

## book reviews

### The Heart of Commitment.

Scott Stanley. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Dr. Stanley has provided an enlightening, encouraging and empowering resource for individuals and couples who want to understand what marital commitment is about. He himself has a Christian heart, a family heart, and, as a clinical psychologist and researcher, a scholarly heart.

This book should be read by every church worker, and it should be read by every Christian who is preparing for marriage, and by those married, whether recently married or married for 40 years. We need to read and talk about books like this, especially in a culture like ours where the word "commitment" seems to be a foreign concept, and marriages are often understood as a contract ("so long as you meet my needs") rather than a sacred, enduring covenant. Dr. Stanley's research, as well as research done by other family scientists, has identified commitment as the heart of a lifelong relationship. Indeed, he teaches us what the New Testament clearly teaches, that the marital relationship of lifelong companionship is founded on total commitment. This is one of the reasons why St. Paul compared marriage to the relationship of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Christ has totally committed Himself to His community of disciples. That commitment by our Lord shows us the meaning of covenant love.

Dr. Stanley writes, "I want to help you go way beyond *staying together* and understand how two people can really *be together* in the full mystery of marriage" (pp. 1-2). He does this very well as he establishes a firm foundation for his goal on the basis of Scripture and research. His first chapter, "Sticking, Stuck, or Stopped?" is thought provoking. Using examples from couples' relationships, he helps us to understand how couples end up on one of three paths: those who stick; those who are mostly stuck; and those who simply stop. He discusses what God intends for marriage, and he follows that discussion with a discussion of research and theory on commitment. At the

end of the chapter he sets forth two significant questions: "First, how do you *maintain* dedication over time in marriage? What does it look like, and how do you do it? Second, how do you *regain* dedication if you have lost some or all of it?" (p. 21). Dr. Stanley clearly answers these questions in the next nine chapters of the book. He ends each chapter with a brief "Point of Application," practical questions to ponder and discuss, suggestions, and biblical references to read and meditate upon.

In Part I the author addresses the subject of choices and the path of commitment. He writes, "Commitment involves making choices, protecting choices from other options, and arriving at ongoing decisions that reflect the priorities of your commitments" (p. 23). This is a most poignant discussion. Church workers, especially today, need to give this section a careful reading, particularly because some of us are being tempted to violate or have violated the Sixth Commandment. But this is not the only concern. It also is about priorities. "Your priorities are the things that are most important to you. The way in which you make choices among competing demands is a fundamental aspect of commitment. Making the right choices in your marriage is part of sticking. Making the wrong choices is part of getting stuck" (p. 32).

Part 2 is an excellent discussion on developing and maintaining the long-term view. He compares the short-term view, the one our contemporary culture conditions us to take, with the long-term view, the one that is a fundamental aspect of commitment, the one that is Godly. With excellent and timely illustrations, Dr. Stanley helps us to understand how the short-term view ". . . kills the chances of having a good marriage" (p. 103), and how the long-term view "that comes with commitment reassures both partners of the permanence of the union" (p. 103). It is not uncommon for partners to threaten the long-term view when they are angry at each other or are focusing

on the negatives in a marriage (concentrating on what's wrong with the marriage instead of focusing on what's right with the marriage). Dr. Stanley's directive is very well taken, "*Do not threaten your future just because you are very frustrated right now. That is very destructive*" (p. 105). Therefore he helps us to understand in a practical way how to invest for the long haul, and how to develop a lasting vision for one's marriage in the light of God's intention and blessings for marriage and what has been found in research to support both the long haul and lasting vision.

The title of Part 3 says it all: "Fostering We-ness and Containing Me-ness." It's a wonderful discussion of oneness, of teamwork. In every reasonably healthy marriage there must be a reasonably healthy sense of self; in every reasonably healthy marriage there must be a reasonably healthy sense of "we." We are a team. Dr. Stanley's comments on competition, power, gender, and repentance are well worth pondering. Starting with Philippians 2:4, his exposition on sacrifice and service in marriage is one for us to review for ourselves periodically. "I think sacrifice is a crucial component of commitment in a strong and healthy marriage. This point is very clear in Scripture, and I think it is quite clear in marital research. That's what this chapter is about—the meaning and effect of sacrificial giving in marriage" (p. 183). The final chapter is on Christian love, a reflection on 1 Corinthians 13. "*What I call dedication as a form of commitment in research is what the New Testament calls agape love. . . . If you prefer, you could think of this book as a discussion of committed, agape, love*" (p. 209). And so it is: *The Heart of Commitment*.

**Paul Vasconcellos, Ph.D.**

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## 12 Hours to a Great Marriage.

Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, Susan L. Blumberg, Natalie H. Jenkins, Carol Whiteley.

San Francisco: Wiley/Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Twelve hours spent in study and activities to assure a great marriage. What an investment! A magic bullet for marriages! Not quite, but in the words of the authors, "If you dream of having a great marriage, this book will help you bring that dream closer."

This book is a print version of the PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) marriage improvement workshops the authors have conducted across the country. It is the most complete version of the workshop program. There are additional books for targeted audiences—Christian, Jewish, new parents, etc.

The PREP program for marriages is a marriage equivalent to the PET, TET, LET programs of some years ago (Parent, Teacher, Leader Effectiveness Training) authored by Tom Gordon that may be familiar to many readers. It is a hands-on, practical guide to developing competencies toward achieving a goal: in this case, a great, long-lasting marriage.

The program is designed for married couples and those contemplating marriage. For the latter it could be one of the most beneficial pre-marital counseling tools ever devised—a set of activities that can carry into married life and be used regularly or as needed with positive results.

We're always skeptical of books written by a committee (recall the camel as a horse put together by a committee). This book is an exception. The first four authors are with either the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver or involved in the administration or practice of the PREP workshops. Carol Whiteley, cofounder of Writing Doctor, ([www.writingdoctor.com](http://www.writingdoctor.com)) is the writing glue that avoids the pitfalls of committee books.

The book's subtitle is "A Step-by-Step Guide for Making Love Last." The authors' operational definition of a great marriage, based on 25 years of evidence, is:

1. couples that share friendship and love in many ways;
2. couples that treat each other with kindness and respect;
3. couples where partners do their own part;
4. couples that are committed to staying together, even when it's no bed of roses.

Using a baseball analogy, these characteristics of a great marriage are achieved by couples working through 12 chapters on 12 topics—one hour per chapter—following specific ground

rules of the program. Each chapter of about 20 pages has a brief explanation of the topic at hand, such as couple scenarios explicating the topic, an explanation of how the PREP approach treats the issue with more scenarios, and a set of exercises for the couple to complete. An hour per chapter will be a minimum investment in most cases, but a good taste of the topic under scrutiny. The 12 topics are ordered under the four keys to success for healthy marriages: handling conflict, positive connections, forgiving, and making a long-term commitment.

We believe that any couple willing to practice loving kindness and invest 12 hours working through this guide will not only be rewarded in the present, but be on their way to a long-lasting, great marriage. Keeping the book for occasional revisiting and reinforcing might be a good idea also.

**Gil and Bonnie Daenzer**

(Celebrating 52 years of marriage)

Gil is professor *emeritus*  
Concordia University, Nebraska

**Happily Ever After: A real-life look at your first year of marriage.**  
(Formerly titled *Great Expectations*).

**Toben and Joanne Heim.**

NavPress, 2004.

**Jason:**

Almost every storybook fairy tale ends with the words "and they lived happily ever after." Toben and Joanne Heim's book titled *Happily Ever After* truly does deliver what it promises on the front cover—"A Real-Life Look at Your First Year of Marriage." While God has created us in His image and to live in relationships with other people, our sinfulness creates tension in any human relationship. Sinfulness certainly invades marriages, as well. The Heims write honestly, and they seek to unravel issues that can and do come to the surface in the first year of a couple's marriage. As Amy and I read this book together, we marveled at how true the book was for us already in the early days of our marriage. You may think it is odd that we have chosen to write our book review in this separated format. This is the exact way that the Heims wrote their book, however. Their writing style intends (and did so very successfully for us) to reach the emotions and feelings of both a husband and a wife.

**Amy:**

The Heims divide their book into eight main sections, each one addressing a key issue that married couples encounter. Nearly all of these

popular topics (family history, communication, conflict, finances, sex, celebrations, community, and spirituality) were issues that Jason and I had addressed in premarital counseling sessions. So, I admit that as Jason and I began reading *Happily Ever After*, I was expecting to hear the "same old" theories and words of advice. Thankfully, however, the book's simple honesty interwoven with the truth of God's Word provided a series of interesting revelations and a springboard for important discussions about our own marriage.

One revelation we had as we read pertained to the issue of family relationships. The Heims reminded us that each partner brings his/her unique family background into a marriage relationship. That one we had heard before. The rest of the chapter, however, seemed to open up an exciting new freedom for us. We started to realize that as a couple we were essentially beginning our own two-person family. Now, we could adopt the "best of the best" from each of our family histories and combine them to create unique traditions and routines of our own. Often, differing family backgrounds can be a stumbling block to newly married couples. The Heims, on the other hand, reminded us that our diverse family histories are a gift from God and can be used to His glory.

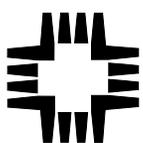
This book also provided wonderful discussion points for Jason and me. Frequently, we would laugh aloud at the stories Toben and Joanne shared in their book, simply because of our ability to relate so closely to their various marital plights. Since the Heims had entered into a heated debate about the "correct" way to fold their bathroom towels, then maybe it was okay for Jason and me to argue about how to display the wall hangings in our new apartment. The Heims' ability to share so openly their own frustrations and missed expectations about marriage encouraged Jason and me to be straightforward with each other about these sensitive issues as well.

**Jason:**

*Happily Ever After* is a book filled with the joy and truth about God-centered marriages. Because of its honest applicability and use of Scripture, we highly recommend this book to all newly married couples and to those who counsel such couples. Marriage is a joyful gift to celebrate, and we were encouraged by the Heims' celebration of God's love through their love for one another and in their practical book on marriage issues.

**Jason Schleicher**, Director of Christian Education, and **Amy Schleicher**, teacher (married one year)  
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[...] process contains at its heart a dual commitment: a renewed commitment by the Government to the Afghan people to improve security, governance and economic opportunities, and a corresponding pledge by the international community to Afghanistan to align its resources and activities in support of the transition [...]

Â Australia welcomes the draft resolution's recognition of the commitment made by the "Heart of Asia" Summit participants at the Istanbul Conference to promote regional security and cooperation through confidence-building measures. [daccess-ods.un.org](https://daccess-ods.un.org). [daccess-ods.un.org](https://daccess-ods.un.org). Gary Swanson takes a deep dive into Herbalife Nutrition's Seed to Feed process and our continue commitment to quality in all of our products.Â Since 1980, Herbalife Nutrition has been committed to maintaining that trust by investing in the quality of our products for the millions of customers around the world who choose us to be part of their daily nutrition plan. Throughout my career, I've applied my expertise as a chemist to help companies improve product and process quality.