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Wedding Ministry Starter Kit

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Check every name, pronoun and detail before you use this.

Start here

If a couple has just asked you to marry them, work through the kit in this order:

1. **Read Resource 5** to decide your own practices before you say yes. Mine are there as an example, not a rule.
2. **Meet the couple** using Resource 2.
3. **Build the ceremony** from the core order in Resource 4, add the optional sections the couple wants, and pick one sermon approach.
4. **Run the rehearsal and the day** from the checklist in Resource 3.
5. **Read Resource 1 the night before.**

Five resources:

1. Wedding Thoughts and Tips
2. Couple Meeting and Premarital Preparation Guide
3. Rehearsal and Wedding Day Checklist
4. Customizable Wedding Ceremony and Sermon Templates
5. My Approach to Officiating and Ongoing Marriage Care

RESOURCE 1 OF 5

Wedding Thoughts and Tips

1. So much of this day revolves around the bride. The groom is a really close second and nobody else matters. If the parents or anyone else is giving the bride or groom a hard time, you step in and have their back.
2. You will be looked at as the one to have a plan. When nobody else knows what to do, even when they have a wedding planner, give everyone the plan. Communicate clearly, calmly, and with a smile.
3. Be the calmest person in the room and look for ways to create moments. I always have the groomsmen surround the groom in the room before they go out and pray over him. And I have the dad and best man put hands on the groom's shoulders, and I pray.
4. Speak clear and loud so that everybody can hear. This is one thing that I see a lot of pastors do wrong. People in the back of the room want to hear what you are saying and often the mic is either too low or glitchy.
5. During the actual ceremony, make sure to keep steady eye contact and focus on the bride and groom. They are already nervous and you making eye contact with them with a calm presence will put them at ease.
6. Don't rock side to side or fidget your hands. Just keep a grounded and comfortable stance as everyone walks down the aisle. You will be first down the aisle and people will be watching the groom.
7. When it is just you and the groom at the front, I usually give the groom a wink, put my hand on his shoulder, or say something to him that no one else can hear to try and ease his nerves.
8. Show up way early. One thing I don't want anyone worrying about is "Where is the pastor?!" Wear a simple and plain suit and tie, save your notes offline (don't rely on WiFi), and be available for soundcheck.
9. Don't worry about looking at your notes when you need to. People are much less focused on that than you realize. Just look at the bride and groom in the eyes when you're sharing something personal or a charge to them.
10. Be funny, but not too funny. You're not a comedian, but it always brings a lot of fun and lightens the room with a little laughter. A funny story or memory, or something in regards to something that happened that day. For example, I once joked with the groom at the intro about going ahead and speeding up the ceremony. That was planned.

> You're going to do great! Don't feel the pressure to use all of these tips or any of them. Just offering up some lessons learned.

Four notes on the ten

- *Tips 1 and 2.* Having the couple's back works best alongside the planner or coordinator, not over them. Agree before the day who makes which calls.
- *Tips 3 and 7.* Ask the groom ahead of time whether he wants the prayer huddle and who should be in it. Some people do not want to be touched or prayed over in front of others.
- *Tip 10.* Clear any joke or story about the couple with them first.
- *Tip 8.* "A simple and plain suit and tie" is my habit. Ask the couple what they would like you to wear.

RESOURCE 2 OF 5

Couple Meeting and Premarital Preparation Guide

Why I do this with every couple

> I only marry people that I do marriage counseling with. I do this for several different reasons. One, I want to ensure that I have had appropriate time to present the gospel and disciple them on marriage. Two, I want the marriage to not only survive, but thrive for the long haul. I want to look back in 30 years and know that the majority of the people I married are still married. And three, I want to see if there is anything glaring in the relationship that they may have overlooked. If they discover something about each other and choose not to get married, then that is better than them finding out after marriage and getting a divorce.

The first meeting

Allow about an hour.

- Hear their story: how they met, how they got engaged, what they love about each other.
- Ask each of them about their faith.
- Explain how you work: what you ask of couples, how many sessions, and what you will and will not do (see Resource 5).
- Get the basics: date, place, planner or coordinator, size of the wedding.
- Set the dates for your sessions before they leave.

The tool I use

> I use Prepare and Enrich for marriage counseling, and for current married couples for a check in.

That is my practice, not an endorsement or a requirement. Nothing from that tool is reproduced here. If you want to use it or any other assessment, check its own training and access requirements. You can prepare a couple well without one.

A simple set of sessions

Here is a simple set of sessions you can adapt. Use as many as you need.

Session 1: The Gospel and the foundation

- Present the Gospel plainly. For me this is the first reason for premarital counseling.
- Picture a triangle with each of you at a bottom corner and the Lord at the top. As you each grow closer to Jesus, you grow closer together.
- Read Matthew 19:5-6.

Session 2: Commitment

- "A successful marriage is not defined by the absence of conflict, it is defined by the presence of commitment."
- "The most exciting days are ahead but the hardest days are ahead also."
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

Session 3: Communication and conflict

From Parker's teaching "The Art of Communication":

- "So much of communication is about learning not lecturing."
- "Extend grace, give space."
- Questions to practice with each other: "How are you doing?" "What did I say that hurt you?" "What did you mean when you said ___?" "How can I support you better in this season?" "How is our pace this season?" "Is there anything you need from me?"
- "Jess and I made a commitment early in our marriage that we were going to honor one another privately and publicly."
- Read James 1:19-20 and Proverbs 18:13.

Session 4: Serving each other

From the teaching "I Need You", which works through Ephesians 5:22-33:

- "Men & Women are EQUAL!"
- "Submission not servitude."
- "Serving not dictating... the best leadership is servant leadership not dictatorship."
- "God didn't call the husband to lead with an iron fist but hands that serve."
- "The point is not perfection. It's growing together."

Session 5: Intimacy, family and money

- Parker's definition: "Sex that brings glory to God and lasting pleasure to each other is the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual act of covenant love, mutual submission, and intimate discovery between a husband and a wife."

- Children and faith at home: read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. "Truth must be in you before it can be taught to others."
- Money, in-laws and expectations. Discussion starter: "How was money handled in the home you grew up in, and what do you expect now?"

Session 6: Planning the ceremony

Ask the couple:

- Vows: repeat after me, answer "I do," write their own, or a combination?
- Communion: yes or no? Just the two of them, or an invitation to others?
- Will someone give the bride away? What words do they want used?
- Who would they like to pray, and is anyone uncomfortable being prayed over or touched?
- Any family situations you should know about before the rehearsal?
- How do they want to be introduced at the end?
- Phones and photos during the ceremony?
- The marriage license: who brings it, who signs, who files? **Verify the requirements where the wedding takes place.**

Things Jess and I have learned along the way

1. Dialogue daily, date weekly, depart quarterly
2. Don't compare, don't compete, do compliment
3. Sex on the regular
4. You can have control or you can have intimacy, but you can't have both
5. God first, spouse second, kids third, everyone else. The order matters

When something is not ordinary conflict

Every couple argues. Abuse and coercion are something else, and commitment language must never be used to keep someone in danger.

> If you are living in an abusive situation, it is not God's desire or design for you to remain in that situation. You should seek immediate help to remove yourself from that situation and find biblical counsel to guide you through your healing and decision making process.

- If you see fear, control, threats or violence, do not treat it as a communication problem and do not work on it in joint sessions.
- Make it possible to speak with each person alone.

- Bring in qualified help: a licensed counselor, a domestic violence service, or emergency services if someone is in danger.
- It is right to pause or decline a wedding.
- Refer on anything beyond your training, including addiction, serious mental health concerns and legal questions.

RESOURCE 3 OF 5

Rehearsal and Wedding Day Checklist

The week before

- ☐ Send the couple the full order of ceremony and get their yes
- ☐ Confirm names, pronunciations and how they want to be introduced
- ☐ Confirm the license plan. Verify local requirements for the officiant, witnesses and filing
- ☐ Agree roles with the planner or coordinator: who cues what, who makes which decisions
- ☐ Confirm who cues the start and who makes the call if weather or sound changes the plan
- ☐ Clear any story or joke with the couple
- ☐ Print your notes and save a copy offline

The rehearsal

- ☐ Arrive early and find the planner or coordinator first
- ☐ Walk the processional and recessional in order
- ☐ Show everyone where to stand
- ☐ Walk through each handoff: giving away, vows, rings, communion, kiss
- ☐ Decide who holds the rings and any vow books
- ☐ Tell the wedding party when you will say "You may be seated"
- ☐ Practice the repeat-after-me lines once, in short phrases
- ☐ End with prayer if the couple wants it

Wedding day: before the ceremony

- ☐ Show up way early
- ☐ Be available for soundcheck. Check that the back of the room can hear you
- ☐ Check in with the planner, photographer and musicians
- ☐ Confirm the license and rings are on site
- ☐ Gather the groomsmen around the groom and pray, if he wants that
- ☐ Check on the bride through the planner or a family member
- ☐ Be the calmest person in the room

During the ceremony

- ☐ Grounded stance; no rocking or fidgeting
- ☐ A quiet word to the groom while you wait together
- ☐ Say "You may be seated" after the bride arrives
- ☐ Speak clear and loud
- ☐ Eyes on the couple, especially for the charge
- ☐ Feed vow and ring lines in short phrases
- ☐ Pause before the pronouncement

After the ceremony

- ☐ Give the dismissal announcement the couple asked for. Example: "Family, you can remain here as the bride and groom would love to take pictures with you. Everyone else, please join us [location] as we continue to celebrate this beautiful couple."
- ☐ Complete the license as local rules require, and confirm who is responsible for filing it
- ☐ Greet both families
- ☐ Put a check-in with the couple on your calendar (see Resource 5)

RESOURCE 4 OF 5

Customizable Wedding Ceremony and Sermon Templates

Before printing

Replace every name and placeholder. Choose the vow form, optional sections, sermon approach, and final introduction with the couple. Remove unused alternatives and rehearsal notes. Read the whole ceremony out loud once.

The core ceremony

Nine steps. Optional sections are marked. The order follows Parker's ceremonies.

1. Processional

Agree the order with the couple and coordinator. In my usual flow, I go first and wait with the groom before the bride enters.

2. Optional: giving away

> Who gives this woman away to be married to this man?

Answers in the sources: "I do" or "Her mother and I." Agree the words and who answers with the couple and family beforehand. Then: "You may be seated."

3. Welcome

> Good evening! On behalf of [Groom] and [Bride] I'd like to welcome you and thank you for coming today as we celebrate the ordinance of marriage. Marriage was ordained by God Himself at the very beginning of human history, and we honor marriage as Scripture calls us to do (Hebrews 13:4). It is fitting on this occasion that we seek God's blessings.

4. Opening prayer

> Father, we thank you for this beautiful day where we can come together, family and friends, to praise you for this couple that stands before us! We know that you've been writing their story since before they were born and you knew this day could come. Your ways are perfect and we praise you in all things. We pray that today you receive all the glory! Amen!

Optional: family and friends pray. Invite people forward to lay hands on the couple and pray. Tell them, "When I say 'Jesus' name,' we'll all say amen together." Only with the couple's agreement.

5. Scripture and message

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 from the CSB, then give the message. If you intend to stop at the first sentence of verse 8, mark your reading 13:4-8a. Choose one of the sermon approaches below.

6. Vows

Have the couple face each other. Choose one form, or combine one with personal vows.

Repeat-after-me vows

> I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife/husband. Before God and these witnesses I promise to be faithful to you. I will tell you the truth and listen when you tell me yours. I will forgive you as Christ has forgiven me. I will pray for you, stand with you in hard days and celebrate with you in good ones, for as long as we both shall live.

Question format

> [Name], do you take [Name] to be your wife/husband? Before God and these witnesses, do you promise to be faithful, to speak truthfully and listen with care, to forgive as Christ has forgiven you, and to pray for and stand with [Name] in hard days and good ones, for as long as you both shall live?

Response: “I do.” Repeat for the other person.

Optional: personal vows. The couple may write and read their own, before or after the spoken vows. Ask to see them in advance so they are similar in length.

7. Optional: communion

> [Groom] and [Bride] have a conviction that Jesus Christ is to be the foundation of their lives. Therefore they are going to take communion as a symbol of that conviction. Communion is recognizing the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time to remember the sacrifice that was made for the atonement of our sins.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

The couple takes communion on their own while family and friends look on. That is my normal practice.

Variation: if the couple wants to invite others, add: "Communion is for followers of Christ. If you have made a profession of faith then please join us for this time of remembrance." Follow your church's practice.

8. Rings

Ring pledge

"[Groom], in placing this ring on [Bride]'s finger, repeat after me:"

> [Name], I give you this ring as a sign of my promise and my love. Wear it and remember that I am yours, today and for the rest of my life.

Repeat for the bride.

Optional: blessing. Pray over the couple or read Numbers 6:24-26. End with "And everyone said? Amen!"

9. Pronouncement, kiss and presentation

> [Groom] and [Bride], today we have heard you make your promises and watched you exchange rings. We stand with you as you begin this marriage. May your home be a place where you serve each other, welcome grace, and keep growing in your love for Jesus.
>
> By the power vested in me by the State of [jurisdiction — verify locally] and our Lord Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you husband and wife! [Groom], you may kiss your bride. Family and friends, please welcome [the introduction the couple chose]!

Confirm local eligibility and ceremony, license, witness and filing requirements before using any legal pronouncement. Changing the words does not establish legal authority. If a religious celebration is separate from legal solemnization, arrange and verify those roles beforehand. A Lord-only phrase may be considered for that religious portion after the distinction is clear.

Building the message

- Keep it short. The couple is standing.
- Open with a personal word about the couple, using only what they have cleared.
- Read the passage, give one main idea, and speak directly to them.
- If guests may not know Jesus, say plainly where this kind of love comes from.

Four sermon approaches

Approach 1: Love that lasts

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

- "I have to be honest with y'all, the most exciting days are ahead but the hardest days are ahead also."

- "The closer you lean in together, it gets both more beautiful and more messy. Things that have never bothered you are now the end of the world."
- "The fact that the trash hasn't been taken out will feel like a bigger deal than it really is."
- "The way you love the Lord, and the way you love each other, will carry you through the highs and lows."
- A successful marriage takes commitment through ordinary conflict. Keep practicing patience, kindness, hope and perseverance together.

Commitment here means working through ordinary conflict. It is never a reason to stay in abuse. See Resource 2.

Approach 2: Relentless pursuit

Text: Matthew 19:5-6

- "If I could give you any advice for the future it would be to continue that RELENTLESS PURSUIT."
- "First, to the Lord." Use the triangle: "As you each grow closer to Jesus individually, you can't help but grow closer together."
- "Secondly, to your bride." Speak to each of them about pursuing the other. The source material here was personal to each couple and is withheld; write your own.
- "Someone once told me that there is a unique equation in marriage where 1+1=1."

Approach 3: You never have to go alone

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

- "No matter what's ahead you never have to go alone."
- "Whether you're traveling to the ends of the earth or to the kitchen for a late night bowl of cereal you will always have each other."
- "The things you love about each other and the things that drive you crazy."
- (This is an application, not something the passage itself states.) The passage commends companionship. You can invite the couple to build their marriage around the Lord as a Christian application; do not say the text explicitly names him as the third strand.

Approach 4: Don't compare, don't compete, do compliment

Text: Matthew 19:5-6

- **Don't compare.** "You are on the journey God has called you to. Stay focused on the calling on your life knowing that comparison kills purpose."

- **Don't compete.** "You're not in competition with each other. You are running this race together, and you will cross the finish line together... The goal is not competing, or winning, the goal is progressing together as one."
- **Do compliment.** "Keep honor at the center of your marriage. Honor God, honor each other, and honor others. Encourage each other often and be each other's biggest supporters and protectors."

A fifth idea, outline only: covenant, not contract

"This oneness in marriage is not simply a contract, but a divine covenant before God." The manuscript's fuller wording for this theme was borrowed from other writers and is not reproduced. If you preach it, read Matthew 19:5-6 and Ephesians 5:31-32, and write the contrasts in your own words.

RESOURCE 5 OF 5

My Approach to Officiating and Ongoing Marriage Care

These are my pastoral practices and convictions. They are not rules for every pastor. Settle your own before a couple asks, and follow your church's and denomination's requirements.

Who I marry

> I personally don't like marrying somebody that I do not know. It is not to say that I would never do that, but I would encourage that person to find somebody that they know and are close to before asking me.

> I do not marry people that are unequally yoked. Meaning that one spouse is a believer, and the other is not. I will, however, marry two believers and two nonbelievers. My pastor always told me that marrying a couple who are not believers is a great opportunity for evangelism.

> If marrying two nonbelievers, I would still do the exact same marriage counseling that I would do if they were two believers. The goal is to present a biblical model for marriage and to show what it would look like going into marriage without a foundation in their faith.

> What do you do with two Christian people wanting to get married, but are currently living together, or have children and are living together? I would still marry them, but I would ask them to honor God by not sleeping together until their wedding night, and I would encourage them to get married very quickly!

> I do not marry people of the same gender. I do not believe that that is biblical or appropriate for pastors.

Counseling comes with it

> I only marry people that I do marriage counseling with.

My three reasons and the way I run the sessions are in Resource 2.

My practice on wedding honorariums

> I do not ask for an honorarium or for them to cover travel expenses. I consider it an honor and blessing to marry people and I leave it up to them on if they want to compensate or not.

After the wedding

> I want to look back in 30 years and know that the majority of the people I married are still married.

- I use the same tool I use for premarital counseling with "current married couples for a check in."
- Three steps I give couples who are struggling to communicate: "Get alone with God. Go on a date with your spouse. Go on a walk with a trusted friend."
- The five things Jess and I have learned are in Resource 2.

An optional check-in rhythm

- ☐ A message a month after the wedding
- ☐ A meal or a call around six months
- ☐ A note on the first anniversary
- ☐ An open door: tell them on the wedding day that they can always call

When a couple is in trouble

- Listen to both of them before you advise.
- Know the counselors in your area and refer early.
- If there is abuse or coercion, safety comes first. See Resource 2.