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PT 518 Pastoral Ministry

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# A Pastoral Theology of the Solemnization of Marriage

*Selected Scriptures and Resources*

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5.31-32).*

Marriage is the God ordained, Christ-blessed, and Spirit sealed intimate, life-long (Matthew 19:6) covenant relationship (Malachi 2:14) of love and life entered by man and woman, in which two become one (e.g., Matthew 19.5; Mark 10.8; Ephesians 5.31,32), physically and in some mysterious way, spiritually (e.g., Ephesians 5.31.32), reflecting the very Godhead (e.g., Ephesians 1.1) and Christ’s union to His Bride (e.g., Ephesians 5.25-31) for the highest good of mankind, the faithful response to the Creation Ordinance (Genesis 1.28) to raise up a godly line (e.g., Psalm 145.4; 1 Corinthians 7.14b), and for the most helpful harnessing of passions (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7.9); , and application of the role relationships of man and woman for the Gospel. Marriage is a covenant that is only broken by death of one of the parties, or through the most severe violation of the covenant (adultery [Matthew 19: 9] and desertion [1 Corinthians 7:15,16]). Marriage is to be held in honor by all (Hebrews 13.4) and is to be a most holy institution upon which all of the rest of our societies are to be ordered.

That it was ordained by God, blessed by Jesus, taught by St. Paul to be the visible expression of Christ and His Church, it should, therefore, be regulated by the Church for common grace and specifically for the advance of the Gospel. It should, therefore, be a primary focus of pastoral ministry. Since marriage is such a high and holy sign of God’s grace among us, it has been, is now, and shall be, an object of diabolical opposition. The flesh, the world and the devil will wage war against this institution. The minister of the Gospel must conduct his holy work in the midst of this challenge, but also with the blessing of God, and the assurance of Christ’s victory.

## Practical Considerations

- 1) Preaching as a method of teaching on a theology of marriage and weddings
- 2) Policies of Session considered<sup>1</sup>
- 3) Marriage Preparation required
  - a) Resources<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of a church wedding policy see the one at First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi: <http://www.fpcjackson.org/general/policy/Christian%20Wedding%20Guidelines.pdf>.

- b) Goals for the Pastor and Couple
- c) Methodology
- d) The First Session
- e) The Middle Sessions
  - i) Preparing the Service
  - ii) Music and Liturgical Selections
- f) The Last Session before the Rehearsal (dealing with intimacy)
- 4) The Rehearsal and Goals
  - a) Explaining the Service as a liturgy shaped by Ephesians 5
  - b) Presenting the Gospel to the wedding party through the Liturgy itself
    - i) “It can be said that the Christian marriage is sort of a ‘pageant’ in which the husband takes the part of the Lord Jesus, loving and leading his wife as Christ does the Church; and the wife plays the role of the believer, loving and submitting to her husband as the Christian does to the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> This “pageant” role, reflecting Ephesians 5, could also include the part of the father of the bride, the family of the groom, and even the movements of the service itself. All of this portrays a believer led by the Spirit to faith in Christ, union with Christ to the glory of God.
  - c) Prayer for saving faith and prayer for the rehearsal
  - d) Working with Coordinators and Musicians and Photographers
  - e) The Positions in the Wedding Service (see page 6f).
  - f) Rehearsal Itself: Begin in the “Middle”
  - g) “Once again from the Top”
  - h) “Never use the Mrs and Mrs until the wedding!”
  - i) Closing Prayer focuses on quieting the hearts of all
  - j) On the matter of being there for wedding parties (Jesus did so you should, if you can!)
- 5) The Day of the Wedding
  - a) The Prayers with Bride
  - b) The Prayers with Groom
  - c) Use of the Book of Common Worship, Pastoral Edition, with adaptations
- 6) Prelude
  - a) Grandmothers
  - b) Mothers
    - i) Unity candle lit if any

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<sup>2</sup> The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, ed., *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, Sixth ed. (2009), Perry H. Biddle, *A Marriage Manual*, Updated and rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), Church of England., *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church : According to the Use of the Church of England, Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, Pointed as They Are to Be Sung or Said in Churches* (London: Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker ... 1662., 1662), The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, ed., *Christian Marriage: Supplemental Liturgical Resource 3* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), Wayne Mack, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* (Tulsa, OK: Hensley, 1986), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Ministry Unit on Theology and Worship., and Cumberland Presbyterian Church., *Book of Common Worship, Pastoral Edition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> “What the Bible Says About Marriage,” Fresh Start Seminars unpublished document, available at [www.freshstartseminars.org/Aboutmarriage.doc](http://www.freshstartseminars.org/Aboutmarriage.doc) (accessed on May 11, 2009).

- c) At the close of a selected piece of music here, let the Minister lead the groom and party out to their place, moving from a side or rear door
- 7) Entrance
  - a) Let the minister stand at the front of the chancel, centered, with the groom to his left, and groomsmen lined up beside him, the best man being next to him
  - b) Music for Processional of Bride's party, with Maid of Honor being last
  - c) As the Processional for Bride's music begins, give a sign to let the congregation rise
- 8) Call to Worship (with Sentences of Scripture)
- 9) Hymn, then have the congregation seated)
- 10) Statement on the Gift of Marriage
- 11) Prayer
- 12) Declarations on Intent
- 13) Affirmation of Families (optional)
- 14) Affirmation of Congregation (optional)
- 15) Father's Words ("Giving of the Bride")
- 16) (Musical or Lectionary Selection can go here)
- 17) Scripture (either by Readers or Minister or Both)
- 18) Sermon
- 19) (Musical or Lectionary Selection can go here)
- 20) Sermon\*
  - a) Move into the Chancel area if in a traditional church architectural setting)
- 21) Vows (couple facing each other and holding their right hands together)
  - a) Guiding them with brief phrases, not sentences
- 22) Exchange of Rings
  - a) If there is a Unity Candle, this is the place to do it
  - b) A solo or instrumental should accompany this time
  - c) After they light the candles, they return to the Kneeler, and kneel
- 23) The Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer
  - a) They stand
- 24) Announcement of Marriage
- 25) "You may now kiss the Bride" is here (if you forget it, then find another vocation)
- 26) Charge
  - a) A brief Scriptural charge
- 27) Presentation of the New Family
  - a) Here say something like, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to introduce Mr. and Mrs. John Quincey Adams (make sure you get his name right, the Bride usually wants his full name, though he may protest; go with the Bride always)
- 28) Benediction and Recessional
- 29) Postlude
- 30) You may be needed to give an announcement (about a reception) before recessing to the side or rear; the congregation will not move until you leave!
- 31) Make sure that immediately afterwards you get the Best Man and Maid of Honor to sign the license and of course the Bride and Groom (it actually makes a great picture)
- 32) Go to the reception. Jesus did.
- 33) Some final thoughts:

- a) Jesus calls His shepherds to feed His sheep. Nothing could be more fulfilling than becoming a living expression of Jesus' command to bring nourishment to His flock. As you go forth to do so, may you know His presence and power. And may you know what I have found in my own ministry, that whether conducting a wedding or funeral, preaching a Sunday morning sermon, or praying with someone to receive Christ, there is nothing like the ministry, nothing like it in the world.

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The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, ed. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*. Sixth ed, 2009).

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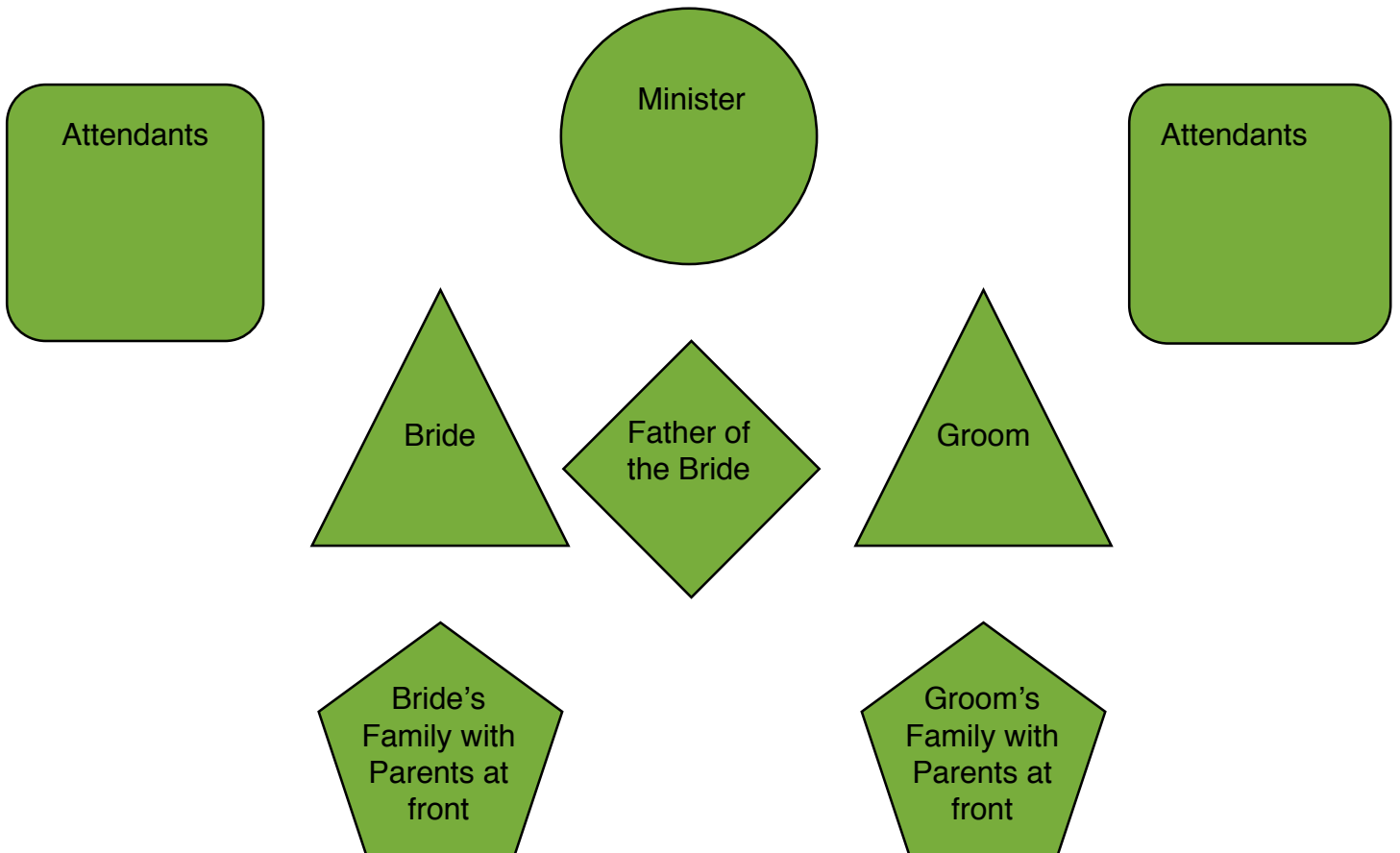
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## I. Position One: The Bride is Presented

As the Processional of the Bride concludes with the Father having escorted his daughter to the front, he faces the minister (the Bride is on his left arm). After the Affirmation of the Family (or instead of that), the Minister asks, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” The father answers, “Her mother and I do.” At this point, he is seated.

### Chancel Area

#### Steps into Chancel



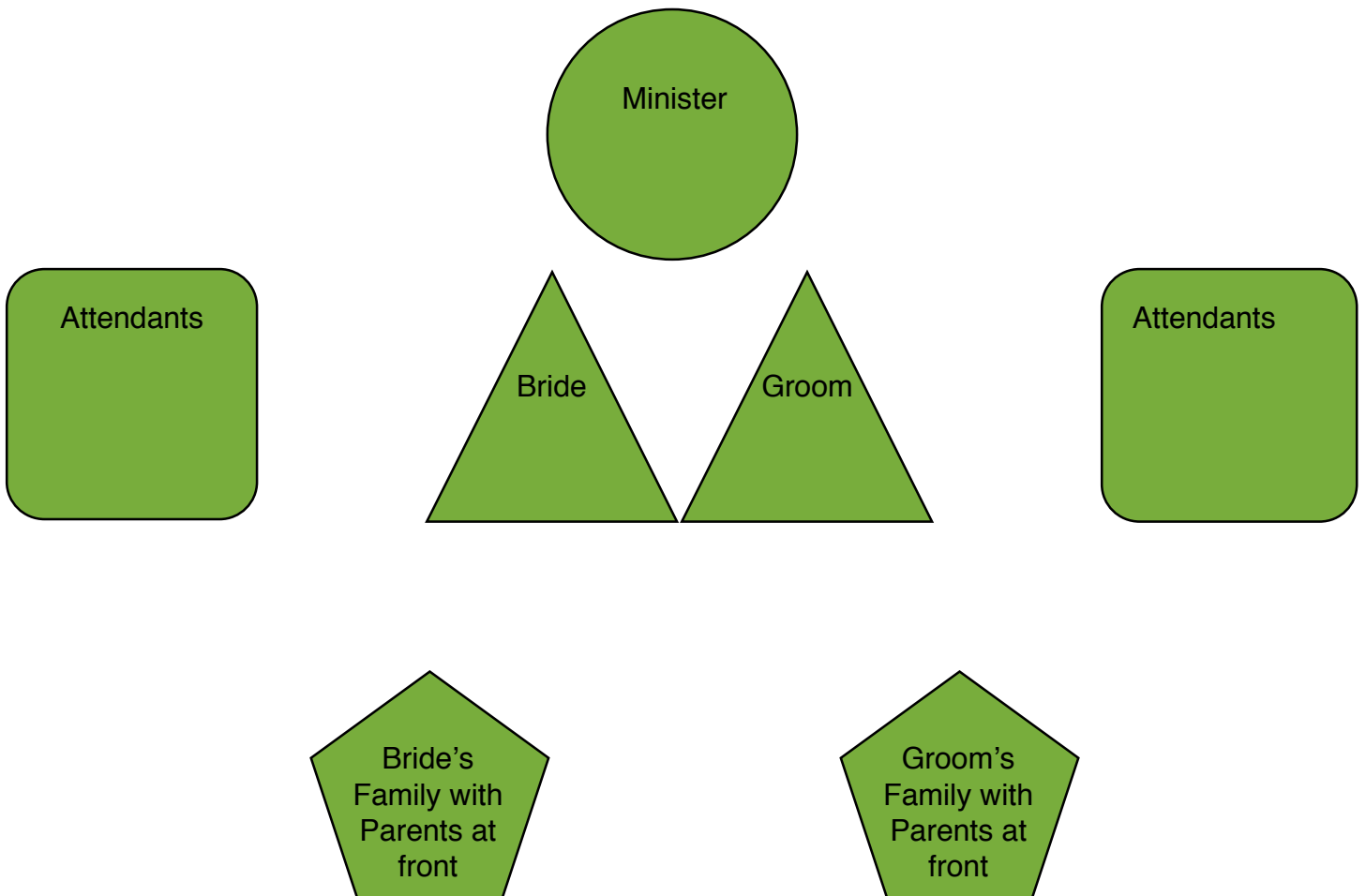
#### Nave

## II. Position Two: After the Giving of the Bride

The Scripture (Readers may read or the minister, or both) and Sermon follow and the minister and couple remain here until after the sermon. At that point the minister turns and walks into (up into) the Chancel area, and the couple follows with the Maid of Honor and Best Man stepping up/beside and just behind.

### Chancel Area

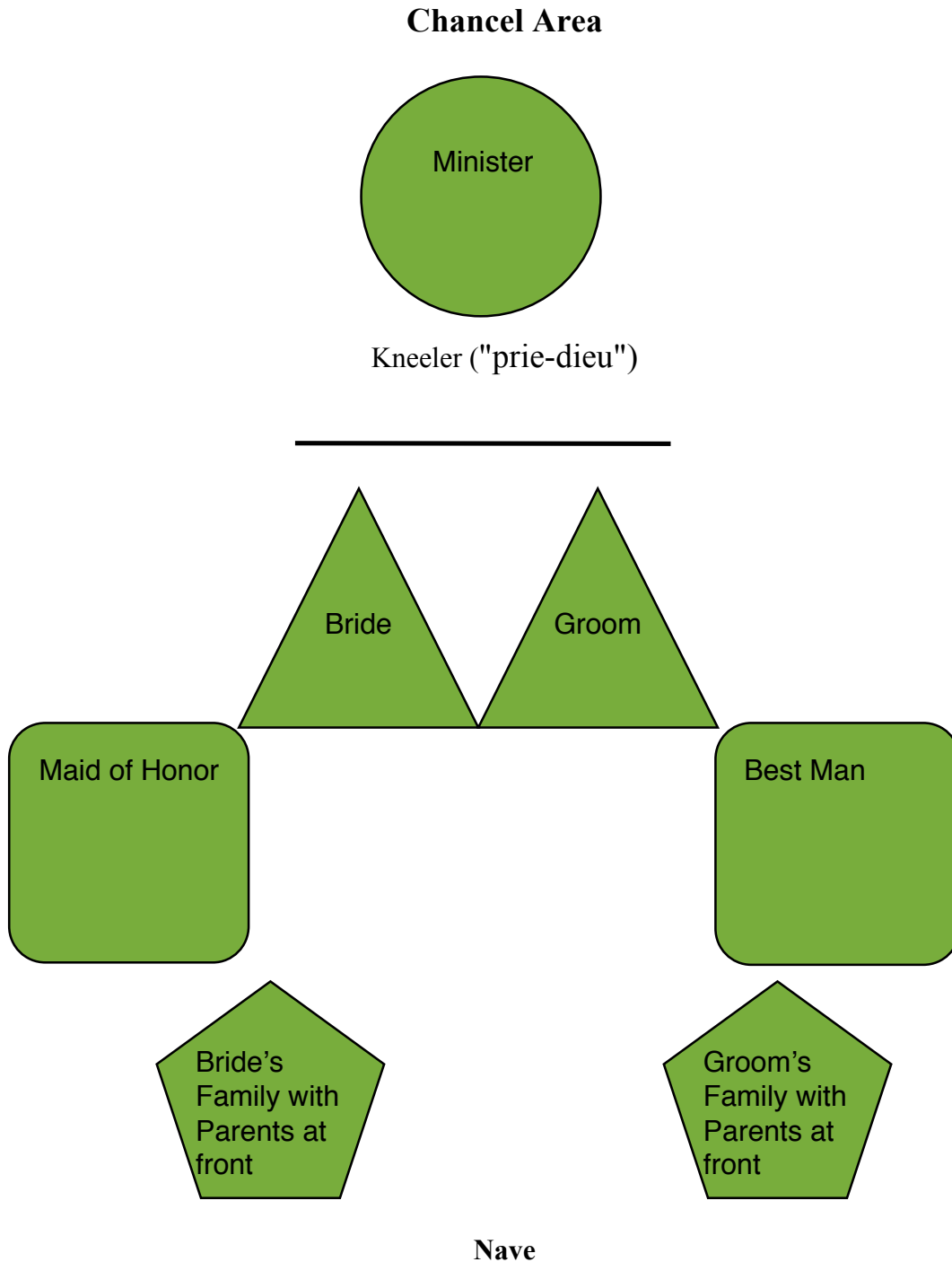
#### Steps into Chancel



Nave

### III. Position Three: The Bride is Presented

After the sermon, the minister leads the bride and groom to the Chancel. They take vows standing, facing each other, exchanging rings, (may light a unity candle), then kneel (during which a solo may be sung), then the Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer, then the minister calls for them to rise.



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## **\*\* A Marriage with a Future and a Hope**

The Wedding Sermon for Steve and Leslie D \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 29.10-11; Eph. 5.1, 22-33

### **Introduction**

The Bride and Groom today selected our reading and no passages are better suited for a wedding! These passages are powerful truths from God's Word to begin a marriage, to renew a marriage, or even to save a soul.

Will you give attention to the reading of the Living Word?

(Read [Jeremiah 29.10-11; Eph. 5.1,22-33](#))

It has been said that a man can be the greatest success in every endeavor in life and yet return each day to an unhappy home and he is a failure. On the other hand, a man could be bankrupt or lacking in any gifts or talents, and be a happy husband of a contented and loving wife, and that man is a success.

We all know that to be true.

Our prayer is that you will enjoy success in every area of life, but there is no doubt about it. And having been involved in premarital counseling with you, seeing you work through all of the Bible study I required of you, being open and honest before the Lord about your dreams and your fears, I think you are off to a great success. In fact, Steve, I have to agree with your father, who took me home from the rehearsal the other night, we all think this is a marriage with a great future and a hope.

Today, those are good words to think about: a future and a hope. Because those are the words of the Scripture, you chose for your wedding: Jeremiah 29.11. While this passage is not about marriage per se, it does contain powerful truths that will guarantee a marriage with a future and a hope. And I pray these truths of God's Word will not only establish your marriage, Steve and Leslie, but also encourage others, maybe even draw someone here today to renew their vows even as you are taking yours.

### **I. First, this passage teaches us to trust God for our past.**

Yes, that's right—trust God for our *past*. We often think of trusting God for our future, and that is right, but we can also trust God that all of the events in our lives up to this point will be used by God to bring us to a great future.

In the passage, God is speaking to his people who have been in captivity in Babylon.

Some of us can look back and think about the days before God gave us our husband or wife and maybe they feel like Babylon to us. But God was preparing us for our mate; God was preparing us for today—in the good times and in the bad.

Steve and Leslie, you grew up together, went to the same elementary school, and knew each other. Your lives went in separate directions and the journey may have seemed like a long and

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winding journey, filled with good times and trials, but you can trust your past to God. He has worked all things together to bring you to this time.

This past year, Leslie, you went through a hard time as your mother went home to be with the Lord. But even in that, Steve was there with you. I remember being there in the hospital room, praying with you and Steve, with Lynette and Michael. Today, it was your wish to honor your mom by a candle and by flowers in the place where she would have sat. You can now trust your past, Leslie, to God. And Steve, God has brought you through all of your life to bring you to your bride today.

Is there someone here who needs to entrust his or her past—or maybe his or her present—to the Lord? To be a child of God is to know that “He works all things together for the good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.” Is that divine power at work in your marriage? Maybe right now you need to commit your marriage to Christ and watch how He can take even the hurtful things, the hard things and turn them to gold. Maybe it’s time you commit your life to Jesus Christ. And let Him be the Lord of the past, the present, and the future.

## **II. Second, this passage teaches us to praise God for His Promises.**

God tells us that His thoughts about us are for peace, not evil, and that He will give us a future and a hope. This is written to Israel in Babylon, people in captivity, hurting people, needy people, people to need to know that God loves them. What a precious promise.

Steve and Leslie, you can not only trust God for your past, but praise God for His promises.

A few years ago, a popular Christian song for weddings was “I Will Be Here” by Steven Curtis Chapman. Part of the line of that song goes like this:

Tomorrow morning if you wake up  
And the future is unclear,  
I will be here.

As sure as seasons are made for change,  
Our lifetimes are made for years,  
So, I will be here.

I will be here, and you can cry on my shoulder;  
When the mirror tells us we’re older, I will hold you.  
And I will be here to watch you grow in beauty,  
And tell you all the things you are to me;  
I will be here.

I will be true to the promise I have made,  
To you and to the One who gave you to me. (© 2009 Greg Nelson Music)

Do you know what? That is exactly what this passage means. Throughout all of your life God is saying, “I will be here.” In fact, Jesus spoke those words to us: Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

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Steve and Leslie, today you are praising God for that promise. And God will not fail you. He will be there throughout all of your life together and because you are trusting in Christ, He will be with you throughout eternity.

Is there anyone here today that needs to hear God say, “I will be here?” for you marriage? For your eternity? Well, maybe you need to just say, “I do” to the Lord this evening and let the promises begin to work in your life.

Finally, we turn to Ephesians 5.1,22-33. Here we learn a third truth:

### **III. We Can Follow God in His Plan.**

Follow God in his plan for marriage. We know that we live in a time when everyone does what is right in his own eyes. But God ordained marriage. He regulates it and He gives us a plan for a happy marriage, which is His will for all of us.

In this passage, Paul teaches the Ephesians that the marriage relationship is like Christ and a believer, Christ and the Church. As Christ gave his life to His bride, the Church, so a man gives his life to his wife. He prioritizes her. He dies to himself and to all others to live for her. The response of that kind of love, Steve, is that Leslie is to submit in love to your tender leadership the way a believer responds to the Cross-centered love of Jesus. It is a beautiful picture, a great circle of love and submission and giving of ourselves to each other.

Even the wedding itself is modeled after this. The groom plays the part of Christ. The bride plays the part of a believer. Your vows reflect what happens when a person receives Jesus as Lord. And as you leave here to begin your life together, so your marriage will always reflect the love that God has for us.

### **Conclusion**

So, in these passage we have seen how to have a marriage with a future and a hope:

1. Trust God for you past.
2. Praise God for His promises.
3. Follow God in His Plan.

You know: you had thought about a hymn, an Easter hymn for this service: “Because He Lives.” And your mother loved it. And you two love that hymn. And you wondered whether to sing it earlier and I do think you chose a wonderful hymn, “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” But the Lord put it on my heart this weekend that “Because He Lives” is a powerful hymn. The words are perfect for you as you begin your lives together:

“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone, Because I know, who He holds the future. And life is worth the living just because He lives.” ©1971 William J. Gaither, Inc. ARR  
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Because of Christ, all things have become new. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope. In a real way, He is our future and our hope: for our marriages and for our very lives.

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Today, I want to ask couples here to join hands. And let all of us commit ourselves to the God who gives us a future and a hope. Let's ask God to bless this marriage and to renew marriages here.

Let us pray.

*Lord of life, strengthen Steve and Leslie as they know you are the Lord of their past, the Lord of the promise, and the Lord who provides a divine plan. Help them by Your Holy Spirit to follow the Plan for marriage: the plan based on Your love for us when You gave us Your Son Jesus Christ. And help every man and woman here to know that plan in their marriages. Grant Your blessing on every child who witnesses this wedding and hears these Words. Grant Your power for every single person to live in faith and know Your love for them. And grant that we all may know that in Jesus Christ, we have a "future and a hope." In Your Name, O Christ. Amen.*