



Living Well

The Character of Marriage



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Check out these websites for more information:

For more detailed information about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.org
Photos and writings about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.blogspot.com
Encouragement/culture on marriage - www.livingwellinmarriage.blogspot.com
Marriage events in the state, resources for marriage - www.marriagenetworkok.net
Making Marriage Memorable blog - www.marriagenetworkok.nblogger.com

Commitment

Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things man chooses or avoids. Aristotle

The word character means those moral or ethical qualities. So the character of marriage includes those moral or ethical qualities that make a marriage – **not just a good marriage but a great, enduring marriage.**

To us, the most important character quality in marriage is **commitment**. In a survey done for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, when asked why they got a divorce, the majority answered "a lack of commitment."

As we meet with couples, **we look for a level of commitment**. We ask them if they are ready to do whatever it takes to save their marriage. Even for couples

who are not in a crisis, the commitment makes a difference in the quality of their marriage.

What is commitment? The dictionary says it is a pledge or a promise, an obligation.

Scott Stanley talks about two kinds of commitment—commitment of constraint and commitment of dedication. [see box below] He explains:

What do you think a marriage would be like if you only had the commitment of constraint?

Couples who maintain and act on dedication are more connected, happier, and more open with each other.

Those who lose dedication and have only constraints will either be together but miserable or come apart.

The loss of dedication represents the loss of the will to try, the loss of the

sense of "us," and the loss of the actions that protect a marriage over time. A marriage without dedication is a marriage without passion or without life.

Examples of constraints are:

- **Social pressure** – *how will friends and/or family react?*
 - **Morality of divorce** – *how much do you believe that divorce is wrong?*
 - **Concern for the welfare of your children** – *do you believe your children will be harmed by the divorce?*
 - **Financial limitations/loss** – *how will your lifestyle change if you get a divorce?*
 - **Termination procedures** – *how difficult are the steps to end the marriage?*
 - **Alternative quality** – *what kind of quality of life do you think you will have living apart from your mate?*
- [see other side for more]

Two kinds

Scott Stanley talks extensively about the topic in his book *The Power of Commitment*. He defines two kinds of commitment:

1. Commitment of dedication. For example: "He is very committed to improving his golf game." He is dedicated to getting better at golf. He does it because he loves it or has a drive to meet the challenge of mastering the game.

Dedication implies **an internal state of devotion to a person or a project.**

It includes the idea of moving forward, a motivating force, based on the thoughtful decisions you made to give your best effort.

2. Commitment of constraint "He has committed to play in the golf tournament. His team won't be able to play without him."

Constraint entails a sense of obligation. It refers to factors that would be costs if the present course were abandoned. *What would I lose or what would it cost me if I didn't follow through with my commitment?*

The commitment of dedication or devotion is a force drawing you forward. The commitment of constraint is a force pushing you from behind.

On the reverse side:

Marriage and Spouse

Commitment to God

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Marriage is not a love affair. A love affair is a totally different thing. A marriage is a commitment to that which you are. That person is literally your other half. And you and the other are one. A love affair isn't that. That is a relationship of pleasure, and when it gets to be unpleasurable, it's off. But a marriage is a life commitment, and a life commitment means the prime concern of your life. If marriage is not the prime concern, you are not married.
Joseph Campbell

Marriage and Spouse

Life is full of choices. When we make a commitment, we are saying "yes" to this choice and "no" to all other choices. **The commitment to marriage is to one person, excluding all other choices.** We may think that sounds limiting or restrictive to us, but **those limitations bring greater freedom.**

Before the fall, they were *naked and not ashamed.* (Genesis 2:25) After the fall, they immediately started covering up and felt very much ashamed. **The openness, vulnerability, and transparency became shame, fear, and blame.**

There is a voice in the head of many people saying "you can have the most fulfilling life by keeping your options open and not giving up a thing."

The paradox is that I can experience more freedom when I accept the limits of

commitment. I no longer contemplate "maybe if." In any part of life, if I live in the land of "maybe" or indecision in committing to a course of action (including marriage), I will not move forward.

What would it mean to be committed to the marriage, not just staying married?

A commitment to the marriage means that **I am not just staying married but I am committed to a marriage that honors the Lord.** This commitment to the marriage is certainly a commitment of dedication.

I am devoted to making this marriage a picture of Christ and The Church to the world. I am going to love like He loves. I am going to forgive as He forgives.

I am not going to just stay married; I am going to do

whatever I can on my part **to make the marriage great.**

My commitment does not limit my freedom; it changes my choices. By getting married, I have chosen to make this one person my priority. I have put the boundaries of marriage on my relationships with people of the opposite sex.

Within the boundaries of marriage, I have **greater opportunities for a profound level of freedom.** It protects the kind of safety that is needed to have the best in marriage. It leads to greater freedom of oneness and openness.

Another commitment is to the very best for my spouse, creating a nurturing environment, a supportive relationship.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Rom. 12:10)

To be devoted to my spouse would include all levels of love – unconditional love, friendship love, physical love and affection.

Part of that commitment to the very best for your spouse is accepting that person just as they are – not trying to change that person.

In fact, I would encourage my spouse in his interests and abilities. **Devotion to my spouse through nurturing and encouraging his abilities will take the quality of my marriage to a higher level. We can have a more intimate and respectful marriage.**

[see more on our blog]

God

Our most important commitment in life is our commitment to our Lord. We say "yes" to Him as the one true God and we say "no" to all other Gods. Our faith is exclusive in love and devotion to Him,

The first of the 10 commandments: *You shall have no other gods before Me.*

He says that when I make a commit-

ment to my spouse at my wedding that I am giving my word before Him too.

When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath, he obligates himself by a pledge. (Numbers 30:2)

My commitment in marriage is a covenant. God says in Malachi 2:14, *she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.*

In this covenant relationship, not only am I committed to my spouse but also to God. He is part of the covenant relationship. As part of the covenant relationship, God commits Himself to keeping my marriage together. **He gives us His commitment to our marriage. He will make it possible to keep that marriage covenant if we are willing.**