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—RAY PRITCHARD

Senior Pastor, Calvary Memorial Church
Oak Park, Illinois

“This valuable resource is packed with ideas and examples for leading these frequent moments in the life of a church, along with other events like ordinations, child dedications, and many more. This useful tool will find a valued place on the shelves of pastors everywhere—although it’s not likely to sit on that shelf for any length of time.”

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Senior Pastor, Midlothian Bible Church

REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

A Contemporary
Handbook
for Weddings
& Funerals
and Other Occasions

Aubrey Malphurs

Keith Willhite

Dennis Hillman

EDITORS



A Contemporary Handbook for Weddings & Funerals and Other Occasions

© 2003, 2006, 2022 by Aubrey Malphurs, Keith Willhite, and Dennis Hillman
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Preface

FEW OCCASIONS OFFER PASTORS the opportunities to minister to and with a family as do weddings and funerals. Often on such occasions, people open their hearts to God and to others in new ways, and the pastor can be there to give direction and encouragement.

THE NEED FOR THIS BOOK

This book grew from a stated need and aims to address that need. The manager of the Dallas Seminary Book Center approached us with the fact that he receives many requests from pastors for resources for weddings, funerals, and other occasions. Younger pastors might not have performed these duties, and even seasoned pastors might want to freshen “that same old service.” Although a few such resources are in print, most of them are rather dated and reflect the era in which they were written. Hence, we have sought more contemporary resources and resources that will be helpful in specific situations.

OUR APPROACH

Our approach is that of the “colaborer” or “pastor to pastor.” The materials in this volume have been shared by pastors for pastors. We intentionally sought materials that have been used in fruitful ministry with the hope that others might use or adapt them for more fruitful ministry in similar situations but different contexts. Hence, this volume contains very little sense of “Well, you might consider doing this.” Rather, the resources in this book have been shared on the premise that “We found this to minister effectively.” We are very grateful to the people who have been willing to share these materials.

While our aim has been to offer an up-to-date, culturally, and personally relevant resource, we learned some interesting things along

the way. First, from churches with very “contemporary” ministries we heard an echoing theme: “When it comes to weddings and funerals, our people often want the more traditional.” Hence, we have woven together traditional and contemporary resources and hope that each user of this book will be able to adapt the resources for effective use. Second, we heard the generosity of God’s servants. The contributors of materials for this book did so willingly and with the goal of helping their fellow servants. In many cases, names have been changed when referring to participants in a service or other individuals.

ORGANIZATION

These resources appear in three major sections: Weddings, Funerals, and Other Occasions. Within each major section, we include the following resources: sample services, messages and message outlines, and supporting materials. The supporting materials vary in kind and length. Some are brief illustrations, whereas others are heart-touching stories. Throughout the volume some sections begin with an “Editors’ Note” to suggest ways to use these resources. Some adaptation might be needed to fit your context, but the resources in this book are offered for your use, with full permission to copy and use them as needed, for fruitful ministry to the glory of God.

Suitable for One Another

BRENT STRAWSBURG

WELCOME TO GUESTS

WELCOME TO THIS GREAT OCCASION. On behalf of Dean and Michelle, allow me to express my thanks for your being here this afternoon. We've all looked forward to this moment. Some of you have a shared history with Dean and Michelle. You marvel at the uniqueness of these two friends and how God has brought them together. Some of you, quite frankly, have waited a long time for this day to come. But God is the master of timing.

Dean and Michelle, God brought the two of you together. He planned the circumstances, He molded your lives, and He's been in control of the timing so that both of you would be exactly what He wants you to be—suitable for one another. He didn't want you to be married two years ago or a year ago because it wasn't His time. You weren't ready then, but I believe that you're ready now. I believe that you have the necessary spiritual sensitivity to make your marriage pleasing to God. Because of what is at stake, this ceremony carries tremendous importance and significance. Would you join me as we commit this ceremony to God?

PRAYER

GIVING OF THE BRIDE

When a couple comes together, families also come together. It is important for the families to say, "We believe in this union; we'll always work to support them." Dave and Janine, I want to turn to you

TRADITIONAL WEDDING SERVICES
Suitable for One Another — Brent Strawsburg

first. Speaking as Dean's folks and on behalf of the entire family, are you willing to pledge your support of Dean as he leaves to begin this new family unit and to demonstrate your love to Michelle as your very own daughter? I want to turn to you also, John and Betty. Speaking on behalf of all of Michelle's family, are you willing not only to support this union but also to embrace Dean as your very own son? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

[Song]

MESSAGE

It would be safe to say that, over the last one hundred years, people have progressively lost their ability to trust the great institutions of our day. We struggle with the institution of government. Time and time again, our leaders fail to engender genuine support and trust. We sense that the problems of our day are too great for government to solve. In addition, the institution of the church has fallen on hard times. For all of its energy, the church often struggles to make a visible impact in society. It has struggled to help people change the way they actually live.

The institution of marriage has also struggled. A lasting marriage is the exception of our day. Couples today struggle to cope with all of the issues facing them. They struggle with the high levels of commitment. Couples enter marriage still struggling with baggage from their childhood. In our "me-centered" culture, it's becoming increasingly difficult for a couple to focus and live for the good of another person.

It's Dean and Michelle's desire that their marriage model for all of us the importance of commitment to the institution of marriage. They recognize that, far from squelching their happiness in life, the institution of marriage will allow them to experience the deepest levels of intimacy and personal development. They desire that their marriage demonstrate that God's priorities still work in today's age.

Let me remind all of us about the design of the institution of marriage.

From the very beginning of humanity, God recognized the need for man to live in relationship. Listen to God's response as He views Adam in his loneliness in the garden: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

As God saw this scene, He responded thus: "I will make a helper suitable for him" (2:18). The actual Hebrew word that God uses means "corresponding to." Here's the idea: Adam looked at Eve and saw the perfect complement to himself. He saw a person who perfectly corresponded to him. You could state it thus: when Adam saw Eve, he saw *a person who helped him to recognize himself.*

It's God's design that a man and a woman be brought together such that they complement each other. The union of two distinctly different people should allow each person to see himself or herself more clearly. They should be able better to recognize their strengths, their weaknesses, and their potential.

Listen to Adam's response after God made Eve. I want you to hear Adam's first expression when he lays eyes on Eve. Listen: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (2:23). Translated from the Hebrew, it means, "Wow, that's a woman!"

Adam marvels not only at how much Eve's like him but also how beautifully different she is. Adam recognized something right away. For man and woman to live in relationship, they would have to live with and appreciate their differences. God's design in marriage is for two people to understand their differences and learn to love and appreciate those differences.

Dean and Michelle, this is what God intends for you in a Christian marriage. I'm well aware that both of you desire for God to play an integral role in your marriage.

At a distinct point in your past, each of you committed your life to Jesus Christ. You recognized that, apart from what He did on the Cross in dying for your sins, you had no relationship with God. You each had to come to the point where you were not trusting in your good behavior or your relationship with the church but solely on what Christ did on the Cross for you. It was the only way, with nothing else added to it, that guaranteed you that, when you die, you'll go to heaven.

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When you became a Christian, God became an integral part of your life. As you prepare to embrace the institution of marriage, God wishes to play an active role. I'd like to ask each of you to commit yourselves to the institution of marriage.

DECLARATION OF INTENT

Dean, believing this to be the will of God for your life, and believing that you should live with Michelle the rest of your days, do you this day take Michelle to be your lawfully wedded wife? Will you love her and lead her? Will you keep her in sickness or in health, in plenty or in want? And, forsaking all other women for the rest of your days on earth, will you keep yourself faithfully only unto Michelle so long as both of you shall live?

Dean: I will.

And Michelle, will you take Dean to be your lawfully wedded husband? Will you, in response to his love and leadership, love him and keep him and submit to him in sickness or in health, in plenty or in want? And, forsaking all other men for the rest of your days on earth, will you keep yourself faithfully only unto Dean so long as both of you shall live?

Michelle: I will.

Please ascend the stairs.

[Song]

CHARGE TO THE COUPLE

Within the institution of marriage, God brings two people together. He asks you to commit yourself not only to the institution of marriage but also to each other as distinctly unique people. Your love was meant to thrive and flourish within the boundaries of marriage.

It's now your responsibility to learn how better to fan the flames of love for each other. Don't be misled. That's exactly what God wants from the two of you. He desires that you fan the flames of passion, commitment, and love such that fifty years from now you are more in love than ever before.

How can you accomplish this? Let me suggest a couple of things from the greatest love story in the Bible. It's the story of King Solomon and his beautiful young bride.

Build Your Mate's Self-Concept

Song of Solomon gives an interesting portrait of Solomon's bride. Apparently she has struggled with her own self-concept throughout her life. Listen to her self-appraisal. Do you hear the lament of a woman who doesn't feel lovely, who has for too long underappreciated how God had made her? It could also very easily describe a man who struggles with his own self-concept. However, for the first time the woman has met someone who time and time again takes the initiative to build up her self-concept. Listen to how Solomon describes his bride in 1:8–9, 15.

[The passage is read.]

Dean, treat Michelle as the prize possession she is. God has molded her and specially gifted her with talents and personality in a beautiful way. Your privilege is to act and speak in lockstep with God. You must consistently and lovingly and creatively build her self-concept not only in her physical beauty but also in the full range of personality, depth of charm, and spiritual sensitivity.

Michelle, your role is regularly to ignore the rough exterior that Dean as a man might project. You have the tough job of handling the fragile ego of a man. Time after time, you will have the opportunity to bolster the spirit and confidence of Dean. When you build his self-concept, here's what you will find: every day, Dean will become more the man that God intended him to be. When he becomes the man God intended, he will have a greater capacity to love and care for you.

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The message of this ultimate love story is to build each other's self-concept. Consistently, patiently, and lovingly build into this person, who will be your mate for the rest of your life. If you build into this person, you will discover a treasure that can never be measured.

Here's the second key to kindling your love and passion.

Communicate through the Rough Times

Listen to the words of Solomon's bride as she expresses her love to Solomon and also her commitment to the process of communication:

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret place of the steep pathway,
Let me see your form,
Let me hear your voice;
For your voice is sweet,
And your form is lovely.
Catch the foxes for us,
The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards,
While our vineyards are in blossom.

—Song of Songs 2:14–15 (NASB)

What's she saying?

She's asking Solomon to catch the foxes. It's a word picture to describe some potential problems in their relationships. She longingly looks to her husband and says, "You who are so beautiful to me, whose voice I long for, please take care of these issues."

Problems, difficulties, and tensions are a fact of life within marriage. Dean, you will express the highest quality of love if you assume responsibility for dealing with the issues that come into your marriage. Michelle has a right to expect that you won't run away from issues. She has a right to expect that you will lead your household into health and spiritual vitality. Like all of us, you both bring issues to this marriage. You've courageously faced these issues and modeled to me your commitment to emotional and spiritual health in your relationship.

Dean, however hard the process, however difficult it might be, regardless of what has transpired in your life, you must continue to be open and honest with Michelle and share your feelings.

Michelle, your job is to create a safe place for Dean to communicate. This is not done by judging what he says but by listening to what he feels by what he says.

People tend to do the most instinctive thing when things go wrong or the pressure builds too much in a relationship. But it's the wrong thing, the worst thing. They hurl blame at each other. Here's the simple truth: we don't come to marriage perfect. You'll find out areas in each other's lives that you might not appreciate, that you don't like, or that you don't understand.

Let me give both of you a suggestion. Criticism is not the pathway to making positive change in your mate. It doesn't come by shaming or blaming each other into change. All that those actions accomplish is to build up hurt and resentment. True, nonselfish love is the pathway.

The job before both of you is to love each other in a language that each of you can understand. Love one another the way you would like to be loved. Love in a way that your mate wishes to be loved.

Dean, you need to love Michelle in a way that would make her feel special—unique. Make her the kind of priority in your life in which there are no rivals. She needs to know by your language, your time, and even your money that she's loved like no one else. She's not simply number one on your list; in a sense she *is* the list. Other people pale in significance to the place she has in your heart.

Michelle, you need to love Dean in a way that makes him know that he's valued for who he is and what he's called to do with his life. He needs to know that, regardless of life situations, you'll always support him, believe in him, and offer him a safe place to be himself. Love each other, and let God use the environment of love in your marriage to make the changes.

Before you express your personal vows to each other, I'd like to read something for you from the files of a famous couple who were married

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for more than forty-eight years before the wife died of cancer. This was a pledge they made to each other to deal with those inevitable times when they wouldn't be at their best, those times when the pressure was too great, those times when one of them was mad at the other, and those times when one of them was frustrated and took it out on the other.

Pledge to Love the Unlovable

Whenever you are not at your best,
if you will let me,
I will put my arms around you
and hold you close.

Then, while I am holding you, I promise
I will try to keep my cool when you are angry.

I will try to be soft when you are hard.

I will try to act rather than react.

If you will listen, I will promise you:
even when you are down on life,
down on me, and down on yourself,

I will be up on the basic you.

Here, now and forever,

I will do my best to love the unlovable.

As you prepare to read your vows to one another, I need to remind you that the deepest beauty of your vows doesn't come from this moment when no one would doubt for a second that you love each other. Their ultimate beauty comes from the remainder of your lives as you demonstrate that, even when you are down on life, down on good fortune, or down on yourself, your mate will be up on the basic you.

VOWS

Michelle, would you read your vows to Dean? *[Bride does so.]*

Dean, would you read your vows to Michelle? *[Groom does so.]*

PRESENTATION OF RINGS

Would you take your rings from your attendants? Michelle, will you place your ring on Dean's finger? Dean, will you place your ring on Michelle's finger? Would you do me (and yourselves) a great favor? The two of you are embarking upon the weightiest, most important adventure of your life. God expects nothing less than absolute commitment to these vows for the rest of your life.

Regardless of what you have faced as individuals or what you will face as a couple, I believe with all of my heart that God wants you to honor those commitments. I also believe that each of you must throw yourself upon God and give Him again the right to make you into the person He wants you to be. As you do that, you'll have a greater capacity to express genuine selfless love for your mate. I'd like the two of you to begin that process right now. Would you kneel and have some silence before the Lord? Then, Dean, would you pray on behalf of Michelle and yourself?

[Prayer/Candle Lighting/Song]

BLESSING

Today symbolizes a very important juncture in your life. Today you start a new family unit. Although you will continue to consult and look for support from each of your extended families, you will begin the ultimate responsibility of charting a course for your life.

In the Old Testament, we catch a glimpse of a beautiful and powerful experience, the blessing given by the parent, or, in some cases, the spiritual mentor. The blessing was the deepest and most profound statement of the mentor in support and belief of what God wanted to do in a person's life. As they expressed the blessing, it was meant to carry the full weight of God's power in their life. At this crucial juncture, would you give me the liberty to express my blessing upon your marriage?

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Suitable for One Another — Brent Strawsburg

Dean and Michelle:

As each of you realize your inheritance as a child of God, may you live, not according to the messages from your past but according to what God has already done for you. As each of you faces the issues in life, may you be freed from those things in your past that have kept you from your potential. As you live in a world that often mocks the fidelity of marriage, may you find love only in each other's arms. Amen.

PRONOUNCEMENT

I know I'm speaking for many friends here today when I say that we love and believe in both of you. I wish that I had the ability to bottle up all of the love and the joy that people in this room feel for the two of you. It is now my privilege, by the authority invested in me as a minister of the Good News concerning Jesus Christ, to pronounce you husband and wife.

You may kiss your bride.

INTRODUCTION OF THE COUPLE

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to present to you . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Dean Lewis

[Recessional]