

TYNDALE SEMINARY

A WEDDING

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
PAST 0541 THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

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BOX 246

A transcript for a wedding conducted in a house of worship for the marital union of Julie and Alex, a Christian couple both previously married.

PART I - GATHERING

1. Call to Worship

Minister gives opening announcements concerning flash photography and reception to follow, then proclaims: “And now let us worship God. ‘God is love, and those who remain in love, remain in God, and God remains in them!’” (I John 4:16, my translation)

The processional begins. The mothers are seated. The wedding party processes to the music “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” by J.S. Bach. The bride and groom enter together to the music “Praise My Soul the King of Heaven” by H.F. Lyte. The bride and groom stand slightly facing the minister, the groom to the right of the bride.

2. Opening Statement

Minister: “Friends, we are gathered together here in the presence of God and the Christian community to give thanks to God for the covenant of marriage. Marriage is a covenant of faith between a man and a woman, and it is established within the greater covenant of shared commitment to Jesus Christ. As such, it requires that both a man and a woman: be open in life and thought, be free from doubt and suspicion, and be committed to speak the truth in love as they grow into Christ.

“Christian marriage, furthermore, is a covenant of hope which endures everything and in which both husband and wife commit themselves to interpret each other’s

behaviour with understanding and compassion, never giving up trying to communicate with each other.”

“Christian marriage, therefore, is a covenant of love in which both husband and wife empty themselves of their own concerns and take upon themselves the concerns of each other, just as God has done for humanity. Therefore, the covenant is not to be entered into lightly, but respectfully in the sight of God. Today, Julie and Alex come to be joined in this union.”¹

3. Address to the Couple

Minster: “Julie and Alex, your marriage covenant is intended to join you for life in a relationship that is so intimate and personal that it will change your whole being. This is God’s intention for marriage, and he offers you the hope, and indeed the promise, of a love that is true and mature.”²

4. Prayer

Minister: “Let us pray together:

Gracious God of Covenant,

you are always faithful in your love for us.

We ask that you look upon Julie and Alex now,

Who have come seeking your blessing.

Let your Holy Spirit rest on them and the covenant they make today,

So that with committed love,

¹ Sidney F. Batts, *The Protestant Wedding Sourcebook* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 24.

² Adapted from *Ibid.*, 34.

They may honour the promises they make this day,
Through Jesus our Saviour.
Amen.”³

5. Declarations of Intent

Minister: “Julie, do you come here of your own free will today?”

Julie: “I do.”

Minister: “And Alex, do you come here of your own free will today?”

Alex: “I do.”⁴

Minister: “I ask before God and these witnesses, do either of you know of any legal impediment to your being wed?”

Julie: “I do not.”

Alex: “I do not.”⁵

Minster: “Julie, having heard how God honours the covenant of marriage, do you affirm your desire and intention to enter this covenant?”

Julie: “I do.”

Minster, “Alex, having heard how God honours the covenant of marriage, do you affirm your desire and intention to enter this covenant?”

Alex: “I do.”

6. Affirmation of Families

³ Adapted from Robert Webber, ed., *The sacred actions of Christian worship* (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 279.

⁴ Legal requirement #1.

⁵ Legal requirement #2.

Minster: "I would now ask the parents of the couple to stand."

(To Julie's parents:) "Doug and Sue, do you give your blessing to Julie and Alex, and promise to do everything in your power to support them in their marriage?"⁶

Julie's parents: "We do."

(To Alex's mother:) "Kathy, do you give your blessing to Julie and Alex, and promise to do everything in your power to support them in their marriage?"

Alex's mother: "I do."

Minister: "Thank you. You may be seated. Now, will the children of the couple please stand."

(To their children:) Scott, Amanda, Josh, and Emma, do you give your blessing to Julie and Alex, and promise to do everything in your power to support them in their marriage?"

Scott, Amanda, Josh, and Emma: "We do."

Minister: "Thank you. You may be seated."

7. Affirmation of Congregation

Minister: "And now I address each person here today. Do any here know of any legal impediment as to why Julie and Alex may not be wed? If so, please speak now."⁷

Silence (hopefully). "And now I ask each of you present: will all who are witnessing the formation of this covenant do everything in your power support Julie and Alex in their marriage?"

⁶ Adapted from *Ibid.*, 280.

⁷ Legal requirement #3.

All: "We do."

Minster: "Amen."

PART II – SERVICE OF THE WORD

8. Prayer for Illumination

Minister: "Let us pray:

O gracious God and most merciful Father,

You have given us the rich and precious gift of your holy Word.

Assist us with your Spirit, that it may be written in our hearts

Just as you promised us,

To reform us, to renew us according to your own image,

And to increase us in all the virtues that please you.

Grant this, Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Amen."⁸

9. Reading of Scripture

Two readers, chosen ahead of time by Julie and Alex and having practiced at the rehearsal, will each read one of the following passages:

Reader 1: "A reading from Genesis 17:1-4, 6. When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is

⁸ Adapted from John Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 144.

with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.... I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.”

Reader 2: “A reading from Exodus 34:8-10. And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance." And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.”⁹

10. Sermon

Minister: “It’s commonly said that love is a gift. This is the kind of statement that gives us warm feelings and adds to the magical air that surrounds a wedding. The sentiment is complicated, however, by this notion: there is actually no such *thing* as ‘love,’ neither is there any such *thing* as ‘gift.’” What a downer, right? Haven’t we used these very words here today many times? Of course we have. Because this doesn’t mean ‘love’ and ‘gift’ don’t *exist*, but rather that there is no “loveness” that makes love what it is, and there is no giftness that makes a gift what it is. And yet here we stand today, because of love, and the gift that is love, between Julie and Alex.

So what do we mean when we say the words ‘love’ and ‘gift?’ Let’s start with ‘love.’ When we say that love doesn’t exist, we mean of course that we can’t see the thing we call ‘love;’ it’s not concrete – it can’t be touched, or seen, or heard. In fact, it’s

⁹ These readings elucidate the theme and origins of covenant to be expounded in the sermon.

invisible to the five senses, and yet we feel it undeniably. I think I would be safe in saying that everyone in this place today has either told someone or has been told by someone the words 'I love you.' I think it's safe to assume that before today Julie and Alex have told each other, 'I love you.' What did any of us mean or understand in the moment when we said, 'I love you?' Whether it was to father, or mother, or spouse, or fiancée, we likely meant, 'I feel an attachment to you; I want to do good to you and do good by you, because of the way I feel about you.' We can't feel love with any of our five senses, but we know love when we feel it. And so, love is a word we use to signify a metaphysical bond that throbs outward from one person to another.

And what about 'gift?' We are all familiar with gifts; in fact, there is an incredible amount of gifting that revolves around the wedding ceremony: the bride gives gifts to her bridesmaids, the groom gives gifts to his groomsmen, the parents give gifts to the couple, the wedding guests give gifts to the couple, and the bride and groom give gifts to each other. And if any of you haven't done that yet, this ceremony will end with enough time for you to rush to the mall before it closes and make it right. And if any of you do have to take me up on that, it raises the question: at what point does your gift become a 'gift?' When the crock pot (of which Julie and Alex will probably receive many this weekend) is sitting on the store shelf, it is just a crock pot. When we ring it through the cash, pile it into the car, and carry it into the house, it is still just a crock pot. And yet if someone asks, we will tell them, 'It's a gift.' When did it become a gift? In fact, I'm sure that many of us have bought some item with the full intent of gifting it, but then given enough time to think about it, we liked it a little too much and decided to keep it and get something

else. Did it then become a non-gift? Was it ever really a gift, then? A gift is just an ordinary thing, called by the name we've given it, until it is freely given; only then does an everyday, ordinary, but very special thing become 'gift.'

Today, we are here to celebrate Julie and Alex's love – the bond that can sense so strongly between this couple whom we love, and who love each other. We are here to celebrate not just their love, but their incredible gift to each other: they are giving to one another their everyday, ordinary, and very special lives. But like all feelings, love changes. And like all gifts, this gift can be returned, exchanged, or refunded. *That* is the real reason we are here today: not just to celebrate Julie and Alex's love and mutual gifting, but the promise to love each other and gift each other even through life's unpredictable events. We are here to celebrate and bear witness to their loving and gifting one another with a covenant.

Covenant is the highest standard of relationship. God himself has demonstrated this in his love toward humanity. Genesis records how God covenanted with Abraham, promising faithfulness to him in return for faithfulness. Centuries later, when Abraham's family became a great nation, God renewed his covenant through Moses, promising again faithfulness for faithfulness. Still centuries later, God renewed his covenant through the prophet Jeremiah, but this renewal hinted at something different. I read from Jeremiah 31: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is

the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord : I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord ,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.' Sure enough, God made good on that covenant in his Son, Jesus. Jesus is God's covenant with us based on the familiar pattern: faithfulness for faithfulness.

John 3:16 is a passage almost everyone knows well, from church-goers to sports fans. 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his unique and only Son....' We often read that to mean, 'God loved Creation so very much, that he gave,' but this is not the meaning. The original language reads, 'God loved the world *in this way*: he gave his only Son.' To love is to give. To give in love is to gift. To gift oneself as a gift is to covenant.

Julie and Alex, you are giving each other today the most profound gift possible; you are gifting each other with the covenant of marriage. This covenant between you is the visible expression of your love – the bond between you – and the gift that constitutes that love – the giving of your very self in mutual service. When you covenant, you promise faithfulness in return for faithfulness. And in doing so, you model to all of us - not only today, but also for as long as your covenant stands - the very love of God himself. Love is indeed a gift, Julie and Alex; today and for your lifetime, it is the gift you promise to each other.”

“Let us sing together”

The congregation sings “Great is Thy Faithfulness” by T.O. Chisholm.

PART III – RITE OF MARRIAGE

11. Vows

Minister: “Alex, you may repeat after me.”

Minister and Alex: “Before God and these witnesses,

I, Alex, take you, Julie to be my wife,

And I promise to love you,

And to be faithful to you,

As long as we both shall live.”

Minister: “Julie, you may repeat after me.”

Minister and Julie: “Before God and these witnesses,

I, Julie, take you, Alex to be my husband,

And I promise to love you,

And to be faithful to you,

As long as we both shall live.”¹⁰

12. Exchange of Rings

Minister: “What do you bring as the sign of your covenant?”

(Rings are presented.)

Minister: “By your blessing, O God,

may these rings be to Julie and Alex

symbols of unending love and faithfulness,

reminding them of the covenant they have made today,

¹⁰ Cumberland Presbyterian Church, *Book of common worship, pastoral edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 117.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹¹

Minister: “You may repeat after me.”

Minister and Alex: “Julie, I give you this ring as a sign of our covenant of faithfulness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Minister and Julie: “I receive this ring as a sign of our covenant of faithfulness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Minister and Julie: “Alex, I give you this ring as a sign of our covenant of faithfulness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Minister and Alex: “I receive this ring as a sign of our covenant of faithfulness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

13. Prayer for the Marriage

Minister: “Let us pray.

“Eternal God,

Without your grace, not promise is sure.

Strengthen Julie and Alex

With patience, kindness, and gentleness,

And all other gifts of your spirit,

So that they may fulfill the vows they have made.

Keep them faithful to each other and to you.

Fill them with such love and joy

That they may build a home of peace and welcome.

¹¹ Adapted from Webber, *The sacred actions of Christian worship*, 281

Guide them by your word.
To serve you in all their ways
As they model what it means to live in covenant.
And help all of us, O God,
To do love in each of our homes and lives.
Enrich us with your grace,
So that, supporting one another,
We may serve those in need
And hasten the coming of peace, love, and justice on earth,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.”¹²

14. Declaration of the Marriage

Minister: “Before God and all of us, Julie and Alex have made their solemn vows to each other, and they have confirmed their promises by the giving and receiving of rings. Therefore, by the authority given me by the state of Ontario and as minister, I proclaim that they are husband and wife. You may now kiss one another.”¹³

15. Signing of the Registry

A solo will be sung: “Deep in Love with You” by Michael W. Smith.

PART IV – ACT OF DISMISSAL

16. Charge and Blessing to the Couple

¹² Church, *Book of common worship, pastoral edition*, 120.

¹³ Legal requirement #4.

Minister: “Julie and Alex, as God’s own,
Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness and patience,
Forgiving each other as God has forgiven you,
And keep love at the centre,
Which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
May the grace of Christ attend you,
The love of the Father surround you,
And the Holy Spirit keep you,
So that you may live in faith,
Abound in hope,
And grow in love,
Both now and forever.
Amen.”

17. Presentation of the Couple

Minister: “Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, it is my pleasure to introduce to you for the first time as husband and wife, Julie and Alex!”

All recess to “Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee” by H. van Dyke.

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