

How Blest the Sacred Tie*Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743–1825)*

How blest the sacred tie, that binds
 In union sweet according minds!
 How swift the heav'nly course they run,
 Whose hearts, and faith, and hopes are one!

To each the soul of each how dear!
 What watchful love, what holy fear!
 How doth the gen'rous flame within
 Refine from earth and cleanse from sin!

Their streaming eyes together flow,
 For human guilt and mortal woe;
 Their ardent pray'rs together rise,
 Like mingling flames in sacrifice.

Together both they seek the place,
 Where God reveals his awful face;
 How high, how strong, their raptures swell,
 There's none but kindred souls can tell.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***65 and Counting***Jon Pratt*

Please travel back in time with me many, many ages ago to the First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN. The day is June 3, 1961. Along with family members and friends and in the presence of God, Ray Pratt and Marie Pates exchanged wedding vows, promising lifelong fidelity to each other. By God's grace, this week marks sixty-five years they have kept those vows.

Good marriages do not just happen. Good marriages last because of God's kind providence and because of His children's persevering obedience. So how did Ray and Marie's marriage move from hopeful anticipation in 1961 to happy fulfillment 65 years later? In order to answer this question, I would like to offer a short history of the Pratt's lives in ministry and then provide some observations about their marriage in the ministry context where God placed them.

After a honeymoon on the north shore of Lake Superior, the newlyweds settled in New Brighton, MN, and they joined the newly planted Woodcrest Baptist Church where Ernest Pickering served as pastor. Incidentally, Pickering was also the dean at Central Seminary while he pastored. Ray enrolled at Central Seminary that fall, and Marie worked to help put him through seminary.

After three grueling years in the Bachelor of Divinity program (the B.D. was the equivalent of today's M.Div.), Ray had completed all his coursework—only his thesis remained. In the spring of 1964, the Pratts received a call to Morris, MN, so that Ray could be pastor of the First Baptist Church. Ray completed his B.D. thesis during his first year in Morris, and together he and Marie ministered to the congregation there until 1967 when they were asked to join the faculty at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College in Owatonna, MN. That same year two other Central Seminary graduates were also invited to join the Bible faculty at Pillsbury—Russ Dell and Sam Telloyan.

The Pratts enjoyed 17 years of ministry at Pillsbury as Ray taught in the Bible and pastoralogy departments as well as assuming administrative roles, first as Dean of Students and then as Registrar. Marie held several part-time jobs in the college offices, but her primary ministry was to the four children



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God had given them. The Pratts also enjoyed the ministry of Grace Baptist Church where both enthusiastically served.

Owatonna proved to be a wonderful town in which to raise the family, and the Pratts enjoyed these years immensely. They made many lifelong friends, both at the college and church; Ray completed his Th.M. degree from Central Seminary in 1974; and they experienced the many joys and sorrows that accompanied the ministries at Pillsbury and Grace Baptist.

The greatest sorrow of their time in Owatonna was the upheaval that took place at the college in the spring of 1984 (you can read about it here). This led to a painful departure that summer, as they moved to Evansville, IN, where Ray became the principal of a Christian school. While Ray's heart had always been oriented toward Christian education, he especially loved higher education, so when he received an invitation to apply for a teaching position at Baptist Bible College in Springfield, MO, he did so immediately. BBC hired him to teach in the fall of 1985. He would join his good friend, Russ Dell, who was the dean of the college. The Pratts joined Parkcrest Baptist Church and would serve there for 25 years. Meanwhile, Ray taught several courses in BBC's graduate school and he split his time between the grad school and the college where he taught the theology courses.

After teaching at BBC for 15 years, Ray experienced two heart attacks in a span of 6 months, the second of which basically destroyed half of his heart's function. He had bypass surgery in early 2000, and he was able to continue teaching for two more years. But the after effects of the heart attacks and surgery caused him great fatigue, especially when he had to climb several flights of stairs every day just to get to his 3rd floor office (the building was built before ADA standards required elevators). So, after teaching for 17 years at BBC (the same number of years he had taught at Pillsbury), Ray retired from his teaching ministry in 2002.

When Marie retired in 2010, the Pratts moved back to Minnesota to be near three of their four children (their daughter, Susie and family live in England where they serve with a missions agency). They have enjoyed seeing their 10 grandchildren grow up in these years even as they have been engaged in the ministry at Chisago Lakes Baptist Church. God has continued to keep them both healthy in mind and body, although Ray did endure another small heart attack in the fall of 2024, but the Lord brought him through again. The Lord has graciously given them eight great-grandchildren with a ninth due in September.

Marriage is one of the most beautiful gifts God has given His children, but as with any gift it can be strengthened, merely maintained, damaged, or lost entirely. And marriage lived out in vocational ministry faces the additional challenges of lack of time as well as lack of financial resources. Yet the Pratt's marriage has endured and flourished through all these years. How?

When asked, they came up with six reasons: 1) they sought to pursue God's will as the priority of their lives; 2) they loved each other sacrificially; 3) they learned to put up with each other's idiosyncrasies; 4) they kept short accounts when they faced disagreements; 5) they never made any major financial purchases without collaboration; and 6) they always kissed, said "I love you," and prayed together every night before going to sleep. I would add three more reasons: 1) they loved the local church and dedicated their lives to serving others through the ministry of their church; 2) they modeled the truth of Deuteronomy 6:5 ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might") and Psalm 78:4 ("We will not conceal [the truth] from [our] children, but will recount to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, and His strength and His wondrous deeds that He has done") for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; and 3) they have followed God's pattern for a blessed marriage described in Ephesians 5:22-33.

I am blessed to be the oldest son of Ray and Marie Pratt, and along with my siblings, Kristen, Susie, and Tim, we rise up and praise God for His grace given to them. This grace has produced their faith in God, their persevering obedience to His Word, and their enduring love to each other for lo, these sixty-five years together.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
