

## Marriage Enrichment – Making a Good Marriage Better – Wedding Vows

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### Scripture: Matthew 19:4-6 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> ‘Haven't you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,’

<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’

<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’”

### Introduction

What value or meaning do you still couple to your wedding vows? Where do you place them in the good and not so good times? May your marriage become an example to those contemplating marriage!

Last week, young Eric (age 6) wisely described marriage as, “...when you get to keep your girl and don't have to give her back to her parents!” Following Eric’s advice, we stood still at two critical moments in a wedding ceremony:

1. The call toward wedding vows, “*We will always remain obedient and faithful to You. We will read Your Word, meditate on it, structure our lives, accordingly, pray together and serve You together.*” and
2. The introduction to the marriage bond, “*Do you accept everything the Lord teaches us in His Word about Marriage? Is it your sincere intention to structure your marriage accordingly? And do you desire to be married with the blessing of the Lord?*”

This week, young Dave (age 8) has some wisdom to share about why couples hold hands, “They want to make sure their rings don’t fall off because they paid good money for them.”

There is something beautiful about a couple who still hold hands. May none of us ever stop doing this, and in a sense Dave is right, rings can’t fall off when you hold hands.

But when was that ring placed on his or her finger? Right after the couple was pronounced husband and wife. So with this in mind, let's step backwards toward marriage bonding.

## **Part 2 of the Vows**

After the minister introduces the couple to the marriage bonding and after part 1 – the requirements of State – has been dealt with, the minister says to the husband-to-be:

*“Do you also promise never to forsake her, but to guide her in love as a God fearing husband is bound to do his lawful wife, whilst you live with her in a holy manner and in everything remain loyal to her according to the Word of God?”*

To the wife-to-be, the minister asks:

*“Do you also promise never to forsake him but to love, obey and help him as a God fearing wife is bound to do to her lawful husband, whilst you live with him in a holy manner and in everything remain loyal to him according to the Word of God?”*

Let's break this up a bit and highlight four biblical themes:

- *Never to forsake her.* “Never” means “at no time,” this is pretty straightforward. “Forsake” however, is a deep word. When you promise to each other “I will never forsake you” you are saying “I won't quit, I won't leave you, I won't abandon you, I won't withdraw from this relationship and I won't reject you, no matter what.” It is a “forever” promise.

To forsake is to break the oneness of marriage.

I have seen couples who stay “married,” yet they have technically forsaken each other a while back. One feels rejected by the other or one has – emotionally or spiritually or physically – already withdrawn from the relationship. And more. And none of this is God honouring.

To couples who find themselves in this position I ask, “What value or meaning do you still couple to your wedding vows?” Repent and make right with each other in the presence of and in the power of God.

- *Love.* Is the couple promising conditional or unconditional love to one another? I believe that we are speaking of unconditional love for as long as the marriage is healthy. Forsaking in any way is the territory of conditional love.

As sinners, on our own, are not capable of unconditional love. So if our love for our partner is to grow, then it has to grow in and with the love of the Lord. For love to remain unconditional, the couple dare not take their eyes off of Jesus.

When you are promising unconditional love, you promise to love each other with the love of the Lord. This takes us back to the belief that God brings couples together, causes their love to grow, in love they progress to marriage and in love they live.

So, how do you know if your love is conditional or unconditional? Conditional love is earned. Unconditional love is given without “ts & cs.” Which form of love is currently active in your relationship?

- *Live with.* “Live” is inseparable from “life” and asks for unconditional love. Living with is how the rest of the couple’s life will be. It speaks to conduct, maintenance, occupying, practising, having life etc.

“Living with” is a permanent God honouring and unconditional loving way of life.

Forsakenness and conditional love will disrupt oneness.

According to Genesis 2:24, a husband and wife are one flesh and this Scripture is widely considered to be the institution of a covenantal marriage blessed by God.

With a brand new family unit coming into being at marriage, it must now exist and thrive because the marriage itself is alive and this life comes from God. It stands therefore to reason that the moment the couple’s eyes are taken off of Jesus, the “live with” of marriage is compromised.

Luke writes in Acts 17:28, “For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” Your marriage cannot satisfactorily grow and cannot fully be, outside of Jesus.

If you have to, come back and “live with.”

- *Remain loyal.* Loyalty and faithfulness exist, hand in hand you cannot be loyal and faithful as long as forsakenness, conditional love and disrupted living is ongoing.

Husbands and wives are loyal to one another according to the Word of God. This means that both prioritize each other above all else, stand up for each other, maintain confidentiality, make decisions, together, are an open book with each other, turn to each other first, are each other's best friends and they cultivate romance, love, and intimacy on a regular basis.

You cannot maintain intimacy and confidentiality in the midst of forsakenness. You cannot be best friends if Jesus is not at the centre of your marriage. You can't cultivate intimacy and turn to one another if one of you – or both are absent. You can't choose the other's side if you are not on the same side, being a side which is rooted in His Word. You get the idea.

A breach of loyalty and faithfulness is a breach of trust. Faith, trust and belief, all point to hope, but it is trust that has no doubt, asks for a high level of confidence and even evidence.

It would be unreasonable to ask you to measure the level of loyalty in your relationship. But can I say that rebuilding and faithfulness is hard work and cannot be done without focussing on Jesus. In this sense, you are not alone and there is everything to gain.

### **Part 1 of the Vows**

This is to satisfy the requirement of State and is made in the presence of God and before witnesses and only after the State's requirements to marriage have been satisfied.

The Marriage Act requires the minister – who is also a commissioner of oaths – to ask the following, “Do you \_\_\_\_\_ declare that as far as you know there is no lawful impediment to your proposed marriage to \_\_\_\_\_ here present, and that you call aa here present to witness that you take \_\_\_\_\_ as your lawful wife (or husband)?” And this is when the couple say “yes” to each other.

### **Conclusion**

What value or meaning do you still couple to your wedding vows? May your marriage become an example to those contemplating marriage!

After the couple has been pronounced husband and wife, the minister says, *“Know that God has joined you together and accept in faith what God brings on your way as married people; expect His blessing in everything.”* Looking back to last week, I remind you that God’s designs and God’s blessings run hand in hand.

I close with the prayer traditionally used after the couple is pronounced husband and wife, which is also the closing blessing to this message.

*“Almighty God, we pray that You will sanctify the bond uniting this couple. Grant that through the power of the Holy Spirit they shall live in true faith and pure love and overcome all temptations. In prosperity and in adversity; in joy and in sadness, guide them by Your hand - faithful and fatherly. Graciously bless them in everything.*

*Grant that this marriage shall contribute to the building up of Your church, to the spreading of Your Holy Gospel, and to the glory of Your Name.”*

Amen.