

God's Design for Marriage

Genesis 2:18-25

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The question these days is: “Who wants to marry a multimillionaire?” I thought maybe I’d seen it all. Who would have thought five years ago that we would actually have a game show where the prize is that a woman would marry a man whom she had never met? And you know what the big news is this week? The big news is that the marriage to the millionaire is not working out. Who could have guessed?

I find myself asking the question, “Could we devalue marriage any more in our culture?” What is happening to us that we no longer understand the sanctity and the beauty of what marriage is really meant to be? Who would have thought years ago that you would have ordained ministers who are fighting for the right to see how deeply they can offend God, by marrying a man with a man and a woman with a woman? What has happened to our understanding of marriage?

A lot of it comes from this discussion that we have been having concerning our origins. Where did we come from? How did we get here? These questions define a lot concerning what we believe about marriage. If the theory of evolution is true, then marriage is nothing more than a sociological development that may or may not last. As a matter of fact, I pulled a definition out of a typical university sociology book – the definition of marriage and family. Listen to what the writer says and how he connects it to evolution. The definition of a *family*:

The family is the most basic of all social institutions. It existed among our ancestors long before the human species evolved to its present physical form.

He goes on then to define *marriage*:

Marriage is a socially-approved sexual union of some permanence between two or more people.

There have been several generations who have basically taught that watered-down definition of family and marriage, so it's no wonder that marriage is in crisis in our culture today. However, it all looks very different when we go back to Genesis and we see what the Creator God intended for a man and a woman to enjoy together in what we call marriage. In Genesis 2, we learn not only God's design for marriage; but in the process, we learn some very rich theology that is represented in the marriage relationship.

Remember that in chapter 1 we learned that man – male and female – are created in the image of God. And the first aspect of the image of God is revealed in those verses – that God is a relational God. So He made us as relational people, with the ability to give and receive love and to enter into a relationship, just as God has been eternally in a relationship with Himself as a trinity God. We also had the introduction to sexuality in the context of the image of God. God created man, male and female, and the very first command in all of the Bible is a command to express that sexuality: to be fruitful and multiply. That’s what God tells us in Genesis 1.

Moving into Genesis 2, He gives us more detail; a blueprint for what He intended for that relationship. Remember, chapter 2 goes back into the sixth day of creation and discusses in detail what was just highlighted in chapter 1. So last week we went back into Day 6, when God created Adam. It appears that God created Adam, then placed him in that garden of grace. In that garden He then created Eve to be Adam's partner. And that's where we pick up the story in chapter 2, beginning in verse 18. It says: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him.' "

Now, it's interesting the way this drama plays out in chapter 2. It is not a case where God created Adam and then struck Himself on the forehead and said, "What was I thinking? Adam needs a partner!" God could have created Adam and Eve at the same time, and we wouldn't know a whole lot more about that. But God is unfolding these dramatic events in chapter 2 in order to teach us. As the Master Teacher, He is unfolding this drama in a way that says, "I want you to know what I designed; I want you to know what I intended, so I'm going to do this in dramatic fashion, so that you get the idea of what marriage is all about." That's why God goes through the creation of Eve with such drama – it's to make a point and to teach us something about marriage.

In verse 18, we are struck with the words, "It is not good." And we're struck by those words, because throughout chapter 1, what we hear at the end of each day is God saying, "It is good." Day 2: "It is good." Day 3: "It is good." And by the time you get to the end of Day 6 God says, "It is *very* good." But somewhere, between the end of Day 5 and the end of Day 6, God made the statement (somewhere on the sixth day), "It is *not* good." And so God has to do something on the sixth day in order to end the day with the statement, "It is *very* good."

It is also worth noting that Adam was in perfect harmony with God, and yet, God said, "It is not good for Adam to be alone." There is a tendency sometimes to think that, as long as we have God, that's all we need. God is not saying that He is not sufficient or that He is not adequate. He is saying that we are made in His image, and that means we are relational beings. God intends for us to express that in a corresponding relationship—in other words, in relationships with one another. The text is saying that we need each other. One of the ways that we learn about God is through relationships with one another. We get to know God better. When it was just Adam, God said that it was not good and Adam needed a corresponding partner. God says, "I will make him a helper suitable for him." Suitable means "corresponding to" – one who is like him.

Ladies, if you wonder what that word "helper" means, it may not sound real flattering to you. It might give the connotation of someone who follows behind Adam and picks up his dirty underwear and socks, and that probably doesn't thrill you. But that's not what the word means at all. As a matter of fact, this is a word God used to describe himself in the Psalms, so this has to be a big, powerful, very honoring word for God to use it of Himself. It's really the idea of being a partner, of being an ally. Adam needed a partner who was corresponding to himself.

As we read through the text, we realize Adam is in this garden of grace and is alone. We know that God's going to make him a partner, and if we didn't know where the story goes, we would be pretty excited for Adam. That's why it is so interesting to see where verses 19 and 20 go. He says:

And out of the ground, the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called the living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to every beast of the field, but for Adam, there was not found a helper suitable for him.

Now, that's an interesting discussion. About the time we're pretty excited for Adam to have a corresponding partner, the writer launches into this discussion of the naming of the animals, and we're wondering if this writer is having trouble keeping a train of thought. We're about to create a partner for Adam, and then he's naming the animals, and I find myself saying, "I don't care what they're called – let's get this guy a partner!" What's going on here is that, if you look at the end of verse 20, clearly the writer is still on the same train of thought. The point he is trying to make is this: as Adam named the animals when they came by (probably two by two), Adam came to grips with the fact that there was no corresponding partner – there was no match for him. Adam didn't see anything in the animal kingdom that he could relate to. I don't think Adam probably watched the animals go by and looked at the gorillas and thought, "Well, you know, maybe.....get a little makeup on her, and she may do." Probably not.

As a matter of fact, the point that's being made is another deathblow to the theory of evolution, because what's being said here is that there is this quantum leap between the animal kingdom and Adam. As the animal kingdom paraded by Adam, there were no transitional forms where Adam thought, "That's close enough – you know, that will do." But there was a quantum leap, and the point is being made that there was nothing corresponding to Adam because he was special, made in the image of God. So Adam came to grips with his aloneness, but we are understanding what is going on here. God is going to create a partner – corresponding – suitable for Adam.

Verse 21: "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept." Ladies, do you find it interesting that Adam slept through this most significant event? I can tell what you're thinking. Some of you are thinking, "That's just typical of man to sleep through this most important event!" There is also a double emphasis on the fact that he was sleeping, I think, as a way of saying that Adam didn't *do* anything in this. This is all a God-thing. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. Then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place, and the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib, which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. It's a wonderful description of the intimacy in the creation of Eve, just as we were confronted with the intimacy of the creation of Adam in last week's study.

One of the questions that arises here is: Why do it this way at all? Why didn't God just create Adam and Eve? Why all the drama? What's being said here is that this is a most intimate relationship. This person comes literally right out of the man, right out of his side— not that Adam would be above, not that Adam would be below – but that they would be partners. And coming right out of his side, of course, is symbolic of that, but it's also a statement of the intimacy that God intended. She came literally right out of Adam, and God built her and formed her for the two of them to be together. These are not two ships that pass in the night who decide that life would be better lived together than apart. This is not some sociological development that just happened to come along. But God is taking great pains to say, "This is according to my design. It's personal, it's intimate – it's meant to be this way."

Verse 23: “And the man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.’” Notice that Adam *does* understand the theology of this. Adam understands this is very personal. This is very intimate. She literally came right out of him, and he names her accordingly.

At the beginning of verse 23, Adam’s words are interesting. They sound rather matter of fact. He looks at Eve and says, “Okay, this is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh – I guess this woman will do.” That’s kind of the way the English reads, but that is not reflective of the Hebrew at all. As a matter of fact, the very first statement out of his mouth would probably be better translated, “This is it!” Notice the exclamation point. If we were to put it in our language, Adam would have been saying, “Yippee!” Not that *I* would say it that way, but those of you prone toward excitement would give a big “Yippee!” For me – just a big eyebrow raise and a “wow.” But the expression is really very vivid in the Hebrew. Adam is very excited to have a corresponding partner with whom he can share his life, and the text in Hebrew reflects that.

It’s a wonderful description, a very beautiful description of how God created Adam and Eve to go together in a most intimate relationship. But in verses 24 and 25, we really get God’s blueprint for marriage. The creation event is God’s way of telling us how intimate and how personal and how designed this all is. In verse 24 he starts talking about leaving father and mother, and obviously Adam and Eve didn’t have a father and mother, so God is going beyond the discussion related to Adam and Eve and saying, “This is now for everybody; this is how marriage will work. This is My design, My blueprint.” Starting in verse 24:

For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.
For this cause, (*meaning the coming together to form this intimate union like Adam and Eve*), a man shall leave his father and mother.

This is talking about the priority of the relationship. These words are not said lightly. God puts a tremendous emphasis on the family and the relationship of children to their parents. So it’s not a passing comment when the writer says that we shall leave father and mother and cleave (which is a word that means glue together) into a new relationship.

When I was growing up, the most significant and the highest priority relationship that I had was with my parents. That is as God intended – to honor your father and mother. But there reached a point when I stood at an altar and said “I do” to Patti. At that moment, I committed myself to a relationship that was now a higher priority than that which I had known before. That is a very significant change that should not be taken lightly, but a very necessary step to create a new family. That family then goes on, and the kingdom of God is perpetuated from generation to generation. It is a wise parent who understands that there comes a point when their children leave. And it is a wise child who understands there is a day in which I am responsible for my own life, and I now commit myself to a new family, which becomes my highest priority of human relationships.

The second thing He says after “leave” is “cleave”. That’s a word which means “to glue together” and that addresses the permanence of the relationship. If you were to glue together two pieces of plywood, you don’t glue them together temporarily. You understand that once they are glued together, they are glued. You can get them apart, but the only way to do that is to get a crowbar and to rip them apart, and that causes tremendous scarring and damage. So this is a reference to the permanence, the glued together relationship of marriage.

The third thing that He says is “the two shall become one flesh” which refers to the intimacy of the relationship. That phrase, *one flesh*, is clearly a reference to the sexual union – the most intimate expression of the intimacy of that relationship. So you have the priority, you have the permanence, and you have the intimacy of that relationship. That is the blueprint, or the design, of what God intended in a marriage. It is a celebration of the image of God, because it’s only people created in His image who can enter into this type of a relationship. It is unique, it is special. Marriage is a celebration of the image of God! The most intimate expression of marriage, sexuality, is a celebration of what it means to be people made in God’s image. It is what separates us from the animal kingdom. Therefore, we could say that marriage is a celebration of the image of God in a one flesh, a lifelong union between a man and a woman. God has formed the boundaries and God has given the definition.

But there’s more in these two verses that we need to understand. There is some significant theology that is illustrated in the marriage relationship. For example, in Genesis 1, we are introduced to God as a trinity – or actually, to be more accurate, we are introduced to God as a plural God—let *us* make man in *our* image. And even the name, Elohim, means plural – three or more. It is later on that the Bible defines that as three: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. We find ourselves wondering: how can that even be, and how can we understand that? What does it mean for three to be one? How could three possibly still just be one?

The best illustration of that is found in marriage in the sexual union talked about in Genesis 2:24, when the writer says “two shall become one.” The problem really isn’t how three can be one; the problem is how can plural be singular? So how can two be one? Those of us who are married can’t describe it, but we understand it to be true. We understand that we share a oneness together that is unique. I don’t share the same connection, the same oneness with any other human relationship outside of my wife. It is a oneness that can’t really be described.

What would you say, if someone asked those of you who are married, “How did you know when you were in love? How did you know that this is the person that you wanted to marry?” I have young people ask me that all the time, and I can’t really answer that question. It’s only the administrative types who have an answer to that question. They have three reasons why it was time to marry. The rest of us – we don’t have a clue. We just say, “You just know. There’s something that happens in your heart, and you know this is the person that you want to marry. This is the person you want to share your life with.” I find the same difficulty in trying to describe how two are one. I feel it. I know that it’s true. But I can’t really explain it.

Part of it goes back to this word “cleave” and the idea of being “glued together”. God does something special when a man and a woman commit their lives to each other, and He cements them together. That, again, is why divorce is such a painful process. It is the literal tearing apart of something God never intended to come apart. It does leave a lot of pain, and it does leave a lot of scarring because of that “gluing” effect that God intended. We are one in a way that can’t be described. It’s not two halves becoming a whole, but two whole people who come together and become one. And in the process, we understand God just a little bit better, because we have a living illustration of how two have become one, which gets us

maybe just one step further in understanding how it could be possible that three could still be one.

This concept also helps us understand a great deal about what's happening in our culture in terms of sexuality, because what's happening is a gluing effect. God intends two people to grow up, and when they leave their family of origin, they come together and are glued together as a couple. And the most intimate expression of that, of course, is the sexual relationship, and it's a very powerful and a very meaningful thing. But what's happening in our culture is that people are experiencing their sexuality outside of God's boundary (outside of God's context) and God never intended for that. There becomes a type of a "hit-and-run" experience where there is a gluing and a tearing and a gluing and a tearing and a gluing a tearing. It is causing severe confusion and pain in our culture, because God never intended sexuality to be used that way. What is so powerful in marriage becomes so destructive outside of marriage, because of the constant gluing and tearing and the tremendous damage that results. God never intended for sex to be a hit-and-run experience. He meant for it to be permanent – a gluing and cementing process with a lifelong partner.

For someone to consistently experience that gluing and tearing effect, they cannot endure that pain. Therefore, they insulate themselves in some way, so as not to emotionally feel that pain. They put on a protective shield, so now they no longer engage their emotions. They no longer engage their soul. They no longer really experience that intimacy – they merely experience a physical act. And the sad thing is, we are never more like the animal kingdom than when we have reduced sex down to a mere physical act. That is what God intended for the animal kingdom. What God intended for us is to celebrate our sexuality as people made in His image in a cemented-together, glued-together, lifelong relationship. That is why people in our culture are unable to be satisfied. That's why they turn to all kinds of strange and bizarre relationships. That's the appeal of pornography. It is an attempt they make to find some satisfaction, but that will never happen, because it's been taken outside of God's context, and it cannot satisfy outside of what God intended. That is significant theology related to this intimacy within a marriage.

There is a second theology that talks about the intimacy in our relationship with our spouse as being symbolic – it's but a taste of the intimacy that we can have with God. God, from heaven, decided to create this relationship on earth where people can experience the most intense intimacy. In the process, that intimacy will still only be a taste of what they can experience with God, so that they will hunger for more and ultimately be satisfied in God. For example, if you have a King James Bible, wherever you run into a text that talks about a man and a woman having relations, it uses the word, "know". For example, in Genesis 4:1, the New American Standard says: "Now the man had relations with...." The literal Hebrew is "....when the man knew his wife," and that is a very important concept. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the same word that's used to describe sexual relations is the same word that is used to describe *knowing* God. As a man knew a woman, so God wants to know us. And you see the imagery throughout the Old and New Testament that God is portrayed as the husband, and we, as God's people, are portrayed as the bride, entering into this intimate relationship with God. Therefore, when we stray spiritually, God calls it adultery numerous times in the Old and New Testament.

There is an intimacy that we experience in marriage that is but a taste of what God wants to experience with us. Let me show you New Testament passages that clearly spell this

out. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is talking to the Corinthian Church. In the city of Corinth, the pagans would worship their gods by going up to the temples, and there they would find temple prostitutes, and they would have relations with them. That, supposedly, would make them one with the gods. These Corinthians have now placed their trust in Jesus, but there's still a lot of confusion, and some of them are still participating with these temple prostitutes. In chapter 6, Paul is saying that this has to stop; this is not what God intended at all. In verse 15 he says:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be. Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her. For he says, the two will become one flesh.

Now, notice the quote right out of Genesis 2:24 that clearly identifies that phrase as the sexual union. It's very clear that's what he's talking about here. But look at the language he uses in that verse, "...the one who joins himself is one body with her." Now, look what he says in verse 17: "...but the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" – the exact same language to describe our union with God. Clearly, Paul is saying that this sexual relationship should not be abused in that way, because two are to become one flesh in this lifelong union known as marriage. He goes on to say, "and that is merely symbolic of our joining together with God and experiencing the ultimate intimacy with Him."

Looking at Ephesians 5, we see something very similar. Paul is talking to the Church in Ephesus. He is talking about the role of the husband and the role of the wife, and how the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the Church. It is the same imagery that we've been talking about. Ephesians 5:28 says:

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the Church, because we are members of His body. For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.

In the midst of that discussion, Paul brings up Genesis 2:24, reminding us of marriage and the intimacy of the sexual union within marriage. But look at what he says in verse 32: "This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church." He clearly identifies that the ultimate expression of Genesis 2:24 is the relationship between Christ and His Church, or God and His people, again emphasizing the intimacy of this relationship.

I love this theological connection for a couple of reasons. If you remember those days when you were growing up as teenagers, or if you are a parent today, and you're trying to explain to your teenager how they deal with all of the sexual temptation in the culture, what do you tell them? What most teens are told is that, when those emotions come up, they just need to take a cold shower and they need to wait. What we're seeing in our culture is that that doesn't work. For those of you who are single, for those of you who have partners where you cannot express yourself sexually, what do you do with that energy that's there? Why does God put that energy there, if He doesn't want you to express it?

The answer is that it is not good counsel to say, "Just hang in there and take a cold shower." That's going against the way God has designed us. We need to understand what is going on. There is a longing in our soul, and that energy is ultimately a longing for God. Instead of telling them "you need to stuff it," we need to be saying to them, "just rechannel the energy, because what your soul is longing for, you can have." What your soul is longing for you **can** have, because ultimately your longing is for God. It's longing for an intimate

relationship with God. And, as a single person, you have to skip the taste, but you still get the full expression. You still get the satisfaction – you get what your soul is longing for. And if people will rechannel their energy into intimacy with God, instead of just trying to cork it, they will find that it becomes very meaningful. That energy drives a more intimate relationship with God, and they become deeper and more intimate with God, and it becomes fulfilling. It is very satisfying, and God meets you where you are. And lo and behold, it actually works, and it gives us what we need to maintain purity in this very sexually-contaminated culture.

This is even true in a lot of marriage relationships. Two people will marry, and they believe that once they're married and can experience this intimacy with their partner, that it will satisfy and be everything they wanted it to be. But couples get a few years down the way, and it's not working – they're still not satisfied. It's not what they thought it would be, and so sometimes they go looking for a different partner, sometimes they're unfaithful outside of the marriage. Sometimes they turn to pornography, or something else, and they don't understand that what's missing is the intimacy with God. Marriage is not an end in itself; marriage is merely a taste of the fuller intimacy that we can only achieve with God. And so we understand that our partner cannot be a substitute for God; our partner cannot meet needs that only God can meet. It is only a taste of what ultimately drives us to God.

Lots of people in our culture are trying to use sexuality to bring meaning and significance and purpose to their life. They're trying to find love in those relationships. They have turned sex into a pursuit of something, and God never intended for that. God intended for sex to be an expression of something we already have. We pursue God, and it's in God we find meaning and significance and purpose. It is in God that we find love; it is in God that we find pleasure. It is in God that we find satisfaction. And having received that from God, then I express it to my wife. Sex is not a pursuit of something; it's an expression of something. We don't make love in the bedroom; we express love that we have already received from God. Therefore, sex becomes a meaningful, satisfying expression – or celebration of the very image of God.

Maybe you find yourself never having really experienced that kind of intimacy with God. And deep down in your soul you would say that there is something missing and something you long for. What you are longing for is intimacy with God. Whether you are married or single, that intimacy is made available to you, because Jesus gave His own life to die on the cross to make payment for your sin. If you're willing to trust in His death on the cross as payment for your sin, by faith you enter into a relationship with Him, and you stand before God, naked and unashamed, which is where Genesis 2 ends. The last verse in Genesis 2 finds Adam and Eve both naked, and there was no shame. A perfect relationship with one another – a perfect relationship with God. It was everything God ever intended for marriage to be. And the wonderful news is we can return to that. We can stand before God with our life partner, naked and unashamed, because of the forgiveness and grace of God. Marriage is the celebration of that. It's the celebration of our salvation. It's the celebration of our intimacy with God, as we experience an intimacy very specially designed by God for a male and a female to celebrate together for life.