

Family Upreach, Inc.

Course V: *Christian Marriage Skills*

"Commitment & the Christian Marriage"

Lesson Ten

The Christian Marriage

COMMITMENT & THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

By

Alan & Shirley Sowders, B.A., M.S.

Brenda Frenzel, Buck Griffith

Hillery M. Motsinger, Ed.D., L.P.C.

Unit 20 – Lesson 1

(NewLife Behavior English Edition)

NewLife 
B E H A V I O R
Ministries

P. O. Box 270720, Corpus Christi, Texas 78427-0720

"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature . . ."
(Second Corinthians 5:17)

Copyright © January 1996 (Revised 2016) by H. M. Motsinger

RESPONSE SHEET

Dear Student,

We have found that thoughtful *written* responses greatly enhance the student's understanding of this course material. Therefore, we urge you to use this **Response Sheet** as an aid in the study of this lesson.



STEP 1: BEFORE YOU START

Before you start, please write three or four sentences below regarding your thoughts on commitment in a Christian marriage. Then, put this sheet out of sight until you finish the lesson.

STEP 2: PREPARING TO STUDY

Read the Study Questions on pages 11-12 (do not attempt to answer them now). Then read and study pages 3-10 as you would a chapter of a book.

COMMITMENT & THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

In this lesson we will study the often-missing ingredient in marriage that would contribute to its enduring nature – commitment. We will examine what the Scriptures have to say about this subject which is likely one of the most needed of our time.

Before continuing, write your definition of commitment and perhaps a word or two about its necessity in your own marriage (using the Response Sheet section on Page 2). Then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson. Read the entire lesson through once without looking up the scriptures. Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Study Questions on Pages 11-12.

I. Introduction

Calvin Warpula, a preacher of this generation, tells a story of one the first missionaries to venture among the Indians of the Yukon Territory where the men had multiple wives. It serves to illustrate the spirit of the time.

Discovering that none of the tribes had been baptized or married, he proceeded without further ado to do both. After the massive five-hour baptismal and marriage ceremony was ended, the preacher asked the Chief which part the people enjoyed the most. “Well, brother,” said the Chief, “We liked being baptized but best of all, we loved being married.” Suspicious, the missionary asked, “Why did you prefer the *marriage* ceremony?” The Chief replied, “Because we all got new wives!”

Many feel that getting a new spouse would make them happy and solve all their problems. Many folks exercise that option. However, the problems we had in the first relationship tend to resurrect in the second.

This leads to this fact: Most second marriages fail more rapidly than the first!

The missing ingredient that helps a marriage endure is ***commitment***.

II. Commitment Defined

“When reference is made to an individual’s ‘commitment’ to marriage, what is being described is the degree to which that person is willing to compromise

NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

self-interest, personal ideals of perfection, indulgences in tastes, and so forth in order that a particular relationship can continue. The alternative to making a commitment is not having a relationship – that is, remaining alone” [William J. Lederer, The Mirages of Marriage, 1969, Page 196].

“Commitment” is the personal pledge and promise to stay with a spouse and the marriage – *no matter what!* It is the decision made at the outset that . . .

“We will never back down”

“We will never quit”

“We will hang tough”

“We will keep hammering away”

**“We will keep working at the
relationship – regardless”**

Though it might be easier to “cut and run” rather than to see it through, we have decided to pay the price and stay the course – *whatever it takes!*

Adam said, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife” (Genesis 2:24). To “cleave” means to adhere, to stick, to cling, to hold fast or to be *cemented together*. Jesus repeats this in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7.

Our Lord says that as a married couple, we are *cemented together* in absolute fidelity and that we “belong” exclusively to each other. Perhaps the most beautiful statement in the Bible about commitment to a relationship is expressed by Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi. The statement is wonderfully applied to the commitment between a husband and wife.

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also if anything but death parts you and me” [Ruth 1:16-17].

III. The Bible on “Commitment”

“The biblical standard for marriage is a monogamous relationship in which a man and woman share a lifetime commitment to each other, second only to their commitment to God” (Holman Bible Dictionary).

NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

The teaching of both Old and New Testaments points to an unconditional lifetime commitment between the husband and wife. In Matthew 19:1-9, men questioned Jesus.

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any cause?”

In reading this text, you will notice that from “the beginning”, God made man male and female. Also, God’s design for marriage is that the “two become one flesh” – an inseparable unit. Jesus underlines this teaching by stating: “Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Following up on their question, the men reminded Jesus that Moses allowed a “certificate of divorce” and permitted men to put away their wives in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Then, Jesus reminded them that it was the *hardness of their hearts* that brought forth Moses’ permission to divorce. However, that was not the way God had ordered things from the beginning (citing Genesis 2:24).

With His authoritative teaching, Jesus states that the sole reason for divorce is sexual immorality. He who divorces for other reasons becomes an adulterer, and whoever marries his divorced wife likewise becomes an adulterer. You can clearly discern the gravity of such actions in the view of heaven.

Paul also cites the “one flesh” concept (Genesis 2:24) to show the sinfulness of sexual relations outside marriage in First Corinthians 6:12-20, and the importance of self-giving love in Ephesians 5:28-30. God has not changed His standard from the beginning.



Other points that might be considered from Genesis 2:18-23 is that God intended for the marriage relationship to take priority over all other relationships – including the parents of either spouse. “Leaving” and “cleaving” was at the heart of the matter and the companionship of the couple was foundational to the divine conception of marriage.

Both Jesus and Paul emphasized permanence in the marital relationship (First Corinthians 7:10-11) but that a Christian was not bound to an unwilling unbeliever who insisted on separation as we see in First Corinthians 7:12-16.

A Christian can divorce because of the sexual immorality of his partner, but is not

NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

required to do so. Forgiveness and renewed commitment to fidelity is certainly a divinely acceptable option. We might also note in passing that Jesus gives permission to divorce due to sexual immorality, but nothing is stated in so many words about *remarriage*.

IV. Commitment Is Related to Vows Expressed

“Marriage is not begun in a context of vagueness and uncertainty. Two people, fully conscious and very much awake, declare their vows: I realize that vows may vary, but without exception, they include words like ‘for better or for worse’ and ‘...till death do us part” (Chuck Swindoll, Strike the Original Match, 1982, Page 152).



Alan Loy McGinnis has an interesting observation, *especially to us*, in this regard. In his book, The Romance Factor (Page 187) . . .

“What is it that makes a (woman) wife visit her husband in the penitentiary every Sunday, year end, and year out? It is something more than ecstatic love . . . something more than a romantic interlude surely. It has to do with perseverance, loyalty, and commitment. Sometimes you do those things, not because you are overcome with passion, but because you are committed. That is, you believe in honoring your word. You do not walk away from your obligations simply because the pleasure is missing.”

Do you remember your vows? The nervousness at a marriage ceremony is due to the pledging of oneself *for life* to another person. We **ought** to be sober, serious and even apprehensive. It is not something done every day. Your wedding day is immeasurably important. Promises are made in the presence of family, friends, and before a designated official who is legally empowered to “pronounce” you as husband and wife. More importantly, you are making these promises in the presence and hearing of GOD! You are calling upon God, in effect, to deal with you severely if you become a *covenant breaker*. As Ruth proclaimed . . .

“The Lord do so to me and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.”

NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

God is very serious about vows taken before Him. He warns in Ecclesiastes 5:2, 4-5 . . .
“Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven and you on the earth, therefore let your words be few. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed – Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”

God, through the prophet Malachi, explains the reason God no longer was accepting of sacrifices from Israel was . . .

“because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Therefore, take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the Lord God says that He hates divorce” [Malachi 2:14-16].

The vows you make are heavy and have eternal consequences though the covenant you make with your wife pertains to *earthly* life and is limited to time. The principle is simple: Commit yourself to carry out what you promise. God is witness!

V. Enhancing Our Commitment

Our marital commitment is enhanced if we realize going in that every marriage has its –

Ups and Downs

Peaks and Valleys

Calms and Conflicts

If each couple recognized, understood, and expected these times – perhaps we would not as easily give up in despair or think that our marriage is “just not working out.” Commitment is the glue that holds us together until we can work our way through the problems of initial adjustment and the pervasive burdens that are a natural part of our marital journey. If we realize that we are in this together (and *with the Lord*), we can survive anything! We will not be defeated! We refuse to give up!

It also helps our commitment to realize that conflicts have solutions. Paul lets us know that married folks . . . “will have trouble in this life” (First Corinthians 7:28). He taught that if you want to serve God without distraction, you could best do so - unmarried! When you marry, look at it this way . . . You are marrying a *distraction* (First Corinthians

NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

7:32-35). Therefore, even in “Christian” marriages, you will have problems that need to be resolved.

But, these problems have solutions.
If we grow in Christian love, Paul says
we will be able to “endure all things”
because . . . *love never fails*

-First Corinthians 13:8-9.

As we grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we will act appropriately toward our spouse. For a list of characteristics that will help us survive and flourish in the marriage relationship, read Galatians 5:22-26 and Second Peter 1:5-11.

We will enhance our commitment if we realize that ***persistence*** pays. Working through difficulties is quickly confessed to being more difficult than walking out! Paul instructs the married person: “A wife is not to depart from her husband” and “a husband is not to divorce his wife.” Even if married to an unbeliever, Paul teaches that if the unbeliever is willing to “dwell” with you, don’t destroy the marriage (First Corinthians 7:10-16).

Peter reminds us that unbelievers are often won to Christ through the godly influential behavior of the Christian spouse (First Peter 3:1-2). However, this godly behavior must be witnessed over time and seen as ***consistent*** if one expects a bountiful harvest.

Persistence is the best way to work through difficulty because it forces needed changes in both partners (when accompanied by a strong desire to peacefully and harmoniously abide). Persistence helps reshape both and spiritual growth in Jesus is strengthened. We must recognize that our conflicts may be the Lord’s way of reconfiguring us into His image so that we bring glory to God. “Conflict” is merely the exterior signal that work remains to be done and ***rough*** edges need smoothing. As we persistently continue, we will enjoy the future benefits.



NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

Persistence is also what our children need to see us model as a method of working through problems. As we stick together – even with occasional wrangling – their security is assured. Further, they get to see this illustration of how godly families live and operate. When they get married, they will recall our persistence (commitment) and make similar application in their marriages. They will carry with them the pattern of success and confidence that you exemplified before them. In this way, you will be able to bless *future* generations.

We may enhance our commitment if we remember that this is the way of unselfishness and that this approach glorifies God.

In reading First Corinthians 7:3-4, we find that marriage (the “one flesh” relationship) is designed by God and consists of giving to others. “Let the husband render to the wife the affection that is due her, and likewise, the wife to her husband.” He further instructs that we do not have authority over our own body, but – the *spouse* does!



Loving carries with it the necessity of unselfishness and at some point - my “personal rights” may have to be sacrificed in the name of committed, loving unity. Too many people look for some other person to “make me happy” instead of searching for one to serve (as the Lord serves the church, Ephesians 5:25-28).

Commitment glorifies God as we see in First Corinthians 6:19-20. My main purpose in living the Christian life is not *personal* happiness. It is bringing glory to God. I have been “bought with a price” and am no longer *my own*. It is my privilege to glorify God in this body and in this spirit “which are God’s.” Being committed to my spouse is one of the ways through which I strive to be like my heavenly Father. God never neglected or abandoned His family in either Old or New Testaments. He expects me to follow Him in this way.

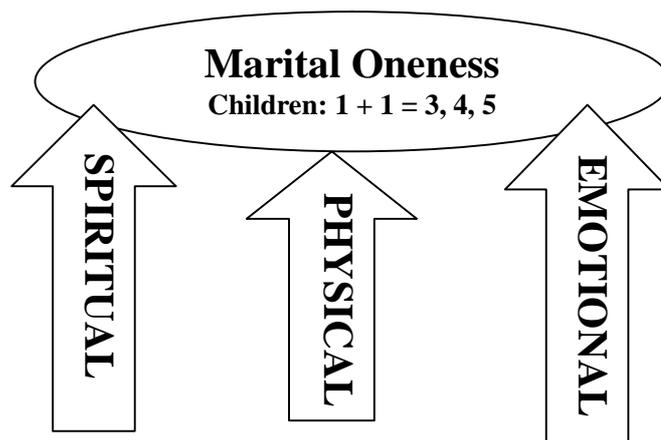
NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1

“To create an enduring marriage, we need to go back to the old-fashioned idea of deciding . . . ‘I will love this mate as long as I live. I will love him enough to stick it out through the rough times and work it through when we are facing trying times’” (Nan Parsons, The Christian Woman, “The Marriage Roller Coaster” (Pages 50-52).



Remember, God sticks with us through our stumblings and continues with us even when we disappoint Him. I follow in this marvelous example when I bear with my spouse as we . . . stumble along together in our married life.

I need to remember – above all things – that my commitment to my marriage partner is parallel to my commitment to God!



NewLife Behavior – Course V
Unit 20 – Lesson 1
Session #10

STUDY QUESTIONS

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

1. An enduring marriage needs
 - (a) lots of money
 - (b) a new house
 - (c) a fast car
 - (d) total commitment

2. *Second* marriages
 - (a) are always better
 - (b) have fewer problems
 - (c) usually fail
 - (d) are cheaper

3. Commitment to marriage is the degree to which I will compromise
 - (a) self-interests
 - (b) personal ideals
 - (c) indulgences in tastes
 - (d) all of these

4. Moses allowed divorce because
 - (a) it was a quick solution
 - (b) hearts were hard
 - (c) it was cheaper
 - (d) God didn't care at the time

5. To "cleave" means to
 - (a) cut, slice or dice
 - (b) stick like glue
 - (c) slash
 - (d) smite

6. Biblically, a Christian may divorce only due to
 - (a) infidelity
 - (b) non-support
 - (c) poor cooking skills
 - (d) diverse personal interests

7. A Christian may win an unbelieving mate to Christ through
 - (a) withholding affection
 - (b) hook or crook
 - (c) living a godly life
 - (d) nagging effectively

8. Making a “vow” is
 - (a) mandatory
 - (b) nonsense
 - (c) non-binding
 - (d) unethical

9. Every marriage experiences
 - (a) ups and downs
 - (b) peaks and valleys
 - (c) calms and conflicts
 - (d) all of these

10. “Working through” difficulties is better than
 - (a) walking out
 - (b) murder
 - (c) committing adultery
 - (d) all of these

REFLECTION

Write a few sentences new ideas you learned about the meaning and importance of deep commitment on the part of both spouses in a Christian marriage.

APPLYING THE LESSON

Finally, to get the most from your study, list one or more ideas that you want to use to change your behavior. Also, list questions you want to ask your instructor or studymate.