

God's Design for Marriage

Genesis 2:23-25

Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapters 1 and 2, as we continue our study of this book. We have embarked on a journey that will take us through the Bible, and we are not even going to guess how long it will take. It may take five to seven years. We have started at the beginning, which has been an exciting thing, and I appreciate the response that I have had from you. I see you bringing your Bibles; I see you taking notes, and it thrills my heart to know that you have the desire to study and learn God's Word.

In Genesis, chapter 1, we have discovered the amazing truths of the perfectly designed creation of God – especially in our last discussion, while looking at the human body. We learned that over and over and over again, as God saw what He had made,

... God saw that it was good ...

God saw and, "It was good! It was good! It was good! It was very good!" – as He summarized the six days of creation. However, in chapter 2, verse 18a,

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone ..."

Then God says, "But something is not good –and that is that man is alone." And He says, in verse 18b,

... I will make a helper suitable for him.

The name Adam comes from the Hebrew word that means "earth". God created man out of earth. The same chemical elements that make up mankind are in the ground. He then takes a portion of Adam's side and creates, or literally sculpts, a woman. "He will build her" is the literal translation of the Hebrew words.

If your translation reads "a helpmeet," then draw a line between the words "help" and "meet". These are two Hebrew words that could be translated literally, "a helper suitable". They mean, "one who complements; one who fills up the empty spaces of man; one who fits". Note, it is not "one who gives fits," it is "one who is fit to". In fact, the Hebrew, I recently discovered, could literally be translated in this fashion, "one answering back to". But do not take that too literally!

God knew exactly what He was doing when He sculpted into existence the first woman, Eve. He introduces her to man in verse 22 of chapter 2.

The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man caught his breath – that is in between the lines! I think it took him a while before he could speak. In fact, I think perhaps they talked for hours, until finally, as we previously discussed, Adam makes an introduction of this woman to the rest of creation. In verse 23a, He perhaps stands up, quiets the animals, and says, "Look,"

... This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ...

After the word "now," the words "at last!" could be inserted. Adam is literally saying, "This is now, at last, finally, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. I now have, at last, a counterpart, one answering to, one who will fill up the void. Flesh of my flesh!"

Adam continues in verse 23b,

... she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Principles of the Marriage Relationship

Now, in our discussion today, I want to give some principles relating to the marriage relationship. These are taken from the text and will make the marital relationship firm and enduring. They still apply today and are as powerful and as timely as they were centuries ago. It is interesting that God will move directly into this after introducing Eve to Adam.

The Principle of Consideration

1. Let us call the first principle, the principle of consideration. Look at verse 24a,

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother . . .

Now understand that God, in this verse, is not speaking in reference to the relationship with the mother and father. In fact, wise is the individual who recognizes when he or she gets married that it is really two worlds merging into one larger one. The relationships of your wife or husband are brought into that marriage and become your relationships. So, at that point, you are involved with uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, mothers and dads-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law, perhaps sons and daughters, and all of these are involved in this larger world.

God is not saying to abandon your mother and father, which is a literal translation of the word leave.

He is not saying to abandon them in terms of your relationship with them – that is going to continue. In fact, you are creating relationships with another family; another entire world.

God is also not referring, ladies and gentlemen, to the sense of responsibility. We do not abandon our sense of responsibility toward our father and mother. In fact, Jesus' harshest words were toward the Pharisees who were abandoning their parents in taking care of them in their aged state (Mark 7). They were hoarding their finances so that moms and dads who were unable to take care of themselves were left alone and were in poverty. The Pharisees were saying, "Well, we've dedicated this money to God, so we can't give it away."

Jesus Christ pointed a finger through their façade and said, "If you cannot take care of them, you are not religious. In fact, you don't even know God."

God, in this passage, is not referring to abandoning a relationship or the responsibility. So, what does He mean when He talks of leaving? Let me give what I think He is saying.

God is referring to priority; to the sense of direction. So, a man and a woman leave the nest and create for themselves their own purpose; their own direction. Their marital relationship takes priority over any other relationship. The responsibility to the wife or husband now has priority over every other relationship in existence. No human relationship then, ladies and gentlemen, should have priority over your marital relationship.

This means that you may strike out on a different course than Mom and Dad would want. You may try some things that they may never try. You may go places that they might never go.

I think this verse also involves the parents of those who marry. This is the painful part because this means that fathers will have to suffer the pain of knowing their little daughters are now looking to another man. I get choked up thinking about it. Can you imagine what it will be like? When my little girls marry – forty years from now? They are going to look toward another man for strength and guidance. It is great being first place in their little lives. I love it! But there is going to come a day when they are going to say, "Dad, I want to introduce you to this guy. He now is my life; my world."

He will be unworthy, of course! And, there will come a day when I may hear that they have purchased an automobile that I do not think is a good deal. The temptation for all dads is to just march over there and give them that lecture. You know, the one on Fiscal Responsibility 332. But you have to bite your tongue, because they have to learn.

One difficulty, I have been told, is that many couples live with their parents' values in mind, rather than formulating their own. You may be married and afraid to develop your own direction; your own values, because more than anything in the world, you want to hear Dad say, "You're doing a great job!" and you want to hear Mom say, "I'm pleased with your direction."

Do you know what God says? God says that what your parents say is now secondary. You, as husband and wife, together are to strive to hear *Him* say, "I'm pleased!"

It means, moms, that your son is now going to be cared for by a woman of different tastes. You know he does not like to eat that food, but you had better not tell her – let her find out. You know how he likes to have his shirts washed and pressed, do not dare advise – let that girl find out for herself.

What I am suggesting is that this message of abandonment is not just for the husband and wife – it is also for the parents. And the message is, “Let them go!!” In fact, you will be doing a great service to your young people, if you will allow them to develop their own values, priorities, and direction.

There are several periods in a marriage, I have read and have experienced a few of them, of course, that create a tremendous amount of stress on a marriage. The first few years and the birth of a child, to name a couple. It is in those situations that moms and dads who watch their married kids can really help their direction. When that daughter comes to you and says, “Dad, I don’t know what to do.”

You could ask her, “Did you ask your husband? What does he think?”

When your son says, “Mom, I’m not sure what I should do in this situation.”

Your response could be, “Did you ask your wife?”

It is in times such as these that parents can have a tremendous impact in developing the direction of their young people. I know it is hard to let go. I will discover that one day. Some of you could tell me by experience.

I cannot believe this is true and you probably will not believe it either, but I read recently of a situation where a mother did not want to let go of her newlywed son. This mother called her son three times on his wedding night! Now that is kind of funny, but I thought about it and wondered, what kind of mother would call her son on his wedding night? Then, I thought about it a little longer and wondered, what kind of dummy would leave his phone on the hook?

God is saying, in the first manual on marriage, that your marital relationship takes priority. It may mean disagreeing with mom and dad at times. It may mean taking a different direction and establishing different values. But the marital relationship takes priority. That is the principle of considering that wife above all other women; that husband above all other men; above all other relationships. That is the principle of consideration.

The Principle of Commitment

2. Let me give the second key principle that I see in this text. It is found in the word “cleave,” and is the principle of commitment. Look again at chapter 2, verse 24, at the second part of the verse.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined [cleave] to his wife . . .

The word “cleave” could be literally translated, “weld or grip”.

The marital scene in America today would change drastically if couples would come into marriage with one basic proposition – that there is absolutely no way out! As one man wrote, “Commitment is taking your hand off the doorknob to the back door of your marriage.”

There is no way out, but there is a way through. If you have in your marriage a fire escape, there will come a time when you are going to run for it. So, you had better seal it up.

Fulfilling marriage involves three commitments

One man wrote that there are three very important commitments in marriage. In fact, these are right out of Scripture. Let me give these three commitments that are important in a marriage and are included in this principle of commitment. They involve three relationships.

The commitment between you and the Lord

- The first commitment is between you and the Lord.

If you are going to have the principle of commitment in your marriage, it means you are committed to the Lord. This is crucial. Before you ever talk about a relationship with another human being, talk about your relationship with God. The reason for this, husbands, is that there is no way in the world that you could ever love your wife without first understanding and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ. How else are you to love your wife like Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25)?

The commitment between your spouse and the Lord

- The second commitment is, of course, the relationship between your spouse and the Lord.

You had better encourage it. Bless your heart if you get in the way of your spouse's relationship with the Lord. God help you if your spouse has to wake you up and get you out of the bed in the morning to go to church. You are hindering the potential relationship. If your breakfast is late because she or he is reading God's word, *fantastic!* Encourage that relationship that they have with the Lord.

A young man walked into my office recently, and asked if I would perform his wedding. He had never attended this church. In fact, I had never seen him before. So, I just asked him a few questions about his relationship with the Lord. It was nonexistent.

I explained to him the truth. I said, "Look, how can the Lord not be involved in your marriage? He is the One who designed your marriage. He is the One who has the manual for it. In fact, if you build it without the Lord, according to David, in Psalm, chapter 127, verse 1, you are going to labor in vain."

He was not very interested. I shocked the daylight out of him by looking him in the eye and saying, "Look, man, why don't you just skip the marriage and live with your girlfriend?"

"What? What are you suggesting that for?"

I simply told him, "Since God's idea is marriage, and since God is not a part of your marriage, He's not going to be involved. Why worry with appearances? Having a ceremony in a church is absolutely meaningless. You want it your way, do it your way. But if you want to do it God's way, then God has to be involved. You need a right relationship with Jesus Christ if you're ever going to pull it off. Your spouse needs to have a right relationship with the Lord if you are to ever experience the kind of commitment He wants."

The commitment between you and your spouse

- Finally, the commitment needs to exist between you and your spouse.

Notice that I placed this relationship last. That is because it hangs upon the balance of the other two. Show me a woman who is out of fellowship with Jesus Christ, and I will show you a woman who is out of fellowship with her husband. Show me a man who is in rebellion to the word of God, and I will show you a

man who is impossible to live with. Marriage hangs upon the first two commitments being in proper perspective.

A respected professor of mine said that eighty-five percent of his marital counseling, as a man who has been teaching God's word for nearly forty years, involves a man or woman who walks into his office and says these words, "I'm not getting out of my marriage what I deserve."

He knows that they are already in phase three in the deterioration of the marriage. That is when spouses begin to concentrate on "I, me, my," and never say the words "we, us".

How could we ever circumvent the selfish nature of our own being? By having a relationship with Jesus Christ and learning to die to self and to live to Him. Then we can live in the proper perspective of our horizontal relationship.

The Principle of Companionship

3. One more principle relating to the marriage relationship is the principle of companionship. Look at verses 24 and 25.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Now this union obviously involved physical intimacy, but it involves much more. That is why I call this the principle of companionship. It also involves spiritual, emotional, and mental unity. It involves two people going in the same direction. That is the principle of companionship.

One man writes that this involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits.

Do you know what is happening today? People get married and the husband goes this way and the wife goes that way. They go in separate directions after separate pursuits. Days off are spent alone. There is no pursuit of developing this companionship. At night, when they are together, the television is on and very little conversation takes place. Then, they separate to go to work, come home tired, and the day off is for themselves.

I want to say something that may shock you, but I believe it is true. I believe many husbands and wives

today are lonely. I believe an evaluation of most marriages in America would find the missing ingredient of companionship; would find husbands and wives who are lonely. It is possible to live under the same roof with someone and still not have a companion; still not have that close friend that God designed.

One clinic took a survey and found that nearly ninety-five percent of those interviewed expressed that they did not feel close to their mate. That is sad. Do you know why that is so sad? Because the basis, the first thing that God said He would do for man was alleviate loneliness. Man is lonely and that is not good. And on the basis of that, He built someone, He formulated, created, sculpted someone who would fill in the void, fill the need, answer back to, complement.

Isn't it interesting, my friends, that when God sought to alleviate the loneliness of man, He did not create ten good friends? He created a woman; a wife.

Now that implies something, men and women. Let me speak to just the men for a moment. If you are bored and lonely today, the solution is not a hobby – the solution is not a bag of golf clubs; the solution is not another friend. The solution is developing a companionship, a warm and vital friendship with your wife.

Ladies, if you are lonely today, do you know what the solution is that is implied in this text? You are to develop a companionship with your husband; a warm and vital friendship with the man that God intended to fill in your void and lonely places.

Three ways to develop marital companionship

Let me give three ways to develop companionship in your marriage; three words that will develop companionship with your spouse.

Confidence

- The first word is confidence.

Confidence is a key ingredient to developing companionship with your spouse. Turn to Proverbs and look at chapter 17, verse 9, which says,

He who conceals a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Who is separated? “Intimate friends” or companions.

The longer you live with your spouse, the more you will understand and know their weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings. That is information that God intended for you to know. So many times, however, when couples argue, the first thing that comes out is something that is used as a weapon directed at one of the weaknesses.

For instance, a man may open up to his wife and admit to her that he is incapable of or finding it difficult to handle finances. The next time they have an argument, guess what comes out? “You never have a penny in your pocket.”

What do you think happens after that? He is going to clam up.

A wife may admit to her husband that she really feels intimidated about being compared to her mother. Oh boy! We have got a weapon now. When the next argument erupts and reaches a peak, out comes, “You’re just like your mother!”

Guess what – you have just broken confidence.

Wives, sometimes you know things about your husbands that you share with other ladies at work. And men, you share things about your wives with other men at work. My friends, you are destroying the potential for companionship – because there is no confidence; because you cannot trust each other.

Solomon says, in this Proverbs verse, that in order to have companionship or confidence, you must cover transgressions and not repeat them.

Communication

- Let me give you another word that I think is crucial in developing companionship, and that word is communication.

Let me give you two thoughts concerning communication. All of these begin with “C’s,” so hopefully, we will be able to remember them a little more easily.

Communication through confrontation

- First is confrontation – that is part of communication.

You might say, “Wait a second, I thought I wasn’t supposed to criticize my spouse.”

I am not suggesting that you be critical, but let me turn your attention to Proverbs, chapter 27, to look at what Solomon says. Now, you might say that the

reason you never say anything to your mate is because you love them; the reason that you never confront them about something is because you love them. And aren't you just supposed to accept everything?

Well, what does Proverbs, chapter 27, verses 5 through 6a, say?

Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

In other words, the wounds of rebuke are more productive in developing character than the kisses of an enemy, which are deceitful.

I have seen couples where the wife does not say a word; where she is the model of passivity. Some husbands might say, "Well, I'd like to learn the secret of that one."

No, you would not. The reason you would not is because of what happened behind closed doors, behind the scenes. It may have even happened out in the open. The wife suggested something to the husband, and *bang*, "Don't you give me advice. I'm the commander of this ship."

The husband has squelched the potential confrontation that would ultimately sharpen him. The same is true of the husband advising the wife, but I have seen it more with wives advising husbands. The husbands do not want to hear it and would rather their wives remain silent. And yet, they have been robbed of one of the best things a marriage provides. That is a sharpening impact of that mate toward you in confronting you with things that you cannot see; that you are blind to.

I read a story that is kind of humorous and yet, it is not. A husband and wife were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Everyone always admired their relationship because she was just the kindest thing and he could do just about anything he wanted to do and she would never say a word. They asked her one day, "How did this happen? What's your secret?"

She replied, "Well, it happened on our honeymoon. We went to the Grand Canyon and were taking two mules down the side of the Grand Canyon. My husband's mule stumbled, and he grabbed him by the ears and shook him and said, 'That's once.' A few yards further, the mule stumbled again and my husband took him by the ears and said, 'That's twice.'

Finally, the third time the mule stumbled, my husband got off the mule, got out a pistol, and shot the mule. I started to protest, but he ran over to me, grabbed me by the ears and said, 'That's once.'"

Would you look at verse 17 of Proverbs, chapter 27? If this isn't talking about the marital relationship, I don't know what is.

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

The spouse, the mate that God has given you is iron. Someone said that a good marriage creates enough friction that it is like sandpaper in rounding off the rough edges. That is what this verse is talking about when it says, "Iron sharpens iron".

Husbands, when you cause your wives to clam up, and wives, when you are advised by your husbands on something you cannot see and you respond, "I don't want to hear that," you have drawn lines around your marriages. You have seen it, perhaps you have been involved in it – there is a line and, buddy, don't step across that line. If you do, you're on my turf. That's mine and don't say anything about that. As a result, you have a blind spot in your life that your mate cannot help you with because you refuse to hear. Confrontation is crucial and sharpening.

Communication through counsel

- Let me give you the second word, and that is counsel. Counsel is also a part of communication.

Look at Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 9. I like this verse.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

God has given the husband and wife an excellent source of objective wisdom. In fact, I think a marriage is strong when the couple is literally counseling one another.

Now, when you, as a husband, want advice and ask your wife and she responds, do not say, "Well, that's kind of dumb. I'll do it my way after all."

No, accept the counsel. Solomon says the counsel is sweet. I think he implies, of course, in this verse, that the attitude in which we counsel our mate and as well, the attitude in which we confront our mate, is

sweet. Confronting is never intended to tear down, it is always intended to build up.

Now, you may think, “Well, my wife never listens to my counsel,” or, “My husband never listens to my advice.” Perhaps you should look at the way you give it. Is it sweet like perfume? Is it laced with love?

So, in order to develop companionship, we need confidence and communication.

Caring

- Let me give you one more word, and that is caring.

The word “care” comes from the Gothic root that means, “to lament, to grieve”. Isn’t it interesting that we get our word “care” from that? Why? Because to lament, or to grieve is to be emotionally involved with the effects, the situation, the life of another human being. So, if I am to care for my spouse, that means I am emotionally involved in that which hurts, that which helps, that which brings joy into his or her life.

Caring is the tangible expression of love. Love is intangible. You can say, “I love my mate,” until you are blue in the face, but until you make tangible expressions by caring – which might include taking the garbage out, washing the dishes, sending a card or writing a note, calling on the phone unexpectedly – it has no meaning. Caring is the tangible expressions of love such as these, and that develops companionship.

Conclusion

I think we could best illustrate marriage by watching a child learn to walk. It has been a joyful thing to see my children learn to walk. Many of you have seen it happen.

First, they sit on the ground and all of a sudden, they get the bright idea to start crawling. After a while, they get down on their hands and knees, but they do not have the motor running yet. They just kind of sit there and rock back and forth. Finally, the motor starts and they start crawling all over the house.

Then, they get the idea that, “Hey, there’s a couch over there. If I crawl over to the couch, maybe I can pull myself up and stand up like my dad or mom or brother or sister.”

And would you believe it, they finally pull themselves up and they are standing. Boy, the celebration begins. You break out the camera. You take thirty-five shots. Ten years later, you wonder,

“What are all those shots of this little kid standing at the couch?” But that was when it happened.

Finally, the child sees dad or mom sitting across the living room floor and they think, “It’d be great if I could walk across to them.”

And do you know what happens? They take their first step. Bang! And they sit there awhile, and they think, “Well, let’s back up and try that again.”

So, they take a couple of steps. Over a process of days and weeks, although after they start walking, you wish it had taken years, but they finally take two or three steps into your open arms. You rejoice and have another celebration. They have learned to walk!

No matter how long you have been walking though, you always have the capacity to stumble and fall. No matter how long you have been married, that is also is a process in which you crawl, you pull yourself up, you take a step, and bang, you fall. Then, you pull yourself up again and walk a couple of steps, and you fall again, you blow it. Now, wouldn’t it be foolish for that child to sit on the floor, after trying about five hundred times, and saying, “Well, Dad, I guess I’m not called to walk.”

So many couples fall and stumble and get up and fall again, and then, some may come to the conclusion, “Well, I guess God doesn’t want us to walk together.”

My friend, when you fall and stumble, and you will, because you will always have the capacity, the difference will be that you are developing a relationship. Built into it are the principles of consideration, commitment, companionship.

Where do we start? First of all, we start with our relationship to the Lord. Then we stop with our relationship with our spouse. We leave it up to the Lord how they will respond, but we do what is right.

May our marriages be characterized with the ingredients: consideration, commitment, companionship, confidence, counsel, and caring.

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