

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Strengthening the Commitment in Your Marriage.

Commitment is an essential quality of any successful relationship, whether it involves a personal friendship, a financial agreement, a business contract, or your marriage. Invariably there comes a day when every promise and vow of allegiance will be tested. Keeping your commitment to the promises you've made is fundamental to carrying you through these rough waters.

Likewise, the tests that come to your marriage are many and varied. These tests often begin with the initial adjustments of a new marriage, or can occur during times of financial pressure, child rearing, the loss of a job, or physical illness. When these or other pressures occur in a marriage they can challenge the steadfastness of your vows. However, commitment is the glue that holds two people together through difficult times. What enables you to stay the course and not waver in your commitment when you enter these rough seas? The answer begins with an understanding of the covenant commitment you've made to your spouse.

Do you understand your vow of commitment?

The truth and power of God's Word concerning your pledge of faithfulness must be planted deep in your heart. Only then will you have the necessary knowledge and conviction to keep you from relinquishing your commitment when the times of testing come. Ask yourself; do you truly understand what you committed to

when you vowed to be faithful on your wedding day? How does God view your covenant commitment?

a. A Covenant for Life: The covenant of marriage is to be a commitment until the death of one of the partners. Jesus reminded His disciples that *"He who made them at the beginning made them male and female"* (Matt. 19:4). God's reason for creating only one man and one woman should be obvious. It shows us that this one woman was all Adam needed for his life. Jesus made it absolutely clear when He said, *"What God has joined together, let not man separate"* (Matt. 19:6). Therefore, God's desire is that this covenant should be for life with one person.

b. A Covenant to Become One: Jesus also said; *"A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"* (Matt. 19:5). Becoming one is a process that only occurs in the security of your commitment to your loved one. What is the means of developing oneness?

c. A Covenant to Companionship: To become one flesh also requires a commitment to become one another's companion spiritually, emotionally, recreationally, and sexually. The prophet Malachi directly connected this covenant commitment with God's ultimate intention that two people would find companionship: *"The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth ... she is your companion and your wife by covenant"* (Malachi 2:14). The word *companion* in this verse means one with whom you are knit together.

Don't you want to experience this knitting together of your two lives? If

you do, you must understand that God wants you to yield to Him so this knitting process can occur. He also wants *you* to work in every possible way to promote the knitting together of your two lives. This is commitment!



Strengthen commitment through companionship!

Now, some of you are probably thinking, *"But, I can't commit myself like this. You don't understand the difficulties I'm experiencing in my marriage."* But, if this is God's command He will also enable you to reach His goal of commitment that you might attain companionship. What can you do to begin strengthening your commitment? Continue reading!

How can you strengthen your commitment?

1. **Ask for forgiveness.** Have you been threatening to break your covenant commitment and to divorce by direct statements or by implication? If you have, the first step in renewing your commitment would be to ask God for His forgiveness. Why is God's forgiveness so essential to the renewal process? You must realize that the commitment you made on

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

your wedding day was in God's presence and primarily a vow to Him. This is why God said, "*The Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth*" (Mal. 2:14). He was the silent witness standing there on your wedding day. You promised in His presence that you would love your spouse as long as you lived. That promise is still binding! Therefore, any threat to divorce is first a threat to break your promise before God.

Next, you need to ask your spouse for his or her forgiveness. If you have threatened divorce, your threat is a great offense and a deep wound to the heart of your mate because you have declared your love dead. Don't you realize that to threaten to dissolve your marriage is to retract the promise you made to love, honor, and cherish?

Therefore, if you ever desire to renew and strengthen your relationship with your mate you must sincerely ask forgiveness and pledge to never make these threats again.

2. Renew your commitment to Christ. The process of forgiveness and reconciliation with the Lord and with your spouse will necessitate the renewal of your commitment to Christ. Why is this essential? If you are considering and threatening divorce this indicates serious problems in your spiritual life. Your marital difficulties are the result of your sinful behavior toward one another (i.e. selfishness, pride, stubbornness, resentment, or unforgiveness). Only by allowing Christ to truly be your Savior and Lord will you be able to save your marriage. A real relationship with Jesus is where you'll get the power to keep yourself under control, be faithful to your vows, and learn how to love each other. This is why Scripture declares: "*Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass*" (Psalm 37:5).

If you've never made a commitment to Christ, this is where you need to begin. Open your heart and receive

Him right now (John 1:12). Acknowledge to God in prayer that you are a sinner and that you believe Jesus died on the cross in your place (1 John 1:9). Invite Jesus to personally come into your heart. Ask all these things in Jesus name (John 14:13).

If you've already made a commitment to Christ, but you know that you've failed to truly walk with Him, turn now and renew your relationship with the One who first loved you. Jesus said, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matt. 11:28-29).

The truth and power of God's Word concerning your pledge of faithfulness must be planted deep in your heart.

How about it? Will you come to Him and learn what you need to do to restore your marriage? He is the One Who made you, and therefore, He is the only One who knows how to fix you and your marriage. As you respond with whole-hearted obedience to what He teaches, you will find rest for your soul and reconciliation of the conflicts in your marriage.

3. Resolve your conflicts. The next step in renewing and building your commitment with your spouse is to begin resolving the long-standing conflicts that have divided you and your mate. Resolving these conflicts is a must because having unresolved issues in your relationship are the primary reason you are so uncommitted toward one another. These unresolved conflicts are like a wedge, driving you so far apart that it is impossible for you to sense the closeness and unity you once had. If you will begin resolving these conflicts the barricade will be removed and your commitment will naturally be

restored. Scripture teaches that when you reconcile with your brother you have "*gained*" him again (Matt. 18:15). The word *gain* means to win or gain favor with this person. Isn't this exactly what you want with your spouse?

Therefore, seek reconciliation. Do you need help with the practical steps to resolve your issues? I would refer you to chapters 8-10 in my book *Married And How To Stay That Way* for an in-depth look at what causes conflicts and how to reconcile them. For a more abbreviated look at this subject please examine the articles found at our web site, www.covenantkeepers.org.

4. Be willing to forgive. One of the great causes of weakened commitment in a marriage is unforgiveness. When you fail to forgive your spouse you cannot maintain your commitment because your hearts are estranged and separated from one another. If you allow this division to remain, you will become more and more alienated from one another until you begin to wonder why you are even married. Therefore, you must forgive if you want to keep your hearts united and growing in love.

Forgiveness for any sin between you is truly possible if you will simply take these steps:

a) Choose to obey God's command. Jesus declared: "*Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven*" (Luke 6:37). Therefore, choose to obey God's command and forgive your mate from your heart (Matt. 18:35).

b) Don't wait to obey this command to forgive until you feel like it. No one ever feels like forgiving. You must choose to forgive because you know this is God's will and doing so pleases Him: "*For thus says the LORD: 'Choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant'*" (Is. 56:4). Therefore, no matter how you feel choose to please the Lord by forgiving right now.

c) In addition, don't wait to obey the command to forgive until you think your mate deserves to be forgiven. If you wait for your spouse to become deserving before you actually forgive, you will never do it. No person can ever be good enough to deserve your mercy or forgiveness. Think about it; do you deserve to be forgiven? Have you *ever* deserved forgiveness? Never! In fact, all of us deserve to spend eternity separated from God. Many times when we see our own sin done by another we can be so unmerciful. King David was this way when Nathan the prophet came and told him a story about another man who had been ruthless and selfish. David's heart was ready to condemn and said, "*The man that has done this shall surely die*" (2 Sam. 12:5). Nathan revealed that the man he had referred to in his story was David himself. Note how little mercy was in David's heart when he was blinded to his own sin. Please remember that God requires each of us to "*love mercy*" as He does (Micah 6:8).

Take a good look at your own sin. This will motivate you to be merciful and forgiving. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*" (Matt. 5:7).

d) Once you've chosen to forgive, continue to forgive by not bringing the issue up again in your next argument. Whenever God forgives He promises never to use your sins against you in the future: "*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins*" (Is. 43:25). The word *remember* means to mention, recall, or recount what's been forgiven. It is not that God forgets your sins. In fact, God can't forget anything because He is omniscient (knowing all things) (Ps. 139:1-6; Acts 15:18). What God means by this promise is that He chooses not to remember your sins against you for future judgment. If you have truly forgiven your spouse you will extend the same mercy.

5. Return to your first love. Have you ever wondered, *What makes God so committed to me? What would move Him to promise that He would never leave or forsake me?* Isn't it His love? Notice the loving commitment He expressed to His struggling people: "*For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,*" says the LORD, *who has mercy on you*" (Is 54:10). What a comforting thought it is to realize that His lovingkindness and mercy is more steadfast than even the greatest mountains upon the earth. God wants to give you this same steadfast love for each other.

You must realize that the commitment you made on your wedding day was in God's presence and primarily a vow to Him.

When you first married you had this committed love for one another, but where has it gone? Isn't it that you have allowed unresolved conflicts, resentments, and other priorities to take first place in your relationship, and your love for each other has simply deteriorated? Without sincere love being expressed in your relationship there will be a sense of distance between you that will naturally drive you from your committed position.

Only by renewing your love, companionship, and intimacy with each other will your commitment be re-established. Returning to your marital first love is accomplished the exact same way it's done in your relationship with Christ. Jesus told the church at Ephesus: "*I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent*" (Rev. 2:4-5). All you need to

do is remember what it was like when you did have the excitement of your first love with your mate. What was it like when you first fell in love? In other words, focus your attention on the good times. Then repent and ask your spouse to forgive you for allowing your marriage to take second place. Go back to doing your first works again. This means that you need to court one another as you did at the beginning of your relationship. As loving companionship with one another becomes the priority of your daily life, the commitment will also return and will become strong again.

6. Develop realistic expectations.

Many people withdraw their commitment when they realize they haven't married the perfect person. People then idealistically think there is someone else out there that is more perfectly suited for them. However, when a marriage partner thinks in this manner, he or she has failed to realize one simple truth. The problem is not with your spouse, it's *your* expectations that are flawed. You are focused on the speck in your mate's eye and you can't see the log in your own (Matt. 7:5).

If you are looking for a perfect marriage partner, your search will be in vain because this person doesn't exist! Many people have the same unrealistic expectations, revealed by the fact that they constantly change from job to job or church-to-church searching for some perfect environment. However, realistically, we all know that there are no perfect churches, jobs, or spouses because we live in a fallen world. God fully knows each of us in our imperfections and chooses to love and redeem us anyway. Thank God for that!

Therefore, reject your unrealistic expectations for greener grass. Why not start watering your own grass! Begin by dealing with your own faults. Become a giver in your relationship instead of expecting your mate to always do what you want. Show some patience and understanding for your loved one's struggles. Only then

will you realize your hopes for a better marriage and strengthen your commitment again.

7. Verbalize your commitment.

Good communication will always enhance your companionship and, therefore, naturally enhance your commitment to one another. When you communicate effectively you will naturally be drawn into a closer and more intimate relationship with your mate. Never sell short the benefit of regularly verbalizing your love and pledge to stay committed. When you read God's verbal commitment to you in His Word, doesn't it assure and comfort you?

Therefore, verbalize your commitment to your mate today. Walk up and put your arms around your spouse and tell him or her, "I love you and I'm committed to you. No matter what our struggles, I'm here for the duration." Do it regularly.

8. Show your commitment. It is not enough to tell your spouse that you are committed to him or her; you must also actively demonstrate your dedication to your marriage. Your actions further confirm your words. How can you show your mate your commitment? The answer is simple. Compare how God has demonstrated His commitment to you.

a) God reveals His commitment to you by His compassion, patience, and longsuffering attitude in spite of all of your faults. The Father is willing to remain committed toward you even when you are very uncommitted to Him. David realized this powerful truth when he saw his own weak and failing heart: "*But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth*" (Ps. 86:15). But, if your marriage partner doesn't sense this same quality of mercy and patience from you he or she will immediately begin to question your commitment. Your mate will wonder, *Is he or she tired of me and my faults?*

Therefore, ask God to fill you with His powerful and all sufficient Spirit

to produce in you His heart of compassion and patience. Then express to your mate your compassion and graciousness the next time there is a conflict.

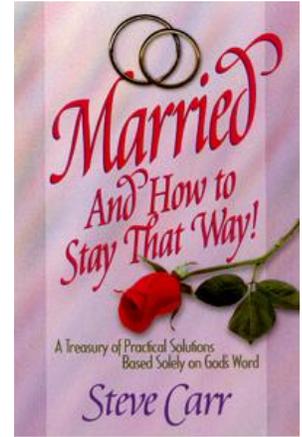
b) God shows you His commitment by His continual forgiveness and by His refusal to keep a record of your sins. Paul the Apostle defined true love when he said, "Love ...thinks no evil" (1 Cor. 13:4-5). The word *thinks* means to take an inventory or to keep a record in your mind. Forgiveness means that you refuse to keep a record or inventory of other people's sins. Your willingness to respond to your mate in this way will demonstrate your complete commitment and will keep your heart tender.

c) God has demonstrated His commitment by His sacrificial giving. Jesus never spoke words without backing them up with action. He showed His commitment by paying the ultimate price when He laid down His life on the cross. Sacrificial giving is the supreme way to convince your mate that you are committed to your marriage. Show your loved one your commitment by laying your life down in practical service every day. This is what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross in order to follow Christ (Luke 9:23).

Brothers and sisters, ask God to produce each of these qualities in your marriage. Don't be satisfied with anything less than complete devotion to each other. Wherever you determine there is weakness in your commitment, turn around and begin rebuilding it today. The result of your dedication, devotion, and loyalty will dramatically affect your relationship and your entire family. Don't miss the blessing! Commit yourself today!

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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site www.covenantkeepers.org or by email at ccag@calvaryag.org or at 805-481-2320.



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