

3 Christlike Commitments to Help You Win at Marriage

This week, Steve and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. Recently, a young medical student asked me what the secret has been to keeping our marriage strong through the years.

As I've mulled that question over in my mind, here are a few thoughts:

We've shared a strong commitment to Jesus Christ. Through the years, there were times when Steve was not "satisfied" with our marriage, and there were times when I was not "satisfied." During those seasons, the most profound thing we learned was that Jesus is the only one who can truly satisfy our deepest longings. Many mornings I would pray, *"Lord, Steve is only human. You alone are the one who can love me perfectly and satisfy my longings. Let these longings in my soul lead me deeper into you."* I echoed the words of David in Psalm 63:5 (NIV), "I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you." That commitment to Jesus held us steady as we walked through intense trials like breast cancer, loss of career and financial struggles. When life got tough, we hit our knees. Jesus has always been faithful.

We've shared a common purpose. We wanted to know Christ and make Him known together. We decided right from the beginning of our marriage that we didn't want our marriage to be a cul-de-sac but a conduit to bless others. That became a driving force behind every decision we made. It helped us in deciding how to use our home, how to spend our resources and how to encourage others. We often remembered verses such as "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9, MEV) and "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Cor.

6:19b-20, NIV).

We've shared common fun experiences and never stopped dating. When we were just dating, Steve asked me to tell him the top places around the world where I wanted to travel. We both loved adventure and travel. Within the first 15 years, we had traveled to all those countries. We built a memory bank of all the fun places we had been in the world.

And even when we had small children, we prioritized one date per week to intentionally connect. Could we afford it? Nope. Did we do it? Yup. We both felt we couldn't afford not to continue dating each other. I remember times when we'd be down to the last \$ and decide to do a coffee date or take a walk. We prioritized paying babysitters over other luxuries so that we could cultivate our dating life. Those weekly dates were life giving. If we were stressed, or fearful, or elated or joyful, we talked about it—just the two of us. Here's the thing: We loved raising kids together, but they grow up. You have to have a strong foundation between the two of you to sustain a loving marriage later in life. Steve and I are still dating. We went to dinner last night. We've spent a week in St. Lucia to celebrate 40 years together.

The truth is that marriage takes intentional work. There will be unexpected trials along the way. The choice to stay in love, compromise and navigate the rough waters needs to be intentional. But here's what I know—it's worth the work. I'm glad Steve and I remained faithful to each other. I'm thankful we have navigated the white water of conflict and stayed in the raft together. Our love today is stronger than ever.

If you're married, here are a few thoughts to consider:

1. What would your life be like without your mate?
2. Are you willing to fight for your marriage?
3. Will you commit to make Christ first in your life and seek Him above even your mate?

4. How will you encourage your spouse today?

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This article originally appeared at [The Marriage Counselor](#).