by the fact. *Are we doing something wrong? Did I marry the right person?* The sirens that lure us into marriage—romance, love, passion, sex, longing, companionship—they seem so far from the actual reality of married life we fear we've made a colossal mistake, caught the wrong bus, missed our flight. And so the hardness also comes as something of an embarrassment (don't you feel embarrassed to admit how hard your marriage is?). *Maybe it's just us.*

❖ Has this been true for you—has your marriage felt hard at times? And did that shock you, surprise you, dishearten you? What has been your reaction to the awkwardness of marriage?

❖ We said in the book that when marriage gets hard we often feel as though we'd made a mistake, or that we are blowing it. Has that been part of your experience?

All those fairy tales about a boy and girl who find themselves thrown together into an adventure in a dangerous land, and how they must come to work together if they have any hope of making it through, but they are both carrying a tragic flaw, an Achilles heel that pricks the other constantly and they barely *do* make it through—those fairy tales pretty much have it right.

In fact, if you look back at the first marriage, that almost fairy-tale-like story in Genesis, you'll see that Adam and Eve had a pretty rough go at it. And they didn't even have parents to screw them up as children or friends giving them ridiculous advice. My goodness, the Fall of man seems to come during the honeymoon, or shortly thereafter. (And how many honeymoon stories reenact that little drama?) They hit rough water as soon as they set sail, poor things. If this is the story of the first marriage, it's a bit sobering.

But it also gives us some encouragement, too. It's normal for marriage to be hard. Even the best of marriages.

❖ What does this truth do for you?

Because marriage is hard, sometimes painfully hard, your first great battle is not to lose heart. That begins with recovering desire—the desire for the love that is written on your heart. Let desire return. Let it remind you of all that you wanted, all that you were created for. And then consider this—what if God could bring you your heart's desire? What if the two of you could find your way to something beautiful?

Stasi and I have become best friends. We started out that way, long ago, before we married, but we lost it somewhere along the road. More than once. God has helped us find it again. We have a shared life now. We are on the same page, living for the same things. We have found our way to something beautiful. We have found that the promise of the Gospel is true.

What would it look like for the two of you to find *your* way to something beautiful?

Don't start with, *How can that happen?* How will come in time; we can help you with how. You have to begin with *desire*. Start with what is written on your heart. What was it that you once dreamed of as a young man or woman? What was it you wanted when you fell in love?

❖ Well? Write down your desires and dreams for your marriage. Some of them might come from movies, as we talked about toward the end of chapter one. Some might come from desires you had when you first got married. Some might be desires that you have matured into over the years. What is it that you long for in marriage?

- ❖ Is there a scene or two from a movie that captures what you want for your marriage? What is it? What about the scene grabs you?

The Bible begins with a marriage, and ends with a marriage. We never noticed that before.

Here is the story God is telling, the story that will explain our lives, the story in which all other stories find their meaning. Open the book to chapter one, page one, and suddenly—there is a marriage.

Now flip to the end of the story. The epic tale reaches its climax with the end of the world as we know it. After the white horse and its Rider appear, after the legendary battle of Armageddon, as the whole creation reaches its dénouement, suddenly we find—a marriage.

And so we see from start to finish, the part of this great story we have been given to play begins and ends with a marriage.

- ❖ Had you noticed that before? Have you seen marriage playing a crucial role in the story God is telling?

❖ In chapter two we describe this world (and the Christian faith) as a love story set in the midst of war. Is that how you've understood it?

In all of the great stories the boy and girl are thrown together in a great adventure they did not choose, and they desperately need each other if they are going to make it through. Shasta and Aravis are driven together by the lion; Mossy and Tangle, sent on a quest with the Golden Key; Hansel and Gretel, holding hands for fear, making their way through the dark woods; Beauty and the Beast, learning to love so that they both might be free; why, even Jack and Jill need each other to get that pail of water. We love those tales; they are loved all over the world. But most of you haven't yet made the connection—the reason your heart leaps to these stories is because they are telling you about *your* story.

Really.

Your marriage is part of a larger story, too, a story as romantic as any that's ever stirred your heart, and at least as dangerous. The sooner you come to terms with this, the sooner you can understand what is happening in your marriage.

❖ How would this change the way you look at your marriage? And the way you interpret what is currently happening *in* your marriage?

### THE CORE IDEAS

This session corresponds to chapters one and two of *Love and War*. Now, we have to try and “boil it down” to a few key points (we wrote a whole book, after all), but here are the core ideas for this week:



- Marriage is fabulously hard. For everyone. Don't let this throw you.
- The Gospel is an offer of hope. God cares passionately about your marriage!
- To find your way to something beautiful, it helps to begin with desire. What is it you long for in marriage?
- We live in a love story, set in a world at war.
- Your marriage plays a crucial role in that Larger Story.

### GROUP TIME

**Watch the session one video together.** If you would like, use the following space to take a few notes on anything that stood out to you.

**After watching the video, discuss as a group any or all of the following questions:**

1. Let's start with a first reaction. What spoke to you in this week's chapters, or this video session?
2. The group talked about how surprised they were that marriage is hard. That it was a lot easier to date than to be married. Have you found that to be true? In what ways?
3. Is that easy to admit? Is there shame connected to that? And does it help to hear that even really good marriages can be really hard?
4. Lori and Stasi both shared that one of the big surprises coming into marriage was that they thought they knew the man they married, and thought they knew themselves, but discovered they had a lot to learn. Can you relate to that?
5. The group talked about fighting for marriage—Morgan said how he has come to realize that the good times have to be fought for, even something as simple as a date or a night out together. Has that been true for you?
6. Chapter two of the book laid out a vision for marriage, that it is a love story set in a world at war. How does that help you understand your marriage?
7. Maybe the biggest idea from this session is that desire is crucial for marriage. Because marriage is hard, because we have to fight for it, the recovery of desire is really essential. The group shared a bit about their desires and dreams for marriage; was there a desire shared in the group that you resonated with? Why?
8. What are your desires and dreams for your marriage? Is there a memory, or a scene from a movie that helps to picture that desire? (It would be good if everyone in the group could answer this question).

In closing, pray together! Maybe a couple of you could pray, and invite God to fill your group, lead your journey together, and that God would fill you with dreams and desires for your marriage.

#### AFTERWARD

- ❖ What would you like to talk to your spouse about?

WARNING: Timing is *everything* in marriage. I can't begin to name the number of times I wanted to talk to Stasi about something, and simply brought it up because I was passionate about it ... BUT I didn't stop to ask Jesus if the timing was right. And when the timing was wrong, it did *not* go well! So, you'll want to practice this one crucial act of following Christ as you move through *Love and War*—ask Jesus when to bring things up! Ask him *how* to bring things up!

If you feel you want to bring up something big, a real whopper, you will want to wait until there is time to talk about it. Maybe go out to dinner this week? Ask your spouse to have coffee? But we don't recommend starting with "big whoppers." This study is just getting started, after all. It's only session one! Let us suggest a couple of things that might help the two of you really enjoy and deepen your experience of the truths of this session:

"Honey, what struck you tonight?" "Did the Lord say something to you?" "Which couple did you most connect with in the video?"

Talk about the desires for your marriage that you shared during group (if you did share them during group; if you didn't share them, talk about them now!) Are there other desires you have which you didn't have time to share? Talk about these with your spouse. Not with the sense of "you are not living up to this" or "this is what I demand of you" but simply in the vulnerable and humble spirit of "this is what I would love to see happen in our marriage."

**ACTIVITY:**

Watch a movie together. Make it a date. One of you could suggest a film because it portrays something that you'd love to experience in your marriage. Or, maybe each of you share a scene from a movie that captures something of your heart's desire for your marriage.

Look at your wedding pictures together. And your honeymoon pictures! Just enjoy them, remember.

This week, you'll want to do the "Personal Preparation" part for session two.



