

## The Meaning of Marriage *Discussion Guide*

### CHAPTER 3: THE ESSENCE OF MARRIAGE

#### Introduction

Modern culture says that love is a feeling. It says marriage is an opportunity to continually pursue that feeling through sex and intimacy—to find fulfillment through another person. But feelings wax and wane. If the intensity and electricity of our desire for our spouses diminish, does that mean we're falling out of love?

Here's a radical thought: what if culture is wrong about love? What if love is an action far sturdier and more resolute than a fleeting emotion? Maybe pursuing the covenantal promise of marriage has the power to define who we are and to lead us to freedom.

#### Icebreaker

Ask each couple to bring a wedding picture and share memories from their wedding day.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What actions by your spouse help you know you're loved?
2. In the chapter, Keller argues that the act of promising leads to freedom. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. Does Keller's description of covenantal relationships in "The Vertical and the Horizontal" section of this chapter change your understanding of marriage? If so, how?
4. When you're in the middle of a decision that affects your marriage, how do you balance what's good for the relationship against your immediate needs?
5. In the chapter, Keller argues, "*It is a mistake to think that you must feel love to give it.*" What are some practical actions you can take to love your spouse even when you're not feeling affection for him or her?

#### For the Ride Home

Talk about this question on your way home:

*What do you most remember about exchanging vows at your wedding ceremony? What did you think and feel when you heard each other reciting them?*

## Exercise

Author and theologian Lewis B. Smedes wrote, “[When you make a promise to someone], you have created a small sanctuary of trust within the jungle of unpredictability.” Answer these questions on your own:

1. *What can I do or not do to better create trust in our marriage?*
2. *What can I say or not say to better create trust in our marriage?*

Before the next group meeting, discuss your answers with your spouse.

## Moving Forward

Every married couple faces times when it’s difficult to love each other. It may last for a short while or for an entire season. It may be caused by outside forces, clashes inside the relationship, or the mysterious feeling that love has just disappeared without warning. During these times, you must *decide to love*—not to somehow feel love for your spouse, but to actively love him or her. Be tender and forgiving even when you don’t feel like it. The long-term result will be a marriage that is stronger, richer, and more tightly bonded because of your choice to keep your promise.

## Changing Your Mind

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

**Ephesians 5:31**

