



THE GLORY OF WOMAN

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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Genesis 2:18-25

Third Message

Gary Vanderet

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In our studies in the book of Genesis we come now to the account of the creation of woman. I approach this text with a sense of timidity. I grew up in a male-dominated home. I have two brothers. My wife Kathy and I have three sons. Although we will celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary this year, it is only in the last few years that I have been begun to understand and appreciate the companion whom God created for me.

A Peanuts cartoon expresses my feelings as we turn to this marvelous passage this morning. Lucy is walking down the street, thinking to herself:

“That Chuck. He’s something else...

I don’t even know why I think about him...

Chuck doesn’t seem to understand a girl’s emotions...

In fact, Chuck doesn’t seem to understand girls at all...

Chuck is hard to talk to because he doesn’t understand life...

He doesn’t understand laughing and crying...

He doesn’t understand love, and silly talk, and touching hands, and things like that...

He plays a lot of baseball, but I doubt if he even understands baseball...”

Then Lucy knocks on Charlie Brown’s door. She says,

“I don’t think you understand **anything** Chuck!”

As she is walking away, Charlie Brown replies:

“I don’t even understand what it is I don’t understand.”

This is how I feel about this deeply theological text. I have so much understanding to do that I sometimes feel “I don’t even understand what it is I don’t understand.”

Someone has said that marriage is like a phone call in the middle of the night. First you get the ring, and then you wake up! How good of God to give us this text to ponder and reflect upon. The passage we will look at, from Genesis 2, is closely connected to the verses we studied last week. Actually, these passages are one unit of thought, but time constraints have forced us to study them on successive Sundays.

Last week, we made the comment that these stories in the book of Genesis are supra-historical. Though these incidents really did take place in time and space, they are more than a recounting of history. They represent every man’s and every woman’s dreams and aspirations. This passage then is archetypal in that it was designed to demonstrate what the Creator intended for the relationship between man and woman. As we will

see, marriage was meant to be God’s good gift to mankind. But it hasn’t always been that way.

The account begins in verse 18:

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone...” (Gen 2:18a, NIV).

There is something jarring about this statement. In chapter 1, following each creative act, God said, “It is good.” And on the sixth day of creation, God said that everything he had done was “very good.” But here God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” The situation called for corrective action.

God himself does not exist in solitude. He has always existed as a tri-unity. A heavenly chorus surrounds him at all times. And he does not want us to be recluses. He wants us to enjoy the company of others. Fellowship with others is part of being human, part of being real, part of being made in the image of God.

In the book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the main character is a shiny new stuffed rabbit who is in the process of becoming “real.” The rabbit wants to be considered more than just a toy on a shelf. As he struggles with initial feelings of uneasiness, he converses with an old, worn-out, well-used and much-loved stuffed horse:

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?” “Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.” “Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once, said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most

of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

We become real through establishing loving relationships with others.

So God's statement, "It is not good for the man to be alone," indicates that at this stage of creation, man was not yet what God had planned. From the beginning it was always God's intention to make two sexes.

And that is what he proceeds to do, as we read in the second part of verse 18:

"...I will make a helper suitable for him." (2:18b)

The word "helper" has been greatly misunderstood. Webster renders it, "one who helps, usually one who is less skilled." Usually it is the latter part of that definition that is emphasized. Thus there is a great deal of misunderstanding about this word "helper." In Scripture, however, "helper" is not a demeaning word at all. In fact, on most occasions it is used of God, who comes alongside to provide what man lacks. The word simply means "companion, someone who comes alongside." The rabbis frequently used this word in their writings to describe someone who comes alongside another to help. The word refers to a sidekick, a friend, someone with whom man can share the job that God gave him. Man needs someone who can share his destiny. He has been given a difficult task—to make the world a garden and to guard it from the attacks of the serpent. Man would accomplish this task by walking with God. God says man needed a helper *suitable* for him. The word means, an exact opposite. One lexicon renders it as "someone equal and adequate to himself." These two would be a fitting complement to each other physically, socially, and spiritually.

But notice that God does not do this immediately. Despite his identification of man's need, there is a delay in God's provision to meet it. God knows that Adam's loneliness is not good; now man must come to the same understanding. God is not going to present the apex of his creation to an unappreciative male.

Verse 19:

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. [By the way, that is how this verse should be translated: the creation of the animals preceded the creation of man.] He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So 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. (2:19-20)

So God puts Adam in a zoo. Then he parades the animals before him so that Adam can name them. In doing so Adam begins to order his world. Scientists attempt to gain control over their environment by giving names to

things and putting them in categories. We like to come up with titles and names and put tags on things. It is our way of analyzing our environment and understanding its relationship with us. If we can name something, we feel secure.

That is what Adam is doing in naming the animals: he is establishing the relationship of that part of creation to himself. If he had named the animals in English, he would have begun with the aardvark and worked his way down through the alphabet to the zebra. And he would name them in terms of their relationship to himself. One would be a beast of burden; one would help him carry his load; one would produce wool for clothing; one would mow his grass; one would be ornamental. But after naming the animals, Adam found that his deficiency was still there: there was no companion for him. While there was one which who could help him clean house, one which could provide clothing for him, and some which could provide meals, there was no sidekick, no companion, no one who could move in alongside him and share the responsibility that God had given him.

Last year, we got our first dog. We needed another female in the house, so we got a little female golden lab, which we named Amber. She now weighs almost 80 pounds. Our boys love her; we spend hours playing with her and sharing her affection. But the fellowship we have with her can only be on her level, because a dog can communicate only on that level.

Through this experience of naming the animals, Adam begins to realize that there is none like himself. Verse 21:

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 [the word means, "something from the side"] and closed up the place with flesh. (2:21)

Once Adam recognized his need, God put him to sleep. He did not have to search for his wife. She was a gift, made for him while he slept.

Notice how the woman was created: she was created from Adam's side. The rabbis described the significance of this in these words:

She was not taken from Adam's head, that she should rule over him; not from his feet, that she should be trampled on by him; but she was taken from his side, that she might be his equal, from under his arm, that she might be protected by him, near his heart, that he might cherish and love her.

God now brings his creation to man. Verse 22:

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, ["Wow! This is what I have been looking for all my life!"] This a loose paraphrase. But that is the point. Adam was saying, in effect, "This one fills my need. These animals can bear my burdens and some can be ornamental, but none of them

can be a companion for me.”]

**“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.” (2:22-23)**

Adam names the woman in relationship to himself. He classifies her in a special way, using what amounts to the feminine form for “man.” The masculine word for man is “ish.” Adam calls the woman “ishah.” These are much like our words, man and woman. Woman means, “wife of man.” Adam is playing on the word “man.” He is saying, in effect, “This is my counterpart, my companion. She is the female counterpart to man. This one will share my life and all that I am. This one will help me in making the world into a garden. She is not like any of the animals; she is not made to be a beast of burden or to be an ornament. She is something special. She is my companion.”

Verses 24 and 25 are a commentary on what has been revealed in the preceding verses. We know it is an editorial comment of Moses and not a continuation of Adam’s words, because Adam did not have a mother or father. Reflecting on this truth, therefore, Moses comments, in verse 24:

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. (2:24-25)

Here Moses establishes the reason for marriage. The expression, “leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,” is his way of referring to marriage. That is what marriage entails—leaving one set of authorities, being joined to someone else, and establishing a separate home. Moses is saying, “It is for this reason that you get married.” That is, when you discover the partner that God has for you, that special person who will help you fulfill your destiny, then you marry. The woman was to meet man’s need—but not merely his sexual needs. She was not to be just a beautiful adornment at his side. She would be the one who would help him fulfill his tasks of working and ruling. This is the criterion that we ought to use in determining whom we will marry. The world has sold us down the river at this point. The world’s criteria demand beauty or wealth or some combination of other qualities. But Moses says that the woman God chooses for man will be his companion to share his life. He can communicate his deepest needs to her. She will move in alongside him and help him to obey God and work to turn the world into a fruitful place. That is why we get married.

We also learn in this passage not only the purpose of marriage, but the place of sex. Moses says, in verse 24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” That last phrase “become one flesh,” is a euphemism. It is a delicate way of describing the sexual rela-

tionship between a husband and wife. That is the way Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians 6, when he says that he who is joined with a prostitute becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor 6:16). Moses is saying that in this context, when a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to a wife, sex is proper and right. It is a part of God’s creation that precedes the fall. There is nothing bad or dirty about it. It was God who thought of sex, not Hugh Hefner.

Sex is an explosive dynamic in life. Sex energizes life. When it is controlled, it produces something powerful and good. But outside the context of marriage, sex is destructive. When the atom is split in the reaction chamber of a power plant, it produces energy, and that energy profits all who come in contact with it. But if that energy is put in a bomb and dropped on a city, in the wrong environment, it destroys and blights the landscape and ruins everything it comes in contact with. The world treats sex not like nuclear energy, but more like play-doh. It doesn’t really matter what you make with it, we are told. Be creative and do with it whatever you desire. But the Bible clearly establishes the place of sex in God’s scheme of things. Sex belongs in a loving relationship between a man and a woman who are united together for life. That is where sex achieves its maximum power and effect.

To single men and women I say, that is God’s word to us! Abstinence never hurt anyone. The world tells you that if you wait, you are going to miss out. But you won’t lose anything. God wants the very best for you. And he says, “Wait!” The proper context for sex is marriage. And so we read in verse 25, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” People become ashamed through guilt and sin. The man and his wife could be naked before each other and not feel shame because they had no feelings of guilt. But if you enter into a sexual relationship outside of marriage, shame and guilt invariably follow.

So here in this chapter we have God’s plan for mankind. Man is to work hard, protect his environment, both physically and spiritually, and walk with God. We must do everything in dependence upon the life of God, because we are merely dust. We cannot do these things on our own.

And finally, we need to realize that God intends for husbands and wives to fulfill their destiny together. We receive our partner as a companion for life, to enable us to fulfill the vocation that God has given to us.

There is a Babylonian account of creation called the Gilgamesh Epic. In this story, man is called Enkidu. He was a hairy beast that lived in the woods. According to the story, the gods sent a prostitute after him to seduce him, and through her seduction he became a man, and gained wisdom to deal with life. How different is God’s perspective. The Babylonians viewed the relationship between man and woman almost entirely on a sexual level. But God sees the union of a husband and wife not

only on the physical, but the spiritual level as well. The person whom God brings to you is to be your companion, to enable you to be God's man or woman. And you do this together, not in competition with one another. Husbands and wives are to be mutually supportive of each other. Men and women share together God's mandate to rule.

Man's helper is not a "gofer," one who runs and fetches. She is his partner who rescues him from working alone. There was a time when the world told us that man's responsibility is to work, while the woman is responsible for the home and children—"and never the twain shall meet." But it is clear from this Genesis account that husbands and wives are to work together to build their home and life.

Further, it is also clear from this passage and others that man is given the responsibility of leadership in the home. But men who treat their wives like children, monitoring their activities, curbing their creativity, restricting their freedoms and using them for their own ends, are not leading, they are dominating. In the Song of Solomon, the bride is called the "friend" of the bridegroom. My wife is my friend, given to me to help me fulfill the destiny that God has for me. I need to respect and honor her. The apostle Peter tells husbands to give their wives honor as joint heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7). If husbands do not do this, he warns, their prayers will be hindered and their spiritual life will collapse.

You may say, "That's all very fine, but my marriage is on the rocks. It can't be salvaged." I cannot comment on your particular situation, but I know that God can repair anything. That is his specialty. He is a Savior. He can create order of chaos. He can fill empty lives. In my marriage he is changing me from being a controlling

man who has abused people to one who is a little more fun to live with and a little safer to be around. If God can change me, I know he can change you.

The single people among us are probably asking, "Where does this leave us?" Isn't it interesting that when God set out to provide a mate for the man, he put him to sleep? There is something to be learned from this. It is this: Men, do not hustle. Be God's man. The apostle Paul has a helpful word for young men in this regard: "Treat the younger women like sisters." How do you treat your sisters? How do you relate to them? That is how you are to treat your Christian sisters. Do not exploit them. Do not defraud them. Do not arouse in them expectations that you cannot fulfill. Care for them, and wait for God to show you his choice. He knows what you need.

There may be some people here this morning who will never marry. Does this passage leave them out in the cold? The text says, "It is not good for man to be alone." Does that mean that singles will live lives of wasted endeavor? Not at all. God may choose some to go through life single. That is a calling, a gift. Paul says that if that is your calling, God will supply your needs out of his riches in glory, according to Christ Jesus. God will be your partner. You will not miss out on a thing. He will fulfill you in every way.

As we come to an understanding of God's design for marriage and sexuality we feel the searching quality of his word. It exposes our weaknesses and wrong attitudes. But it also sets before us the great possibilities and potential that await us when we submit ourselves to his wisdom. May God grant to us submissive hearts, and restored confidence that he wants the highest good for each of us, whether married or single.

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