

## Weddings are a Day, Marriages are a Lifetime

John 2:1-11

6 of 6 in the series *Built to Last: Christian Marriages that Endure*

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### Introduction

**Funny things** happen at **weddings**. I have witnessed brides cry, grooms faint, ring bearers fall asleep, and flower girls show off their underwear. On one memorable occasion, I entered the sanctuary with the groom an entire song before our cue. Rather than admit a mistake, we stood there and smiled at the congregation for five minutes!

Most of the miscues occur when nervous brides and grooms flub a line in their **vows**. Try saying "*for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part*" three times real fast!

One minister tells the story about a groom who came unglued at a wedding ceremony and just couldn't finish his vows. He never made it past "*for better, for worse.*" At the reception, the bride approached the minister and asked with a smile, "*We are really married, aren't we?*" The pastor grinned and said, "Of course!" As she turned away, he added, "Just don't get sick!"

Our society stresses the importance of the **wedding ceremony**—and I use the word “stresses” intentionally! Couples invest tremendous amounts of time, money, and emotion in the service. The average American wedding last year cost about \$25,000—and that did not include the rings and honeymoon.

After months of preparation, however, most weddings last less than thirty minutes; and a “no frills” ceremony without music takes about seven minutes. If you ever see a bride's father crying during the service, it's because he is calculating how much the wedding cost him per minute!

### I. Weddings and Marriages

**Weddings** are a day; and I don't want to downplay their significance. Christians celebrate the union of husband and wife within the context of a worship service. The traditional liturgy begins with the recognition that we are gathered together “*in the sight of God.*” It also recalls that Jesus performed his first miracle while attending a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Certainly the Lord is present whenever a husband and wife enter into a marital covenant before God, family, and friends.

Weddings are a day, but **marriages** are a lifetime. I firmly believe that God is much more interested in a Christian marriage than a church wedding. The ceremony is only the first step in a lifelong commitment.

Marriage is a dynamic, **living relationship** with ups and downs, highs and lows, ebbs and flows. Following the wedding and honeymoon, husband and wife settle into the daily life of marriage. They slowly begin to discover the reality underlying the vows they

made to one another. Their idealized notion of what it means to live with another person bumps nose-first into real life.

In his book entitled *The Five Love Languages*, Gary **Chapman** wrote: “Welcome to the real world of marriage, where hairs are always on the sink and little white spots cover the mirror, where arguments center on what way the toilet paper comes off the roll and whether the lid should be up or down. It’s a world where shoes do not walk to the closet and drawers do not close themselves, where coats do not like hangers, and socks go AWOL during the laundry.”

It is a world where spouses are challenged to live together in the ordinary, daily humdrum of life. The new quickly wears off as love grows out of infatuation. James Hewett illustrates the progression in “**The 7 Stages of the Common Cold in Marriage:**”

- 1) “Oh, Sugar Dumpling, you have fallen ill. We must rush you to the hospital. I’ll bring in food because I do not want you to suffer through the hospital food, and I’ll send you fresh flowers.”
- 2) “Darling, I’m calling the doctor. Go straight to bed and rest. I’ll take care of you.”
- 3) “Lie down. Get some rest. I’ll get some canned soup.”
- 4) “Be sensible. Feed the kids, THEN get some rest.”
- 5) “Take two aspirin.”
- 6) “Gargle or something, but don’t sit around and bark like a seal.”
- 7) “Stop sneezing. You’re going to give me pneumonia!”

## II. The Stages of Marriage

Although each couple is unique, marriages tend to follow similar **patterns**. People change over the years and so do marriages. A husband and wife celebrating their golden anniversary are not the same people who stood before an altar fifty years before.

A young boy and his cousin were attending a wedding. The one boy asked the other, “**How many women** can a man marry?” The other boy did some quick math in his head and then announced with authority, “You can marry 16 women: 4 better, 4 worse, 4 richer, and 4 poorer. 16!”

He was partly right—over the course of marriage, husband and wife will mature into different people. Married couples with children typically experience **nine phases** of married life. (*The Intimate Marriage* by Howard and Charlotte Clinebell identifies eight phases, p.105) For **baseball** fans, think of these stages as the “nine innings” of a game.

Christian marriages that are “built to last” endure in every season of life. The nine phases of marriage include:

- 1) Courtship and Engagement
- 2) Wedding through First Pregnancy
- 3) Parents: Preschool
- 4) Parents: Primary/Elementary School

- 5) Parents: Teens
- 6) Parents: Children Leave Home
- 7) Empty Nest to Retirement
- 8) Retirement to the Death of a Spouse
- 9) Surviving Spouse

We don't have time this morning to discuss each stage in depth. However, it is important to recognize that each **stage** contains its own peculiar challenges and issues along with joys and opportunities. Sometimes we focus on the problems and overlook the blessings. It is always tempting to say, "I'll be glad when THIS phase is over."

I recall when our children were babies, older and wiser parents would say to us, "Enjoy them while they're young—they grow up before you know it." This was difficult advice to believe in the midst of 2 a.m. feedings, dirty diapers, colic, ear aches, and teething. But they were right, and now I find myself telling new parents, "Enjoy them while they're young—they grow up before you know it!"

Wise couples recognize that marriage is a journey. We are called to enjoy each part of the trip with love, drawing faith from the past and hope for the future. Believe it or not, you will miss it when it's gone.

The **transitional times** *between* the stages often create the greatest stress on marriages. During a space shuttle launch, aeronautical engineers talk about the "**Max Q**" of the launch. "Max Q" occurs when the vehicle's velocity and the air's density combine to form the most dynamic pressure. It's one of the most dangerous points of the liftoff.

"Max Q" occurs in marriage when couples move from one stage to the next. During these crisis moments in marriage, spouses must redefine their roles and relationship. Sometimes the old ways of doing things have to be unlearned and new ways embraced. A relationship which has been frozen in one shape thaws and assumes new forms before freezing again.

The crisis can stress a marriage, but it can also enrich a relationship. "*Such periods of transition can be opportunities for discovering new ways of relating, new joys, and satisfaction which can give new depth and height to intimacy.*" (Clinebells, p. 103)

It is important to **invest** one's self in the marriage at every age and stage of life. Those who do so discover the miracle of "*compounding interest.*" The capital you originally invested can grow and multiply over the years. Immature infatuation can grow slowly into a mature love that lasts a lifetime.

Just like baseball, the game can be won or lost in any inning. You have to play your heart out from the first to the last at bat. To quote the great Yogi Berra, "*It ain't over till it's over.*"

### **III. Marriage Vows**

One resource for the journey is to take seriously the **vows** made at the wedding ceremony. I realize that the service itself often goes by in a blur for brides and grooms. So today I invite the married couples in the congregation to revisit the vows you once made. This holy covenant made before God, family, and friends can help instruct us in how to live, love, and last.

The first charge made to the husband and wife begins with the words, “*Will you.*” In order to survive and thrive in every season of marriage, couples must nurture a mature understanding of love. During this series, I have emphasized repeatedly that Christian love is both feeling *and* willing. The commitment a couple makes at its wedding must carry both persons through a lifetime. Husbands and wives say “I will” love you . . . in all times when the feelings of love ebb and flow. “***Will you:***”

- 1) *Love* (feeling and willing love)
- 2) *Comfort* (Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as “the Comforter.”)
- 3) *Honor* (Respect, kindness)
- 4) *Keep* (Keep means to guard—it can also describe a fortress)
  
- 5) *In sickness and in health* (Both will occur—stages of the common cold)
- 6) *Forsaking all others* (Marriage is exclusive: “I do” AND “I don’t”)
- 7) *As long as you both shall live* (Livelong relationship and commitment)

***“I take you:”***

- 1) *To have and to hold* (Don’t underestimate importance of holding)
- 2) *For better, for worse* (See each other at best and worst)
- 3) *For richer, for poorer* (Probably should reverse these two!)
  
- 4) *In sickness and in health* (Note this is repeated twice! Experience at CWL)
- 5) *To love and to cherish* (Cherish—precious)
- 6) *Till death us do part.* (Live and die together)

#### **IV. Renewal of Wedding Vows**

On significant anniversaries that end in a 0 or 5, some couples choose to **renew their marriage vows**. They hold hands and recite the same promises made decades before. My guess is that a couple celebrating its silver or gold anniversary understands the reality of the words much more than they did as a younger bride and groom.

Suppose for a moment, however, that a veteran couple had the chance to go back and rewrite their spouse’s wedding vows. No doubt such a ceremony would much more enlightening and entertaining!

Imagine a couple named **Ken and Barbie** married for twenty-five years. They live in a four-bedroom home with three children, two dogs, and one cat. On their silver anniversary, they decide to write their own renewal vows—but here’s the catch—they decide to write their spouse’s vows! What would each person want the other to promise? The service *might* sound something like this.

**KEN:** “I, Ken, take thee, Barbie, to be my wedded wife, to have and to cuddle from this day forward. I promise to put the toilet seat down, pick wet towels off the bathroom floor, and not clip my toenails in bed. I will read your mind and know what it really means when you say, ‘Nothing’s wrong!’

I will leave my boots on the carport, take out the trash, wash your car, and watch the ‘Home and Garden’ channel on TV with you. At Valentine’s, I will buy flannel robes rather than silk teddies. I will remember that camouflage is never a good fashion choice and eating at Arby’s is not your idea of a night out.

Finally, I vow to answer ‘Yes, dear’ to whatever you might say. God, help me. Uh, I mean, so help me God!”

**BARBIE:** “I, Barbie, take thee, Ken, to be my wedded husband, to pamper and indulge from this day forward. I will never wear curlers to bed, hang pantyhose on the shower, or use your razor for shaving.

I grant full custody of the TV remote to you. I realize that channel surfing is a legitimate sport and watching three television shows at once is not abnormal for males.

I will always check my car’s gas gauge, oil level, and tire pressure. I will never complain when you snore. I will drive the car only if I’m seated behind the steering wheel. I vow to load the dishwasher correctly, clean the dryer lint trap, be ready to leave on time, and never ask, ‘Are you wearing THAT?’

God better help us both! So help me God.”

Planning a beautiful wedding is a singular challenge. Maintaining a healthy marriage is a lifelong commitment. Anniversaries are earned one day at a time. Here is the reality: couples choose to renew their vows each day. In every situation and circumstance, we decide whether we will remain true to the promises made before God and others. During some seasons of marriage, this is easy to do. During other stages of marriage, it is a difficult challenge. But it is a commitment to keep these vows that creates Christian marriages that endure.

## **Conclusion**

One of my favorite Christian authors is **Frederick Buechner**. I thought it was fitting to conclude the “Built to Last” series with his words about marriage.

“They say they will love, comfort, honor each other to the end of their days. They say they will cherish each other and be faithful to each other always. They say they will do these things not just when they feel like it, but even—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health—when they don’t feel like it at all.

In other words, the vows they make at a marriage could hardly be more extravagant. They give away their freedom. They take on each others’ burdens. They bind their lives together in ways that are even more painful to unbind emotionally, humanly than they are to unbind legally. The question is, what do they get in return?

They get each other in return. Assuming they have any success at all in keeping their rash, quixotic promises, they never have to face the world quite alone again. There will always be the other to talk to, to listen to. If they’re lucky, even after the first passion

passes, they still have a kindness and a patience to depend on, a change to be patient and kind. There is still someone to get through the night with, to wake into the new day beside. If they have children, they can give them, as well as each other, roots and wings. If they don't have children, they each become the other's child.

They both still have their lives apart as well as a life together. They both still have their separate ways to find. But a marriage made in heaven is one where a man and a woman become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone.

When Jesus changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, perhaps it was a way of saying more or less the same thing."

(Frederick Buechner, Beyond Words, p. 242-3)

May God grant us the grace to create enduring marriages that are "built to last."  
Amen.