

FINDING JOY IN A COVID-19 WEDDING

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My wedding was scheduled for 200 people on April 4. Up until March 15, I was genuinely convinced we were still having it.

It went from a call on Sunday from our venue (assuring us that they were taking plenty of precautions and would absolutely still have our wedding) to Monday morning (another call from the venue, saying that they were canceling all weddings through mid-April).

Honestly, it was devastating. I missed my friends and family and wanted desperately to see them. I had spent months looking forward to this celebration that was just, overnight, gone.

But, plans changed. We got married in my parent's backyard. My sister did my makeup while wearing a face mask. I still wore my wedding dress. The house was decorated with flowers from Trader Joes. My dad walked me down the aisle. Kevin and I took communion together. We said our vows and prayed for the first time together as husband and wife. We ate waffles and played a board game after.

If you are in this situation, or maybe a similar one, I want to encourage you. This is something worth mourning, and it is something worth celebrating. Here is my advice for those who are walking through the same loss.

1. MOURN WHAT YOU LOST

Yes, it's about the marriage and not the wedding...But it's okay to mourn the wedding. We took the time to cry. We took the time to hurt. In the midst of hearing stories of lost jobs and people losing family, we still found the space to mourn our own loss. Find that balance for yourself. Bring it before God and recognize the loss. When you're ready, lift your head up and make a plan.

2. HAVE GOALS

Find a shortlist of what you want to prioritize. We sat down and each listed what we *could* do, in order to lift ourselves out of what we *couldn't* do. Our list included starting our marriage with communion and having our family able to participate, whether digitally or in-person. Then, we fought for this list. When I struggled, Kevin reminded me of our goals. When he struggled, I reminded him.

3. STAY SAFE

We knew if we made a choice, then someone got sick from our decision, it would be awful. We didn't want the start of our marriage to be a source of pain for anyone. It's a hard conversation to have, asking "*What is the risk?*" with every decision around your wedding. However, it has to be done. We sought advice from medical professionals—clearly outlining our hope to get married in my parent's backyard with the number of people and planning to keep everyone safe and at a healthy distance. We did research, prayed, and made the best decision we could once we felt peace.

4. REMEMBER GOD IS FOR MARRIAGE

Our decision to not get married in a courthouse was that, ultimately, we wanted the reminder for ourselves that our marriage was about our covenant with God, not the legal status of our relationship. When it felt like the world was taking away our ability to do our wedding the way we planned, we needed to remember that *God is for marriage*, and with Him at the center, we could still have a marriage the way *He* has planned. We wanted to find a way to signify that in our wedding, whatever it looked like. This will be different for everyone, but I encourage you to remember that in the midst of all this, the covenant of marriage is a covenant with God, and He is here as much as ever.

5. REMEMBER GOD IS FOR CELEBRATION

I cried the night before I got married. One of the most painful things about this process was that even in the buildup, every question was “*Is it wrong of us to have X number of people?*”. So many people told us to cancel; so many people told us to not. It’s hard to plan your wedding with the constant question of “*Is it even ethical or safe to have a wedding celebration?*” hanging over your head. An event that you intended to have as a celebration is suddenly an event that feels like a danger or a threat. I cried because I felt the weight of that—missing having a bachelorette party, missing being able to celebrate with those who I wanted to celebrate with—in the hope and desire that this was the best course of action to keep everyone I loved safe.

On the day of, we live-streamed the ceremony. A few hours later, I looked at my phone. HUNDREDS of people had watched, more people than we had originally invited. Dozens of our friends and family had made waffles to eat with us. Multiple members of our bridal party dressed up for the event. One of the groomsmen “entered” and “exited” his living room with our tiny bridal party on his screen. Friends posted how, in the midst of something dark and difficult, our wedding was a reminder that there are still things in life happening that are worth celebrating.

On the other side of this, I have sober gratitude for how things went. It’s hard to remember that there are things worth celebrating during this season. I had the beautiful privilege of accidentally providing that reminder for a few people who might have needed it. It became a reminder for me. We’ve lost so many celebrations this season, yet there are still so many things happening worth celebrating—weddings, birthdays, baby showers, and graduations. In the midst of this pandemic, I felt like I got to celebrate, and be celebrated.

If you have something worth celebrating, share it with those around you—we all need it right now. If you have someone worth celebrating, celebrate them—they need it too.