

## Wedding Officiating Guidelines

In our culture, it's pretty common to ask pastors to officiate weddings and I have been blessed to be part of my fair share. I have many fond memories and experiences that I will cherish forever. Thank you to those who have honored me by being part of your special day.

That said, I do not agree to do every wedding request brought to me. I am not called to just officiate weddings, I am a minister of Jesus Christ and sometimes those are not the same things.

After 15 years of ministering, I feel the need to put in place some guidelines on performing weddings. It is my hope that by people knowing up front how I view things, they can make an educated decision before asking me to perform their wedding. The following are those guidelines....

### Overview

First, please know that I am a pastor. Any advice or structure I bring to counseling or a wedding will be from a Christian point of view.

I also require pre-marital counseling. In a normal situation, there will be some papers to fill out at home, go over together at home, and then go through together with me as we explore common areas of life in marriage. The goal is to have conversations about possible struggling points now before they are real issues on your plate. This is usually done over three two-hour meetings. Sometimes, I have made exceptions on how the meetings play out due to distance or schedules but I do not make exceptions on the pre-marital counseling itself.

Pre-marital counseling happens at my office at the church. Sometimes we may dig into sensitive topics depending on how you drive the discussions so if you live at a distance, please know I cannot meet you half way at a restaurant or other venue.

The pre-marital counseling is private and confidential (unless if it's disclosed someone is being hurt in a way that requires outside help or assistance). The session's dive into some sensitive areas that some might consider personal so confidentiality is a must. We dive into these topics because they are major issues for married couples (money, intimacy, parenting, communication, ect) but done in a way that is respectful.

All of the modules are required. To put it bluntly, there is a reason for each topic so if a couple thinks, "This one is too personal and it's none of your business. I refuse to do this."; it will be an incomplete pre-marital counseling and I will not be able to officiate your wedding.

I view a wedding as a time to celebrate the couple as well as lifting up God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you do not want God talked about at your wedding, there are others who do that. I do not.

Because I have a high view of marriage, I believe God needs to be in your marriage. This is not just a ceremony in my belief; it's a covenant between two people before God. Biblically, marriage should be evenly yoked, not adulterous, and between a man and a woman. You obviously do not need my approval to get married but if I'm doing your wedding, I have to be comfortable officiating that covenant before God. If I am not, though I may love you dearly, I may not be able to minister and officiate your wedding with a clear conscience and will invite you to find someone else to officiate your wedding.

If you are not a Christian but are seeking things out, I would be more than thrilled to meet with you and talk through any questions or concerns you may have about Christianity and a relationship with Christ.

#### Couples within my church

If you are a couple within The Shepherd's Fellowship, please just touch base if you are hoping I will officiate your wedding. Since I know both of you, it should be an easy starting conversation to see if officiating your wedding will work out.

*Fees: Doing weddings are not part of my job at the church. It's something I do because I want to bless and support our families. I will accept any size love gift for the pre-marital counseling, wedding rehearsal, and wedding the couple can afford comfortably and feel is fair.*

#### Couples from outside the church that I know

Again, please touch base with me and we can chat about your upcoming nuptials. I do not do a lot of weddings but again, for those I know and love we should be able to determine in one talk if I am a good fit for your wedding.

*Fees: I generally charge \$300 for the above services. If you have a hardship, we can talk about this area.*

#### I know one person but not the other person

In this case, I require the pre-marital counseling before I answer if I will officiate the wedding. The pre-marital counseling not only benefits you as a couple but it also allows me to get to know you as a couple. By the end of this time, I will know you better and we will know if we are a good match or not. If not, I may or may not be able to suggest some other officiates to you.

*Fees: I generally charge \$300 for the above services. If you have a hardship, we can talk about this area.*

*(If I choose not to officiate, there will be no fee for the counseling)*

### Couples I do not know

The same is true as the category above. Assuming I am available (since I have a limited number of weddings I can do a year), the pre-marital counseling would be required first and then we will make a decision if I should officiate your wedding or not.

*Fees: I generally charge \$300 for the above services. If you have a hardship, we can talk about this area.*

*(If I choose not to officiate, there will be a \$75 for the counseling)*

### Wedding Planning

Once we get done with the counseling and determine I will be officiating the wedding, we will have a meeting to work out the details of the ceremony.

I have resources available to help you with these steps.

### Wedding Rehearsal

I do ask that there is a wedding rehearsal at the location where the wedding will be held with all participants there. This will make your day go much smoother. (If this is impossible, I have made exceptions)

By the time of the wedding rehearsal, I will have knowledge of how you want your wedding to go. If anything comes up that I do not know at the rehearsal, I will ask you to make sure we are all on the same page.

That said, I do facilitate the rehearsal with that knowledge so I will conduct the practices and everyone involved in a way that is respectful, fun, and caring but also focused.

### Closing

I know some of these guidelines seem blunt and might come off a little raw as you look at something as beautiful and loving as your wedding. Please forgive me for that. The simple truth is I would rather have everything be up front. These guidelines are being put in place because of some uncomfortable situations in my past by not having them in place before.

When I am a good match for the hearts, lives, and commitment of the couple, the wedding is awesome, loving, and uplifting.

When I am not, it becomes uncomfortable and can distract from your wedding goals.

Thank you for going through these and again, if you think my beliefs and guidelines are a good match for you, I look forward to talking to you more about your special day!