



The Meaning of Marriage: A Couple's Devotional: A Year of Daily Devotions,
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INTRODUCTION

Several years ago Tim and I wrote a book, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. We discussed a number of issues related to knowing and loving your spouse in the context of a marriage grounded in the Christian faith. Many people have told us how much the book has helped them, and nothing makes us happier. It was the fruit of hard-won experience, and God promises that what he gives to one is meant for the benefit of all.

It is not necessary to have read that book in order to use this one. But it is worth recapping some of the basic themes of *The Meaning of Marriage*. The main problem every marriage faces is the self-centeredness in both spouse's hearts. Traditional cultures often dealt with this by browbeating people about their sin. Modern culture has virtually enshrined it, talking about "Me-Marriages" that last only as long as both parties feel the marriage is meeting their needs without too much exertion. The solution, however, is the gospel of Christ, for it both humbles us and exalts us at the same time.

An equally crucial theme is that the essence of your marriage is a covenant, a binding promise. A covenant is neither a cold contract nor merely an emotional pledge. It is giving your whole life to each other, not just physically but also legally, financially, emotionally, spiritually. The binding, legal commitment creates an unparalleled space for trust, vulnerability, and intimacy. Many modern people think the essence of marriage is a romantic feeling, but rather it is the marriage promise that keeps you together through the ups and downs of feeling, which over time provides a depth of love that could not be attained any other way.

We see marriage as friendship-with-a-mission. While ancient and traditional marriages gave priority to the roles of parents, and modern marriage elevates the desires of romantic lovers, we argued that, along with all the other factors, spouses need to be best friends. Friendship, however, needs to be *about* something, and in a Christian marriage it needs to be about spiritual growth and each spouse helping the other to grow into Christlikeness. If we aim at holiness for each other, happiness will come; if we aim primarily at just happiness, we will get neither.

Then, for these various tasks and responsibilities in marriage, we pointed to a “toolbox” of ways to know and love your spouse over the years, particularly as you both go through major life changes and sometimes we feel we are married to a stranger. What do we do? There are three basic things to do: speak the truth; show love—in the particular “currencies” or “love languages” that your spouse finds most valuable; and, finally, give grace through regular repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

In Christian marriage, it is both a glory and a challenge to love someone of the other gender. Loving across the gender divide takes a great deal of patience, understanding, humility, and love. Today, of course, this is an area marked by controversy, but we tried as much as possible to follow the Scriptures here, which critique both overly rigid gender stereotypes as well as the modern denial of distinct gender roles.

In the last two chapters we turned to the subjects of singleness and sexuality. There we laid out something of the Christian ethic and understanding of sex, so revolutionary when it burst on the world scene,

but so contested today.

So why this devotional? The purpose of this couple's devotional is to provide an opportunity for sustained and practical reflection on love and marriage within a Christian perspective. A book like *The Meaning of Marriage* can provide principles and insights, but it can also be hard to digest and apply to every-day life. In the book you hold, we both expanded on and broke down the themes and lessons into short meditations, looking at each concept in its various aspects and proposing application questions and practices.

This devotional pulls out passages from *The Meaning of Marriage* and provides an opportunity to think out the personal implications of one very specific aspect of Christian marriage each day.

On the first week of each month, we provide you with a Scripture text regarding love, sex, and marriage, followed by a meditation on an aspect of the biblical teaching. After that there is a reflection, which is a set of application questions, followed finally with a brief example of a prayer about the subject. While some of these biblical texts are referred to in *The Meaning of Marriage*, these studies are new and not found in the earlier book. The texts that are covered are listed on page xiv.

Month	Scripture References	Topics and Themes
January	Genesis 1 and 2	Marriage and creation
February	Genesis 2–3; Ephesians 5	Marriage and redemption
March	Various	The seventh commandment
April	Genesis 39 and various	Preventing adultery
May	Various	Divorce
June	Proverbs and various	Who we are to one another
July	Various New Testament	How to serve one another
August	Various New Testament	How to reconcile
September	1 Corinthians 6	The Christian sexual revolution: 1
October	1 Corinthians 7	The Christian sexual revolution: 2
November	The Song of Solomon -	Love song: seeking one another
December	The Song of Solomon	Love song: finding one another

On each day of the other three weeks of every month we begin with a quote from *The Meaning of Marriage* instead of a Bible verse, followed

by a meditation and a reflection. Finally there is a “Thought for prayer” that gives some ideas for how you can pray the topic of the day into your heart and life.

This is a “couple’s devotional,” and it is designed for married couples to use. One way to do it is to read it aloud to each other. Then ask: “What helped you the most?” After that, answer the Reflection questions together. Finally pray together, using the “Thought for prayer” as a springboard for your own conversation with God. Another way to use this book, however, is to read it daily as an individual, write down your thoughts, and regularly meet with your spouse to discuss your insights and findings.

Keep in mind that the basic themes and lessons noted here will be brought up numerous times, but each time they will be approached from a different perspective or asking different practical questions.

The Meaning of Marriage was not written only for married couples. Its origin lay in a series of sermons to a congregation consisting overwhelmingly of single adults. This particular devotional, however, is meant for couples, though unmarried couples who are engaged or who are considering marriage could use it in the way we have prescribed. Some of the meditations near the end of the year should be especially applicable to them.

One very important caveat. Every Christian needs to be reading the Bible and praying daily. This book, while it can supplement that, should not be the only time one spends daily before God. As important as this subject is, marriage is not the only thing you should be talking to God about for an entire year! We would ask readers to consider also using either our Psalms or Proverbs devotionals along with this one, or some other aid to a daily time with God.

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