

How God Brought Us Together

I love my wife. I feel like at times I may express it too much. If this were sin, I would be happy to repent of it. However, how can it be sin when the Bible emphatically declares, "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*" (Ephesians 5:25)? So until I am convinced I love my wife as much as Christ loved His Church, the only thing I will repent of...is not loving her enough! In my opinion, which is not infallible (although my last name is Pope), I think those who would object are 1) People who are envious. Those who would like to have the relationship that not only Barbara and I have, but all dedicated and in love Christian couples share. 2) Sourpusses. And my word to the sourpuss is, you repent, not me. Then fall in love with your spouse. Now I do need to insert, I respect the feelings of the introvert who doesn't have the rather vociferous nature of some (yes, your pastor included), who have a tendency to get passionate about everything that moves them. The introvert's love is just as deep, just as real and genuine...they just aren't as loud.

Yesterday marked the thirty-sixth year of our marriage. We met and courted the old fashioned way. We did not live together before we were married. And when we dated, with God's help, we kept it pure. Our first date was to a rescue mission; she played the piano and I led the singing. You might say we made beautiful music together. We became serious. She had doubts; our relationship was put on hold. We prayed and fasted. My wife saw the light (I'm having some fun here) and I formally proposed marriage. I made an appointment to talk with her dad and I asked permission to marry his daughter. He gave me her hand and blessing. I can honestly think of nothing I would change. Ours was an idyllic courtship and for these many years, a blessed marriage.

I know we cannot make a doctrine of our relationship and judge rights and wrongs by the way we believe God guided us. I thank the Lord for the opportunity He has given me to preach and counsel youth across our nation. A few months ago, I was asked by a young person whose engagement to be married had recently been terminated and wanted some answers as to what direction they should go now. Without taking this Scripture too far out of context, the Bible says, "*And they overcame...by the word of their testimony...*" (Revelation 12:11). There is power in our testimony. I wrote these words:

"God had led to me to the girl of my dreams. As I look back now, she was more than the girl of my heart's desire, she was the desire of the Lord's heart as well. It was God's desire and design that we be married. You see, after I met Barbara Wright, I never saw another girl beyond her. With all the others I thought, "Well if this young lady doesn't work out, there is a nice girl over there." After Barbara, there was no other nice girl appealing "over there" or anywhere. When she broke up with me, I was devastated. I was devastated because I loved her. I loved everything about her. Even though my heart was broken...even then, I couldn't be mad at her. I adored her. Then as the days turned into weeks and the weeks to months, I tried to be interested in others. It didn't work. It occurred to me that at this point if I marry, it would only be for companionship or the opportunity to be physically joined. But that would not be fair to the one I would wed. She (whoever she would be) deserved to be thought of as my one and only. As far as I was concerned Barbara was my one and only. One exception. God was my One and Only for all time. Jesus was my Lord. I would never lose Him. So therefore I entertained the thought of the foreign mission field, perhaps in an environment that would not be conducive for a young lady. I knew in my heart the Bible taught this, i.e. to be a eunuch (unmarried) for the kingdom of God's sake. "*For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it*"(Matthew 19:12). God does lead certain people in rare circumstances to live a single life for His glory. But understand, it is a gift. If one tries to live the celibate life without the gift you are

setting yourself up for bitterness by pining over the love you lost or at worse, you are setting yourself up for temptations that lead to sinful activity, by thoughts or deed. *"But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn"*(I Corinthians 7:9).

“My life was totally, wholly surrendered to God. And as the days went on I realized I had not yet been given the gift to remain unmarried. So I prayed. Did I ever pray! Barbara was the pianist for a singing group in the college we both attended and had been assigned to go with me while on a preaching mission for our college. When I was near her, my heart nearly jumped out of my chest! I got alone with the Lord the next night and I said to my Lord, "What is this all about? You have not released me from these emotions, these feelings I have for this girl who obviously doesn't want to spend the rest of her life with me.” A dear friend of mine was a young lieutenant in the Viet Nam War. He was permanently physically impaired for life from injuries he received. He lived in the dorm next to me. His name was Mike...we were good friends. He had been jilted by one of the most popular girls on campus. So you might say we were brothers in pain. Mike had just brought to my attention that C.T. Stud was in a similar situation like us. He said, "Johnny, he prayed and fasted for a week." God spoke to my heart to do the same. On the second day of my fast, God spoke to Barbara that I was the one for her after all. By the end of the week we were engaged. We've been married now for thirty-six years. She is my one and only love. I love her now more than ever. The break up was necessary. She was relieved of her doubts. And I, like Abraham, had to take her to Mount Moriah and there offer her to the Lord, never to be married. And I wasn't kidding. I was going to call it off and never pursue her again...I loved Jesus more than her, more than anybody and even as I write these words I feel overcome with emotion...because He is still the greatest love of my life. And to God be all the glory, it was as though He said to me, "My son...now that you have proven that I am your greatest love, I now have a double gift for you. You have Me in intimate fellowship for the rest of your life. Your ministry will be My ministry...your life is My life. And oh, by the way, My boy, you shall leave Moriah with Barbara and have the greatest love a husband and wife could ever have. And you know what? I have never known a man and woman closer than Barbara and I are. Selah.”

Well, with only a little tweaking, these are the words I wrote to this troubled youth. Now as I write these words, I do so from the Mission House on the campus of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Greenville, SC where I am preaching a revival. This is where we celebrated our anniversary. How appropriate! We started our life together as servants dedicated to serving the Lord together. And today as she help plan our music every week at Christchurch and I work on sermons, we are a team. Wherever we are, are hearts are one. And with this one heart, we present it to Our Lord and Savior for His glory and purposes.

- Pastor Pope

[Back to Pastor's Word](#)