



The Power of Commitment

It is Christ alone who gives us the power to love others in a committed way.

by Phil Callaway

My most brilliant achievement was my ability to persuade my wife to marry me.

— Winston Churchill

The great philosopher Socrates once wrote, "By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you will become very happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher."

Commitment

Some time ago, my parents were visiting and I asked them about the secret to their 55-year marriage. Without hesitation, Dad said, "Senility. I wake up each morning and I can't remember who this old girl is. So each day is a new adventure." When Mom finally quit pinching him, he got serious.

"In a word?" he said. "Commitment."

You don't have to stand in the checkout line long to know that commitment is not a hallmark of our culture. Standing near the chocolate bars the other day, I picked out a tabloid and read of Rex and Teresa LeGalley, a young couple who want to ensure that their recent marriage will stand the test of time. After all, it was Teresa's second marriage and Rex's third. So they drew up a 16-page prenuptial agreement that specifies such details as what time they'll go to bed, how often they'll have sex, which gasoline they'll purchase and who will do the laundry. Says Teresa, "This is the plan that we think will keep us married for 50 or 60 years."

When I told this to Dad, he had another one-word response: "Ha!"

Hollywood Surprises

Occasionally Hollywood surprises us with some good news, though. Famed singer and actress Bette Midler, who has been married for 13 years to artist Martin von Haselberg, was asked about the key to their marriage. Midler responded, "Separate vacations." Then, like my dad, she got serious. "We're committed," she said. "We're in it for the long haul. Besides, you really don't get to know a person until you've known them a long time, and we don't know each other yet, even though it's been 13 years. Sometimes it's been a struggle, but amazingly we didn't give up."

When asked by US magazine about the secret to his 41-year marriage, James Garner, the star of *Maverick* and *The Rockford Files*, said, "Consideration. You have to care for [your spouse] and do a lot of forgiving and forgetting. It's a two-way street. A lot of people don't get married because they know they can get out of it at any minute. Hey, it was difficult for me to make that commitment, but when I make them, I stick with them."

Marriage is a Joyful Privilege

I remember reading of an elderly couple whose family had thrown a golden anniversary party for them. The husband was deeply touched by their kindness and stood to thank them. Then he looked at his wife of 50 years and tried to put into words just how he felt about her. Lifting his glass he said: "My dear wife, after 50 years I've found you tried and true." Everyone smiled their approval, but not his wife. She had hearing trouble, so she cupped one hand behind an ear and said, "Eh?" Her husband repeated himself loudly, "AFTER FIFTY YEARS I'VE FOUND YOU TRIED AND TRUE!" His wife shot back, "Well, let me tell YOU something — after 50 years I'm tired of you, too!"

Thankfully, commitment doesn't need to be like that. Marriage is not a life sentence; it is a joyful privilege. Paul Brand, the

missionary doctor who worked for many years among leprosy victims in India, said these challenging words: "As I enter my sixth decade of marriage I can say without a flicker of hesitation that the basic human virtue of faithfulness to one partner is the most joyful way of life ... I have always trusted my wife completely, and she me. We have each been able to channel love and commitment and intimacy to one person — a lifelong investment that is now, in old age, paying rich dividends."

Obedience Breeds Commitment

A friend once told me that his parents always got along. That he had never heard them disagree, and he had certainly never heard them argue. I finally stopped laughing long enough to tell him that I couldn't say that about Mom and Dad. But I never doubted their commitment to each other. What kept them committed? Simple obedience to the One with whom they had the most important relationship of all.

Often at night, I came into Mom and Dad's room and found them praying together. Or reading the Bible together. They knew that "unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). Mom told me one day, "Only with Christ at the center of our marriage, at the center of our home, at the center of everything we do, can we experience the greatest joy and fulfillment possible." My wife and I have made a commitment to read the Bible and pray together before we go to sleep each night. We haven't always achieved that goal. In fact, sometimes we have gone through weeks of neglecting it altogether. But when we follow through on this simple commitment, it can make a world of difference in our marriage. For one thing, I find it very difficult to read passages like Colossians 3:12-14 aloud to my wife without it having a dramatic effect on the way I treat her.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

It is Christ alone who gives us the power to love others in this way.

Believe me, ours is not a perfect marriage. But I am far richer when I remember the three "Cs" of a great marriage: Communication. Commitment. Christ.

It may not be the deepest thing you'll ever read, but I'd rather be a happily married man than a philosopher. Any day.

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