

Guidelines for Getting Married at Grace

INTRODUCTION

We're so excited about your upcoming wedding, and that you're considering getting married at Grace. This document lays out several guidelines that we ask all couples to follow if one of the Grace pastors will be officiating your wedding.

We believe that these guidelines invite God's greatest blessing for your marriage, that when you decide upfront to do things God's way, that great things will happen, and you'll benefit in your relationship.

We also realize that as pastors, we're accountable to God and responsible for those that we marry. We want God's best for you, and so in inviting us to marry you, you're asking for us to guide you and give you direction and accountability to begin this next season of your life well.

We must overlay a matter of conscience to what God's word says. We want to stand before God with every couple and bless their marriage with confidence.

Therefore, after thorough discussions by the pastoral staff at Grace, there is agreement that we will be pleased to marry couples per the following guidelines. If a couple cannot agree to these guidelines, they won't be married at Grace. If a pastor declines to marry a couple because they have not met one or more of these guidelines, no other staff pastor will do the wedding.

If a couple does not agree with the guidelines, the pastor involved will encourage them to prayerfully consider the guidelines they disagree with and make the appropriate adjustments. If the couple doesn't come to an agreement, the pastor will decline the wedding. Yet they will continue to be accepted and welcomed at Grace.

After you've read these guidelines, you'll sit down with your marrying pastor and talk them through. Read through them all, and if you have any questions, please ask! Don't assume you'll know what our response will be until you talk to us.

The Six Guidelines

Guideline #1

The couple must complete pre-marital counseling before the wedding.

Premarital counseling is designed to give insights into marriage, offer tools for a strong marriage, and deal with issues and problems couples deal with—past, present, and future.

Pre-marital counseling will include at least the following elements:

1. Planning the wedding.
2. Personality analysis.
3. Marital issues concerning finances, sexuality, family, communication, conflict resolution, unresolved former issues, etc.

The pre-marital counseling process is one of the most important steps in a couple's preparation for marriage. Sufficient time must be allowed for the process, usually a minimum of eight weeks to three months, usually 5-8 sessions. Grace uses both group counseling, which is a pre-marital class, and individual counseling.

When one of the couple or both live out of town, the couple must provide verification that a premarital counseling program of a similar nature will take place.

Guideline #2

Both people must be of like faith.

The Bible teaches that a Christian should not marry a person who is not a Christian. (II Cor. 6:14-15). Having the same faith is important because it brings unity to the marriage. Your faith beliefs are the deepest part of you and being divided there will bring unnecessary confusion and division to your marriage.

Some Christians believe that they can win their fiancé to Christ once they marry, but the Bible does not see marriage as an evangelism tool or a reason to violate the commands of God. While those intentions are good, we would discourage that couple to get married.

“Like faith” should not be confused with like denomination. It's about both people having a personal, saving relationship with Jesus-

While a Christian should marry someone who also has relationship with Jesus, God has given the gift of biblical marriage to all people, and so two people who aren't Christians may be married by a Grace pastor.

Guideline #3

Divorced persons must have scriptural grounds for remarriage.

Remarriage following a divorce is not a scripturally automatic scenario. The Bible regulates divorce as well as remarriage for Christians. If one or both of the parties has been divorced, the pastor will discuss the various Scriptural scenarios that allow for or prohibit remarriage.

Regardless of the circumstances of one's divorce, when a couple decides to get married, they should not assume a pastor's position on their situation until they meet with him. The divorce and remarriage scenarios are complex. A couple's case may indeed qualify for a wedding at Grace. Perhaps it won't. The role of pastors is not just to marry, it is to give spiritual guidance. A session with a pastor about these matters could pay lifelong dividends.

Obviously, the issue of divorce and remarriage can be uncomfortable for both the couple and the pastor. Rehearsing the pertinent details of the past to establish whether there is compliance with the Scriptures may not be pleasant. Neither are the words of the pastor who may have to decline the invitation to marry the couple. It's important that all parties understand that the pastors are not making judgments about the couple. The Pastors are abiding by what they believe the Scriptures teach and by their convictions. Each couple must be convinced before God as to the propriety of their remarriage.

If a pastor believes a couple is moving into sin by a remarriage, he will tell them. If a pastor cannot remarry the person, it isn't a message to the couple that they should no longer attend the church. We work hard to minister in such a way that Christ will be formed in every person.

Guideline #4

The couple should not only have parental consent for the marriage but a parental blessing as well.

People not only marry each other, but they also marry families. It's best to marry on good terms. So, it's good for those intending to get married to seek the consent of their parents, especially if they are still living at home.

If a parent cannot bless the marriage or if they stand in opposition to the wedding, this situation must be addressed by the couple and the marrying pastor.

In the case of older couples, those who are no longer closely associated with parental guidance, or whose parents are deceased, this only becomes an issue if there are apparent problems that should be addressed concerning prospective in-laws. In all cases, it's good to have the blessing of the parents.

Guideline #5

The couple must be living a life of sexual purity before marriage.

The Scriptures are clear that sexual purity is the will of God for believers (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Romantic love is not a legitimate reason to violate God's standards. Couples who are having sex or living together, with or without sex, must agree to refrain from sex and to live apart until the time of the wedding.

Sexual activity is a deeply intimate thing, something that we believe is best saved for marriage. It brings unity and intimacy that is intended to be in the context of lifelong commitment. When it occurs outside of that relationship, it gives something of yourself away that was only intended to be given away in marriage.

Many couples ask, "How far can we go before we get ourselves into trouble?" But the real question is, "What's the wise thing to do? What will best help us to grow in our relationship with Christ and with each other?"

Living together is also a deeply intimate thing and something that is best saved for marriage. From a biblical perspective, it protects a couple from temptation. Studies have also shown that living together before marriage has a significant negative effect on the health of a marriage long term.

But beyond this, we believe that something significant happens when a couple is willing to trust God and live apart for a season. God moves and works in that time to help a couple grow both in their faith and in their relationship together. We believe this so strongly that we make it a requirement for getting married at Grace.

This guideline is not something to satisfy a pastor; it's a step of obedience, indicating your willingness to get married God's way. If a couple will not refrain from sex and/or live separately until the wedding day, the request for a wedding at Grace will be declined.

Guideline #6

The couple will exercise mature discretion concerning the celebrations surrounding the wedding.

It's important that the spiritual atmosphere of the ceremony and the atmosphere of the reception complement one another. Your day is a witness to your friends and family, and we want the joy of a marriage blessed by God to be consistent throughout your wedding day. Mature discretion means that you commit to carefully considering how things like the use of alcohol, activities planned for the wedding party during the bachelorette/bachelor party, and/or the reception will affect that witness and desire to glorify God.

If you have any questions, your marrying pastor can walk you through what this looks like.

CONCLUSION

At Grace, we want marriages to thrive. We believe that these guidelines will foster good discussion and lay a foundation for a healthy marriage.

Again, if you've read this document and you have any doubts or questions about any of the guidelines, we would encourage you to still have a meeting with a pastor. No couple should assume that we will accept or decline their wedding until this meeting. No matter what's decided, this conversation can be fruitful and beneficial to your relationship.

"What therefore God has joined together let no man divide."

-Matthew 19:6

Approved by Elders and Pastoral Team, December 2015