

# Much More Than A Marriage

(Genesis 2:15-25)

## The Big Idea

*Marriage is not for the fulfilment of people; it's for the fulfilment of God's purposes in the world.*

## Preamble

If you were with us last Sunday morning, we looked at the whole issue of human identity, and what God says about it in the Bible. We live in a society that is confused about what it means to be human, so we looked through a few passages in the Bible to discover God's original design for humanity:

- 1. Human beings are made in the image of God**
- 2. Human beings are made to complement one-another within specific created genders of male and female**
- 3. Human beings are made to rule the world under God**
- 4. Human beings are made to multiply and fill the earth**

We also looked at how sin has made it impossible for us to truly fulfil our God-given mandate as human beings. And then we saw how Jesus has perfected what it means to be human, and suffered and died in our place so that we can have a new identity in him.

The idea of human identity is one of the current points of tension between what our society says and what the Bible says. Just last weekend there was a news story about the first person in the USA to be legally recognised as 'genderless'.

Another point of tension that is closely related to this issue is that of marriage. What our society says and what God says in his word are two completely different things.

So I thought we'd turn our attention there today, seeing as we've already opened this can of worms! As with human identity, we need to be clear about God's design for marriage to be able to respond intelligently and graciously to what our society says.

Before we do that let's pray.

## Married For A Purpose

I'm sure many of you would be familiar with the classic Richard Curtis movie, *Four Weddings and A Funeral*, starring Hugh Grant and Andie McDowell.

There's a scene in the movie that I enjoy very time I watch it, and that's the scene of the final wedding in the movie, where Father Gerald (played by Rowan Atkinson) tries to marry Hugh Grant's character Charles to his fiancé Henrietta. As the service commences, Father Gerald stands and says:

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church and therefore is not by any to be enterprises nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.”

Of course, from there the whole wedding descends into chaos when Charles' brother objects to the union. Father Gerald's words here might go unnoticed - after all, they are the part of the traditional wedding service in the Church of England, hence the dated language. The reason I enjoy this scene is that even in a movie that is full of confused notions about love and relationships, these words shine out like a lighthouse on a dark night, warning people to take God's design for marriage seriously.

Consider how differently our society talks about marriage today.

Peter Tatchell, Australian-born UK gay rights advocate:

“Marriage is the internationally recognised system of relationship recognition. It is the global language of love.”<sup>1</sup>

Adele Horin, columnist with the Sydney Morning Herald:

“Marriage is more than ever a love match between equals, a primarily personal relationship in which partners maintain a level of independence. They organise their partnership on the basis of personal inclination rather than gender roles...”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.australianmarriageequality.org/quatable-quotes/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.australianmarriageequality.org/quatable-quotes/>  
Grace Christian Church Buderim (Rev Clint Lombard)

The fundamental difference between these views of marriage is not hard to see. In the marriage service from the movie, marriage is for God's purposes, and He defines it. In our society, marriage is for our purposes, and so we define it.

Spoiler alert: I'm going to give you our big idea today right up front, so we all know where we're going.

The big idea is simply this:

*Marriage is not for the fulfilment of people; it's for the fulfilment of God's purposes in the world.*

We'll obviously unpack this idea more and more as we go along this morning. On one hand understanding that there's so much more to marriage means that this message isn't just for those who are married, or for those who may still get married. It's for all of us who are concerned that God's purposes are accomplished in his world.

## **Made to Work (Genesis 2:15)**

Let's dive in at the passage that was read for us earlier, in Genesis 2.

This second chapter revisits God's creation work from chapter 1, but zooms in on the circumstances of how God created man, and then woman.

Just for context, the fourteen verses before our reading today tell us two important things about the creation of the first man. One, that God formed him from the ground and breathed life into him (v7), and two, that God put him in the Garden of Eden on purpose (v8).

Then we get to verse 15:

*"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."*

(Genesis 2:15 ESV)

This verse links in with what we read in chapter one:

*"And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said,*

*“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.”*

(Genesis 1:28–30 ESV)

Understanding this *work* is actually crucial to a Biblical understanding of marriage.

A major part of the purpose God had in creating humanity was for them to be ‘gardeners’ in his perfect garden. There is a sense in which God created humanity to “tame” creation, or, as he says, to “*subdue it*” and “*have dominion*”. They are to bring the best out of creation, and actually to express their worship of the creator in doing so.

Let me explain what I mean: a fundamental part of our expression of worship is to take what he has given us, and make the most of it, for his glory. A simple example might be our voices, which can be used well to sing his praises and proclaim his truth to the world around us. Another example might be our finances, where we can worship God by using them to serve his eternal purposes rather than our own temporary wants.

This is why Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 10:31:

*“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

(1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

Even though the Creation was perfect, it still required human intervention to “work it and keep it”. This wasn’t a flaw in the design, it was part of the design. Creation was never meant to run on automatic. God made humanity as a purposeful part of his creation. And humanity would find fulfilment in serving that purpose. In fact, we are built to serve that purpose in ways no other created thing is.

## **Made to Obey (Genesis 2:16-17)**

Now, I must confess that I was tempted to bypass v16-17 as being non-essential to our discussion about marriage but the more I looked at it, the more I thought there must be a reason why it’s here, even though it’s only really picked up again in chapter three.

Let’s read it again:

*“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.””*

(Genesis 2:16–17 ESV)

Apart from being made to work the Garden, the man was also made to obey God in the Garden. This is what we call the “created order”. Man is subordinate to God.

We see God’s generous blessing here, that the man is permitted to eat from every tree in the Garden, which includes the mysterious “Tree of Life” in v9. But there was only one tree from which he couldn’t eat, and that was the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”.

As we said last week, this prohibited tree was a reminder that the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, or the right to *define* good and evil, belong to God alone, and not to humanity. And we know what happened - the man and women disobeyed God, ate from the tree, and messed everything up.

But we’re still on the good side of the Fall, in chapter 2, the happy side. And man has a mandate to work and keep the garden, and obey God’s simple, specific law.

## **Alone? (v18-20)**

And it’s into this context that God created *woman*.

Let’s pick up at 2:18:

*“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.””*

(Genesis 2:18 ESV)

There’s trouble in paradise! All through chapter one, God has been saying, “It’s good... it’s good... it’s very good...”. Now all of a sudden, something’s *not good*. What’s not good?

Well, the fact that the man is *alone*. Now, what’s your first thought when you hear that Adam was alone?

I use to think, “Poor guy! He’s got nobody to wander around the garden hand-in-hand with. He’s got no-one to sit on the grass and watch the sunset with. He’s got no-one to “complete him” (heart hands), in a relational sense.”

Lonely/I am so lonely/I have nobody/For my own...

But this is to consider Adam's 'aloneness' out of context. You see, he's not lonely, he's alone. Alone in the great task he has to accomplish of working and keeping the garden, and alone in the task of obeying God's Law.

And so God doesn't make him a friend, or a companion, or a soul-mate. He makes him a "helper", as the text says, "...a helper fit for him." A helper that complements him, in the purpose to which he, and she, are both called by their Creator.

Let's look at the next few verses, because these underline this idea. God gives Adam the task of naming the animals, exercising his dominion over the creation under the Creator:

*"Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him."*

(Genesis 2:19–20 ESV)

You'll notice here the close relationship Adam enjoyed with God. God is interested in what Adam does in naming the animals. They are clearly ruling together over the creation. In a very real sense, Adam didn't have a companionship deficit, because he had God, in whose image and likeness he was made, and he was the only being in the world who could relate to God as he did.

But as he goes through the spiders, the geckos, the budgies, the wombats, the foxes, the lions, the kangaroos, the pandas, the giant sloths, the elephants all the rest of the Eden menagerie, and finds no suitable helper. (I'm presuming from the text that God handled whatever was living the rivers and seas.)

Even the chimpanzees (with whom we share, we are told, 95% of our DNA), are no good at gardening, or at helping Adam stay away from the prohibited tree. No surprise there, really.

## **God Makes The Perfect Helper (v21-23)**

So what does God do? He has determined to make Adam a helper fit for him. So that's what he does.

*“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”*

(Genesis 2:21–22 ESV)

It would take thousands of years before a human being was able to have surgery under general anaesthetic again.

Now, much has been written about the meaning of these verses. They seem almost mythological. I believed for a long time that men had one less rib in their bodies than women, until recently a friend who works in medical imaging put me right.

So what’s going on here? The 16th and 17th century English Bible commentator Matthew Henry famously wrote:

“...the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”<sup>3</sup>

This is a very sweet suggestion, and bears a lot of truth in principle, but it may be reading too much into the text!

What is clear is that Eve is made of the same stuff as Adam. She is “of a kind” with him. She is different only in the sense that she is a feminine expression of humanity, and in her humanness expresses God’s image just like Adam. But it’s strikingly clear to Adam that she’s not another animal - she’s like him. And she’s the only one like him in the entire creation, the only one who truly complements him.

The only one who can really be his ‘helper’.

And then we have the first recorded words of any human in the Bible, and it’s a poem or a song. v23:

“Woah! That’s what I’m talking about! God, you did good!”

---

<sup>3</sup> from <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/genesis/2.html>, Accessed: 23 June 2016 at 14:44.

Just kidding. But I'm sure that's what he was thinking! Let's try again:

*"Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.""*

(Genesis 2:23 ESV)

Adam recognises how perfectly she meets the brief ("This at last...!").

He recognises where she comes from, and how they are connected in a way that he doesn't share with any other animal. He recognises her intrinsic value and worth, and beauty.

But then, like another animal, he also names *her*. What's going on here?

Well, all he's doing is exercising his God-appointed role, as head of the male-female relationship. And the name he gives her reflects not her "otherness", but her "same-ness".

In Hebrew, man is "*ish*", and the woman's name is "*isha*". He appropriates and adapts for the woman the name God gave him.

## **The First Marriage. Ever.**

Now that we understand where man and woman come from, the author of Genesis comments on the implications of these things for humanity, and brings the whole of the creation story full-circle.

*"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."*

(Genesis 2:24–25 ESV)

It's the first marriage ever. God has brought the beautiful bride down the aisle to meet the groom, and he is blown away by what he sees. God brought her to the man, and pronounced them husband and wife, a team to accomplish God's purposes together. Cheapest wedding ever, not a hired suit, a dress, a canapé, or even a guest in sight!

These two verses connect to something else in back in Genesis 1: specifically, the mandate to multiply. The writer understands that the man and woman are created uniquely

for this purpose, and this purpose can only be accomplished by their coming together in an exclusive, permanent, physical relationship.

He makes three points of **implication in (v24)**, followed by one of observation (v25):

1. **“A man shall leave his father and his mother”**: there shall be the creation of a new family unit, a subsequent generation, to carry on and on the mandate of filling the earth with God’s image-bearers.
2. **The man shall “hold fast to his wife”**: you might be familiar with the wording “cleave to his wife” from some older Bibles. The idea is to “stick to”, to “cling to”. It’s the same word used to describes Israel’s covenant relationship with God, where they are to “hold fast” to him.

American Bible teacher Kent Hughes comments incisively on this clause:

*“The term “cleave” (“stick”) here indicates that marriage is to be viewed as a covenant. Leaving and cleaving involves a public declaration in the sight of God. Marriage is not a private matter. It involves a declaration of intention and a reorganising of relationship. The idea of a purely private marriage is a recent aberration spawned by the culture of individualism and the demise of community.”<sup>4</sup>*

3. **They shall become “one flesh”**: Finally, he describes their physical union. What’s interesting here is that where the man has had part of his “flesh” removed to form the woman (in v21-22), here they come together again as “one flesh”, as though they were two parts of a puzzle that create a whole when joined together.

What this clause tells us is that marriage involves sexual union. We must be careful of believing that sex is some base desire that is a necessary evil in the lives of God’s people, as Christians have wrongly believed and taught (see 1 Tim 4:3). God created sex as one of the cornerstones of the marriage covenant. Some have said that sex is his wedding gift. But marriage must also be *more than sex*; Paul uses the same term to condemn the men of Corinth who became “one flesh” with prostitutes (1 Corinth 6:16).

This Hebrew word for “one flesh” can also refer to a separate family group, which links in with the first clause, and is the result of sexual intercourse - procreation.

Finally, there is one **observational** statement (v25):

---

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Preaching the Word; Accordance electronic ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 62.

1. **The were both naked, and were not ashamed:** clearly, this is the language of sexual intimacy and vulnerability to one-another.

But notice where in the whole process it is mentioned: after there “leaving and cleaving”. This means that the foundation for marriage isn’t sexual intimacy, important though that is. The foundation for marriage is the public covenant, the “leaving and cleaving” and the become “one flesh” in the new family sense.

English Bible teacher Christopher Ash is very helpful here:

*“...what the Bible calls ‘nakedness’ (meaning the nakedness of sexual intimacy) speaks of tremendous vulnerability. In sexual intimacy we open ourselves to another as in no other context in human life. And that vulnerability is safe only after first pledging lifelong faithfulness. Sex within marriage is to be sex in safety. Sex before or outside of marriage is sex exposed to danger.”<sup>5</sup>*

## Drawing Some Boundaries

Now, we’ve been very thorough in unpacking much of what Genesis 2, and Genesis 1, have to say about God’s original design for marriage.

Of course, we hit Genesis 3 and everything goes to pot. Sin enters the world and affects and infects everything. And curiously, it starts its dirty work within the marriage relationship. We read in Romans 8 that the creation is now “in bondage to corruption” because of the effects of sin.

This is, in large part, why some married couples are unable to have children, or why some may never get married, or why some lose their spouses and must live on without them, or why some marriages break down. It’s also the reason why the idea of marriage is so messed-up in our world. God’s original design is defaced by sin, and we now wait for a new heaven and new earth where everything is restored.

But just on an objective level, this paradigm for marriage that’s detailed so clearly in Genesis 1 and 2 allows us to draw some very clear boundaries around the idea of marriage. Within those boundaries, we can place what fits God’s original design for marriage, and outside those boundaries we must exclude everything that doesn’t match that design.

---

<sup>5</sup> in *Married For God*, by Christopher Ash © 2007 (iBooks)  
Grace Christian Church Buderim (Rev Clint Lombard)

So we said right at the beginning that our big idea was this:

*Marriage is not for the fulfilment of people; it's for the fulfilment of God's purposes in the world.*

The fulfilment of God's purposes in the world (ultimately, his own glory) form our boundary lines. And if marriage is for God's purposes, then we can put the marriage distinctives he has defined for the fulfilment of those purposes inside our boundaries - we can say "yes" to them.

So, marriage is...

1. ...created by God, it's not a social construct that we can adapt at will (Even Jesus affirms this in Matthew 19)
2. ...between biological man and biological woman, in order that children may be potentially be born within the marriage,
3. ...between one man and one woman; God didn't give Adam, or Eve, multiple partners; they were each sufficient for each other,
4. ...the creation of a new family unit,
5. ...a public commitment to a new relationship,
6. ...enduring, husband and wife are to "hold fast", being faithful to each other in covenant,
7. ...a relationship within which sexual intimacy may be enjoyed safely,
8. ...for protection against sin (Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 7), and
9. ...for the purpose of serving God in the world, and bringing him glory.

With those ideas inside the boundaries, we can then exclude a number of other notions about marriage that our society sadly holds so dear:

Marriage is not...

1. ... a fluid, cultural expression of relationships,
2. ...between two members of the same gender,
3. ...between humans and animals (or inanimate objects),
4. ...between more than two people,
5. ...temporary,
6. ...a private thing, which has no bearing on anyone else or on society as a whole,
7. ...for the purpose of personal fulfilment or gain.

Marriage is not for the fulfilment of people; it's for the fulfilment of God's purposes in the world.

Let's remember these things, so that whether we are married or not, when our society cries out for the redefinition of marriage, either in principle or in law, we know how to respond.

As Christians, whether we are married or not, let us be clear about what marriage truly is, so that we may obey the words of Hebrews 13:4:

*“Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”*

(Hebrews 13:4 ESV)

But there's one particular purpose for marriage which isn't clear in Genesis, though it becomes clear as the Bible plays out its story. Marriage is meant to be a reflection of the gospel, the restored relationship between God and his people, through Jesus Christ.

In the book of Hosea, in the Old Testament, we read of God's tender words to his wayward and rebellious people:

*““And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”*

(Hosea 2:16–20 ESV)

And in Ephesians 5, in the New Testament, we read:

*“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with*

*the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

(Ephesians 5:25–32 ESV)

As important as marriage is, it's just a shadow of a much greater relationship. Marriage was designed to help us understand the gospel. As Father Gerald said, "...signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church."

And so (to paraphrase Paul) to the married I say this: Don't let your marriage be self-serving. Use your marriage, that complementary relationship that you share with your wife or your husband, use it to serve God and bring him glory in the world. Use all the opportunities and resources that marriage gives you to serve God. Let people look at your marriage, and catch a glimpse of the gospel at work.

Now, you may need to do some hard thinking, talking and praying together with your spouse, and perhaps even repent and make some conscious changes for your marriage to be more of what God wants and less of what you want. But it's worth it - if we follow the Creator's design we will find true fulfilment.

And to the unmarried, to the widowed, to the childless: Don't feel as though your situation makes you less worthy to serve God's purposes in the world. Don't feel as though your situation makes you "second-rate".

Remember that Adam was called to serve God before Eve was even created. Marriage can make serving God really complicated. In 1 Corinthians 7:35, Paul talks about how being unmarried can promote "undivided devotion to God", whilst being married makes us anxious! The goal is not marriage, it's service, bringing God glory.

And remember also that marriage isn't an end in itself, it's a relationship created by God for his purposes, and for *reflecting* the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves you and reconciles you to your creator. And that's the relationship that will truly give you worth and meaning.