

Made for each other

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord, again, we need your help. We need your help whenever we are tackling subjects that might be sometimes a bit sensitive as well.

And so, Father, we just pray that you would help us to open our minds, open our hearts, that we might be ready to receive what you have to say to us and that you would shape us, shape our mindsets, shape our perspectives, shape our attitudes so that we would be more and more like your son.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Some passages of scripture are unfamiliar, but I don't think this is one of them.

Many of you have probably heard me speak from this very passage at weddings. And some passages of scripture seem irrelevant, but this isn't one of them.

After all, it speaks about men and women and how they relate to one another, especially in marriage. And some passages of scripture feel impersonal, but again, this isn't one of them.

[1 : 14] For we know personally the pleasures and the pain associated with relationships, don't we? We know marriage is still very much the happy ending many of us still want.

What can be better than two people who are in love with one another? We know the pleasure. But then we also know the pain.

Some of us know the pain of wanting that happy ending for ourselves, but being unable to find it. Others of us know the pain of actually being in a marriage, but finding it really difficult at the moment.

Then there is the scary statistics. As far back as 2012, our State Minister for Women and Family, Dr. Sri Fatima Abdullah, noted that the uptrend in divorce cases in Sarawak was worrying. And by 2020, she said it had reached a critical stage. And perhaps all that pain is why marriage is no longer the aspiration it once was, particularly amongst Gen Z.

[2 : 26] Educational attainment, career accomplishments, and lifestyle goals have all taken precedence. So we need to hear from the Lord as we work through all these.

And today, the way God's word will help us is not so much by teaching us relationship tips or better communication techniques. Those have their place.

When I do premarital counselling, we do talk about such things. But we always need to start by looking at the bigger picture. And so today, that's why Genesis 2 will get us looking at God's original design for men and women, particularly in marriage.

Now, if you are single today, you might hear that, and you might think, okay, guess I can switch off now. But I want you to know that today is also for you.

And I'll try to make sure throughout that I wouldn't just draw out implications merely for the marriage. But also for you. And I hope today would help all of us, married or not, gain just a little more clarity on what a truly Christian view of marriage looks like.

[3 : 38] And today, in a sense, it's quite simple. I'm just going to show us three things from today's passage. That marriage has a significant purpose, marriage has a particular shape, and marriage preaches the gospel.

So firstly, marriage has a significant purpose. What is the purpose of marriage? Now, for many of our Muslim friends, the answer is religious.

This week, I've discovered that they often say to get married is to membina masjid, which is their way of saying marriage can strengthen the Muslim faith so that it is strong and stable.

But what about my less religious friends? What do they say? Interestingly, they struggle to answer this very question. Many will default to something along these lines.

Well, I guess it's to show that I really love them and I want to spend my life with them. But then someone else will reply, Aiyah, but why need to get married to show that?

[4 : 43] Just live together lah. Getting married is the traditional way, but must I follow tradition? Some are more pragmatic. Well, you don't need marriage to show that you love a person, but it offers better legal protection, just in case something happens.

And a more cynical person might say, Oh, marriage exists to help the diamond industry make money. Now, what about Christians?

What do we think? Do we actually know? Well, Genesis 2 will help us. Let's begin with verse 18. The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone.

Now, that's surprising. So far in Genesis 1 and 2, we keep hearing God declare that everything is good. The land and the seas, good. The animals, good.

The human beings, very good. But now, for the very first time, we hear something is not good. We have a potential problem.

[5 : 53] You remember last week, don't you, how the problem was no rain and no man? But this week, the problem is that the man is alone. Now, at first glance, it sounds like the issue is that the man is lonesome.

You know, we imagine God is looking at Adam, staring at the beautiful sunset all by himself, while the Backstreet Boys song, Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely, is playing in the background. Teenagers don't laugh, okay? Adam is a millennial. He doesn't know who Harry Styles is. And God is thinking, Oh, poor guy.

He has no significant other to share this moment with. He needs a girlfriend. But is that what we are talking about? Notice the context.

Back in chapter 1, verse 26 to 28, we know that God has tasked Adam to be fruitful and multiply, and to rule over and subdue the earth. And last week, we saw that he is to work the ground, to serve God, and to guard the garden, and to expand Eden.

[7 : 05] That has been the emphasis of Genesis 1 and 2 so far. And so when God now says, verse 18, it is not good for a man to be alone, contextually, it has to mean this.

It is not good for Adam to do this work that God has asked him to do alone. And that is why, verse 18 again, God says, I will make a helper suitable for him.

The problem isn't that Adam is feeling lonely and is pining for a lover. The problem is that Adam doesn't have help. That's why God wants to make him a helper.

There is actually nothing in the text that suggests that Adam is unhappy without a mate by his side. It's just that we've been conditioned by decades of watching Disney movies and listening to pop songs to automatically read that in.

And so that is the problem. The earth is a big place. It needs plenty of subduing and cultivating and Adam can't do it alone.

[8 : 21] What he lacks is someone to partner with him in serving God together. And this point is so important to get right, is it not?

You see, what if we thought that the problem was that right from the beginning, Adam had no romantic partner and God gave him one?

Well, that would imply that today, if you have no romantic partner in your life, you have a problem too. You somehow don't fit God's good original design.

You are less than you were made to be. But is that right? When Jesus was here on earth, he was a single man throughout.

Same goes with Paul. John the Baptist too. So that can't be the problem. And what a relief that is. Not just for the singles, but for those of us in dating or marital relationships as well.

[9 : 27] Imagine if you discovered that your purpose is to find a partner and make sure that he or she is never lonely all the time. Imagine if you thought that you were made to fulfill every single one of his or her relational needs.

What a burden that must be to carry around. And in fact, it's just too much for us to bear. We are not omnipresent like God. We don't have unlimited energy like God.

But if that's what you thought all this while, then listen up. Here's the good news. God never designed us to carry that kind of burden. That is simply not the message of Genesis 2.

Instead, the message is that God designed woman to be a helper to the man. It is an incredibly significant role because without her, Adam has no chance of succeeding.

He cannot fulfill his purpose alone. He cannot serve God and glorify him alone. He needs her. No other creature will do.

[10:37] Look at verses 19 to 20. Now, on one level, this is quite a light-hearted scene. God has a parade of animals and birds brought to Adam and he begins naming them one by one.

You know, sometimes my daughter will ask me, Papa, why is a dog called a dog? Well, we can blame Adam for that. But it also feels a bit of a sad scene because of the end of verse 20.

But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. Adam can't find what he needs. So can you feel Adam's lack at this point?

As he sees this lineup of animals, it becomes clearer and clearer to him that none of them can ever be the one to help him serve God.

If you've ever been in a foreign country where everyone around you is speaking some language you don't understand and therefore can't help you to find the toilet or buy a ticket, you might know how Adam is feeling.

[11:47] He stands apart from the rest. But now, verse 21, things begin to change. God provides what is lacking just as he did last week.

Once again, he brings life where there is no life. He causes the man to fall into a deep sleep that makes a woman out of the man and then brings her to him.

And that moment brings Adam nothing but happiness. Verse 23, the NIV says, this is now, but that is too tame a translation.

What he really says is this, at last, bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, at last, here is someone who can help me live for God.

You see, my friends, this is why men and women come together. It is for the purpose of serving and glorifying God together for Adam and Eve to cultivate and subdue the earth.

[12:58] Now, this is true whether they come together as brothers and sisters or as husband and wife. They serve and glorify God as one. And that's why Adam is so happy.

Now, to avoid misunderstanding, I'm not saying that there is no romance and intimacy and companionship in marriage. There is no reason why you can't have romance and serve God together.

But, if we simply absorb the world's vision for marriage uncritically, then we would think of marriage as merely gazing into one another's eyes and existing for each other's private gratification.

It is completely inward-looking. But, if we look at God's original design, we realize that marriage is really about linking arms together side by side for the sake of God's kingdom.

It is outward-looking. Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes the point. Well, Bonhoeffer, if you don't know, was a German theologian in the 20th century, famous for resisting Adolf Hitler.

[14:17] And he wrote a wedding sermon from prison for his soon-to-be-married niece. I see it's on the screen. Let me read part of it out to you. In your love, you see only your two selves in the world.

But in marriage, you are a link in the chain of the generations which God causes to come and to pass away to his glory and cause into his kingdom. In your love, you see only the heaven of your own happiness but in marriage, you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind.

Now, Bonhoeffer is basically saying marriage is not just about you and your romantic story. It is about living out God's call for you together.

And actually, that is when marriages really come alive. I don't know about you, but some of the best pictures of marriages I've seen are when the husband and wife are clearly excited to use their gifts together to help minister to someone or to build up the church.

Perhaps the husband is good at offering biblical advice while the wife is good at making someone feel right at home. And when their gifts are used in combination, the sum is greater than its parts and it is a joy to see.

[15:48] Now, my own marriage isn't perfect. Chin-Yin and I will be the first to admit that. And there are probably many ministry marriages that offer a better model than ours. But perhaps one way in which we occasionally try to put that on display is whenever Chin-Yin gets to use her Mandarin-speaking skills to translate what I preach.

And based on what some of you and others outside of this church also tell me, that combination often seems to edify people in a way neither of us can do on our own.

And that is one tiny way we try to live out God's purposes for us as a married couple together. And so the first thing Genesis 2 teaches us is that marriage has a significant purpose. It is to serve God and carry out his task for us together. But what else does Genesis 2 have to teach us? Plenty, it turns out.

Secondly, marriage has a particular shape. A particular shape. Let me ask you another question. what makes a marriage a real marriage?

[17:09] Perhaps the most popular answer the world gives today will be love. It is love that makes a marriage. A marriage is only real when two people are in love with one another.

Now, love is essential for sure. After all, when the woman appears, Adam gets excited. He bursts into poetry. He didn't do that when he saw the animals.

And ever since then, men and women have always felt the urge to get all poetic about marital love. In fact, there's a whole book like that in the Old Testament.

It's called The Song of Songs. Read through it and it is clear that romantic love is a gift that God gives for us to enjoy. So yes, a real marriage must have love.

But is love sufficient on its own to define what a marriage is? Consider this.

[18:16] If marriage is nothing more than an emotional union of love, what happens when the romance fades? consider two people.

Let's call them Tony and Vivian. They met each other at school, they hit it off, and within a couple of years they are exchanging vows. Sounds like a typical love story, doesn't it?

But what if I told you that they actually met each other at the school of their children? They were both married to other people at that time.

But since they have now developed romantic feelings for one another, well, can't they just abandon their marriages? After all, it's no longer a real marriage, right? There's no more love.

They don't feel anything for their previous spouses anymore. So why not call an aunt to their arrangement with their previous partners? It's not a real marriage anymore, right?

[19:18] Or if such romantic love is the only basis for marriage, then why can't it be between two people of the same sex? If that is the only ingredient that makes a marriage a marriage, then why can't a loving sexual relationship between two guys and two girls be called marriage too?

If you think marriage is just love, then you're simply being discriminatory if you protest against gay relationships. for that matter, what if I am in love with two girls at the same time?

Again, if romantic love is the only ingredient, then on what basis can I object to that columnist seller who appeared in the news a few months ago, who ended up having a wedding with two brides?

So do you see? If romantic love alone provides the only basis for marriage, then it is actually easy for marriage to shapeshift.

If marriage is defined in purely emotional terms, then it becomes really hard to explain why marriage should be exclusive, monogamous, heterosexual, or permanent.

[20:39] And yet, whenever Christians are asked to define marriage, too often we tend to parent. the world. Ah, love is what makes marriage a real marriage.

It's what gives marriage its shape. We have bought into the world's vision completely without even realising it. But God tells us that while marriage is not less than love, it is more than love.

It is not plus the scene which we can shape into anything we like. Rather, God has designed it a certain way. Have a look at Genesis 2, verse 24.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh. Now, notice how marriage is defined.

one flesh. It is becoming one flesh. In other words, it is not so much an emotional union as a covenantal union.

[21:48] That's how Malachi 2, verse 14 unpacks Genesis 2, verse 24. According to Malachi, to be one flesh is for a man and a woman to promise, with God as the witness, to be faithfully united in every way, bodily, emotionally, socially.

And God is not just a witness, but the person who actually joins the two together. That's what Jesus says. In the New Testament, when some Pharisees approach Jesus to discuss the issue of divorce, Jesus draws their attention to God's good design by specifically quoting Genesis 2, verse 24.

And he applies it this way. He says, what God has joined together, let no one separate. In other words, Jesus says, if you are married, you are one flesh until you die.

This union is lifelong. Lifelongness is an intrinsic feature of what marriage is, making that is a serious matter indeed.

And marriage is designed to be exclusive to one man and one woman. Verse 24 itself shows that by mentioning a husband, and a wife as the only two parties.

[23 : 23] And this is reinforced by the wider biblical story. Think about it. Who is the God of Genesis 2?

I didn't draw your attention to this last week, but from Genesis 2, verse 4 onwards, God is never referred to just as God, but as the Lord God.

Did you notice that? You can see it in our passage today in verses 18 and 22. And the Lord there in capital letters is God's personal name.

It's his covenant name. It reminds us that God relates to us covenantally. Now, what does it mean for God to relate to us in such a way?

Now, here is one big way the Old Testament explains it. For God to be in covenant with us is to say God relates to us as a faithful husband.

[24 : 27] That's how God is sometimes described as a husband. And he shows that by being utterly committed to us. And we in turn show our commitment to him by being exclusively his.

We never worship any other gods. We don't make idols. This relationship is exclusive. That is, it excludes third parties.

And so given that God describes his relationship to us in terms of a marriage, and it is exclusive in nature, we know that is another intrinsic feature of marriage.

marriage. And that is why even parents should not get unhealthily involved in their children's marriages. The marriage relationship excludes even you, if you are a parent.

And actually, if this is the shape of marriage, this is good news. Because if this is what we are entering into on our wedding day, it is something reassuring.

[25 : 39] It offers us protection. You see, what marriage will not go through hard times? What marriage will not go through moments when you can't help but wonder a little if the spouse you are with is the one you are supposed to be with?

And what will sustain you through those times? What will keep you going when there is sinning and finger-pointing going on? It is actually those promises you made before God.

It is the belief that when you and your partner entered into marriage, you entered into something that has this basic, lifelong, exclusive, covenantal design.

Look again at how Bonheifer says it in his wedding sermon on the screen. What a fantastic quote that is, isn't it?

It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love. Because God designed marriage to be a lifelong, exclusive, covenantal union, it assures each party within a marriage, they are in a safe and secure space where they can open their hearts without the worry that the other person will walk away as soon as they encounter the real you.

[27 : 33] That's what verse 25 is all about. It means that the husband can rest secure knowing that although he is not the handyman his wife wishes he was, that he just isn't good at repairing stuff around the house no matter how hard he tries, his wife isn't just going to walk away.

And it means that the wife can rest secure knowing that although she can't quite cook the incredible meals that her husband dreams of no matter how many YouTube videos she watches, her husband isn't just going to walk away.

Even when the fires of affection cool down and they know each other's weaknesses intimately, they went straight because of the mutual commitment they made before God.

They understand that is what a marriage is. And so because of the security a covenantal union gives, love can still spark and grow and deepen as they work to love another person beyond their weaknesses.

As the pastor Tim Keller insightfully observes, wedding vows are not a declaration of present love but a mutually binding promise of future love.

[29 : 00] That is how God designed it to be and that is the Christian vision for marriage. And it is built upon a much more secure foundation than changeable emotions.

And we did that marriage, God also wants to remind us that men and women are equal yet different. Men and women are equal. You see that word helper is pretty loaded, right?

You know, in Malaysia say helper and we can't help but think of the maid, the janitor, the kitchen assistant, those at the bottom of the food chain. So we might think, oh, the Bible is telling us that woman is at the bottom.

But do you know how that word helper is used in the Old Testament? It is used in two main ways. One refers to allied soldiers who assist in battle.

The other refers to God himself as Israel's helper. There's obviously nothing lesser or demeaning about that.

[30 : 08] If anything, it is the opposite. the helper is actually indispensable. And so the man and the woman are equal in worth and dignity before God.

After all, as Genesis 1 has already reminded us, both are made in God's image. But men and women are also different.

They are not just generic human beings who are simply interchangeable. look again at verse 18. God says, I will make a helper suitable for him.

And that phrase, suitable for him, is actually quite hard to translate. Quite literally, it can be translated as like opposite to him. Like opposite to him.

The woman is like the man in that they are both human beings, and yet she is opposite to him. She is not just another Adam.

[31 : 13] God did not just create another man, but a woman to help Adam, a clear counterpart who is differentiated and yet corresponds to the man.

That's what verse 23 is communicating. This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. So in that respect, she is like the man, and yet she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man, so that's communicating difference.

And because they are equal yet different, they can complement, that's complement with an E, not an I, although complementing is good too, but they can complement one another.

That's how God designed it to be. They are not interchangeable, but interdependent. In verse 21, God creates woman out of the man's rib, or perhaps better translated side.

It's not actually clear in the Hebrew that the rib is specifically in view. But the point is the woman is taken from deep within the man. And the implication seems to be that men and women could not be more integrally related, even though they are distinct.

[32 : 33] in fact, that's exactly why it is only a man and a woman that can unite in marriage. They are differentiated as male and female, they're not two males or two females.

So they are two distinct beings, and yet they are both human beings who uniquely correspond to one another, and so they can become one. That's confirmed anatomically.

And so that's how God designed marriage to be. That is the shape. It is one that recognizes that men and women are not identical, but they are interdependent.

Or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 11 to 12, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman, for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.

And indeed, if we have more time, I would have shown that there is a certain order to the way that they complement one another as well, in that there are hints that the man here is to take the lead, something that Paul picks up more on in Ephesians 5, but because of time, I will leave it aside for today.

[33 : 48] But if it is true that we are designed to complement one another and be interdependent, what does that mean for us today? Well, if we are married, I think that means we should work hard to figure out what is the best way you complement your partner to be an asset to God's kingdom.

You see, every couple is made up of two unique individuals, so how you complement one another might not look exactly the same from couple to couple. Although places like Ephesians 5 will give you the general outline.

But have a thing. Maybe you have different problem-solving approaches. After all, guys and girls often can spot different things. And maybe you can combine your approaches to a particular ministry in a way that's really creative and effective so that lives are touched for Jesus.

Jesus. And if we are not married, I think there is still an implication for us here. It seems to me that in highlighting the interdependence of men and women, God is really teaching us that single or not, we work better together than apart.

Church works better when men and women are both involved. in other words, marriage is not the only avenue whereby we can serve with someone of the opposite sex.

[35 : 16] Did you notice that whenever we look at the list of names of Paul's co-workers in his letters, they are not just men, but plenty of women as well?

And that's why, for the joy has dawn evangelistic event that we've been advertising, we don't want it to be too imbalanced in the direction of one gender. Because God has designed it that it is better if brothers and sisters work together.

So my brothers and sisters seek out the opposite sex, not just for the purpose of romance, but simply for the purpose of teamwork, kingdom work. Young men and women don't just think of that guy or girl in church as a potential romantic interest, but as a potential ministry teammate.

And as you work together, if romance does blossom, well, congratulations. But you don't need to view everyone through that lens.

Instead, let them be a brother or sister in Christ to you, whom you know will spur you on to live for Jesus. So Genesis 2 teaches us that marriage has a significant purpose, marriage has a particular shape, but as we finish more briefly, I want to make sure we don't forget this last point.

[36 : 36] Thirdly, marriage preaches the gospel. In the New Testament, it is not just Jesus who quotes Genesis 2 verse 24. So does Paul.

In Ephesians 5 verse 31, he says this, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So that's Genesis 2 verse 24, and it's no surprise.

he quotes this verse, given that he's speaking to husbands at this point. But then he goes on to say, verse 32, this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

And suddenly Paul is telling us something incredible. He's saying that at the end of the day, marriage is not just about you too. You know, I'm doing a few weddings at the end of this year, and the couples getting married are all lovely, but I will need to tell them, at the end of the day, marriage is bigger than you.

It is about the Christian gospel. It refers to Christ and his church. Because at the end of the day, marriage is a parable.

[37 : 54] Now, think about that wedding day. The groom has pursued the bride. He's worn her. He's worn her. And now he just has to wait. Until, at last, the bride walks in.

She's dressed in pure white. She's spotless. She's radiant. And now she's being presented to the groom. They make vows. The rings serve as the sign of the covenant.

And they walk out as one. Everything he has is now hers. And the Bible says this, the wedding between a man and a woman, is really about that, the wedding between Christ and his church. Jesus has pursued his people. He's worn her. In fact, he sacrificed his very life for her. And he's made her pure and spotless and radiant.

And we are now presented to Christ as such. And Jesus promises us, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. And we promise to forsake all other gods.

[39 : 14] Legally, we are pronounced righteous in his sight, and we can walk out as one. Everything Jesus has is ours.

marriage preaches the gospel. And that is exactly why Christians want to preserve the shape of marriage.

If it gets bent out of shape, the gospel message we want to present also gets bent out of shape. And what a tragedy that would be within it, because the gospel is the best news in the universe. See, don't forget, what is the gospel? It is the message that the bride, that is us, has been untrue and unfaithful and devout in so many ways.

And it is the message that the groom, Jesus, isn't put off by it. The groom knows the sting of betrayal. You know, if there's anyone in this hall today who has suffered that, know that Jesus sympathises with you.

[40 : 16] And yet, this groom just keeps pursuing and going after this unfaithful bride and telling her, I love you, I'm going to be faithful to you to the end. And that is really why God designed marriage.

He wants us to know that love exists which is far greater than anything you find in Hollywood. It is a love that is secure even when we are being imperfect spouses or imperfect singles.

And it is a love that means that even if you are not married today, in Christ you are going to have that happy ending that you want. you will have a wedding day when the church is presented to Jesus and you will experience the best love of all.

And so rest in God's good design. Whether single or married, male or female, let us all be thankful that God is our faithful husband and let us all serve God together letting our faithfulness overflow into fruitfulness for his kingdom as we embody the gospel in our specific circumstances.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just want to let the message of Genesis 2 sink in right now.

[41 : 40] We know that there's maybe quite a bit to take in, but by your spirit will you help us to process that, help us to be grateful that you have designed such a good gift and that it reflects the gospel.

And Lord, whatever our circumstances, whether we are married or single, if we are struggling, please help us to hang on to you, help us to keep trusting you and keep persevering on and leaning on you.

So we just comment all this into your hands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now just before we sing our response song, I'm quite aware and I just want to acknowledge that it's quite possible that some people here might be facing difficult situations in which one single sermon is unable to speak into.

And if that's you, please do speak to a trusted Christian leader, whether that is me or someone else. So I just want to make sure that you know that as well.