

# Are You Unwittingly Breaking Your Wedding Vows?

I'm sure you remember as I do, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the feeling of standing in front of the crowd of family and friends with the pastor before us. He asked the first promise to each of us individually in the form of a question.

"Do you promise to forsake all others?" We generally acknowledged in some way, "I do." This is the first promise we committed to being a lover-spouse. In its most simple meaning, a 20-year-old couple would that promise as "You will not have any other girlfriend or boyfriends other than this person standing in front of you the rest of your life." However, this promise goes way deeper and continues to grow in meaning over time.

The promise to forsake all others means much more than not having other romantic or sexual relationships, but let's first explore this primary aspect of the promise we've made.

We all know of a Christian couple who has been damaged or divorced because of some form of infidelity. Circumstances surrounding the dissolution of their marriage might involve a long sexual affair, a one-night stand, an anonymous encounter from someone via the internet or even paid-for sex.

When a couple models their marriage after the paradigm of husband and wife, they create a set of rules to perform by. They can tend to move toward more of a functionality than a relationship and stop really being lovers.

Quietly they begin to feel less a priority to their spouse because in a functional relationship, the priority is managing the marriage around all the other priorities. The task of managing those other priorities has replaced connection,

quality time and dreaming together. Dating has lost its priority, and sex has moved to a familiar or “have-to” attitude rather than a “get-to” attitude.

Pain begins to impact the marriage. This pain was either created within the marriage due to infidelity or another betrayal or is due to issues one or both of the individuals didn't deal with prior to the marriage.

When one commits to or feels strongly about the deeper spirit of the promise to forsake “all others” that isn't just defined as having sex outside of marriage, then the promise is a priority promise. This means, “I put you above all other people or circumstances.” As Christians, God always comes first. Second should be our spouse. Lovers know this intuitively. However, the paradigm of some husbands and wives might exclude this priority after marriage.

Genesis 2:24: “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And they will become one flesh.” Even in the first marriage where there were no parents, God made clear what the priorities of marriage are.

To be faithful and forsake all others includes prioritizing your family of origin, including your parents, over your spouse. Of course, you should have a loving relationship with these people, but make sure to evaluate the priority of these relationships and how these priorities affect your marriage. It needs to be said that forsaking all these others is not just a problem among women. Both spouses struggle here regularly.

Forsaking all others also means you prioritize your own children in such a way that your marriage remains the priority. I am in full support of women who want to be great mothers, but I've repeatedly seen this as an excuse not to be great lovers to their spouse. In these situations, dating the spouse ceases, the woman rarely expresses affection and

praise, she lacks the energy or urgency to prioritize sex, she has no time for dates or fun or weekends away here and there. These are all symptoms of a woman who has moved from a lover-spouse to prioritizing her children or her role to be a “good mom” over her husband.

Men can also over prioritize their children over their wife, although this is more common in later years or after he retires. The wife feels he’s always helping the children with projects, time or money. He stops prioritizing her, becomes too tired for her, ceases sex and stops expressing affection as well.

Forsaking all others includes all others. You can also evaluate whether friends hold too high a value in either of your lives. I’ve had to work with men who give way too much time to a set of guy friends or friend by scheduling hunting and fishing trips or golf outings. He had to adjust priorities. It didn’t mean he had to stop his activities. He just had to adjust his activities. I’ve had to deal with a “golf widow.” That’s what a wife is called when her husband golfs all weekend, most weekends. Her husband adjusted to one time per week, and that felt fine to everyone.

Women can also overprioritize friendships and/or social activities such as making excessive or long phone calls, Facebook perusing, attending athletic activities and volunteering. She can overinvolve, overvalue, and overinvest her heart and time in these relationships. In other marriage books, I’ve written about the value of same-gender relationships, but there must be balance.

Church family is another set of people we must balance in our life. I’m a church-loving guy. I love going to church. Through the years, Lisa and I have been involved in various forms of groups, activities and leadership positions. However, some couples or individuals can overprioritize the church or “their ministry.” For all involved, forsaking all others also means

that you find balance with how you dedicate your time to your church.

Community is another group of people we need to evaluate. Examples of community are volunteering or just participating in community events. Again, in balance this is healthy and great for a couple to enjoy or contribute in events locally or even globally. You must evaluate your priorities in the area of volunteering and community and create a balance so you can keep your promise to forsake all others.

You should now take a moment to reflect, evaluate and ask yourself whether there's a family member, friend or group of people whom you overprioritize. Remember, you're a lover-spouse, so as a lover-spouse, your husband or wife should feel and believe they're the most important soul to you in the whole wide world. {eoa}

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