

Chase Helling & Niki Mitchem

People love to give advice to engaged couples. Chase and Niki, I'm sure you've heard too much advice to remember it all. Yet some advice sticks. You'll remember pieces throughout your lives. You may even later admit that some advice you thought was totally irrelevant when you got married actually means something twenty years from now.

Among the Scripture readings you chose for us to hear on your wedding day is a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews chockfull of advice. The writer of this letter is unknown, but the advice it contains has lasted nearly 2000 years. The letter is addressed to an entire Hebrew community in general, not just to engaged couples. Even though the words are ancient, they are ever timely. The Letter says, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality.... Be mindful of prisoners... and of the ill-treated.... Be free from love of money...be content with what you have." In the middle of this list is advice for engaged and married couples: "Let marriage be honored among all and the marriage bed be kept undefiled."

All of you have gathered here today because you know the beauty of these sentiments. Faithful marriages form the bedrock of our society. Those who make this commitment experience joy and fulfillment. You have all in some way reassured Chase and Niki about the value of marriage, you have come to celebrate with them, and you've probably given them some advice.

Regarding hospitality, both Niki and Chase share this value in the work they do. At school Niki prepares a place where young people feel welcomed, inspired and challenged to grow into the persons God made them to be. Chase creates systems that keep people cool on the hottest days of the year. They both even chose a wedding date in the middle of a hot summer to show how much we need people like Chase. Both these jobs show this couple's commitment to making the world a place where people are informed, comfortable and welcomed.

The Letter to the Hebrews says this specifically about hospitality: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." That's probably a reference to a story of Abraham from the Book of Genesis. In chapter 18, Abraham "sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot." The tent entrance served as his cooling tower in the desert. Three angels approached him, requesting hospitality—water to wash their feet, permission to rest in the shade under Abraham's tree, another primitive cooling tower. Abraham does all this and more: He asks his wife Sarah to prepare food for the guests, which she does. The three guests are angels, and due to the hospitality they received, they promise when they return the following year, Sarah will be pregnant with her first child, a son. Sarah overheard this promise from inside the cool tent, and she laughed because she was 90 years old, and Abraham was 100. The angels had the last laugh: The following year this couple indeed fondled the infant they called Isaac.

Chase and Niki, we have no idea what surprises God has in store for you, but this advice we believe: You will receive gifts beyond imagining if you provide hospitality for God to enter the comfort of your home.

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