

“GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE” (Genesis 2:18-25)

This morning we continue our study of the early chapters of Genesis – which lays the foundation of all God intends creation to be – and today we’ll look at the foundation of marriage. Some of you know what it’s like on Christmas morning to have your child open a gift, and on the outside of the box it says “some assembly required,” and you spend the rest of Christmas morning putting it together for them. Show of hands... how many of you start putting it together without looking at the instructions? That’s what I usually do – I look at the picture and think, “This can’t be that hard,” and after getting things backwards, I do what I should have done in the first place and follow the instructions.

When it comes to marriage, God – who thought up and designed marriage – gives us a very simple instruction manual in the second chapter of Genesis. It’s not super detailed – just eight verses – but in these eight verses we see the need, the purpose, and the design of marriage. The institution of marriage is the first institution - it comes before government, before church, before any other relationship. Someone has said that each family is a mini-civilization, and as the family goes, so goes the rest of civilization – and since marriage is the bedrock of the family, as marriages go – so goes society.

As you know, marriage has fallen on hard times in recent decades. A hundred years ago, there was one divorce for every ten marriages in America. In 1960 there was one divorce for every four marriages. In 1970 there was one divorce for every three marriages. Since 1980 it has been one divorce for just about every two marriages. Added to the high rate of divorce is the fact that fewer people are even bothering to get married. A whopping 69% of Americans believe that living together is acceptable, even if a couple does not plan on getting married. Added to this is the Supreme Court decision in 2015 to legalize same-sex marriage, and it’s obvious that we as a culture have ignored God’s instruction manual on marriage, and the result is chaos and confusion. More than ever, we need to go back to the instruction manual and understand marriage the way God originally designed it.

After describing the big picture of creation with a wide-angle lens in Genesis 1, in 2:4, Moses – the author of Genesis – zooms with tele-photo lens in on the sixth day of creation – the creation of the first man – Adam – and how God places him in the garden of Eden to serve and obey Him. In verses 18-25 we come to the climax of day six and the bringing together of the first man and woman in marriage. In these verses we see a problem and a solution.

In verse 18 we read... The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” In chapter two we see a pattern in which a problem is stated and a solution is given. In verse 5 the problem is that there’s no one to work the ground and take care of the earth. God’s solution is to make Adam from the dust of the earth and place him in the garden. In verse 18 there’s another problem: God has someone to rule over the earth and take care of it, but Adam is incomplete – he needs someone to help him fulfill God’s purpose.

Up to this point, everything God created He calls “good.” The creation of the land, sky and sea is good – the creation of animals to fill the land, and the birds to fill the sky, and the fish fill the sea is good. On day six God creates man and calls His creation “very good.” But now God says, “Not good.” It is not good for the man to be alone.

One time in my early twenties I drove alone from Oregon to Dallas, Texas where I was going to school. As I started out my trip, I didn’t think much about traveling alone, but just enjoyed the freedom of the road. Every once in a while, though, it felt a little strange to be alone, and this was long before cell phones, and if something happened to me out in the middle of nowhere, no one would know.

When I got to the southern part of Colorado, I noticed on the map that I was not far from Mesa Verde National Park – the place where the Pueblo Indians built cliff dwellings into the side of a rock canyon. The park was thirty miles off the beaten path – one way in and one way out. I vacillated over whether I should take the time to see it or just keep going, but I figured as long as I'm in the area I might as well do it. When I got to the main lookout, I was instantly glad I made the trip. It was an unbelievable sight, but as I was taking it all in, I suddenly had this overwhelming awareness that I was all alone and had no one to share the moment with. There was not even anyone else at the lookout – nobody. I couldn't even call someone or facetime with them. I thought, "What good was it to drive all the way up here, and not be able to share it with someone?"

It is not good for man to be alone. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one." Two people provide comfort and encouragement and protection that one alone cannot give. God created us as relational beings, and every human needs another human to survive. Prison officials say that the worst possible punishment they can give a prisoner is solitary confinement. You might survive physically, but without relationships you will go crazy and be something less than human.

Imagine being Adam. He's less than a few hours created, and he already feels lonely. It's just him and the animals. Verses 19-20 says, "Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found."

God called Adam to rule over the earth, and naming the animals is a way of showing his authority and leadership. Rather than God naming them, He says, "You name them," and He waits to see what Adam comes up with. Adam looks at the animals – He studies them and their features. He sees that like him, they have a body – they have eyes and ears, a nose and a mouth. He also sees that, like him, they are living beings that walk and run, they can be playful and show emotion – but there's something very different about them. He can't have a conversation with them, they don't think and reason like he does, and they don't fellowship with their creator like he does. Only he is made in the image and likeness of God, and Adam recognizes this difference.

He starts assign each animal a name: you're a zebra, you're a hippopotamus, you're a cat, you're a dog. In the few hours Adam has been alive, he has it pretty good. He's in paradise, surrounded by unbelievable beauty and fruit trees and waterfalls, and enjoys a zoo-full of animals. But there's something missing. What could be missing in paradise? "For Adam no suitable helper was found." Adam sees that while the animals are like him in many ways, they are fundamentally different from him. They don't correspond to him. He notices that the animals come in pairs – a male and female counterpart – but Adam doesn't have a corresponding partner who is like him. He has no "suitable helper."

What is a suitable helper? The Hebrew word for "helper" means one who provides what is lacking – to do what man alone cannot do. In the Old Testament God is described a helper – someone who comes alongside of and helps His people. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is said to be our helper – He comes alongside believers and comforts and guides us – providing what we lack. Adam needed a lot of help – men do – as wonderful and capable as we are, we can only do so much on our own. We need help – lots of help. I love the memes online about why men die younger than women – and it shows all these pictures of men standing on a rickety ladder or jacking their truck up with a two-by four. We need lots of help.

The word "suitable" literally means, "according to the opposite of him." The idea is that Eve is an appropriate match – she will be like Adam – she will correspond to him – she'll be just what he needs.

Verses 21-22 says, “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”

God’s solution to Adam’s problem comes while he is sleeping. I like that. Adam has nothing to do with finding a wife – God puts him out – it will be God’s work, not Adam’s. One of the biggest decisions of life, and one of the most stressful, is finding the right person to marry. Part of finding someone involves effort on your part – God can’t steer a parked car, as they say – but it also requires trust in God to lead you to the right one. God wants you to rest in Him and not be anxious. He wants you to make the most of whatever state you’re in. As long as you’re single, serve God with everything you have – take advantage of being single – and sometimes, when you least expect it, when you’re resting in Him, God will put things together for you.

As Adam is sleeping, God performs orthopedic surgery on him, and takes a rib from Adam’s side, and from it makes woman. That’s an interesting way to do it. The word “rib” can be translated “side,” and it’s likely that God takes both flesh and bone from Adam’s side – a piece of him – which is saying that woman is made of the same substance as man – they are both made in the image and likeness of God. They correspond to each other. In taking a piece of Adam’s flesh also shows the intimate bonding and union between man and woman. In Ephesians 5, where Paul talks about a husband’s love for his wife, and he says, “Love your wife as your own body.” That takes us right back to Genesis two.

It’s interesting that God takes a piece of Adam’s body from his side. The idea of a helper is someone to come alongside – side by side – to do it together. It wasn’t from his feet or from his head or out of his back – it was from his side. This speaks of equality – that one is not superior to the other – they are both of equal value and standing before God. At the same time, there are differences in the roles God wants them to play in creation, which we will talk about in a moment.

At the end of verse 22 God brings the woman to the man – just like weddings begin with the father of the bride bringing her to the man – it’s all based on Genesis two. This causes Adam to break in the first song or poem found in the Bible. Verse 23... The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

Adam awakes from his sleep and sees this creature standing in front of him, and it’s not a giraffe. It is someone like him – made directly from his flesh and bone. Suddenly, the “not good” part of creation becomes good – very good – and Adam calls her “woman,” which in the Hebrew means “Whoa-man!” He’s excited – he’s attracted. God saved the best the best for last, amen? And together Adam and Eve form the perfect combination – the beauty and the beast.

It’s interesting how in art and in movies and books, if you want to show beauty, you paint a woman. If you want to show strength, you draw a man. There’s no getting around it – you can’t explain it away. That’s the way God created it to be and it’s the perfect balance. This is seen in dancing. The man throws and twirls his partner – providing the strength – and the woman provides the grace and beauty – and together they bring glory to God.

God uniquely built into the fiber of man a desire to show his strength by protecting and providing – to be the knight in shining armor. Every marriage expert agrees that a man’s number one need is respect – respect is what motivates him. God uniquely built into the fiber of a woman the desire to nurture and bond, and her number one need is love. Love and care are what motivates her.

Verse 23 also tells us something about the role of leadership God gives to the man, the details of which will later be fleshed out in the New Testament. While Adam and Eve are both equal before God in value and standing, God has wired them up differently – on purpose – to bring the fullness of God’s image to the world. Adam is given the role of leadership, and this is seen by the simple fact that Adam is created first – and, as verse 23 says, “she was taken from man.” God could have created Adam and Eve at the same time, but he creates Adam first, and then Eve. Adam was given the mandate in chapter one to subdue the earth and rule over it, and after he and Eve sin in chapter 3, he is held accountable by God.

God created everything in the universe with order and design, and in order for any system to function properly there must be a structure – and in every arena of life, there is a leader – someone who has authority. When you have a complaint at a store you say, “I’d like to see the manager.” You want to talk to the head person – the person with the authority to solve your problem. At work you have a boss. You may be smarter than your boss, and you might be a better boss than your boss, but someone has to be the boss and for the business to function well everyone yields to the boss’s leadership. In sports there is a coach and the players and ball boys. In the military, and at school – in every area of life there is order and structure and authority, and when people cooperate with order and give respect to those placed in a position of authority, things function smoothly and efficiently and there is a peaceful atmosphere. When there is rebellion against the established order, there is chaos and dysfunction.

Why did God make man the head? I don’t know, but He did. Someone’s got to be the head and when God made Adam He said, “You’re it. You’re the leader, you’re the head.” Now in many, many cases, wives might be smarter than their husbands (that is certainly true in our marriage) and wives might be more spiritual. But God designed man to take the role of headship in marriage and the church, and uniquely gifted them to do so.

The reason this is resisted by so many in our culture – and even in the church – is because we are living on the other side of Genesis 3 – where sin entered the world. Before the fall, Adam and Eve had no problem accepting and flourishing in their roles, but after the fall there would be a power struggle – and men would lead imperfectly and women would not respect well. The whole “Me too” movement has brought to light how badly some men have strayed from their original design. Because of this, masculinity is deemed as “toxic,” and our boys are taught that there is something wrong with being manly. Just because people do not live up to the ideal design of God does not mean that we should throw out the ideal. As imperfectly as we fail to hold up the ideal, does not mean that the ideal has changed or that we shouldn’t strive to live by it.

But when a man “man’s up” and leads his family in a Christlike way, when he exercises strength in the right way, when he sacrificially loves his wife as Christ loves the church, and listens and affirms and builds his wife up to be all that she can be – I have not met a wife who doesn’t want her husband to step up and lead. And when a wife gives her husband respect and honor, it is a powerful motivation for him to live out his design. God’s design still works, and when rightly understood, brings peace and harmony to relationships.

This leads us, then, to the clearest, most concise statements on marriage in the Bible in verse 24... “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Five big principles of marriage are packed into this one verse – as well as verse 25 – and the first is that marriage is designed to be a **primary relationship**. Once a marriage is entered into, the relationship between husband and wife trumps all others. In Jewish culture, a son or daughter was under the authority of their father, but as they grew older the time would come for them to leave home and start their own family. A man would leave his father’s authority, get married, and begin a new family.

That means that both the bride and groom must cut the cord with their parents – in the sense of being dependent on them. They are to start a new family unit – that hopefully has the blessing and support of parents – but independent from them.

This also means that a couple's marriage comes before the kids. Your children will be in your home for only so long and then they will leave, but you are with your spouse for life. The best way to be a good parent to your children is to be a good husband to their mother or a good wife to their father. What happens all too often is that a husband builds his life around his job while the wife builds her life around the children, and when the nest is empty, they realize they don't have a marriage. If you're married, that relationship comes before all others.

Secondly, we see that marriage is to be a **permanent relationship**. While the two remain individuals, they become bonded physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is reflected in the word "united," or the familiar KJV word "cleave." The man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. To "cleave" means to cling to, to hold to, to be glued to something. After quoting this same verse, Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6).

God designed the family to be the foundation of society, and the most important piece of the family is marriage. As goes marriage, so goes family. And as the family goes, so goes society. Nearly every issue confronting our nation can be traced back to the strength or weakness of marriage.

In 1934 a British anthropologist named John Unwin conducted an in-depth study of 80 civilizations that have come and gone over the last 4000 years. He wanted to see what caused these civilizations to rise to power and what caused them to decline and fade off the scene. He studied the Romans, the Greeks, the Babylonians – 80 civilizations in all. He was surprised to discover that a common thread ran through all of them. Every single civilization started with strong moral values and a heavy emphasis on marriage and the family. But over time, as moral values loosened, sexuality immorality and divorce became normalized and eroded the family structure. The nation, in turn, became internally weak and was conquered by another nation. This study validates why God designed marriage to be permanent, for whenever marriage is not taken seriously, there is chaos. And the chaos happening right now in our nation is directly linked to us not living according to God's design.

This is why marriage must be built on commitment. God says, "Feel free to look for someone – search the planet high and low – but when you find someone you want to marry – when you find a fellow believer – then leave your parents and cleave to that person." I understand, that in a fallen world, marriages will not always make it, but with God's help we should commit ourselves to doing all we can to stay united and bonded together.

Third, we see in verse 24 that marriage is designed to be an **exclusive relationship**. From the beginning God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman for a lifetime. This means it's an exclusive relationship and it rules out polygamy. It rules out sex before marriage – which the Bible calls "fornication." It rules out adultery with someone else after marriage.

Sharla and I always used to rehearse with our kids the proper sequence of their future relationships. We'd say, "Someday you'll meet someone you really like, you'll date and you'll fall in love, you'll get married and then you'll have kids." Whenever we do things out of order and sequence, there are problems – and God wants to save us those problems by sticking to the blueprint for marriage and saving yourself sexually for that one person.

Verse 24 also excludes any idea of homosexual marriage. Marriage, by God's design, is between a man and a woman. To believe or support anything differently is to rebel against God's design. It's only in our fallen nature that we would believe otherwise.

Fourth, we see that marriage is designed to be an **intimate relationship**... "The two will become one flesh." This naturally emphasizes the sexual relationship, which brings two people together in a way that nothing else does, and whenever one of both spouses neglect it, there's always trouble. But intimacy, of course, involves more than sex – it involves relational and emotional oneness as well. Marriage is the bonding of body, soul, and spirit.

Every marriage book I've read emphasizes the husband's need for sexual intimacy, and the wife's need for relational and emotional intimacy. When the man's need is not met, he withholds emotional support and communication; and when the wife's need is not met, she in turn withholds sex. Marriage is about meeting each other's needs and growing closer and closer in intimacy.

That leads to a fifth principle of marriage, and that is that it's a **transparent relationship**. The chapter ends in verse 25 by saying, "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Nakedness speaks of innocence – your two-year-old can run around the house naked and unashamed because he or she is not yet aware of right and wrong. This was Adam and Eve – they were naked and unashamed because there was nothing to hide. After the fall, as we will see in chapter 3, they felt exposed and vulnerable, and the first thing they try to do is cover themselves up.

Not only do we cover up physically, we cover up relationally and emotionally. We hold people at a distance. We don't want them to know too much about us. We're slow to trust someone enough to share our secrets, our thoughts, our feelings and our fears. Adam and Eve had no problems with transparency. But in marriage part of that original transparency can be regained. In the security of a lifetime commitment, a husband and wife can relax and feel comfortable together and the walls begin to come down. When you do, you recapture some of what Adam and Eve had in the garden.

We've talked about a lot today, and just scratched the surface of all that could be said about marriage, but a good place to end is to ask yourself: What am I doing to uphold, honor, and live out God's design for marriage – regardless of what state you find yourself in...

- If you're single, you can commit yourself to serving God with your time and energy, and honor the covenant of marriage by remaining sexual pure for your future wife or husband.
- If you are widowed, you no doubt feel the pain of that separation, and you can cling to the hope you have in Christ of being reunited with them someday.
- If you are divorced, you also feel pain in that God's ideal was not realized. We live in a broken world – it's a reality we must live with – and you may not be able to do anything about the past – but you can commit yourself, with God's help, to live according to His design.
- If you're married, thank God for His gift of companionship, and do all you can to love your spouse and meet their needs. Regardless of where you're at today, all of us can honor God's ideal for marriage before a watching world that desperately needs to see it lived out.