

# God's gift

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[ 0 : 00 ] With Genesis 2 open in front of us, what do you think of verse 25 there?! As they stand there, Adam and his wife, end of verse 25, they felt no shame.

Do you not long to feel that too? Do you not long to feel that? In this garden paradise in Genesis 2, together, in the presence of God himself, they are totally uncovered, they can be seen and known, and they feel no shame.

That means as a person you're presentable, you're acceptable, you're clean. You have nothing to hide before the person standing next to you, or before God. You belong. You can be open and known and safe.

That is life as it's meant to be, without dishonour, without shame. Do you not long to feel that? Is that even possible for us now in our world today?

And we've just heard, read, Ephesians 5, and now the ends of Genesis chapter 2, which is the second creation account in our series in the early chapters of the Bible.

[ 1 : 16 ] After the sweeping creation epic of Genesis 1, if you were here, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He spoke, he brought order, he formed this stable good world.

He made human beings in his image to be like him and know him and serve him. Genesis 2, verse 4 onwards, swoops down and in on one location in the east, in Eden.

And in this garden, because this is where the action takes place, we meet the Lord God and the first man relating together. These verses before us, they describe the beginnings of history.

They describe our beginnings. They describe paradise. Life as God designed it to be for us with him in his world.

Last Sunday, in verses 4 to 17, we saw the Lord God forming the first man lovingly and breathing life into Adam as he did into us.

[ 2 : 18 ] The Lord God then placed the man in a delightful, rich garden full of food and beauty, gave him purpose to work and take care of the place, and ruled him rightly.

You can eat from any tree, but not that one. Genesis 2, these ancient verses, describe the life that we human beings are made for.

To walk in the presence of and live under our good creator and righteous king. And now this morning, second half of this chapter, we come to verses 18 to 25.

A short little scene that, frankly, we should be honest about this, many people would laugh at today and dismiss out of hand.

Like you see the action here, from the man's rib, the first woman made. You think, what's that about? Are you serious? And there's a song and nakedness, and it all sounds like ancient make-believe.

[ 3 : 17 ] I would love us to see, however, that what God reveals to us here, what he designs and what he does in these foundational beginnings, is very, very weighty and deeply significant for you and me and our culture and our world today.

What does this scene teach us? First this morning, our God is good, and he gives. That is, the creator of the heavens and the earth, our God who rules today, the one we belong to, is not a tyrant or a miser.

In the creation of the first woman here, see how good he is and how giving he is. Just to get a sense of that, notice this with me.

Really, verse 18, the first verse we read, should make us sit up, should make us a bit shocked, verse 18. Look at this, verse 18 with me.

Because all through chapter 1, God creates and sees his work is good. In the garden, in chapter 2, he makes trees, verse 9, that are good for food.

[ 4 : 34 ] The gold of the land, in verse 12, is good. Everything to this point in Genesis 1 and 2, in God's designed and created world, is good. It's right and beautiful. It's just as he wants.

But now, verse 18, something is missing. And God sees and knows. The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone.

What does that mean? It's not so much that the man is lonely and could do with a bit of company. Rather, it is not good for the man to be by himself with the tasks that God has given him.

You see, the Lord has placed Adam in the garden, verse 15, to work it and take care of it. More than that, mankind, in the language of chapter 1, is meant to fill the earth and subdue it, go on and develop and care for the whole world and serve God gladly, moment by moment.

And the point is, Adam cannot do that alone. It's not adequate by himself, a man, to fill the earth with people and subdue it.

[ 5 : 46 ] It's beyond him. And so in his kind goodness, it is all about kindness and goodness, this. The Lord God says, I will provide. I will make a helper suitable for him.

It's a very important verse, this. Don't miss the sense of this. Later in Genesis, do you know this? God himself is described as a helper to his people because of your father's God who helps you. Because of the Almighty who blesses you. Same word. So know that there is nothing demeaning or degrading about being created as a helper.

A helper here is someone who will stand with the man, is suitable for the man, will fit him and provide what he can't, who will help him to fill the earth and subdue it like the man, yet clearly different from him.

God says, I will provide. So now see the story flow on. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.

[ 6 : 58 ] 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 in the sky and all the wild animals.

But here's the thing. Amongst all those living creatures for Adam, top of page five, no suitable helper was found. And so in verse 21, the Lord God acts miraculously.

Can you picture this? So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep so that God alone could act. Notice this.

She is a woman. She is like the man and yet different from him. I don't think it's only this, but foundationally here as a woman, her body is different from his.

For she, unlike him, is able to bear and nurture children to help fill the earth. The Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and now having made her, verse 22, he brought her to the man.

[ 8 : 29 ] Now look at this bit. Adam wakes up, I guess, from his deep sleep, his anaesthetic. He rubs his eyes and there she is in front of him.

And the moment he sets his eyes on her for the very first time, he is so bowled over, he bursts into song. It's like slightly old fashioned lyrics. It's not Ed Sheeran perfect or something like that.

But you sense the joy here. He sings. This now at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She's mine.

She's for me. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man. She's the one. She's like him yet different from him.

She's for him. He is not alone now. This man and woman will fit one another. That is God's gift. Relationally, bodily, man and woman can be bound and joined together at the deepest level and able to serve their Lord and God as one.

[ 9 : 36 ] Verse 24. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh. And the first man, Adam and his wife, were both naked and they felt no shame.

So do you see what's happened? After the not good of verse 18, now everything is good. And it is all God's doing.

The basic thing to notice here. Here in the garden, do you see? God is good. God is good. And he gives. And he provides everything and everyone for humanity to flourish.

And we'll go on and talk about verse 24 and marriage in a second. But before we do, just pause and reflect on this so far.

By the end of Genesis chapter 2, God's good design for his world and us. And how good and generous he is. Let me mention a couple of things.

[10:42] This might feel like a change of tone, but it's not. With what we have just read in mind, I should mention briefly here something about gender and identity. Something good, yet controversial in our world today.

Would you notice in Genesis 1 and 2, God does not give us 81 or more gender options for us to pick from? It's worth mentioning that because in the UK today, I do want to say how destabilizing that is for young people and others.

How confusing, how pressuring, how damaging to desperately seek to define yourself and then even go down a path of drugs and surgery for a self-made happiness you'll never find.

It's awful. In creation here, see God's good design for our good. Because in and flowing from these verses in Genesis 2 come two given genders.

You're a boy, man, like Adam. You're a male human being. Or you're a girl, woman, like Eve, a female human being.

[12:06] Who you are is given and stable. Doesn't depend on what you feel or what society says you should be like. God formed you.

God made you. As a woman, as a man, your dignity and value and worth is given and comes from God.

That is good. First thing to say. And, maybe this is a bit more general, like everything else in Genesis 1 and 2, the creating of man and woman here really does display and cap God's goodness.

Do you not think? We mentioned last Sunday when we were earlier in chapter 2, the monster lie that says the God of the Bible is some kind of demanding, restricting, life-sapping authority figure. And the suggestion kind of hangs around that Bible Christians can end up like that too. You follow what it says in the Bible and you create some kind of grim, handmaid's tale kind of world.

[13:15] But by Genesis 2, verse 25, what do you see? What do you see? The first man formed tenderly and placed in this fertile, beautiful paradise, given trees for food.

And now he knows one who's bone of his bones, who makes him sink. And the delight for Adam and his wife of being one flesh and standing without shame next to one another, serving their maker.

All of that, God's design, his purpose, his gift from our good Lord and God. That is how life is meant to be. This is God's design.

And it's good for Adam, for us. You and I flourishing, men and women, under the rule of a God who still today gives and gives.

Do you believe that? That said, point one, let's come back now to verse 24.

[14:22] Because, did you notice this? As we're told about what happens with Adam and Eve in chapter 2, in verse 24, the writer kind of steps back from the story and draws a lesson for all of humanity.

Which is that God is good and gives marriage. Look at this really closely with me. I'm going to read again from verse 23.

As the man wakes up and sees her, the man says, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.

And now, verse 24, do you see how things change? Listen up, people reading Genesis 2. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.

In the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 19, Jesus himself is asked a question about marriage and divorce. And he answers by pointing to Genesis 1 and 2.

[15:32] Just see this with me on the screen. Haven't you read, Jesus replied, that at the beginning the creator made them male and female? Jesus quotes Genesis 1, 27.

And the creator said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. Genesis 2, verse 24.

So Jesus in his ministry says, God the creator said, Genesis 2, 24. And it's talking about marriage. So we need to look at this then.

The gift of God in creation. Marriage. Not a man-made institution that we have come up with. But rather a relationship defined and given by God.

For all of history. For every society. And for our flourishing. So what does verse 24 say of Genesis 2? We're going to have to look really carefully at this.

[16:40] Because some in our world have moved very far away from what God says here. I should talk carefully about this as well. Because I'm aware that the Bible's teaching on marriage and sex and relationships may be a very sensitive and raw area for some of us too.

But here is an opportunity to think really clearly together. I've tried to sum things up. Marriage, verse 24, God's gift, is a public, permanent, physical union between a man and a woman.

See if you notice this with me. Let's work through it. Verse 24 says, So first thing, marriage means a public and obvious leaving and a cleaving.

A joining together as you leave one family and start another. The man publicly transfers his loyalty as he leaves his parents and is united to his wife.

I say that. Have you ever been to a wedding in the UK in a church? You kind of see that acted out. Maybe you take that for granted if you've been to a wedding. But he, the groom, arrives early with his family.

[18:06] Should do. And they all sit on one side. And then she arrives a touch later. And she walks up the aisle with her father. And her hand is then given to the groom.

And then the father steps back and takes his place. And then at the end of the service, it's husband and wife who return down the aisle and out together.

A public change. First thing. Second thing, notice this. United in verse 24.

It means bound together. Stuck together in loving, permanent commitment. I will stay faithful to you as long as we both shall live.

A public union. A permanent union. Marriage. And then, verse 24 again, husband and wife become one flesh. In part, that is a vivid glimpse.

[19:11] It's an image, one flesh, of sex. God's gift. Where the first woman having been taken out of man. As husband and wife with their God-given different bodies and sexual desires and drive.

They fit together again. In intimate love. One flesh. A physical expression of their union together. And that's marriage. And that's marriage. Here and through the Bible. And marriage is the God-given good place for his gift of sexual intimacy.

And coming from that, sometimes children who will fill the earth. And then finally, notice here in these verses, marriage is between one man and one woman.

That's what marriage is here in Genesis 2. Genesis 2. Not a man and a man. Or a woman and a woman. But someone who's taken out of man.

[20:15] She different from him. And then man and woman united together. Genesis 2. In creation, God is good.

And he gives marriage. You don't need me to tell you, and I can sense that you know this.

But this teaching here, it speaks very sharply and radically into our culture today, doesn't it? God's good design says no to casual cohabitation.

Just moving in with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Like you're married, but it's private and vague. God's good teaching here says no to divorce.

With a couple of exceptions in the Bible. Because marriage is permanent. And what God has joined together, let no man separate. God's good teaching here says that same-sex, so-called marriage, really isn't marriage at all.

[21:21] According to God. Despite what the government says. And some in the Church of England would like to say. And for sure.

The Bible's teaching here places one flesh sexual intimacy only within the context of marriage. That's how God has designed sex for us.

And these days in our world. Not just in the past few years. That's long, long gone, has it not?

Because we do live in a world and a culture now where sexually there are no real boundaries.

Apart from what you don't consent to. We're free to do what we want, with whom we want, when we want. It is my body. And for the sake of young ears, I won't flesh out what that looks like.

But the purity of Genesis 2, 24 and 25 is so different. So, well, ridiculously restrictive, many would say.

[22:24] Do you not think? To which I think we should say no. It's not restrictive and bad. God's way, God's design in Genesis 2 absolutely is good and right.

I think actually more than anything else, that's what life in this Genesis 2 paradise is showing us. And it's true for sex and marriage as well.

And the honest truth is many of us actually will know the destructive effects of choosing to live outside of God's ways. Or of being caught up in that through things we've experienced or have been done to us.

Messing up our marriages. And our minds and our bodies. Screwing up families. Getting burnt. Hurting. And getting hurt.

The truth is living outside of paradise. And having turned from what God says here, we are a sexually bruised and broken society.

[ 23 : 32 ] And there is guilt and shame that sticks to us. Could it be that God's design is good? We should say it is.

It really, really is. These verses in Genesis 2 here. The God, the good giving God who gives marriage.

Not for every one of us. Not for Jesus himself. Who lived a full life without being married. And yet marriage is God's precious gift in creation for all of history and every society.

A man and a woman together for good. And safely and wonderfully. Sexually intimate. Unashamed together. Playing their part, if they can, in filling the earth.

Living together in stable faithfulness. Turning outwards to serve others. And upwards to live for their God. Is that good? That is good. It is something to be honoured.

[ 24 : 44 ] That's Genesis 2. 18 to 25. Which describes the beginnings of history and our beginnings. A giving God.

A good creator and king who rules and provides. A God who creates man and woman and gives marriage. And in verse 25. When all is said and done. Stop the Bible at this point. Adam and his wife were both naked.

And they felt no shame. Together with their God. Adam and his bride have all they need. And nothing to hide. A life of flourishing. As it's meant to be for us in God's world.

Which is so good. And yet at the same time. However many years later. May leave us feeling a bit. Flat.

To say the least. Because. With this verse in front of us. Although you and I do have a God who provides for us.

[ 25 : 43 ] Who we can know as we've said. We are no longer in the Garden of Eden. In our now sin marked and fallen world. Man and woman so often don't take delight in each other.

Some of us would love to be married. And we're not. And it hurts. Some of us are married. And it hurts.

Many of us. Many of us undoubtedly have done wrong sexually. Many will bear the scars and damages of past relationships.

And some among us will know a deep shame. That we cannot almost bear. Not. We can't bear to be seen almost. And so you read Genesis 2 and verse 25.

It seems so, so far from us. What do we do? We'll hear this finally this morning.

[ 26 : 45 ] In the last few minutes. Did you know this? In his goodness and his grace. Our God still holds out to us today.

This life without shame in paradise. And that is because the whole Bible story. And all of salvation history. Is heading unstopably towards a day.

A day of restoration. A day of no shame. A wedding day. I want to show you this as we finish.

It might blow your mind. And you think. What's going on there? On the screen here are some words from the New Testament. From Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 30 onward.

That Emily read. The Apostle Paul in these verses. Is talking about the relationship between Jesus and his people. Christian believers. The church.

[ 27 : 43 ] Just look at this with me. Look at what he says. Paul says. We are members of his body. Christ's body. We are bone of his bones. And flesh of his flesh.

And Paul then quotes Genesis 2 verse 24. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother. And be united to his wife. And the two will become one flesh.

And then he says. This. The verses we've been looking at. Is a profound mystery. But I am talking about Christ. And the church. And do you notice what's happening in these verses?

Paul is saying. That the Genesis 2 marriage. Between Adam and his bride. Finds its fulfillment. In the perfect marriage.

Between Jesus Christ. And the church. Let me say that again. The Genesis 2 marriage. Between Adam and his wife. And this life of no shame.

[ 28 : 44 ] Finds its perfect fulfillment. In the marriage between Christ. And the church. There is a second Adam.

Jesus. Jesus. Who came into this fallen world. For his bride. He came into the world. For an uncountable number of people. Like you and me.

The church. For people who turned to Christ. And put their trust in him. And what did he do for us? This man. Ephesians chapter 5.

Verses 25 to 27. Christ loved the church. And gave himself up for her. He came into the world. To people who know.

Sexual sin and shame. And he gave himself for us. He gave his body. As a sacrifice for us. And he did that. Verse 26. To make her holy.

[ 29 : 44 ] Cleansing her by the washing with water. Through the word. He died. To wash away. Our sin. And shame. So that. Verse 27. He might present us.

To himself. As a radiant church. Without stain or wrinkle. Or any other blemish. But holy. And blameless. This verse here.

Ephesians 5. 27. Describes the future wedding day. To which all of creation is moving. A day of which Adam and his wife in the garden.

Is a shadow. And a foretaste. For on that day. You will see one man. The Lord Jesus Christ. And by his side.

His perfect bride. He's talking about you and me. And countless millions of people. Who know and follow Christ. With this in mind.

[ 30 : 40 ] We are meant to picture this. Could you picture this day? The Lord Jesus. Standing next to his bride. Unashamed.

He has borne our sins. And shame upon himself. He has absorbed them into himself. And as the church. His bride. Stands alongside him.

And with him. We receive his honour. And in that moment. All of God's people. Presented to him. Are radiant. And clean.

And holy. And accepted. You see in your eyes. Genesis 2.25. Adam and Eve. Standing next to one another.

Naked and unashamed. Now look forward in history. To where all of history is heading. And the certain future. For every person. Who places their trust in Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 37 ] In a new creation paradise. In the presence of God himself. We will stand alongside the one who loves us. And we will feel no shame.

You're presentable. You're acceptable. You have nothing to hide before anyone else. Or before God. You belong.

You can be open. And known. And safe. That is where history is heading. That is life as it's meant to be. And that is the no shame life.

That we can enjoy. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the no shame life. I'm going to lead us in a prayer.

Let's pray together. Almighty God and Father.

[ 32 : 35 ] How we need your word to us. We thank you this morning for your good design. For your world.

And for us. For how you create as male and female. Man and woman to be like one another yet different. To play our parts together in serving you.

In your world. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. The bridegroom. Who gave himself for us. That we might be purified.

And belong to him forever. And know all our shame washed away. Make us those we pray. Who line up our lives with your word.

And may we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ forever. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.