Bob: It’s one thing for a husband or a wife to be encouraged. Author and speaker, Gary Thomas, says it’s very important that the encouragement is coming from your marriage partner.

Gary: I’m to be my wife’s chief encourager. If she has to get that from her best friend, something’s wrong. If she has to get that from her parents, somethings really wrong. If she has to get that from her kids, something is wrong. God created me, as her husband, to be the chief encourager / the supporter—the one to lift her up / to appreciate her—and then, like that engaged woman, showing off her diamond ring, getting others to appreciate her: “See how it sparkles! See how wonderful and excellent it is.” I want husbands to do it for wives, and I want wives to do it for husbands.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, March 21st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Is there someone offering your spouse more encouragement / more affirmation -than you're providing? That can be pretty dangerous. We’ll talk more about that with Gary Thomas today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking this week about what it means to cherish one another in marriage. I was just thinking, “I wonder if Adam cherished Eve in the garden. You know?—if Eve cherished Adam?” I thought: “Well, of course, they did; because nobody else around to cherish. You only have one option,”—right?

Dennis: Well, he had a bunch of animals he could have cherished.

Bob: Yes; you look at the animals / you look at Eve. You know, which one you’re going to cherish?—right? [Laughter] I mean, let’s just be honest about that.

Dennis: Well, we’ve got a guest back with us again. In fact, Gary, do you have any idea how many times you’ve been on FamilyLife Today? Actually, I was thinking of just moving over and letting you just take over—you’ve been on so many times; huh?

Gary: I think half a dozen; but then sometimes you play talks, as well, when I wasn’t here that you put on.
**Dennis:** Yes; no doubt about it. The talks that Gary Thomas is speaking of are messages he’s given at Second Baptist Church in Houston, where he is a teaching pastor. He has written almost a dozen-and-a-half books. He and his wife Lisa have been married for 30 years—got a number of adult children—and making a great impact for Jesus Christ. He has written a book called *Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage.*

I want to go back to Bob’s observation about Adam and Eve. What can we learn about cherishing from Adam and Eve, even if Adam only had one woman to cherish? There was none other he could care for.

**Gary:** I think that was partly behind their satisfaction with each other. Think about it—for one point in history, there was literally no other woman in the world that Adam could compare Eve to. He couldn’t say it would be nice if she was kinder / if she had a better sense of humor—or if she was curvier, or thinner, or darker, or lighter, or taller. She just was—she defined woman for him.

When you want to build a cherishing marriage, that’s the point you want to get to—where this woman defines for you what beauty is. You don’t compare her to anyone else—you receive her as she is and you celebrate who she is. You want to look at her as the only woman in the world. Often, that is a one-day reality for too many grooms.

As a pastor, I’ve stood next to a number of men, who are getting married. It used to be, when the doors would swing open and the bride would come in, every head would turn and look at the bride coming up the aisle. But because of some internet means that focus on the groom’s response, I see more and more heads turn: “Is the groom crying? Is he happy? What’s the expression on his face?” But I tell you—I’ve seen these guys—some of them successful businessmen, in spite of themselves, breaking down, weeping. At that moment, their bride is the only woman in the world / everybody else is background furniture. Their eyes are fixed on who she is as she is coming up.

Cherishing is about choosing to make that your daily reality—to be so satisfied in your spouse—that they are the only one in the world. I would say to the guys listening, in particular: “That’s what our wives desire.” There’s a powerful verse in The Song of Songs, Chapter 6, verse 9—it says this: “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one.” [Laughter] It’s not enough that you find me beautiful—in my eyes, when you walked into the room, everybody else is black and white—you’re in color: “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one,”—that’s where cherish aims to get.

**Dennis:** You know, it all sounds so good, here in the studio; but then there’s just the harsh reality of who we are, as men. I’ve got a real tough question for you, Gary: “Are you a perfectionist?” You strike me—because of how well you can wordsmith your books and how well you can craft the sentences—you have to be a perfectionist.

**Gary:** Yes; I’m guilty as charged.
**Dennis:** How does that show up in a marriage? And how does that mitigate against cherishing Lisa?

**Gary:** One of the ways I think it helps—I don’t always look at a perfectionist as a negative—I know you are supposed to; alright? But I think, when you strive often, you hit a little higher than you would have if you were just complacent. Being a perfectionist, actually makes me rely on grace, I believe, more than others; because I see how far I fall short. When I say, “This is how I should be,” and I realize, every day, I need God’s grace, I receive God’s patience / I receive God’s kindness. I can so blow it. When you write and speak for a living, it’s so humiliating. [Laughter] You’re going to the Lord and repenting—He drops this chorus into my head: “Grace, grace, God’s grace, grace that is greater than all my sin.” I’m like: “Ahh! That’s who You are.”

I was talking, Bob, with you before about the Christian classics that really shaped my thinking. When you read the Christian classics, they’re very clear—that a biblical high standard means you’re difficult on yourself and you show great grace to others. There are four or five classics that talk about that—that a biblical sense of the call to grow is that you are—and the more mature you become / the ideal—I’m not saying I’m there—but the ideal is that you are hard on yourself but grace-filled toward others. I just think, by God’s grace, it has become true.

Here’s an exercise I’ve done that has really helped. I mention it here—I stole this from another woman / she did it for her husband. I have a daily journal that has every day delineated. Every day, for a year, I write down something that Lisa did that day or something that I appreciated about Lisa that day. I’m near the end of the year, doing that. Sometimes, I have to sit before the Lord; because I can’t write the same thing. I have to come up with 365 things to thank God for. What’s been so wonderful about that is—I literally begin my day, opening up that journal, before I have my quiet time: “Alright, Lord, what am I going to write down to affirm Lisa today?” Look—she’s an excellent wife / she’s a wonderful wife, but sometimes I’m just forgetful. And so, I have to sit before God sometimes and say, “Tell me what my wife did.” He never fails to answer that prayer.

Since I’ve been keeping that journal, I haven’t asked God to change Lisa once; because when you’ve got hundreds of occurrences / hundreds of things that you’re thanking your wife for—to ask God to change one little thing just feels a little bit greedy. [Laughter] Lisa doesn’t know about this yet—this will air after she gets it. It really has been one of the most helpful things I’ve done in my marriage—because it’s kept me thankful for her / it’s kept me cherishing her—because that’s the way I start out every day. Here’s the thing—I was afraid sometimes to take it with me, traveling; because I thought, “If I lost this, it’s irreplaceable,” because it’s all written in hand.

But even—if I would have lost it—nine months in, it so blessed our marriage; because it changed me, as a husband. Lisa doesn’t know I’m writing it / I’ve kept it a secret. But I
bet you—when she reads the book and gets it, she’s going to say, “Oh!” because I know she’s noticed a difference. My attitude really has changed. That’s the thing I really want to stress—you can choose to cherish her. There are things you can do that really starts to build the cherishing mindset.

**Dennis:** I’m so glad you said that; because there are some, who are listening, say: “I’m just not good at this. Gary, you just put me under a guilt pile; because I could never do that. I’m not creative. I’m not a romanticist. I’m not a great author/writer.”

And yet, I was thinking about this in preparing to interview you: “The Holy Spirit can show up in your life and can guide you in how to cherish your spouse.” You say: “The Holy Spirit? What does He have to do with cherishing?” He is the One who guides you into all truth—it can be the truth about your spouse / the good things about your spouse—why you married him or her in the first place. And so, to just say to the Holy Spirit: “Holy Spirit, You’re the Creator. You’re the One who guides us, teaches us, and instructs us. Would You get me some creativity here so I can cherish my bride?” or “…my husband?”

**Gary:** Lisa and I have some friends, Jaclyn and Donnie. Their story appears often in this book, because they have a very cherishing marriage. Early on in their relationship, they were going through the five love languages. Donnie made it very clear that his primary love language was affirming words. Jaclyn thought: “Oh no! I’m a Yankee through and through. We don’t talk about our husbands like that.” She says: “I’m just not very good at it. You’re never going to feel very loved by me.” But she did what you just said: “God, I know You want Your son to be affirmed. I want to be an agent of that affirmation.

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Gary:** “Help me do it.” She had to first, literally, write down a bunch of things—she found that it fed itself. Then she discovered that he really liked it when she said those things, not just to him, but to his grandmother or others and she was affirming him in front of others. She realized: “If you want to cherish your spouse, sometimes, you have to say: ‘Lord, help me improve in an area that I’m not naturally good at; but I want to affirm Your son,’” / “…I want to affirm Your daughter.” God will answer that prayer, because He wants our spouse to feel loved and cherished.

**Bob:** I want to go back to what you talked about earlier—and you talked about in the book—the seven guys, who are asked the question: “Do you believe that your wife loves you?” and then “Do you believe that she likes you or that she cherishes you?” And they all said, “Yes; she loves me.” And they all said, “No; she doesn’t cherish me.” There’s some folks who hear that and go: “Okay; here we go. This is the male—the fragile male ego. Men need women to come along and just fawn over them and say: ‘Oh, you’re so strong!’ and ‘You’re so handsome!’ and ‘You’re so smart!’ This is just playing to a weakness in men to do this.”
I’m actually sitting here, Gary, thinking about a guest we had on FamilyLife Today—a husband and a wife. I remember, in the interview, when the wife was describing the husband—in glowing/radiant terms—just talking about what an exceptional person he was and how much she respects him and admires him. I remember thinking: “That’s nice. I wouldn’t mind hearing that a little more than I hear that.” Is this just our ego demanding to be fed?

Gary: It’s not our ego, and it’s not just men. I’m really stressing that this is what a Christian wife deserves as well. Again, I go back—most of us pledge to do that. We can’t say, “That’s just what the pastor told me to say.” We said a promise, before God; and why wouldn’t we want to cherish our spouse?

In a blog post, I wrote—I talked about how the church needs to do a better job of addressing domestic violence. Some women are living in situations that are just untenable.

Bob: That’s right.

Gary: What I’m trying to say is: “Let’s not just avoid abuse. A wife should be cherished. We need to raise the bar—the way we talk about our spouse, the way we serve our spouse, the way we make a spouse feel.” Here’s the thing—when you do that for your spouse—not always but most of the time—and not immediately but, often, eventually—that comes back. And I tell you—when you’re in a marriage, where you cherish each other—and I think my wife and I are getting there—it’s a much more satisfying marriage. We’re building each other up. It’s been one of the best seasons of our marriage, by far, because of that.

You could look at it as meeting an ego need, but I look at this way: “I’m to be my wife’s chief encourager. If she has to get that from her best friend, somethings wrong. If she has to get that from her parents, something really is wrong. If she has to get that from her kids, something’s wrong. God created me, as her husband, to be the chief encourager / the supporter—the one to lift her up—to see her / to get her—to appreciate her. And then, like that engaged woman, showing off her diamond ring—getting others to appreciate her: ‘See how it sparkles! See how wonderful and excellent it is.’” I want husbands to do it for wives, and I want wives to do it for husbands.

Bob: In our video series, The Art of Marriage®, we have a vignette where a wife talks about the fact that, when she was in high school, she was a cheerleader. She said “Our football team was terrible.” She said: “We often found ourselves in the fourth quarter of the game, urging fans to cheer for a losing cause. We were down by four touchdowns. We weren’t going to win anything, and we’re begging the crowd to cheer our guys on.”

She goes on to say, “When I got married, I took off my wedding gown and put on a new cheerleader outfit.” She said: “I am my husband’s cheerleader. I’m the one, now, who
God has called to get the kids and go: ‘Come on! Let’s cheer for dad!’ and to get the people around us to go, ‘We need to be cheering for him, even if he’s two touchdowns down,’—even if we’re looking and going, ‘How come you’re letting them score on you, right and left?’ It’s not our job to point out what the team did wrong. It’s our job to cheer on the team and say: ‘You can do it! I believe in you.’” There’s great power in that.

**Dennis:** I think there are a lot of people in marriages today who think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. They compare their spouse with another, and so they’re discontent. Speak to the issue of discontentment and how you deal with that as you seek to truly cherish your spouse.

**Gary:** When you get married, I believe you have to accept the commitment to contentment. You married a person with certain flaws, and weaknesses, and certain strengths. The whole concept behind viewing your wife as Eve / the only woman in the world and viewing your husband as Adam / the only man in the world—is you saying: “I chose this. I’m going to focus on this. I’m going to appreciate this.” “If I didn’t marry a handyman, I’m not going to fault my husband for not being a handyman,” / “If I didn’t marry an extrovert woman, I’m not going to fault her for being the wallflower that wants to hang by me at the parties.” “I chose this person—I want to affirm them / I want to help them become who God created them to be, and to accept it, and thank God for that.”

The challenge is / it’s just the way our brain operates—we tend to tolerate what we accept, and that becomes the bar—rather than appreciate who they are. What really opened my eyes was talking to the woman who was married to the guy I mentioned earlier—NFL quarterback / pastor in a church—but a really solid spiritual leader kind of guy, in the best sense of the term, and succeeded his entire life. He said to her one time: “You know, the challenge is—I’ve been cheered my whole life—by my mom, by the cheerleaders, by the coaches. Sometimes, I come home and I feel like it is: ‘Booooo! Booooo!’” [Laughter] I don’t get it how I can please everybody else but you.”

She said to me: “Gary, what I realized I was doing is that I took it for granted that a guy provides really well for his wife—because he always has for me. Then I saw not every man works that hard. I took it for granted that a man prays for his wife and prays for his kids. He’s the spirit—a lot of guys don’t do that. I take it for granted that a husband is courteous toward...” She goes: “I realize all of these excellent things he was for me—that’s just normal / that’s what’s supposed to happen. So, he had to be this extraordinary super guy to ever get a ‘Thanks!’”

Her husband said, after that moment, everything in their marriage changed; because she began thanking him for all the things she used to take for granted. It changed the climate of their marriage.

Here’s what it does when we affirm our spouse this way—I mentioned a woman before who wrote a journal, writing down everything that she appreciated about her husband—one thing every day. When she gave him that journal, he read it in one sitting. He told
his best friend, “This makes me aspire to be the man she thinks I am.” By affirmation, he said, “If she appreciates this, she’s going to get more of that next year.” Affirmation makes a beautiful yet more beautiful. Contempt increases the hurt, and reinforces the weakness and the character traits that we actually want to see die. You grow contempt or you grow cherish. Why wouldn’t we want to grow cherish?

I think to cherish means more than appreciation—it means understanding for weaknesses. James 3:2—I really can’t do a seminar or talk without “We all stumble in many ways.” We’re marrying a spouse with weaknesses. The spouse that wants to cherish their spouse understands that there’s no perfect being there, and they don’t expect perfection. You look for the presence behind the problem.

I have two podcasts I like to listen to a lot of times. One is on sports. I know Lisa, particularly, doesn’t like the sports one. I didn’t want to keep irritating her. I said to her one time, “Is this okay, because I know….” She goes: “Of course, it is; because hearing those podcasts reminds me you are home. I’ll take your presence with this liability.”

The way I’ve applied it—we used to live out in the suburbs of Houston, Texas. They kept building, and building, and building. I had to keep getting up earlier, and earlier, and earlier to make it to work to beat the traffic. Within a year, I had to leave by 5:30; and then it was 5:15.

**Bob:** Whoa.

**Dennis:** Wow.

**Gary:** One morning, I slept in until 5. I thought: “Ahh! Now, I’m going to have a long commute.” I rushed through a shower / get dressed. I couldn’t find my car keys. I’ve got my phone flashlight around and kind of stirred Lisa. She goes, “What’s the matter?” I said, “I can’t find my keys.” She goes: “Oh! I couldn’t find my keys last night. So I had to take your car.” “Oh; where did you put them?” She said, “Ahh…” So we both got up and were looking around, and she finally found it.

Earlier on, in my marriage—when I cherished myself—I would have let her have it. But now, I realize she didn’t do it on purpose. She already knew the consequences. There was no purpose in holding her account—she already felt terrible. She called me later that morning and said “I’m so so sorry.” I said: “Honey, I know you didn’t mean it.” And you know what? My morning was better, because of that. —because, if I would have let her have it, I would have been miserable / she would’ve felt miserable.

It’s just recognizing you can’t be married to a real person without them, occasionally, stumbling. Some spouses are late / some spouses are obsessively early and make it difficult that way. Some forget keys / some forget to pick up the dry cleaning on the way home. Some really don’t see the mess—they think the kitchen is clean. The key to
cherish your spouse is to realize every good presence comes with a problem and to appreciate the presence and not focus on the problem.

Dennis: What I want to encourage our listeners to realize—you’ve just been listening to Gary Thomas, who has a PhD in cherishing his wife; okay? He’s been doing it for over three decades. If that’s not worthy of a PhD, I’m not sure what is. He’s just given you a great idea—a journal filled with 365 ways to cherish his wife and give it to her as a Christmas present. If you’re in need of enrolling in the first grade of cherishing, and you want to get your undergraduate degree all the way through college, this book, *Cherish*, will help you do that.

Gary, there’s one other thing I want to ask you to give us before you leave here today. I want those five classics / those Christian literature classics that help us better understand who we are and how we’re to think about ourselves. I want to list that, online, Bob, and give that and make that available to our listeners.

Bob: I’m just thinking about that Christmas present. You think it would be okay if it was like one a week instead of one a day? [Laughter] I just find something that’s achievable; okay? I don’t know if I’d get—

Dennis: Don’t you love somebody, who’s so disciplined they could do 365?

Bob: It’s not that Mary Ann doesn’t have 365 things I cherish about her. It’s that I don’t know that I can do that every morning, before everything else gets going; but it is a great idea, and I did think about it. I just thought maybe one a week, maybe. I wouldn’t get as many points as you get for 365, but I’m bound to get some points for the deal.

We do have copies of your book, *Cherish*, available in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. Probably, reading the book will help me put my list together. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order *Cherish* by Gary Thomas. You will also find the five books that Gary mentioned earlier listed, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call if you’d like a copy of the book, *Cherish*. We can mail it to you. Our number is 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” Again, ask about the book, *Cherish*, by Gary Thomas. We’re happy to send it out to you.

If our listeners ever had a chance to stop by our headquarters, here in FamilyLife, and they went up to the second floor in the foyer / the rotunda area, there are four banners that hang on that second floor that really define what this ministry is all about. The first banner relates to our walk with God—the fact that, for all human relationships to be what God intended them to be, we have to be rightly-related to Him. The second banner is all about our marriage covenant, where we promise to love, honor, cherish, obey—those kinds of things. The third banner has to do with the biblically-ordered responsibilities for men and women in a marriage relationship. The fourth banner is
about the responsibility we each have to pass on a legacy of spiritual vitality to the next
generation.

This is what *FamilyLife Today* is all about—that’s what we talk about on this program,
that’s what you’ll hear more about on our website and our events / through our
resources. We want to provide practical biblical help and hope for marriages and
families so that, in the end, God is glorified as we live out His purposes for our lives and
for our marriages.

We just want to say a word of thanks here today for those of you who make this ministry
possible as Legacy Partners—monthly contributors to this ministry—and those of you
who will, from time to time, make a donation supporting the work of *FamilyLife Today.*
We appreciate whatever support you’re able to provide. In fact, we’d love to express our
appreciation, right now, by giving you a set of Resurrection Eggs®, a tool to help you
share the gospel with your children or your grandchildren during the Easter season.
We’ll send those Resurrection Eggs out to you when you donate online at
FamilyLifeToday.com or when you call to donate at 1-800-FL-TODAY. You can also
request the Resurrection Eggs when you mail your donation to us. Our address is
*FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to continue our conversation with Gary Thomas, continuing
to explore what it looks like to cherish one another in a marriage relationship.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast
production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you
back tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today.*

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas.
Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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