



May 20, 2026

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MARRIAGE OR MIRAGE?

Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell believe they have come to the best couple's relationship possible. They have been "together" since Valentine's Day 1983 --- that's 43 years ago --- without any formal marriage. They love each other and have raised a blended family together (four children and eight grandchildren). Over the years, each has had a number of outside relationships, some serious and some frivolous, but their major commitment has continued to be to each other. Goldie believes, "If we had married, we would have been long divorced." One of the positive values she speaks about is, "We want to choose each other every day."¹

Good for them, if in their Golden Years (Goldie is 80 and Kurt is 75) they can look back on a successful "**open marriage**"! Actually, in their earlier years, they both suffered because of poor relationship choices. Kurt came up as a child actor, then a journeyman professional baseball player, before returning to acting. He was married once, to the actress who played Priscilla Presley to his "Elvis" in the TV movie of that name. This film helped launch his career as a Hollywood leading man, which made many attractive women available to him. Meanwhile, Goldie had already established herself as the classic cute and cuddly blonde on TV's Laugh In and in her early movies. This quality made her irresistibly attractive to men but, apparently, it didn't wear well in marriage. Her second of two marriages had fallen apart and she had gone through a number of highly publicized romantic relationships before she met Kurt. The point is, they began their seemingly idyllic open relationship only after a series of painful failures.

"Open Marriage" is often presented as an attractive option in modern society, but it doesn't usually work out the way it's described. More often than not, one person is very committed to the "open" part, while the other sees it only as theoretical. When the more "open" partner acts on their freedom, the other partner feels just as hurt and betrayed as they would if they were married. And if one partner is investing time, attention and affection in an outside person, will they have anything left to relate to the emotional needs of their partner? Not likely. The original partnership is dead or dormant while the affair is going on.

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Marriage is not a **sacrament**. You can't argue that it is from the Old Testament, where polygamy is hiding in many of our favorite stories and their major heroes had complex multiple relationships, and primitive family customs often dominated over spiritual values. Instead of giving us clear teaching about how their marriage was solemnized, the Old Testament author simply says that Isaac took Rebecca into his tent, and "she became his wife, and he loved her" (Genesis 24:67).

The New Testament doesn't help us much either. Polygamy is gone, because the Roman and Greek societies of that day didn't allow it. But there is no marriage ceremony laid out by the Apostles, and there's no evidence that any such ceremony existed in the Early Church. Jesus famously attended a wedding feast, where he changed water into wine, but the Gospels say nothing about him attending a wedding ceremony. Interesting. It's clear that the writers of both the Old Testament and the New Testament saw marriage as a civil, rather than a religious, ceremony.

The idea of marriage as a sacrament is actually a creation of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages.² Part of the Protestant Reformation is the affirmation that marriage is a "divine covenant," but *not a sacrament*. That is, it's not something the Church owns and can give to or take from couples, as a way of controlling them. The fact that I, as a Baptist minister, can declare someone married ("I now pronounce you . . .") is a hangover from the Medieval Catholic Church. I'm really making the pronouncement on behalf of the State of California, which issued the license, though at the same time I'm adding God's blessing through prayer. This distinction has important implications for modern issues, like divorce, remarriage after divorce, marriage of gay partners, etc.

I believe (and have counseled couples I've married) that the best chance of success in

marriage comes from a humble, honest, whole-hearted two-way personal commitment. The commitment should not be a "downward" act, implying ownership, but an "upward" act, implying respect --- "Would you do me the honor?" And that respect should be the continuing attitude throughout the life of the marriage.

Goldie Hawn expresses her ideal for an open marriage as,

"We want to choose each other every day."

The joint commitment model I'm suggesting would adjust that to,

"We choose each other every day, but the choice is pre-shaped by our mutual commitment and enabled by God's grace."

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ You may enjoy reading this <https://people.com/kurt-russell-goldie-hawn-kids-everything-to-know-11925520> or watching this <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBuCVduP8Ts>

² While the Apostles Paul and Peter discussed how Christians should behave in their marriages, they did not address the question of the marriage ceremony itself. Three centuries later, St. Augustine wrote about the spiritual dimensions of marriage, but the ceremony was not officially canonized as one of the seven sacraments until the Council of Florence (AD 1439) ratified by the Council of Trent (AD 1547).