

Family and Marriage 10.30.11R

Commitment Doesn't Always Look the Same

"Commitment in the face of conflict produces character." – Anonymous

"...not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, ..." – Bible

Recently I received a call from a married couple receiving counseling. They had been married only a short time and were dealing with a lot of mistrust and spillover from previous relationships. The caller said that the spouse had decided to quit. They wanted out.

The desire to quit when the going gets tough is difficult to overcome. The ability to resist giving up is dependent on the level of commitment. Perhaps the challenge is in understanding commitment, e.g. if a person is primarily committed to self, then commitment elsewhere, such as to marriage, may be secondary.

So I did a little more research on commitment. This article and the following will attempt to provide some food for all of us to consider as we evaluate our commitments and that of others.

Sarah Diffenderfer Satterwhite, in an article published in Faithworks, says: "What fuels our commitment aversion? Uncertainty. Virtually all of life is up for grabs. No job is secure. Half of all marriages aren't forever. Consumerism has made us option addicts. And when change is the only cultural constant, long-term commitments begin to look foolish."

Ms. Satterwhite then goes on to reference some research by Cassidy Dale, 29, a research consultant and futurist in Washington, D.C. Dale says that what often looks like a lack of commitment may actually be a shifting of commitments.

Quoting Dale: "The Builder generation – those born before 1946 – tend to commit to concrete things, like churches and other institutions. The Boomers – born 1946 to 1964 – don't feel that allegiance to concrete institutions, so the Builders see them as noncommittal. On the contrary, the Boomers feel a strong commitment to causes, such as Habitat for Humanity and Promise Keepers.

"By comparison, Generation Xers – born roughly between 1964 and 1981 – tend to commit to a community, a group of people with whom they feel a strong connection, rather than to a cause or institution, which can be impersonal. Xers are not necessarily afraid of commitment; they simply want to base their commitments on a different set of priorities than previous generations."

Dale goes on: "Xers don't expect companies to be loyal to them, so they're not loyal to the companies. They don't know how long a company will be around, so they don't commit to it. And while Xers don't tend to be loyal to institutions, they are loyal to their friends."

Consider this comment by Tom Beaudoin, author of "Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual

Quest of Generation X:” “The clearest indications of fear of commitment are evidenced in the phenomena I see among younger generations of serial monogamy, cohabitation and delayed marriages.”

What does all this mean to us? If you are in the Builder generation (born before 1946) you are likely to do things because you think you “should.” The requirements that we “should” adhere to are established by “concrete” institutions such as the church and civil and criminal laws.

On the other hand if you are in the Boomer generation (born 1946-1964) you are more likely to be driven by non-concrete institutions, or “causes”. Those causes or foundations for our actions can be multiple, e.g. helping the poor and hungry, protecting animal species, or marriage and the family.

Since the cause is not concrete, it can change at the whim of society, e.g. society’s current efforts to redefine marriage and the family. What was not acceptable to the Builders is now gaining acceptability with the Boomers.

Then there are the Xers (born 1964-1981) whose commitment is to community. Xers are driven by relationships with others, and these relationships can change quickly. Commitment is not necessarily to one relationship, but to the group in general.

Dale doesn’t address the Generation Yers (born after 1981), otherwise known as the Millennial generation, but I will next week.

For the moment, I end with a quote from Stephen Covey: “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

The Family and Marriage Coalition of Aiken, Inc. (FAMCO) provides resources for you to succeed in your marriage and families. Roger Rollins, Executive Director, FAMCO, 640-4689, rogerrollins@aikenfamco.com, www.aikenfamco.com.