

The Commitment of Marriage

by Mr. Richard Pinelli

You've probably heard it said maybe a hundred times, maybe even a thousand times or maybe when you looked into the eyes of the individual you were standing next to, maybe it was said to you. The vow goes something like this, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, I promise to be faithful to you forsaking all others until death do us part. Beautiful vow.

As reflected in these beautiful vows, commitment. Commitment, a deeply fulfilling path that we would like to examine today in the sermon. You and I probably dream of journeying through life with one person who knows how to make us smile, believes in us, holds us close, treasures us always. However, while we hope the commitment paths will take us to the mountaintops, sometimes it takes us through deep valleys and dark times.

An old Navy expression conveys such a total commitment as found in these vows. When a captain was heading into battle, the captain simply said these words, he said, surrender is not contemplated and so he ordered that the colors of their flag be nailed very high up on the mast. Having the flag nailed up high there, there was no possibility of lowering them in the heat of the battle in order to raise the flag of surrender. With surrender no longer an option crew members were motivated to fix their mind on how to best win the battle. Surrender is not an option. Such is the commitment of marriage. Such is the commitment in marriage. Such should be the mindset of every married person in God's church.

What did God intend? Let's evaluate today something that perhaps we have not evaluated very much. I describe it as one of the major marriage killers in the church of God. One of the major of marriage killers and that is the understanding or the lack of understanding of this particular vow or the commitment in marriage. I'd like you to turn to begin with to the book of Genesis 2. Let's read Genesis 2 and see that in the beginning when God set the foundation for what he wanted done. This is the core account on the idea of marriage. This is the ideal. This is where we should plant our feet. This is where we should stay. This is where we should go. This passage illustrates the commitment in marriage fundamentally, and it involves choices. Some of them are going to be very hard choices. Many of these choices are about major allegiances in a person's life. Notice Genesis 2:24.

Genesis 2:24. *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*

Marriage requires a priority. This priority even overshadows the devotion to parents. In fact, if you remember the Torah taught a tremendously high level of respect toward the parents, but your commitment to your spouse is to exceed that level of devotion and respect to your parents because a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. It is a commitment to your spouse that excels the level of devotion and respect that you have toward your parents.

It is what I describe as a high calling. It is what I describe as simply a major choice that you have to keep in the forefront of your mind if at all possible as a human being. This passage also portrays the picture of what I describe as permanence in marriage. For the Hebrew word that we talk about in the Old Testament as being joined is from the spelling d-a-b-a-q or d-e-b-e-q, which means to adhere. It means to cling; it means to cleave; it means to stick. It literally means to stick, and it's interesting to note that when you look at the concept about sticking you get the idea that it means to be joined together in a lasting bond. Even the Greek word in the New Testament used for joined k-o-l-l-a-o literally means to be glued together. It literally means to be glued together.

Isn't it interesting that both the Old and the New Testament words for joined show that concept? The image by many of being joined is more of that today as being stuck, not sticking. I'm stuck with her. I'm stuck with this old goat. I'm stuck with this particular individual, rather than sticking. It is reflected in the text here and in the New Testament that it is the design by God that two individuals have a deeply entwining relationship that frees these individuals for intimacy between each other.

What follows in the last part of this particular scripture shows, that it is emphasizing permanence because it says going on in the last part of the verse here, it says, simply...

Verse 24. "...*they shall be one flesh.*"

They shall become one flesh. That means in two different ways, but the first way has to do with clinging, it has to do with cleaving, it has to do with sticking and bonding for the entirety of the vow. I'd like you to turn to Ephesians 5. Let's go to Ephesians 5. I want to show you that this word clinging, this word adhering, this word bonding has to do with something even greater than the marriage vow because when we look at Galatians the 5th chapter we begin to realize that what God is doing to us as Christians is turning to us and saying, see this example over here in Genesis 2:23-26. This particular section and this section in Ephesians 5 have to do with a relationship of vowing between you and God that represents the physical relationship ate and it represents the spiritual relationship with your creator. Notice Ephesians 5:21. He said...

Ephesians 5:21. "*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*"

So he begins by talking about a relationship of being dominant or recessive under specific needs and situations within the church. Then he goes on and he begins to amplify it a little bit when he says...

Verse 22-23. *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."*

Now we begin to realize the importance of this bonding in a physical relationship of marriage because it is as important to be there as it is to be in the vow that you made at baptism between you and God. What you and I learn in practice in one vow, we should be applying to the other one. This is what the 5th chapter of Ephesians is about. He runs a parallel between the physical marriage of two human beings and the spiritual marriage to Christ, and so he is telling us here that...

Verse 24. *"...as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."*

This line and this line. They both are equal; they both come from the same cleaving. They come from the concept of leaving your father and mother and cleaving unto your wife; they both are adhering to or being glued together in a relationship that is there both physically and spiritually. And so he goes on to tell us beginning, going into verse 25.

Verse 25. *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church..."*

So we grab the parallel between the physical and the spiritual relationship.

Verse 25-28. *"...and he gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies."*

A beautiful analogy. A beautiful parallel. This is what God intends that we see the principles that parallel a strong, total commitment in both a physical vow and a spiritual vow or a vow of marriage and a vow of baptism that we make with God. So going on he says in verse 28.

Verse 28. *"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself."*

Because she is an extension of him.

Verse 30-32. *"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be..."* glued together, that's what the word means *"...unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

So when you read this particular passage, you begin to realize there really are two major commitments; there are two major commitments in the lives of most Christians. 1) Our commitment to God, which was made at baptism, and 2) our commitment that is made at

the marriage ceremony. In the marriage ceremony there is a covenant vow with God to cleave to the spouse until death. It's a beautiful parallel between this and the church as the bride of Christ, is there not? And what we see Paul showing us here in this passage is the parallel between the heart of commitment in our marriage vow with the heart of commitment in our baptismal vow.

And we should then take both of these because some of you are not married and some of you are. So what we're going to see today is that we have a little something for both sides of the fence, so you can't say to me if you're not married, this doesn't apply to me.

Yes it does. It applies just as strongly to you as a single person as any of us as married people in this room.

So what's the attitude of the heart of commitment in these two most important vows? How do we proceed? How do we procure this?

How do we keep it? Let's take a look at this today in the sermon in the time that I have left. Our whole society is predicated on the lack of permanency. Our whole society is predicated on the lack of permanency and commitment. You and I reflect, and we are affected by the cultures in which we live. Cultures reinforce certain mindsets. It's a fact of life. I hear people talking when we visit in church. I go out to people's homes and we visit, and you recognize a tremendous amount of what you reflect comes from radio, television, and the printing press or maybe it comes from your family or your relatives who've had a bad experience in life in certain ways.

But our society lives for the moment; it doesn't live for the future. It drives, that particular idea drives us today. People are obsessed with making money and making it now and looking at things so far as the now. When 9/11 hit, we found so many people who were doing a little bit of saving, decided forget this, I'm going to go out and buy a yacht because I don't know if I'm going to be around in the next year or so after all these things happening in New York. So they took their goods in the sense of their savings, and they began buy huge yachts worth one, two and three hundred thousand dollars. Taking their life savings that in some cases they had and buying it to live in the now.

But it's a part of the frame of mind that we have. People are obsessed with being lovers of their own selves, poking things in their eyes and in their mouth and up their nose and in their ears and the senses that they have and all of the feely-touchy stuff that has to be, that you want to have now. The Bible says very simply in II Timothy 3 that men would be lovers of their own selves more than lovers of God.

You take a look at our government; it doesn't live for a hundred years from now; it lives for today; it overspends from the point of view of saying that you and I with our children, our children's children, our children's children's children will be the ones who will pay off the debt of this particular government, and so we live for the now.

The employment situation that we live in today—there is no loyalty today in many companies to the employee. There is no loyalty to him; there is no loyalty to the employer. We don't think about working long hours and doing the thing that needs to be done to keep the company going. People don't think about that today in the same way that they thought about it twenty, thirty, forty years ago. In big business, you find so many people are nothing than pawns. They are the chattel. We are told now by employment people that you can expect to have five or six different jobs because the society is moving so fast and the fluctuation of this society is so fast that you may not be able to work from the time you got out of high school or out of college until the day that you retire. It would have been a wonderful thing.

My father was one of those few people that worked from the time he got out of school until he retired at aged sixty-five. It doesn't happen with most people any more. Why? It's this lack of permanence, this lack of continuous, this lack of loyalty, this lack of just simply being able to commit to one and stay with it all the time. And we bounce all over the place as human beings. We have wonderful, built-in obsolescence.

My particular car now begins to have so many noises at eight years of age, that I'm not sure whether I'll make it to work some days. It squeaks and howls and hacks and bounces and makes all kinds of noises, and I say which is this one now? And it's only got 85,000 miles on it or 87,000 miles on it, but it also has been around for eight years, and what they tell me is this car should be obsolete now. So I worry about one of these days, I turn the thing and the whole thing flops, and hits the deck, you know, that type of thing. You wonder about it. Eight years and it's going to be gone. I mean my dad used to have cars that were so old that we thought that they were older than dirt. I mean they were so old that he could just keep going. He kept working with that four, five, six cylinder engine, and he kept it up, kept it up for years and years, and it was amazing how much you could do with them, but the point is those cars today are made for obsolescence.

I have a toaster. They tell me that toaster will be obsolete in five years. I have a washing machine. They tell me that five to seven years and fella, that's it, it's over. Throw it away, get a new one. And so what's going to happen is I am going to be able to throw those things away in the next few years, and I will have more garbage up to my eyebrows in this society where you throw everything out than we would've had back ten, twenty, thirty years ago. So the end result is my toaster, my car, my appliances are made with a certain amount of time, and so the whole frame of mind is that, you know, here today and gone tomorrow. And so when you suck into that particular frame of mind through the day, if our senses of the future are built in that particular way, our future is week. Our vision is week. We live listlessly as a human being.

You know there's a word in the Greek language, which depicts a point of character necessary for these vows, the one of baptism and the one of simply marriage to be fulfilled. The word in the Greek is spelled h-y-p-o-m-o-n-e. "Hypomone." It is translated endurance; it is translated steadfastness; it is translated patience or perseverance. It could be equally translated stick-to-it-iveness or what you and I call staying power. Now let's

go to II Timothy 1:7. Let's notice this particular word in II Timothy 1:7. The apostle Paul is speaking to us about the three major qualities that we see and one of them has to do with sticking power, staying power. Notice II Timothy 1:6-7.

II Timothy 1:6-7. *"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."*

Now there are three words that are used here and all three of them have a superbly different meaning to them. This particular word "power" that we're going to zero in on for just a moment comes from "dunamis." It simply means power or will power or resolve. It means that there is something very special that comes to unite with the spirit in man when you're baptized and it grows. It is what I describe as the strengthening of the will through the power of the holy spirit.

Now the apostle Paul talks about this same thing over in Philippians 2. So let's turn over there for just a moment. This is Philippians the 2nd chapter. The same concept of the strengthening of the will; the strengthening of resolve; the need for this concept of staying power for a Christian is available. It is a part of what God said you are to receive. It is something that you want to exercise and you want to build on as one of the foundational concepts of a Christian. Notice Philippians 2 beginning in verse 12.

Philippians 2:12-13. *"Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

So this particular scripture tells us simply that the power to have this endurance, the power to have this stick-to-it-iveness, the ability to cling is something that Christians can have. And when the rest of the world gives up, we can pick it up one more notch because we have the help of God's holy spirit. And when people give up, when they give in, and they throw in the towel, we say that the word of God gives to us the ability to have our will strengthened to work just a little bit harder to push a little bit harder, to try a little bit more when it comes to the concept of staying power. It is something that doesn't start with to begin with in the sense of baptism, it's like the embryo with it inside; it grows slowly, but it's apart of that.

Now let's go over to I Corinthians 13 because the second word that is found in the book of II Timothy was love and in I Corinthians 13, we see that love is also mentioned as a very important quality. This is over in I Corinthians 13. I'm not going to read all of this particular section, but I just want to touch on this particular word and its meaning. Love is mentioned as one of the three words and one of the main characteristics of love is persistence. One of the main characteristics of love is tenacity, and when others give up, there is something there that God gives to his people that should take us through dark times.

David said, "...*though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me.*" David understood that particular concept, so what we see then as we begin to look at this word love, when the world pulls the plug on marriage, when the world pulls the plug on commitment, the Christians kick it up a notch, and we do and we can win. You just have to have faith in this God that we serve to help you do that. Notice verse 4 of I Corinthians 13.

I Corinthians 13:4. "*Love...*" or charity as the Old King James has it "...*suffers long...*"

That is, is patient. It's one of the characteristics of hanging in there, of an individual who is going to strive against the conditions that they face. And he said it is also...

Verse 4. "...*kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself...*"

Verse 5. "...*does not behave rudely, does not seek its own...*"

That is it's not selfish. One of the great things that we saw last week in the sermon was the concept of sharing yourself with someone else in this fellowship. Sharing your love, sharing your beliefs and your understanding and the need for that. There's a tremendous need to get outside of yourself. And so this true love that God imparts to us helps to seek not our own.

Verse 5. "...*is not provoked...*"

Again, it's a thing that hangs onto what needs to be done.

Verse 5. "...*thinks no evil.*"

Verse 7. "...*bears all things...*"

And it says it also...

Verse 7. "...*believes all things, hopes all things...*" and last of all it "...*endures all things.*"

These verses simply indicate the staying power of love. If so that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit we have staying power. Now why do you need staying power? Well, let's go back to Matthew 24. Let's talk about what's going to happen at the time of the end. Let's just take a short look at Matthew 24:12. We see here in Matthew 24:12, we see what is noticed and prophesied about staying power at the time of the end. Notice what it says, verse 12...

Matthew 24:12. "*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*"

One translation says...

Verse 12. "...continued stress brings loss of feelings."

Going on he said...

Verse 13. "*But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*"

So the Bible in verse 12 tells us that the love of many will wax cold. It means that the staying power of many would grow cold. It means people would give up on what should be in their lives, but the Bible simply says, "...*he that shall endure...*" Did you know that this particular word endure is from the same Greek word as we see for steadfastness, for clinging, for remaining faithful to those things. It's the same word that we shall endure to the time of the end. You know we could easily and accurately say he that has staying power, he that has staying power shall be saved. I think we can say that because it's a part of what you and I understand.

He that has staying power shall remain faithful.

Now Peter came to this realization. Peter came to this realization. He thought he had staying power. It's kind of like young love; it's like first love. You know there is that flush and then you just feel so good that you'll say, I will never... I remember an evangelist said some years ago—he said they will never take me out of this church; they'll have to take me out feet first. I will never leave. He was gone two years later. I'll tell you never say never when the devil's around because he listens very closely. This particular man named Peter thought he had staying power and what did he say, let's go to Matthew 26:33. Let's take a look at it for just a moment because I believe it's priceless. It tells us what we need so desperately according to II Timothy 1:6-7. This is Matthew 26:33.

Matthew 26:33. "*Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."*

Verse 34. "*Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night..."*

Now, you know, I hate to say this, but it's kind of funny that he just opens his mouth and all of a sudden Christ has to twist his tongue and say, you're going to get it this evening and shows him that. He said...

Verse 34-35. "...*this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"*

And likewise all the disciples said yes, yes, yes. Yet he denied Christ vehemently and even swore and returned to his fishing trade with others. You know the disciples, brethren, like Peter, were willing to follow Christ, one might say for richer or for poorer, in sickness, in health, forsaking all others, etc., etc. And they fell flat on their face. I go a-fishing. That's the way it is until you have staying power. That's the way it is when it

comes to marriage; you have to have that staying power. It's a part of the vow that we make with God; it's a part of the vow that we make with one another. It's what we need desperately as the people of God. Yet Christ wanted them to understand that without God's spirit they could not succeed. Of course, you have to realize, don't you, that staying power is realized over a period of time. It doesn't happen overnight. It is developed. Staying power is the virtue by which a person becomes capable of keeping the commitments that ought to be life-long, and it's something that we have to grow in.

So the parallel between faithfulness to a physical human being in marriage and the faithfulness to God is a good one. It's one that we can draw from. I think it's a profound set of principles that he was given us in Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5. You know we look at the early days of first love, young love, a man would give his life for his bride. How many of you men would have given your life for your bride? How many of you wives would have given your life for your husband? You know we could literally be faithful to her or to him until death at that particular stage of the relationship. This is that passionate love. Sometimes the reality of things do not fit in at that particular time, but life, not death, but life is a far greater challenge that many who have, would have given their life in the early part of their marriage to that bride would not do so later in life. Something happens. They are literally separated from each other by life, not death, but by life or the lack of what I describe as staying power.

Bertrand Russell in his autobiography I think made a profound statement. I want you to listen closely to what he said. It is absolutely shocking, but it's true. Bertrand Russell said this...

"I went out cycling one afternoon and suddenly as I was riding along the country road I realized that I no longer loved Alice."

Wow, riding along and all of a sudden wham it hits him--I don't love her any longer.

"I had had no idea until this moment that my love for her was even lessening."

Russell was separated by life, not death from Alice Pearsall Smith. It took him eight or nine years to come to the realization that he no longer loved her. You know if he had marital commitment to his wife that Christ required of you and me, he would have been married probably seventy-six years. He would have been married seventy-six years. That's a long life in which to develop staying power. He was married four times and divorced three.

You know it reminds me, it reminds me of the little boy who attended his first wedding at this particular church and after the service his cousin asked him, well, how many women can a man marry? And the little boy just like that—sixteen! Sixteen he said. Yes, sixteen. His cousin was amazed that he could answer so quickly. He said, well, how do you know that? He said, easily, the little boy said, all you have to do is add it up. Like the bishop

said, four better, four worse, four richer, and four poorer. That wasn't a part of the sermon, but I through it in anyway.

But it's typical that Bertrand Russell's attitude in the passive conception of married love that is so prevalent today. You know I've had some people in this congregation say several years ago the following, well, if things don't work out for us, we can always get a divorce. That's the thinking of some church members. People in this room who have thought that several years ago. I don't know if they've changed their mind or not, but it's tragic to say and see and understand it's a part of this whole frame of mind that we have in our society today. Well, if it doesn't work out for us, we can just get a divorce. What did Bertrand Russell say? After awhile we just didn't seem to have anything in common. It was as though enough in common to sustain a marriage is something that kind of drops out from heaven. You don't have to work at it. It took him eight or nine years to decide that he didn't love his wife.

In discussing commitment we need to stop for a moment and understand that there are two biblical reasons commitment may be broken. Only the following two reasons can but do not necessarily have to dissolve a marriage in which a believer is involved. The first one is concerning the word "pornea" or sexual immorality. This would include the broader sense of all cases of sexual deviancy, but the implication is habitual sexual misconduct of all kinds before or after marriage. If before, it is labeled as fraud and if after, it is the breaking of the commitment of the marriage vow. Christ tells us in Matthew 19:9 the following words.

Matthew 19:9. *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery..."*

The word here is "pornea" and it means sexual immorality. The second reason for the breaking of commitment is found in I Corinthians 7:10-16 where a non-believer is not pleased to dwell with a Christian and that person departs. That Christian then is not under or is not bound to that marriage. As a non-believer an individual may express his or her displeasure in a number of ways. Habitual misconduct, such as immorality, criminality, addictive behaviors, abuse, desertion or willful failure to provide physical support. In such cases, it may be appropriate for the believer to initiate the proceedings, but as a Christian we should not be the one who causes the break-up. We are the ones who should be striving harder to fulfill commitment in both our marriage vows and in our baptismal vows.

I thought it was interesting some years ago, we did a little bit of research and I'd like to share it with you. Let's take the commitment to baptism for a moment. Let's take what Bertrand Russell did in his marriage and parlay that into what he did in the sense of what would've been done in baptism. We take his nine years and we're going to apply it to baptism. In a nine-year period after individuals were baptized, we found that 78% of the people stuck with us, 78% stuck with us after nine years. 22% dropped out. After fourteen

years from baptism, 35% dropped out, 65% were still with us. Thirty years later 43% dropped out and only 57% stayed.

I've been on baptizing tours where there was no church, and we used to baptize 50% of the people on those baptizing tours both years that I was out—50%. I baptized on baptizing tours 420, I think its 423 people altogether in those two years. Wonderful people. All hot to do the will of God. They had a first love. They were zealous. They wanted to do what was right. That was in 1959 and 1960. I can't find most of them anymore. There was no church, and they kind of drifted away, but the sadness is that maybe when you look at that and you look at just the figures where these people had a church to go in most cases, maybe you can now understand the importance of staying power to be sure that we make it in our vows. Think about that. The staying power necessary to make it in our vows.

Staying power is simply described in definition as the virtue by which a person is capable and becomes more and more capable of keeping commitments that ought to be lifelong. Let me repeat the definition one more time; I think it's priceless. The virtue, staying power is the virtue by which a person is capable and becomes more and more capable of keeping commitments that ought to be lifelong. Okay. What are the pre-conditions for staying power? Let me in the last third of the sermon here give you four principles that you can use. And for Fred Fenner, who keeps count on me all the time, it is three points with two in one, so there you are Fred, so no criticism today. I only kid him. I give him a hard time about that.

Let's take you to four principles on pre-conditions for staying power. Number one. Let's turn to Luke 14. You've heard, you've seen it, you've read it, you believe it, you try to practice it. Jesus said...

Luke 14:28. *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it."*

Point number one. Count the cost. Walk into it with your eyes wide open. Now if I were to run a 10K race what would I do? Well, first of all I would go and talk with a whole lot of people about running a 10K race. How they go about preparing for it. How they go about running, what they eat before, what they drink during. How they take care of themselves after it's over. I go and talk to people who are young and then I go and talk to people my age because there's a different that way that we would look at it. Then what do you do? Then you go into training. If you're going to do it, you go into training. You try to follow all of these things that you've learned. Experience what you are going to experience by going into training.

Now to effectively count the cost, you have to have some experience of the trials and the setbacks of life itself. So let's go to Hebrews 10:31 and see the apostle Paul who tells us that this is what happened to the early church called the Hebrews, chapter 10:31. Let's read a couple of scriptures from Hebrews 10:31. Breaking into the thought, he said...

Hebrews 10:31-32. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings."*

So coming into the church is not always easy for most people. I had a fight with my pastor in the baptist church. I had a fight with my relatives in the catholic church. I had a fight with my uncle and aunt in a protestant church. I went through all the arguments of Colossians 2:14-17, Romans 14, and I went through the things about Galatians and Romans, and I had all kinds of struggles for months and months and months, and I had arguments and fights with them over the topic, and I went through a terrible, terrible ordeal. I lost somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen or twelve, twelve to fifteen pounds over the whole thing because of the experiences that I went through.

Now as a result of those experiences that I went through, I proved that the law of God was in effect. I proved that we didn't have a trinity; I proved all of those things. So that when 1993 came around, and they started telling me all these new things, I said, these are not new, these are old. This came from the baptist church out of which I came. This is dumb, this is stupid. Where are you going with this stuff? And I got kind of cranky and they did not like that. In fact, they got downright irritated with me because I kept telling them we're going back into the world.

But the point was that I had to go through those things in order to come out of the world, and I had to endure tremendous number of struggles in going through that, and as he said here you need to...

Verse 32-34. *"...recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession..."*

And so the end result was that those Hebrews who went through those trials came to realities about what they needed to do. Now when I became a pastor I was able to help some people. The first week I was in Edmonton I received two telephone calls in which two irate husbands of wives who said they wanted to keep God's laws called me and they told me that they were coming over to my house to kill me. Now I don't know about you but I was only twenty-six years of age, and I had a child, and I did not want to die, so I called my boss, Mr. Wilson. And I said, what do I do? And he said, well, Richard you just work with it. I said, thanks a lot, Dean. I said they're about ready to kill me. Oh, just, don't, you know, they're not going to kill you. And so we laughed about it, then I, I told you I did a lot of fasting and praying even then.

Well, it never happened, but the point was even those people had to go through a great fight of affliction coming out of the world as many of us have, and it sets you up for the reality of what you're going to have to face later because that stuff back in 1956 pails, it

pails into insignificance when I realize '93, '94, '95 and they, the fact that you had to give up your life and your job because you kept the Sabbath. The very thing you proved to begin with was right. So the end result is that, you know, when you have these things happen a little bit later, wow, it is great to have been able to be through that. Now I don't want to ever have to go through '93, '94, '95 or '55, '56, '57 either. But the point is you laid a foundation in counting the cost. You have to experience some of the trials and setbacks of life.

Now you and I say when we look at these scriptures that this is important, right? But I say to you that marriage is not for children. Marriage is not for children. That is marriage is not compatible or marriage is incompatible with the moral make-up of a child. You know what I mean by that. It means that the child is immature, so what these people went through here in Hebrews 10 was a maturing process by which they could remain faithful and then Paul went on to tell them in verse 35...

Verse 35-36. *"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance..."*

Which is the foundational thing of staying power. Patience and faith. Those are things that are necessary to stay with the program, as we would say. But we recognize that if you don't have maturity and realize what you're doing, then we recognize that marriage is not for children, that is the immature can't understand what they're getting into. Now you understand that with a child because a child invariably when he goes to a buffet will look at it, and he will take more than he can eat. Invariably that is so. Why? Because we used to say back when I was a kid, I don't know if we still the term anymore, because I tell people I'm so old that I don't if that term is used, but you used to say 'your eyes are bigger than your stomach.' Well, my father had a way of taking care of me in that way. When I would take something on plate, and I didn't want to eat all of it, he'd say, you're going to eat it all or you're going to get a spanking. So I would eat it all and boy did I learn because several times I was in the bathroom barking it up after I finished eating that meal, and my father taught me some interesting lessons, some of which, wow, you know, it's an interesting world, but my eyes were bigger than stomach, but the point was that's a child.

A young child offers to help a parent. How quickly does he lose interest because he or she is immature? We don't take young children too seriously when they make other than the most short-term promises. Young children are not expected to stay with anything very long unless strongly encouraged or supported by the parents. Therefore, you and I have to realize that marriage and Christianity can become very unpopular unless we have a strongly independent people to succeed in these forms of dependency or inter-dependency through having counted the cost and the staying power that has to be there to go through that.

You only embark on these two adventures when you are a viable individual who has faced enough problems and trials in life to have a concept of anticipating the possibility

of some difficult times. It's like the man at forty said, or excuse me, the young man at twenty-five who was going to marry the girl, he turned to her and said, will you love me when I'm bald and fat-ponched? He was a little more realistic about it, and of course, that's a truism because of the fact that you have to realize there are some scenarios that are going to make it a little more difficult.

Now second aspect of point one for Fred. Second aspect of point one. Realistic commitment. Once the cost is counted then a more realistic commitment to God or to a partner can be made. That's way we do pre-marital counseling. That's why we have four, five, six counsels. That's why we do testing. That's why we work with people over a period of time because we want them to make the best decision they can make as realistically as we can make it. It's the same thing with baptism counseling; we try to make sure that people understand the basic principle.

James Dobson writes of his father who wrote this to his son, I think it's profound, you're not going to find it in this society, so, and you're going to say to me after I read this to you, oh, you can't do that in this society. That's not going to work. Well, listen to what he said because I think it has profound meaning when it comes to our baptismal vows, and I think it has profound meaning when it comes to marriage. Listen to what he said...

"Before your mother and I got married forty-two years ago I made a commitment to her as to what our lives would be like together. This is what I wrote. I want you to understand and be fully aware of my feelings considering the marriage covenant, which we are about to enter. I had been taught at my mother's knee and in harmony with the word of God..."

So apparently, he was what the world calls a Christian family. And he said that...

"...the marriage vows are invaluable and by entering into them I am binding myself completely and for life. The idea of estrangement from you through divorce for any reason at all will never at any time be allowed to enter into my thinking."

Wow. That's what my dad said to my mom. That's old world thinking. You know what? It's biblical thinking. It's the word of God—this is what he's talking about. Listen to what he said...

"I am not naïve on this. On the contrary, I am fully aware of the possibility unlikely as it now appears that mutual incompatibility or other unforeseen circumstance could result in extreme mental suffering. If such becomes the case, I am resolved on my part to except it as a consequence of the commitment I am now making and bear it if necessary to the end of our lives together. I d you dearly as a sweetheart, and I will continue to love you as my wife, but over and above that love, I love you with a Christian love that demands that I never react in any way toward you that would jeopardize your prospects of entering heaven."

That's where they believed they were going. And now he's talking about I Corinthians 13, which I went through before. And he goes on to say...

"...which is the supreme objective of both our lives, and I pray that God himself will make our affection for one another perfect and eternal."

That's profound. I read it. It comes out of a book, let's see, was it 'What Wives Wish Husbands Knew About Men' or something like that by James Dobson. I can't remember the title of it. Romans 1:20 tells us, you don't need to turn there, that the invisible things of the creation of God are clearly understood by the things that are seen even his eternal God-head. My point is I hope we can see in this instance the parallels between the physical life and the spiritual life.

Now usually after I give a sermon I probably have about five to ten people call me on the phone to have a little bit of an argument with me about what I just said. That's normal. I fully expect that because people don't like what I am saying this afternoon. I know it. I see a few faces. I recognize that, but I think you need to understand something very clearly. As a minister of Jesus Christ, I am simply saying to you that if you're not ready for what God hands to you in marriage, the closest relationship between two individuals, then you're not ready for the marriage of the Lamb—to be a literal member of his family. I think you have to realize how important those two run and how they run hand-in-hand. I know that's a fact of life, and you know it is, too, because you know what the word of God says.

Big point number two. Moral passion. We think of young love and it's parallel of the first love of God. When you look at the day of Pentecost, they were spiritually and emotionally fired up. They were speaking passionately about the truth because of the vision they had of God's way of life and God's kingdom. Remember Stephen when he was stoned to death? And the final words that he had when he was looking up into heaven, and he said, I see God on his throne and Christ next to him. Remember what he saw? He saw that vision and what he did was that gave him the strength to finally allow himself to be killed, and he said that I commit myself into your hands or I commit my spirit into you hands because he had the vision. He kept the vision.

Let's turn to Hebrews 12:1-4. Notice Jesus Christ and what he says here. It was the vision of the resurrection. It was the vision of the kingdom. It was that particular moral passion that Jesus Christ had in his life which was so important. Notice what it says...

Hebrews 12:1-3. *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy..."* meaning what he actually saw *"...that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."*

So you count the costs. You make a commitment and then you pray for the vision. You pray for the vision. You ask for that moral passion that will take you through. Now I suppose that if the vision of God's kingdom were always absolutely burning in our minds all the time we wouldn't need staying power, correct? So let's admit at times we feel flat. Sometimes we'll feel depressed. Sometimes we'll feel discouraged. I've never said that that doesn't happen in the life of a Christian, it doesn't happen in the life of a married person because it does.

Sometimes we feel hopeless about coping with the present situation. I know that. I counseled with half a dozen of you in this room over that over the past two years. I know. You know. We all know. Getting married is not the same as being married. Getting married is not the same as being married. Young love is a strong emotion. This is the departure from being single to us-ness. It's fraught with a number of different things.

If you were to look at a wonderful book that is entitled 'The Seasons of a Marriage,' you will find, and in fact I'm going to give a sermon on that if I have a chance one of these days, 'The Seasons of a Marriage' that you realize that you go from young love to an us-ness that is developed over a period of time. There is emotion associated with weddings, is it not? There is emotion associated with baptisms. There is emotion associated with having babies or even being grandparents, having you know, your kids having babies. This is wonderful. In each case, we are talking about beginnings. You have to live with him or her. You have to live with Christ. You have to live with that baby.

So we're not talking about beginnings, we're talking about conclusions. So sometimes the emotion ebbs and sometimes in changes and people mistakenly assume that they're no longer in love or that their baptism wasn't valid or that we don't love this child. On any journey there are high spots and there are low spots, brethren. It is during those low spots that we need the staying power even more. So in the vision it is good to use something that I think is important. To use the past to support the present. You in this exercise can see your mate through the grid of pleasant memories. You need to make sure that you're building memories for future rough spots. You got to do that in Christianity. You know it's an amazing thing. I'd like you to turn to Philippians 4. I'm going to use a spiritual example here from the apostle Paul, and I'm going to talk a little bit about what a man by the name of Luker taught us at a three day conference. I thought it was priceless. It was profound. This is over in Philippians 4:6. Philippians 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Then he goes on to say...

Verse 8. *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things."*

Then he was talking about discouragement in the ministry. You know it's not easy, it's not easy sometimes to be a minister. There are difficulties and there are discouragements of all kinds that you go through. And he was talking about how in the most discouraging times that he faced, especially when we were coming out of our former association and wondering what was going to happen. He said what he had to do was he had to reach back to all the positive things that occurred. His calling, his election, the development of his life and Ambassador College. His being ordained to the ministry and all of the successes that he went through in the middle of all of the trials and difficulties that he had to face, and he said, I focused on those things, and I said if he did this for me back then, why won't he do it for me now? Well, isn't that profound? I thought it was so profound I stuck it in my notes here because I think we need to understand that when you look back on the past and you bring it into the present and then you take the future that's sitting out there that we all are living toward and you put them together you have to say that if you got this rough spot, let's get through this rough spot. Let's make it through here. Let's fight it. Let's grab hold. Let's put the bit in our teeth and run with it in that sense of the word.

This is what the apostle Paul said...

Philippians 4:9 *"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."*

So he's talking about the positive things that you have to look at. We both look at the past positives and the future positives to help us in the rough spots of our vows to God. They help us in our vows to our mate. You have to admit as a married person that the person of whom these happy memories are memories that this person back then looked lovely to you. And when you begin to think about those things that happened back then you can realize that that person will look more lovely and loveable to you now because you see them in a light of the positive things that have happened back then.

That's why I say to you we need to make sure we're building memories for rough spots because there are going to be future rough spots in baptism and there are future rough spots in marriage. Sharing memories of past love will arouse present affection. That's just the opposite of a grudge. See grudge-bearing, actually, what you do is you see a person in a non-complimentary light and it leads down the road and everything keeps tumbling and tumbling down—it leads to hostility rather than affection.

The right use of memory, vision of the past is the technique for persevering in love. Now you don't live in the past. You can't live in the past. There are people that try to do that. It's an impossibility, but you simply take encouragement from it for the present. You take encouragement from the future. Because in the same way you use the future to help the present, to help us behave responsibly.

When you see the present connected to a positive future, you have to be naïve to not know that our single actions have a significance of contributing to or frustrating the long term project of married love, of remaining faithful and loving until death.

The thought of commitment, of cleaving and loving until death will give you a certain distance from the sufferings and the impulses of the moment. Our version for marriage is for as long as you both shall live, rather than the version that is practiced in many parts of the world today by those who simply believe as long as you both shall love. There's a world of difference between the two.

Brethren, you and I need to take bite-sized chunks of the task. If loving this man or this woman for the next thirty or forty years overwhelms you, well, what do you have to do? How about loving them for twenty minutes? How about even ten? You know, what do you do? It's the same thing with the problem. You have to look at the problem that you have to face as a Christian. Can you for the next twenty, thirty minutes do that from the positive thing? I think we can. I think you have to listen, to hear what he or she has to say and hug him or her in the way that you need to.

These techniques apply to the rest of our Christian lives. Staying power is a part of the skill of knowing when and how to focus on the long hall vision to see you through as Christ did. Let me give you one more because I promised someone in this audience who said I never speak more than forty-five minutes. I promised myself that I would go overtime today just for them. II Corinthians 4:16. I'm only kidding. I'm not serious in that particular case, even though I am serious.

Sometimes... **Number three, point number three. It's a very simple one, but it's very true. Sometimes you have to hunker down with a vengeance.** Hunker down is a word that I can't even find in the dictionary. I have "hunkers" and "hunkerings" and it's just simply a concept of getting down on your haunches, getting down real low and just getting with it and hanging on and keeping your head down.

There have been days in the lives of many of us in God's church where you just simply had to put your head to the wind and do what you had to do. Spring time of the year in my early years in the ministry when we came to the Passover season and the Feast of Tabernacles. It was always a nightmare. Feast of Tabernacles time, transmissions and engines were always going out, and in the spring of the year, somebody was having some kind of problem where they thought they weren't going to make the Passover, but the point is I do believe that the concept of hunkering down with a vengeance is very important. Notice II Corinthians 4:16.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17. *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."*

So you begin to realize sometimes that's the way it is for a while.

Verse 18. *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary..."*

This won't last. As my friend used to say, this too shall pass, and it will give way to something else. As somebody once told me, cheer-up things could get worse and so I did and sure enough they got worse. But I do not believe that it's going to last forever, but the point is very simply...

Verse 18. *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal..."*

So point number three, sometimes the overall vision keeps us going and sometimes we just have to hunker down with a vengeance in the present moment and somewhat mechanically act out the significance of a larger perspective.

So in summary, we count the cost and with the counting of the cost you make a meaningful commitment. Number two, you pray to God for clarity of vision to sustain us when the vision is not clear as it should be and use the positive memories of the past to help us in the present, as well as looking to the future. And lastly, sometimes you simply need to hunker down in the present on a day-to-day basis until the vision of that commitment is restored.

Don't walk away from what I just said. Don't decide living in this society and the experiences that you've had bad that I'm wrong. Please don't do that because you will have done the same thing that so many people outside this room have done. You think about what I said. Back off from your justifications. Except the reality of what I just said. God help you to understand that these are techniques that help us to develop staying power in both our vows to God and our vows to our mate.