

Created for Community

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[0 : 00] Well, as I mentioned, if you've been with us, we've been going through this creation story, and hopefully as we've looked at each day, you've recognized a pattern that is recurring here. Each day, God creates, and then at the end of that day, he's giving a benediction, a good word. He's saying, what I've created is good. And so the dry land is created, he calls it good. The sea is created, it's good. Vegetation, dry land created, it's good. Sun, moon, and stars, good. Livestock, wild animals, good.

Man, good. And then we get to this passage in chapter 2, and we see what might be a shocking pronouncement, because God looks at man, and he says, that's not good.

And so how can that be? Because this is before sin has actually entered into the world. But God is looking at his creation, saying something's not good here, and it's really a remarkable admission. Because God has created us with this innate need for a vertical relationship with God, but he's also pointing out that he's created us for a horizontal relationship with one another.

And so that's the focus of what I want us to think about today, that we were created for community. And in doing so, I really want us to focus on three things. Our design, our desire, and our destiny.

[1 : 18] Our design, our desire, and our destiny. So let's first consider our design. We remember from the last chapter, when God created man, he created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them male and female. He created them. And so we recognize that we are image bearers of God, that we are set apart from the rest of creation. But yet, while we share the sameness, male and female, there's key distinction between us.

And so I want us to consider, just for a moment, the distinctions between male, that God shows us in this creation story, and that also of the female. In verse 7, if we go back, it says that the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground.

He breathed air into his nostrils, he became this living being. So this word Adam, it comes from that Hebrew word, for dust of the ground. And he takes him, he places him in the garden with his instruction.

To work it and to care for it. And so this aligns with the instruction that we see from chapter 1. That he gives to man, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule over it. And so while we think about being image bearers, this is who we are.

[2 : 24] This is a reality, but it's also a calling and a command. And we see this play out in the life of Adam. He's given these two roles. A kingly role, and really a priestly role.

In this kingly role, it's this dynastic command that he's given to be fruitful and multiply. To create this royal race, a family, a legacy, a heritage that should continue and fill the earth.

But he's also given this command to have dominion over the earth. The same way a king would rule over his land. That Adam, that man, would be ruler over all the occupants of the earth. And secondly, we see this priestly command.

It's a command to work the garden and to care for it. This is the same language and instruction that we'd see later in the Old Testament that's given to priests. In the book of Exodus and Leviticus, of how they are supposed to care for the temple.

And so the garden really should be seen as a temple. It's a kind of sanctuary where God's presence is with his people. It's a place of worship and a place of fellowship. And so Adam, as he's living in this priestly location, he's given this priestly vocation to guard and care for and protect the temple.

[3 : 36] And so we see this played out in our passage here. God acknowledges that it's not good for Adam to be alone, but he doesn't immediately then give him a companion. He gives him the task of looking at all the animals and naming these animals.

And you wonder, maybe he did this so that Adam himself could recognize his own need. That he sees all these inferior animals around him. All of these animals that find a mate and then go populate the earth and he's left alone wondering, where's my companion?

And so we see that while Adam is created with great authority and great responsibility, there's this level of incompleteness in his isolation.

And so that then leads us to consider the role of woman. Now there's much that's been said in error or just in jest about the role of woman because they were created second. This thought of, oh, they're inferior.

Oh, they're not as important. They're subordinate in some way. But I think when we look at this creation story, it paints a very different picture. Because the timing and manner in which woman is created holds great significance that I think points to the exact opposite.

[4 : 43] Recognize that God could have made man and woman at the exact same time in the exact same way. But he chooses not to. Instead, out of all that is created, woman is created last.

We see this kind of this building until we reach this crescendo, this climax at the creation of woman. She's the crowning achievement of that creation week. She stands as the glory symbol of creation. Paul even says this in 1 Corinthians. He says that woman is the glory of man. And so again, we see how she uses this role, how she is glorified through her fulfillment and completion that she brings. Think about this pattern again of the days of creation. They coordinate with one another. Day 1, light is created. And then we see at day 4, it's the sun, moon, and stars are created.

Day and night are separated. Day 2, the skies and the waters are created. What happens on day 5? They're filled with fish and with birds. Day 3, land, dry land and vegetation.

[5 : 49] It's day 6 that we see them filled with livestock and wild animals. And so in the same way, man is created and yet is incomplete. The fullness and completion of his being comes with the creation of woman.

And so Adam doesn't get any sort of glory just from being first. In fact, it's the woman who has glory because she completes the picture. While Adam represents the creation, we should think of Eve as representing recreation.

Because she is a part of God's answer to death. It is through the woman that life is given. If we think of the very next chapter, the first proclamation of the gospel includes the seed of the woman.

And so if we think about the Garden of Eden, this is not a wholly perfect place. Because there's a potential for sin and we see that potential becomes a reality.

But this woman stands as a sign that perfection will come. She is glorious because death becomes our enemy. And so in the same way that Adam serves as a priest, Eve really serves as a temple.

[7 : 04] She's the object of the priesthood. She's the one who's supposed to be protected and cared for. And so it's really interesting to note the different words that are used for the creation of man and the creation of woman. In the Hebrew, when it talks about the creation of man, it's this word that means to be formed or fashioned in some way.

But the Hebrew word for the creation of woman is this word that means to be built or established. And so it's the same language that was used for the building of the temple.

And so just as Adam is formed from the dust, we see that Eve is built upon the dust. She is this glorious edifice that serves as a sign of the coming fulfillment of God's covenant.

And so we think, what was the purpose of the Old Testament temple that the people of God built? It was to house God's presence. It was to point forward to when God would come to dwell with his people. And so this language of building in the Hebrew, it's not only the thought of building a building, but also building a family.

And so we see this word used that Abraham builds a family and Jacob builds a family and Ruth builds a family. From whom would come the Messiah?

[8 : 14] And so the created order should reveal to us the glory and the excellence of the woman. But not only that, because I think beyond just the order, I think it's worth noting how God describes the need that man has here in verse 18.

A helper who is suitable for him. That is his need. And again, we think of helper and we may think, okay, this is kind of a second class citizens, kind of a derogatory term, maybe subservient creature. But again, this language in the Hebrew is quite different. This word suitable, it means someone who is opposite. Someone who is your counterpart. And so there exists this sameness between the two.

They're both image bearers of God, but there's functional differences here. Think about it. If God could have looked at Adam's loneliness and thought, you know what, I'll just make another one of him. If one is good, then two is better, right?

But if we think about that, what if we had a second person ourselves? Maybe we're prideful enough or arrogant to think that we'd get some work done here.

[9 : 22] But I think others around us would think rather otherwise. I know my wife probably thanks the Lord every day that there's not two of me. Right? Because that would only expose my weaknesses.

It would only make greater the need that I have. What we don't need is sameness. We need a counterpart. We need someone who complements us, who accounts for our weaknesses. And so this is the help that the woman offers. Help that the man cannot help himself. And so we see then that this help, then, it's not just a bit of assistance. It's not kind of just a push in the right direction.

This is the same word of help that God often speaks of, the help that he provides to his people Israel. And so Deuteronomy 33, it says this, Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and your helper. Think of Psalms 121. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

[10 : 23] And so the woman is the provision of this divine help so that mankind can achieve this cultural mandate. Excuse me, this creation mandate.

Fill and subdue and to rule and to care for creation. It's only together that male and female can take dominion over the earth.

It's only together that male and female can be fruitful and multiply. And so in this creation story, we should not be seeing a story of subordination between the sexes.

There's this equality here, but there's complementary differences, both in biology and in roles. And so we see it's only through this union of the two that we really can see the complexity and the beauty and the fullness of God's image.

But unfortunately, this truth is rejected by many in our day and age. Because people want to think that equality means sameness. And they want to reject the notion that there could be value and dignity in distinct roles.

[11 : 33] But as believers, we need to recognize and acknowledge and even model these distinct roles. And be sure not to exploit them. Think of the men in this church, a question that we ask.

Do we value the women that God has placed in our lives? Do we rightly acknowledge their importance not only in our families, but also in the church?

If we turn to Proverbs 31, there's this beautiful recounting of the value and virtue of woman. That she is good and productive and resourceful and hardworking and compassionate, clothed with dignity and strength.

She is wise and a blessing to others. And so while we have this instruction, especially what we see Paul talks about in the New Testament, that man is created to be overseers of the church, we need to be careful that as we lead, we do not belittle.

If the church is to grow, if our families are to prosper, if this creation mandate is to be met, it requires the wisdom and care and effort of woman.

[12 : 43] And so we need should, we should really marvel at this design. To recognize God's wisdom and kindness and creativity, how he has made man and woman equal but distinct.

That leads us to our second point then, our desire. There's a popular children's book that I've read to my children a number of times, and you may be familiar with it yourself, The Velveteen Rabbit. And it's the story of this stuffed rabbit who lives with this boy's room, and she just desires to become real. And so he asks the rocking horse one day, what does it mean to become real?

How can I become real? And the horse responds, when a child loves you for a long, long time, then you become real. And this stuffed rabbit is loved by the boy, and over years his fur becomes rather tattered and torn.

His seams are loosened, his eyes and his nose lose its new glossiness. But it's precisely because of this relationship that the rabbit actually becomes real by the end of the story.

[13 : 52] And I think we see in this passage, Adam, he senses this relationship, he sees this relationship, and he experiences this realness or this fullness for the first time when he lays his eyes on his wife Eve.

This emptiness has now been full. He's truly alive. His heart has been awoken. And so it's really neat then that the very first words recorded in the Bible of man speaking is this, of Adam's elation. This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. Finally, at last, here is one of my own kind. That is for me. And so we see this beautiful God-given desire that man has for a wife.

And then what's described for us in the very next verse, in verse 24, is what this covenant relationship should look like. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.

It's really this threefold action that we see in this covenant relationship. We see this leaving. And that's talking about this new primary loyalty that we have in marriage. It's this new pledge that supersedes all other commitments that we have to other people.

[15:02] It speaks of this union, this cleaving, this clinging. It means that this relationship is supposed to be exclusive and permanent in nature. And it talks about being one flesh.

It's this physical and spiritual and emotional union creating this covenant oneness between man and woman. And so this is the foundation by which God introduces to his people the importance and the centrality of marriage and family.

It's the design purpose of marriage that makes male and female who we are. The union of marriage. Both as image bearers of God. This is, we can, again, accomplish our creation mandate to rule and to fill the earth.

And so man is constituted both body and soul for the purpose of being a husband and a father. The woman is constituted both body and soul that she may be a wife and a mother.

And so it's this desire then is not only meant to be some flash in the pan. We think about this initial emotion that we may see that in this phase of infatuation when we get to know someone.

[16:15] But we see something very different here. This desire, as God speaks of it, is something that should grow and deepen over time. And this is what we read in Ephesians 5 earlier. That the husband is to love his wife and to care for her as Christ loves the church.

And the woman is to respect and submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ. And so this ongoing desire, it's one of commitment.

Commitment to the good of the other. And so while we see that these desires are good, we see in our day and age how they've become distorted. Because we see that before sin, our desires always fit our duty.

God gave us the duty as man and woman, this calling to rule over and fill the earth. And it was our desire to do that, to enter into marriage, to accomplish that task.

However, since the fall, that design remains, that duty remains, but the desire has now changed. Because we've now been distorted by sin. Now there is no one who has been untouched by some sexual or relational desires that have not been misdirected or corrupted in some way.

[17:32] And so consider just how predominantly featured that the sexual sin is throughout the Old Testament. We only have to go to Genesis 4 until we see it begin with polygamy.

And we see it continue with adultery and incest and prostitution, sexual violence, lust, homosexuality.

And I think the central characteristic of all these distorted desires that we see in the Bible and even throughout our own lives is desire for sexual pleasure outside of marriage. We look at marriage and we recognize this leaving and cleaving that's required.

It's this focused, sacrificial, unconditional love. Marriage by its very nature requires commitment. But oftentimes we push against that.

When I was in uni, way back in the day, in the States, I was a part of a ministry called Reformed University Fellowship. And we had a campus minister who I remember going through a series on dating and relationships and marriage.

[18:36] And he was talking about how often students would come to him with time and they were in a dating relationship and ask the question, how do I know if this is the person I should marry? How do I know that I'm ready to marry?

And his response is something that really stuck with me because at the time I was dating my future wife, Rachel. And he said this, you know you should marry when your deepest desire is to serve that person.

You see, marriage should not be viewed as a means of getting what we want. It shouldn't be viewed as a means of seeing how we can benefit from this relationship, what we can get out of it.

How can I be happy and satisfied? No, it's grounded in this desire to sacrificially love and serve another. To seek their good above our own.

And it's that desire that is linked with this sexual desire. But the distortion comes is when we seek shortcuts. We desire instant sexual gratification without any effort and without any commitment.

[19 : 39] And so we see this played out all over our society with the prominence of pornography and homosexuality and casual sex and affairs and all these things selfishly searching for wholeness with no level of commitment, with no level of effort.

But what we come to find out is that as we pursue this sexual freedom, it only really leads to our own captivity. Because we become enslaved to these idols that we so desperately want.

And we turn from what is good and are deprived ultimately of God's blessing. For those of us who have children, you probably know this. When the children come home from school and they're hungry, what do they do?

They may go directly to the cupboard and they look for the bag of crisps or the biscuits or the sweets. When you have a fridge full of fruits and veggies and other things. And maybe we blame it on children, we do this too, right?

You want a quick fix, you want something to grab. But oftentimes what we grab is something that's not actually nourishing, that's only going to leave us in a same state of hunger only a short time later.

[20 : 50] And so I think the same thing occurs when we consider our sexual desires. Rather than reaching for the nourishment of marriage, so often we run to cheap forms of sex that only lead to loneliness and shame and depression and anxiety.

Our society is suffering from the consequences of sexual malnourishment. We see it all around us. High rates of divorce, fewer people getting married, gender dysphoria, pornography addiction. And so as image bearers, we need to crave the good food of our creator. Practically speaking, what does this look like?

Well, as those of us who are married, we need to make sure that we are protecting our marriages. Do we truly value our spouse? Do we go on dates? Do we give gifts? Do we spend quality time? Do we pray together? Do we not neglect the marriage bed? It says in the problems, rejoice in the wife of your youth. Let her love alone fill you with delight.

[21 : 59] And so do we express gratitude for the spouse that God has given us? One theologian, he puts it this way. He says, how believers behave toward their spouse is nothing less than a test of their faith in Jesus Christ.

What about those who are single? How in an age of isolation can we get off of our phones and actually interact face to face with one another?

Think about the students among us. What is the challenge here? So often we hide in group settings. We just hang out with our friends. What if we had, there was a bravery enough to ask a girl out?

Women, what if you had the bravery enough to accept this invitation? Knowing that every encounter isn't going to necessarily lead to marriage. But in building these relationships, we're building and developing these skills of knowing how to love and serve the opposite sex.

Are you as singles pursuing purity, both spiritually and sexually, that you are preparing yourself for your future spouse?

[23 : 08] And what about us as a church as a whole? So often sex is a taboo topic that we just try to generally avoid altogether. But what if we regularly met as men and women to openly acknowledge the temptation and the struggle that we face?

What if we held each other accountable as we pursued personal holiness? What if we did a better job of encouraging and supporting those who are single in our church?

What if we modeled healthy relationships to the young people around us? What if we displayed the joy and fulfillment that comes by being God's image bearers to an unbelieving world?

I think we're going to drastically change our perception of relationship and our understanding of gender. And this ultimately leads us to our final point, our destiny.

Have you ever been around maybe a couple of newlyweds and you just see kind of their puppy love and it kind of just makes you sick a little bit? You kind of just roll your eyes and think, okay, just give them some time.

[24 : 21] Give them some time. This will pass. Rachel is back in the States right now. She's helping her mom kind of pack up and clean out her house as she's about to put it on the market. And she's been sending me photos these last couple of days of love letters that we wrote to one another almost 20 years ago.

And besides being just really sappy, they're embarrassing in just how naive we really were. Because we never would have imagined 17 years later, four children later, living in three different countries, two different states, now a job change. The struggles that we have gone through. And as much as we love one another, our marriage has been far from perfect. And we have let each other down. And it's guaranteed that we're going to let each other down again. And what we see is that our marriage will never ultimately bring us fulfillment because it's just a union of two sinners. Certainly, I'm sure we've all felt this tension as well. Whether we're married or not, we see God's ideal for relationship and for gender and we struggle. And we are discouraged by broken relationship or strained relationship or lack of relationship at all.

[25 : 34] And so what we need to remember is that marriage is not an ultimate in and of itself. Even from the very beginning, what we see in this passage, it's meant to be a picture of something far greater.

A picture of our loving God's desiring to be in covenant relationship with his people. So again, thinking of Ephesians 5, it speaks of the union of marriage as being this profound mystery. Because it depicts the relationship between Christ and the church. So even the most wonderful marriages are only for this life.

And so this is hope for those who are discouraged and broken and sorrowful. That we look beyond the hardship of this life to the eternal life to come.

Because just as the Bible begins with this message, this message of a marriage, it also ends with a marriage. If we turn to Revelation 19, we read this glorious gathering in heaven.

[26 : 40] This day of worship. This day of wonder in which the voices of this great multitude fill the entire earth. The wonderful reality of this passage is that those of us who have received God's grace through faith, we are the bride of Christ.

And we have been made ready for that wedding day. Through the blood of Jesus who demonstrated his unconditional love to us. Through his sacrificial love on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

And so this is what all marriage points to. So may this be a great comfort to us in the midst of our brokenness. In the midst of our distortion.

That we have a great God who loves us. And so whatever status you find yourself in in this life. We can take delight in knowing that there is a true bridegroom.

The risen Christ who has promised to love you. Promised to come again and take you home to be with him forever. To live in perfect communion in a new Eden.

[28 : 07] That is even greater than the first. Let's cling to that promise. Let's go.