

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

During this special time of engagement, couples are encouraged to be intentional about building a foundation for marriage that reflects God's love, wisdom, and grace. While the wedding day is an important milestone, the covenant made before God and each other is eternal. "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Investing in each other, seeking God's guidance, and celebrating this beautiful journey toward becoming one in Christ is the greatest preparation of all.

GOING FURTHER: RESOURCES

The Meaning of Marriage by Timothy Keller (with Kathy Keller)

Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas

Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married by Gary Chapman

You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity by Francis and Lisa Chan

Preparing for Marriage by Dennis Rainey

The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman

Boundaries in Marriage by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

For Women Only and *For Men Only* by Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn

Love and Respect by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

The Mingling of Souls by Matt Chandler

DEVOTIONALS FOR COUPLES

Devotions for a Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas

Preparing Your Heart for Marriage: Devotions for Engaged Couples by Gary Thomas

Closer: 52 Devotions to Draw Couples Together by Jim and Cathy Burns

Cherish by Gary Thomas



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WE'RE ENGAGED, NOW WHAT?

GETTING READY FOR MARRIAGE

Few seasons in life are filled with as much joy and anticipation as the time spent preparing to get married. This is an incredible opportunity not just to plan a wedding but to establish a strong foundation for life together as husband and wife.

Engaged couples have probably heard it said that as they plan their wedding, they shouldn't forget to plan their marriage. But it may feel abstract to "plan a marriage" in the midst of the more tangible (and demanding) project of planning a wedding. How does a couple do it?

STEP ONE: LEARN FROM OTHERS

Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." Surrounding a relationship with wise mentors and seeking premarital counseling can set that relationship on a path of wisdom and growth.

Research shows that couples who engage in premarital counseling are 30% less likely to divorce and report significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction. Additionally, seeking advice from a seasoned Christian couple can provide real-life examples of how to navigate the joys and challenges of marriage.

Consider setting up regular meetings with a couple whose relationship reflects Christ-centered love and humility. Asking them about their struggles, victories, and the biblical principles they've leaned on to keep their marriage strong is a worthwhile investment.

STEP TWO: PLAN WITH PATIENCE

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us, "For everything there is a season, and a time

for every matter under heaven.” The engagement season is not just for planning a wedding day but also for learning how to grow as a couple.

The way a couple plans their wedding reflects the way they approach decision-making as a team. This time can be used to cultivate habits of patience, selflessness, and unity. For example:

- When disagreements arise over details, practice mutual submission as described in Ephesians 5:21: “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- Beginning a tradition of intentional connection, such as a weekly date night or times of prayer together, can be a bedrock for the future marriage.

The small decisions a couple makes now—like setting a budget or prioritizing family relationships—can shape the habits and values that will carry over into their life together.

STEP THREE: DISCOVER THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Marriage isn’t just a social contract or a personal decision—it’s a divine covenant. Genesis 2:24 declares, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This covenant mirrors the sacrificial love Christ has for His church.

Ephesians 5:25–27 says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (verses 25–26). This kind of love requires putting your spouse’s needs above your own—a countercultural call to selflessness in a world that often prioritizes personal happiness.

Understanding the biblical purpose of marriage will give a relationship eternal significance and keep a couple grounded when challenges arise.

STEP FOUR: CREATE A MEANINGFUL EVENT

While a wedding is a joyful celebration, it’s important to keep priorities in perspective. Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

A wedding day is an opportunity to honor God, unite families, and celebrate the covenant with Christ at the center. Being intentional about creating a ceremony that reflects core values and points others toward the hope found in Christ is a meaningful gift to all who attend.

Statistics show that the average wedding in the U.S. costs over \$28,000, but research also indicates that simpler ceremonies often lead to less fi-

nancial stress in the early years of marriage—a common source of conflict for many couples. By focusing on what truly matters, couples can create a celebration that blesses them and others without compromising their future.

STEP FIVE: DRAW CLOSER TO GOD TOGETHER

Psalm 127:1 reminds us, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” The engagement season is a wonderful time to deepen a relationship with God as a couple.

- Establish a routine of praying together daily.
- Dive into God’s Word together, perhaps starting with passages on love and marriage, such as 1 Corinthians 13 or Colossians 3:12–14.
- Consider a devotional or book on Christian marriage to help align hearts with God’s design for the relationship.

STEP SIX: PASTORAL COUNSELLING

Proverbs 24:3–4: “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”

As couples prepare for marriage, they have likely thought of almost everything—flowers, invitations, a menu, and more. But there are still a few essential conversations to have before saying, “I do.” Premarital counseling provides the perfect opportunity to explore topics that may not have been fully considered yet.

Many churches offer a counseling program that typically involves six sessions over about six weeks. This isn’t just a checklist item; it’s a refreshing time of laughter, discovery, and meaningful discussion. Counseling helps couples and their partners strengthen their relationship by addressing key areas such as communication, conflict resolution, finances, and spiritual unity.

It also gives the pastoral team an opportunity to get to know the relationship better so the church can walk alongside couples throughout their marriage journey. Whether or not a pastor is officiating the ceremony, the wisdom, tools, and resources gained from these sessions are invaluable for building a Christ-centered marriage.

This time of preparation isn’t just about solving problems or checking boxes—it’s about investing in a strong foundation for the future together. Taking the time to prioritize these conversations is one of the most worthwhile steps a couple can take to prepare for a lifetime of love and partnership.