

## God Joins Together: Strength for Marriage

Genesis 2:18-25

Tim Becker – October 15, 2017

### 1. Introduction

Renee and I are regularly reminded that we need help in our marriage. We go through times of wonderful harmony, when we're tempted to think we don't need any help. But we also go through times of painful disharmony, when we see plainly that we do. After 39 years of marriage, we are finding it frustrating and discouraging that we are still disagreeing about some things that have bothered us for most of those years. Are we never going to meld into perfect harmony?

Renee and I are pretty different from one another. I loved those differences when we were dating. But when the pressures of family life came along, her differences chafed me. It seems like many of those differences between us aren't going to go away, but will be lifelong. This is a discouraging thought.

Are you and your spouse quite different from one another? By far, most couples that I know would answer a strong 'yes' to this. Maybe you have been married for more years than Renee and I. If so do you still disagree about some things that bothered you long ago? Others of you have been married for less years. I'll bet that some of you younger couples are quietly believing, hoping, that surely someday your marriage will grow into a sweet harmony and leave the painful disagreements behind.

When you think that some of your marital tensions are likely to continue until the end of your lives, where do you turn for strength to endure? In your most frustrated moments, how do you face down the temptation to believe that you made a mistake marrying this person, that the one you have isn't really the perfect match for you?

If, like me, you want strength to keep doing the oftentimes hard work of staying married, then turn with me to Gen 2:18-25 (page 2 in the pew Bible). If you are divorced or widowed or not married, then please keep listening because I will be sharing with you some helpful implications for your life as well. Please follow along as I read Gen 2:18-25.

*Read Gen 2:18-25.*

Please pray with me.

God help us to do the hard work of concentrating on, understanding, and applying your word. Please send your Holy Spirit to help us see what you are saying in the text and what that means for us now. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Let me give you a roadmap for the rest of this message. First, we are going to look carefully at our Scripture text. We will identify 4 key details that lead up to the main idea. We'll highlight that main idea and deal with some objections. This is part 1. Part 2 of this message will be taking a look at some implications and applications to our lives with specific focuses on those who are married, those who are not married, those who are widows or widowers, and those who are divorced.

### 2. Context and Key Detail 1: God declares that man needs a helper

Let's start by getting a little context for our passage. Where are we in the Bible? We are at the beginning. The chapter before the one we read tells the story of creation. That story runs through chapter 2 verse 3. Then starting in 2:4, the story of creation is told again, but from a different angle and includes different details.

In that 2<sup>nd</sup> story of creation, v. 7, God forms man from the dust of the ground and breathes life into him. In v. 15, God takes the man and puts him in the garden of Eden to work and keep it. When Genesis ch. 1 tells about the creation of man, it does not give us any details for the separate creation of male and female. It just says, “male and female he created them.” We just get the summary view. But here in ch. 2 we see the male created first, with no mention of the female. Then we see how God created the female later. These 2 views of creation are not contradictory, just different looks at the same event.

Now that we have some context, let’s look at the first verse we read a few minutes ago, chapter 2 verse 18. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” Notice who is taking the initiative here. Adam is not coming to God suggesting that he needs something. God is looking over his creation of man and declaring that something is not good, something is missing. And notice who God tasks with fixing this problem. He does not ask Adam to figure it out, but God says that he himself will make a helper fit for the man.

This is the first key detail leading to the main idea of this passage: God declares that man needs a suitable helper and says that God will make one.

### 3. Key Detail 2: Adam looks for a suitable helper among all living creatures and finds none.

What happens next? Let’s look at vs. 19 and 20. God brings all the created animals to the man so that the man would name them. And we see in v. 20 that the man did indeed give them all names. But the second half of v. 20 tells us that the most important thing about this wasn’t the naming. God brought the animals to Adam so that Adam would see that none of those animals is a helper fit for him. None of the animals is like Adam. They are tiger or bluebird or sheep, but they are not human. We might imagine that Adam noticed among the tigers that there was a male and a female, fit for each other. But Adam noticed, and so should we, that man does not have a helper fit for him.

This is the second key detail leading to the main idea of this passage: Adam looks for a suitable helper among all living creatures and finds none.

### 4. Key Detail 3: God makes a suitable helper, a woman, from Adam’s rib and brings her to the man.

Now let’s look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> key detail. Verse 21 says, “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” For what reason did God make a woman out of the rib of the man? Because “for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.” God knew that the man had this need, but the man didn’t know. And now that Adam knows, God makes the woman and brings her to the man.

Please notice 3 things here. First, the woman comes from Adam’s rib. We’ll see why this is significant in a moment. Second, God the master creator is at work. While the woman comes from the man’s rib, God makes the woman; the man doesn’t make the woman. God’s intent was to make a suitable helper for the man. And God always accomplishes what he intends. So we can be sure that the woman he made was perfectly suited to the man. The third thing to notice is that God does not leave it to chance to see if the man and woman would get together. God brings the woman to the man.

This is the third key detail leading to the main idea of this passage: God makes a suitable helper, a woman, from Adam’s rib and brings her to the man.

## 5. Key Detail 4: Adam sees the woman is the suitable helper for him and is pleased.

For the 4<sup>th</sup> and final key detail leading up to the main idea, look at v. 23. The man sees the woman and he talks. This is the first speech the Bible records for man. The man sees what God has made for him and is pleased. He says, “at last!” The man sees that this is not an animal, but a human. He has never seen another human before. And this one is like him in a kinship kind of way. This is what is meant by “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” I say, kinship, because Laban uses this phrase to refer to his nephew, Jacob in Gen 29:14, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” Now we see why making the woman from man’s rib was important. She is literally from his bone, but even more, she is his kin.

This is fourth key detail leading to the main idea of this passage: Adam sees that the woman is a helper fit for him. And he is pleased.

## 6. Main Idea

Now look with me at v. 24 for the main idea. Our clue that this is the main idea of the entire passage is that it starts with “therefore.” When we see a “therefore,” we know to look back to see what came before and to see what came before as the ground or reason for what we are now about to read. So in light of God’s declaration that man needed a suitable helper and in light of Adam not finding a suitable helper among all the animals and in light of God making a woman as that helper and in light of Adam seeing that the woman God made is just right for him, ... in light of all these things, God tells us now that this is why “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Let’s try to answer 3 questions about this statement. One: who is this verse talking about? Adam and Eve? Two: what does leave and hold fast mean? And three: what does one flesh mean?

So, who is this verse talking about? Is it talking about the first man and woman? If so, we might expect it say “the man shall leave his father and mother” instead of “a man.” And this first man doesn’t have a father and mother; God created him “from the ground” (v. 7). This verse is taking what has just happened to the first man and woman and declaring how it applies to every man and his wife.

Our second question is what does leave and hold fast mean in this context. They do not mean merely physical action: the man walking away from the presence of his parents and hugging his wife. As a matter of fact, some historians say that what was common among the Hebrews of Moses day, when this was written, was that the husband would bring his wife to his family to live, like Isaac had done with Rebekka, not that the husband would move away from his family.

The point? God is commanding a husband to change his primary loyalty, not necessarily his primary residence. Boaz tells Ruth in the book of Ruth 2:11, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.” When he says “left” your father and mother and native land, he doesn’t merely mean that Ruth moved away, although she did. He means that Ruth forsook her father and mother and native land; she changed her primary loyalty from her native family to the family and people of Naomi, from the people of Moab to the people of Israel. Boaz is not commending her for changing her house address, but for changing her loyalties.

Likewise, the same word translated “hold fast” is used in Deut 10:20 when Moses tells the Israelites, “You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.” When he

commands them to “hold fast” to the Lord, he doesn’t mean they are to do this with their hands. They can’t hold God with their hands. He means that they are to do this with their hearts and lives, with their loyalties. And so here with a husband to his wife.

The third question is what does one flesh mean. When God brought the woman to the man in v. 22, the man rightly recognized that the woman was one flesh with him. And we said then that this had a physical reality with the rib and even a shared humanity. But we also said that “flesh of my flesh” implied a kinship between the man and the woman. So it is here. For the every-man referred to in v. 24, his wife won’t be made from his own rib, yet the text says they shall become one flesh. They shall become kin, family. When shall they become this? We’ll answer this in a little bit.

As we’ve said, the terms leave and hold fast and one flesh mean more than their physical meaning. These words in this verse are meant to communicate that the man and wife are brought together in covenant loyalty. A covenant is a promise. So the kind of coming together that is described in v. 24 is a promise in heart and life. How does this picture fit the following words? Listen.

“I, take you, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, from this day forward until death do us part, according to God’s holy ordinance.”

These are traditional wedding vows. Can you hear how they are brim full of a promise of loyalty, the kind God has prescribed for us in Gen 2:24?

My point in bringing in these vows isn’t to exalt the vows, although they are really good, but to step into the thought that what God’s word is describing in v. 24 is marriage. We might think this is over interpreting the verse, except for what Jesus says.

The Pharisees come to Jesus asking if it is lawful under God’s law for a husband to divorce his wife for any cause. Here is Jesus’ answer.

Matthew 19:4–6 <sup>4</sup> He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Four quick points. First, Jesus is quoting Gen 2:24 here. Notice that Jesus is apply this verse to every marriage. Second, remember we wondered when a man and his wife become one flesh. Jesus is implying here that this happens when they get married. Third, who joins the couple together when they get married? Jesus says that God joins them together. And fourth, what is Jesus conclusion? It is that if God joins the couple together, that no one else better separate them.

Where does Jesus get the idea that God joins every husband and wife together? He gets it from our passage in Genesis 2. He quoted it. We are to see that just as God brought the first woman to the first man, so God brings every husband and wife together.

Here is the main idea from Gen 2:18-25. Every marriage is joined by God and God commands that they live together in promised faithfulness.

## 7. Big sermon idea

What does this mean for all of us? Please give me your attention. Your remembering that God joins together every married couple is a gift to strengthen your marriage and the marriages around you. I will say it again.

Your remembering that God joins together every married couple is a gift to strengthen your marriage and the marriages around you.

Next, let's see how this is true for you. This is part 2 of this message, looking at some of the implications of this big idea.

## 8. Implications for those who are married

Let's talk first about those who are married. At times the differences between you and your spouse can become not just maddening, but painful. What should you think about when you are tempted to wonder if you married the right person? When you chose each other, it wasn't just you doing the choosing. Remember Jesus words that divorce is not permitted because it is God who joined the married couple together. So when you are tempted to wonder if you married the right person, put in your mind a picture of God bringing this woman or this man to you. Picture God holding Eve's hand, walking with her to Adam, and placing their hands together. As surely as God brought Eve to Adam, God brought your husband or wife to you.

When you remember that God has joined you and your spouse together, this not only helps you step away from divorce, but God means for it to change the way you live with your spouse. A husband who holds fast to his wife works to stay near her in his heart and to stay loving in his words and actions. He is wary of even emotional ties with other women. He knows the paths that can lead to an affair.

He respects his wife: inside his own heart and mind, as well as in his speech and actions to her and about her to others. When he sees her sins or limits and starts to grumble or get angry, what should this man do? How does a husband hold fast to his wife when what she does or doesn't do offends him or hurts him? Men, in this moment of temptation you must fix your mind on how Christ treats you when you offend or hurt him. Jesus Christ gives you mercy. He forgives you not just seven times, but seventy times seven. He pays for your sins himself. He treats your weaknesses gently. Gentlemen, if you wait to hold fast to your wife until she stops offending you by her sins or limits, you will disobey God's charge to you during your entire married life. Don't disobey God, my fellow husbands. Receive Christ's mercy for your own sins and weaknesses. And then apply that same mercy to your wife. Hold her fast to you.

Wives, everything I just described for your husband, applies to you as well. A wife who holds fast to her husband works to stay near him in her heart and to stay loving in her words and actions. She too runs away from paths that endanger her one-flesh union with her husband. She too works to respect her husband even when his sins and limits offend and hurt her.

Husbands and wives, remember that God is good. He didn't bring you a spouse so different from you to do you harm, but to do you good. Give up your self-pity and your I-deserve-better attitude. Submit yourself to God. He will glorify himself and he wants to do it through your happy living for him in the midst of marital trial. So smile. Endure. Bear the fruit of the Spirit in your marriage. You'll be happier. Your spouse will be happier. And your merciful good God will be praised.

Married friends, remembering that God joins you and your spouse together is a gift to strengthen your marriage. Take it. Often.

## 9. Implications for those who are not married

What if you are not married ... how is the passage a help to you? God joins every married couple together. So wait for God to bring you your husband or wife. Don't force it. You really want God's choice for you. He'll choose better than you will. Do you believe that? It's true.

Next, be content to not be married. A strong sense of discontentment with God's plan takes front of the line priority in our affections. And it can ruin us for becoming the person God wants to change us into. When God brings a difficulty to us to produce in us Christ-like character, all we can think of is how unhappy and maybe angry we are that God isn't giving us what we want. Getting what we want won't make us happy. Being a person of Christ-like character who trusts God to work in all things, this will make us happy. So be content to not be married. You will never regret submitting to God's plan for your life.

Last, while marriage is honorable and while it is not good for man to be alone, at the same time God does good for many men and women by not bringing a spouse to them. Marriage to a husband or wife is not our ultimate good and joy. Marriage to Christ is our ultimate good and joy. God will never cheat you or withhold good from you. Trust him. He's worthy of it.

Unmarried friends, remembering that God joins a husband and wife together is a gift to strengthen your resolve to wait for him to give you a spouse, to be content to not be married, and to reduce your desire to be married so that it is not ultimate.

#### 9. Implications for those who are widows or widowers

What if your husband or wife has died before you? Remember that God joined you together and rejoice in the marriage God had given you. Your marriage was a good gift from him. Rejoice that God kept you together until death parted you. If you know your own sin nature, you know that that was no small miracle of his grace.

It is okay and right to feel sorrow that this good gift is now gone. But be careful of excess sorrow. As I said a moment ago, remember that your marriage with your spouse is not and should not ever have been your ultimate good and joy. Marriage to your groom Jesus is your ultimate good and joy. So keep holding fast to Jesus.

#### 10. Implications for those who are divorced from their husband or wife

What if you are divorced from you husband or wife? How is this passage a help to you? First, knowing that God had joined you together, be sorrowful for your divorce. If you are happy about your divorce, temper that with the truth that your marriage was a gift from God to you, even if there were many troubles in it.

Second, be sorrowful and repentant of your sins and failures that contributed to your divorce. You will be tempted to focus on the sins and failures of your ex-spouse. But even when considering your previous marriage, Jesus would tell you to consider the log in your own eye as more significant than the speck in your ex-spouse's. Give thought to confessing your sins to those affected, especially children, parents, in-laws, and maybe your ex-spouse.

Lastly, while your sinful contributions to your divorce ought to bring sorrow to your heart, they need not bring continued guilt and condemnation. You will not find relief from the guilt and condemnation for your sins by minimizing them or by comparing them to your spouse's sins or by forgetting them through a new relationship. True and lasting relief from the guilt and condemnation for your sins can only come as you look to Christ for forgiveness. He gave himself on the cross to redeem you from your sins (Gal 1:4). So look to Christ in faith. Confess all your sins to him. Turn your back on those sins. And trust Jesus to be your righteousness before God.

## 10. Implications for everyone

Lastly, here are a few implications for everyone. If every marriage is joined by God, then this elevates marriage to a place of honor, because every marriage is a work of God. Therefore, we ought to honor marriage, whether we are children or adults, single or married or divorced. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Both the institution of marriage and individual marriages ought to be honored. From our passage in Genesis 2, it is clear that a biblical marriage consists of 1 man and 1 woman promising to be loyal and faithful to each other. This promise of faithfulness is the only right protection to guard the one flesh marital union from harm and sin. So let’s encourage marriage, especially among our friends or family who are living together like a husband and wife, but without the promise of faithfulness before God. And let’s not put down marriage in how we talk or joke. We honor the institution of marriage when we think well of it, speak well of it, and protect it.

How are individual marriages to be honored? One way is by keeping the marriage bed undefiled. As you know, this includes staying away from all sexual immorality. But friends, honoring marriage goes beyond that. Any flirting, any lustful looking or any longing for another dishonors your marriage. And it dishonors the marriage of the one you are flirting with, looking at, or longing for. Some say that flirting, looking, and longing for another are harmless . . . no touch, no harm. Jesus shockingly explained God’s moral standard when he said that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” This applies to both men and women. When Jesus said, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”, he meant more than divorce. Flirting, lusting, and longing for another who is not your spouse separate what God has joined together. More could be said about honoring marriage, but this is a part.

## 11. Conclusion

In conclusion, what I want you to remember this morning is that your remembering that God joins together every married couple is a gift to strengthen your marriage and the marriages around you.