

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

February 2012

Commitment

By Shaunti Feldhahn



“If you really love someone, you shouldn’t have to work at it.”

That’s what High School Musical star Vanessa Hudgens told CosmoGIRL! for its August 2008 issue. This young celebrity was speaking out loud what millions of people privately think: Loving feelings should come naturally in a relationship, so if you have to work at it, something’s wrong. But the truth is exactly the opposite: If you truly love someone, you will work hard for the relationship.

Rock or Sand

Jesus spoke of a house that was built on sand and shaken by storms, while another house was built on rock and remained unmoved. One of my greatest surprises as a relationship analyst is just

how many of us build our marriages on the sand of feelings instead of the rock of commitment. But I’ve been encouraged to see that truly committed couples are able, with God’s help, to thrive even through the inevitable storms.

Over a five-year period, a close friend sent me e-mails sharing about her struggles with her marriage. She went from daily messages that read, “I can’t take this anymore!” to e-mails saying, “He is such a gift to me.” What accounted for the change? Her determination.

As she now says, “A successful marriage has little to do with circumstances and a lot to do with determination — taking the word divorce out of your vocabulary and replacing it with commitment.”

What is Commitment?

Commitment is a decision to have the abundant marriage God desires, regardless of circumstances or whether you think your spouse is doing his or her part. This includes:

Realizing that marriage is an unbreakable covenant before God. At weddings, Atlanta minister Barry Grecu explains that ancient Hebrew culture understood a covenant not as a contract, which could be broken, but as a binding, permanent agreement — just like the covenant God makes with us.

A successful marriage has little to do with circumstances and a lot to do with determination — taking the word “divorce” out of your vocabulary and replacing it with “commitment.”

Choosing to “do it until you feel it.” We often let our feelings guide our actions, but we are actually built for the opposite. Our Creator has designed us so that when we love another person with our actions, our feelings inevitably follow.

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Commitment

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Focusing on the good in our spouse and the sin in ourselves — instead of the other way around.

If you're dissatisfied with your marriage, try this challenge: For the next 30 days, don't say anything negative about your spouse — neither to him or her nor to someone else. Every day, find something you appreciate about your spouse, and verbalize it. This marital application of Philippians 4:8 (which instructs us to focus on whatever is praiseworthy) has the power to transform a marriage. When we examine and work to change ourselves, we often bring out the best in our spouse as well.

Engaging in Christian community, prayer and discipleship — especially when you don't want to.

These three aspects of the Christian life help sustain every believer, but they are particularly essential for those going through a difficult season.

Relying on God to help you act selflessly toward your spouse. As Grecu puts it, "We are incapable of living out our covenant promises in our own human strength. Jesus says, 'Apart from Me you can do nothing' and calls us to engage with the Spirit of God being lived out through us."

A 1998 survey by the Georgia Family Council found that among couples who prayed together weekly, only 7 percent had seriously considered divorce, compared to 65 percent of those who never prayed together.

Is Commitment Possible?

The often-cited statistic that 50 percent of marriages end in divorce — even among churchgoers — can make commitment seem fruitless. But that statistic is misleading. Dozens of studies distinguish between couples who claim a nominal faith and those who prioritize church attendance. Couples who have a strong commitment to faith and attend church regularly are far more likely to have lifelong relationships.

One recent study in particular shows that those who go to church and pray together have a much lower divorce rate. The University of Virginia's Brad Wilcox found that regular church attendance cuts the likelihood of divorce by 30 percent to 35 percent. Wilcox's work is supported by another study by Annette Mahoney of Bowling Green State University, which independently came to a similar conclusion.

While that rate is still unfortunately high, when you add prayer into the mix, thoughts of divorce plummet. A 1998 survey by the Georgia Family Council found that among couples who prayed together weekly, only 7 percent had seriously considered divorce, compared to 65 percent of those who never prayed together.

The abundant marriage that God has designed for us is not only possible but also likely, and the journey there starts with one word — commitment.

[Taken from *Focus on the Family* magazine, January, 2009]

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