



IN THE  
SIGHT  
OF  
GOD

*Gordon Cheng*

PREPARING TO GET  
MARRIED IN CHURCH

*I*n the busy and exciting lead-up to the wedding day, it's easy to forget about what comes next: **the marriage**.

The four sessions in this booklet are designed to bring the focus back onto the reason for the wedding day: the marriage itself. What is marriage about? What does 'love' mean, and does it change? How can we manage differing expectations? And how does it all relate to God and to his love for us in Jesus Christ?

This booklet also contains a useful sample 'order for the celebration of marriage', and an appendix featuring a practical guide to choosing suitable Bible readings for the wedding day.

(A guide for ministers conducting these sessions is also available.)



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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

*In the Sight of God*

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 921068 32 4

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Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

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# IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

# GETTING STARTED

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Congratulations on your approaching marriage! And on the wedding, too, of course—but this booklet is not so much about wedding preparation; it's more about *marriage* preparation.

Couples and families often spend a large amount of time, energy and money preparing for the day of the wedding, but then they spend almost nothing on getting ready for the *marriage* that, God willing, will last long after the wedding itself has become a happy memory.

So these four brief sessions from the Bible have been put together to help you begin to prepare for what comes after the wedding. They are designed for a couple meeting with a minister, and are short enough (no more than half an hour each) to be used alongside other material that your minister may want to cover with you (such as the details of the wedding service).

Each session starts with the assumption that, because you are getting married in a church, you are interested in something more than a secular ceremony. In a Christian wedding, you are making Christian promises, and the words used reveal a distinctly Christian way of looking at the marriage relationship. By choosing a church wedding, you are choosing (to a greater or lesser extent) to be married “in the sight of God and of this congregation”, as the traditional wedding service puts it.

Your minister will talk to you about the form of the promises that you use and why. He may also recommend or know about other ways of

preparing for marriage, such as counselling, marriage education programs, courses and the like. A number of such courses are available, and it is well worth finding out about them and putting aside the time to do them.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET**

After this 'getting started' introduction, you'll find four sessions:

Session 1: What's love about?

Session 2: Great expectations

Session 3: Equal but different

Session 4: Something bigger than both of us

Before you come to each of the four sessions with the minister, spend about ten minutes looking at the session and noting down brief answers, together with any questions or comments you might have. Don't feel compelled to agree with what you are reading; the idea is to open up issues and get a useful discussion flowing about the important relationship that you're entering into. Each session includes passages from the Bible that are, in one way or another, relevant to marriage. This means that you can be confident that the ideas you are thinking about haven't been pulled out of thin air, but are solidly based in Christian and church tradition. As a side benefit, it can also help you work out what passages are best suited for use in your wedding ceremony! Again, your minister will help you with this.

Also, at the end of the booklet you will find one traditional and widely-used order for the celebration of marriage. It's a modern update of a marriage service written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the 16th century, and it expresses many of the ideas in the Bible passages covered by these sessions. You may find it interesting to compare it with the order you will be using for your own wedding.

## GOD IS A FAN

The final thing to note as we get started is that God thinks pretty highly of what you're about to do.

Unfortunately, over the years the church has developed—at least in some circles—a pretty negative reputation when it comes to love, sex and marriage. Unfortunately also, this is something that the church has often deserved. It's important to realize, then, that according to the Bible, God is a big fan of marriage. No-one can read the early chapters of Genesis and come away with the impression that God is somehow anti-sex, or that men and women are not supposed to enjoy each other, their differences, and the way they are made. Here's a key passage:

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”. So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man”.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and



hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.  
(Genesis 2:18-25)

It's not a concept that needs a lot of explanation. Men and women were designed for each other and for life together, with all that this implies for a healthy sexual and personal relationship. It's in this context that the first child is born into the world, and it's within the context of stable marriage and family that happy relationships and healthy individuals are able to grow. It's a gift of God. Marriage is, first and foremost, a determination to use God's good gift the way it was intended—to bring glory and thanks to him, enjoyment to each other, and children into the world.



## WHAT'S LOVE ABOUT?

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1. a) In a sentence, how would you define 'love'?

b) Think of as many different examples of 'love' as you can, and compare them with the love that an old, happily married couple have for each other.