

**A Witness To Christian Marriage**  
**Wes Brooks and Kristen Smith**  
**Main Street UMC, Saturday, September 28, 2013**

**T**his wedding is a delight for me. First because I've been welcomed into the lives and friendship of two fine young people, Wes and Kristen- an artist and a nurse, as we've worked together through a program of pre-marital counseling over the last several months. I'd love to have a recording of the things they talked about on the way home to Greenville after our discussions. Wes, in a relaxed Wes sort of way, might smile and say, "Kristen, he's really serious about this stuff, isn't he?"

And Kristen would say back in her own sassy way, "Oh Yea! And Wes, I have a plan for you now that we've studied assertive marital communications. I want you to start bragging on me when I'm not around the way Pastor Phil brags on Lori, and I'll do the same for you, though not as often you understand."

Wes would then say, "Yes, and I think we'd better find a church soon or he might un-sign our wedding license!"

As good students they've read the books, taken the profile, studied the meaning of Christian marriage, and opened their lives to the Lord and one another at a new level. We've agreed in private that their parents deserve much of the credit for how well-equipped they are for the new status and the honorable and enduring titles of *husband* and *wife*. Not that life has been perfect or without pain or all their decisions wise, but the basics are all there for them to go the distance together, which is- as the service states- *until we are parted by death*. Marriage is- by God's design- a good but limited earthly institution, the boundary of which is death. It will not endure into the kingdom of God, so in this sense marriage is not eternal, though all its lessons and learnings go with us into that new world where all are transparent to one another and to the unlimited creativity and joy of dwelling within the circle of love that is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Kristen and Wes may now call me *Coach Phil* since I'm their marriage educator, and if they have some bumps ahead as they move deeper into an appreciation of one another's virtues and vices- they have someone they can call who's invested considerable time in the foundation of their life. You build a bridge which can be walked back over whenever needed. It's why the pastoral care of marriages ought to be a high priority of churches. We must rebuild a pro-marriage culture and the thoughtful practices that support it.

The TV program *Say Yes To The Dress* is not just about being beautiful for a day. Beneath the fluff and fashion is the deep hope of a woman that one good man will love

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her all her life, not just when she's young and sleek, but when she carries a few extra pounds, has crow's feet around her eyes, gray hair, and age spots on her hands. The culture has the hype, but the church the realities, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until we are parted by death." I will love you not just today but all of life no matter what. The promises taken today shape the future with deep and enduring commitments. Today you enter this *honorable estate*.

Marriage, as licensed by the state and blessed by the church, is the natural order of life. All other arrangements and all lesser arrangements are less precisely because they do not approach the ideal written into our minds and bodies as gendered pairs. But when the impulses of biology and the structures of commitment and public order come together in marriage, there a deep and sweet goodness is being enacted. Something basic is celebrated. We are back in Genesis chapter 2 where God presented Eve to Adam as his equal, his earthly fulfillment and forever friend. Societies that honor and protect the marriage of men and women are more stable and vital than those who neglect or undermine it by redefinition. One man and one woman in a lifelong bond is self-evidently the best way to go. Children know this; they want a momma and a daddy who love each other. Marriage is good for adults and critical for children. In one of our sessions I heard a clicking in the background and asked Wes, "What's that noise?" He smiled, "I think that's Kristen's biological clock gaining volume." Not all couples can conceive and bear children, and children do not validate a marriage, but having a family and passing on this faith to another generation is one of the core purposes of marriage. It starts with the two of you, but it does not stop there. It is God who made us from the moment of conception male and female, who charged us with sexual energies as man and woman, and who brings order and fruitfulness to those wonderful powers through the enduring dignity of public Christian marriage. And if you are saying an inward Yes to my words, it's because you know they are true and deeply grounded in the Bible's wisdom.

Notice all the promises made today. First the vows of intention by the couple, their family, and all who are present. We give notice why we're here, and we do not move ahead until the couple, their families, and all present agree to keep our promises. Then the wedding vows with the two facing each other. It's an electric moment because only the married know what's ahead after they say *I do*. Then the ring vows where circles of gold on a certain finger announced to the world, "I'm already taken and happy about it." And at the end a kiss, a sign of joyful physical intimacy to stretch across a lifetime. This is good stuff! Anything better must await God's kingdom when the whole of creation will be one big, unending wedding feast. Blessings on your both on this your wedding day. Follow Jesus Christ among his people, and you will find all that you need. Amen.

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