

One of my favorite stories regarding the family is told by David Jeremiah. A mother had two incorrigible sons whom she could not control. She consulted child psychologists, read books and listened to tapes, but still struggled. One day, her neighbor recommended her pastor, and said, "I was having trouble with my child once. My pastor talked to him, and a big change took place." So the mother scheduled an appointment.

The younger child sat in the waiting room while the older boy went in first to see the pastor. The mother waited in the car. The older boy stared at the intimidating decor of the office furniture while waiting for the pastor to enter. The pastor of this rather liturgical church had just finished a wedding, when he walked into the study wearing his long, dignified black robe. He sat down behind his big walnut desk, sized up the boy for about 30 seconds of silent reflection, and then said, "Young man, where is God?" The boy freaked out. He didn't know what to say, and sat speechless. The pastor repeated the question, "Young man, I asked you, where is God?" The boy was paralyzed and petrified with fright. Finally, the agitated man of the cloth raised his voice and thundered the third time, "Young man, I said, where is God?" At that, the boy jumped up out of his chair, ran out of the office, grabbed his brother by the arm, and as they ran from the building was heard to say, "Come on Johnny, let's get out of here. They've lost God, and they're trying to pin it on us!"

This morning, we are beginning a new series entitled, "God's Design for the Family." This will be a six-week study of the Word of God. The purpose of this series is to strengthen our family relationships and bring glory to God in our homes. God designed the family. God tells us in His Word how He intends for the family to operate. In our weeks together, we'll explore what the Bible has to say about the following topics:

- Week #1 "Back to Basics on Marriage"
- Week #2 "What God Expects of the Husband"
- Week #3 "God's Design for the Wife"
- Week #4 "Communication in the Home"
- Week #5 "The Goal of Parents"
- Week #6 "The Responsibilities of Parents"

Someone might think, "But I don't have a family. This study isn't for me, is it?" The answer is, clearly, this is for all of us. Why? Even if you don't have a family (perhaps you're single, or widowed, or divorced, or don't have children), you know people who do have families. And you talk to them. They may struggle and ask you for counsel. Will the counsel you give them be biblical counsel, or personal opinion? All of us need to know what the Bible has to say about God's design for the family.

To begin, I want to take us "Back to the Basics on Marriage." What are the basics in marriage?

Proposition: In Genesis 2:18-25, God addresses two basic issues that are fundamental to successful marriages.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- I. Basic Issue #1: Marriage involves Design (18-23).
 - A. The plan of marriage goes back to Creation (18).
 - 1. Man didn't invent marriage.
 - 2. Since it's of God, it's good.
 - B. The purpose of marriage is companionship (18b-23).
 - C. The basis of marriage is Commitment (24).
- II. Basic Issue #2: Marriage involves Duty (24-25).
 - A. Married couples must leave.
 - B. Married couples must cleave.
 - C. Married couples weave.

Implications:

- 1. I must be committed to God.
- 2. I must be committed to my partner.

Why are families in trouble these days? Let's hasten to say that marriage isn't in trouble. The people are! Marriage is of God, and marriage is good. Yet the family unit seems to be in great trouble. Why?

One of the reasons (as suggested in the material presented by "Clearcreek Chapel Counseling Ministry") is that people are marrying for the wrong reasons. Some marry for promiscuity. Others marry merely to satisfy their passions. There are those that marry to realize an image. And not a few enter marriage as an attempt to run away from other problems, such as a bad relationship with parents. Those are wrong reasons to marry.

Perhaps you married for one of those reasons. Should you get out of the marriage? Certainly not, and we'll see why from the Word of God this morning. The good news is this. Even if your marriage is sour today, it can sing! How? By learning and beginning to apply biblical principles. Which brings us to the first basic issue.

I. Basic Issue #1: Marriage involves Design (18-23).

What do we mean by "design?" There are three fundamental truths involved in the design of marriage which are spelled out in Genesis 2.

A. The plan of marriage goes back to Creation (18).

V 18 "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help fit for him." It's important to see the origin of marriage. Marriage is rooted in the creation account. When Jesus responded to the common misunderstanding of marriage that existed in His day, how did He do it? In Mt 19:4-6, He took His critics back to Genesis, and said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning, made them male and female; And said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife..." Jesus quoted Gen 2:24 to uphold the sanctity of marriage.

The plan of marriage is grounded in creation. Allow me to re-sketch the creation account briefly. Genesis 1 gives us the telescope view of God's creative work, whereas Genesis 2 is the "microscopic" view. We're told in Gen 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." God summed up what He thought of His creative work, including the marriage relationship, when He declared it "very good" in Gen 1:31.

Genesis 2 gives us the details involved in the creation of the first man and woman. Adam was created first (2:7) when God scooped up some dirt, fashioned a man, and then placed the breath of life within him. He put Adam in a perfect environment, the garden of Eden (2:8). He gave Adam an important job to do in 2:15--he was to till and take care of the garden (2:15). It soon became apparent, however, that something was missing in Adam's life. He was alone. Oh, yes, the animals were there but what Adam lacked, the animals couldn't supply. Neither could his job, or anything else. So God said (2:18), "I will make an help fit for him."

Please realize two very important implications.

1. Man didn't invent marriage.

Marriage isn't a mere social contract. It's not the product of some evolutionary process in which, one day, men decided it might be better to pool our resources in this survival-of-the-fittest world. No, man didn't invent marriage, and therefore, man has no right to scrap it. Marriage was designed by God.

2. Since it's of God, it's good.

In fact, according to Gen 1:31, marriage, along with everything else God created, is VERY GOOD. Do you know what that means? When we go back to creation, we discover that celibacy is not the norm. Granted, God may give certain individuals the gift of singleness for the sake of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 7), but that doesn't insinuate marriage is second-rate. Marriage is good.

For that matter, sex is good. God created us as sexual beings. The world has perverted this. But we need to affirm (and teach our young people) that sex isn't bad, rather, it's the perversion of sex that's wrong. Here's what God said in Heb 13:4, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Why is homosexuality wrong? Why is adultery wrong? Why is premarital sex wrong? The answer to each is the same--because each is a distortion of the good gift God designed and gave to mankind.

Marriage, as designed by God, is good. Do you believe that? If so, some of us need to make some changes. For instance, if marriage is good, why do we make jokes that ridicule marriage? And if marriage is good, why, in the name of entertainment, do we watch sitcoms and soaps and movies that mock marriage? What right do we have to cheapen what God has called good?

Why did God design marriage? That question brings us to a second truth.

B. The purpose of marriage is companionship (18b-23).

God declared that it was not good for the man to be alone. In v 18, He revealed He was going to provide him with a suitable helper. But notice the text carefully. What was the very next thing God did? He brought the animals to Adam (19-20). Why did God do that? God knew Adam needed a helper. He wanted Adam to know that, too.

Notice the text (19-20), "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them...And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field." Don't miss the end of v 20, "But for Adam there was not found an help fit for him." Adam needed someone "suitable" for him, to complement him.

When God brought the animals to Adam to be named, He was giving Adam an object lesson. Adam saw two of every animal, and one of him. Adam learned two

critical lessons. One, the animals have partners and I don't. And two, what I need, the animals can't provide (sorry, you may be close to your pet, but God never designed your pet to complement your life like your spouse!).

With those lessons in Adam's mind, God went to work. V 21 "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs (the Hebrew word is "part"), and closed up the flesh." Then v 22 reveals, "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."

Commentator Matthew Henry observes this (in Blocher, 99), "God did not make the woman out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

How did Adam respond to his counterpart? V 23 "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man." Immediately, Adam knew the woman to be his perfect companion. He saw no blemishes. Her character and her attitude were pure. There was not one thing to criticize in her.

Please don't miss the fact that when Adam needed a companion, God didn't create another man. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., a professor at TEDS, asks and answers an important question (in MacArthur, 19-20), "Was Eve Adam's equal? Yes and no. She was his spiritual equal and...'suitable for him.' But she was not his equal in that she was his 'helper.' God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles. A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God."

Adam learned an important lesson that day which we need to affirm. The purpose of marriage is companionship. The purpose is not children nor sex, though both are good. The purpose of marriage is for two people to become covenant companions. Do you know what is tragic? When a couple spends 20 years raising their children, and in the process become total strangers to each other, that's tragic. That violates God's design.

C. The basis of marriage is Commitment (24).

V 24 is the climax of the narrative, the punch line. "Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." Actually, v 24 was inserted by the narrator, Moses. Moses, writing in the 15th century B.C., gave the Israelites Divine instruction on marriage based on what happened to Adam. Moses wrote, "Therefore (a word highlighting implications) shall a man leave his father and mother." Remember, Adam had no father or mother! Moses is making application.

We'll consider v 24 in greater detail in a moment, but one thing is perfectly clear even from a casual reading. The basis of marriage is commitment. God never intended marriage to be based on feelings. Marriage is a commitment, in which two people become one for life.

Listen. Marriage is God's design. Since that's true, then two things follow. One, there is hope for marriage, even in a day in which the family is taking it on the chin. And two, since God instituted marriage, He alone is qualified to give us answers concerning

how marriage is to operate. Why run to Ann Landers, or secular counselors for help? God has given us an answer book on marriage. It's the Bible.

There's a second basic issue that's fundamental to successful marriage.

II. Basic Issue #2: Marriage involves Duty (24-25).

Our first task was to understand what God intended marriage to BE. Next, we must grasp what God intended couples to DO. Marriage involves duty. When two people marry, God gives them a threefold, practical duty spelled out in v 24.

A. Married couples must leave.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother." First, let's clarify what this does not mean. It's not saying we are to abandon our parents (1 Tim 5:8 "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"). It's also not justifying a person getting married while on bad terms with Mom and Dad (no, before getting married, couples must make sure they are not leaving behind unresolved, past conflict with their parents).

What does it mean to "leave"? It means priorities change. Before marriage, a man's obligation is to his parents. Afterwards, his priority obligation is to his wife. And vice versa. Leaving means my mate's ideas must be more important to me than my parents'.

I want to speak to parents for a moment. Did you realize that by God's design, the parent-child relationship is temporary? The husband-wife relationship is permanent. God gives children to the authority of parents for 20 years or so, but He gives spouses to each other for life. We get in trouble when we treat temporary relationships as though they were permanent. The most basic family relationship is not the parent-child relationship, but the husband-wife relationship.

Do you remember the old, American folk song, "Billy Boy"? Do you remember why Billy Boy and his girlfriend didn't marry? The song says, "She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother." You get the impression she was 12 or 13, right? Wrong. Listen to the stanza (in Swindoll, Strike..., 29-30):

*How old is she, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? How old is she charming Billy?
Three times six and four times sev'n, twenty eight and elev'n,
She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother.*

Did you catch that? Billy Boy's girlfriend was 85 years old! It makes you wonder how old her mother was! But as the song goes, the reason she didn't marry was because she was too young to leave her mother.

Frankly, what we chuckle about in this song is causing havoc in many a marriage today. Moms and Dads, do you realize we are raising our kids to LEAVE us? We need to do all we can to make it easy for our children to leave us and begin their own Christ-centered family. We mustn't use guilt trips to keep them tied to us emotionally. The best wedding present we can give our children is to release them!

B. Married couples must cleave.

"And shall cleave unto his wife." The word "cleave" means "to cling, to glue." As applied to marriage, the word speaks of permanence.

When I was in High School, I took a Vocational Agriculture class in which we learned welding. When you weld, you join two objects together. One thing's for sure. You don't intend for them to come apart.

So it is with marriage. While the parent-child relationship may be close, the Bible never describes it as being "one flesh" or "let no man put asunder." But to a man and a woman who say before God, "I do," God says, "Cleave." Nothing but death must be allowed to break that unit (see Adams, 52).

May I speak candidly. The basis for marriage is not love (at least as love is defined by our culture), but commitment. God does not say, "Leave and love," or "Leave and be infatuated by," or "Leave and enjoy romance with." God says, "Leave and cleave."

A man says to me, "I don't feel anything for my wife anymore," expecting me to say, "Well, you'd better end the relationship." To which I must say, "Since when did God say FEELINGS were the basis of marriage? God said, Leave and cleave."

C. Married couples weave.

"And they shall be one flesh." The biblical idea of "becoming one flesh" involves sexual intimacy, but it goes beyond that. The idea is, "And they shall become one person."

Honestly, this requires a ton of work. In his book, Strike the Original Match, Chuck Swindoll tells us why (31), "Becoming one flesh suggests a process, not an instant fact. Two people with different backgrounds, temperaments, habits, scars, feelings, parents, educational pursuits, gifts, and interests don't immediately leave a wedding ceremony in perfect unity."

According to v 25, Adam and Eve experienced total transparency with each other, "And they were both naked...and were not ashamed." But that was before sin entered the picture (later they hid in the trees, 3:8). In a sin-cursed world, weaving takes work.

If you are married, what steps are you taking to promote companionship with your spouse? Men, when was the last time you said NO to playing ball with the guys so you could minister to your wife?

Implications:

We've gone back to the basics on marriage this morning. We've seen that marriage involves getting a handle on two issues--design and duty. How should we respond?

1. I must be committed to God.

Leaving, cleaving, and weaving are not just techniques we do to get a great marriage. They are commands we must obey in order to please God. Our greatest priority must not be to have a great marriage, but to please God. Listen. The #1 reason I love my wife is not to change her. It's not even for the sake of my marriage. It's to please Christ. Are you committed to pleasing Christ?

2. I must be committed to my partner.

There must be nothing in your life, outside of the Savior, that is a higher priority than your spouse. Not your job. Not your children. Not your parents. Are you committed to your partner? To help you answer that question, I want to give you homework. As you leave, pick up and fill out an inventory entitled, "Rate Your Marriage" (by Wayne Mack).

Key: The standard that God calls us to keep in marriage is high. In fact, it is too high for us to reach. We can't reach it on our own. We need the grace of God which is available through a relationship with Jesus Christ if we are to fulfill God's design in marriage. Ephesians 5 makes it clear that we must be filled with the Spirit if we want to enjoy truly successful family relationships (Eph 5:18ff). Make sure you know Christ.