

## **Premarital Counselling Policy**

Harvest Bible Chapel Barrie

The purpose of this policy is to outline the details regarding expectations on the couple, and what the couple can expect of the pastor who will be performing the marriage ceremony. If after reading this material, the couple feels that they want to proceed, they should schedule a preliminary interview with the biblical soul care (BSC) pastor to discuss introductory matters.

### **The Meaning of Marriage**

Marriage was ordained by God at the very outset of human history. When the first man and woman were joined, it was much less complicated than today . . . there was no need for premarital counselling since sin had not yet invaded the world, and there were no guests to invite, no tuxedos or dresses to get, and no better place than where they were for a honeymoon. The foundational Bible passage for marriage is found within the context of that first marriage, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24).

### **The Pastor's Role**

Of paramount importance is the recognition that because we are an evangelical, Jesus-centred, Bible-believing church, we are under moral obligation to only perform marriages that join together people who would describe themselves as followers of Christ. This will be covered in more detail during the initial meeting with the BSC pastor.

The pastor will pledge himself to the couple as a partner in establishing the marriage. It is our goal to give the couple the strongest foundation possible so as to ensure that the vows made are kept throughout a life-long relationship.

### **Expectations of the Couple**

Being a believer as described above demands a life of obedience to God. The Bible says, "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands . . . This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 2:3; 5:3). In other words, when we really do love God, we will want to live according to how his Word, the Bible, says we should live.

One important area where this affects the engaged couple is concerning cohabitation prior to marriage. The Bible makes it clear that living together before marriage contravenes God's standards (Galatians 5:19). In addition, even secular research shows cohabitating couples have a higher-than-average chance of divorcing later on than couples who do not live together prior to marriage.

Our recommendation to couples who are cohabitating and who desire a Bible-based marriage is to move apart until the wedding day, giving yourselves the best possible start. We are unable to perform a marriage ceremony for anyone who remains in a cohabitation situation. We are willing to discuss this in more detail should you have further questions.

### **Premarital Counselling Requirements**

Generally, there will be nine sessions, which include the initial interview and a ceremony walk through. Audio teaching will be used as the basis for discussion during the six counselling sessions. The bride and groom will each receive a workbook with sections that should be completed prior to each session. The details of what will be covered and when will be worked out after the initial interview. It usually takes a minimum of four months to complete the counselling. In most cases, we will not accept a request to perform a marriage unless there is ample time to complete the premarital counselling program.

### **Counselling after the Ceremony**

Follow up to the ceremony is very important. Think of it as a post-operative checkup—radical surgery has been performed to join two people together, and post-op therapy and consultation is critical. This follow up will take place within the first year of marriage, and will include continuing to meet with the mentoring couple, the reading of one marriage book from the selected reading list, doing an evaluation, and meeting with the pastor once about six to eight months after the wedding day.

### **Mentoring Couple**

Every marrying couple will be assigned a mentoring couple that has been married for at least ten years, and who have proven to be a solid Christian couple and to model a biblical marriage. The marrying couple will meet with the mentoring couple both before and after the ceremony.

### **Cost of Counselling**

There is no fee structure for the premarital counselling or performance of the marriage ceremony.

**Reading List**

The following books will be beneficial as you begin your life together.

- When Sinners Say I Do - Dave Harvey
- The Mingling of Souls - Matt Chandler
- What Did You Expect - Paul David Tripp
- Sacred Marriage - Gary Thomas