

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

Fall commitment issue

What's the Bottom Line?

Writer Vicki Larson, author of the New "I do" asked a large sample of engaged couples what they meant by commitment in marriage. Most said it would be a deal breaker if their partner was unfaithful. Reasonable, right? After all, commitment implies faithfulness.

What If...?

But then she asked, would the marriage be over if it was a one-night stand? Some said they might be able to work through that. A long-term affair? A clear no on that one. Multiple one-night stands? Nope.

So the question is, what does commitment mean to you? And beyond

that, what does infidelity mean to you? Is viewing pornography being unfaithful? What about flirting on Facebook? How about having lunch with a coworker and not telling you about it?

Murky Rules

There was a time when the rules were clear about fidelity. Now there are so many ways to be unfaithful, and so many different definitions of it that it becomes very important to define what it is for each of you, and what the consequences are if someone steps over the line.

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The Three Strands of Commitment

Why do people stay committed to one another? What is the difference between couples who honor their vow to "forsake all others," as the old wedding vows say? Well researchers have discovered that there are three strands to keeping the promise that was made at the wedding ceremony.

#1. Attraction.

The attraction that brought a couple together helps maintain the bond that enables them to stay loyal. When you think of all the things that you and your spouse share – common experiences, jokes, favorite movies, foods – it all feeds into the attraction you have for one another.



Yes, Good looks, and...

Surely physical attraction plays into it, but that is just one way you are attracted to your partner. You may value your spouse's virtues, their abilities or accomplishments. Husbands may say that they would be lost without their wife's ability to remember names. Wives might know that their husband's sense of direction has kept them from getting actually lost many times!

#2. Morality

People also stay faithful in their marriage because it's the right thing to do. After all, you made a promise to be true to your spouse. It's important to keep

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What's the Bottom Line? (continued from page 1)



Trust is Necessary

A healthy marriage requires trust of one's partner. That is why it's so important that you come to agreement on what these terms mean and how you are likely to respond if they are violated. It makes a big difference if you say you would want to go to couples therapy or if you say you would file for divorce. A feeling of trust comes from knowing that you and your spouse have the same understanding about your behaviors.

Build a wall to protect your relationship

Building trust happens by building the friendship between you. Do you get upset if your spouse opens your email? That's not building trust. Create walls around your relationship, not between the two of you. You should feel safe inside the shelter of your relationship, and part of feeling safe is to have the conversation about what commitment means to you, what infidelity means, and what the likely outcome would be for violating the trust.

Enhance Your Commitment

A way to strengthen your commitment is to make it public. That's what you did when you got married – you said vows in front of witnesses and an officiant. By volunteering together, joining an activity together, you are again saying to the world, we are a couple! We go together like peanut butter and jelly.

“..Strong, Mutual Signal..”

In his article in the Institute for Family Studies blog entitled [3 Questions That Can Clarify Commitment: a Response to Mandy Len Catron](#), Scott Stanley (yes, the same one referred to elsewhere in this newsletter) writes, “Marriage is a strong, mutual signal of an intention to pursue a life together.” His three questions support the beliefs expressed here, that both people in the marriage must be on the same page with regard to their intentions and understanding of a shared married life. Those who have had the privilege of living a long, fruitful life with their spouse would want you to know the deep joy and satisfaction that results. ■

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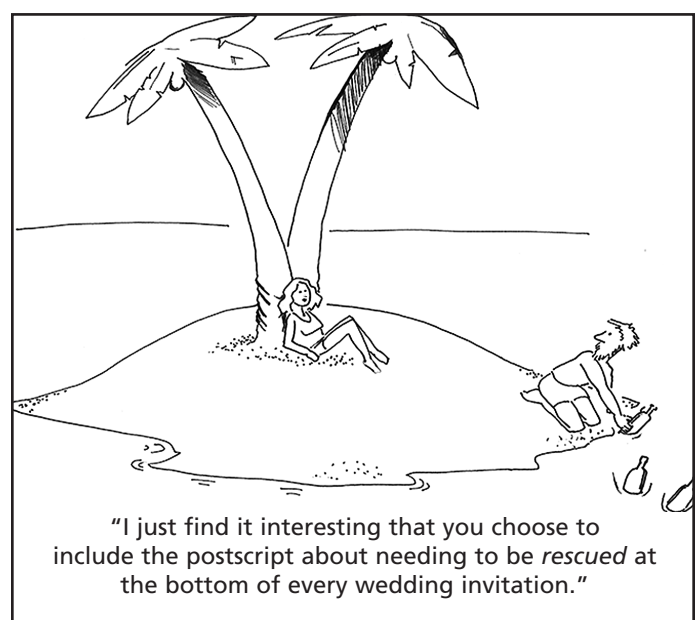
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Foundations Newsletter for married couples

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Exercise

I know/understand:

It is sometimes difficult to live up to my commitments.

Yes No Uncertain

There are people in my family (parents, siblings, other relatives) who have struggled with their marital commitment.

Children suffer when their parents separate or divorce.

Conflicts are hard on my sense of commitment.

I believe:

Marriage is worth my time and effort.

Yes No Uncertain

Marriage needs work to stay strong.

I know programs and books that help strengthen our marriage.

My spouse knows I am committed to her/him.

My commitment is stronger when I think of our early days together.

I will:

Talk to my spouse about the reasons I love and am committed to him/her.

Yes No Uncertain

Encourage friends, relatives, etc. to seek help if they are having trouble in their marriage

Ask God's help in keeping my commitments.

Look for ways to strengthen our marriage.

Thank my spouse for his/her support.

Avoid situations that might lead me to compromise my commitment to my spouse.



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 then 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! ■

The Three Strands of Commitment (continued from page 1)

your word, many believe. You would be breaking your word and hurting countless people in your extended family, not just your spouse. If you are a churchgoer then you have the reinforcing presence of the church's teaching reminding you that you are violating a religious principle as well as cheating on your partner. When presented with the opportunity to stray, those that have a strong sense of right and wrong are aided in their commitment to their marriage.

#3. Fear of consequences

Garrison Keillor, on the *Prairie Home Companion*, once did a piece about a man that was tempted to stray, but then imagined how different it would be in his

neighborhood if he left his family. Maybe they couldn't stay in their house. His kids might need to change schools, lose friends, his wife would have to work longer hours. Both of them would have less time with the children. The more he reflected, the more negatives he conjured up.

Whether you fear the loss of your home, or the disapproval of friends and family, or the loss of financial security, negative consequences can help folks stay on the straight and narrow.

Three in One

For most couples who stay in a committed marriage, all three strands are part of their reasons for staying, though at times one may be strongest.

When things are going well, probably the attraction is the chief reason. When the relationship waters are choppy, it may well be the moral dimension or the fear of consequences that keeps the commitment alive.

Talk about it

This is a critical area of your relationship so take time to talk about it and be honest with one another. Be clear with one another about your feelings around faithfulness and what you think would help keep you committed to the marriage and to each other. You will be designing the union you want and increasing the probability of a healthy, happy marriage in the future. ■

Book Review

The Heart of Commitment by Scott Stanley, PhD

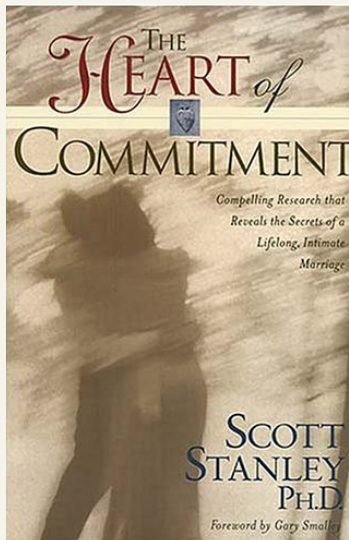
Many people think about commitment as the “til death do us part” in the marriage vows. That’s kind of jumping over the whole middle part, all the decisions that get you to the end together. If you have seen a spouse waiting for a partner to come home from Iraq you know what commitment looks like. Couples with a disabled child commit themselves to supporting each other in the care of that child. And we all know husbands and wives committed to caring for a spouse that has dementia, or a terminal illness.

The Heart of Commitment

Scott Stanley PhD., an eminent researcher on relationships, 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.”

Well-worn path

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 grieving the losses that come along with commitment based on an unexpected event. Jay and Dolores were anticipating Jay being able to cut back on work. They planned to travel, Have a more active 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 was diagnosed with 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. You might 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

One of the aspects of commitment highlighted in this book, a point of view that is unique, is that commitment is an active and lifelong (or at least marriage-long) pursuit. It’s comprised of making active choices that build a continuing relationship., not a passive posture of not doing anything to tear the marriage down. 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.” ■

Gottman on Commitment

Dr. John Gottman, world-renowned expert on relationships, has an illustration of what he calls a sound relationship house. It displays the building blocks that are necessary to maintain and shelter your relationship.

Most significant for this issue of *Foundations* Newsletter are the side pillars. They are trust, and commitment. Without those two, Dr. Gottman maintains. The house cannot stand.

And if they are not equally strong the house will tip over. So think about how you plan to keep the trust and commitment in your marriage strong.



Spirituality

It's ironic that one of the most beautiful examples of commitment in Scripture is not one between husband and wife, but between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

The Book of Ruth tells of a Hebrew couple, Elimelech and Naomi, who move out of Israel because of a famine. They went to Moab where they could get food. They had two sons, and when it was time to marry, the sons chose Moabite wives because there were no Hebrew women around. Then Elimelech died, and after another few years the two sons died also. Naomi decided to move back to her homeland. Her daughters-in-law wanted to come with her. She firmly told them no, that they would not be able to find husbands in her country.

Ruth's decision

One woman, Orpah, agreed to stay but Ruth would not be swayed. She told Naomi,

*"Don't press me to go back and abandon you!
Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live.
Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.
Where you die I will die, and that's where I'll be buried.
May the Lord do this to me and more,
if even death separates me from you. Ruth 1:16-17*

Strength of Conviction

Kind of like us when we marry, Ruth did not have any idea what lay ahead. She had never been to Israel, didn't know if Naomi's kinfolk would be there and welcome her. She just placed her entire trust in God, in Naomi, and in the relationship she had forged with her.

Leap of Faith

It's a leap of faith when we say to each other that we promise to love and honor one another, in good times and bad, until

death. People change, situations change, but our promise is supposed to stand fast. When problems arise, we should have the courage to stand back from the brink and find a solution. We need to work on our relationship so that it has the muscle to get through the tough times. That's what we promised when we took one another for a spouse.

Ruth's example

We probably never would have heard of Ruth if things had not come to such a hard pass. She was in about as low a place as a woman could be in that society, and yet she didn't focus on that. She kept her eye on the duty she felt toward her mother-in-law and it made a hero of her. We admire Ruth today because she took a bad situation and with the faithfulness to her own principles became an example for others. Thousands of years later we look to her as one who knew what real commitment looked like. ■



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equipped for joy.

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