

GENESIS 2:18–25. (EHV)

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is a suitable partner for him.” Out of the soil the LORD God had formed every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that became its name. The man gave names to all the livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal, but for Adam no helper was found who was a suitable partner for him. The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, the LORD God took a rib and closed up the flesh where it had been. The LORD God built a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man and brought her to the man.

The man said,
Now this one is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh.
She will be called “woman,”
because she was taken out of man.
For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother
and will remain united with his wife,
and they will become one flesh.

They were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.

Put yourselves in Adam’s shoes. It’s Day 6 of creation, Day 1 for you. God has formed you from the dust of the ground and breathed into your nostrils the breath of life, so that you are now a living being. Look around you. You are in a beautiful garden planted by God himself in the eastern part of Eden. God has placed you there to work it and take care of it. And God has told you about the two trees he placed in the middle of the garden, and how you are not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day you eat of it, you will surely die.

So you essentially have two commandments—one Do and one Don’t. The Do—work and take care of the Garden of Eden. The Don’t—refrain from eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These will be your acts of love for God and your worship of God, which is what God created you for.

Everything is perfect. But something is still missing.

After God placed Adam in the garden, he said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Up until now, God saw that everything at every stage was good. But here, for the first time, he sees that something is not good. It’s not “not good” because it is wicked or morally deficient. It is “not good” in the sense that it is incomplete; it is not ideal. God cannot look at everything he has made and say that it is *very* good until he does something more, something to remedy the fact that Adam is alone.

And that’s not just because the man will be an even better version of himself with a companion—though that is true. It’s also because God has just given Adam his word. Worship of God is something best done with others. And God’s word needs an audience. God had created Adam as an audience for his word. But now that he has entrusted his word to Adam, Adam in

turn needs an audience, and God will bless him and his wife with the ability to procreate so that the two of them together can have an audience for God's word. And their children in turn will be able to share it with their children, and so on. "It is not good for the man to be alone," because it is not good for God's word to be alone.

So God resolves to remedy the situation: "I will make a helper who is a suitable partner for him." There are two things to note here. The first is that what God is going to make for Adam, for the man, is a helper. In the early seasons of the mockumentary sitcom *The Office*, there was a continuously awkward situation between the regional manager and his main helper or assistant. The assistant always wanted to refer to himself as "assistant regional manager," and the regional manager would then always have to correct him, "assistant *to* the regional manager." What God is making here isn't an assistant man or assistant husband. He is making a wife, an assistant *to* the husband. Here is where God very clearly establishes what we call the roles of men and women, the roles of husbands and wives, with the husband being the head and the wife being the helper. But lest either husband or wife twist this concept, we'll have more to say about it later.

Second, the assistant God is going to make for him is going to be suitable for him. In other words, he is going to make Adam's assistant different from him, but different in such a way that she will complement him—like two gears that have their teeth in opposite places, in such a way that they work perfectly together.

All of this so far is good for us to note today. A young woman at my dad and mom's church once told my mom years ago that there was no way she was getting married. Her parents' marriage had been less than pleasant and had ended in divorce, and she generally didn't see positive things coming from marriage. I'm sure she is not the first person to have such a view and to say such things about marriage; many people view marriage as a curse rather than a blessing. But no one's judgment on the matter trumps God's: "It is not good for the man to be alone." Solomon echoes the same sentiment when he says later, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord." Circumstances in this sinful world might create situations where it is more advisable for someone to remain unmarried, like the apostle Paul did, and like he advised the Corinthians to do because of their circumstances. But as a general rule and principle, as a default position, remaining unmarried is not good. It is good to get married. It is good to have head and helper. When they live together according to God's will and plan, they complement each other and work well together, better than they would on their own.

Now the Lord goes about making a helper suited to Adam. He brings to Adam everything else that he has formed from the ground that wasn't already with him, namely the wild animals and the birds. The domestic animals were already with Adam. God does this for two reasons, the first of which was to see what Adam would name them. And Adam had no problem giving fitting names to all these animals, with hours of daylight to spare. Remember that all of this is taking place on Day 6. This reminds us what amazing intellect and ability God gave mankind. God watched and listened with interest as Adam did this.

The second reason God brought all these animals to Adam was to lead Adam to see the truth of God's word for himself: "It is not good for the man to be alone." It was to lead Adam to desire what God was about to do. This shows God's unique relationship with mankind. God did not first create the male dogs and horses and then lead them to desire female dogs and horses.

God only did this for Adam. Adam noted Mr. Penguin, Mrs. Penguin; Mr. Camel, Mrs. Camel; lion, lioness; bull, cow; buck, doe; stallion, mare; and so on. And it became increasingly apparent to him how much he stood out. He did not have a Mrs. There was no female version of his kind. And none of these creatures could serve as suitable helpers for him. Adam finishes naming all the animals and thinks, “It isn’t good for me to be alone.”

Mission accomplished. Time for sleep. Time for surgery.

“The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, the LORD God took a rib and closed up the flesh where it had been. The LORD God built a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man.” Note that the Lord doesn’t take from Adam’s head to build the woman, that she might rule over him. Nor does he take from Adam’s feet to build the woman, that he might subjugate and walk all over her. She is to be a helper, not a slave. He takes from Adam’s side to build the woman, so that she might stand by his side and help him and engage with him as his companion and fellow human being.

I think there is also something to note in the verbs God uses when making each. When God made the man, he *formed* him, *fashioned* him from the dust. Forming and fashioning puts emphasis on shape and function and work. The man was created to be a provider and protector. But when God made the woman, he *built* her from the dust. When you build something, you make it to house and host someone or something else. The woman was created to be a house for human beings—literally, in one sense. New human beings would grow inside of her. But she would also be a house for human beings in another sense; she was created for hosting and cultivating relationships and gatherings and togetherness. Think again of the teeth of two gears, complementing each other and working together.

Once the Lord finished building the woman from Adam’s rib, he woke Adam up and walked Adam’s new bride down the aisle, so to speak. And Adam’s reaction could not have been more ecstatic. He composes the very first poem or song in history. In Hebrew he literally begins, “This *at last* is bone of my bones.” At last? Finally? This has all happened on the same day! Yet Adam’s words show how much God’s plan worked and how intensely Adam was longing for what God had done. A husband excited to see his wife—imagine that!

“Now, at last, this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of man.” Adam shows that he appreciates both Eve’s similarities to him and her differences from him. She is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. She is not something inferior to him, but just as human as he is. She is not the same as any of the other creatures Adam has already named. She is a helper suited *to him*. Yet she is not a man. He calls her *Ishah* because she was taken out of *Ish*, “woman” because she was taken out of “man.” The teeth of her gears are in different places than the teeth of his, but those differences are not cause for ridicule but for rejoicing and for praising God.

She was different in shape, different in her thinking and reasoning, different in her emotional makeup and in the way she expressed her emotions. But her shape, thinking, and emotions complemented and counterbalanced his own and enhanced his own existence, even as her shape, thinking, and emotions enhanced hers. Yes, she is the same, but different. Just as Adam classified and named all God’s other creatures, so he now classifies and names this most beautiful of God’s creatures. She is woman.

And I agree with the EHV in making the words that follow Adam's words and not Moses's words. I think that Adam realized, by the Spirit's own inspiration, that an institution as beautiful as this marriage could not possibly be a one-time thing, but something that God intended for all humans as long as the earth endures: "For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will remain united with his wife, and they will become one flesh."

And so marriage is instituted, and the family is founded at the same time. Its beginning consists in the mutual consent and lifelong commitment of one man and one woman, who are brought together by the Lord God himself for physical intimacy, for deeper communication and companionship, for producing children, and for the sharing of his word. After all, God did not give Eve his first two commandments. He only gave them to Adam, expecting that he in turn would share them with her as the head of the family, which he did. And they in turn were to share them with their children.

When marriage is honored, the family and society thrive and are blessed. When marriage is dishonored and God's plan perverted in any way, the family and society are not as beautiful or are downright ugly. They do not work as well or at all. Society breaks down and God is dishonored. And all the poetry is ripped out of love.

As much as we marvel at God's goodness in instituting something so beautiful, we also can't help but mourn what it has become and how it is treated in a fallen world, even among people identifying as Christians. Perhaps around 130 AD, roughly a century after Jesus ascended, a man who simply identified himself as Mathetes, which means "disciple," wrote a letter to a man named Diognetus for the purpose of defending the Christian faith. In his letter he wrote that Christians "marry, like everyone else does, and beget children, but they do not throw their babies away. They share their table, but not their bed. They are in the flesh, but do not follow the desires of the flesh." Mathetes obviously wrote this in a fallen world and it wasn't universally true of Christians. But he wouldn't have written it if it weren't true in a general way and if it weren't generally his own experience. Does this still describe us in a general way? Do we still take marriage and family seriously, whether we're old or young? Do we still know that marriage and family are going to fail or be meaningless without God?

We don't have the ability in ourselves to live up to Mathetes's description and God's institution. In order to continue to honor marriage and to view it in a positive light in a fallen world, we also need to marvel at another marriage, one with the true prototype husband—the marriage of Christ and his Church. God sent his Son to take us as his Bride. His Son did not see a beautiful, perfect bride willingly approaching him, like Adam saw. He saw a repulsively ugly and unworthy one foolishly trying to run away from him, one that had perverted his gift of marriage, intimacy, and family so often, among other sins.

So he wooed us in a way no other suitor could. He sewed for us a breathtakingly beautiful wedding dress with the needle and thread of his own perfect life, sparkling white with his own righteousness. When we were sentenced to death, he took our place and bore the shame and filth of our adulteries and their punishment for us. Then, risen from the dead and reascended to God's right hand, he called for us: "Sinner, come here. I love you and want to be yours. I have for you a dress like none other. It is already yours; I give it to you free of charge. Come put it on. I have prepared for you the finest food. Come take your seat at my table and eat. I will wash you up in

baptism. I will remove every stain and spot, wrinkle and blemish and make you beautiful like no one else can. I will give you my body and blood as the tokens of my love, again and again. I will provide for you. I will protect you. Do not refuse me. Where else can you find such love as mine?"

It is this marriage that helps us to see God's earthly institutions of marriage and family as the beautiful things that they are. It is this marriage that moves us to share our food, but not our bed, to be in the flesh, but not to follow its desires, to not throw our children away. It is this marriage that moves us to strive with all we are and have to uphold and honor God's earthly institutions of marriage and family, and above all to uphold and honor and share God's saving word within them. Amen.