



A Vow of Faithfulness

Remaining Loyal to Yourself

CONTENTS

An Invitation

- Chapter 1 Woman-Affirming Perspectives
The Journey • The Descent • The Connection • The Practice
- Chapter 2 Transforming Self-Sabotage into Self-Commitment
Composing a Vow • Designing a Ceremony
- Chapter 3 Growing in Knowledge and Love of Yourself
The Essential Vow of Faithfulness
- Chapter 4 Remembering Yourself
Composing a Vow to Inspire Conscious Beginnings
- Chapter 5 Gathering the Gifts
Composing a Vow to Navigate Life's Transitions
- Chapter 6 Even When Things Fall Apart
Composing a Vow to Deepen Self-Loyalty

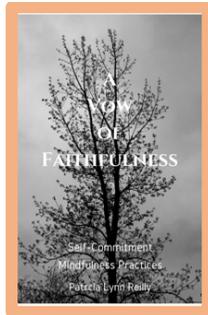
Imagine women of all ages vowing faithfulness to their own lives and capacities.
Imagine an adolescence in which our daughters, granddaughters, and nieces
deepen their relationship to their natural vitality, resilience, and sense of self.

Imagine a woman-affirming rite of passage, a ceremony
of self-commitment, culminating in these words of self-blessing:

This is it. This is my life. Nothing to wait for.

Nowhere else to go. No one to make it all different.

What a relief to have finally landed here, now. Blessed be my life!



An Invitation

*Until we imagine something, it remains an impossibility.
Once imagined, it becomes our experience.*

Imagine a woman who has grown in knowledge and love of herself.

A woman who has vowed faithfulness to her life and capacities.

Who remains loyal to herself. Regardless. Imagine yourself as this woman.

From childhood, I was thrust into circumstances that required tremendous resilience, stamina, and self-loyalty. The adults in my world were deeply injured addicts and unable to offer me stability, safety, and the basics of food, lodging, and uninterrupted sleep. I had to fend for myself, wandering here and there to find food, safe places, adults who cared and could be trusted, and opportunities that would allow me to thrive.

From those earliest years, I turned inward and discovered within myself a reservoir of survival instincts and life-saving creativity that enabled me to navigate the first thirteen years of life in a violent alcoholic home, a chaotic children's shelter, and eventually, in a Catholic orphanage. I found opportunities to thrive in the midst of those challenging situations. If I had not turned all my attention and effort toward my own life and had not been tenaciously committed to my own survival, I would not be alive today.

It makes sense that my “calling” has been to invite women to grow in knowledge of, respect for, and loyalty to themselves by reclaiming their original resilience, creativity, and self-interest. As women turn inward, they re-discover their original YES to life. For some of us, that YES was honored and easily expressed in childhood. For others of us, our original YES to life was stretched to its limits in the face of intense opposition. In childhood I imagined that I was one of those tenacious green growing things pressing through the cracks in the concrete to reach toward sun, light, and breath.

Years later, I read Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Solitude of the Self." In 1892 at age 77, she resigned after twenty years as president of the National Women's Suffrage Association. Her resignation speech, "The Solitude of Self," summarized the powerful beliefs that inspired her lifelong promotion of women's equality. The strength of her words has reverberated throughout the decades in my own life, empowering me to seize my birthright to self-sovereignty, embrace the solitude of my "self," and take personal responsibility for my individual life. Here's an excerpt from her talk:

"The strongest reason for giving woman the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition and from all the crippling influences of fear—is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life.

The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; is because of her birthright to self-sovereignty; because, as an individual, she must rely on herself.

No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency, they must know something of the laws of navigation. It matters not whether the solitary voyager is man or woman; nature, having endowed them equally, leaves them to their own skill and judgment in the hour of danger, and, if not equal to the occasion, alike they perish."

A Word about the "Self"

Some women cringe when reading Stanton's words: "Too much self-focus. Borders on narcissism. Uncomfortably self-centered." In response, I invite them to pause for a moment to recall the emergency training all airline passengers receive: "Should oxygen be needed, a mask will appear from the compartment above your seat. Put your oxygen mask on first and then offer assistance to those traveling with you."

It makes great sense. If you don't get oxygen, you'll lose consciousness quickly. You will not be available to support anyone else. If, however, you have access to your own oxygen source, those dependent on you have a chance of surviving. The "Vow of Faithfulness" you compose will become your oxygen mask . . . your life-giving breath through every season and situation of life. Your vow reflects your relationship with yourself, and that's what determines the quality of your life and relationships.

My mother eventually put on her own oxygen mask in order to fulfil her vow to retrieve me from the orphanage on the day of my 8th grade graduation. Fulfilling this vow required that she clean up the messes within her, and around her, including extricating herself from life-threatening relationships, arranging a work-exchange to enter a detox facility, and starting over again, sober this time, in a new city to prepare a home for her daughter. By the time of my elementary school graduation, she was attending AA, working as Head Nurse at a local hospital, and settling into a new church community. On that day, I left St. Joseph's Village with my mother. Life is always experienced and lived from the inside out.

The Journey Home

For three decades, I have invited women to journey from self-loathing to self-love, from self-criticism to self-respect, and from self-sabotage to self-loyalty. Along the way it has been necessary to dismantle the disempowering questions "what's wrong with me" and "who will save me."

As these questions are ousted from our lives, we return home to ourselves, reclaiming our natural resources and capacities; we author our own lives, participating fully in life's gifts and challenges; and we remain loyal to ourselves even in the face of challenge and opposition. The journey transforms our inner landscape and reframes our relationship to the world around us.

To deepen these fundamental shifts in self-understanding within women's hearts, minds, and bodies, I re-fashioned the wedding vow and wedding ceremony into transformational resources for making a life-long commitment to ourselves. Each woman's journey culminates in the composition of a 'Vow of Faithfulness" (VOF) to herself. A "Vow of Faithfulness" is a positive assertion and declaration, expressing a woman's intention to remain loyal to herself no matter what, to preserve allegiance to herself even when challenged or opposed. I believe this is the first step to achieving balanced, rich, and reciprocal relationships with others.

Although I have developed many transformative resources over the years, none has been as universally understood and powerfully experienced as the "Vow of Faithfulness" self-commitment process. Once a woman recognizes that a healthy and vibrant relationship with herself is the pre-requisite to healthy and vibrant relationships with others, she transfers her understanding of wedding vows—whether her own or someone else's—to the process of composing a vow to herself. This book explores several types of vows:

The Essential Vow of Faithfulness

The Essential Vow is the gateway to “self-sovereignty” and self-commitment because it addresses the root causes of our self-alienation and self-sabotage. The writing an Essential Vow reverses our socialization, reclaims our inner resources and capacities, and deepens our relationships from the inside out.

Circumstantial and Retrospective Vows

The “Vow of Faithfulness” process can be used to support us in every season and situation of life. These vows are grounded in the ongoing details and regular rhythms of life, and are one way to embody our essential vow.

Vows to Inspire Conscious Beginnings

Your “Vow of Faithfulness” will provide safe passage through transitional seasons of your life, and support you to design self-commitment strategies that tap into your own creativity and wisdom.

Vows to Navigate Life’s Transitions

Incorporating the lessons of the past and the possibilities of the future, while firmly grounded in the present moment, your vow becomes your north star, your guiding light, the faithful breath during the "creative chaos" of transition.

Vows to Deepen Self-Loyalty

Is it possible to find safe passage when things fall apart around us? Yes, your self-commitment will remind you, even in times of unbearable sadness, grief, dis-ease, and dislocation, of your YES to life. And like those tenacious green growing things pressing through the cracks in the concrete, you will rise! For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, clutching your precious vow, you will rise.

Vows and Ceremonies

Women of all ages and from all walks of life are vowing faithfulness to their own lives. As a result, they are refusing to ask the questions "what's wrong with me" and "who will save me." Instead, they make a powerful statement with every thought they share, feeling they express, and action they take on their own behalf. The results are life-altering:

- High school aged women are vowing faithfulness to their own lives. As a result, they focus on exploring their interests and curiosities and developing their gifts and talents. Kathy wrote her “Vow of Faithfulness” during her senior year. Her vow prepared her to

participate fully in the challenges of college life, using them as an opportunity to sharpen her skills for conscious living and to deepen her partnership with herself.

- Twenty-something women are vowing faithfulness to their own lives. As a result, their relationship obsession is dissolving. The organizing focus of twenty-year-old Karen's life is no longer the pursuit of lovers—it is remaining faithful to her vow. Karen refuses to measure her success or failure as a woman by her ability to snag a husband; she now defines success as the fulfillment of her own incredible potential.
- Engaged women are vowing faithfulness to their own lives. As a result, they are truly prepared to enter marriage. Sandy felt stuck while trying to write her vow to Nathan. Instead, she wrote a “Vow of Faithfulness” to herself, after which her vow to Nathan flowed without effort. When faced with challenges in her marriage, Sandy reviews and then renews her personal vow.
- Women in transition after a divorce or the death of a partner are vowing faithfulness to themselves. As a result, they are reminded of their personal dreams and goals. Helen was married at eighteen. She spent the next forty years supporting her husband's career. He died unexpectedly. While writing her “Vow of Faithfulness,” Helen remembered her own dream of becoming a pediatric nurse and vowed to fulfill it.

A Vow of Faithfulness: Remaining Loyal to Yourself provides step-by-step guidelines for composing your personal “Vow of Faithfulness” and designing a self-commitment ceremony. The vow composition process invites you to turn inward to re-establish a committed relationship to yourself. By accepting the invitation, you will offer yourself what was needed most in childhood and adolescence: support to go on a remarkable adventure of self-discovery, which includes deepening your relationship to your own vitality, resilience, and sense of self. Throughout the book I’ve included women’s stories, vows, and ceremonies. May their experience inspire you to grow in knowledge and love of yourself, vow faithfulness to yourself, and remain loyal to yourself. No matter what.

Imagine a woman whose vow is her north star, her guiding light,
the faithful breath she returns to in every season and situation of life.
A woman whose vow supports her to participate fully in the gifts and challenges
of life, using them as an opportunity to deepen her skills for conscious living.
Imagine yourself as this woman as your read . . .