

Wedding Exhortation: Lifesigns

by Tim Isbell

(For more depth on this sermon, read *Lifesigns* by Henri Nouwen.)

John 15.4-12

Statement to the congregation (use it to start the exhortation)

Dear friends, you came here to share in the marriage of _____ and _____. It is a time for joy and gladness.

The occasion when a man and a woman enter into a lifetime relationship of love is a wedding. A Christian wedding is also a time of worship - not merely a formal observance. It is the celebration of the highest we know of love, the pledging of our deepest fidelity. A relationship so sacred must not be entered into thoughtfully and deliberately.

On this occasion, <groom> and <bride> stand before family and friends to affirm their decision to establish a home for the fulfillment of life together.

Scripture reading/exhortation (reference Henri Nouwen's book: Lifesigns)

All humans hunger for 3 things: intimacy, fecundity, ecstasy

All 3 are available to authentic Christians – though not all authentic Christians experience intimacy, fecundity, and ecstasy.

Our prayer today is that you will experience all 3.

Each one springs from a verse in this John passage.

INTIMACY - a relationship totally transparent and empty of fear

Make your home in me as I make mine in you. (John 15:4).

Healthy hearts hunger for a totally transparent and loving relationship. At the deepest level, we only experience this in our romance with God.

As you continue to nurture your own romances with God and nurture each other's romance with God, you will discover your fears falling away and intimacy growing between you that will satisfy your heart.

FECUNDITY - fruitfulness

I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. (John 15:5, NRSV).

Fecundity is sometimes confused with productivity. Productivity is good, but this is something we make with our effort.

Productivity feeds our ego or eases our fear but does not satisfy us; fruitfulness satisfies us.

Fecundity, fruitfulness, is something that God makes in well-tended soil.

So tend the soil of your own heart and each other's heart, and you will discover that your marriage is fruitful in the highest forms imaginable.

And that will satisfy your heart.

ECSTASY ... a life characterized by joy.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete. (John 15:11).

Ecstasy is often limited to moments of emotional escape from the cares/pain of life.

But to Christians, ecstasy describes the deep quality of joy that can characterize your life together regardless of what comes along.

Jesus showed us this joy in his life, even as he moved toward the cross.

Jesus offers you his joy

The kind of joy where you can see clearly the hard reality of life – without being imprisoned by fear.

There they are, 3 things you are built to desire:

Intimacy, fecundity, ecstasy.

All 3 are available.

The biggest threat to each one is fear.

But Jesus' words are clear: *Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.* (John 14:27, NRSV).

So, now, as you stand in the presence of God and these witnesses, I charge you both to keep forever the commitments you are making this day. As you do, you will experience fulfillment in your life together and in your home.