

Weddings

Except as noted, the following was written by Dr. Jerry Nelson
www.soundliving.org

p1 The marriage covenant
p3 Decisions a pastor must make
p3 A letter or conversation with the couple desiring to be married
p4 Premarital guidance
p5 A wedding worksheet (questions for planning the ceremony)
p7 Processional and recessional order
p8 The Ceremony
p10 The Rehearsal
p12 The Charge w/ sample
p14 Sample Wedding prayers
p16 Symbolism of unity candle, sand or braid

The Marriage Covenant

In Malachi 2:14 God calls the marriage relationship a “covenant.” Divorce was the breaking of a covenant agreement: “It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” When we say, “This is my solemn vow” or “This is my promise,” we are making a covenant. And we are binding ourselves, before God, to fulfill the vow. In fact, so binding was a covenant in the Old Testament that everyone understood that to avoid the obligations of the covenant would result in divine penalty.

To be a marriage covenant certain things are required:

1. A marriage covenant includes a verbalized commitment; This is called a vow. An “assumed” commitment doesn't qualify as a marriage covenant. A marriage covenant includes specific commitments that are testable; it will be observed if the commitments are or are not being kept.
2. In the marriage covenant there is the promise to be a husband or a wife. This marks a profound change in the relationship. By their vows a man and a woman are entering into a kinship, a fellowship, with another human being in which their very bodies are the medium of that relationship. They are not just promising to be an emotional

friend or a business partner; they are promising to be a husband or a wife. This relationship is unlike any other relationship.

3. The marriage covenant includes a verbalized commitment to **permanence** – a life-long commitment, “until we are parted by death.” Included is the idea that the commitment will endure any and all circumstances: “For better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.” Yes, covenants were broken but the very word "broken" indicates the intention of covenants - they were to be permanent. When Jesus spoke to the subject of marriage he harkened back to the very beginning, to Genesis itself, in stating what marriage is intended to be by God. He said, "A man shall leave his father and mother and shall be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let man not separate." The word "united" that Jesus used (also translated "cleave") means to be permanently bound to.
4. A marriage covenant includes a verbalized commitment to **faithfulness**. Because the husband/wife relationship is so unique, because of its one-fleshness, the husband/wife relationship is, by its very definition, exclusive. No one else can be a part of that unique relationship without destroying the relationship. It is one man and one woman in this covenant relationship.
5. A marriage covenant includes **witnesses** to the vows made. Covenants were witnessed or attested by others. These “others” could later say "yes" or "no" that was or wasn't part of the covenant. A private covenant is an oxymoron. Without witnesses there is no covenant. The private commitment between a man and a woman doesn't qualify as a covenant of marriage. Also, according to Jesus (Matthew 19) God is an active witness, "What God has joined together let man not separate." God does the joining.
6. A marriage covenant includes **ceremony, ritual, and symbols** connected to the commitments being made. In the Scriptures, when

marriages are begun, there are dowries, parties, specific actions that symbolize the covenant made. Sexual intercourse itself is one of the chief signs of the covenant, the union, the marriage. And sex outside of a marriage covenant is dishonoring of marriage, it is a cheapening of all that the covenant of marriage stands for - and it is a direct contradiction of the will of God.

The Bible is clear - **marriage** is not just an unstated agreement between two people - it **is a stated covenant between a man and a woman to be husband and wife in a permanent and faithful relationship witnessed by God and others and solemnized with ceremony and symbol.**

Decisions for the pastor and the church:

Will we participate in the marriage of two who are admittedly not Christians, a Christian to a non-Christian, homosexuals, transsexuals, or divorced, etc?

A letter to, or conversation with, the prospective couple:

"We are delighted that you would honor us by including us in your wedding plans. Most thoughtful people who decide to get married by a Christian pastor do so with the understanding that they will have a Christian ceremony, which includes desiring God's blessing. It is assumed that people who want a "Christian" ceremony and want God's blessing are people who themselves are Christians - Christ-followers.

Please find enclosed a pamphlet entitled "What is a Christian?" After you have read this pamphlet we invite you to inform us if you consider yourself a Christian.

1. If you are a Christian, and it is your intention to follow Christ as Lord of your lives (living in obedience to God's Word), then we ask of you the following: You agree to participate in premarital guidance from a mature Christian couple and to agree to live celibately until your

marriage.

2. If you are not a Christian, we are still very willing to be involved in your wedding because we believe God has ordained marriage as a blessing for humanity. In the ceremony we will pray for you and invite God's blessing on you. We will also do all we can to help you establish a relationship that will benefit society as a whole, your children and you. To that end, we encourage you to agree to participate in premarital guidance from a mature Christian couple.
3. If you are not certain whether you are or are not a Christian please allow us the privilege of discussing this eternally important question with you.

Pre-marital guidance (counseling)

The pastor needs to decide who will provide and what kind of premarital guidance will be provided to the couple. Some churches use trained lay couples to provide several sessions of guidance. Such churches usually have manuals they have prepared which they are willing to share with others. Many communities have counseling centers which provide premarital counseling. There are on-line resources available as well.

Wedding Worksheet

Names and contact information:

Bride

Groom

Date/time/place of rehearsal

Date/time/place of wedding

Questions:

Is it the intention of the bride and groom to NOT see each other before the ceremony?

Name of the coordinator. It is recommended that one be appointed to aid the pastor at the rehearsal and wedding.

Names and relationship to the bride and groom of all who will be seated specially (grandparents, parents, others).

Names of all bridesmaids and groomsmen.

Will bridesmaids and groomsmen enter as couples or will the bridesmaids enter alone to be met by groomsmen at the front?

Will the maid/matron of honor enter alone or with the best man?

Names of flower girls and ring bearer

Will the flower girls and ring bearer stand on the platform during the wedding or after entering be seated with an adult?

Names and duties of the ushers

Which usher will escort which grandparent, parent, etc in AND out?

Is the congregation to be dismissed en masse or by row?

Will there be an aisle "runner" and if it is desired that it be used by the wedding party only?

Who else should have part in the ceremony and what part should they have? E.g. blessing by parent, reading of scripture, etc.

Who will have the rings to be handed to the pastor in the ceremony? (two rings or only one?)

Guest book: At what time and by whom should the book be closed even if there is a line of guests waiting to sign?

Musicians: Who, where will they be seated, from where will they perform and what equipment will they need?

Music: Instrumental and/or vocal, what songs and placement in the order of service.

Photographers: Are there any limits on when and what pictures may be taken during the ceremony?

Sound technician and equipment

Video technician and equipment

Special rituals (unity candle, sand, braid, etc)

Candles, where and when lit and by whom

When does wedding party need to be at the facility before the wedding (usually for pictures)?

Will the pastor be needed for pictures?

When will the marriage certificate (license) be signed?

Will the pastor be needed for any part in the reception?

Processional and Recessional Order

(to be used by the coordinator)

Guests seated (unless directed otherwise by the bride, ushers should not ask which side of the room guests wish to be seated. This will allow the ushers to fill the room more evenly).

Candles lit?

Usher _____ escorts grandparents _____ to seat ___ e.g. L:2:4 ___ (left or right, row # and seat #)

Usher _____ escorts grandparent _____ to seat ___ e.g. R:2:2 ___ (left or right, row # and seat #)

Usher _____ escorts parents _____ to seat _____ (left or right, row #, and seat #)

Usher _____ escorts parent _____ To seat _____

Sometimes unity candles are lit by mothers of the couple

Pastor, Groom, (Groomsmen?) enter

Bridesmaids (and groomsmen?) enter in the following order:

Ring bearer enters

Flower girl(s) enters

Bride and escort (usually father) enter

CEREMONY

Recessional:

Bride and Groom

Flower girl(s) and Ring bearer

Maid of honor and best man

Other couples in reverse order of entrance

Coordinator direct ushers to escort out the following in order:

Mother and father of the bride

Mother and father of the groom

Grandparents of the bride

Grandparents of the groom

Audience ushered out en masse or row by row?

The Ceremony

Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer

The bride and her escort (father) stop at the front of the room (before the father gives the bride to the groom and before the couple moves to the place where they will stand for the ceremony) and the pastor introduces the ceremony.

Introduction

"Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.

"The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and for the nurture of their children in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

"Into this holy union _____ now come to be joined. (Invite congregation to be seated.)

To (woman): _____, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live? If so say, "I will."

To (man): _____, will you take this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live? If so say "I will."

To the Congregation: "Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage? If so say, "We will."

Pastor asks, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

_____ answers, is seated and couple comes forward.

Bride and groom mount the platform

Invocation

Scripture

Charge to the couple

(Determine selection and placement of special music in the order)

Vows

_____ please take _____ right hand and repeat after me: "I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow." (loose hands)

_____ please take _____'s right hand and repeat after me: "I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow." (loose hands)

Ring Ceremony

Pastor: "These rings are to be a sign, a symbol, of the vows these two have made to each other."

_____ please place this ring on _____'s left hand and repeat after me: "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you.

_____ please place this ring on _____'s left hand and repeat after me: "_____, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you."

Pronouncement of marriage: Pastor places his hand over the joined right hands of the couple and says, "Now that _____ have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, before God and these witnesses, I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one separate.

Wedding Kiss (ask the couple to not embarrass the audience by too intimate a display of affection)

Ritual of unity candle, unity braid, sand, or other

Wedding Prayer and/or Blessing (by pastor or parent)

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; The Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. Amen

Introduction of the newly married couple: "It is my privilege to introduce to you, Mr. and Mrs.

Recessional

The Wedding rehearsal

Wedding rehearsals should be enjoyable celebrations but not prolonged. A well prepared rehearsal avoids a great deal of frustration.

- Prepare the order of service and the processional/recessional specifics with the bride (and groom) IN ADVANCE.
- Determine the “coordinator” and review the details of processional and recessional with him/her before the rehearsal.
- If musicians need to rehearse their music in the venue, invite them to do so either before or following the rehearsal.
- Ask the coordinator to review ushering details with the ushers before or following the rehearsal, using the processional/recessional worksheet.
- It is not usually necessary to “rehearse” the escorting of grandparents and parents to their seats; it is only necessary to remind them they should be in the foyer area before the wedding and NOT be seated with the other guests.
- At the appointed rehearsal time, invite all present to the front of the venue for opening prayer and for introductions of all present. Invite the bride to introduce those who are present because of her and the groom to introduce those present because of him. Remember to introduce the musicians, technicians and coordinator.
- As you introduce the coordinator, instruct the wedding party that she/he will be giving direction from the back of the venue while you will give direction at the front. Invite their cooperation with the coordinator both at the rehearsal and at the wedding.
- Ask the bride and groom to assume the position on the platform where they will be standing during the most of the ceremony; invite the bridesmaids and groomsmen to stand on the platform where they will be during the ceremony. (Before the rehearsal ask the bride how she wishes the bridesmaids and groomsmen to position themselves on the platform – as couples or men on left, women on right, etc.)
- Instruct the attendants to always be facing the bride whether she is in the back of the venue waiting to process or is actually on the platform.

- Hands hanging slack by the sides provides the most natural appearance for attendants.
- “Walk” through the order of service quickly just noting the various pieces of the services. It is not necessary to actually read everything or ask the couple to repeat everything during the rehearsal.
- It is helpful to the couple if you assure them that once they get on the platform you will tell them everything they need to do or say so they may choose not to worry about what is next.
- If there are others who will sing, speak or read as part of the ceremony, demonstrate for them when they will do so and from where on the platform or other.
- Invite the instrumentalist playing the recessional music to do so as the wedding party recesses to the back where the coordinator lines them up for the processional.
- Do a processional including pastor, groom groomsmen, bridesmaids, ring bearer, flower girls and father and bride.
- Go through the entire ceremony (again not reading everything but just moving through the pieces to familiarize all with what will happen).
- Recess again.
- Invite all to the front for final questions and instructions.
- Remind the wedding party when they need to be at the venue on the wedding day.
- Have coordinator go over instructions with ushers.
- Allow musicians time to rehearse if they desire.

The “Charge”

Typically the ceremony includes a “charge” (a short devotional). It is recommended that it be no more than 15 minutes in length and usually shorter. The content of the “charge” while personal usually deals with the privilege, benefits and responsibilities of marriage. It is good opportunity to remind the audience of the same.

Sample Charge:

“In a society that increasingly depreciates marriage through redefinition, through divorce, through cohabitation, through “friends with benefits” and through a warped portrayal of marriage in much of the media, why would anyone want to get married?

Rather than illustrate the negative effects on individuals and a society where marriage is depreciated, I want to speak briefly to the overwhelmingly positive reasons for marriage.

Genesis 2:18,22-23 “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him... Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...”

Of all that God created it was the only time God said it was “not good.” It wasn’t that Adam was evil but that he was incomplete.

And so God created the complement to man – the second part of a whole; he created woman – more specifically he created a wife for Adam.

And Adam’s response indicates what God had done – “this is now bone of my bones.” That woman who became Adam’s wife, became part of him and he of her to such a degree that the Bible goes on to say, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

So close, so connected, so complementary, so intimate is this relationship that that the language used to describe it pushes right to the brink, without going too far, of saying the two beings become one being.

And why did God design us to have that kind of relationship?

First of all, in that “oneness” we reflect God’s image. God is Trinity – three in one. A central aspect of the Trinity is relationship – intimacy. Marriage was designed by God to mirror that intimacy.

Secondly, as I have already mentioned, marriage was designed by God to bring about a new “whole” from the complementary male/husband and female/wife. Each completes the other; there is a unique interdependency.

Thirdly, the husband/wife relationship is God's demonstration of the Christ/church relationship. A godly marriage reflects the servant heart and actions of Christ toward his church. A godly marriage demonstrates to observing friends what is possible by God's grace in their relationship with Christ: It is loving servant-leadership and respectful willing followership.

Fourthly, the husband/wife relationship is to be the incubator for rearing godly children. There is no greater human influence on the mind and heart of a child than the relationship of a father and mother to each other. God designed marriage to be the means of propagating the human race and more specifically propagating the Christian race, the people of God.

Lastly God designed marriage as the foundation of a godly society; the basic unit of society is the family. As that basic unit thrives so does the culture.

You might have thought you were just getting married! But you realize anew how significant, how life-changing, family-changing and society-changing your marriage is. That is why the vows you make today are called, "solemn vows." They are weighty, serious, life-altering vows.

So, here today, you will make very intentional and very specific promises. Next, you will declare that those promises are irrevocable except by death – you are binding yourselves to each other in a way that supersedes any contract or any other agreement. Then you will make this covenant not only with each other but you are also making it public - with the rest of us and, more importantly, God as witnesses. Jesus said of your marriage: "What **God** has joined together let man not separate."

And lastly, as with biblical covenants, you are making this covenant with ceremony and symbols. With rings, with ritual, and with celebration you are making a covenant here today that will carry the weight of your lives, your children's lives and your witness to the world of God's covenantal love.

That is why we said earlier, "Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

We come now to the heart of this sacred ceremony – your vows."

Sample Wedding prayers

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. We bow before you today because we both humbly acknowledge and gratefully delight in the truth that you are our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As our heavenly Father, you have invited us, urged us, and even graciously commanded us to seek your blessing. And so today we gladly come on behalf of two of your children, _____.

We are immediately reminded of your blessing on them already:

- You chose them, redeemed them, gave them your Holy Spirit and guaranteed them your eternal presence and blessing.
- You have given them a rich physical and spiritual heritage; parents, grandparents and a host of other relatives and friends who have modeled for them what it means to follow Jesus and have prayed for them and held them accountable and will continue to do so.
- You have blessed them with sound minds and strong bodies and have endowed them with gifts of your Spirit to serve each other and your kingdom work in this age.

And now, our God, we ask that you would bless them with growing faith in you that they may withstand the pressures of sin and temptation in all forms and faithfully trust you in all circumstances. Give them neither poverty nor riches, but give them only their daily bread, so they may not have too much and think “Who needs God” or too little and think, “Where is God?”

We ask that you grant them health and long life with which to serve your kingdom purposes.

We ask that you grant them a growing love and understanding of each other AND a continuing willingness to serve each other, thereby making of their marriage a witness to your sanctifying grace.

We ask that you grant them children to nurture in the Lord, to serve with in the work you assign them and to honor them in their old age.

Lastly we ask that you enlighten the eyes of their hearts to know beyond any doubt the hope to which you have called them, the riches of their inheritance in Christ and your incomparably great power to achieve your good purpose in their lives.

Bless them and keep them;

Make your face shine upon them and be gracious to them;

Lift up your countenance upon them and give them peace.

Amen.”

“Lord God, as we gather in your name and presence here today, we are keenly aware of your grace. Thank you God for the work you have done in all our lives to enable us to enjoy the privilege of the presence of these friends and loved ones.

Thank you for the parents who love these two people before me. Thank you for the discipline and encouragement they have given over the years.

But thank you most of all for work you have done in _____ lives - You have shown them yourself, you have convicted them of their need for you , you have saved them by your grace and are now shepherding them each day. They belong to you and you will not fail them.

God help them to be so confident of your love that they always feel the freedom of grace and respond to it in thankfulness and obedience to you.

God grant them such faith in you and your Word that they will cling to its truths even when tempted to waver by discouraging events in their lives and times of emotional distance from each other.

Father, grant them growing love for each other, patience with each other's failings and perseverance in faithfulness to each other.

Bless this marriage, God. Bless these two with health, long life, children, and a satisfying marriage.

Most of all bless them with spiritual fruitfulness. May their life together bear witness to your love and grace. May others want to know you because of the testimony of their relationship to each other and you.

Oh God be gracious to _____ we pray in the name of Jesus.
AMEN”

Symbolism

The unity candle is widely used and its simplicity easily understood. Likewise the mixing of two containers, each containing different colored sand, into one container symbolizes two unique beings becoming one. The braid is less widely used and thus less well known.

“A Cord of Three Strands is not Quickly Broken”

“It was a well-known proverb of the day. Anyone could have said it. We easily say, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” OR “There is strength in numbers.” Just as easily they said, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Anyone hearing it knew instantly what it meant. God has designed us to need each other.

Of all God created in the beginning there is only one creation of which he said, “It is NOT good.” That was when he created a solo human being. And so God created another. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

But why three strands? As certainly as a husband and a wife need each other, so they need the community of faith with Christ as the Lord. Their lives are made stronger by their union and their oneness with us - their family and friends. The braiding of three strands - _____ and _____, and the people of God.”