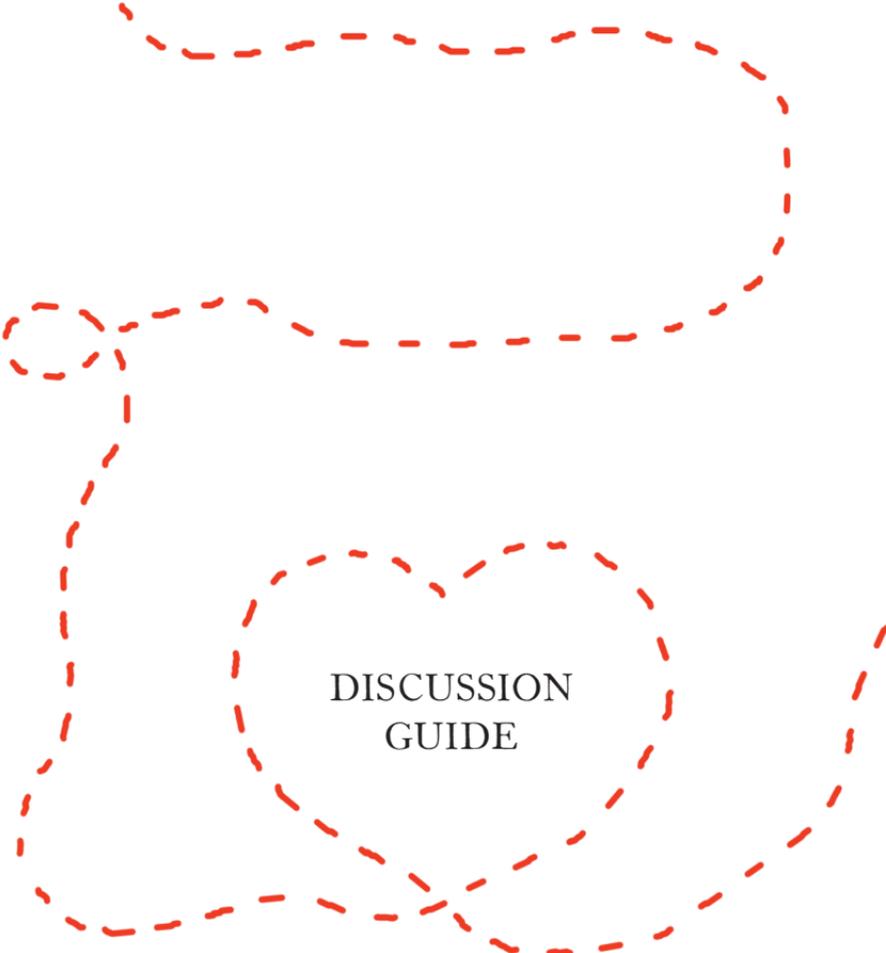


FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY

MARRIAGE

Crazy
Little Thing
Called
Marriage



DISCUSSION
GUIDE



The following questions and activities should serve as discussion starters for couples to use together or for small group studies.

Be sure each group member feels comfortable, and if sharing certain personal information is not appropriate, just skip to another question!

Some couples may want to make note of more sensitive discussion topics and talk privately together later.

INTRODUCTION:

This Thing Called Love



1. Of faith, hope, and love, we read in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that the greatest of these is love. Why is love the greatest?
2. How is “loving your spouse” a life-changing commitment?
3. What are some of the lies about love and marriage that our contemporary culture is broadcasting? Have you ever believed any of those lies? How did it affect your relationship?
4. Respond to this statement, “The Creator of the universe loves you completely.” How does that make you feel? How does it impact your heart and mind?
5. What is one way your spouse has sacrificed for you? Can you share a specific instance with your spouse or with the group?
6. From the Bible, books, films, or TV shows you’ve enjoyed, share an example of a strong marriage. In your opinion, what was responsible for the strength of that marriage?

True Love Commits



1. Read these words from Jesus' parable about the house built on the rock in Matthew 7:24-27 and discuss the questions that follow: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."
2. In what areas of your marriage are you built on the rock?
3. What are the rains, streams, and winds that beat against your marriage?
4. What can you do today to strengthen your marriage foundation?
5. Talk about how "burning the boats" makes a difference in a marriage. In what way have you done that as a couple? Are there any boats you still need to burn?

True Love Seeks God



1. Rate your level of spiritual intimacy on a scale of 1 (low: running away from spiritual intimacy) to 10 (high: intentionally seeking God together). Talk about the reasons for your ratings.
2. Break down the guidance in Ephesian 4:2-3 into action steps. Where do you need to start? When didn't you make "every effort" to keep the unity of the Spirit? How can you keep that from happening again?
3. What words of encouragement can you speak to each other in order to see each other in a positive light?
4. Identify the road blocks that make it difficult to build spiritual intimacy.
5. How can you naturally incorporate spiritual disciplines into your daily lives? What spiritual connection opportunities can you create?
6. What is your shared dream as a couple?

True Love Strives to Know and Be Known



1. Share with one positive characteristic that you enjoy about your spouse. Explain why it's important to you.
2. If you could text your spouse an important message about yourself, what would it say?
3. How does it make you feel to consider sharing openly and vulnerably about your inner life? Is it a little scary? Exciting? Business as usual? How does this relate to your personality?
4. What gets in the way when you are trying to communicate openly? What would help you to see each other more clearly?
5. How does technology such as your cell phone aid your communication? How does it interfere?
6. Do you feel like your spouse knows you as well as possible? If not, name one action step you could take today to move closer to connection?

True Love Fights for Peace



1. There are two sides to every story. How did reading Erin’s side of the “Hawaii story” affect your perception of that conflict?
2. What conflict in your marriage has led to a learning situation and personal growth?
3. Name a time when you experienced conflict that wasn’t resolved? What happened in the long term? Is the conflict still unresolved? Did it turn into a good conflict or did it deteriorate into combat? How can you redeem the experience, if necessary?
4. What does it mean to keep “short accounts” with each other?
5. Share with each other one “button” that gets pushed in your marriage. Why do you respond so readily? How can you keep from withdrawing when your button gets pushed?
6. When you are in conflict, are you a “Fighter” or a “Flighter?” How does this affect your relationship? Is your way of dealing with conflict healthy or unhealthy?
7. Reread Matthew 7: 3-5. What kind of plank do you have in your own eye? How might you deal with that plank before you try to remove the “speck” in your spouse’s eye?

True Love Honors



1. How would you define the term *honor* as it relates to your marriage?
2. What do you think about the idea of listing your spouse's valuable qualities and characteristics? Name 3 things that would go on your list today.
3. Why might it be difficult to honor each other in our modern culture? What influences work against this value?
4. What does it look like to "love your spouse as yourself"? Name one practical application of that principle that would strengthen your marriage today.
5. How did Boaz show honor to Ruth? How did Ruth cherish Boaz in turn?
6. List 3 reasons why you are grateful for your spouse. Name a time when your spouse was gracious to you.

True Love Nourishes



1. How is nourishing your spouse and your marriage different from cherishing or honoring your spouse?
2. What does it mean to care for your spouse in the same manner that Christ loved the church? What sacrifices does it require?
3. Name one way your spouse has offered sustenance for a physical, emotional, or spiritual need of yours.
4. What is one request you would like to make of your spouse, being certain that the answer would be: “As you wish.”
5. Has your spouse ever done a “jumbo act of service” for you? Share what it meant to you.
6. Have you ever given your spouse a gift that was actually a gift for yourself in disguise? What happened? What did you learn from that experience?
7. What is a dream you share together as a couple? Have you made a plan to fulfill that dream or desire? If so, what does that plan look like today?

True Love Needs Time to Grow



1. How much time do you spend together as a couple each week? Do you think that is too much, too little, or just right?
2. What steals time that you would rather spend together? Is there a way you can make improvements in that area?
3. Do you have priorities in the way you spend your time and other resources that seem out of order? If you could move one thing higher on the list, what would it be?
4. In this chapter, poet Roy Croft is quoted: “I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you.” Share “what you are” when you are with your spouse. What good qualities does he or she bring out in you?
5. List the three biggest demands on your shared life as a couple. Do you have ideas for how you could better manage those demands? Plan a time when you can talk together and create a list of possibilities.
6. What unique traditions and rituals have you created as a couple? How do they help bind you together? Are there more you’d like to include in your lives? What’s stopping you?

True Love Embraces



1. What are some of the reasons that sex is a good gift given by God?
2. How has the world, and our contemporary culture distorted the gift of sexual intimacy in marriage as God designed it?
3. What does it mean to serve your spouse sacrificially? What is first required in a marriage in order to have a healthy sexual relationship?
4. What kind of role model did God provide as a husband “wooing” a wife? Were you surprised to see the example from Hosea 2:14? Why or why not?
5. How can you become a better “student” of your spouse? What are the positive outcomes of studying your spouse and applying what you learn?

True Love Serves



1. Do you struggle with dividing up household responsibilities? Why or why not?
2. Which of the most-argued-about issues is at the top of your list as a couple? Do you have a plan for working on that issue? How much does it interfere with your unity in your marriage?
3. Is one of you more perfectionistic than the other when it comes to the way household chores should be completed? What is the result of the imbalance?
4. The authors suggest you “try to out-serve your spouse.” What would that look like in your daily life?
5. It’s a good idea to talk about your expectations and preferences. Start with one item on your list of responsibilities and discuss the expectations and preferences that are attached to it. Are they realistic? Do you agree on them? Or does a change need to be made?
6. Have you ever reached a stalemate in a disagreement with your spouse? If so, what caused the problem? How did you resolve it? How do you feel about it today?

True Love Endures



1. What is one major crisis you have endured in your life? Has it occurred during your marriage? How did it affect your relationship?
2. Think of an older couple that has undergone a challenging trial during their married lives. What enabled them to overcome the hardship and stay together?
3. Name some enemies of enduring marriage. What kind of damage can these enemies do? Which one threatens you personally the most?
4. What is your go-to strategy as a couple when you are faced with trials and difficulties? If you don't have a strategy, how do you plan to create one?
5. Have you sought help during a time of struggle or difficulty? What was the most effective help you received?
6. In what way is *hope* a powerful weapon for a married couple?
7. Read this passage again: "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10). How have you seen this to be true in your own lives or in the lives of others?

True Love Looks Inward



1. What does it mean to “guard your heart?” Do that mean we shouldn’t share what’s going on inside with each other?
2. Have you ever felt your heart “closing down?” Why did that happen?
3. The story of the monkey trap describes a common problem for many people: holding on to the very things that trap and imprison us. Can each of you identify one sort of “monkey trap” that hinders your ability to love others, or be healthier or more joyful?
4. If you are comfortable doing so, discuss a monkey trap in your life. How does it affect your marriage?
5. What is one thing that helps you care for yourself when life is busy and stressful?
6. How can you help each other achieve better self-care in the midst of a full and demanding life?

True Love Seeks Fellowship



1. Are you looking outward as a couple? Discuss the ways you interact with the people in your world. Are those interactions healthy and positive?
2. Do you have a goal as a couple to reach out to people in your neighborhood, your town, or the wider world? If so, how do you try to fulfill that goal? If not, what first step might you plan together to “look outward” from within your marriage?
3. This chapter includes twenty-two ways to invest in another couple’s marriage. Discuss which of the ideas included on the list appeal to you as a couple. Start by choosing one or two ways to build up another couple in your life.
4. Have you ever felt that you are “pulling in different directions” when it comes to reaching out to people around you? What causes that?
5. Review the four key ideas for serving God in a way that strengthens your marriage instead of stressing it. Discuss how you can apply one of the suggestions in a practical way as a couple.