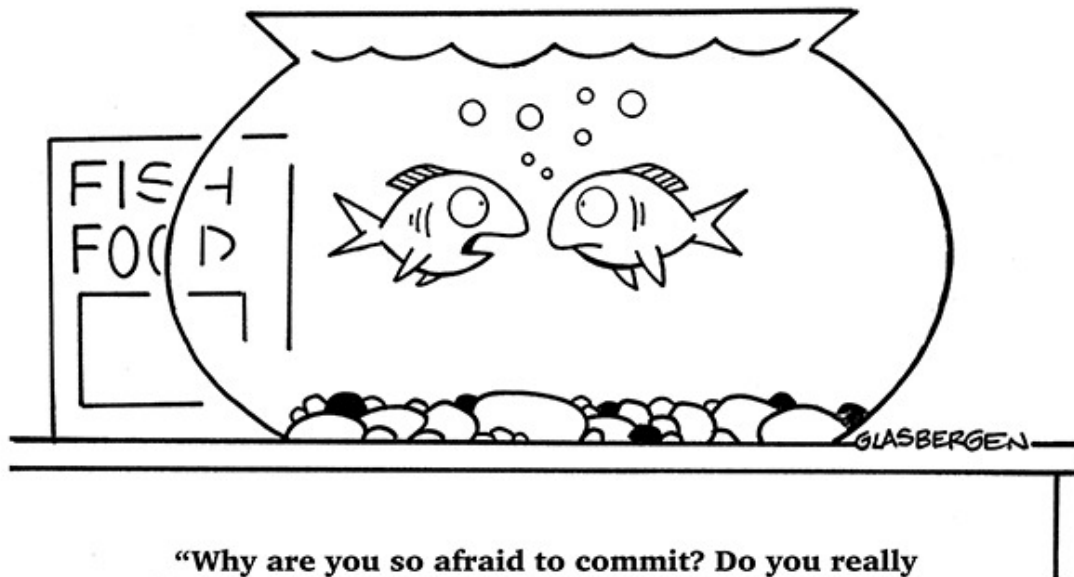


Be devoted to one another

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“Why are you so afraid to commit? Do you really think you’re going to meet someone better than me?”

Thirty-six times in the New Testament we see a recurring word pattern—an action verb followed by the words *one another*. In English grammar this phrase is called a reciprocal pronoun—I am to act a certain way toward you and you should act the same way toward me. For instance, we’re told to *encourage* one another, *accept* one another, *comfort* one another, *honor* one another (and 32 other phrases).

In the book I wrote on these actions ([Love One Another: 20 Practical Lessons](#)) I suggested that *all* of us should give *all* the one anothers to *all* people at *all* times. In short, give all to all.

- These phrases are commands for us to obey; we can’t opt out and choose not to participate.
- I shouldn’t pick and choose which of the one anothers I’ll give (for instance: I’ll encourage people but not accept them).
- I shouldn’t show favoritism as to *whom* I give them to (for instance: I’ll encourage some people but not others).
- I should willingly dispense these acts of grace *all the time* (for instance, I shouldn’t have the attitude: “I’ll give these when I’m feeling good but not when I’m upset.”)

But there is one exception to the “give all to all” guideline; there is one “one another” that can be sparingly dispensed: “Be devoted to one another” (Romans 12:10).

The Greek word for “devotion” is *philostorgos*, which means “to cherish one’s kindred, to be fond of, to be fraternal toward others, tenderly loving, and tenderly affectionate.” Devotion implies a deep level of commitment. It is, perhaps, the only One Another that we can ration out.

Through the years, I have developed a deep sense of devotion to certain individuals, but not to everyone. My highest devotion is to my wife, children, and grandchildren. Even among my friends, I am more devoted to some than others.

Jesus did the same. He had a small group of people he was deeply devoted to: his twelve disciples. Among the twelve, there were three men in whom he confided the most: Peter, James, and John. Some would even suggest he was closest to John. He didn't love these three men more than the others, but he did spend more time with them, allowing them to know him in ways the others didn't. They were invited to be with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, perhaps the highlight of his earthly ministry, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, arguably the lowest point in his life. Jesus didn't have favorites, but he did have intimates. He loved the world, taught thousands, but was devoted to a few.

Likewise, it's okay for us to be selective as to whom we're devoted to. On a practical level, it would be impossible for us to express devotion to the hundreds of people we're acquainted with. A sense of devotion can be reserved for a few.

I am devoted to my family. I've jokingly told my wife, "If you ever leave me, I'm going with you." I'm devoted to my two daughters; through life's ups and downs, I'll be their faithful father. I'm devoted to my son-in-law and his daughter. Five years ago, my grandson entered my scope of devotion. As a leader, I'm devoted to members of my team. I have hundreds of good friends and feel devoted to some but not all of them.

Devotion is expressed in these terms:

- Value — "I highly value you; you are important to me."
- Commitment — "I am committed to you; I pledge to be lovingly involved in your life."
- Long-term commitment — "I'm in this relationship for the long haul. I'll walk with you through good times and bad. We're friends for life."
- Priority — "My life, like yours, is multifaceted. However, you are a priority to me."
- Meeting needs — "I am aware of your physical and emotional needs and want to be a part of meeting those needs."
- Faithfulness — "Relationally, I'm going to bind myself to you. I hope my deep commitment will make you feel secure."
- Vulnerable communication — "I am willing to share with you the deep issues of my life, and you can trust me with the deep concerns of your life. I want to know you in a deep, intimate way."
- Tenderness — "You are very dear to me."
- Consistency — "You can count on me to be a consistent source of love and care."
- Love, even unto death — "I would give my life for you."

Question: to whom are you devoted? As suggested by the previous list, true devotion requires enormous commitment; have you made such a commitment to a few people?

Soon after Jack Benny died, George Burns was interviewed on TV. "Jack and I had a wonderful friendship for fifty-five years," Burns said. "Jack never walked out on me when I sang a song, and I never walked out on him when he played the violin. We laughed together, we played together, we worked together, and we ate together. I suppose that for many of those years we talked every single day."

In a sweet and sincere way, George Gurns and Jack Benny were devoted to each other.