

## Getting Married!

David L. Miller

Northbrook Baptist Church

***Congratulations! You are getting married.*** You have asked either to have your wedding at Northbrook Baptist Church, or to have our pastor participate in the ceremony. Please read the following information. Some of the information in this packet may seem strange to people not familiar with what the Bible says about marriage, sex and family-issues. We hope you will read it with an ***open mind and heart.***

We want to do more than just help you plan and carry out a wedding ceremony. We want to help you understand how to have a ***wonderful marriage.*** Everyone enters marriage with hope and optimism. But, in Iowa, there are ***46 divorces for every 100 marriages.*** What we have been doing has not been working. We feel a responsibility to help you ***prepare for marriage as well as for the wedding.*** If you are just looking for a church and/or pastor for the ceremony, and are not willing to view marriage as a sacred covenant with God, this is probably not the church for you. We believe marriage is ordained by God. We take it seriously. We hope you do, too.

We share these truths because we want to honor God and uphold His Word. We also believe that ***obedience to God's ways is best for you and for your marriage.*** God does not give us laws to oppress us, but to bless us. Those who live their lives according to what God says in the Bible have a firm foundation for their lives. They build ***better marriages*** and raise spiritually ***healthier children.*** We believe what the Bible says. We believe it will help you. We hope you will listen.

There are two main sections in this packet. The first section contains ***policies for our church about the use of the building, the ceremony, and other issues.*** These are the more practical details of planning a wedding. We also include a list of simple guidelines for weddings at Northbrook, and a listing of our fees.

In the second section, the pastor will share with you ***what he believes about marriage,*** and related issues. After the general discussion, we will deal with ***specific situations*** that may or may not apply to you. Please read those that pertain to you

We do ***not expect*** that everyone who gets married at Northbrook agree with everything we believe about marriage. But we, as a church, are committed to honoring God and to obeying him fully. We cannot compromise God's Word. If you wish to be married at Northbrook, or to have our pastoral staff involved, ***you should share our desire*** to do things according to scripture.

We present these guidelines with our hope and our prayer that your wedding will be wonderful, and that the ***marriage that follows will be even better.***

## **Wedding Policies**

### **Northbrook Baptist Church**

#### **Procedure for Planning and Scheduling a Wedding**

- 1) Call the church to see if the pastor and/or church are available. We need to have at least 3 months advance notice of a wedding. Six months is preferable. This gives us time to make adequate preparation both for the wedding ceremony and the marriage itself. We will make a tentative reservation of the building, which will be confirmed later after you have reviewed these guidelines and met with the pastor.
- 2) We will send you a copy of these policies for you to review. If you are willing to abide by the policies, you return the last page of this packet, signed by both the Bride and the Groom. If we do not hear from you within two weeks after we send out the policy statement, we will cancel your building reservation, and assume you have made other plans.
- 3) You should call the church to set up an appointment with the pastor to go over policies and procedures, and begin planning the service. He will confirm at this meeting his participation in the wedding, and the use of the building. You should be prepared to pay the building usage fee at this time.
- 4) You must go through any premarital counseling the pastor deems necessary. There are local counseling services and opportunities to take marriage classes. The pastor may also require your willingness to schedule some counseling sessions in the first year of your marriage.
- 5) Meet with the pastor about a month before the wedding to make sure everything is set for the wedding ceremony. Finalize plans and confirm that other conditions have been met.
- 6) We will schedule a rehearsal, under the pastor's direction, to rehearse the ceremony. It is important that the entire wedding party be present for this. If you have a wedding coordinator, please have him or her contact the pastor so that they can work together. However, the pastor maintains authority over the ceremony, and will conduct the rehearsal.
- 7) If, at any point during this process, you fail to abide by this agreement, the pastor may decide not to participate in the wedding ceremony, and to revoke permission to use the building.
- 8) All fees must be paid at the time of the reservation of the building. The wedding is not officially scheduled on the church calendar until the fees are paid.

#### **Use of the Building**

- 1) Our facility will hold nearly 300 people for a wedding. We have stacking chairs that can be arranged any way desirable. We have a modern kitchen and spacious area for the reception, if other requirements are met

2) The wedding party is responsible to set up the church and/or the fellowship hall, and to *return everything to its original position before you leave*. We will bring in a janitor to clean the building after the wedding, but the wedding party is responsible to replace furniture. This must be done the day of the wedding.

3) The following policies should be observed at all times when using Northbrook's facilities.

- No alcohol products on the premises, including the parking lot. If members of the wedding party or guests arrive at the church in a drunken condition, they may be asked to leave the premises.
- No smoking in the buildings. We would prefer no smoking on the premises, but if people have to smoke, it must be in the covered entry area at the north entrance to the building. The cement front entry area is a no-smoking area. Cigarette butts should be properly disposed of, not thrown on the ground.
- No dances are allowed on the church premises.
- All members of the wedding party, as well as guests, should remember that they are in a church and behave in a manner that is appropriate for a church setting. It is the wedding party's responsibility to enforce this policy.
- Rice will not be thrown on the church premises. If bird seed is used, it must be completely cleaned up.
- During the time before and after weddings and during the reception if it is held on premises, children should be well-supervised. They must not be allowed to play in the nurseries unsupervised, and they must not play on the church stage or around the piano and organ.
- The wedding party may not use the church kitchen as a dressing room.

## **Fees**

For those who are not members or regular attenders of Northbrook Baptist Church, there is a \$200 fee for the use of the building, \$300 if the building is to be used for the reception. This includes a janitorial fee. Members and regular attenders will pay a \$50 fee for janitorial services, \$100 if the reception is held here.

The current pastor does not set a specific fee. That is left to the wedding party's discretion. The wedding party should decide what honorarium they feel is appropriate. This should be given directly to the pastor, not to the church. Future pastors may set fees for performing weddings, at their discretion.

We do not have professional musicians. But if the church's musicians are used, there will be a standard fee for their services, as follows. The pianist or organist should be paid \$50 by members, \$75 by non-members. The church does not have a staff soloist, so finding and compensating soloists is at the discretion of the wedding party.

If the church piano or organ is to be used by the wedding party, but not the church pianist or organist, a representative of the music department of the church must be consulted. We have a beautiful grand piano, and a good quality organ. Those who use the instruments must treat them carefully.

In addition, if the sound system will be used in any way, there must be a member of the church AV committee present for rehearsal and the wedding. No one but a member of the church AV committee may use the church's sound or lighting system. A fee of \$50 for members and \$75 for non-members is required for their service.

If the church nurseries are to be used, there will be an additional \$25 fee for each nursery room used. This fee will not apply to members. Toys must be picked up and the room straightened after usage

#### Who Is a Member?

Members fees apply to those who are regular attenders and active participants in this church, whether their names are on the membership rolls or not. If the bride or groom has an immediate family member who is a member, the wedding party may be given the reduced members' fees, at the pastor's discretion. In addition, members of our sister churches who wish to use the building may be given the members fees, at the pastor's discretion.

#### **Fees for Use of Building for Weddings**

<u>Service</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Non-members</u>
Wedding	\$50	\$200
Wedding with Reception	\$100	\$300
Pastor's Honorarium	Wedding Party's Discretion	
Pianist/Organist	\$50	\$75
Sound Technician	\$50	\$75
Soloists	Not provided by church.	
Nursery Usage	0	\$25 per room.

Fees must be paid at the time the building is reserved.

If the wedding is cancelled, whether by the wedding party or by the church, the fees will be returned, except for a \$25 administrative fee for members, \$50 for non-members.

## Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony is a time of celebration and joy, but it is **also a worship service**. We expect people to behave appropriately during the ceremony. The ceremony does not need to be somber, but it should be **worshipful and reverent**. The following policies will be observed;

- 1) The pastor reserves the right to refuse to participate in any wedding. If a pastor is to be used who is not a part of the Northbrook Baptist Church staff, he must contact and be approved by the pastor. In general, pastors must be of like faith and practice to ours. A document listing the doctrines and practices of Southern Baptist Churches is available upon request. If the wedding party desires joint participation between the pastor and a minister from another church, the same requirements apply.
- 2) Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman before God. Therefore, solemn **vows are appropriate**. If a couple wishes to express their feelings for one another personally, they will be given time to do so. This expression of love cannot replace the vows made during the ceremony. The pastor generally uses traditional vows, or a more modern language version. The vows **must reflect biblical concepts of marriage**, and bind the couple in a **sacred covenant**.
- 3) It is strongly urged that **all music used in the service be Christian**. If any secular music is to be used in the ceremony, it must be appropriate and **in accord with biblical values**. This will be determined by the pastor or music director. There are musical styles that are inappropriate for a Christian wedding, and there are many songs with lyrics that run counter to God's standards. They will not be used in the wedding ceremony.
- 4) Candles may be used in ceremonies, but only in line with established local codes.
- 5) There is great freedom in the format of the wedding ceremony. The pastor has a standard service which can be used as a guide, but there is freedom to vary from that, or to formulate an entirely new service. However, the pastor reserves the right to veto any portion of the service that would be deemed contrary to biblical principles.

## *What the Bible Says About Marriage*

David L. Miller, Pastor

### My Philosophy of Marriage

Marriage is a “sacred institution.” God made man and woman and decreed that they would be joined together in marriage and called this “very good.” Marriage is not just between a man and a woman, but **between a man and a woman and the God who made them**. Jesus blessed the institution of marriage and made this strong statement about marriage, “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” The vows made are sacred and holy, made not only to one another, but also to God. For this reason, **Northbrook Baptist Church and its ministerial staff take marriage and the marriage vows very seriously**.

Those who wish to be married at Northbrook Baptist Church, or by its pastor, members or not, should know my stands and views. **You do not have to agree with everything I believe**, but need to understand where I come from. I would be glad to meet with you to discuss any of this.

### God’s Ideal for Marriage

Attitudes toward marriage have changed drastically from the original intent of God when he designed marriage. It has always been God’s will, revealed in scripture, that **a man and a woman would unite together as one, leaving behind their separate lives to spend the rest of their lives in an intimate, permanent, and faithful relationship**. It has always been God’s will that **sexual activity should take place only within marriage**. That means that sex before marriage is both sinful and damaging to the eventual success of the marriage. Nothing is more destructive to marriage than infidelity, sexual involvement outside of marriage.

**God’s will has not changed**. It is today what it was at the beginning of time: that a man and a woman who have kept themselves pure would commit themselves to one another for the rest of their lives in unswerving faithfulness. This is God’s will, and the key to successful and happy marriages.

### When Situations Are Not Ideal

Sin mars the beauty of God’s original plan. A recent survey in a national magazine said that only 7% of men and 20% of women are virgins when they marry. The fact that the majority ignores God’s will and his standards of right and wrong do not change the standards. **God’s standards do not change** no matter how many people violate them.

And there are serious consequences to all sin. **Sin not only grieves God, but it damages the people** who commit it. The reality is that many of the people who ask to be married at Northbrook Baptist Church have not followed God’s standards in everything. Some have been sexually active. Some even live together before marriage. Some are expecting a child and are getting married because of that. Some have been married and divorced. It is our hope and wish that everyone would obey God’s will and keep all sexual activity within marriage. It is an unfortunate reality that many do not. The question we face is what to do when people have failed to follow God’s will. **We believe that God can heal what sin has broken**. We need to seek God’s healing in situations where sin has been present.

### *Forgiveness in Christ*

The scripture tells us that **all have sinned**. We have all turned away from God and sinned against him. God gave us his laws for behavior, called the Ten Commandments. We are to put him first in our lives, honor his name, and take time to worship him regularly. We are to honor our parents, be sexually pure, not kill, steal, lie, or even covet things that belong to others. Jesus said that even lust and hatred, sins of the heart, are violations of God's law against adultery and murder. By this standard, **we are all sinners**. No one is righteous before God. Scripture says that the **penalty for sin is death**; God's eternal wrath and hell.

But, in spite of our sins, God loves us and has **provided a way** for our sins to be forgiven. He sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus kept the law perfectly. He never committed a single sin in thought, word or action in his whole life. He took the punishment of our sins on himself on the cross. **God punished Jesus with the death and hell that our sins deserved**. Jesus died for our sins.

Jesus then **rose from the dead to offer salvation** to all who would believe. To receive salvation and the forgiveness of sins, you must recognize your sin and **repent** of it. Then, you must **believe** in Jesus Christ, yielding the ownership of your life to him. Those who repent of sin and believe in Jesus have their sins washed away and born again, given new and eternal life.

What does all this have to do with marriage? Everything. If you want to have a happy, fulfilled, and lifelong marriage as God intended, you need the help and support of Jesus Christ. God blesses those who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. **The sins you have committed in the past do not have to ruin your future**. You can have both forgiveness for those sins, and a new life of righteousness through Jesus Christ.

However, if you ignore God, and violate God's law, it will bring serious consequences into your life, not just in eternity, but in your life right now. Our society is just beginning to reap a harvest from the immorality and sin we have sown in the last generation. If you do not deal with moral sin before your marriage, it will have serious consequences after marriage.

Have you ever repented of your sins and trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

If not, will you do that now, to receive forgiveness from sin and a new life with Jesus at the center?

## Specific Situations

### *For a Christian Marrying a Non-Christian*

2 Corinthians 7 says that Christians should not be “unequally yoked” together with non-Christians. This was a reference to using two completely different types of animals to work together to pull a plow. Someone who has trusted Christ as Savior and Lord has made a life-defining commitment. Such a person cannot join in marriage with someone who has not trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord without becoming “unequally yoked.”

For this reason, the pastor of Northbrook Baptist Church refuses to participate in the wedding of a Christian to a non-Christian.

For this purpose, we define a Christian as someone who has personally placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, turning away from their sin and trusting their lives to Christ.

Have both of you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord?

### *For the Sexually Active*

This world makes it seem normal to be sexually active before marriage. It may be **normal, but it is not moral**. It is wrong. It is sin. It is also destructive to the long term success of marriage. For a healthy marriage, one that honors God, you must repent of all sexual activity in your past, and commit yourself to sexual purity in the future. This would include a commitment to abstinence (no sexual activity) from this point until you are married.

God created sex, and called His creation very good. There is **nothing shameful or dirty** about sex, as long as it is **kept within the boundaries that God has determined**. It is His will that a man and a woman wait until marriage to have sex, and then have sex only with one another while married.

Within the boundaries of marriage, sex is a **beautiful expression of love and intimacy**. It is intended not only for the purpose of having children, but is designed by God to give mutual pleasure. Studies have shown repeatedly that the **most satisfying sex comes within a healthy monogamous relationship** (a happy marriage).

If you have failed in this area, **forgiveness is available**. You must admit that the sexual activity you have been involved in is a sin against God, and confess that. Commit yourself to God and His ways. He will help you to be pure, to resist temptation, and to enjoy sex the way He intended, within the bonds of marriage.

It is not my habit to inquire into details about the sex lives of the couples I marry, unless I am doing extensive premarital counseling. **God, who sees our hearts**, and knows what is done in secret, **is the one you must answer to**, not me. To have a marriage blessed by Him, you need to be right with Him.

Have you confessed to God and to your fiancée all previous sexual activity with others?

(It is usually not necessary to go into details, just to confess the sin.)

Have you confessed to God and to your fiancée any previous sexual activity with each other?

Have you committed yourselves to a life of sexual purity from this moment until you are married?

### *For Those Living Together*

Many couples live together before marriage. The logic is that by living together, they discover if they are truly compatible, and then marry if things work out. There are two problems with this. First, **it violates God's holy will**. Second, **it does not work**. Statistics show that those who live together before marriage have a **much higher divorce rate** than those who do not. So, living together before marriage is not only a sin, it is a **bad idea**. It contributes to the failure of marriage.

If you are living together, and wish to get married, there are **two options** that can be considered. I have done **simple, private ceremonies** for those who want to get married quickly. Those who want to have a bigger public wedding must make the **commitment to live separately until the wedding**.

What I will not do is perform a large public ceremony for a couple living together who are unwilling to repent and commit themselves to living God's way. To do so would be to publicly condone a living arrangement that violates God's will, and to dishonor Him.

Have you repented to God and to each other for the sin of living together?

Have you committed yourselves to sexual purity from today until your marriage?

*For Those Who Are Having a Baby*

Today, pregnancy is often the factor that motivates people to get married. The relationship may or may not have been heading for the altar, but once a baby is on the way, the couple wants to get married. There are some important observations about this.

- It is best for the child to be raised in a home by his mother and father, **living together in marriage**, loving each other and bringing the child up in the ways of the Lord. The needs of the baby must be put first. Mature **parents sacrifice** for the good of their children. That means that the decision to marry must be made with a view toward the needs and interests of the child. When you make a baby, **you (both father and mother) lose the right to put yourself first.**
- On the other hand, marriage will not automatically change a person. An irresponsible, self-centered person **will not magically change** by saying “I do” or by becoming a father or mother. You are deceiving yourself if you think he or she will. There are times when the best thing to do for the sake of the baby is to put an irresponsible, angry person out of your life. You should not expose your baby to someone who might harm that child.
- Marriages that take place only because of a baby are among the most difficult. The divorce rate is very high, and dissatisfaction is also high. People often feel **trapped and forced into marriage**, and can even grow to **resent both the spouse and the child.** It takes much more sacrifice and effort to make this kind of marriage work. **With the power of Jesus Christ, these marriages can be successful, but they are difficult.**
- Young people should not be forced into marriage by their parents, even if they are having a baby.

If you are pregnant, you should seriously and prayerfully consider marriage, based primarily on what is best for the child. Whether you marry or not, the father is responsible to his child, and to the woman who bears that child. If you wish to marry, you should repent of sexual sin, look to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, and commit yourselves to a life of honoring and obeying him.

### *For the Divorced*

Divorce is a difficult issue. The ideal of God's Word is that marriage lasts "as long as you both shall live." On the other hand, scripture, allowing for the imperfections of human behavior, allows limited grounds for divorce, especially adultery or abandonment by the other spouse. I have done weddings for people who have previously been divorced. Each situation is different, though, so each must be dealt with differently. Second marriages are statistically more difficult than first marriages. The divorce rate on second marriages approaches two-thirds. The following suggestions might be helpful:

- Many people repeat the same mistakes in marriage over and over. Have you ever known someone who divorced one alcoholic and married another? The key is to analyze, sometimes with the help of wise counsel, why your previous marriage failed and what can be done to see that it doesn't happen again. Have you availed yourself of such wise counsel?
- Have you repented to God of any sin and failure on your part in the previous marriage? Even if your spouse was 95% responsible for the divorce, you are still responsible for the 5%. You need to deal with that in humility. Often, divorced people are very defensive, laying the blame on the other party. Another person's sin does not excuse yours. The best way to start over is to make sure that all the past issues are completely dealt with.
- One final point: despite the statistics, the power of Christ changes lives. Even though a previous marriage may have failed, this one does not have to. God can make all things new, and empower you have a happy, fulfilling and wonderful second marriage. It will take faith and hard work, but it can happen.

### *Summary*

God has set forth his will for marriage clearly: **one man and one woman, sexually pure until marriage, committing themselves to a lifelong and completely faithful relationship, and to living together as one for the glory of God.** This standard is clear in scripture, and is still true even though many do not follow it.

Those who have violated God's standards can turn from their sin and **rebuild lives of righteousness.** They can still have happy and fulfilled marriages, if they commit themselves to God's ways.

I am very willing to help anyone, no matter what their situation in life, to get their lives in order and to come to God for forgiveness and renewal. Those who want to continue in lives of sin and rebellion against God's law should not ask me to speak God's blessing on their marriage.

I hope that, whatever your situation in life, you will seek a living relationship with Christ, and seek to build a marriage that will glorify Him and be a blessing to you. When you repent of sin and trust Jesus Christ, it is possible. God works miracles. He changes life. Will you ask Him to do that for you?

**Groom:**

I have read the church policies for weddings at Northbrook Baptist Church, and have reviewed Dave Miller's statement of a "Biblical Philosophy of Marriage." Having read these policies, I agree to abide by them, and wish to be married at Northbrook Baptist Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(Groom's signature)

Has the groom trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Yes No Not Sure

**Bride:**

I have read the church policies for weddings at Northbrook Baptist Church, and have reviewed Dave Miller's statement of a "Biblical Philosophy of Marriage." Having read these policies, I agree to abide by them, and wish to be married at Northbrook Baptist Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(Bride's signature)

Has the bride trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Yes No Not Sure

Information:

Planned Date of Wedding: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated number to attend \_\_\_\_\_

Will the reception be at Northbrook? Yes No

**Pastor**

I have with this couple and reviewed the Biblical teachings on marriage with them, as well as their personal information. I agree to place this wedding on the church calendar, reserve our building for the wedding, and/or to participate in the wedding.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(Pastor's signature)

Please return this form to the church office with the total fee amount, and request an appointment with the pastor to discuss the wedding details.