

# The Rehearsal and Wedding

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The key, I believe, to an excellent wedding ceremony when it comes to the actual getting it done is actually the rehearsal. The rehearsal, I've experienced over the years, can be more stressful than the actual wedding itself because the rehearsal, it just seems like there's so many nerves going on, so much stress. People are coming from out of town and people sometimes could be late. There's all forms of trouble at the rehearsal. But if you can get on top of this and have a great rehearsal, I find that the wedding goes very well.

Now, let's talk about some things to talk about before the rehearsal. This is maybe like a week before the wedding and just sort of like the pre-rehearsal meeting. The first thing is get into the question of who is in charge. And then is it the bride who ultimately it's her day. She sets the final decision. The groom... Talk this over. Maybe there are parents or relatives or friends who may try to take control in a way that's undesirable. I have seen that happen many times.

I'm going to tell a few stories because this is so real. I'd had it just recently where the mother of the bride was starting to take control of the whole thing over against the wedding coordinator who was supposed to be in charge while I was still not there because they basically are going to go over everything before I got there. And when I got there, we are going to rehearse at once. Well, the wedding coordinator had no idea about this strong mother who had very much many concepts and ideas of how things were going to go. I remember coming in there and people were starting to be in tears. So I remember having to say, "Okay, everybody please sit down."

And I laid it very clear. "Okay, from this point on, now that I'm here, the pastor, I'm in charge." And then the whole thing went smooth and even the mother afterwards came and said, "Oh, I'm so glad you took charge." And the bride did. That "who's in charge" issue is really important and in some ways, I allowed the wedding coordinator to go out there and the question was not really clearly decided by the wedding coordinator and the bride and groom. So I'm just saying it's very important to ask the question "Who's in charge?"

And then if you find that there is a controlling parent or somebody involved, as a pastor with the couple, get a game plan on how it's going to go despite the fact somebody is very controlling. I'll give you some suggestions about this as this presentation goes on.

Here's another thing to talk about. What time is everybody going to come to the rehearsal? What time is it actually going to start and what time do you actually need to end? This is another interesting discussion because there's usually one groomsman or one bridesmaid or a parent or somebody who is habitually a half hour late or forty-five minutes late or whatever. So it's important to talk about the gathering time and make the gathering time way ahead or appropriately ahead of the start time. And then be very clear about the end time.

A rehearsal should take no more than forty-five minutes to an hour. Some of you are saying, "Really? I was at a rehearsal that took two hours." Some can take three hours. I've been doing this for twenty some years. And right now, my church is located right next to a wedding banquet center. So we're doing a lot of community weddings and I've done a lot. What I'm going to now share with you is how to get the wedding to be less than one hour. Are you ready? Are you ready? Here we go.

First, if there's a wedding coordinator, talk to the wedding coordinator and find out who's in charge and clarify this. If the wedding coordinator's in charge, what is he/she in charge of? Clarify this because I've also had it too where I will come into a situation where I'm sort of leading the rehearsal and then the wedding coordinator thinks that she/he is in charge. And then all of a sudden, we have a conflict between the wedding coordinator and the pastor and then all of a sudden, it takes longer. So clarify ahead of time.

In the case, when I do a wedding, I like to be in charge as a pastor. Now, you may have a different personality. But I know that I have looked at and tried at every way I find that is best as a pastor I'm going to be in charge. And then I'm going to be in charge with the bride being who I take my charging orders from or if the bride wants the groom to participate. But there's no question about it. When I do a wedding, I like to be in charge.

Some may say, “Is that the humble way of Christ?” Well, what I have learned over the years is that the best way I can serve the couple and the family at a rehearsal is serving them by being in charge. It’s way too emotional. It’s way too frustrating. When you start throwing decision upon decision upon the bride and groom, in my experience, it all takes longer and everybody gets more frustrated. Now ultimately, the bride usually is in charge higher than me so I don’t want like I’m in charge. Let’s do it my way. No. I ask the bride or the bride and groom what they want and be very clear about what it is and I execute their will. That’s being a servant.

But the day, it looks like the pastor’s in charge. No. I’m in charge but I’m really charged to do the work knowing the expectation of the bride and groom. Now, in the process of getting those clarifications down, definitely in your church or local community that you work with, develop some volunteers that know exactly what you want to do and meet with the wedding helpers at your local church. Or if you’re at a different church, actually take a few moments or use all those volunteers wherever you go that are helping out and meet with them a moment and sort of see what they’re into.

So you’re getting to the wedding place now and usually it’s your own church or another place especially if I’m traveling but I even do it in my own church is I will make the rounds and meet with the staff. If there’s a janitor, and I do this, every time I meet the janitor. If there is a wedding coordinator that I don’t know, I will meet the wedding coordinator and like I said before clarify things. I’ll even meet the people doing some coffee. I will make the rounds.

Get familiar with the sound system situation. Is there one? Is there not one? How does that work? If you’re traveling to another church, how does that mic work? And even with your own church, do not assume that the sound system will be perfect. Ask a question such as “Has the battery been changed?” You do not want to do a wedding and all of a sudden, you’re starting to get clicking and buzzing because a simple thing like the battery was not changed.

Talk to the photographers. Again, if they’re at the rehearsal, it’s outstanding to do it at the rehearsal if they’re there. A lot of times they are there. If they’re not there, you have to do that on the day of the wedding. So as you get to the wedding place, there will be staff. There will be a sound system.

But it's your own church or whether it's another church and there often are photographers there not always. If not, this is one that you probably wait until the very day of the wedding.

So right when you get there, you have to sort of make the rounds a little bit. Walk over to the bride and groom for two minutes, maybe three minutes. Then remind them of what's going to happen at the rehearsal that in fact you talked about when you did the wedding ceremony. Let them know that they are going to introduce everyone to each other before they get started. Most times, when two families come together, there's a lot of people that are not known. And you as a pastor, you want to sort of get to know the lay of the land, who is there and who is not there.

Also before the wedding ask again the couple. Do they have any questions? Again, I like to at this time really say to the bride that if there is a major decision, I'm going to ask you. And sometimes there might be noise in there like the bride's mother or someone else will try to convince her to do something else. Basically I might come off like a little bit mean. Again, I never do it meanly. But I might come off a little rude.

Again, you do this non-rudely. But you really are about doing the will of the bride and the groom and not the will of four or five people that all of a sudden chime in. Now believe you me. If you are not very assertive, I'm going to go back to this, in terms of what the will of the bride is or the will of the groom is, it can be a free for all. I kid you not. Okay. I said it. Now again, and I'm going to move on.

So you gather everybody for the rehearsal and the first thing is the welcome. A lot of times I like to do is I want to sort of want to welcome them with maybe a cool story about the bride and groom and your relationship maybe or the bride and groom and how they met or something that just starts the whole thing with a positive. Just let the nerves settle type of statement. And then you open with prayer including asking God to really help the rehearsal tonight and keep us all serving the Lord and wanting the best for the bride and the groom.

The introductions then occur and then expectations. Now in the expectation side, I again state, "You know, I'm so glad you're all here." This is sort of my line. I say, "Don't be offended if I'm very direct with what we're doing here. I think everybody's hungry, right?" And usually everybody shakes their head

and laughs. “How long do you want to be here? Do you want to be here forty-five minutes, an hour? How about two hours or three hours?” Everybody’s going like “Half hour, Pastor.” “Oh, you want a half hour.” So then I joke around. If that’s going to be the case, then I’m going to really have to be a sergeant here today.

I’m going to ask the bride and groom that I’ve already met and we sort of know how this is going to go. So I’m going to be like a sergeant to you all today and I’m asking you do not get offended especially your moms or dads or relatives because everybody has a lot of input. We start opening up to a lot of input, we could be here all night. And notice what I’ve just done. I sort of set the expectation that I’m going to be in charge. When I’m talking directly, then people are not so offended.

Now, I say this---this is in America and probably the west---something that would work very well. But I’m not sure in your particular culture how all those expectations would be. But I will tell you if time is of the essence, then you’re going to want the expectations clearly given.

Okay, now let’s get into the actual rehearsal. Now what I’ve learned over the years is after the prayer and expectation is set is line everybody up into position one. What’s position one? Position one is the position right after everybody has processed in. So I’m now the pastor and on my right are the bridesmaids. On my left are the groomsmen. There might be a flower girl or a ring bearer. They’ve all come there and they’re into that position and I call it position one.

In that position, everybody stays in the back and the bride and her father are going to process into that position. Once everybody’s into that position, and I’ll do that first before we even practice the walking in, what I do is once they’re in position, we’ll position everybody at the right place so they all look good. And then I will ask the bride, not the bride’s mother, I’ll ask the bride, “Hey, Suzy/Sally, come out here. Does that look good to you?” When she says yes, then I have a volunteer get a little masking tape and I put the tape where it’s supposed to go.

Now I tell you that it’s interesting how some people say, “We don’t need tape. We know where to go.” And I right away say, “Oh, no. we’re taping this down. I cannot tell you how many times people say like “Oh, we remember. We won’t need tape.” Early in my ministry, I would allow them not to tape it

down. And then when they actually did the wedding, they're in all these positions that are awkward and not quite right. So I always say is tape. Put a little piece of tape down so that when we're actually having the processional in there, everyone knows exactly where they're supposed to stand.

Okay. So you've got position one all set up. Then have everybody go to the back and line up. The grandparents are lined up first and the parents except the father of the bride. So you have them come in. The grandparents sit down. A lot of times, there might be an usher that will take the arm of the grandmother and process in, and the grandfather is walking right behind. And then the parents except the bride. You'll have the groom's father and mother coming in. You might have an usher take the hand or take the arm of a groom's mother with the father right behind or you just might have them walk in as a couple. Talk about that and have them walk. And then after the grandparents and the parents except the father of the bride are seated.

In the program that I have before you, I have the mothers then walk up in practice lighting the unity candle if they do the unity candle. Of course, those candles represent the birth of that groom and the bride. So they do their thing and they practice that. And then the groom and the pastor, so the groom and I will walk into our position which is the center position looking backwards, looking back towards the audience, toward the back of the church or the back of the place where the wedding is going to occur.

So we're standing in there right next to each other. We've walked in together. Again, the walking in, traditionally as the pastor walks in and the groom walks behind the pastor, I like to just walk side by side with the groom into our position. So we walk into the place. The next thing is the groomsmen and the bridesmaids' process into position one that you just put them all into before they even went to the back of the church of the building that you're doing the wedding at or the place you're doing the wedding.

So now, they are now practicing and I'm like in the center there. What I'm making sure is that they don't walk too fast so that the photographer tomorrow, the next day is not going to have trouble and they walk arm in arm. The other option to do here by the way is to have all the groomsmen come in

already lined up. So the pastor and the groom come forward and all the groomsmen just line up on the side and then each bridesmaid comes in one by one. But for the purposes of this class, I'm just going to have them meet together and walk in together.

So as they walk in together, they come to that place right before the pastor and the groom and then they separate and they go to their tape. The last bridesmaid and the last groomsman in order of how the bride and groom picked go first, and they go to the place where the tape is. Then after they're all in place, the flower girl or girls and the ring bearer or ring bearers practice walking down. Now, one thing I like to do is I like to stop everything now even before the sixth and ask. Sometimes there'll be like a white carpet that the ushers will roll down.

What often happens is that the groomsmen and the bridesmaids are in position one. And then the ushers come after that and roll down the carpet and then the flower girls put little petals off. In America, you see those little petals on the white carpet at that point. In the rehearsal, there won't be a white carpet there and that's fine. But anyway, you want to talk about that issue if there is going to be a white carpet and if the flower girls and the ring bearer are going to do it before the bride comes down if they're going to put like little petals on there. But again, that's just a detail to talk about at the rehearsal.

While the music starts, and again there was music by the way. I didn't mention this. There was music happening. The piano player will be there. He/she will be doing the music even through the processional of the groomsmen and the bridesmaids and the pastor. There might be a music change after the parents come in. I forgot to mention that. I'm not going to go back and do this presentation over. You probably get the point that there will be music.

But the music starts—and this is the bridal music, the bridal march or whatever—and when that music starts, the bride's mother usually stands and turns around, and it signals to everybody else to also stand. Now some people choose not to have anybody stand and they're all seating. But usually everybody stands for the entrance of the bride. So the bride starts walking with her father. Not too quick. You'll say, "Not too quick. Just enjoy this. Take this all in as the music is playing."

And then the bride and her father processional occurs. What they do is they will go even with the mothers. So it's the bride and her father process, that processional occurs. But they will step even with the mothers so the mothers will be there with the groom's father and the other mother and there the bride will be there. We're all now finally in position one.

What you then do is have everybody practice that again. I always find that this is the hardest thing to do. Before you even practice the rest of the ceremony, go do it again. So now you're doing this whole thing again and now we're back to the giving of the bride. I gave you a sample ceremony there. You ask the question, "Who gives this woman to this woman?" "Her mother and I do. We do." Those are all things to talk about when you actually talk about the program at the ceremony discussion.

When that's all done, you are going to go to position two. Now before you go to position two, before you even ask the giving of the bride, and I am giving different suggestions, when everybody's in that position, you might have a location or you might even have the purpose of marriage or I want to welcome everybody here today. That's all you as a pastor how you want to do that. I gave some suggestions and very self-evident in some of the resources I gave you.

But at the giving of the bride, whether you put a little purpose of marriage before that or whatever, but after the father says, "Her mother and I or I do," all of you move to position two. Now position two is where let's say you have a podium and often there is in church a podium, you'll walk up the stairs. It's a more elevated place. The pastor is here and the bride is on your right and the groom is on your left like this. You're in that position now and then what happens is the groomsmen are kind of staggered on the steps going down to the bottom step and the bridesmaids on the other side.

At this point in the rehearsal, you sort of have everybody go into position, and then you just say, "Time out!" I go "Time out!" and I'll take the bride down with me and the bride and I will decide where is everybody standing. Is it the right spot? Then I will ask everybody, "Can everybody see the bride and the groom?" Early in my ministry, I would just position them and then afterwards find out that they couldn't see the ceremony. What you can do is you can position them and ask, "Can everybody see the bride and the groom?" So you find that position that's just right for that. Okay.



So you find it and what do you do? You get tape and tape it down again. Tape down their positions so everybody knows where they're going to go. Then after so you then process to position two. It's been taped down and then you'll do the prayer or maybe you'll do the purpose of marriage at that time or you'll do a purpose of marriage and a prayer. See, those are all those things you'll talk about when you talk about the ceremony.

There's the institution of marriage that you'll go through. Notice that on the notes that I gave you. I even have written down the institution of marriage that I got from the Psalter Hymnal of the CRC since I have Christian reform background. I've been using that for years and they really researched this really well. I looked at other resources on the web and often they're very, very similar. So that's the one that I'm going to give you as a sample. And then after you do that, then you ask a declaration of intent. Now that you heard the will of God for marriage, do you promise to abide by it? And the couple says each "I do."

In a sense, know this. Marriage is a contract. It's a contract with God, a contract with the couple together. It's a contract with the community. It's really important that you do the institution of marriage and that declaration of intent. So when I put down here declaration of intent, what you're reading is what is the institution of marriage before they decide to the declaration of intent. All the resources are in the class for you to look at.

Then after that comes the exchange of vows and I have sample vows for you to look at. And we will practice that in the rehearsal because that's really important that... I, George, take you Sally to be my wife. And then they say it. "I promise before God. I promise before God and all who are present here and all who are present here to be your loving and faithful wife, to be your loving and faithful wife as long as our life shall last." Look at this. I got the whole thing memorized because I've done it for so many times and for so many couples. I have it memorized but you say it in little increments.

Then after you do the vows, you do the exchange of rings. "I give you this ring as a symbol of our covenant in Christ." "Repeat after me, George" and George does that and vice versa. And then the lighting of the unity candle or sometimes there's a sand ceremony. They're very popular nowadays.

Whatever it is, after the rings, they'll go over and I'm just going to use the unity candle. They'll take the two individual unity candles and light the unity candle. They can either blow out that candle or they can just leave the candle going.

Then after that, have the scripture read. Oh by the way, in the unity candle back up a little bit. If somebody sings a solo right there, that's a beautiful place for a solo whether it's a traditional Our Father or another song. It's often beautiful. What's nice about having that there is it gives the couple---up to this whole point, it just seemed everything was going really fast---it gives the couple a little bit of a time just to take a little breath and take in their day.

Then you do the scripture reading. And even the scripture, again I put that right there. But that can go up right around the institution of marriage, declaration of intent spot. You can just talk to the couple about where they want. But for the purposes of the teaching, the scripture passage is right there. It can be read or you could read it. In the sample message that I did, I just read that one passage about giving thanks in whatever circumstances for this is God's will.

Then comes the message. I gave you a sample message and you can look at that. Now in the rehearsal, you would not do that sample message. Just say, "Well, I'll do the message tomorrow." Don't practice the message with everybody there. And then the declaration of marriage after it. And then you might after the message have a prayer. You might want to say pray, pray, pray, pray. But in the declaration of marriage, actually do that right there. Why? It's because you are practicing their correct names.

Like in the beginning when you do "The purpose we're here today to bring together so and so and so and so." You will be practicing their names. But in the rehearsal, for your benefit, practice their names again. So then after that's done, after you've declared them husband and wife in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, what God has brought together let no man separate," then you'll present. "I like to present..."

And then you say to the groom before I move on, "You may kiss your bride." So there's the kiss and they do the practice kiss and everybody claps in the rehearsal if that is your tradition. In America, they

will kiss right there. In some traditions, that first kiss is going to be at the altar. Whatever your tradition is, I'm just showing you what we do here.

Then comes the presentation of the bride and groom, so you say, "I like to present to you, Mr. and Mrs." And then you mention their name. Everybody claps. The bride and groom process out followed by the pastor followed by the flower girls and ring bearer if they're up there. A lot of times they're too young and they're not even up there anymore. But then it would be the maid of honor and best man who will process down. What that will do is waiting to go to a certain amount that the photographer has enough to take pictures of everybody. They don't just all process down and stampede out at the same time.

So there you have it. You have a ceremony that you can do with a bride and groom and what you're seeking to do is to just really create an organized and make sense and have in your mind what the next step is. So when you're doing a ceremony, I'm going to go back to the rehearsal, the rehearsal is vital. Because at the rehearsal, if you have everybody knowing what they're supposed to do and you're leading this in confidence, the next day is a dream. You're just going forward. You're not even thinking that much about it and everybody feels comfortable. So if you can get that rehearsal down, it's great.

Now what I've observed if you followed this formula of where you get them into position one first. After they're in position, put the tape. Have everybody go in the back. Have them process once. Then after that, have them process again because that's the hardest part so that's where it happens. It goes twice. Then all you have to do is finish the other part of the ceremony once. You don't have to do that second thing twice. Just do that once.

Don't do the sermon. Do the form because it would be good to practice like doing the institution of marriage. Do that. Do all those things. Do the declaration of intent. Do the vows. Practice that. Then do the unity candle, do the rings. All those things. Don't do the message as I said before. Then practice declaring them husband and wife and then presentation of couple so you can actually say their name, Mr. and Mrs. Smith or whatever.

I find that you do not need to practice that second piece in position two. You do not need to practice that more than once. But you can get this wedding rehearsal in less than an hour and everybody is grateful. Everybody. And they're thanking you and they're going, "Wow, that was wonderful." We could get that rehearsal done right away and they can go on to their rehearsal dinner. So anyway, that's how I do it.

I know that this was a lot of information to absorb in one presentation. At times, it was hard to explain it to you because this was years and years of doing this. But I share with what I have journeyed in this whole wedding ceremony path and rehearsal. Watch this video again but pay attention. Down the road, when you do wedding ceremonies, understand that the rehearsal is the big deal. Get that right and usually the ceremony goes great.