Discipline plays a central role in Coupling. There are rules that just need to be followed. The discipline of binding together, committing together at all times is what builds strength and resiliency into a marriage.

Ecclesiates 4:12 says something about being strong when a cord is not just by itself, or two strands but “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” I liberally interpret this to suggest that the two of you in your coupling need that other thing that I was working on a few articles back. I had suggested that a relationship needs a strong seam or weld to bind the couple together.

My friend Jean suggested a wonderful word, covenant. This pulls together all of those images of commitment, love, and discipline. A covenant is a sacred agreement between two parties. A legal definition is “an agreement, contract, or written promise between two individuals that frequently constitutes a pledge to do or refrain from doing something.”

Frequently used as religious language to describe the relationship between God and God’s people, a covenant for a couple suggests another level of meaning. The word may be easy to say, but living out a covenant is something else.

Many people struggle with truly understanding the concept of love. Commitment can be challenging in this fast paced, self-centered world. Discipline is almost an archaic concept. Attaining a covenantal relationship between two people can truly challenge us.

The challenge comes from the complicated position of being selfish and self-giving in a relationship. We love and commit because of the feeling that we have when we are with or think of the object of our love. But commonly this brings pain. How? Because to give ourselves to them requires an ability to deny ourselves, give away, or restrict ourselves.

This struggle of discipline is one of sacrifice when we refrain from doing, even when we want to. To refrain we have to go beyond our selfish desires and serve the needs of the other. Just as the Holy Other struggles and suffers with loving and sustaining an imperfect and willful people, Coupling can contain some of these same elements.

No, you are not God and your spouse is not the rebellious child of Satan, but the point is the same. There is struggling and suffering in a true and meaningful relationship based on love and sacrifice.

Leonard Cohen in his song, “Hallelujah” captures this rapturous and painful experience of love. We may be cold and broken, but we still sing hallelujah, Hallelujah.

What do you think of when discipline is tied to a subject? Difficult writing to finish your thesis that requires no weekends may come to mind. Maybe you think of a workout plan that gets you off the couch and back into the gym. Even cutting out the carbs, which means saying no to Nu-Way or those Krispy Kremes. Saying no in one part of our lives can bring a very satisfying yes in another part.

Yes, Coupling can mean a no to self but it brings an uplifting and resonant Hallelujah.