

BEFORE  
YOU SAY  
“I DO”<sup>®</sup>  
DEVOTIONAL

H. NORMAN WRIGHT



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

Verses marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, Copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Verses marked NCV are taken from *The Holy Bible, New Century Version*, Copyright © 1987, 1988, 1991 by Word Publishing, Nashville, TN 37214. Used by permission.

Verses marked AMP are taken from *The Amplified Bible, Old Testament*, Copyright © 1965 and 1987 by The Zondervan Corporation, and from *The Amplified New Testament*, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Verses marked THE MESSAGE are taken from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

BEFORE YOU SAY “I DO”® is a registered trademark of The Hawkins Children’s LLC. Harvest House Publishers, Inc., is the exclusive licensee of the federally registered trademark BEFORE YOU SAY “I DO”.

*Cover photo © nasstock / Fotolia*

*Cover by Writely Designed, Enumclaw, Washington*

## **BEFORE YOU SAY “I DO”® DEVOTIONAL**

Copyright © 2003 by H. Norman Wright

Published 2015 by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6112-7 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6113-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wright, H. Norman

Before you say “I do” devotional / H. Norman Wright

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7369-0922-8 (pbk.)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV835 .W735 2003

242'.644—dc21

2002012589

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Printed in the United States of America**

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 / VP-CD / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Expectations



*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.*

1 CORINTHIANS 10:24 NKJV

*Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:4 NKJV

Expectations. Oh, you have them. And so does your fiancé. You may already be aware of them or you've yet to experience a plateful of surprises.

For many couples, their expectations remain unspoken. Many of them are desires. Some reflect a dream or an ideal rather than a necessity. Often, they turn into assumptions: "My partner should know what I need"—which never works.

Let's face it. We're all selfish. We have a "me" attitude about life. We've learned to focus on "what I want, what I can get, and what the other person (in this case fiancé) is going to do for me." This attitude runs counter to what your new married life is to behold.

See how author Gary Smalley learned this important marriage lesson:

He was in seminary, was engaged in ministry as a youth pastor, and was in his second year of marriage to Norma. At that time, it was dawning on him that marriage was perhaps not all he thought or hoped it would be. Disagreements and conflicts were increasing. Then he went to a seminar and heard a message that, as he told the story, changed his life. The point that hit home was this: if you are irritated by many things in a

relationship, perhaps you are fundamentally self-centered and primarily looking out for your own interests.

Gary had a revelation of sorts about how he had been treating Norma. He expected her to respond to his various needs on his timetable and in the way he wanted.

If you are familiar with Gary’s work, you know he has a gift for expressing the needs of the soul in graphic word pictures. Upon realizing the depths of his selfishness, he held a funeral service for himself. As he told the story, he got down on his knees—just God and Gary—and prayed, imagining his casket, funeral songs, and being laid to rest in a deep hole in the ground. Six feet under. From there, he felt led to systematically give up to God various things that he held dear. He began to see just how much he had expected everything to go *his* way in their marriage—from the car they drove to the apartment they lived in to the priority placed on his work to about what they ate for dinner. Gary said of himself following this event, “I wasn’t the same any longer. Things were changing about me that I would never have imagined.”<sup>1</sup>

If you were to hold a funeral service for some of your expectations what would you bury? It’s something to think about.

### Questions for Commitment

**For You:** Describe two or three examples of how you will put today’s verses into practice once you are married.

**For You and Your Fiancé:** Discuss what each of you would bury about your past and your expectations if you were to have a funeral service for yourself.

**For God:** Ask God to show you which expectations are realistic and which need to be discarded. Ask Him to give you opportunities to put into practice these passages of Scripture this week.

# Vows



*Lord, who may go and find refuge and shelter in your tabernacle up on your holy hill? Anyone who leads a blameless life and is truly sincere. Anyone who refuses to slander others, does not listen to gossip, never harms his neighbors, speaks out against sin, criticizes those committing it, commends the faithful followers of the Lord, keeps a promise even if it ruins him, does not crush his debtors with high interest rates, and refuses to testify against the innocent despite the bribes offered him—such a man shall stand firm forever.*

PSALM 15:1-5 TLB

Marriage is a relationship of promises. “Promise me” is a common request from parents and friends alike.

As you grew up, you might have learned to “use” promises yourself: “I promise...really,” or “Hey, *you promised!*” or “Please promise me you won’t tell.” Promises eventually become an important part of friendships, showing trust. You even might have exchanged a promise ring with a special friend.

Simply stated, a promise is an agreement to do something or not to do something.

When you make a promise, you’re saying, “*Trust me. You can depend on me. I will follow through.*” It’s not just an agreement on your part, it’s a commitment. And until this point, every promise volunteered on your part—whether freely given or asked of you—was just the prelude to the promise you are going to make on your wedding day.

The details of a wedding ceremony—the processional music, the

attendants, the seating of the parents, the flowers, the words of the minister, the food at the reception—are important, but you could have all of the above and still not be married. *The heart of your wedding will be your vows!* Sadly, I’ve counseled many couples that never gave any thought to the vows until either the rehearsal or the actual wedding.

It’s not just making your wedding memorable with heartfelt vows—these words will express what you will be doing with the rest of your life together!

The language of a wedding service should be the language of promising. That’s why the ceremony has such a serious ring to it. The promises are to be spoken seriously and without coercion. And once you make these promises through the exchanging of vows, you and your spouse will never be the same. You will move to a new life status by virtue of your promising. A transformation will take place. What was separate before will now become “one flesh.” And no matter what happens, this fact can never be erased.

### Questions for Commitment

***For You:*** What are three promises that you will make to your fiancé?

***For You and Your Fiancé:*** Discuss promises that each of you have made in the past and how you have honored them.

***For God:*** Ask Him to help you discover the promises that each of you will make to one another, as well as to the Lord, when you marry.

# I Promise



*Keeps a promise even if it ruins him.*

PSALM 15:4 TLB

Promises have a future quality about them as well. A promise is only kept when it's fulfilled. A promise is not contingent upon changes in the future. It's not "I promise, if..."

There are no conditions. This is not a contract. A contract contains conditional clauses. Both parties are responsible for carrying out their part of the pact. There are conditional or "if" clauses. If you do this, the other person must do this, and if the other person does this, you must do this. But in the marriage relationship there are no conditional clauses. It's an unconditional commitment. And each day of your marriage you will need to renew your act of commitment to your partner.

Have you considered what you will promise one another? Have you considered what you are committing yourself to?

A Christian marriage goes beyond an earthly partnership. It's a commitment involving three individuals—husband, wife, and Jesus Christ.

"One standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer, three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12, TLB).

A promise is a binding pledge, a pledge of mutual fidelity and mutual submission. It is a private pledge you also make public. It is a pledge carried out to completion, working through any roadblocks. It is a total giving of oneself to another person.

Consider these vows:

**Bride:**

*I believe in you, (name). I want to help make all your dreams come true. I have seen your love for God, and I promise to support your decisions and submit to your leadership knowing you always seek God’s will. I promise to be faithful, and I will never leave you.*

*You are my best friend. I will pray for you daily, and I will always seek to grow closer to God. My desire is to be the woman you need me to be. I will make our home a place of rest, and I will always be there for you. I will listen to you and keep what I hear.*

**Groom:**

*I am most fortunate to have found such a wonderful woman as a life partner. I happily anticipate having you as my wife and being your husband. Marriage comes with many responsibilities and even some surprises. I eagerly look ahead to them all so that we may grow together emotionally and spiritually.*

*I will be your spiritual leader: I will keep Christ at the center of our relationship so that we might have Spirit-filled lives. As Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22-23, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” I dedicate myself to assuring our marriage will have an abundance of this fruit.*

*My arms will always be open to hold, comfort, and keep you safe as long as I am here on this earth.*



Questions for Commitment

***For You:*** What are three promises you want your fiancé to make to you?

***For You and Your Fiancé:*** Share your responses from the first question.

***For God:*** Continue to ask God to help you discover the promises that each will make to one another as well as to Him when you marry.

(For help in creating your wedding vows see *The Complete Book of Wedding Vows*, by H. Norman Wright, Bethany House, 2001.)

# The Phantom in Your Marriage



*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

During World War II, the American Forces in France had a phantom military outfit—a group called the Twenty-Third Headquarters Special Troops. With careful staging and show-business theatrics, they impersonated real troops and created an illusion of military strength to strategically fool the Germans. For example, to mask the true location of their real troops, they created fake tanks and other equipment that looked real from the air. These were phantoms.

Were you aware that many men and women bring phantoms with them into marriage? Their phantoms are mental images they think they need to battle. Their partner can't see these phantoms; only the individuals who create them are aware of them—but they seem real nevertheless.

One such phantom is an unattainable standard by which we measure our own performance, ability, looks, and characteristics. It's good to have a goal to aim for because it gives us motivation. But a phantom is an illusion, an apparition, or only a resemblance to reality.

What's the picture you have of how you should act as a husband or wife? Is this image so perfect, so idyllic that it's unattainable? Maybe. And because you can't meet those standards, what's the result?

The greater the distance your phantom is from reality, the more frustrating it will be to you. You live in its shadow. It may be confusing for your partner, who is unaware of its presence. He or she is left wondering why you seem dissatisfied and unhappy. Your future spouse might begin thinking, "Is it me? Is there something I'm doing or not doing that's creating this dissatisfaction?" Phantoms can derail marriages.

When the word "husband" comes to mind, what images pop into your mind? Who are some husbands that you know that you admire?

When the word "wife" comes to mind, what images pop into your mind? Who are some wives you know that you admire?

### Questions for Commitment

*For You:* What are your own expectations that you have as a future wife or husband? Spend some time reflecting on where these came from. Are they realistic and attainable or do you need to make some adjustments?

*For You and Your Fiancé:* Discuss what each of you expects from yourself and the other in your husband/wife roles.

*For God:* Ask God to show you what He wants you to become as a husband or wife. Which passages from the Scripture would help you in this process?