

Introduction

I vaguely remember my wedding day. My father, a minister, did the sermon. There was a crowd full of people watching us. My dad said some words and Amy and I both said, "I Do." But did the words mean anything? Probably, but at the time I was too nervous and too excited to comprehend them. What did I promise to do? What were my vows? What did I agree to with those simple, highly overused, words, "I Do?" Just what was I getting myself into?

At the time of our marriage Amy and I were not Christians. We were just solidifying our relationship before a large group of witnesses. Years later, when I began studying scripture and we began building a relationship with God, we realized the full meaning of the words that were said that day. We finally understood ramifications of those 2 simple words, "I Do." And most importantly we discovered the beautiful and perfect plan that God had from the beginning when he bestowed one of His greatest gifts to mankind: the gift of marriage.

I have read many premarital counseling books and have counseled several couples in the process of preparing for their wedding day and for their lives together. However, many of the books focused on the psychology of marriage. These are very helpful in the sense that they show us how men and women tend to think and how to communicate with one another. The counseling sessions tended to focus on the major problems men and women face as they walk through life together: money, in-laws, children, careers, loss of careers, and sex. These are all very helpful and important to address when we are entering into a relationship with

another person. The psychological aspect is very important in how we face the daily battles and circumstances that surround us.

The side that I would have liked someone to have explained to me as a soon to be bride-groom, however, wasn't so much the psychology of marriage, but the meaning of marriage. What are its foundations? What is its purpose? What is its goal? For this reason when I began to study scripture I wished that I had a tape of the vows Amy and I made on that hot day in May nine years ago.

Unfortunately, the video-camera we had at the wedding never worked. So as I studied I took from many traditional wedding vows, the phrases and language, common to most. I began to slowly understand what I had gotten myself into by uttering the words, "I Do." The truth is I was amazed. I found that God had a plan for me and my wife. I also came to realize that no matter how much psychology you understood about how men are from the moon and women are from Jupiter, no matter how many marriage strategies you might have picked up in the magazines in the grocery line, no matter how many seminars you went to on how to understand your mate, there was something more pertinent that needed to be understood. I began to understand what this aspect of marriage was when we bought our first home. It was a nice old fixer upper in Durham, North Carolina. We turned that house from a rundown, unkempt, squirrel infested house into an elegant, chic, and comfortable palace. (Actually Amy did most of it, I just hammered, scraped and painted where I was told.) The problem is that after we spent thousands of dollars on making the house look nice and reading many home improvement books and watching hours of shoe string budget house makeovers on HGTV the house could not be sold. Why? It looked perfect. The people who came to look at the house fell in love with it. Why couldn't we sell it? Because the foundation was cracked. Until we fixed the foundation, no one was willing to put any money down on the place. Modern day marriage can be the same way. People spend time, money, and energy trying to "fix up" their marriages. They read books with lists of ways to revitalize their waning passions, lists of ways to understand what the other really means when he or she says certain things, and they go to weekend seminars that teach them what marriages are supposed to look like. These are all great. Don't think that I am trying to say that they are a waste of time, they are not. They help turn our rundown marriages into beautiful relationships. The problem is that we sometimes overlook the foundation. What is marriage built on? My kids sing a song at church that says it perfectly, "The foolish man's house went splat!" The foolish man could have had a beautiful mansion that was the envy of all his neighbors. But he chose to build that house on sand and no matter how hard he tried he couldn't keep it standing. In the same way, we could have a great looking marriage. A marriage that others look at and envy. But if our marriage is not built on a strong foundation, then no amount of

counseling or seminars will hold it up. Luckily foundations can be fixed. It may call for some discomfort. With our house the discomfort came when we got the estimates to fix the cracks in the foundation. In our marriage the discomfort came when we had to make changes to the way we thought of one another, the way we thought of ourselves and the way we thought of our relationship. As I said, when Amy and I were married we had no idea what we were getting into. Our foundation was made of sand. The good news is that we were able to sure up our foundations so that our marriage is now based on the rock it was meant to be based on from the beginning.

So what are the foundations of marriage? To answer that we need to go back to the Creator of marriage. When you have a problem with your television the best thing to do is call the company who made it so that you can figure out what you need to do to fix it. You don't call the telephone company to ask about how to fix your television and you certainly don't ask the television how it should be fixed. But in many ways we try to do this in many aspects of our lives. When we want to know how to fix our marriages we tend to look in all the wrong places. God is the Creator of marriage. He had a plan and a purpose for our joining together from the very beginning. The foundations of marriage can be found in His Word. The truth is that the majority of couples I have talked to knew more about Freud's views of marriage than about God's view.

This book is written to try to see God's plan, to reveal the Biblical foundation of marriage so that we may realize his goal for us as a couple. Some of you who have grown up in this post-modern culture may say, "But weddings are just traditions. They don't have the same meaning that they used to have." True, weddings are traditions, but all traditions have meaning and a purpose if you are willing to look into them. Wedding ceremonies have changed throughout history, but the intent of marriage has been the same from the beginning. The traditions surrounding marriage have changed through time, but the overlying purposes of God that those traditions illustrate have been the same from the beginning.

The way in which I have set up this book is pretty simple. It is the way that I wish I had been shown the necessary foundations before I said "I Do." I have taken the basic structure of the traditional wedding vows and have broken them up. Each statement, each vow will be explained in two ways: What it means to God as the designer of marriage and what it means to me as I enter into marriage.

The best way to read this book is as a couple. If you are preparing to marry, I pray this book will provide you with an understanding of the vows you will make and the great plan God has for you as you enter into your journey together. If you build your marriage on the foundation it was meant to be built on then you will be blessed.

If you have been married already, whether a few weeks ago or decades ago,

then I pray that this book will help you to possibly restore the foundation on which marriage was meant to be built.

Either way, I pray that you honestly examine your own heart and your relationship and compare it to the blue prints that God had for your marriage. Change can be painful and it takes humility to see where we may need to change our attitudes, our habits, and our lifestyles. Don't just read this book for its information. I pray that you will follow along with the study with your Bible next to you and I pray that you will put the things you see there into practice in your own lives.

Each chapter will end with discussion questions for you and your betrothed or your spouse to talk about. Once you have each read the chapter please discuss the questions together. Wives, you most likely will read faster than your husband. Please wait until he has finished so that you are on the same page when you begin your discussion.

The Vows:

"I take you to be my wedded husband/wife.

*I promise that I will love you, comfort you, honor and keep you,
in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, till death parts us."*