

## FAMILY GOD'S WAY

### God's Plan for Commitment

She was barely 17, and he was 20. Their engagement came more out of a sudden sense of responsibility, than of romance (if you know what I mean). Nevertheless, there they stood before the altar on their wedding day. He was wearing a suit his dad bought him the day before, and she was wearing her mother's old wedding gown. And as the vows were made and the commitment was exchanged, the whole room was wondering, "*Do they even have a chance?*"

This couple met in college at age 25 & 26. They both had incredible careers ahead of them. They had one of those weddings that took months & months to plan, and massive amounts of money to pull off. She had like 26 bridesmaids – it was one of those. He and his buddies threw a bachelor party that made legend. And as they exchanged vows, under an arch covered with flowers, the sun was setting behind them. The music of a string quartet waltzed them down the aisle. It was picture-perfect, beautiful, planned in detail, and everything went according to plan. It something for the cover of *People magazine*. But, just like that, the party was over.

In their late forties, this is her second, and his third. This time around they couldn't care less about what colors to choose or which flowers to use. Their kids were there for it, and his mother flew into town for it. Hi brother was able to use his ipod and be the DJ for it – to same some money that way. And as they held hands and exchanged vows, it hit them both that they had been in that situation before, but with other people from their pasts. But that was the past. And they were determined that from this day on, their lives would be different.

You know, every wedding is unique. Every marriage gets its start with a different set of circumstances, and each ceremony has a personality all its own. But underneath all the differences, there is one thing that is common to them all. Every wedding has promises, vows, words of commitment.

Now, in our society these days, there are those who protest loudly against the idea of a marriage based on a commitment between a man and a

woman. There are those people who declare that a commitment doesn't matter, and what shape or form a marriage may take doesn't matter. We all know people at work or in our family who prefer to hedge their bet and try-out a relationship based on chemistry and compatibility, rather than dive into a marriage with words of commitment. And maybe that's because we want to avoid the commitment part because of the pain we've experience when commitments have been broken. (Many of us know that pain).

**There is power in words of commitment.**

If we're going to understand God's design for our lives, and God's design for our marriage, then we have to get at how huge a part these words play in our life. A huge part of our lives and of our marriages is understanding how these simple words – words like, I choose you, I will follow you, I will cherish you, I will be faithful to you in sickness and health, for richer or poorer, for better for worse until death do us part -- a huge part of our lives is understanding the power of *those* simple words.

It all starts in the Bible, way back in the book of Exodus. It's 1400 BC and the descendants of Jacob have been in Egypt about 400 years as slaves. The people prayed, and prayed to God to help them. And God responded sending Moses to lead them out of slavery. So the people prayed, and God responded, "Yes, I've heard you. I love you. I will save you." And God promised them some very important things – God made a commitment to them. Exodus 6

*<sup>6</sup> "So tell the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord. I will throw off the heavy load the Egyptians have put on your shoulders. I will set you free from being slaves to them. I will reach out my arm and save you with mighty acts when I judge Egypt.*

*<sup>7</sup> " 'I will take you to be my own people. I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God when I throw off the load the Egyptians have put on your shoulders.*

*<sup>8</sup> " 'I will bring you to the land I promised with an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I lifted up my hand and promised it to them. The land will belong to you. I am the Lord.' "* Exodus 6:6-8

**God made a commitment.** Exodus 6:6-8

- 1. I will take you out of your old life.**
- 2. I will forgive your sins.**
- 3. I will redeem you from your troubles.**
- 4. I will make you My own.**

So God said, “out of all the people of this world, I love you, and I choose you.” And God makes 4 specific and unconditional promises to them. God says: (1) I will take you out of your old life; (2) I will forgive your sins; (3) I will redeem you from your troubles; (4) and I will make you My own.

Sure enough, God bust them out of slavery in Egypt. And God led them up to a new life in a new land. Along the journey, God reassured them of His presence with them in a cloud by day and a burning fire at night hovering over them, guiding their every step. God protected them from danger. And when, 40 years later, they finally arrived, God restated those promises, but this time He asked them a question: He asked them “from this day forward, << will you be My people? Will you be My prized possession?” And the Israelites said, “yes.” The Israelites said, “I do. I will.”

From that day forward, God has kept His promises to the Israelites – His promises to us. No matter how unfaithful the people then were, no matter how unfaithful we are, God says “I am taking you out,” “I will rescue you from your sins,” “I will redeem you from your troubles,” “and I will make you My own, no matter what!”

**Marriage is a picture of the spiritual relationship between us and God.**

Now, in the ancient world, they understood that there was deep spiritual meaning to marriage. They understood that the relationship in marriage was a living picture of the *spiritual* relationship between us and God. They understood that marriage was more, much more, than making car payments together, cranking out a couple kids, and sitting in side by side lazy-boys watching DVR episodes of *Dancing with the Stars*. They

understood that marriage was so more – much more -- that marriage holds a spiritual meaning of picturing God’s relationship to us.



That’s why in the ancient world, it was very common at a Hebrew wedding to see what is known as a ‘huppa, << (say that with me). It was a canopy with 4 poles under which the bride and groom would stand as they made their vows of commitment to one another. Often the ‘huppa was carried in by the family during the ceremony and assembled right there in the center of the wedding ceremony. Some huppas these days are decorated elaborately, but most look something like a crude tent or a canopy. It’s purpose, though, was much more than just keep the sun out of the bride’s eyes. It symbolized something -- it had a deep spiritual meaning.

It has 4 poles. Each pole symbolizes one of those promises God made to His people back in Exodus. “I will take you out of your old life. I will forgive your sins. I will redeem you from your troubles. And I will make you my own.”

Every ancient Hebrew couple understood that getting married under that canopy meant that they were surrounded by the loving promises of God. And the canopy above pictured for them the loving protection of God over them. So, standing beneath the protection of God and surrounded by His promises to them, the bride and groom would say some very familiar words to one another. They would say, “Out of everybody in this world, I have heard you. I love you. And I choose you.” The groom would then take the bride’s hands in his, and he would speak to her these words – words once uttered by God to us, but now spoken by him to his bride: “I will take you out of your old life. I will rescue you from your sins. I will redeem you from your troubles. And I will make you my own. What my God has done for us, I will do for you.” And the husband and the wife stand there, and both of them say, “I do.” And in that moment, the vows and promises that God has made to us, become the vows and promises that we make to each other. That’s why the promises we make in marriage become so important.

There is another tradition, that pictures this -- called hand fastening. Jesus said, *“At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and*

*female,'<sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* Matthew 19:4-6

As a way to picture that by their words and the presence of their Maker, the husband and wife are tied together as one by God, their hands were tied together by the pastor, or wrapped with the ribbons of his robe. The three of them – man, woman, and Maker – form what is meant to be an unbreakable bond.

The Bible book of Ecclesiastes, talking about marriage, puts it this way, *"a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."* Ecclesiastes 4:12b

Take these two traditions together – the huppa and the hand fastening – and you have a powerful picture of, not just what happens in marriage, but also of the power of our words in marriage. Through your words – simple words – what happens is that 2 very different people become one, bound together, and promise to do for one another, the same thing that God has done for us.

**When commitment based on spiritual life is broken, we are broken in a spiritual place inside us.**

This also helps us to understand why it hurts so bad when the commitment in marriage is broken. The commitment could be broken through deceit, divorce, infidelity, abuse, abandonment – whatever. (There are lots of ways this commitment can be broken). If we take these vows seriously, whenever the commitment is broken, it's a wound that is deep down inside, a wound in that very tender place inside where our spiritual life is found, it's a break that is deep down in the heart. And many of us have experienced that wound – the pain of when one person steps out from under the huppa, and forgets the nature of God's promises to us and the nature of their promises to their spouse, and substitutes that with now living to fulfill either promises to themselves or to a new person. Many of us have experienced the pain of when the hands get untied, and one or both spouses are no longer orienting their life to their spouse to live as one.

**When commitment is broken, God's commitment of love heals us.**

And this is where the love and forgiveness of Jesus comes in. It was for all our broken promises, that He took the beating, the nails, and gave

His life. He took the punishment on Himself for all the things that we have done wrong. It is because of what Jesus, in love, has done for us, that God not only forgives the things that we have done wrong – He forgives ALL of them – there’s nothing left you’ve got to do to make it right – it’s all paid for, completely. And it’s because of what Jesus has done, that God also punishes the things that have been done wrong against us. HE’s the judge, HE pays, HE puts it all right – so you don’t have to. And through Jesus, God demonstrates His own love for us.

Even if things don’t go well in *our* home, we always have a place in *His*. So it doesn’t matter if you’re married or divorced, if you’re single, the sinner or the one who has been sinned against, God’s promises and His presence remain.

Through Jesus, it doesn’t matter if he walked out, if she screwed up, if you have a whole host of sins that have been mounting up – God isn’t going anywhere. His promises remain.

We usually don’t base our commitments in marriage – or in any relationship – on God’s commitment to us. Our commitment usually only lasts as long as we *receive* what we want from the other person. Or our commitment is based on our emotions or infatuation, or just plain convenience.

**God’s desire is that our vows and commitments would be as steady and secure as His.**

See, God’s desire and His design, is that our vows and commitments would be as steady and secure as His. Because marriage is not so much about being happy as it is about enduring change together and keeping those words of commitment constant through all the change life brings. Think about it, the one constant in marriage is change. Our bodies change – we go from hunky to junky. Our bank accounts change – we go from poor, to slightly less poor, back to poor again. Kids come in, kids go out, then they come back in again. You endure debt, and deceit, the death of a parent, the loss of a child. She’s not the same at 58 as she was at 28. He’s more mature at 54 than he was at 24. And yet the one thing that remains, the one thing that’s unchanged, are those vows. The one thing that never goes away are the promises that you made to each other. You will change and I will change, but our promises will not change -- because they are based on a God and on His love that never change. Even

though I know more about you now than I did then, even though we endured things that we never saw coming, still on this day out of everybody in the world, I choose you, and I will love you. Still, on this day I will take you out of your old life, I will rescue you from your sins, I will redeem you from all your troubles, and I will make you my own.

These are more than just words. They are the one thing that stays the same. They are *every-thing!*

Today, **PRACTICAL CHALLENGE**, commit your relationship to God.

- MARRIED? → recommit to your husband / wife. (Quite possibly & likely, never done this – mouthed the words, but today, with new understanding of what commitment means, say it and mean in your heart. Say it today, this week. )
- PARENT? → Discuss with your kids what commitment in marriage is all about. ( Watching TV – plenty of situations on TV shows give you opportunities to talk about how God’s kind of commitment is a better deal).
- HOPING TO GET MARRIED ONE DAY? → Look for a partner and enter into a relationship with the goal of building God’s kind of commitment.
- MARRIED or ONCE MARRIED? → (divorced, widowed) – look back and recognize the times and ways you didn’t live up to God’s plan – the kind of commitment He desires for marriage. Confess that to God. Ask His forgiveness.
- ALL → Celebrate God’s love and commitment to you! Admit times and ways you’ve broken or turned away from your relationship with God. Confess that to Him. Then rejoice in His awesome forgiveness and the new life He gives.