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SOME POPULAR READINGS FOR CIVIL WEDDINGS

Below are the words for some popular readings for civil wedding ceremonies. You'll normally need to choose either one or two readings.

For further information and advice about civil weddings, call us on 020 8293 3392 (London) or 0131 624 4005 (Edinburgh) or email us at help@weddingmusic.co.uk

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Sonnet 43 - Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being an Ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old grief's, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

From: 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' by Louis de Bernieres

Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your root was so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part.

Because this is what love is.

Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion. That is just being in love, which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident.

Those that truly love have roots that grow towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossoms have fallen from their branches, they find that they are one tree and not two.

My true love hath my heart - Sir Philip Sidney

My true-love hath my heart, and I have his,
By just exchange one for another given:
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven:

My true-love hath my heart, and I have his,
My heart in me keeps him and me in one,
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guide:
He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his because in me it bides:

My true-love hath my heart, and I have his.

O tell me the truth about love - WH Auden

Some say love's a little boy, and some say it's a bird,
Some say it makes the world go around, some say that's absurd,
And when I asked the man next-door, who looked as if he knew,
His wife got very cross indeed, and said it wouldn't do.

Does it look like a pair of pyjamas, or the ham in a temperance hotel?
Does its odour remind one of llamas, or has it a comforting smell?
Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is, or soft as eiderdown fluff?
Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?

O tell me the truth about love.

Our history books refer to it in cryptic little notes,
It's quite a common topic on the Transatlantic boats;
I've found the subject mentioned in accounts of suicides,
And even seen it scribbled on the backs of railway guides.

Does it howl like a hungry Alsatian, or boom like a military band?
Could one give a first-rate imitation on a saw or a Steinway Grand?
Is its singing at parties a riot? Does it only like Classical stuff?
Will it stop when one wants to be quiet?

O tell me the truth about love.

I looked inside the summer-house; it wasn't over there;
I tried the Thames at Maidenhead, and Brighton's bracing air.
I don't know what the blackbird sang, or what the tulip said;
But it wasn't in the chicken-run, or underneath the bed.

Can it pull extraordinary faces? Is it usually sick on a swing?
Does it spend all its time at the races, or fiddling with pieces of string?
Has it views of its own about money? Does it think Patriotism enough?
Are its stories vulgar but funny?

O tell me the truth about love.

When it comes, will it come without warning just as I'm picking my nose?
Will it knock on my door in the morning, or tread in the bus on my toes?
Will it come like a change in the weather? Will its greeting be courteous or rough?
Will it alter my life altogether?

O tell me the truth about love.

Sonnet 18 - William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as man can breath, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet 116 - William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds.
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is not shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom,
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Giving up smoking - Wendy Cope

There's not a Shakespeare sonnet
Or a Beethoven quartet
That's easier to like than you
Or harder to forget.

You think that sounds extravagant?
I haven't finished yet -

I like you more than I would like
To have a cigarette.

The passionate shepherd to his love - Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,
And all the craggy mountains yields.

There we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks.
By shallow rivers to whose fells
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
With a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my love.

The shepherds' swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

The good morrow - John Donne

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights control,
And makes one little room, an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown.
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West?
What ever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die.

On Marriage, from "The Prophet" - Kahlil Gibran

Then Almitra spoke again and said, 'And what of Marriage, master?' And he answered saying: You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore. You shall be together when white wings of death scatter your days. Aye, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God. But let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together : For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

Extract from "The Velveteen Rabbit" - Margery Williams

'What is Real?' asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. 'Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?'

'Real isn't how you are made,' said the Skin Horse. 'It's a thing that happens to you. When someone loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.'

'Does it hurt?' Asked the Rabbit. 'Sometimes,' said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. 'When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.'

'Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,' he asked, 'or bit by bit?'

'It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse. 'You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby.

But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.'

'I suppose you are real?' said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse only smiled.

'Someone made me Real,' he said. 'That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.'

Extract from "Les Miserables" - Victor Hugo

You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving. The great acts of love are done by those who are habitually performing small acts of kindness. We pardon to the extent that we love. Love is knowing that even when you are alone, you will never be lonely again. And great happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved. Loved for ourselves. And even loved in spite of ourselves.

A Birthday - Christina Rossetti

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.
Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleur-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

Extract from Song of the Open Road - Walt Whitman

Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but
Offer rough new prizes,
These are the days that must happen to you:

You shall not heap up what is call'd riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve.
However sweet these laid-up stores,
however convenient this dwelling, we cannot remain there.
However shelter'd the port, and however
calm the waters, we must not anchor here,
however welcome the hospitality that
surrounds us we are permitted to receive
it but a little while.

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading
Wherever I choose.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? Will you come

Travel with me?

Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

I will be here - Steven Curtis Chapman

If in the morning when you wake,
If the sun does not appear,
I will be here.
If in the dark we lose sight of love,
Hold my hand and have no fear,
I will be here.

I will be here,
When you feel like being quiet,
When you need to speak your mind I will listen.
Through the winning, losing, and trying we'll be together,
And I will be here.
If in the morning when you wake,
If the future is unclear,
I will be here.
As sure as seasons were made for change,
Our lifetimes were made for years,
I will be here.

I will be here,
And you can cry on my shoulder,
When the mirror tells us we're older.
I will hold you, to watch you grow in beauty,
And tell you all the things you are to me.
We'll be together and I will be here.
I will be true to the promises I've made,
To you and to the one who gave you to me.
I will be here.

I wanna be yours - John Cooper Clarke

I wanna be your vacuum cleaner
Breathing in your dust,
I wanna be your Ford Cortina
I will never rust,
If you like your coffee hot
Let me be your coffee pot,
You call the shots,
I wanna be yours.

I wanna be your raincoat
For those frequent rainy days,
I wanna be your dreamboat
When you want to sail away,
Let me be your teddy bear
Take me with you anywhere,
I don't care,
I wanna be yours.

I wanna be your electric meter
I will not run out,
I wanna be the electric heater
You'll get cold without,
I wanna be your setting lotion
Hold your hair in deep devotion,
Deep as the deep Atlantic ocean
That's how deep is my devotion.

Yes, I'll marry you - Pam Ayres

Yes, I'll marry you, my dear,
And here's the reason why;
So I can push you out of bed
When the baby starts to cry,
And if we hear a knocking
And it's creepy and it's late,
I hand you the torch you see,
And you investigate.

Yes I'll marry you, my dear,
You may not apprehend it,
But when the tumble-drier goes
It's you that has to mend it,
You have to face the neighbour
Should our labrador attack him,
And if a drunkard fondles me
It's you that has to whack him.

Yes, I'll marry you,
You're virile and you're lean,
My house is like a pigsty
You can help to keep it clean.
That sexy little dinner
Which you served by candlelight,
As I do chipolatas,
You can cook it every night!

It's you who has to work the drill
and put up curtain track,
And when I've got PMT it's you who gets the flak,
I do see great advantages,
But none of them for you,
And so before you see the light,
I do, I do, I do!