

Until Death Parts Us

Decide today that you're in your marriage for the long haul

When we see marriage as a covenant, not a contract, it's confirmation that we are meant to stay together until death parts us. In *A Model for Marriage*, Jack and Judy Balswick point out that "the core characteristic of a covenant marriage is commitment, a factor that is profoundly important to marital stability, according to research findings."

The very nature of wedding vows implies a covenant, but for most brides and grooms, the common attitude is to see marriage as a contract that can be broken. Typically, a couple—despite vowing to endure better or worse until death—live by the principle that they'll stay together only as long as their spouse fulfills their end of the bargain. That's an attitude that feeds into the "short haul" approach.

The first 10 years of our marriage were terrible—what we call the "Great Tribulation." Yes, we had some good times; but, overall, we didn't have a good marriage. Yet we never considered divorce as an option. Though we were both young when we married, one thing was clear: We were determined to make it work. We didn't think of our marriage as a covenant in those days, but we lived as if we had made a covenant. We understood our vows. We were there for the long haul—for better or for worse.

How different our lives would have been if we had given up because we were miserable. Eventually, we grew past our misery and started to build something special together.

A number of marriage studies have been based on interviews with couples on the verge of divorce who, of course, reported that they were miserable. Many of these studies are designed so the researchers can go back and reinterview the same couples years later. Invariably, the couples who divorced

report that they still are unhappy; but most of the couples who stayed together report that they are now happy.

I've worked with couples who were miserable but came to counseling because divorce just wasn't an option for them. One of these couples came back recently to deal with some extended-family issues. I hadn't seen them in years. My last memory of them was their telling me they believed they'd turned the corner in their marriage and had the tools to keep their relationship on-track. It turns out they did, and they thanked me for helping them turn things around. What had been misery to them—and the cause of divorce with many other couples—was long past. They were in the process of becoming everything they had hoped to be as a couple.

Marriages go through seasons. When a couple can genuinely make an unconditional commitment to stay the course during the cold, dark season of a marriage, then spring and even summer seasons follow.

There is a saying that goes something like: "Don't doubt in the darkness what you know to be true in the light." You can apply this warning to the seasons of a marriage. When you hit the dark , cold winter season together, don't question the vows and commitments you made to each other in the light of the summer season. Stay the course. Love unconditionally and know that spring will come.

Click [here](#) to read two other principles to help fix your marriage before it's too late.

David Stoop, Ph.D., and **Jan Stoop, Ph.D.**, lead seminars and marriage retreats nationally and internationally. More tips to keeping the love fires burning in marriage are available in their book *Better Than Ever: Seven Secrets to a Great Marriage*. Or visit them online at [.](#)