



PREMARITAL COUNSELING

BEFORE MEETING 1: KNOWING YOUR STORY

Complete these questions individually before the first meeting. Bring your answers with you. You don't need to write an essay. A few thoughtful sentences for each question is enough.

1. Why do you want to marry this person? What qualities do you most appreciate about them?
2. What are you most looking forward to about marriage?
3. What are you most nervous or uncertain about as you think about marriage?
4. What do you think makes a marriage healthy and successful?
5. What role do you want your relationship with Jesus and involvement in the church to have in your marriage?
6. Is there anything you believe we need to make sure we discuss during premarital counseling?

Come prepared to answer: Twenty-five years from now, what kind of marriage do you hope you have?

PASTOR MEETING 1: YOUR STORY & GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

The goal of the first meeting is to get to know the couple and understand the relationship they are building. Talk about how they met, what they appreciate about one another, why they want to get married, and their hopes and dreams for their marriage.

MARRIAGE IS GOD'S DESIGN AND GOD'S GIFT

A healthy marriage is built on more than attraction or emotion. You receive one another as a gift from God and choose to build a life together.

18 The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. **20** So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. **21** So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with

flesh. **22** Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. **25** Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. **GENESIS 2:18-25**

Marriage is not simply a relationship we create because two people love each other. God designed it and gives it to us for our good.

Genesis 2 also teaches us that we were created for relationship. God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Marriage is one of God’s gifts of companionship. Your spouse becomes the person with whom you share life in a unique way.

The word “helper” does not communicate inferiority. It describes someone who comes alongside another with the strength needed. God created husband and wife to share life, help one another, encourage one another, and accomplish together what God has called them to do.

Verse 25 gives us another beautiful picture of God's intention: “They were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Marriage should become the safest human relationship in your life. You should increasingly be able to be known honestly and completely while knowing you are still loved.

Discuss

- How did you begin your relationship? How has God knit you together since?
- What is one thing that you look forward to about marriage?
- How would you describe the marriage that you want to build?

MARRIAGE FORMS A NEW FAMILY

Marriage creates something new. You are not simply adding a spouse to your existing family. You are creating a new family. Your relationship with your parents and siblings remains important, but your primary human relationship changes.

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ **5** and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? **6** So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” **MATTHEW 19:4-6**

Jesus goes back to Genesis when He explains marriage. He says a man will leave his father and mother, unite with his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

Leaving does not mean abandoning or dishonoring your family. It means recognizing that your spouse now becomes your first priority among your human relationships. Decisions about money, holidays, schedules, children, traditions, and the future must increasingly be made together rather than being determined by either family of origin.

Every person enters marriage with an idea of what is “normal.” How your family handled money, conflict, affection, discipline, holidays, faith, chores, communication, and even dinner can shape what you expect from your spouse. The challenge is that your spouse grew up with a different version of normal. The goal isn't to decide whose family did everything correctly. The goal is to intentionally decide together: What kind of family are we going to build?

Jesus also emphasizes the permanence of this new relationship: “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” Marriage is a covenant. You are choosing to build your life around the commitment that you are on the same team.

Activity: Create a simple family tree/genogram together. Discuss parents, grandparents, siblings, marriages, divorces, conflict, communication, faith, finances, addiction, significant losses, and other family patterns. The purpose is not to diagnose their families but to identify patterns they may unknowingly bring into their own marriage.

Discuss

- What did your family do that you want to carry into your marriage?
- What would you like to do differently?
- What expectations from your family could create tension in your marriage?
- How involved do you expect your parents and extended family to be in your lives?
- What traditions do you want to continue, change, or create?

MARRIAGE IS MEANT TO MAKE US MORE LIKE JESUS

Marriage is designed to bring happiness and companionship, but God also uses marriage to shape our character.

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her **26** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, **27** and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. **28** In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— **30** for we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. **EPHESIANS 5:21-33**

Marriage exposes things in us that other relationships can sometimes hide. Selfishness, impatience, pride, insecurity, control, anger, and unrealistic expectations eventually surface when

two people share life together. Those moments are not necessarily evidence that something is wrong with your marriage. They can become opportunities for God to change you.

Ephesians 5 begins with an important principle: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Christian marriage begins with two people asking, "How can I love and serve you?" rather than constantly asking, "What am I getting from you?"

Paul points husbands to Jesus as the model of love: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Biblical leadership is never permission for selfishness, control, or domination. Jesus demonstrates leadership through sacrificial love. A husband should continually ask, "How can I use my strength, influence, and leadership for the good of my wife and family?"

Paul also calls wives to respect their husbands and willingly participate in this Christ-centered relationship. Both husband and wife learn to lay aside selfishness and seek the other's good. This changes the question we ask when marriage becomes difficult. Instead of only asking, "Why isn't my spouse changing?" we also learn to ask, "Jesus, what are You trying to change in me?"

Your spouse will never be perfect, and neither will you. That means every healthy marriage requires grace, repentance, forgiveness, patience, humility, and sacrifice.

Marriage also tells a bigger story. Paul says the relationship between a husband and wife points toward Christ and the church. Your marriage can give the people around you a picture of faithful, sacrificial, covenant love. The goal isn't simply to stay married. The goal is to follow Jesus together and love one another more and more like Jesus.

Discuss

- What qualities in your future spouse already make you better?
- What selfish tendencies do you recognize in yourself?
- What would sacrificial love look like in your marriage?
- How can you help one another become more like Jesus?
- If someone watched your marriage 20 years from now, what would you want them to learn about Jesus from the way you love one another?

BEFORE MEETING 2: WHAT WE BRING TO MARRIAGE

Your first meeting included creating a family tree and identifying patterns involving marriage, communication, conflict, faith, finances, loss, and other significant family experiences. The homework builds directly on that conversation.

Complete this assignment together. Each person should first identify:

- Three things from my family I want us to continue
- Three things from my family I want us to do differently
- One family pattern I recognize in myself that could affect our marriage
- One strength from my family background that I believe I bring into our marriage

Then discuss these questions together:

Communication: When I'm upset, do I want to talk immediately or need time to process? What makes me feel heard? What causes me to shut down?

Conflict: What did conflict look like in my family? Did we talk, argue, yell, withdraw, pretend nothing happened, or resolve things well?

Money: What did my family teach me about spending, saving, debt, generosity, and financial security? What priorities do I have when it comes to money?

Affection: How did my family express love? Were affection and encouragement common or uncommon?

Faith: What role did faith and church have in my family? What do we want spiritual life to look like in our home?

Family: How involved do we expect our parents and extended families to be after we're married?

Marriage: What expectations do I have about marriage that I may have never actually communicated to you?

Finish this sentence for each other:

"One thing I want to understand better about you before we get married is..."

PASTOR MEETING 2: BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Use the family tree and the first conversation to identify the areas that deserve the most attention. Rather than trying to cover everything, focus on the issues most relevant to this particular couple.

Growing Together in Christ

A Christian marriage is more than two people building a life together. It is two people following Jesus together. Your relationship with Christ will shape the way you love, forgive, communicate, make decisions, handle difficulties, raise a family, and determine what matters most in your home.

15 Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. **18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **EPHESIANS 5:15-20**

One of the greatest gifts you can give your spouse is a growing relationship with Jesus. Your spouse cannot be responsible for your spiritual life, and you cannot be responsible for theirs. Each of you needs your own relationship with Christ, but marriage gives you the opportunity to encourage and strengthen one another as you grow.

Growing together spiritually does not mean that you will always grow at the same pace or connect with God in exactly the same ways. One person may love reading and studying Scripture while the other connects more naturally through prayer, worship, serving, or conversation. The

goal is not to make your spiritual lives look identical. The goal is to help one another continue moving toward Jesus.

Talk about what spiritual rhythms you want to build into your marriage. Will you pray together? Will you talk about what God is teaching you? Will you read Scripture or a devotional together? How will you encourage one another when one of you feels spiritually dry or discouraged?

Do not wait until your marriage is struggling to begin praying together. Build spiritual habits while your relationship is healthy so those habits are already in place when difficult seasons come.

Make being part of a local church a priority you establish together. Church shouldn't be something you attend only when nothing else is happening. Corporate worship, biblical teaching, Christian community, and relationships with other believers help keep your marriage connected to something bigger than itself.

Decide now that worship will be part of your home's rhythm. Competing priorities will always compete with busy schedules, travel, sports, children, work, and exhaustion. Couples who want Christ at the center of their marriage need to intentionally make room for Him.

Your church involvement also gives you relationships with people who can encourage you, challenge you, pray for you, and walk with you through different seasons of marriage. Isolation makes marriage harder. Christian community reminds you that you do not have to navigate marriage alone.

Jesus did not call us simply to attend church. He called us to follow Him and serve others. One of the healthiest things you can do as a married couple is to discover how God can use your marriage to bless people around you.

You may not always serve in the same ministry or have the same spiritual gifts. One of you may love working with children while the other prefers serving behind the scenes. One may be energized by people while the other enjoys meeting practical needs. That is okay. Serving together does not necessarily mean doing the exact same thing. It means building a marriage that asks, "How can God use us?"

Your home, time, gifts, finances, relationships, and experiences can all become tools God uses to serve others. Over the years, your opportunities to serve may change, but keep looking for ways to make your marriage about more than yourselves.

Discuss

- What does your relationship with Jesus look like right now?
- What spiritual habits would you like to build into your marriage?
- How comfortable are you praying together? What could help prayer become a natural part of your relationship?
- How can you encourage your spouse spiritually without becoming critical or trying to manage their relationship with God?
- What role do you want weekly worship and involvement in a local church to have in your marriage?

- What could compete with church involvement as your life becomes busier?
- How important is being part of a small group or other Christian community to you?
- What gifts, passions, or experiences has God given each of you that could be used to serve others?
- What do you hope people will see about Jesus through your marriage?

A good habit: Regularly ask each other, "How are you doing with Jesus, and how can I encourage you or pray for you?" The goal is not simply to have a marriage that lasts. The goal is to build a marriage in which both of you are becoming more like Jesus and helping each other follow Him faithfully.

Communication

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. **JAMES 1:19-20**

James gives us a simple pattern for healthy communication: quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Most communication problems happen when we reverse the order. We are quick to speak, quick to become defensive, and slow to really listen.

Good communication is more than talking. It is learning to understand what your spouse is thinking, feeling, and trying to communicate. One of the greatest gifts you can give your spouse is the feeling that "You hear me, you understand me, and what matters to me matters to you."

People also have different communication styles. One person may want to talk through an issue immediately while the other needs time to think. One may communicate through details while the other gets straight to the point. One may become more verbal when emotions rise while the other becomes quiet. Neither style is automatically wrong, but those differences can create frustration if you do not understand them.

Pay attention to your natural tendencies:

- Processor: "I need to talk about it to understand what I'm thinking."
- Thinker: "I need some time before I'm ready to talk."
- Pursuer: "We need to resolve this right now."
- Withdrawer: "I need some space before this gets worse."
- Fixer: "Tell me the problem, and I'll give you a solution."
- Listener: "Sometimes I don't need a solution. I need you to understand."

The goal isn't to make your spouse communicate exactly like you. The goal is to learn how to communicate in a way your spouse can receive.

Discuss

- How did your family communicate growing up?
- When something is bothering you, do you tend to talk immediately or process internally?
- Do you want advice when you share a problem, or do you primarily want someone to listen?
- What makes you feel heard? What causes you to shut down?
- What could your spouse do that would help you communicate more openly?

A good habit: Before responding, ask, "What do you need from me right now? Do you want me to listen, help you think through it, or help you solve it?"

Conflict and Forgiveness

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. **26** "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. **28** Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

Every marriage will experience conflict. The goal isn't a marriage without conflict. The goal is learning to handle conflict in a healthy, biblical way. Ephesians 4 doesn't tell us never to become angry. It tells us what to do with our anger. Anger can quickly become destructive when it produces harsh words, personal attacks, withdrawal, bitterness, or a desire to win.

One important question to discover before marriage is: What happens inside you when conflict begins? Some people attack. Some defend. Some withdraw. Some become emotional. Some become logical and detached. Some even apologize immediately because they hate tension, even if the issue hasn't been resolved.

Your conflict style is often connected to what you saw growing up. If your parents yelled, you may repeat that pattern or determine never to raise your voice. If your family avoided conflict, you may have learned to pretend everything is okay. Understanding where your reactions come from helps you choose healthier responses.

Create some rules for conflict before you need them:

- Tell the truth without attacking. Talk about the issue instead of attacking your spouse's character.
- Stay with the current issue. Don't bring previous arguments into today's disagreement.
- Avoid "always" and "never." Statements like "You always..." or "You never..." usually make someone defensive.
- Don't threaten the relationship. Divorce, leaving, or ending the relationship should never become weapons during an argument.
- Take a timeout when necessary, but come back. Saying, "I need 30 minutes to calm down, but I promise we'll finish this conversation," is very different from walking away.
- Remember the goal. The goal isn't winning. The goal is understanding, reconciliation, and protecting the relationship.

Paul says, "Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Forgiveness will be essential because you are marrying an imperfect person, and your spouse is marrying one too.

Forgiveness doesn't mean pretending something didn't hurt. It doesn't mean that consequences disappear or that trust is instantly restored. Forgiveness means that, because of the grace you have received from Jesus, you refuse to keep making your spouse pay for something that has genuinely been confessed and addressed.

Healthy marriages become very good at two sentences: "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" "I forgive you." A good apology doesn't say, "I'm sorry you got upset." It takes responsibility: "What I said was wrong. I understand why it hurt you. Will you forgive me?"

Discuss

- How did your family handle conflict?
- Is there anything from your past that makes trust especially difficult?
- What usually happens when you get angry? Do you tend to pursue, withdraw, attack, defend, or shut down?
- Is apologizing difficult for you? Why?
- Is forgiving difficult for you?
- Do you tend to forgive and move forward, or keep bringing previous hurts back into new disagreements?
- Are there unresolved hurts between you that need to be addressed before marriage?
- What rules do you want to establish for handling conflict in your marriage?

Putting Your Spouse First

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5

Philippians 2 gives us a foundational attitude for marriage: "Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Most people don't enter marriage intending to be selfish. But everyday life reveals how naturally we think about ourselves: my schedule, my money, my preferences, my career, my family, my hobbies, my expectations, my needs.

Marriage requires a shift from "me" to "we." That doesn't mean losing your identity or never expressing your needs. It means learning to consider how your decisions affect the person you are building a life with.

Jesus becomes our model. Instead of continually asking, "Am I getting what I want?" Christian marriage teaches us to ask, "How can I love and serve my spouse?"

This becomes very practical. Who gets up with a sick child? Whose career determines where you live? How much time do hobbies receive? How will you spend money? How often will you see extended family? Who does what around the house?

Healthy marriage isn't necessarily 50/50. There will be seasons when one person carries more because the other person needs them. The goal is for two people to continually look for opportunities to serve one another rather than keep score.

Discuss

- What makes you feel valued by your spouse?
- Where do you recognize selfishness in yourself?
- What expectations do you have about household responsibilities?
- How important are hobbies and friendships outside your marriage?
- What happens if one person's career opportunity requires sacrifice from the other?
- How will you make major decisions?
- What does serving your spouse look like to you?

Healthy Boundaries with Family

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. **GENESIS 2:24**

Genesis describes marriage with three important ideas: leave, unite, and become one. Leaving does not mean abandoning your parents. Scripture teaches us to honor our parents. But marriage changes the priority of those relationships. Your spouse becomes your primary human relationship.

This can be one of the biggest adjustments during the first years of marriage. Your parents may have opinions about where you live, how you spend money, where you spend Christmas, how often you visit, how you raise children, or how you resolve problems. Their advice may be valuable, but your parents don't get a vote in your marriage.

One important boundary is how much you share about your spouse with your family. Be careful about calling a parent every time you're frustrated with your spouse. You may forgive your spouse tomorrow, but your parent may remember the offense for years.

You also need to decide together how you will handle holidays, traditions, visits, phone calls, financial assistance, and eventually grandparents and children.

The principle is simple: You can love your family deeply without allowing them to lead your marriage. And when boundaries need to be established, each person should generally take responsibility for communicating difficult boundaries with their own family rather than forcing their spouse to do it.

Discuss

- How involved are your families in your lives right now?
- How often do you expect to see or talk with your parents after marriage?
- How will you divide holidays between families?
- Does either family expect you to continue traditions that could create tension?
- How comfortable are you telling your parents "no"?
- What information about your marriage should remain private?
- How would you respond if your parents criticized your spouse?
- What boundaries do you think you need to establish before getting married?

CLOSE

At the end of this meeting, I would bring everything back to one idea: You aren't trying to discover whether you are exactly alike. You are learning how to love each other well in the places where you are different.

Ask each person to answer three questions:

- "Something I understand better about you after today is..."
- "Something I need to work on to love you better is..."
- "One thing I want us to intentionally build into our marriage is..."

AFTER MEETING 2: PRACTICING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

1. Have One Intentional Conversation

Set aside at least 30 minutes with phones and other distractions put away. Each person completes these statements:

- Something I appreciate about you is...
- Something I understand better about you after counseling is...
- Something I know I need to work on is...
- Something you can do that helps me feel heard is...
- Something that worries me about marriage is...
- Something I'm excited about in our future is...
- One way I want us to grow spiritually together is...

Rule: When your future spouse is talking, don't correct, defend, explain, or fix. Listen first. Then say, "What I hear you saying is..."

2. Create Your Rules for Conflict

Agree on five rules you want to follow when you disagree. For example:

- We will not threaten divorce or the relationship.
- We will not call names or attack each other's character.
- We will deal with the issue instead of bringing up old arguments.
- Either person can ask for a timeout, but we will agree on when we will return to the conversation.
- We will apologize specifically when we're wrong.
- We will forgive rather than keeping score.
- We will remember that we are on the same team.

3. Talk Through Five Practical Areas

Before Meeting 3, make sure you have discussed:

1. Finances: budget, debt, accounts, spending habits, giving, saving, and financial goals.
2. Family: holidays, visits, boundaries, expectations, and how you will respond when family members disagree with your decisions.
3. Home: chores, responsibilities, schedules, work, and expectations about how your household will function.

4. Children: whether you want children, approximate timing, parenting expectations, and how you were each raised.
5. Faith: church involvement, prayer, spiritual growth, serving, giving, and how you want to pursue Jesus together.

4. Prepare for Meeting 3

Finally, come prepared to begin planning the ceremony. Each person should think about:

- What do we want our wedding ceremony to communicate about our faith and marriage?
- Traditional vows or personal vows?
- What Scripture would we like included?
- Communion or another unity element?
- Who from our families should participate? Are there any complicated family dynamics the pastor needs to know about? Is there anything we definitely want included or excluded?
- Is there anything from counseling that we still need to discuss before getting married?

Bring to Meeting 3: any ceremony ideas, Scripture choices, vows you've begun writing, wedding-party information, rehearsal details, and questions for the pastor.

PASTOR MEETING 3: PLANNING THE CEREMONY

Begin with a final conversation about the marriage itself. Ask whether anything has surfaced through counseling that they still need to discuss. Reinforce that a healthy marriage is not built by avoiding problems but by learning to face them together with honesty, grace, forgiveness, and commitment.

Then transition to planning the wedding ceremony. Discuss the order of service, Scripture, vows, rings, unity elements, music, family involvement, communion if desired, rehearsal details, marriage license, and other practical expectations.

Close by reminding them that the wedding is one day, but the covenant they are making is for a lifetime. Pray over them, their marriage, their families, and the life they are beginning together.

Discuss

- Is there anything we've talked about that you feel still needs more conversation?
- Have you had any difficult or important conversations since our last meeting?
- What do you want to be intentional about during your first year of marriage?

Remind them that needing help is not a sign that their marriage is failing. Encourage them to address problems early, rather than letting small frustrations become established patterns.

PLANNING THE WEDDING CEREMONY

Transition from preparing for the marriage to preparing for the wedding. Explain that the ceremony should reflect who they are while keeping the focus on the covenant they are making before God and the people who love them.

Walk through the ceremony from beginning to end.

Overall Ceremony

- What kind of ceremony are you hoping for: traditional, simple, relaxed, formal?
- About how long would you like the ceremony to be?
- Are there any family, cultural, or church traditions you want included?
- Is there anything you definitely do not want included?
- What do you want people to remember about your ceremony?
- How important is it to you that the Gospel or your faith be clearly expressed?
- What is the dress code for the ceremony - formal or casual? Colors?

Processional

- Who will be part of the wedding party?
- Who will escort the bride?
- Will parents and grandparents be formally seated?
- Will the groom and wedding party enter separately?
- What music will be used?
- Are there children involved as a flower girl or ring bearer?

Welcome and Opening

- Would you like a reminder for a camera-free service to be included in the ceremony?

Scripture and Message

- Are there particular Bible passages that are meaningful to you?
- Would you like someone other than the pastor to read Scripture?
- Is there a passage that has been important during your relationship?
- Is there a particular truth about Christian marriage you would like emphasized?
- Would you like a short pastoral message or a more substantial wedding message?

Possible passages include Genesis 2:18–24, Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, Ephesians 5:21–33, Colossians 3:12–17, and 1 John 4:7–12.

Vows

Explain that the vows are the heart of the ceremony. The couple isn't simply expressing how they feel about one another. They are making promises to one another before God.

Ask:

- Would you like traditional vows or would you like to write your own?
- If writing your own, would you also like to include traditional covenant language?
- Would you like to see each other's vows before the wedding or hear them for the first time during the ceremony?

If they write their own vows, encourage them to remember: A vow should primarily be a promise, not simply a description of how much you love the other person.

Rings

Rings symbolize a couple's unending love for one another. Rings are also an everyday reminder of the covenant shared on the wedding day.

- Who will hold the rings?
- Will the best man/maid of honor have them, or will a ring bearer?
- Would you like a prayer or blessing over the rings?

Remind them to make sure the actual rings make it to the rehearsal/wedding.

Unity Elements

Some couples want an additional element that symbolizes the joining of their lives.

- Would you like a unity candle, unity cross, cord of three strands, sand ceremony, or another symbolic element?
- Would you like to take communion together?
- If taking communion, will it be just the couple or the entire congregation?
- What music, if any, should play during this portion?
- Who will prepare the communion elements?

Don't feel obligated to add something simply to fill time. The vows and rings already beautifully symbolize the covenant being made.

Family Involvement

Weddings often involve more family dynamics than couples expect, so talk through this ahead of time.

- Are there parents, grandparents, siblings, or children you want involved?
- Will parents be recognized during the ceremony?
- Are there blended-family dynamics we need to consider?
- Would you like parents or family members to pray over you?

This is also a good opportunity to remind the couple that the ceremony belongs to them, not to their families. Honor parents while protecting the couple from unnecessary pressure.

Pronouncement & Recessional

Walk through exactly how they want the ceremony to conclude.

- How would you like to be introduced after you're married?
- What happens immediately after the kiss?
- Where should the couple go after exiting?
- Will the wedding party follow immediately?

REHEARSAL DETAILS

Explain that the purpose of rehearsal isn't to practice every word of the ceremony. It is primarily to make sure everyone knows where to go, when to go, and what to do.

Confirm:

- Date and time of rehearsal
- Who is coordinating the wedding

Ask the couple to designate one person other than the bride or groom who can answer logistical questions on the wedding day.

MARRIAGE LICENSE & FINAL DETAILS

Make sure the practical pieces aren't overlooked.

- Have you obtained or made plans to obtain the marriage license?
- Who will bring the license to the wedding?
- Who is responsible for making sure it gets to the officiant?
- Who will return/file the completed license? Typically, the pastor mails it in.
- What time should the pastor arrive?
- Who is the wedding coordinator/contact person?
- Are there any photography or videography expectations during the ceremony?

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Finish by shifting the attention away from the wedding and back toward the marriage.

The wedding is important, and you want it to be meaningful and memorable. But the wedding is one day. The covenant you are making is for a lifetime. Something will probably not go exactly according to plan on your wedding day, and that's okay. At the end of the day, the goal isn't a perfect wedding. The goal is to begin a Christ-centered marriage.

Ask one final question: "When you look back 25 years from now, what kind of marriage do you hope you have built together?"

Then pray specifically for their marriage, their relationship with Christ, their families, their future home, and the covenant they are preparing to make.