

With this Ring

by John L. Hoh Jr.

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The bride walks down the aisle, resplendent in her white gown, every hair in place, her face beaming with a bright smile that cannot be contained within the veil. At this point she can think only of happiness and joy to come.

The groom is by the altar, awaiting the arrival of the woman with whom he plans to share his life, his love, his hopes and his dreams. He, too, thinks of happiness, joy and wedded bliss.

Unfortunately, statistics laugh in the background—statistics that speak of as many as half of marriages ending in divorce. Statistics that say the vows spoken “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death do us part” often have little meaning in the coming years.

And it's not from a lack of knowing those vows. For basically the same vows are spoken at every wedding—not just for the benefit of the bride and groom, but as a refresher to every married couple in attendance.

And these vows are carried out in the symbols exchanged between the bride and groom and, usually, worn by both.

Prior to the wedding, in our tradition, the man offers a ring as a token of his love and commitment to the woman—a diamond ring. With this symbol, the man is making a commitment to take the woman as his wife, to care for her, to treasure her as a suitable helper from God.

At the wedding ceremony the bride and groom exchange wedding rings. They are circles to symbolize the permanence of this relationship.

Let's look, then, at these pieces of jewelry that have such significance to us.

There are three aspects that these rings portray: preciousness of jewelry is like the love of a husband and wife for each other; a solid resolve, like the diamond, to endure and to be polished from stress and pressure; and the malleability of gold to be flexible, compromising and changing.

Precious. The rings are made of precious materials—diamonds and gold. These are not easy materials to obtain. Diamond cutting is very difficult given the hardness of diamonds. And men have traveled great distances and endured hardships seeking gold.

A husband and wife must treasure each other as precious. Each one knows the other. Each one knows when the other is suffering. They share in each other's joys. They raise their children together.

No doubt, many see marriage as an institution of convenience. And they see spouses as disposable and replaceable. The divorce rate actually gets higher for each subsequent marriage for divorced people. Many have lost the ability to treasure their spouse and to see their spouse as precious.

God often uses the imagery of marriage to illustrate His relationship to His people. How does Christ see His bride, the Church? He loved her so much that He gave His life for her. God treasures His spouse, the Church, and expects husbands and wives to treasure each other.

Perhaps there is no greater illustration of the treasuring of a spouse in all of literature than the *Song of Solomon*. I encourage every couple to read this book, to see how the couple treasures each other in this song. They treasure each other as a gift from God, not a perfect gift, but a gift cleansed in the blood of Christ!

Firm Resolve. The couple should have a firm resolve in their marriage. No matter what, the two are committed as one, and with the help of Christ they endure.

Diamonds are created when pressure is exerted upon carbon. Think about this for a minute. If there was no pressure, no stress, there would be no beautiful, enduring diamonds. There would be only dull carbon deposits.

Pressure comes in every marriage—financial pressure, pressure from families, pressure in raising a family, pressure from friends, pressure from society that places an emphasis on rights and neglects responsibilities. The key is not to break down under pressure, but to let the pressure make your marriage stronger. In pressure, each person learns strengths and weaknesses—and the need for each other to work through problems.

With pressure, God also draws us closer to Himself as we realize we cannot by our own reason or strength face these challenges.

Flexible. The rings are usually made from gold. Gold is very heavy and it is very malleable. Our rings remind us that we have the weight of our vows. God takes vows we make seriously. In Proverbs, God states He would rather we didn't make a vow than make one we don't anticipate keeping. Yes, that seems like a heavy burden, but our Lord took on that same burden when He promised us He would rescue us from our sins. And God kept His promise!

In our marriage there must be malleability, flexibility. People change over time. No doubt, many a spouse has said, "You're not the same person I married." Everyone grows and changes. Sometimes life situations change. We are to be flexible in our marriages to accept and live with these changes.

Remember what the vows say? They *do not* say: “As long as you remain healthy; as long as you remain rich.” They *do* say: “in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer.” Those vows anticipate that changes can and do happen! Be flexible as changes come in the marriage.

And, just as Christ forgives us, let us forgive each other when we err.

Take another look at those rings on your fingers. Remember the vows you both took in front of God’s altar. And take strength and comfort in the faithfulness of our forgiving God, who promises, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

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