



Selecting Readings for Wedding Services

Many couples are happy to delegate the choice of a reading or readings to the minister taking their wedding, but ideally it is a decision in which they should have a part. This sheet is intended to help make that process easier.

As mentioned on our general information sheets, there is always a reading from the Bible at a wedding, but there can be two bible readings, as well as other kinds of readings or poems.

Choosing Bible readings

The list on the following pages includes the most common choices of Bible readings, with some notes to help you understand the background to the passages and how the preacher might use them. Hopefully this will make the choice easier than if you need to find and read every passage.

One reading is sufficient, in which case it can be from any book of the Bible. If there is to be more than one reading they would normally be chosen from different parts of the Bible (Old and New Testament), and would preferably have a common thread in their themes.

The Bible readings can be read from any standard translation you prefer. However, we normally recommend using a good modern translation such as the NIV (New International Version) or NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). Please feel free to call or email me for further advice if you like a particular passage but would like to see alternative translations before making a final decision.

Choosing non-Bible readings

Including this kind of material can be a good way to personalise the wedding and make it creative and interesting. For that reason we don't supply a list of suggestions! However, we always take care to double check proposed non-Bible readings and other material, and the final decision on suitability rests with the minister taking the service. There is very rarely a problem, but if you want to use one, please let us have a copy in good time – certainly before preparing an order of service for printing or asking someone to read it.

Choosing readers

Readings can be a good opportunity to involve a member of the family or a friend. If the person is used to speaking in public, that is helpful, but it is by no means essential. All that is required is a good speaking voice, and a little practice! Several of our churches have sound systems installed, which helps, but we always recommend that the reader comes along to the wedding rehearsal to get the feel of the building and have a trial run. It is also best to print out a large copy of the text for them, rather than letting them bring their own copy, just to ensure that they read the exact section and the exact version you are expecting.

I do hope this helps you make a choice that you are pleased with. Please also let me know if there is anything else I can do to help you plan for your special day.

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Readings from the Old Testament

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| <i>Genesis 1.26-28</i> | The story of God creating mankind – male and female – in his own image, and giving the command to be fruitful and multiply. The address is likely to be about the God-given nature of marriage and how we are made for faithful relationships. Not suitable for couples who don't intend to have children, but also possibly embarrassing if they already have children together. |
| <i>Genesis 2.18-24</i> | More of the creation story. This time the fuller version where God sees that Adam needs a companion and creates Eve from his rib. The message is similar to Genesis 1, but with the added element of God's care and provision for us in our relationships. Unlike Genesis 1 it is suitable for any couple. |
| <i>Song of Solomon 2.10-13 and 8.6-7</i> | The Song of Solomon is an ode to love, especially erotic love – surprising for some people in a book of the Bible. This particular passage is about a lover calling his partner away, and about absolute commitment in love. |
| <i>Jeremiah 31.31-34</i> | Not suitable for use as the only reading, but good because it talks about the covenant between God and his people. The address might focus on the importance of binding promises, and heartfelt commitment. |

Gospel readings

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| <i>Matthew 5.1-10</i> | This reading is from the major section of Jesus' teaching called the Sermon on the Mount, and is called the Beatitudes (meaning blessings). It describes the Christian qualities that promote good relationships with each other and with God. An unusual but very good choice which might be a good alternative to the famous reading about love from 1 Corinthians (listed below). The address would almost certainly focus on the qualities that we need to bring to a good marriage. |
| <i>Matthew 7.21 and 24-end</i> | This is the story of the wise man who built his house on a rock and the foolish man who built his house on sand. Obviously the address would talk about the importance of good foundations. |
| <i>Mark 10.6-9 and 13-16</i> | In this passage Jesus quotes from Genesis 2, and then insists on the disciples allowing the children to come to him, using them as an example of faith. As with Genesis 1, it is probably not suitable for couples who don't intend to have children. Best if coupled with either of the Genesis readings above, and the address would probably draw mostly on the reading chosen from Genesis. |
| <i>John 2.1-11</i> | The story of Jesus attending a wedding at Cana in Galilee early in his ministry and turning water into wine. Ideal for preaching about how God delights in marriage and can make the ordinary into something extraordinary. |
| <i>John 15.9-17</i> | Jesus speaks about God's love, and his greatest commandment – the commandment to love one another in sacrificial ways that make us fruitful disciples. The address would be almost certain to focus either on the importance of committed loving relationships as a powerful and potentially fruitful witness to Christian values in society. |

Other New Testament readings

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| <i>Romans 8.31-35 and 37-39</i> | In this passage Paul affirms that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Not suitable as the only reading, but could be coupled with a gospel reading about absolute commitment. |
| <i>Romans 12.1-2 and 9-13</i> | This is a lovely passage about desiring to live lives that please God, and about genuine, pure love. Ideal as the only reading, and the address would be likely to focus on important attributes of a strong marriage that fits the God-given pattern. |
| <i>1 Corinthians 13</i> | The most popular passage at weddings! Paul's great 'ode to love'. Not actually a passage about love and marriage, but a recipe for enduring love in the church. Even so, it is perfect for preaching about the kind of mature love that makes a marriage last. |
| <i>Ephesians 4.1-6</i> | Again, a passage about relationships in the church, not specifically about marriage. However, it is another one which speaks about qualities that will make relationships last by give and take. Rather short, and good to have as one of a pair of readings. |
| <i>Ephesians 5.21-end</i> | A passage which likens love and mutual submission in marriage to the relationship between Christ and the church. Good to use in a pair of readings with Genesis 2 (see above). A lovely idealistic view of marriage as God intended it. |
| <i>Colossians 3.12-17</i> | Rather like Ephesians 4.1-6 but with a slightly different slant on many of the same themes. See the two as alternatives to each other. |
| <i>1 John 3.18-end</i> | A fantastic passage about love being shown by actions more than words. Good for preaching on the practical nature of marital love vs. the ideal of romantic love. |
| <i>1 John 4.7-12</i> | This passage basically says that God and love cannot be untangled from each other and contains the famous phrase 'God is love' and the statement that God loved us first, long before we learned to love him. Quite a complex passage, but a good one on which to base an address focussing on love as the thing that perfects all relationships and helps us grow towards God, whether we know it or not. |