

CHAPTER 1

*I Am My Beloved's
and He Is Mine*

ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT PARTIES

PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

SETTING DATES FOR SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

ENGAGEMENT PORTRAITS

GIFT REGISTRY

RINGS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANK-YOU NOTES

FOR THE BRIDE: A TIME OF PREPARATION

ENGAGEMENT PARTIES

One of the first things your families or friends may wish to do is throw you an engagement party. This celebration is usually hosted by one of the families of the couple or by their close friends. Anything from large, elaborate affairs to small family gatherings can be done, depending on the circumstances. Whatever kind it is, an engagement party provides an opportunity for your families and friends to show their pleasure in your announcement. While you may not be the one making decisions about an engagement party, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- An engagement party is either held within the first few weeks of publicly announcing your engagement or is an occasion for making a public announcement of the engagement.
- Not everyone has an engagement party. If time, expense, and hassle make having a party stressful for you or your family, skip it! If it is going to cause more anxiety than joy, it is not worth having.
- Engagement parties are traditionally thrown by the bride's family, but this is not a hard and fast rule. Other family members, your closest friends, or even you and your fiancé can host the party. Remember that unless you are throwing the party yourself, you should defer to the wishes of those hosting this event for you. Let them set the tone and agenda for the event. If they ask you what you would like, discuss it with your fiancé and give your thoughts, but not demands.

You may not see the need for an engagement party, but it may be important to whoever wants to throw the party for you. It is an opportunity for your family and friends to show how pleased they are about your engagement. You may need to defer to their excitement and needs over your own personal reservations and let them make a fuss over you.

The opposite is also true. If no one offers to throw you a party, do not get your feelings hurt. Not everyone thinks of an engagement party. Either throw the party yourself or cheerfully let it go. Don't let it become a source of secret hurt or bitterness at the start of your wedding season.

- Engagement parties can be as simple or elaborate, casual or formal as you desire. It can be anything from an impromptu party the weekend after he proposes to an invitation-only event to start the marriage celebrations early! If you are throwing your own party, take into account how much time, money, and energy you can dedicate to this event.

If you are not hosting the party yourself, go with the flow of whatever kind of party is being designed. It may not be your first choice, but remember that those throwing the party are doing it out of love for you and be thankful.

- Guest lists should include only those invited to the wedding. It is a little awkward to say, “Come celebrate our engagement, but don’t come to the wedding.” Exceptions to this would be if you are having an out-of-town wedding or, because you are having a small, private wedding, you specifically ask guests to come celebrate your coming marriage at your engagement party.
- An engagement party can be a great opportunity to do something you may not be able to do for the wedding. If you are having a formal wedding, but your fiancé loves to barbecue, use the engagement party as an opportunity to throw just the kind of party *he* loves. If you are having a huge wedding, it may be nice to have an intimate gathering to celebrate your engagement with just those who love and know you best. If you are unable, because of expense or logistics, to include particular things you enjoy at your wedding, such as a ball/dance or a sit-down dinner, the engagement party can be an opportunity to do this separate from the wedding day, but still in celebration of your marriage.

It may be more practical and enjoyable to do certain things at a separate celebration like this, rather than trying to work them into the wedding day. Whether you have a backyard barbecue or a period ball, a cocktail party or a feast, make your engagement party a time to tell the world how thrilled you are that God has brought the two of you together!

The following is a list of things to do in order to throw an engagement party. This list assumes you will take a large role in planning the party. If someone else is throwing the party for you, just sit back and enjoy the event!

ENGAGEMENT PARTY TO-DO LIST:

- Set a date.**
- Set a budget.** Your budget will largely determine the kind of event you throw. When choosing between barbecue and ball, keep in mind what food you will provide, who provides it, the locations you have at your disposal, and how many people you have helping with the event. These can greatly affect the cost of your party. A dance with a potluck may actually be cheaper than buying meat to barbecue for a hundred people. Either may be cheaper than taking twenty of your closest friends out to a fancy dinner on the town. Think through all the various expenses involved with whatever kind of event you are interested in hosting.
- Consider your family.** Your engagement party is a wonderful opportunity to practice being considerate of others who have a vested interest in your wedding day. Include your mother and mother-in-law in the planning. Consider who may like to be invited that you may not normally think of asking. Consider what your families would like to see done at your engagement party. Practice putting others

first at this very early wedding event, and you will be more likely to avoid becoming the kind of bride who thinks that a wedding is all about her.

- **Choose a theme or style** for your party.
- **Choose a location** and make any necessary reservations.
- **Send invitations.** Using electronic media for this can save time and money. Since this event is usually held fairly quickly, electronic invitations may be the most effective way to get the word out and allow a quick RSVP from your guests. This may also be a good opportunity to launch your wedding website, if desired.
- **Decide whether you will have food or not**, and if so, what kind (hors d'oeuvres, dinner, dessert, etc.) and who will provide it.
- **Arrange catering.** Hire a professional caterer, make dinner reservations at your favorite restaurant, ask several willing friends or family members to bring certain dishes, or make your own menu and go shopping for supplies.
- **Buy party supplies.** The dollar store or local party store should have what you need to deck out your chosen location in whatever style or theme you have chosen.
- **Plan events for the party.** One nice thing to do at an engagement party is for you and your fiancé to tell your “story.” Not everyone you know may have heard how you got together. Everyone likes to hear how he proposed. Telling your story draws people into the excitement of your coming marriage. This may be a good chance to share what God has done in your lives in anticipation of the Big Day to come.

Other ideas include a time for toasts or speeches, “get to know the couple” games, a picture slide-show of your courtship, introductions of friends and family who have not yet met, etc.

- **Choose and arrange for music.** Music makes any party more or less enjoyable, as the case may be. Choosing the kind of music you *want*, rather than simply letting it happen, can make your party more enjoyable. Consider the tone of your event, the musical tastes of your fiancé and family, and the prominence you want music to take. This can mean simply playing a few of your favorite CD's or hiring a band to play for your dance.
- **Arrange for photography.** While you don't need to hire a photographer for this event, it is useful to ask someone to bring a camera and be responsible for taking pictures. You and your fiancé will want to spend your evening visiting with your guests. Your families may be hosting and will be sharing in your celebration. None of you will want to be distracted with a camera.
- **Plan your wardrobe.**
- **Enjoy your party!**

PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

Every couple should attend some kind of pre-marital counseling. Usually this is done by the pastor performing the ceremony. If this is not possible, ask another pastor you know or some other trusted, experienced counselor. Engaged couples often feel very emotionally close and in-tune with one another and attending counseling can sometimes feel invasive and unnecessary. However, your pastor will be able to lead you through conversations that will help make the transition to married life smooth and joyful. Often, an outside counselor will be able to help you think of important topics you haven't yet discussed. He can also help you be more aware of one another's strengths and weaknesses and provide tools for starting your marriage off on the right foot.

A wedding is first and foremost about creating a *marriage*. Taking the time and summoning up the courage for in-depth pre-marital counseling is one of the most important steps you can take towards the goal of creating a glorious marriage. Additionally, many churches require a couple to attend a certain number of pre-marital counseling sessions before being married at their facilities. Sometimes the church whose building you wish to use for the wedding will also require you meet and counsel with their pastor.

SETTING DATES FOR SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

In Chapter 13 we will discuss the various activities that will fill the final week before your wedding. Throughout your engagement and during that week there may be many special celebrations people wish to host for you. Bridal showers, bachelor parties, luncheons, teas, shopping excursions, and more can easily fill every spare moment from now until you say, "I do." After becoming engaged you and anyone who may wish to host such events should sit down to plan dates for each celebration. Using **Our Wedding Calendar** on page 81 will help you make time for everyone who wishes to celebrate your coming marriage.

ENGAGEMENT PORTRAITS

See "Engagement Portraits" on page 172 of Chapter 9, Wedding Photography.

GIFT REGISTRY

Most couples nowadays take advantage of the ready availability of wedding gift registry. While for some it feels awkward to ask for specific gifts, most see it as a useful tool in allowing guests to select something that will be truly appreciated and used. It also prevents multiple guests from buying the same item, as most registries remove items as they are purchased. While this can feel at times prosaic or even self-serving, it really is a kindness to your guests as no one wants to spend a lot of money on a wedding gift that is returned, re-gifted, or packed away never again to see the light of day!

Here are a few things to keep in mind when registering for wedding gifts:

- Most chain stores and often local stores have gift registries, so **pick stores which best fit your style** and carry the specific brands and items you most appreciate.
- **Register at two kinds of stores.** One should be a chain department or housewares store which carries the style of home goods you prefer. This is where you will register for more expensive items such as china, stemware, furniture, etc. Some popular choices are Macy's, Pottery Barn, and Crate & Barrel. Your second choice should be something more practical and affordable for your guests. This is where you would register for the bulk of the items you feel you need to set up housekeeping. Popular choices currently are Target and Bed, Bath & Beyond. Registering in two locations which are different in scale and price allows guests to find something within their price range that they are excited to buy you.
- **Limit your registry to these two stores, or at most a third.** Registering at too many locations usually means you end up with a random assortment of items that don't really go together, such as two napkins from one store that don't match a tablecloth from the other store. It also helps guests purchase gifts that most benefit you without your appearing overly anxious to receive a lot of gifts.
- **Take along your fiancé and give him the scan gun!** Registering is often one of the few aspects of wedding preparation the groom really enjoys. Register for the housewares you want, but also encourage him to scan tools, electronics, or whatever interests him most. Use registering as an opportunity to learn more about each other, to give preference to one another's desires, and to start forming a family style and home environment together. It may be the best pre-marital counseling session you do!
- An alternative to a traditional gift registry is **posting a list of desired items on your wedding website** or a wedding wish list or registry through Amazon.com. This allows you more flexibility in the items you request and gives you a larger

selection. If most of the items you want or need are not found at more traditional big-box stores, this may be the best solution for you.

- **Do not assume you will receive everything on your list.** Be thankful for the unique personal items you receive. In the modern world of gift registry, it can be easy to view wedding gifts as a pile of stuff you need, rather than someone's heartfelt investment in your future. Do not despise the old-fashioned cross-stitched gift your best friend's aunt made for you because it doesn't suit your home decorating style. Do not be irritated if someone buys white towels at a different store than you chose. While we would never think of ourselves as being that petty, people often are surprised at what they say and think when wrapped up in wedding plans. Remember that your temptation will be towards self-absorption during this time of life. The antidote is to be thankful in all things.
- If at all possible, **register several weeks before your first bridal shower** to give attendees as much time as needed to shop for your gift.
- **Most stores provide registry cards for your invitations.** You can include these in your invitations, if desired. Some couples choose to mention their registries in their invitation wording. Others are more comfortable sharing registry information via word of mouth or on their wedding website, rather than announcing it outright in the invitation.

*R*INGS

There are many options when it comes to your wedding rings. Couples find “the perfect ring” everywhere from flea markets to Tiffany's, choosing styles ranging from family heirlooms to diamond-encrusted investment pieces. Many shop together for a traditional wedding “set” of his-and-hers bands which match with a diamond solitaire engagement ring. However, there are a multitude of other options. Here are a few things to keep in mind when deciding on your wedding set:

- **Remember you'll be wearing this ring for the rest of your life.** If you want something unique from an antique store or flea market, take someone with you who will be able to recognize quality. Someone knowledgeable will be able to see if the stones are real, the band is strong enough to hold up to a lifetime of wear, if the “points” holding in the stones need re-tipping, and other important aspects of buying a ring that will not wear out before death do you part.
- Other factors to consider in a ring you will wear forever are **comfort and practicality**. If buying new rings, consider getting what is called a “comfort band” for the groom's ring. These bands have edges designed to not cut into his finger and wear better for men who work with their hands all the time. Also, while a big

shiny rock may be appealing to you now, you may want to consider whether its size or design will cause problems in daily use. No matter how pretty your ring looks, you may get frustrated when it catches on your favorite sweater, scratches your baby's face, or has to be repaired yearly because the mounts wear out.

- **Do not feel pressured to have two rings** because wedding sets are sold in the combination described above. Many brides simply wear their engagement ring as their wedding ring as well. Others wear a simple gold band and either forego the engagement ring or wear it on the opposite hand.
- **Think outside-the-box** when choosing what you wear for your wedding bands. Wear an heirloom ring that wasn't necessarily a wedding band. Choose a style you like with your favorite stones; you don't need to be limited to diamonds. Design your own rings. My engagement ring was a mother's ring with a stone for each of my husband's children as I was marrying not only a man, but a family of six. We found our wedding bands at a little Celtic shop – relatively inexpensive matching Celtic knot bands that reflected the music and art we had fallen in love over and that matched the Celtic style of our wedding. Let your rings tell your story.
- **Be sure to shop early enough** that you leave time to have your rings either custom made or sized in time to exchange them at your ceremony.

*A*NNOUNCEMENTS

Traditionally, both engagements and weddings were announced in the newspaper. While this tradition may be waning as fewer people read the daily paper, in a culture that increasingly despises marriage, announcing our joy in Christian marriage should be something we *do* want to proclaim to the world. If you choose to publish an engagement and/or wedding announcement, contact your local newspaper to request a form for doing so. They will provide you with information on submitting a picture, deadlines, and cost. Most papers also provide forms, fees, and sizing options on their website. In the past, these announcements were done by the parents of the bride. Today, however, who-does-what is less strictly governed by rigid rules of etiquette. Couples should feel free to handle these details themselves.

*T*HANK-YOU NOTES

While a seemingly insignificant detail in the grand scheme of wedding plans, making arrangements for your thank-you notes ahead of time is quite helpful. If you have cards chosen and purchased, responding quickly to shower and wedding gifts as they arrive

will be a simple task. Rather than having an overwhelming stack of notes to write three months after the wedding, your gratitude will be easily and promptly shared with your friends and family as the gifts flow in. Keep the following in mind as you consider writing your thank-you notes:

- **Thank-you notes are a must.** Eliminating this gesture is the quickest way to communicate ingratitude or selfishness to those who have spent time and money creating or purchasing a gift to celebrate your marriage. Additionally, guests who send gifts won't know if their gift arrived safely unless they receive your note of appreciation.
- **Be creative!** Try selecting cards that match your invitations. Or, have a card making party with your bridesmaids as a fellowship time during the wedding preparations. Some couples have included thank-you notes in their wedding photography, having the photographer take a picture of the couple holding a sign reading "thank you" from which note-cards are printed. Alternatively, you could use any number of printers (Costco, Shutterfly, etc.) who provide photo cards for any occasion and create individualized thank-you cards which incorporate a picture from the wedding. Receiving a picture along with your thanks is an extra pleasure for those opening your notes!
- **If you are late in getting on top of your thank-you notes, do not despair!** Traditional wedding etiquette says you have up to a year after the wedding to send your cards. Better to send them late than to omit giving thanks.
- **Be personal.** If thank-you note writing is not a habit you have already acquired, keep a few simple things in mind. Mention specifically what has been given – no form letters! Mention why you enjoy the particular gift. Thank them for taking time to share in your joy. Say "Thank You." It does not have to be complicated or lengthy, just sincere.
- **Thank-you notes can be a useful way to share your new info as well.** Adding a line with your new address, email, and phone numbers helps all your friends and family keep in touch with you as a couple.
- **Share the job.** Ask your new hubby to address envelopes, write some of the cards himself, or suggest wording. How much more meaningful to receive the thanks of the couple, rather than just the bride.

FOR THE BRIDE

A Time of Preparation

Ready? Set. Go! From the moment he puts that engagement ring on your finger, you've probably been in high gear wedding mode. You have a thousand things to think about at once and a million people to talk to and about a gallon of adrenaline pumping through your system. In the midst of this flurry of wedding preparations, I encourage you to take time to prepare *yourself*.

As mentioned in the introduction, you have taken on a new name – Bride. Naming bestows identity and with a new identity comes a new mission to fulfill. Bride may be a short-lived name, but it is a particular calling to lay hold of. In Scripture, a bride is often portrayed as a woman who is preparing herself. Revelation 19 describes Christ's Bride, the Church, as one who makes herself ready for the marriage supper of the lamb. In Esther, the potential brides of King Ahasuerus spent a year in preparations before they came before the king. Now is your time of preparation before you walk the aisle towards your own Prince Charming.

The bridal preparations described by Scripture are not what you might think. If your pastor's wife told you the Bible encourages you to prepare to be a glorious bride, what would you think of? Practices such as studying the Word as it speaks to wives, praying for your future husband, and applying good relationship skills would likely spring to mind. While all these are true and good considerations, they are not the bridal preparations described in the passages mentioned above. In their twelve months of apportioned bridal preparations, the young women of Esther spent, "six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women." The Bride of Christ is described as arraying herself in fine linens, costly jewels, and beautiful ornaments. (Is. 49:18, 61:10, Joel 2:16, Rev. 21:2) In Ezekiel 16, when the Lord is preparing his Bride, Israel, He covers her with jewels, costly oils, and fine clothes.

Devoting time and great expense to the adornment of a bride doesn't seem to be discouraged at all in Scripture. Rather, such attention to beauty appears to be promoted as one of her main concerns. A bride's beauty is a reflection of the perfect and glorious Bride of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:7 tells us that women are the glory of men. Being the

most beautifully splendid bride you can be is a glory both to God and to the man God has given you to marry.

Given this liberty and even encouragement to expend time and money on personal beauty and adornment, what special measures can you take to be a glorious bride on your upcoming wedding day? What preparations would best aid your skin, hair, nails, clothing, and appearance to be at its most beautiful? Consider making room in your budget for beauty products you might not normally indulge in. Would you enjoy and benefit from special skin care products, high quality cosmetics, or salon treatments such as a facial or manicure? Make time to take care of yourself so that you can look your best. Get plenty of rest and nourishment, stay hydrated, find ways to do things that help you relax and de-stress. A relaxed and happy bride is a more beautiful bride. Perhaps plan to spend the extra money and hire a hairdresser to do your hair in a more elaborate style for the wedding day, or have your makeup done at a salon. Adorn yourself with special clothing from the skin out for your wedding day and beautiful jewelry that complements your attire. Wear that which will make you feel beautiful and feminine. If you feel beautiful and happy you will radiate beauty.

Many of these things may seem like expensive luxuries, but consider what six months of costly oils and perfumes would have meant in biblical times! What we spend time and money on, we value. The extra expense and time you give to beauty preparations for your wedding day will remind you that you are being prepared to be a wife. You value that role and are willing to go to great cost to be a bride that is glorious for her bridegroom. Adorning yourself for your groom will carry over into other ways of being your best for him. Beauty is a virtue, just as patience and humility, when it adorns a faithful woman of God. Be a beautiful bride.