



3: The Glue of Commitment | Pastor Joe Wittwer | February 21, 2010

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Introduction: At a wedding, a bride and groom make promises—commitments—to each other, promises that are to be kept “for better or worse”—no matter what. These promises are the glue that holds us together through the difficult times. We’re going to talk about the role of commitment in creating a life-long marriage, about how important these promises are, and how helpful it is to repeat them regularly. Great marriages are the result of a lot of hard work by two committed partners. They require skill and will. There are skills that you have to learn, and for most of us, we’ll take a lifetime to learn them. Skills like understanding the opposite sex, communication, conflict resolution, compromise, anger management, raising children, managing money, and even making love. Many couples, lacking the skills, break up early on. Nearly one half of all divorces happen in the first two years of marriage. People marry without knowing how hard it will be and without many of the skills, and then they break up before they have a chance to develop the skills. What carries us through while we’re learning the skills? Will or in others words, commitment. We make the choice: “I choose us.” We make a promise: for better or worse till death do us part. And that’s the glue that holds us together. The commitment isn’t just to stay in the marriage; it’s to make the marriage great. To be committed to your marriage is to be actively working to make it better, to be all God wants it to be. To be committed to you partner is to be actively working to help him or her become all God wants them to be. Commitment is active, not passive. Marriage is a covenant, a “formal, binding and solemn agreement.” God has made a covenant with us. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the nation of Israel. In many places, God likens that covenant with Israel to a marriage. He is the groom, Israel is His bride. “You will be my people, and I will be Your God.” In the New Testament, Jesus makes a new covenant. All of us who believe in Jesus and follow Him have entered into this covenant with God. The New Testament also compares this covenant with us to a marriage. [Read **Ephesians 5:22–33** together now.] The apostle Paul compares marriage to Christ’s relationship with the church (all of us). Christ is the groom, and we are His bride. God made promises to us, and asked promises of us in return. The covenant was based on these promises. In the same way, the marriage covenant is made on a set of promises that we make to each other before God. These vows are the steel framework of the marriage.

1. I do: The promises we make.

There are many forms of marriage vows, but most of them include a few basic promises.

I will love you.

This is the first and most important promise, for all the other promises are summed up in this one. If you love your spouse, you’ll keep all the other promises. Love isn’t primarily an emotion, but an action. Love is doing what is best for another no matter what it costs you. We get this definition of love from the Bible, from God’s love for us. **John 3:16** says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God so loved that He gave. He didn’t just feel something for us, He did something for us. He did what was best for us, no matter what it cost Him. And it cost him a lot: His Son. **Romans 5:8** states: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Love is doing what is best for another no matter what it costs you.

I will cherish you.

To cherish is to nurture, to keep or cultivate with care. When you cherish someone, you care for them and protect them.

I will honor you.

To honor someone is to show them great respect, to acknowledge their worth and value. Sadly, we often treat the most important people in our lives with the least respect. We honor someone when we listen to them attentively and respectfully, when we speak highly of them to others, when we praise them in public. We honor someone when we put their interests and concerns ahead of our own, when we put them first above ourselves.

I will be faithful to you.

Faithfulness is not only physical, sexual, but it's also mental and emotional. Faithfulness means that we will not entertain fantasies of another man or woman. We don't allow our affections to wander. **Proverbs 4:23** warns that you should, "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*" Guard your heart, your affections, your thoughts—everything else flows from this.

No matter what: For better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health.

Sometimes it's easy to keep your promise and sometimes it's hard. **Psalm 15:4** describes the righteous person as one who "*keeps his promise even when it hurts.*" It hurts to keep your promises when the other person isn't keeping theirs. And sometimes things don't turn out the way that you expected. It's easy to think, "I didn't sign up for this. I want out." We quit too easily. Marriage is hard! Sometimes you have hard days, weeks or even years. What are you going to do? Many people quit. But you made a promise: for better or worse. I will love you.

Forever: as long as we both shall live.

This defines the duration of the promises. I promise to love you, cherish you, honor you and be faithful to you, for better or worse...for as long as we both shall live. Till death do us part. I choose us...forever.

2. I will be your God: the promises God makes.

God is far more committed to you than you'll ever be to Him. His love for you is far greater than yours will ever be for Him. His faithfulness to us is perfect even though we fail Him often. He keeps His promises to you even though you often fail to keep yours.

We end with this thought: God is totally committed to you. God says, "I choose you." And He promises to keep you to the end. [Read **Jude 24-25** together now.]

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. If you are married, how would you assess your "skills" and "will" at the time you got married? What are you doing to improve your "skills," such as communication, conflict resolution, joint decision-making, and others? If you're not married, what steps can you take to prepare your skills for a future marriage?
2. Read **1John 3:16** and **4:9-10**. How did God demonstrate what love in action looks like? What does this look like in the marriage relationship? Share some specific examples. Compare your ideas with what it says in **Psalm 15:4**. What does God require from us in marriage? What specific actions are you using to say "I choose you" to your spouse?
3. What are you doing now to make and keep your marriage great? As a committed spouse, how are you actively working to help your partner be all God wants them to be? How are you guarding your heart and honoring the promises you made to your spouse?
4. Paul, in **Ephesians 5:22-33**, equates marriage to Christ's relationship with the church. What does Jesus require from us before He loves us? What do you require from your spouse before you love them? Discuss some practical ways that we can love and respect each other in our marriages.

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes.)

- If you are married, be intentional this week about repeating the marriage vows (below) to your spouse every day this week. Make it a regular practice.

"I choose us. I promise to love you. I promise to cherish you. I promise to honor you. I promise to be faithful to you. I will keep these promises in good times and bad, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live. So, help me God."

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4:10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for His incredible example of love and the commitment he has made to us.
- Ask God to help you every day live up to your commitment...to Him, and to your spouse. And ask Him to help you work hard at building a really great marriage.
- Bring other praises or request to God that came up during the discussion.