

## **God's Purpose for Marriage**

Genesis 2:15-25

We have chosen to call this the “Summer of Love.” We began the summer with a six-week series on the book of 1 John, a book that thoroughly describes love and have now transitioned to a series on marriage and family, a place where we can apply what we’ve learned to real life situations. When designing this series, the pastoral staff recognized that while not everyone is involved in a marriage relationship, this was a worthy use of our time because all of us know others who are married and many couples are not yet enjoying the fullness of love and blessing that is possible when we follow the biblical mandates.

Clearly we’re not the only ones who recognize the need for biblical teaching in this area. When I opened my favorite online Bible study guide last week, I was directed to Dr. Dobson’s site, informing me that marriage is under fire. I don’t know if marriage is any more under fire now than in the past, but all the unhappy marriages and broken homes we encounter indicate the importance and relevance of this topic.

This week we turn our attention to Genesis 2 to examine “God’s Purpose for Marriage.” This is a fascinating passage penned by Moses in the first of five books written by him. The writing comes perhaps thousands of years after the events he describes, so we can assume that his record is a compilation contemporary creation accounts along with direct revelation from God. In any case, we can take this account as true and reliable. In the time we have today, I’d like for us to begin by walking through the passage together making observations along the way, and then conclude by seeing what the text has to say about God’s purpose for marriage.

The first thing I notice when I read this account is that **God is very active in this passage**. God was very active in our previous study as well. Over and over again John wrote of God’s active love with words like this:

This is how God ***showed his love*** among us: He ***sent his one and only Son*** into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that ***he loved us*** and ***sent his Son*** as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

...and this is also the case here in Genesis 1 and 2. One of the first things I like to do when studying a passage of

scripture is to go through and highlight the verbs. Here's what our text looks like when we highlight the words describing God's activity.

The Genesis account does not present us with a self-perpetuating, evolutionary process. Genesis 1 and 2 do not describe a mere "intelligent design" nor the God of the deist described historically as "the master clockmaker" who wound things up then sat back to see what would happen. Nor do we see a God who is distant from the affairs of humankind, stepping in only after things go awry. No, this text describes a person called God who is personally active in his creation.

There's an interesting textual nuance that subtly conveys God's personal activity in creation. In Genesis 1, the central character is named "God." The very first verse of the Bible reads,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

The Hebrew name translated "God" is Elohim, the name of the Creator-God that appears in plural form. This name is repeated over and over.

Verse 3: And God [Elohim] said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Gen 1:3)

Verse 4: God saw that the light was good... (Gen 1:4)

Verse 5: God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." (Gen 1:5)

...and so on. However, there is a change when we get to chapter 2. Verse 4 says:

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.  
(Gen 2:4)

When you see the word "Lord" in all caps, this is the English translation of the Hebrew name "Yahweh." "Yahweh" is sometimes pronounced "Jehovah" and is the personal, covenant name of God. Every time God is mentioned in Genesis 2, the name "Yahweh Elohim" is used.

A second observation we can make in this text is that **God's perfect environment included a test of Adam's devotion.** We have no idea how long Adam and Eve lived in the Garden before they succumbed to the temptation to disobey God. We all know about the temptation, the serpent and the forbidden fruit, but sometimes we overlook the absolute perfection of the garden provided by God in which this disobedience took place.

Let's take a moment for a brief glimpse at the beauty, design and perfection of Eden. Genesis 2 describes a divine irrigation system to water the vegetation. We're told that God didn't place plants and shrubs there until Adam was ready to assume his duties as custodian of the garden. And then on the sixth day of creation, God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, animating him with the divine breath of God. Everything humankind could ever desire was placed in the garden by the hand of a loving God. And as if all this were not enough, we're told in a later verse that God himself came down in the cool of the afternoon to talk to Adam and Eve. It's hard for our minds to grasp the complete perfection of their situation.

God did not create Adam to meet a personal need or to compensate for any lack within himself. It was a demonstration of his amazing grace that he created man to be the beneficiary of his gracious goodness and that his creation, one made in his own likeness and animated with the very breath of God would rightly render to God worship and praise.

There's an important word-play in the naming of Adam that is obvious in the Hebrew but lost to English readers. The

Hebrew word for soil is “adamah.” If you go to a Hebrew Wal-Mart to buy a bag of topsoil, the label on the bag would say “adamah.” The name of the first human man, “A-dam” constantly reminded him of his origins. If the historical record had been written in English instead of Hebrew, our first forefather would probably have been named “Clay” or perhaps “Dusty.” Of course, Adam followed suit in his naming of Eve. “Adam” means “formed from the soil; “woman” means “formed from the man.”

People often wonder why God provided a test for Adam and Eve by placing the forbidden tree in the garden in the first place. Most commentaries suggest that for Adam’s love and devotion to God to be sincere, it had to be based on an act of his will and the presence of the forbidden tree gave him the opportunity to exercise that will aright. I personally find it more difficult to understand how Adam and Eve could be drawn to that one tree when a smorgasbord of paradise was spread before them. Verse 9 says:

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:9)

A poor comparison would be for me to drop you off at the doors to the Mall of America and say, “The cash registers and ATMs have been removed...you don’t need them. The place is yours...all five floors. Ever store, every aisle, every display, every restaurant...it’s all yours, go for it!

Oh...one thing: don’t go to Cinnabon.”

So what are you thinking right now? “Cinnabon?! I LOVE Cinnabon!”

So as soon as you walk through the door to the Mall of America, above the sounds of people and businesses and roller coasters and cell phones, you hear the faint sound of an oven door quietly opening three floors above you. Beyond the smells of popcorn and pasta and perfumes, the sweet, sticky buttery icing layered on a cinnamon-baked twirl of pastry perfection calls to you from heights above.

We probably can’t fully comprehend all the reasons for the choice of obedience and disobedience placed before Adam, but we do know that it was within his power to obey. Echoes of Adam’s choice is found in the temptation of Christ, the “second Adam” who succeeded where the first Adam failed. We also know that even before creation God knew exactly

what was going to happen and that even Adam's failure was a part of his divine plan to display his superabounding grace to all mankind. There never was a "Plan B" with God. The plan for the salvation of mankind through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was always God's "Plan A." Verses in the New Testament tell us that we were chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world" and that all things have occurred according to the predetermined foreknowledge of God.

So we find Adam in the garden, a place of perfection, completeness, fulfillment and purposeful work. Yet Adam did not have one like himself for companionship. Certainly he had the company of the animals below him and fellowship with his Creator above him, but there was no one beside him to complement and accompany him. So while Genesis 1 records God's repeated "It is good, It is good..." after each day of creation, in Genesis 2 we hear him say

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen 2:18)

So a third observation we can make in this passage is that **God provided a perfect accompanist for Adam.** I've chosen a musical term to describe the relationship of Adam and Eve for several reasons. To begin with, it gets me out of

trouble for many of the other words that are sometimes used, especially that non-word “helpmeet.” Sometimes we hear that Eve was created to “complete” Adam or “supply his lack.” Now, I’d be the first guy to stand up and admit the inadequacies and failures of the male gender of the species. All I need is for Charlene to go out of town for a couple of days to remind me of how much I miss her and need her. But to say that a person is somehow inherently incomplete without a spouse is simply not true. There are many single, divorced and widowed people in God’s family who lead rich, fulfilling lives without a spouse. These people are anything but “incomplete.” Many unmarried people in our congregation are living proof of Paul’s teaching that an unmarried person has the distinct advantages of time and resources to devote to the spread of the gospel, and I am grateful to God for the many unmarried friends I have in this church.

The other danger in saying that a person is incomplete or unfulfilled without a spouse is that you are setting up your potential future spouse for failure. The only person who can complete you, fulfill you and make you utterly happy is Jesus Christ. Getting married to try to make yourself happy or fill your personal emptiness is a recipe for disaster. Until you

find your sufficiency in Christ as many of my unmarried friends have done, no other human relationship can completely satisfy. It's also true that until you make him your sufficiency, you can't fully supply the perfect love and companionship your spouse needs from you.

I like the word "accompanist" because it conveys the vital role that person plays in the relationship. No one would have chosen the word "incomplete" to refer to the late Luciano Pavorotti, but the power of his voice shone most perfectly when accompanied by the symphony orchestra of La Scala. Steven Curtis Chapman will be performing here in October, but if he showed up without his band, his backup singers or his guitar and you had to listen to him sing a cappella for two hours, you might ask for your money back.

For the last 12 years I have been blessed with an incredible accompanist for the choir in Michelle Harris. We were in sync musically right from the start. A good accompanist can make or break a rehearsal. When I stop the music in rehearsal to fix a problem, Michelle knows where I'm going, what I'm going to do and what I need from her to make it happen efficiently. As the conductor, I rely heavily on

Michelle. I don't think I'm more important than my accompanist, we simply have different roles.

I think that's what God had in mind when he created the woman and ordained marriage. Eve was a perfect accompanist for Adam.

Now, God had done some pretty phenomenal things in the first six days of creation, some of these things so amazing we are just now discovering them today. The Hubble telescope has shown us pictures of things God did millions of years ago and they are astounding to us. And while our minds are blown away by the incomprehensible vastness of the universe, scientists are still plumbing the depths of the complexity and perfection of God's creation in a single strand of DNA, something we've only recently discovered. Adam saw sunrises in a perfect, unpolluted sky, stars shining in their brilliance unobscured by man's artificial light. Rivers and waterfalls, plants and animals...all of the unimaginable diversity that flowed from the mind of God. But when God saw that man needed an accompanist, I imagine him saying to himself, "Adam, you ain't seen nothing yet!"

I've tried to picture in my mind the scene when Adam first laid eyes on Eve, and I confess I just can't do it. This is one of the videos I want to rent on Netflix when I get to heaven. The closest I can imagine to Adam's response takes me back a few years ago when I was playing basketball with a group of students. I was guarding the baseline when one of the guys decided to drive for the basket. He put his head down and drove forward, putting the top of his head right between my eyes. I heard a cracking sound as he broke my nose and I learned in that moment that there is a hair-trigger connection between your eyes and your knees. My knees buckled and I went down in a heartbeat.

I imagine that's how Adam reacted. He wakes up from an unusually restful mid-afternoon nap that included some really strange dreams, reaches over and feels an odd pain in his side and then looks up, and ...WHAM! I can see his knees buckling and him staggering to regain his balance against the nearest tree, Eve standing before him in all her radiant, God-given beauty, and God watching the whole thing with a grin the size of Saturn.

In the biblical record, Moses very poetically has Adam next say something like, "This is now flesh of my flesh and bone

of my bone...” I’m more inclined to believe he stood their speechless for a moment, trying to remember how to breath, finally repeating to himself God’s own words, “It is good!” Eve was a perfect accompanist for Adam.

Well, let me quickly finish by suggesting some thoughts for God’s purpose for marriage found in Genesis 2. A first purpose that appears here is

I. For mankind to participate in God’s work.

Several verses in this passage tell us that after creating everything, God gave Adam and Eve custodial responsibility for their environment. Gen 1:28 says,

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:28)

The word translated “subdue” does not imply wasteful exhaustion of the earth’s resources, rather the word speaks of Adam’s administrative responsibilities to sustain the health of the earth, both for his personal benefit and for the protection of the animal and plant life present. In chapter 2 we learn that God put man in the garden to “work it and take

care of it.” He probably wasn’t pulling weeds like we do nowadays, but the natural growth of a healthy forest and garden blessed by God must have required constant pruning and harvesting. Adam’s responsibilities also included naming all the animals that God brought to him. While Eve is not specifically named in all these important tasks, it’s hard to imagine that Adam could handle the volume of work by himself.

The text indicates that it was in the context of performing these assigned tasks that Adam realized his need for a companion. Verse 19 tells us that God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them, then verse 20 says,

...the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (Gen 2:21)

I believe one of God’s chief purposes for marriage is for husbands and wives to participate together in the work of God’s kingdom. That work for us is certainly different than it was for Adam and Eve, the animals have all been named and most of our agricultural work these days is done for

personal enjoyment. Yet there is important kingdom work that married persons can do together.

One of the most important tasks before us is the discipleship of our children in the home. As our children pass from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood, we have the responsibility of reading the Word of God to them, praying with and for them, teaching them to think Christianly and make decisions guided by the values of God's kingdom rather than influences of modern culture. We need to show them how to suffer in a godly way during times of adversity or poverty and how to use our God-given resources to further the spread of the gospel.

There is a wealth of family discipleship materials available to us these days. If you're looking for ideas for your family, stop by Christos Book Center or talk to any of our children's or student ministries pastors whose role it is to help you disciple your children. One of the greatest contributions we can make to the furtherance of God's kingdom is to raise children who love God and serve people.

A second purpose for marriage is

II. For mankind to display God's character.

Adam and Eve were made in the image of God; as Christians we are constantly being conformed more and more into the image of Christ. There's nothing this world needs more than people, both single and married, who will accurately display God's character to a lost world. The marriage relationship is particularly suited to display several important characteristics of God. The primary, essential characteristic of God is his holiness, so first...

A. The home can reflect the holiness of God.

Now you're probably thinking, "There are many words you might use to describe our home, but 'holy' isn't one of them. It's noisy, there's always people coming and going, and you should see the mess we make sometimes."

I believe your home can be messy and noisy and even sometimes a bit chaotic but still be a holy place. The word "holy" doesn't mean perfect, "holy" means set apart, safe, sacred. Your home can be a holy place if it is set apart—set apart *from* some things and set apart *for* others. If dad has decided that certain outside influences like inappropriate entertainment or improper internet sites are going to be kept outside his home, that home is a holy place. If mom has

decided that no matter how crazy and intense things get from time to time, we're not going to raise our voices in anger, that home is a holy place. Positively, if the parents have decided that they're going to read a verse of scripture and pray together at meal times, that home is a holy place. Your home can display the holiness of God. Secondly,

B. The home can display the communion of God.

The Bible describes a perfect, beautiful communion of thought, love and purpose among Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the one God. At Christ's baptism, God declared his love of Jesus with an audible voice. Jesus glorified the Father by doing the work he was sent to do. And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. There is perfect communion among the three persons of the Trinity.

Our homes can display that same unity and communion, but it takes a real commitment from each family member to make it a reality. Selfishness is poison to relationships—nothing will kill a marriage or ruin a family faster than selfishness. Paul encourages us to

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph 4:3)

When families make a commitment to display the communion of God no matter what, home is a place where people look forward to gathering each night.

Third,

C. The home can display the harmony of God.

The Bible tells us that in substance, God is a spirit but that as a spirit He has both masculine and feminine characteristics. Genesis 1:27 says,

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

Although both male and female are mysteriously present there, there is no strife, no conflict within the person of God. So while our culture talks about “the battle of the sexes” and tells us that “men are from Mars and women are from Venus,” the truth is that both masculinity and femininity are from God and the relationship of husband and wife can and should display the beautiful harmony present in God.

Finally,

#### D. The home can display the joy of God.

It's a fascinating Bible study to read all the verses that speak of the joy God has in his creation and redemption of mankind, the joy of Jesus and the joy of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians in the past have drawn an image of God as a perpetually unhappy, austere, affection-withholding curmudgeon seated in the heavens, but this is a horribly inaccurate picture of God. The hymn-writer William Cowper once wrote:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

I'm guessing Cowper had issues, because God does not show us a disapproving frown while secretly hiding a smiling face. God loves you and enjoys your company...that's why you were created. How could the fruit of the Spirit include joy if the Holy Spirit himself had no joy? A home that includes the presence of God is going to display God's character and be a holy place of communion, harmony and joy.

A final purpose I'd like to suggest for marriage is

### III. For mankind to reflect God's love.

The final verse of this passage is intriguing and presents particular problems for the powerpoint operator. Verse 25 says,

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.  
(Gen 2:25)

Because you and I live on the wrong side of Genesis chapter 3, it's impossible for us to fully grasp things that were normal and taken for granted in Genesis chapter 2. We can't fully grasp what it must have been like to enjoy the presence of God as you would enjoy time with a close friend. We can't grasp the perfect relationship of rest and work that was at once perfectly fulfilling and perfectly peaceful. We can't fathom a holy liberty that allowed free expression of an open mind to know God, a receptive spirit to respond to God and a naked body to experience God's perfect world. The perfect purity of their hearts and minds made the concealment of their bodies unimaginable. Their first realization after disobeying God was shame over that which once was a sign of their purity. Go to the internet, study modern advertising, look at the pop musicians who have to shed their clothing to make record sales and you'll see that even to this day

mankind has been shamefully throwing off their clothing, pretending to be free, all the while in bondage to their sinfulness, desiring a soul-freedom that only God can grant.

Now I'm not suggesting that we shed our clothing on the way to the parking lot this morning. What I'm trying to say is that Adam and Eve's nakedness was symbolic of their freedom to be all that God created them to be; their freedom to God and love one another with complete abandon. They were created to fully reflect the love of God just as a person's image is reflected in a mirror. Sin had the effect of covering that mirror and muting the reflection of that love in the same way their shame caused them to cover their bodies.

But there is good news for those who know Jesus Christ. We can return to that place of reflecting God's love to one another by being clothed with Christ. In Galatians 3, Paul writes:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
(Gal 3:26-27)

What your spouse needs, what your children need, what your co-workers need more than anything else is Christ.

When we are clothed with Christ and make a decision of our wills that we are going to put aside our selfishness and love them the way Jesus does, it can almost be like returning to the garden of Eden. All of us can reflect the love of God, but for the time being I suggest you do it with your clothes on.

I realize that for most of our time today we've been talking about the ideal, a home where God abides and the husband and wife live in harmony with one another, but that much of the time we are really more like the Adam and Eve who stood outside the garden, looking back at what was and wondering if there's any way to regain that former happiness. I've learned that while we have to begin by taking personal responsibility and making the changes within ourselves that make that happiness possible, it's very difficult to get there by yourself. Many of the happy, successful couples I know have spent time with a marriage counselor. After about 15 years of marriage, Charlene and I spent six months with a counselor and it completely changed our relationship. I want to encourage the men to take the lead in this. If the wife suggests seeing a marriage counselor, what the man hears is, "She thinks I'm a failure." If the husband makes the suggestion, the wife hears, "He really cares about our relationship."

The pastoral staff would love to meet with you, pray for you and direct you to resources that are available for strengthening your marriage. So please, give me a call or send me an email sometime this week.