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# The Meaning Of Marriage: Facing The Complexities Of Commitment With The Wisdom Of God

*New York Times* Bestselling Author of *THE REASON FOR GOD* and *THE PRODIGAL GOD*

**TIMOTHY  
KELLER**

with KATHY KELLER

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THE  
MEANING  
OF  
MARRIAGE

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Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God



UNABRIDGED  
Read by LLOYD JAMES & MARGUERITE GAVIN



## Synopsis

Based on his most popular sermon series, New York Times best-selling author Timothy Keller delivers an extraordinarily insightful look at the keys to happiness in marriage. Few subjects are as compelling-or as endlessly variable-as love and marriage. The Bible is filled with references to husbands and wives, from the story of Adam and Eve to advice in the New Testament, each open to interpretation. In *The Meaning of Marriage*, Timothy Keller, pastor of New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and bestselling author of *The Reason for God*, uses the scriptures as his guide to show readers what God's call to marriage is, and why this is such a powerful call. He talks in frank terms about the difficulties that couples have and how they can best work them out while keeping their faith in God intact. *The Meaning of Marriage* showcases Keller's vast understanding of the Bible and how it can not only be relevant to relationships today but also form the foundation of a modern, healthy, loving, and long-lasting marriage.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 20 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: November 14, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0067MFBOK

Best Sellers Rank: #2 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Counseling #18 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Marriage #20 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christianity

## Customer Reviews

Tim Keller is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York since he planted it in 1989, and the church reflects the city's demographics: approximately 80% of the people (in a church of several thousand) are single. So Keller has a lot of experience in teaching, counseling and shepherding singles in particular. This book had its roots in the early 1990's when he did a series of sermons on marriage because of the skepticism, fear, and arguments that many of the singles in attendance had toward marriage in the beginning stages of the church - and still do today.

He also wrote this book to share from his own experiences with his wife Kathy of 37 years and counting. However, most importantly he wrote this book to give a compelling vision of what marriage was designed to look like from the Bible from Genesis to Revelation - from the first marriage of Adam and Eve to the last marriage of Christ and the Church. Keller states in the introduction, "its [the books] primary goal is to give both married and unmarried people a vision for what marriage is according to the Bible." I believe that Keller succeeds in giving a very compelling case for marriage from the three stands above - from his experience, his realistic apologetic of building a case for the benefits and values of marriage, and then giving a compelling biblical vision throughout the book for the beauty of marriage when it reflects the glory of Christ at the center of it all. He does not minimize the difficulties, or the effort and hard work involved in a marriage, but is clear-headed, and cogently eloquent in presenting the "complexities of commitment with the wisdom of God." Here is a sample of an excellent example he gives for submitting to the Bible as God's manual for marriage: "Think of buying a car: If you purchase a vehicle, a machine well beyond your own ability to create, you will certainly take up the owner's manual and abide by what the designer says the car needs by way of treatment and maintenance. To ignore it would be to court disaster...Plenty of people who do not acknowledge God or the Bible, yet who are experiencing happy marriages, are largely abiding by God's intentions, whether they realize it or not. But it is far better if we are conscious of those intentions. And the place to discover them is in the writings of the Scripture." Some of the ambivalent views and objections to marriage Keller elaborates on and dispels in this book are as follows: "Marriage is just a piece of paper that only serves to complicate love" "Marriage was originally about property and is now in flux" "Marriage crushes individual identity and has been oppressive for women" "Marriage stifles passion and is ill-fitted to psychological reality" The Outline of Keller's book is as follows: Chapter One - A rich and deep discussion of Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5 bringing Paul's discussion into today's context and demonstrating "why the gospel helps us to understand marriage and how marriage helps us to understand the gospel." Chapter Two - With great skill and penetrating insight Keller shows how the sin nature resulting in selfishness necessitates the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in making the saving work of Christ operative in bringing two hearts to beat as one. Chapter Three - He helpfully shows what biblical love is - and what covenantal commitment is all about. Chapter Four - He elaborates on the whole question of what marriage is for: "It is a way for two spiritual friends to help each other on their journey to become the persons God designed them to be...there is a kind of deeper happiness that is found on the far side of holiness." Chapter Five - He talks about the power of truth; the power of love - via affection, friendship, and service all in the context of grace. Chapter Six - An excellent discussion of

the Trinitarian roles and how that translates into gender roles in a marriage. Chapter Seven - On Singleness and Marriage. Here is a sample of some guidelines he gleans for singles in relationships before marriage: "Recognize that there are seasons for not seeking marriage." "Understand the "gift of singleness." "Get more serious about seeking marriage as you get older." "Do not allow yourself deep emotional involvement with a non-believing person." "Feel 'attraction' in the most comprehensive sense." "Don't let things get too passionate too quickly." "...don't become a faux spouse for someone who won't commit to you." "Get and submit to lots of community input." Chapter Eight - A good discussion of sex - realities and misperceptions - and the glory of it when it is practiced the way God designed it. The book closes with a short epilogue and a short, but very helpful discussion on decision-making and gender roles. All the chapters are very well written, have depth and penetrating insight, are logical and clear, balanced in dealing with the "then" and "now" of how the Scriptures apply and always pointing to Jesus at the center of the meaning of life and marriage. Dr. Keller knows what he's talking about and has done an outstanding job of building a great case for marriage in a culture that simply doesn't understand it and hasn't been consulting the Creator's manual and applying it in our marriages. I now have a new favorite book on marriage to recommend whole-heartedly to singles and married couples alike!

Straightforward without being dry, this book schools on marriage unapologetically. Just the first chapter dumbfounded me and I had to process it and read it once more. The book was recommended to my husband and myself and I thought, "it's a book. How on earth is this going to be life-changing?" In a time when people are expending so much energy keeping same-sex marriage illegal or at the very least a state's choice, we have neglected to shore up our own marriages. We have the me culture define our understanding of marriage and sprinkle it with a few of God's "promises". But anyone who continues in that fashion will either end up another divorce statistic or worse, a shell of a marriage where two people live parallel lives and their home is a ghost town, far from the reflection of what marriage was designed to be.

Marriage is clearly a troubled institution in American culture, and that includes even among American Christians. The problem is that so often Christians have accepted the world's definitions of marriage. While many Christian books have been written on marriage, Tim Keller's "The Meaning of Marriage" is one of the best. What makes "The Meaning of Marriage" so excellent? At least four things. First, Keller gives a vision for marriage. His main reason for writing the book, in fact, was to give both Christians and non-Christians a vision for marriage. What is Keller's vision for marriage?

Keller writes, concerning the meaning of marriage, that "It is for helping each other to become our future glory-selves, the new creations that God will eventually make us." More than this, Keller (in Chapter 6) relates marriage not only to "the dance of the Trinity" but also to Christ's love of the stranger (Chapter 5). The second reason "The Meaning of Marriage" is so excellent is that Keller bases his views on the Bible. Time and again, instead of turning to what the world teaches about marriage, Keller returns to the Bible, especially Ephesians 5. While Keller begins with the Bible, he does more than just quote Scripture: he unlocks its meaning and applies it to our lives. This is what makes his teaching on writing so profound and powerful. While he doesn't cover every possible topic, he does give a theological vision for marriage that will change your marriage for the better or better prepare you for marriage in the future. Third, in presenting a biblical view of marriage, Keller directly challenges the worldly views of marriage, including many that have infected the Church. Among the most popular of these myths is that we should be looking for our "soul mate," in the sense of finding someone we're presently in love with. This view minimizes the importance of the hard work that goes into marital love. Keller also rightly rebukes the idea that we should not go into marriage expecting to change the other person. To the contrary, marriage is precisely for the purpose of sanctifying one another, and Keller demonstrates some of the many reasons why marriage is such a powerful means of sanctification for Christian spouses. Keller takes on many other myths as well, for example, the idea that marriage is primarily for self-fulfillment, instead of mutual sanctification and becoming one with another. Fourth, "The Meaning of Marriage" is both readable and practical. Keller's ideas are rooted in theology but are written in a very readable prose. Most importantly, his book is eminently practical. While it's not a "How To" manual and doesn't give you every detail, he does amply illustrate and explain his major ideas on marriage. So practical is "The Meaning of Marriage" that it's applicable not only to Christian spouses but also non-Christian spouses and Christian singles. He has, for example, a chapter on a theology of singleness (Chapter 7). There are many profound insights in the book. There was little that was new to me as a priest and as a husband who has worked every day on his marriage for 18 years. But there were still many revelations and "Aha!" moments that reminded me of what it was all about and encouraged me to love my wife to an even greater degree. As I'm writing this, she's out of town on a business trip (which she never takes). I can't wait for her to return so that I can begin immediately putting into practice some of the things Keller has taught me. Here are some of his best insights: 1. You never marry the right person. No 2 people are compatible. For this reason, marriage takes a lot of love and work. Also, marriage profoundly changes us! 2. Two-thirds of unhappy marriages will become happy within five years if people stay married. Keller uses this to demonstrate the power of making and

keeping a vow. Promising is the key to identity and is the very essence of marital love.<sup>3</sup> Actions of love lead to feelings of love.<sup>4</sup> Marriage is a friendship, and friendship must have constancy, transparency, and a common passion, which, for Christians, should especially be Christ.<sup>5</sup> Each spouse should see the great thing that Jesus is doing in the life of their mate through the Word. And each spouse should then give himself or herself to be a vehicle for this work of God.<sup>6</sup> Your spouse IS the "someone better" you're looking for! This is true if you see him or her in terms of the glory God intends for them, a work to which you are called. There's much, much, more, and each chapter holds its delights and wisdom for the reader. I highly recommend both "The Meaning of Marriage," as well as "The Mystery of Marriage" by Mike Mason! Keller presents his teaching on marriage, based on a sermon series of his, in the following chapters:<sup>1</sup> The Secret of Marriage - how marriage and the gospel relate<sup>2</sup> The Power for Marriage - submitting to one another out of love<sup>3</sup> The Essence of Marriage - covenantal commitment<sup>4</sup> The Mission of Marriage - marriage and mutual sanctification<sup>5</sup> Loving the Stranger - the power of love (all 4 kinds)<sup>6</sup> Embracing the Other - man and wife as one flesh; the Trinity as a model for marriage<sup>7</sup> Singleness and Marriage<sup>8</sup> Sex and Marriage Epilogue and Appendix (Decision Making and Gender Roles)

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