



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Where were you, fifteen years ago? For me, it was only yesterday... and, a lifetime past. My journey of life - and, calling - dropped me into "active duty," as a senior pastor in a very large church, for four years. That era of my leadership saga comes to mind as we turn this corner into May...

When you're the senior guy in a church, there are three crucial seasons in the church year calendar. Think USC Football: all of your scheduled games are important, for sure, but there are two that stand out above the others: the UCLA game... and, the Rose Bowl (which, of course, will be USC's to win). In the same manner, the three biggies are all-hands-on-deck at church: Christmas, Easter... and Mother's Day.

Like Christmas - which, at church, isn't one day, but a month-long build-up - Mother's Day is part of a larger whole. Mother's Day in May; Father's Day in June: those are the bookends for the obligatory, annual "life in the family" preaching series. Four weeks devoted to affirming moms and confronting dads, with a little warm-and-fuzzy marriage stuff thrown in for balance...

Mother's Day marked the start of the annual wedding frenzy. The prime dates for the church auditorium were Friday nights and Saturday noons, from Memorial Day to Labor



Day. You could wait and book the caterer and the groom later, but locking in the venue was a long-horizon act of strategic planning. The planning that went into weddings surpassed the logistics of the *six-services-for-Christmas strain* that we "pro's" engaged.

It always amazed me how much forethought went into the smallest details of the matrimonial mayhem... and how little attention was paid to the most imperative piece of the whole affair. They would pick out the garnish on the plate for the reception dinner... but say, "Whatever!" to the selection of the VOWS...

Vows? Not a small part of the deal. Those are the fine print of marriage; more important than the prenuptial (standard issue for the second-time-around, with children in the wedding party who are wondering if the new spouse will use their college fund for a timeshare in Bali), the vows are the only part of the service that God puts in the digital archive. Why?

"When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God." (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7)

Cheri and I are heading into our 37th anniversary, come June. The only part of our wedding that is still meaningful is our vows. While I appreciate the romantic rush that comes from "renewing your vows," we are still bound by the ones we agreed to with Rev. Bob Scott, back in '71.

When we married, divorce was on the rise. In that year, for every three marriages conducted, there was one divorce granted. Fast forward to today: the number of marriages is down by a third, but the number of divorces is stable. Now, for every wedding license granted, one is revoked. Less "I do's," but a steady stream of "I'm done's." *Whasup? Why the problem?*

A generation that is comfortable getting out of a car loan or mortgage when it goes upside down (when the asset is worth less than the debt attached), lifetime partners seem similarly disposable. When the cost of making it great exceeds the value of the aging spouse, the cost-to-exit seems like a penalty worth paying...

If you've got any excited brides or grooms in your relational network, encourage them to put more energy into choosing their vows than their china pattern. Have them

focus on the contract they're entering - "until death do us part" and all of that, which is part of God's boilerplate in the deal - and avoid the cultural collision that awaits way too many of the people who will be showered with rice between now and the Fall...

Thanks, Cheri, for 37 great years. *Let's do another 40 or 50, just to prove that 18 wasn't too young to say "I do," and mean it...*

Bob Shank

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