

# Married for God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thanks very much, James. Okay, Genesis chapter 2, verses 18 to 25, as we've just read. If you've got a Bible, it'd be worth keeping it open in front of you at those verses.

We're dealing here with the creation, as we've just heard, of the first woman. We're dealing here with the first marriage, and we're dealing with what is then given as really a pattern for marriage going forwards.

And so straight away, it's worth seeing here that marriage is a big deal. Marriage is a big focus in these verses. And as soon as I say that, perhaps even as we were reading through this passage, different thoughts and different feelings and different situations will come to mind and will come to the surface for different people in this room, as would be the case in any room, in any church, as we talk about and as we dig into this topic.

It's good for us to just be upfront about that straight away. There will be people in this room for whom the topic of marriage brings up happy, positive thoughts. There will be people here for whom it instantly leads to sorrow or regret.

There will be people here for whom it brings feelings of shame or guilt. We're stepping onto kind of sensitive ground for a whole host of reasons. But I just want to kind of flag that up at the beginning.

[ 1 : 2 0 ] And I do want to say that whatever your kind of gut is feeling this morning as we approach these verses, let me assure you that the very best thing that we can do is to look at what God himself has to say about marriage.

It's to let that be the thing that shapes our expectations and our thoughts and our response to it. And most importantly, as we're going to see, let that be the thing that is going to point us to Christ, to demonstrate his love for us and to build us up in our love for him in response.

And so this morning, whether you are married or single or in a relationship or widowed or divorced, whether you are content or disappointed, whether marriage just feels perhaps for some of the younger guys like something that is a million miles away, please do stick with us as we look at this passage together.

These verses are not here as a kind of a clinic just for newlyweds to be separated off and given some input. They're verses as the whole of the Bible is for the people of God, for the church community, as we are looking to be built up in our faith and in turn to build one another up as well.

Again, as we look in these early chapters of Genesis, we're seeing a model of how things were in perfection. And then we're going to see how we can learn from that in the very imperfect world that we live in.

[ 2 : 5 1 ] We're going to do that this morning, look at three points, three Ps, in fact, as we look at what these verses are showing us in that framework of marriage, but absolutely not exclusively to do with marriage.

So please do, yeah, stick with us. But the first thing that we see here is the purpose of marriage. The purpose of marriage. And getting this right from the very beginning is absolutely fundamental for everything that we're going to talk about this morning.

This is the first verse that we read, verse 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. This verse is kind of designed, it's written, it's meant to make us stop in our tracks.

If you've been with us over the last few weeks as we work through Genesis 1 and 2, we saw in Genesis 1 that repeated refrain, It was good, it was good, it was good. At the very end of that chapter, God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

We've seen last week the perfection of Eden so far in chapter 2. And then suddenly here, it's as if we have this kind of flashing red light, something that is not good.

[ 4 : 05 ] We're to sit up, we're to pay attention. What is it that's not good? Well, it is not good that man should be alone, God says. That's the situation that causes God to make woman, to bring man and woman together as the rest of these verses explain.

And so what we need to get to grips with then is why is that not good? Why is it not good that this man is alone? Because that's going to show us then the purpose of marriage. That's what God is putting right in these verses.

Okay, well, here's what a lot of people kind of naturally assume here about what is not good. Adam is by himself. Therefore, they think, well, Adam is lonely.

And therefore, that means the purpose of marriage is to stop that loneliness. Okay, this is what you can call the kind of the Jerry Maguire version of marriage. If you've seen that film with Tom Cruise, he goes back to kind of win his wife back with those famous words, you complete me, he says, as if he's not whole without her.

And plenty of other films, romances have followed in those footsteps, plenty of Christians, churches have absorbed this idea as well, that marriage is about me being satisfied.

[ 5 : 22 ] Marriage is needed for my needs to be met. Marriage is what makes a person whole. Let's be really clear here as we start. That is not what the Bible says.

That is not what marriage is for. That single people are not incomplete people. To make sense of the purpose of marriage, we need here to keep these verses in the flow of Genesis chapter 2.

You can look back to verse 4. It begins, This relationship gives us a purpose.

That was one of the things we spoke about last week, that God gives humanity work to do. And it's in that context. That is the problem here. That is what is not good.

The man, one man, cannot do all this work by himself. That's what's not good. Look at the words there.

[ 6 : 27 ] It's that he is alone. It's not that he is lonely. And that's why God doesn't say he's going to make him a friend, or a companion, or a lover, but a helper, a fit for him.

Someone to join in this work mankind has been given. The purpose of marriage, the Bible's blueprint from the very beginning, is about serving God together.

And now, of course, there can be great joy in doing that. We're not here to reduce marriage to something purely utilitarian, or deny some of the relational joys and blessings that marriage brings.

And yet it's so easy in our culture and in our churches as well to kind of get things back to front, and actually to start with those things. To start with ourselves. To start with marriage becoming about our satisfaction and giving us what we need, rather than starting with God's purposes and working from that.

Marriage and family, children that might follow on, can so easily become what the Bible would describe as an idol. That means something, even a good thing, that we elevate to become the ultimate thing in our lives.

[ 7 : 40 ] And yet, from the very beginning, marriage is not the goal. Marriage is here to serve God. Marriage isn't about two people endlessly gazing into each other's eyes, kind of oblivious of what is happening in the world around them.

Marriage is about going out into the world together to serve God in a particularly married way. So with that in mind, let me give you three questions, if you're married, which can help.

I suppose there's a bit of a diagnostic in this, to gauge the situations in our marriage. Number one, how much is your marriage a blessing to other people outside of your family?

Is your marriage something that brings other people in? Or does it kind of shut them out? Because you're so focused on one another, or your own family unit.

Question two, what role does church then play in your marriage? Do you recognize, actually, that even if you are married, that still you need other people than just each other?

[ 8 : 42 ] Does being married make you more engaged, or less engaged in the church? Are you encouraging each other in serving, or are you resenting the time that that takes?

Number three, and I suppose most importantly, how central is Jesus in your marriage? Is Jesus' priorities, is his great commission to go and make disciples to glorify God, to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, is that the same as the priorities of your marriage?

Are you encouraging each other, spurring each other on in making that your goal? Three kind of questions we can ask ourselves there. And again, the point here is not to downplay marriage or make it an entirely functional thing or to make people feel bad about the state of their marriage.

It's actually so that our expectations are right, so that marriage can be as good as it can be, so that marriage can work the best it can, so that marriage can do what it's designed for.

The author Christopher Ashe has got a really helpful book called Married for God. He says this, He's saying marriage can't hold that weight that we're tempted to put on it.

[ 10 : 08 ] He goes on to say, surprisingly, the key to a good marriage is not to pursue a good marriage, but to pursue the honor of God. The purpose of marriage and how marriage works best is serving God together.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that only those who are married can serve God or that those who are single can't do that as well. We need to recognize here that Adam is in a pretty unique situation, isn't he?

He's the only person on the planet at this point. For that reason, it's very much not good for him to be alone in that task that God has given humanity.

But absolutely, it's important to remember singleness doesn't mean we can't serve God's purposes or that we're in any way short of the resources that we need to do that.

And we could talk about that for a while. Really, all we need to do is point back again to Jesus, who, of course, was single, or to look at the example of the apostle Paul, who was unmarried and who at one point says he wishes more people could be single as he was to serve in that particular way.

[ 11 : 16 ] And so both single and married are to serve God. We're talking about marriage here, not because it is the higher calling or the priority or the default, but because simply we are making our way through this part of the Bible and that is the focus of these particular verses as they remind us of the purpose of marriage, serving God together.

And that means that marriages are not something, healthy marriages, are not something to be embarrassed about or that we need to kind of tiptoe around. But we want to pray that marriages in our, we want to pray that for marriages in our church.

We want to try and support them because they should be a blessing to the whole family as they are directed towards and prioritize the glory of God.

So there is the purpose of marriage, our first thing we see here, such an important foundation for us to get right, doing God's work together, as we see right from the very beginning here.

Okay, we're moving on. Second in these verses, we see the partners in marriage. God promises to make a partner for the man in this work who will be, it says in verse 18 again, a helper fit for him.

[ 12 : 29 ] So then who is this helper? Who does God provide? Well, obviously the answer is that God then goes on to make the woman. He makes Eve. And yet how does kind of understanding this role help us understand the relationship between male and female?

And I think both in a marriage relationship here, but also we'll see bigger than that as well. Well, the first thing to get properly clear is this word helper, a helper fit for him.

Again, I think this is a place where we can easily kind of stumble into a bit of a misunderstanding. We can easily get the idea that a helper is kind of someone who does the lesser things.

I used to run a youth group kind of many moons ago, and some of the kids would want to be helpers, and I'd say, oh, brilliant, yeah, you're a helper. It basically meant getting them to do all the things I didn't want to do or kind of making up jobs just to keep them out of the way and out of trouble, keep them busy.

Again, that's not what we're talking about here. That word used for helper here in Genesis 2, pretty much all the other times it's used in the Old Testament, it's used to describe God as the helper of his people.

[ 13 : 43 ] A couple of examples, Psalm 115, you who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. It's that same word. Or God himself, he says, as his people turn away from him, for you are against me, against your helper, he says.

Okay, so when the Bible uses that word about God in relation to his people, we can be really certain, can't we, that it's not talking about an inferior or a lesser partner.

Absolutely not. The idea here is one who supplies what is lacking. Again, not in a relational way, but in a getting things done way.

And the meaning behind this helper being fit for him, as it says there, it literally means kind of across from or opposite. The point is not someone identical, but someone corresponding to.

And so that's where Adam names all the animals in verses 19 and 20, and yet there's no correspondence. There is no helper fit for him there.

[ 14 : 53 ] And so a woman is made. And it's only one made from Adam, equal with him, who is fit for this role. And then we see there that God brings her to the man as a father kind of gives away the bride.

And Adam exclaims, the first human words recorded in the Bible, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. He shall be called woman because he was taken out of man.

And really this whole passage here is kind of geared to emphasize the complementarity of male and female. It follows that same pattern that backs up what we saw in Genesis chapter 1 where we read, in the image of God, he created him male and female, he created them.

That is equal in dignity. Both made in the image of God and yet distinct, different male and female to work together. Again, I think we can look at this perhaps in three different areas.

Firstly, in marriage is the major theme of this section. That fulfilling the purpose of serving God together requires that input from man and wife.

[ 16 : 11 ] For those who are married, that is not just one person's job. The husband isn't supposed to be reluctant or uninterested, having to be dragged into church by his wife, nor is the wife to be overly passive or slow to use the gifts that God has given her.

For that to work well, a marriage to work well, they need to embrace that actually they are complementary partners within that marriage. For that marriage to flourish, they both have a role to play in serving God together.

And actually that same principle applies secondly to the church as well. For the church, we need to recognize that all of us, male and female, are created with our own particular gifts that are to be used for the building up of God's people.

We need to, again, to embrace that equality, but also there's distinction there. And it's not to kind of pigeonhole people and say, well, all women are like this and all men are like this.

You know, there's obviously a range of gifts that we've been given. We're individuals. God made us like that. But we do also need to remember that complementariness. That actually for the church to function well, it can't just be guys doing things.

[ 17 : 32 ] And we'll be impoverished as a church if it is just women doing things. But that God brings us together as a church family, male and female, as his people to serve him for his glory.

Again, and we could talk more about this if people would like to, but as a church, we believe there are differences for the roles of men and women in the family and the church.

The Bible gives different instructions to men and women in these different areas. But we want to be so, so clear and we want to model as well as we can that male and female are partners in this.

Distinct but equal. are both vital to the building up of the church. And thirdly then, even bigger beyond marriage, beyond church, into the world, throughout history, really the kind of the clash between or the conflict we might see between male and female has been a huge feature of history and continues to be so.

That there are challenges, there are dangers, there are struggles that women have faced far more than men, not exclusively, that way, but I think that's fair to say that's the general direction.

[ 18 : 47 ] And again, it's good to ask that question, well, where does that come from? The irony here is that so often in our world, things like religion would get the blame for that.

And there would be this idea, actually, if we could just progress beyond or away from our kind of Christian roots and heritage, well, suddenly, everything would get so much better. But actually, the true problem is that we have strayed from this biblical picture rather than that we're holding too closely to it.

And it's because in our world, so often, man's reaction to woman is not to say, wow, here is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh rejoicing, but rather seeking to take advantage for their own benefit.

There have been stories in the news this week, as I'm sure there are every week, that have been highlighting those things in the medical practice and in other things as well. The solution for that isn't that men should all feel guilty over some sort of privilege.

But actually, the solution is that rather all of us should look to the good news out of Genesis. that all of us should be quick to recognize and present that the Bible opens by showing us really the world that we all want, recognizing the unity of male and female, distinct but dignified, created different but relating well, joyfully together in order to serve God.

[ 20 : 27 ] The partners in marriage, beyond that in the church and in the world, male and female, created to glorify God together. Okay, let's move on to the last point and our final couple of verses.

We've just seen, I hope, how this passage is bigger than simply talking about marriage. This isn't just kind of 10 tips for a happy marriage. But these verses finish off by bringing the focus again back to marriage.

And we see that finally, that in this work of creation here in chapter 2, the creation of man and then woman and then bringing them together, God says that we are given the pattern for marriage.

Now, this isn't so much what marriage is for, about what does marriage look like and really significantly, we're going to see what does that point to, the pattern for marriage.

Verse 24, Again, that's not saying there that everyone will be married, but it's saying that when people are married, this is the shape of it.

[ 21 : 35 ] This is the pattern that it follows. And that pattern is spelled out there, is that a husband and a wife, a male and a female, distinct but complementary, coming together in faithful, lifelong unity, becoming one flesh.

These are verses which Jesus himself quotes in Matthew's Gospel as he speaks about marriage. He refers back to this pattern, showing that this is still his understanding of what marriage is all about.

These are verses which the church throughout history has built upon as the pattern for marriage. Again, one man, one woman in faithful unity, brought together as one flesh.

And yet we're very aware that that is not the pattern that we see around us or the pattern that is promoted in the world around us. Where the kind of male-female distinction has been lost, where that permanence has been weakened or undermined, where faithfulness is often broken, where increasingly we'll see the idea of marriage as only between two people as being something that is challenged.

And that's not kind of a strange, scaremongery thing to say. That's just a fact on the trajectory our culture is on. And yet it's great that we can come back to the very beginning and we can see the Bible's clear on the pattern for marriage.

[ 23 : 07 ] And it's also great that we recognize that there will be people here in this room where that pattern hasn't worked out as the Bible teaches. And it's important that we remember that nobody here has a perfect marriage or a flawless relationship history.

And again, as we've been saying throughout these weeks in Genesis, if anyone wants to talk about any of those things, I'd be really happy to talk more about that. As we said at the start of this message, we're treading on sensitive ground here.

And the headline I suppose to say is that there is grace to cover all of those things. Whatever your situation, whatever your history, there is no one here who has written themselves off from being God's people.

There is no one here who is unable through that to join in God's purposes. It's so important we hear that. We're not a church only for people with marriages that somehow kind of measure up.

and it's absolutely not a gospel only for people with marriages that measure up to some standard. But I do want to spend the final part of our time emphasizing why still, even with all that in mind, even with our experience, even with the way that the culture around us is heading, why still this pattern is important and still it is something that we want to promote and strive after.

[ 24 : 30 ] Why we can't actually say, well, this is hard. This doesn't always work out like this. Let's just make marriage whatever we want it to be. And the reason for that is that marriage is another of these incredibly significant threads which find their beginning here in the opening chapters of Genesis but which run throughout the whole Bible, which tie everything together as one story, one whole.

The Apostle Paul shows the significance of this pattern in his letter to the Ephesians as he quotes these verses and shows its trajectory, its ultimate fulfillment.

Listen to what he says. He writes, Therefore, a man shall leave 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.

We're not able to tamper with or ignore this pattern of marriage because, as Paul tells us there, it is designed by God to point us to the perfect relationship between Christ and his church.

That is an incredible thing to say. And yet, that is why it's no coincidence that this teaching on marriage is part of this chapter which, as we saw last week, is all about the relationship between God and humanity that we were designed for.

[ 25 : 59 ] That relationship which was broken, that relationship which God has re-established in the gospel where Jesus, as the perfect groom, takes us, takes the church to be his eternal bride.

And that is the relationship which is supposed to truly satisfy us. That is the relationship we were designed for to make us whole.

And that through his forgiveness on the cross, Jesus purifies his church and welcomes us back to him. A perfectly faithful relationship where even though we make mistakes time and time again, Jesus will never let us down.

A perfectly eternal relationship. a marriage which is not even till death do us part, but which a relationship we will enjoy for all eternity in the new heavens and the new earth, being with God again, a restored Eden.

And that is what marriage is pointing us to, Christ and his church. That's what gives us hope. Those of us who recognize as we look at these verses this morning, hang on, my marriage doesn't match up to this perfect blueprint in Genesis chapter 2.

[ 27 : 18 ] Or my marriage doesn't quite kind of satisfy me the way I'd hoped it might or had been led to believe it would. It's because it was never fully supposed to, but it was to point to the perfect relationship which could.

And that's why for those who aren't married but would love to be, that doesn't mean a life where you're not quite complete. That doesn't mean having to settle for not quite being fulfilled.

because still you are invited into those things in the marriage of Jesus and his church. Jesus is the only place that you will find that fulfillment and completion.

That's why as well if you're ever about to kind of open your mouth and say something like we'll find you a husband or that guy needs a good wife just close your mouth again and don't say anything because that is not helpful and that is not biblical.

Because what people need to be pointed to is Christ and the eternal relationship they can have with him the joy they can find in him which they can find nowhere else. And that's why if thinking of marriage fills you with sadness or shame from previous relationships or from ongoing struggles that you can know that there is still perfect hope for a perfect future through trusting in Jesus and being brought into his eternal bride the church to be with him and the only relationship that does satisfy that does fill our deepest need that does make us whole that will never end a relationship with Christ himself.

[ 29 : 01 ]    God does not look at single people and say it is not good that they should be alone. God looks at those who are apart from him and says it is not good that they should be alone.

And because of that he has sent Jesus who suffered for us on the cross that we might be forgiven that we might be brought into his church and find friendship fellowship companionship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and most of all an eternal relationship with our loving creator God which will never end as Christ the perfect groom purifies us and takes us to be his bride now and for all days for all eternity the one relationship we were designed for and which will truly and eternally satisfy let's pray together together