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GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:18-25

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Some of you made the mistake of buying your children toys for Christmas that had the ominous words on the box, "Some assembly required." Of those who did that, a small percentage, probably about one percent, read through the directions completely as instructed before you began to assemble the toy. The rest of you thought, "I can figure this out," and plunged in. But not many of you got the thing assembled without having to dig out the instruction manual!

Marriage comes with the label, "Much assembly required!" It takes a lifetime of work to put it together the right way. Most of us plunged in without carefully reading the instruction manual, confident that we could figure it out. But we quickly get into trouble and frequently need to read and re-read the manufacturer's instructions. Most of the problems we get into in marriage can be traced to our neglect of reading and obeying God's instructions.

Early in Genesis, the book of beginnings, we find God's design for marriage (Gen. 2:18-25). This text describing the original marriage is the basis for almost everything else the Bible says about marriage. It explains God's reason for designing marriage and also gives us many principles which, if applied, will enable us to build solid, satisfying marriages which honor God. The text teaches us that:

God designed marriage to meet our need for companionship and to provide an illustration of our relationship with Him.

The name used for God, translated "Lord [Yahweh] God" (2:18, 19, 21, 22) emphasizes His covenant relationship with His people. Genesis 1 refers to God as "Elohim," emphasizing His power as the Creator. Genesis 2 refers to Him as the Lord God, showing that the powerful Creator is also the personal God who cares for His creatures. This caring, personal God knew that the

man He created had a need, and so He took action to meet that need.

1. God designed marriage to meet the human need for companionship.

When you read Genesis 1 & 2, the words of 2:18 hit abruptly: "It is not good for the man to be alone." Throughout chapter one, God surveys His work and pronounces it good (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This is the first time God says that something in His creation is not good: "It is not good for the man to be alone."

Think about it: Here's a sinless man, in perfect fellowship with God, in a perfect environment. What more could you want? Isn't that enough? Not according to God! God's evaluation was that the man needed a human companion to correspond to him.

Sometimes super-spiritual people say that if you're lonely, there must be something wrong with your spiritual life. But God acknowledges our need not only for fellowship with Him, but also with a life partner. This is not to say that every person needs to be married. Everyone spends many years of life as a single person. God has called some to remain single (1 Cor. 7:7-9). Nor is it to say that marriage will meet all our needs for companionship. Married people need friends of the same sex. But it is to say that a main reason God designed marriage was to meet the human need for companionship. First, we must affirm:

A. God designed marriage.

That means that He knows best how it should operate. His Word gives us the principles we need for satisfying marriages. Since God designed marriage, it takes three to make a good marriage: God, the man, and the woman. For a Christian to marry an unbeliever is not only to disobey God, it is to enter marriage lacking a crucial ingredient. Marriage has been described as a triangle with God at the top: the closer each partner moves to God, the closer they move toward each other. The further each moves from God, the further they move from each other. As soon as Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they experienced alienation from each other and Adam began blaming Eve for his problems (3:7, 12). Broken marriages always involve at least one partner moving away from God.

So the starting place in having a marriage according to God's design is genuine conversion and a daily walk with God.

God says that He will make Adam "a helper suitable for him" (2:18). The Hebrew word is not demeaning. It is often used of God's help for those in distress and for military assistance. It points to the fact that the husband needs and even depends on his wife's support and help. But we also need to remember Paul's words that "man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" (1 Cor. 11:9). That verse alone destroys the feminist view that there are no distinctions based on gender. The fact that God created the woman as a helper points to her subordinate role to her husband, even before the fall.

But at the same time, there is no basis for the view that men are superior to women. God made the woman to be a helper "suitable for" (lit. = "corresponding to") the man. The picture is that the woman is the missing part of the man. Just as a jigsaw puzzle is incomplete if half the pieces are missing, so a man is incomplete without his wife. God designed it so that the man needs the woman and the woman needs the man (see 1 Cor. 11:11). Both are equal persons and yet have distinct roles to fulfill.

God made Adam out of the dust (2:7). Why didn't He make Eve out of the dust? Why did He make her from Adam's rib (2:21-22)? I believe God did it to show Adam that his wife was a part of him, equal with him, not a lower creation. A man is to cherish his wife as his own flesh (Eph. 5:28-29). As has often been observed, she was not taken from Adam's head to rule over him, nor from his feet, that he should put her down, but she was taken from his side that he would protect her and keep her close to his heart.

Why didn't God create Adam and Eve simultaneously? Before God created Eve he put Adam through the exercise of naming the animals (2:19-20). Some critics allege that these verses are out of context. There is no basis for that assertion. But why this strange exercise of naming the animals right here? God had a lesson to teach Adam. By naming all the animals, Adam discovered that for every animal there were both male and female. After a few dozen cases--male and female aardvarks, ... and finally, male and female zebras--Adam got to the end of the list and wondered, "Where's

mine?" The forlorn note reads, "but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him" (2:20).

God first made Adam feel the need for a wife. A dog may be man's best friend, but it could not satisfy Adam's need for companionship. Only a woman could. God sometimes makes us endure loneliness so that when the need is met, we appreciate it more. I felt the need to get married at 20. The Lord made me wait until just before my 27th birthday. By then I really felt the need. But I also deeply appreciate my wife. I remember how lonely I felt all those years. God prepares us to receive His gifts and then provides for our needs. We need to thank God for the partner He has given us and express our appreciation to that partner. God designed marriage, including your marriage.

This account of the first marriage also plainly teaches that God designed marriage to include sex. Many Christians have ungodly notions about sex. Some think that sex was the original sin. I read of one pastor and his wife who announced to their congregation that they would be adopting their first son. One dear old lady told the pastor, "That's how every pastor and his wife should have children." She thought that abstinence was more spiritual!

I don't know if you've given much thought to what the text describes concerning the creation of Eve, but I would guess that it might surprise you. In the first place, it says that God fashioned a woman from the man's rib. "Fashioned" is literally, "built." The verb pictures God as a sculptor, carefully and deliberately shaping the woman into a creature who would meet Adam's need. Since she was built by God, you could safely say that she was well-built! She was a real beauty. Verse 22 implies that Adam didn't wake up and find Eve lying beside him. Rather, God brought her to him. Picture Adam waking up and wondering what the funny feeling in his side was. He's counting his ribs when he hears God say, "Adam, you forgot to name one creature." Adam looks up to see Eve, not in a wedding dress, but naked! Wow!

We know she was a knockout because of Adam's response (2:23). These are the first recorded words of the first man. They were not quite as mild as the various translations indicate. A more literal rendering of the original Hebrew is: "YAHOO!" The phrase "this is now" is literally, "Here, now!" or "This one! At last!" Keil

and Delitzsch, two German scholars from the last century, translate it, "This time!" and say that it is "expressive of joyous astonishment" (*Commentary on the Old Testament* [Eerdmans], 1:90). Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, another commentary from Victorian times, say it is emphatic: "Now at last!" Or, "This is the very thing that hits the mark; this reaches what was desired" (*A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical* [Eerdmans], 1:46). Remember, Adam had been looking through all the animals for one corresponding to him and had come up empty. When God brought Eve to him, he shouted, "Eureka!"

Next, Adam promptly finished his work of naming the creatures. He recognized that Eve was a part of him and named her accordingly: "She shall be called Woman [Heb., *Ishshah*] because she was taken out of Man [Heb., *Ish*]." God brought her to Adam as His exquisitely crafted gift, perfect for Adam's deepest need.

These verses teach us something important about God: He is not opposed to our enjoyment of sex within marriage. He designed it and gave it to Adam and Eve. Satan tries to malign the goodness of God by making us think that God is trying to take our fun away by restricting sex to marriage. But God knows that it creates major problems when we violate His design for His gift. We need to regard marriage and sex in marriage as God's good gift, designed for our pleasure, to meet our deepest needs for human companionship. In the context of marriage, we can thankfully enjoy what God has given.

B. God designed marriage to meet our need for companionship.

Verse 24 is Moses speaking, not Adam (who didn't have a father and mother to leave). It is Moses' commentary on these events. "For this reason" means, "Because of the way God designed marriage from the start, because the woman is bone of man's bone and flesh of his flesh, these things hold true." He shows that to fulfill our need for companionship, marriage must be a primary, permanent, exclusive, and intimate relationship.

(1) Companionship requires that marriage be a primary relationship. God did not create a father and mother for Adam, nor a child, but a wife. A man must leave father and mother in order to

cleave to his wife to establish a one flesh relationship. This means that the marriage relationship is primary, not the parent-child relationship. The parent child relationship must be altered before the marriage relationship can be established. The cord must be cut. This doesn't mean abandoning parents or cutting off contact with them. But it does mean that a person needs enough emotional maturity to break away from dependence upon his parents to enter marriage. And parents need to raise their children with a view to releasing them.

It also means that if a couple builds their marriage around their children, or as more frequently happens, the husband builds his life around his job while the wife builds her life around the children, they are heading for serious problems when it's time for the nest to empty. It is not helping the children, either. 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.

(2) Companionship requires that marriage be a permanent relationship. This follows from it being the primary relationship. Your children are with you in the home a few years; your partner is with you for life. "Cleave" means to cling to, to hold to, as bone to skin. It means to be glued to something--so when you get married, you're stuck! After Jesus quoted this verse, He added, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

This means that the marriage relationship must be built primarily on commitment, not on feelings of romantic love. Romantic love is important, but the foundation of marriage is a commitment of the will. It is a covenant before God (Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17). Commitment is what will hold a couple together through the difficulties that invariably come. A Christian couple should never use the threat of divorce as leverage in a conflict.

(3) Companionship requires that marriage be an exclusive relationship. The text says, "To his wife," not "wives." Monogamy is God's design: One man, one woman for life. Although God tolerated polygamy in Old Testament times, it was not His original intention. God easily could have created many wives for Adam, but He did not. One man, one woman, for life--that's God's design.

This means that when you get married, you give up close friendships with women other than your wife. You give up your freedom to go out with the guys whenever you choose. You have a new relationship with your wife; she is now your first priority in terms of human relationships. If you can't handle that, you aren't mature enough for the demands of marriage.

(4) Companionship requires that marriage be an intimate relationship. "And they shall become one flesh." One flesh emphasizes the sexual union (1 Cor. 6:16). But the sexual union is always more than just physical. There is relational and emotional oneness as well. Most sexual problems in marriage stem from a failure of total person intimacy. Sexual harmony must be built on the foundation of a primary, permanent, exclusive relationship that is growing in trust, openness, and oneness. God made us that way.

If you remove sex from the context of a primary, permanent, exclusive commitment, you will experience a superficial sense of closeness. Paul says that even when a man has sex with a prostitute, he becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:16). But apart from the lifelong commitment of marriage, sex will never bring the satisfaction God designed it to give.

Sin always hinders intimacy, even in marriage. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they recognized their nakedness and began to hide themselves, not only from God, but also from one another. While as fallen sinners we can never experience what Adam and Eve knew with one another before the fall, to the extent that we deal with our sin before God and one another and grow in holiness, we will grow in personal intimacy. It takes constant work! Good marriages aren't the result of luck in finding the right partner. They're the result of couples who work daily at walking openly and humbly before God and with each other.

But God didn't design marriage just so that we could be happy and have our needs met. He designed marriage to be a testimony for Him. Godly marriages bear witness of what it means to know God.

2. God designed marriage to provide an illustration of our relationship with Him.

The Bible says that God created marriage for a purpose bigger than itself: Marriage is a picture of the believer's relationship with God. After talking about marriage and quoting Genesis 2:24, Paul writes, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Marriage is an earthly picture of the spiritual relationship that exists between Christ, the bridegroom, and the church, His bride. The consummation of a marriage is referred to in the Bible as a man knowing his wife; even so, we can know Christ our bridegroom. A husband and wife are one flesh; we are one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Just as there must be the shedding of blood in the breaking of the hymen for there to be a joining of husband and wife, so there had to be the shedding of blood for us to be joined to the Lord. Just as the church is to be subject to Christ, so the wife is to be subject to her husband. Just as Christ loves the church, so a husband is to love his wife. Just as the marital union results in children, so the union of the Lord and His church is to result in many offspring, to God's glory.

Someone has described marriage as God's doing with one man and one woman that which He is always trying to do within the world as a whole. That's why it's so important for you to work at developing a Christ-honoring relationship with your mate. You're working on a portrait of Christ and the church, and the world is looking over your shoulder. God's glory is at stake!

Conclusion

If you're single, and content to remain single, then God's Word to you is, use your single state to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord and His work (1 Cor. 7:35). If you're single, but desire to be married, God's Word to you is, Be growing in godliness and purity and look for a mate who is committed to do the same. Your lifelong relationship must be centered on God, so that it will reflect to the world a picture of Christ and the church. If you're married, God's Word to you is, Are you growing deeper in companionship with your mate? Is your marriage relationship growing in the way it reflects Christ and the church to this selfish, pleasure-seeking, lost world? If you can't honestly answer yes, then it ought to be a warning light on the dashboard to tell you that you

are not in line with God's design for marriage. Take immediate action to get it fixed!

Discussion Questions

1. Why are so many Christian marriages breaking up in our day? How can the church offer compassion to those who have suffered divorce and yet hold a tight line against divorce?
2. Discuss: Is sexual sin more prevalent in our day than in past generations?
3. What is the biggest hindrance to developing emotional intimacy in marriage?
4. Discuss: Is it possible for two Christians married to one another to be irreconcilably incompatible?

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