

Foundations: In the Beginning...a New Relationship
Genesis 2:18-25 (June 18, 2017)

Today is Father's Day. Traditionally, this is a time to talk about parenting—and the Bible certainly addresses many issues related to being good, effective parents.

But this morning, I want to take us back a ways in the book of Genesis—all the way back to chapter two—before any children are mentioned. Instead, the focus here is on marriage.

When family matters progress as intended, marriage comes before parenting. In fact, in a perfect world, babies wouldn't even think about making their entrance until their moms-and-dads-to-be had all the kinks worked out of their relationships. This way, those little ones would begin their lives among us as members of committed, loving families.

What I want to suggest to you this morning is that in order to do parenting right, we need to do marriage right. Now, having said this, I know there are good, loving, committed parents who are not married.

There are single moms and dads who do a wonderful job of raising their children on their own. They're to be commended!

But the image of the family we find in Scripture involves a man and a woman who love the Lord and love each other and are fully committed in these vital relationships. And then, into the home of this married couple comes a child who is loved and nurtured toward adulthood.

But it doesn't always work out his way, does it? Families find it difficult to function well if marriages are faltering. And so often today, this is what we find.

God never intended for this relationship to be so unstable. God designed marriage to be the most fulfilling, exciting, and satisfying human relationship possible.

For many, it is--thankfully. But for others, marriage seems to consist of one conflict after another. There's mounting neglect or abuse or heartbreak until one spouse or both decide it's time to quit trying to make it work!

It's a shame, but it seems the only news we get concerning marriage today is bad news. Have you noticed this? The word on the street is, "Don't do it." Young adults hear about the failed attempts their friends made and decide that marriage isn't worth it. It's sad.

Increasingly, our society has a negative perception of marriage. Most people no longer resonate with the Biblical portrait of marriage as a man and a woman who commit themselves to each other, becoming one flesh as they love and honor one another for a lifetime.

Years ago, Ted Turner, the billionaire media mogul said, "After having done CNN and the Superstation, winning the America's Cup in 1997 and the '95 World Series with the Atlanta Braves, I feel I can do just about anything... **except have a successful marriage.**"

We could spend a lot of time today looking at and discussing all the problems associated with marriage. We would likely end up feeling rather helpless.

But here's what I want us to do instead: I want us to focus on the wisdom we find in the Bible concerning marriage. Marriages in Scripture are not without problems. Ours won't be either!

But we find guidance in Scripture that will help us overcome the challenges we face as married people, and guidance also to build a strong, enduring relationship with that person who, for some remarkable reason, agreed to share their lives with us—for as long as life shall last!

We have to begin with a clear understanding of what marriage is, and this takes us back to one of the foundational passages we find in Scripture. Our text for this morning is in the book of beginnings, Genesis. Here we find God's original intention—His Divine plan—for marriage.

At the outset, God designed marriage to meet one of our most basic needs--our need for companionship. It's an incredible account—how God goes about this.

God creates Adam, breathes life into his nostrils, and puts him in a beautiful garden. Then, in verse 18, God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Think about this: six times in Genesis 1, after each major creation event, God looks at what He has created and says, "It is good." But with this verse, for the first time, God says that something is "not good" about His creation.

Something is wrong with Adam, the one creature who in some way shares in the nature of God Himself, created as he is in God's image. God realizes that Adam is lonely—that just as a loving God has a need for companionship—so does Adam.

So God says that He will create "a helper" for Adam—you know what that means. A helper is someone who has dinner on the table when you get home and keeps the house tidy. This is what Adam really needs--right?

Well, no--that's really not the idea at all. In Psalm 46:1, the same word used here to refer to Adam's companion is used of God Himself: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

A "helper," then, is one who supplies what is lacking in the other. So God creates Eve to do what Adam cannot do by himself. It's not that the man is better than the woman, or the woman better than the man, but that each of them is inadequate by themselves.

This is how God designed the marriage relationship. The husband and wife need each other. They complement each other. They are, in fact, incomplete... without each other.

Now, after God says that it is not good for the man to be alone, we might expect the next verse to say something like, "So God created Eve." But it doesn't. Instead of making Adam a partner at this point, God puts Adam to work. He's told to give names to all the animals.

Why? Couldn't the "cats and rats and elephants" wait? The forlorn unicorn too? Some of you remember that song...

But could it be that, through this assignment, God is preparing Adam for marriage--that God is waking Adam up to his need for

companionship and love? As Adam surveys all the animals, he sees Mr. Giraffe and Mrs. Giraffe, the rooster and hen, the stallion and his mare. The other animals have partners, but where is his?

Could it be that God is creating within Adam a desire for a life mate, a hunger that God would soon satisfy with the creation of Eve? Look at the end of verse 20: "...But for Adam no suitable helper was found."

Adam discovers for himself in verse 20 what God had already observed in verse 18. He is living in a paradise where he has everything his heart desires, except that one creature who would complete him and end his loneliness: namely, EVE.

Everything else is a poor substitute. Even the beauty of the Garden, the joy of joining with God in taking care of it, and the blessings of God's presence with him there, could not resolve Adam's loneliness. Adam gets it: he needs his mate!

In verses 21-23, God meets Adam's need: "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 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. 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.'"

God "brought her to the man," it says. Last Father's Day weekend, it was my privilege to watch as Mark Leach escorted his daughter, Christen, down the aisle of the Samford University Chapel on her wedding day. It was also our son's wedding day-- Christen was his bride!

I don't know that it was anything quite like that the day when there, in the Garden of Eden, the Almighty God, in the role of Father of the bride, brought His crowning act of creation and presented her to Adam. Whoever was supposed to get the photographer dropped the ball--so we don't have pictures!

But the very clear image we take away from this grand event is that God designed the human heart for love and companionship, which for most of us eventually culminates in marriage. God first makes Adam aware of his need. Then He creates a partner for Adam and presents her to him. And Adam, we learn, is very

pleased! He finds Eve to be the one he's been waiting for all his life! From his reaction, Adam clearly sees Eve as "a keeper." He's excited to learn that he won't be alone anymore.

If you're married now, or you've been married, do you remember that first time you looked at your future spouse and it dawned on you—"you are the one I have been waiting for all my life?" Some may need to refresh their memory banks a bit and rediscover the wonder and joy of that special moment.

Perhaps for some—even for some of us here today—there have been so many difficulties in your relationship, you're not sure you can. But try to remember those happier days and help the person to whom you're married remember them as well. This may be the spark you need to get through the challenges you're facing.

Now, there are also some other things we can do to strengthen and protect our marriages. In the time remaining, I want to share with you four Biblical principles which serve to both protect the marriage relationship and also make it stronger.

All four of these are found in verses 24-25 of Genesis 2: **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."**

Principle 1: LEAVING. God says when we get married, we need to *leave* our parents. Now, at first, this may sound sad or even cruel because, for most of us, our relationship with our parents is the most important one we have before marriage.

But God knows this is important. When we marry, the relationship with Mom and Dad takes a backseat to our relationship with our spouse. The former relationship doesn't end. It simply becomes secondary to the marriage.

And the same must be said for all other relationships. Friends are important—but our spouse is more important. People at work are important—as is the job itself—but our spouse is more important, and our actions must demonstrate this.

We can still be loyal to our parents, friends, and fellow workers, but our first and most important loyalty is to the person we married. Anything less makes a marriage vulnerable.

Principle 2: CLEAVING. God says that once we leave, we then need to be committed to uniting permanently with our spouse. That word “united” means to form a permanent bond. The KJV translation of the Bible uses the word “cleave.” This is a union that’s so strong, it would take something violent to break it apart.

Listen—unless a couple is willing to make a commitment to be with each other in good times and bad, and mean this with all their hearts, the gaps in the foundation of that marriage will be too wide for it to withstand much. For marriage to survive, we must have this commitment nailed down solid—this is for life!!!

Principle 3: COMBINING. Scripture says “the two become one flesh.” The idea is that two people who come together and combine every aspect of their lives: who they are mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. This is a relationship that keeps growing closer and dearer over the course of a lifetime.

The two don’t become one because they have a beautiful wedding ceremony or experience the perfect honeymoon. That’s a good start, but this couple will need a lifetime of sharing every aspect of their lives together for them to begin to experience the oneness that God intends. It’s a process. Oneness grows over time.

Principle 4: KNOWING. The final element in God’s plan for marriage is intimacy. In the Bible, sexual intimacy is described as “knowing” your mate. In Scripture, we’re told that this person KNEW that person. Then we’re told about the child that was born to them. This wasn’t a casual acquaintance being described.

Genesis 2 gives us a sneak preview of all this “knowing” when it says in verse 25, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Once again--subtle, but we get the point!

Intimacy means knowing the other person and accepting who they are when all the coverings are stripped away. It means sharing completely, unashamedly, in every aspect of life.

Marriage is designed by God to be incredibly intimate—with no way to hide our flaws because marriage makes us so vulnerable

and so transparent, but hopefully, so loved as well. Try this, please. If you're married, try to picture your relationship on a continuum. Every marriage is somewhere between Separateness and Oneness. You are either moving toward oneness, or you're moving toward... separateness.

If you think you can just coast for a while in your marriage, I have news for you: the challenges come too often and get too intense to just drift along. There's that daily stress, and never enough time... or money! Children are challenging, and all the while, there're a whole host of temptations out there.

So, this is important: which way is your marriage moving today—closer together or further apart? It is moving; so are you moving toward oneness or separateness?

Wherever you are in your marriage right now—even if you feel it's hopeless--know that with God's help, it can get better. Don't lose hope for your marriage. Jesus Christ is all about hope. He's all about fixing what's broken—in you, in me, and... in us.

- 1) If forgiveness is what's needed, then forgive one another.
- 2) If time spent together is what's missing, find the time to invest yourselves in each other.
- 3) If you just don't love your spouse anymore, confess this to God, and ask Him to help you find the way to love again.
- 4) Make a commitment to God that you will begin right now to follow His plan and build a marriage that's strong—one that's a great joy to you and a great blessing to everyone who's part of your family.