

Christian Marriage: An Introduction for Engaged Couples

Congratulations on your engagement! We are excited for you both, and honored to be invited to participate in the celebration of your marriage!

A Christian Understanding of Marriage

God promises unconditional faithfulness to His children, and in Jesus God gave His life for our salvation in love. Through these beloved people, for whom He died, God seeks to bless the world.

Christian marriage is patterned after this love of God. In marriage, both parties give themselves to the other in love, until death, and seek to bless one another and the world around them through their relationship.

Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant- an unconditional commitment- between an imperfect man and an imperfect woman, binding both to self-giving love and exclusive fidelity, patterned after the love of Jesus Christ. The Rite of Holy Matrimony is a worship service of the church, in which the couple exchanges vows to uphold this covenant. They do this before God and in the presence of witnesses, who pray that God will bless their life together.

Marriage has been established by God for particular reasons: for the procreation of children (and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord); for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity amongst God's people; and for the revelation of God's love to the world.

(adapted from the Book of Common Prayer 2019)

Four Important Considerations

Therefore, Christian marriage joyfully unites two Christians, persons who are first committed to Christ, who have received His perfect grace and can extend the same to their future spouse (albeit imperfectly)- persons who seek to live according to His word.

Living according to God's word means many things, but four implications are particularly important in approaching marriage today.

First, marriage welcomes two people into complete honesty with each other. Here a great joy and freedom (that of being truly known and still deeply loved) is achieved through great promise (the marriage vows) and great risk (that of being truly vulnerable with one another). Secrets kept from one another, even when intended to protect oneself, the other, or the relationship, undermine the freedom and joy possible in a covenant of love. **Thus, to live into the full**

promise of Christian marriage is to commit to totally honesty with one another- starting now. It is far better for uncomfortable truths to be brought into the light now than to wait until vows have been exchanged.

The good news of Jesus is that God's covenant with us precedes our covenants with one another: He knows our hearts and histories, and loves us still. This love can give us the courage to share our greatest fears and shames with those we love, and likewise can give us the strength to forgive and love those who have kept secrets from us. Nevertheless, this can seem an impossible task. Please speak to a pastor or counselor for help in pursuing transparency with one another, now and in future.

Second, God's word directly addresses sex. Sex, as understood in God's word, is the apex of mutual self-giving love. It is powerful and mysterious. In its highest form, it expresses, deepens, and rewards mutual vulnerability with great passion and joy. In its lowest form, it can become self-seeking and cruel, confusing to our sense of self and can limit our ability to be vulnerable again. This is proven true both by God's word and by our experience. This is why God has placed sexual intercourse within the secure, loving bonds of marriage- that is, **God commands that that we refrain from giving ourselves to each other sexually until we have given ourselves to each other in the rest of life.**

Few if any come to marriage without some sexual history- some of which we willingly participated in, and some which has been done to us against our will. Both are common, and both are grievous. And Jesus has come to redeem them both. Jesus offers forgiveness and healing for whatever we have done against his will or against others- and he extends true healing and restoration to those who have suffered at the hands of others. For those who come to marriage with complicated sexual histories, to now live according to Christ's word is to repent of sin and to ask his forgiveness where needed for our own sinful choices, to seek his healing both for the effects of our choices and the effects we have suffered at the hands of others, and to practice abstinence until the marriage. We are available to help you through any and all of this process, and for further conversation on the matter.

Third, because Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant, **the Christian cannot consider divorce as a viable option** (except in the case of adultery, abuse, or abandonment). Prenuptial agreements are therefore out-of-place in a Christian marriage. Nor can the Christian pursue remarriage after divorce, *except when the prior marriage covenant has been broken through*

adultery, abuse, or abandonment, and then only with great deliberation, prayer and counsel (and, in the Anglican tradition, with the consent of the Bishop).¹

Fourth and finally, marriage takes a village. It is a call to lay one's life down for another, day in and day out, for the rest of one's life. In this mutual, self-giving, covenantal love, we find the freedom and joy for which we were created, and the greatest challenge of most of our lives. You will need help. **Therefore the Christian marriage must be anchored within a Christian community**, a church body which will support and encourage both husband and wife in their love for God and one another, and in their service to the world. Those pursuing Christian marriage must therefore commit to finding and joining a local church. We are here for you.

These four implications of the word of God are good tests for our level of commitment to one another and to God. Are you willing to commit to these four commands of God as you seek His blessing on this marriage?

SAMs Wedding Process²

1. First informational meeting (introductions, and this document)
2. Completing the Marriage Questionnaire (individually)
3. Completing a Psychological Assessment (personality/psych test, usually by a licensed counselor, with a follow-up discussion with the same)
4. Completing Premarital Counseling (multiple topical sessions, 5-7 usually)
5. Completing the Wedding Ceremony Planning Worksheet with a Pastor
6. Obtaining a Marriage License
7. The Wedding Ceremony!

¹ This is a hard teaching. Please talk to us if you have questions or special circumstances. There are other cases which may prove to be exceptions (ie, When the divorced party was converted *after* their first marriage).

² This process may be amended under exceptional circumstances.