

Psalm 37:3-9  
2 Peter 1:1-11

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## COMMITMENT

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. 2 Peter 1:5-7

When I'm leading a couple through pre-marital counseling I sense that a hinge moment is when I ask about when the couple first met. Then I back up from there to before they met. Imagine, I say, that you're driving down Route 30 when you stop at the light, and in an idle moment with your fingers tapping out the cadence of some song on the radio, you glance across at the total stranger car stopped next to you. Then an angel whispers very audibly in your ear, "Psst! See that person in the car there?"

"Ahaa."

"That's the one you're going to marry."

"What! I don't even know that person."

The light changes, he (or she) takes a right turn, you take a left, and life goes on.

It would be a bit of a shocker, to say the least. My point is that in that moment of time, before the first blossoming of affection, or even interest, long before love's first tremors, you are two people differently formed by life, with different friends and interests, different families and styles of relating, you name it. Nothing you ever did in your life to that moment was ever done consciously preparing to meet this particular person. So, when you do marry, making a commitment to one whom you know so partially, it's as though you drag up to the attic these big steamer trunks full of formative memories, associations, relationships, dashed hopes, dark little secrets and lingering dreams. Once in a while you take your spouse up to the attic in your mind, open the lid and peel back a few memories. "Let me tell you about this . . . ."

We are not just speaking of marriage here. Most of life functions this way: learning the resident culture of a new workplace, or school with its teachers and administration, the in-laws, the church—all come with their own white noise background of unexplained hopes, traditions and expectations that we implicitly expect each other to honor and cultivate, to commit to embracing. Impossible!—you might say. What this asks for sounds like over commitment, unselective commitment. Besides, what about my needs.

Imagine a married couple struggling to find their way among their competing claims and agendas, each expecting the other to validate their needs, each sensing little cooperation or support from the other. Then one spouse has an idea. Perhaps it comes from contemplating Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude, and how everyone got fed by giving away virtually all that they received. Or maybe it was Paul's great love passage in Corinthians which love appears not as feeling but as choosing to do the good thing, giving itself away, that spouse has an idea. 'What if I

make my spouse's agenda my agenda, just quietly, without conditions or expectations. So, he or she does, and slowly the barricades come down. Then a lovely serendipitous series of things start to happen. The one giving now finds him or herself receiving—little kindnesses, faults overlooked rather than underscored, he gets home before her to put a meal on the table, she surprises him coming to watch his racquetball competition. Each find their own needs being met through their giving. And because it's all so counterintuitive it starts to bear the scent of the divine, a holy goodness seeping into the commonplace.

Second Peter gets it so right:

“For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The reason that commitment is so important is because everything this side of God and heaven is unfinished, and getting it right is a communal effort.

This is very different from what the world teaches, especially Madison Avenue. Most marketing is an appeal to cupidity, the excessive desire to possess something. Jesus teaches just the opposite—that giving ourselves away is what gains the whole world.

Giving ourselves away. That's a pretty good definition of *commitment*, come to think of it. Commitment as giving it away. Like the seed that cannot grow in the hand, but only when it's let go of and trusted to the earth. Luther famously said, “Whatever I held in my hand, I lost. But whatever I let go of, I gained.”

Charles Swindoll once found his professional commitments impinging on his private life: “I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day,” he recalled. “Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

“I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, ‘Daddy, I wanna tell you something, and I’ll tell you really fast.’

“Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, ‘Honey, you can tell me and you don’t have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.’

I’ll never forget her answer, she said: ‘Then listen slowly.’”

Commitment. People rely on us to keep our promises, and others rely on them and, consequently, on the promises we make. Others constantly invest their hope in, and make larger plans based on what we promise them.

- “I promise to get it to you by Thursday.”
- “For better or worse, for richer or poorer.”
- “That I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”
- “Meet me at 7:00?”

- “Can I borrow your copy, I’ll get it right back to you.”
- “Sure, I’ll be glad to call these folks. I’ll do it tonight.”
- “Your game’s at 4:30?; I’ll be there,”
- “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”
- “What y’ doin’, Mom?”  
“Oh, just writing a few checks. By the way, how did you do on your exams, sweetheart?”
- “I see it says here on your resume that you graduated with honors

And this one:

“Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?”

“I do.”

“Do you trust in him?”

“I do.”

“Do you intend to be his disciple, obey his word, and declare his love?”

“I do.”

“For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love”

Amen.