

# Foundations

*A Newsletter for Married Couples*

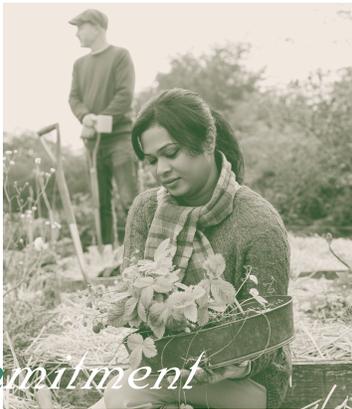
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## Commitment

## Affair-Proofing Your Marriage

In today's culture, making the decision to be committed for a lifetime takes courage and planning. It is not a universal choice, but those people whose trust has been betrayed in their marriage can tell you that it is a choice worth making and worth protecting. If it's important to you to live in a faithful, committed marriage, there are some steps you can take to make your commitment more secure.

### Mutual expectations

Make sure to tell your partner that you expect to be faithful, and you expect the same from her or him. Couples have told us that one partner assumed it was a bottom line requirement for marriage that spouses be faithful, but the other one didn't. Whether they came from a home with a straying parent, or just watched too many movies, they hadn't understood what their spouse expected. So talk about fidelity. Be

specific – unfaithfulness can be an emotional affair as well as a physical affair.

### Marriage Friends

Make friends who are friends to your marriage. If you socialize with people who are flirtatious, or have had affairs themselves, they will probably not honor your desire to have a faithful marriage. Couples who are trying to live a good married life too, or single friends who share your ideals about marriage are friends who will support you in your desire for a lifelong marriage.

### Common Interests

Find things you enjoy doing together. Studies on the kinds of intimacy each gender most values has men liking recreational intimacy, so having a hobby in common can be helpful for your marriage. But even if it's not a recreational activity, volunteer or find something else you can do together.

### Distances shouldn't stop communication

Make a plan for communicating if one of you is away. Call first thing in the morning or last thing at night. If time zones are very different, email or text. Try not to let a day go by without some communication. Don't let "out of sight" mean "out of mind."

### Be Open and Honest!

If you have lunch with a co-worker, tell your spouse about it. If your old boyfriend contacts you on Facebook, tell your spouse about it. If you find yourself hiding things from your spouse, *be aware that it is a real danger signal.*

Living a faithful married life supports the deepest desire of our hearts – to love and be loved. Affairs provide short term satisfaction and long term problems, so in your own best interest, protect the integrity of your marriage. ■

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Many people think about commitment and the “til death do us part” in the marriage vows. And that’s part of it, but there’s part of the path to that end that also requires commitment. If you have seen a spouse waiting for a partner to come home from Iraq you know what commitment looks like. Or we see the couples committing themselves to supporting each other in the care of a disabled child, along with the many spouses committed to caring for a spouse that has dementia, or a terminal disease.

### *The Heart of Commitment*

Scott Stanley PhD., an eminent researcher on relationships –marriage and pre-marriage – wrote a book that integrates his research work with insights from Scripture. *The Heart of Commitment*, written in 1998, remains a classic that reveals the length and breadth of commitment. “When you delve into rich insights from Scripture and findings from marital research,” Stanley tells us in the introduction, “the picture that emerges is one that is wider, deeper, and more practical than most people expect.”

The picture he paints in this book is that commitment is about all the work we do along the way to keep our marriage alive and growing. He points out that it is part and parcel of so many choices we make.

### **Losing a Dream**

One of the aspects he talks about is the grieving the losses that come along with commitment based on an unexpected event. We had friends who were getting to the point of the husband being able to

cut back on work, and they were anticipating travel, an increased social life, and more involvement in cultural events. Then there was a fire at his business. All of a sudden he was needed there more than ever. It was nobody’s fault, but they had to adjust their ideas about their future. Then he got cancer, so the hoped-for time of leisure never arrived.

### **...Even with Good Fortune**

It’s possible that you might even grieve the future you envisioned if something good happens.

It’s possible that you mourn your small town anonymity if you win the lottery, or your family time if you get elected to national office.

### **Facing Changed Plans Together**

Stanley’s point, though, is that if you grieve those things together then they are just another aspect of your commitment, and another part of your shared path. It can be that a job loss means that you have to move to a new community, or that you take a job with a longer commute meaning less family time. How will you resolve the grief that comes with such a change? Hopefully by working together, making a plan to minimize the losses to your togetherness the change has brought about. It is within the power of the two of you to find a path that is good for your marriage. Scott Stanley advises in this great book, “Bring along your willingness to work hard and your sense of humor, and roll up your sleeves.

Commitment asks us to *do* something. Let’s dig in.” ■

## Commitment



### **Resources**

**While *The Heart of Commitment*** by Scott Stanley appears to be out of print, used copies are still available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble. There is a discussion about it on Goodreads too!

**Divorce Busting** is an organization begun by Michelle Weiner Davis. She believes most marriages can be saved, and she provides help to save them. Her organization offers coaching to help troubled marriages. You can check it out at [divorcebusting.com](http://divorcebusting.com)

**The For Your Marriage website** has a good article on commitment. Here are two resources they recommend:

- *The Marriage Benefit: The Surprising Rewards of Staying Together* By Mark O’Connell Springboard Press, New York, N.Y., 2008; \$23.99.
- *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls Us Apart* by William J. Doherty (this is also available as an ebook)

**Scott Stanley’s blog Sliding vs Deciding** is another place to get good advice on having a committed marriage. This is a link that discusses protecting your marriage from divorce. <http://slidingvsdeciding.blogspot.com/2015/03/eight-ideas-for-protecting-your.html>

# Exercise

## I know/understand:

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
It is sometimes difficult to live up to my commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are people in my family (parents, siblings, other relatives) who have struggled with their marital commitment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children suffer when their parents separate or divorce.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conflicts are hard on my sense of commitment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## I believe:

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Marriage is not valued in society.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage needs work to stay strong.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our parish supports our marriage through programs for married couples.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My spouse knows I am committed to her/him.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My commitment is stronger when I think of our early days together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## I will:

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Talk to my spouse about the reasons I love and am committed to him/her.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage friends, relatives, etc. to seek help if they are having trouble in their marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ask God's help in keeping my commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Look for ways to strengthen our marriage and to thank my spouse for his/her support.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid situations that might lead me to compromise my commitment to my spouse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Ripples of commitment

How does your commitment to each other and your marriage impact the children you have or may have? Imagine a wall surrounding a castle and you'll have an idea about the way your promise to stay together makes your children feel safe. Everything in a child's life is held together by parents who are secure in their relationship.

### No Fighting Ever?

Does that mean that you should never let your children see you disagree? Not at all! Watching you and your spouse respectfully disagree and then come to terms with that disagreement is one of the important life lessons children learn living in a family. They need to know that every difference of opinion does not mean that the family is coming apart. They need to see modeled for them the way that grownups can express their unhappiness, frustration or disappointment without giving up on the relationship.

### Give Assurance

If you are comfortable doing so, you might want to tell your children together that you don't intend to get a divorce. They probably have seen friends going through the breakup of their parents and may secretly worry about it. If you can reassure them that it will not be happening in your home than it will put those fears to rest.

### Family Meals

On another note, making family meals part of your routine is a wonderful way to let children see the good side of family life. Take the opportunity to enjoy each other and enjoy a healthy meal. It can be simple, but eating together is a great way to put stability in your children's lives. Studies keep coming out that show children who eat five to seven family meals a week do better in school, get into less trouble with alcohol, smoking and drugs, and also have a healthier diet.

### Wider ripples

If your family doesn't include children, it is also reassuring to the extended family and friends to see that you are working to keep your relationship strong. Healthy marriages lead to healthy families which lead to healthy communities. So it turns out that making a commitment to a healthy marriage is a public service! ■

# Spirituality

There is a part of the marriage rite in most church services called the declaration of consent. It is where people are asked if they intend to live with the other in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer. In some rites it includes the expression, “forsaking all others.” This is the promise all who marry, especially within a religious tradition, make – to make this person the one to go forward with, two as one, for life.

## All others

As we look at marriage from this perspective, it is interesting to explore what “all others” refers to. The most obvious interpretation is other romantic partners. It’s your promise to be faithful to this person, the one you have chosen and made this compact with. There is an article in this newsletter about “affair-proofing your marriage. That is an important aspect of keeping others away from the bond you have created. Of course, it is important to nurture and grow that bond too, not just wall it off from outsiders.

## Virtual others

But in this age of rampant pornography, it is also important to consider the virtual others that can creep in between the two of you. Your spouse is the person you have chosen and your sexual life is bound to him or her. You can’t develop the intimacy that marriage promises if there are other images that intrude on your life. By becoming a married person, and a person who has married under religious auspices, you need to forsake those others too.

## God’s dream

Pope Francis shared this statement about marriage: “For God, marriage is not some adolescent utopia, but a dream without which his creatures will be doomed to solitude. Indeed, being afraid to accept this plan paralyses the human heart. Paradoxically, people today – who often ridicule this plan – continue to be attracted and fascinated by every authentic love, by every steadfast love, by every fruitful love, by every faithful and enduring love. We see people chase after fleeting

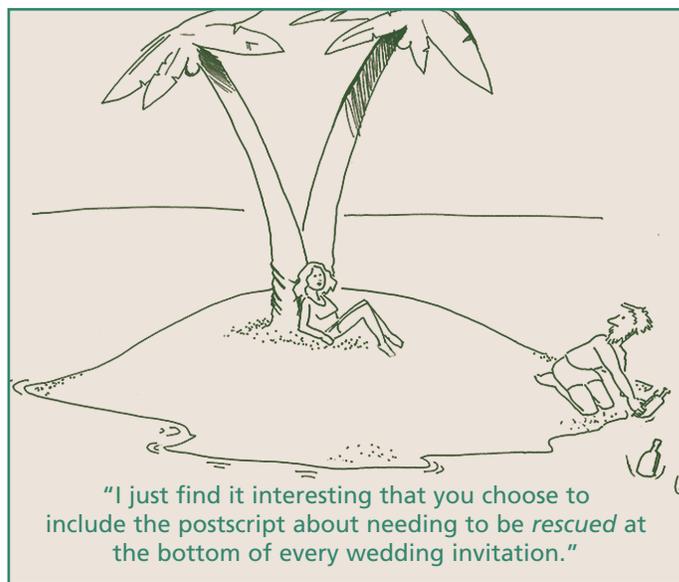
loves while dreaming of true love; they chase after carnal pleasures but desire total self-giving.”

## Living the dream

Living out that dream can sometimes seem impossible. It’s true that in a culture that seems conflicted about the possibility of living this dream it is a challenge. But we all have seen marriages like this. It is a goal worth shooting for. And it’s not just so we get to the end, gray heads together on the sofa, but every day of our married life, waking up and saying to each other, “How can I show my love for you today?” And meaning it!

## Being true to each other

The forsaking part of commitment it’s the negative part – the turning away. The positive part is the turning toward with all of our most authentic selves. “Here I am,” we say to each other, “the person God made, given to you with all my flaws and weaknesses, all my strengths and abilities.” This is what we mean when we commit ourselves to our partner. It is the dream God has for each of us and the dream we make happen when we live out the promise of our wedding day. ■



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