

A Groom in Flip-Flops

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My oldest daughter, Margaret, made it clear from the beginning that she didn't want me to perform her wedding ceremony. She knows me too well. She figured that as soon as the mothers and grandmothers were seated and the first song began, I would lose it.

Sure enough, my manly tears started flowing before Margaret and I started down the aisle. I was trying to stay focused (left, right, left ...), but my mind was buzzing with so many random thoughts. Is this princess on my arm the same little girl I took to Disney World every year for her birthday? How much did all these flowers cost? Why are my son-in-law and his groomsmen wearing flip-flops with their tuxedos?

Then came the dreaded words: "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" This was my ultimate father-of-the-bride moment. It was my last chance to question the groom about his salary, health benefits, career plans and car insurance.

Yet I did what all fathers do under such pressure: I swallowed hard and coughed up my expected answer: "Her mother and I."

I put Margaret's hand into Rick's and whispered to him: "She's all yours now." I sighed with relief and sat down. Then my wife handed me a Kleenex.

I was not crying because of the cost of the flowers. I cried tears of joy because I was so happy that Margaret and Rick had made Jesus the center of their relationship since they started dating in 2005. It was obvious these two were made for each other.

I was not the only one with wet eyes. All the bridesmaids got tearful when Rick's voice cracked as he repeated his vows. I

heard people sniffing as Rick washed Margaret's feet—revealing that she, too, was wearing flip-flops under her wedding gown. (Hers had fake pearls on them.) I shed more tears when Jason, one of the officiating ministers, told how Rick and Margaret had touched the lives of students at Emmanuel College.

I suppose if I were bound by tradition I would have been upset that Rick and his college friends hadn't rented shiny black leather dress shoes for this solemn occasion. After all, if you're going to spend hundreds of dollars for candles, calla lilies and chocolate fondue you might as well pay for the proper footwear.

But honestly the flip-flops didn't bother me. They were the perfect symbol of Margaret and Rick's playfulness—and of a God-ordained romance that started on a college campus in Georgia and culminated in a wedding in the same school's auditorium.

I was reminded of three things during Margaret's wedding that seem appropriate to share now, since our cover story this month is about marriage.

1. God can put couples together. Since my four daughters were little, my wife and I have prayed that they would find the right husbands. We saw that prayer answered for Margaret. In a crazy, confused culture characterized by crass dating shows such as *The Bachelor*, Christians should prove that God is the perfect matchmaker and that sex is still worth saving for the honeymoon.

2. It's not about a fancy ceremony. I'm told that every wedding has at least one major glitch. Sometimes a bridesmaid faints. Sometimes a groomsman's sleeve catches fire. In our case, we forgot to give the corsages to the mothers, and no one said anything until we found the flowers on the floor after the wedding.

But in the end, who really cares whether we had enough finger sandwiches and strawberries at the reception or if the bridal gown was a designer original? What matters is that God was there—and that He smiled on the occasion.

3. Marriage is sustained by servanthood. When Margaret began to wash Rick's feet I realized that flip-flops were perfect for this ceremony. (No socks or shoestrings to worry about!) That prophetic act of footwashing provided a picture of the mutual submission God expects a husband and a wife to show each other.

I can assure you that this dad rejoiced that day, knowing that Rick and Margaret understand Jesus' humble, selfless approach to love. And I might even start recommending flip-flops for every wedding ceremony.

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