



SESSION 5

WHEN MARRIAGE IS QUESTIONED

▶ **The Point**

Marriage is between one man and one woman for life.

▶ **The Passage**

Genesis 2:18-25

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Most of us have attended or participated in at least one especially memorable wedding. Some weddings are “over the top” in cost and extravagance. Others are “bare bones” with just an officiant and a couple of witnesses. And a few weddings have those unexpected, yet unforgettable moments. I know of one young boy who was recruited to be the ringbearer, but as he walked alongside the flower girl, he started to cry. Asked what was wrong, he said, “I don’t want to get married. I want to keep living with mom and dad!” He questioned marriage! But he grew up to change his mind and I was blessed to officiate his wedding years later.

A lot of people these days question the whole nature of marriage: who can marry whom, what makes a marriage a marriage, or even if marriage is needed at all. But marriage is still a good idea, and it’s a good idea because it originated with God! You likely know couples who are a great “advertisement” for what God intended when He brought the first woman to man. For those who question marriage, God has given us the answer.

▶ **The Setting**

God formed and fashioned everything that exists according to His plan and purpose. In each element of creation, God proclaimed it was good . . . with one exception. God declared it was not good for the man He had created to be alone. Thus the Lord created a suitable mate for the man, fashioned from the man’s own body; the man’s mate would be called *woman*. In this action God initiated the marriage relationship, the union of one man and one woman for life.

What does the Bible say?

Helper (v. 18)—The Hebrew word refers to one who aids, assists, or supports. In the Old Testament, it is often used to refer to God assisting His chosen people.

One flesh (v. 24)—Referencing the sexual union between husband and wife, the term symbolizes the multi-faceted relationship between the two (for example: monogamy, community, interdependence, accountability to each other).

Genesis 2:18-25

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.”

19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

21 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.

22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman,

because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 101 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the funniest thing you’ve observed at a wedding?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 102 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of God’s design for marriage by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, contact group members and ask them to send you a digital copy of their wedding pictures or those of their parents if they are single. Collect all of the images and create a digital collage or a digital slide show. As you show the pictures, lead class members to guess who the couple are. After the presentation, write **“The Point”** for this session on the board.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 102 of the PSG: **“Marriage is between one man and one woman for life.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us understand His great design for marriage. Thank Him for those in our lives who model His design in ways that bring honor to Him and help to others.

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STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Genesis 2:18-20

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." **19** Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **20** The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 2:18-20 on page 103 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how the creation of human beings and the institution of marriage fit into the context of God's creation.

RECAP: God created us to live with others. Being created in the image of God means that, first and foremost, we are to live in relationship to Him. But He also made us for a relationship with others. A sense of community is part of God's design for us.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 103 of the PSG: **"What do you appreciate about God's design for marriage?"**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Wedding Pictures" on page 105 of the PSG to help them relate to God's principles for marriage.

Which of the following wedding pictures best represents God's principles for marriage? Choose one and explain why it resonates most for you. [PSG has four pictures from which to choose.]

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that not only did God design the marriage relationship, but man and woman were created as unique genders.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why is it still true that it's not good for us to be alone?



Genesis 2:18-20 Commentary

[Verse 18] When someone mentions the word *marriage* today, people's thoughts could go in many directions. Despite the push by some to radically change the nature and definition of this union, we must remember God uniquely designed the marriage relationship according to His plan and purpose.

The opening chapter of Genesis highlights God's overall activity on each of the six days of creation. It describes God's purposeful action in the creation of the first man and woman, made in the image of God, and how they were given responsibilities from the outset. (See Gen. 1:26-30.) Chapter two provides a more in-depth view into the forming of the crown of God's creation: humanity.

The **LORD GOD** created the first man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, so that the man became a living being. (See 2:7.) God also created a perfect habitat for the man, the garden of Eden. He placed the man in the garden to work and care for it. (See vv. 8-15.)

The first indication of God's concern about the man's solitude occurs with His words, **"It is not good that the man should be alone."** Despite the perfection that was evident throughout creation, in which God repeatedly proclaimed everything "good" (see 1:4,10,12,18,21,25) and "very good" (see v. 31), one thing was missing. Despite having a perfect living environment and enjoying perfect fellowship with his Creator, in a very real sense the man was **alone**. This indicates God did not intend for the man to live in isolation. Human beings were created to live in community, in relationships with other people. However, what God had in mind for the man was much more than just interaction with someone else who was similar to him.

God announced His intentions to make for the man a **helper**. This word can mean someone who aids, assists, or supports. It pictures one who assists or supports in a significant way. Never in Scripture does it suggest a diminished status or role of the one providing the help.

While God was superior to the man, and the animals were inferior to the man, the man needed another being who complemented him—a counterpart who was like him. This would be one who was equal in makeup—another human being made in the image of God.

[Verses 19-20] The focus moves from God's recognition of the man's alone status to God's creation of the wildlife. **The LORD GOD** created **every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens**.

God brought the animals to the man to see what he would call them. The man **gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field**. In this action of naming each living creature, the man was exercising his dominion over that animal. As he carried out the activity of naming the animals, the man had to consider each animal's nature and distinctiveness. In so doing, he would certainly have recognized the contrast between them and himself. Soon enough he would have realized he had no partner who was similar in nature to him. As he studied the other earthly life forms God had created, the man found there was no helper for him. He was one of a kind, which was not good.

STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Genesis 2:21-22

21 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. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How have you seen God's distinct design for man and woman lived out well in marriage?

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 2:21-22 on page 104 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 104 of the PSG: **"In what ways does our culture challenge God's distinct design of men and women?"**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the significance of God building the woman from the side of the man.

RECAP: Our differences do not make one gender stronger or superior to another. Unfortunately, the world often has seen it differently. In some cultures, for example, women are treated like slaves or property. From the beginning, God created the genders unique but always has considered them equal. Jesus elevated women to the status God originally intended. Christianity brought a love and respect for women unheard of in the Roman world. Husbands are to love their wives even as Christ loves us, sacrificing all for them as He gave Himself for us. (See Eph. 5:25.)

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, invite a pastor or staff member to visit with your group and share briefly how your church seeks to treat men and women equally while reinforcing important gender distinctives. Have the group offer prayer for church leadership as they move forward with God-honoring strategies in a sometimes difficult cultural climate.

TRANSITION: The next verses show us that marriage is a permanent relationship between a man and a woman.

Genesis 2:21-22 Commentary

[Verse 21] The Bible declares that God intentionally created man and woman as unique genders. After the man named all the animals yet failed to find a suitable companion, **the Lord God** acted with the next step in His plan for creation. First, God put the man into **a deep sleep**. While the Hebrew term translated *deep sleep* can refer to a normal night's rest, it is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the sleep God brought upon Abraham (see Gen. 15:12), the sleep brought upon King Saul and his men when David took Saul's spear and water jug (see 1 Sam. 26:12), and in the proverb that warns such a deep sleep is also brought on by laziness. (See Prov. 19:15.) As the man slept, God removed one of the man's ribs and then closed the place of the incision.

The description of God's creation of the woman from the man is packed with symbolism. The Hebrew term for "rib" is typically translated as "side" in the Old Testament, often referring to the side of a building. It is frequently used in reference to the construction of the tabernacle. (See Ex. 25:12,14; 26:20,26,35.) That God **took** a rib from the man may suggest the marriage relationship as God's intention for the creation of woman, since the same word is used elsewhere in Genesis in reference to marriage (Gen. 4:19, "took"; 6:2, "took"; 12:19, "took," "take"; 19:14, "marry").

The woman being taken from the man emphasized the special nature of her creation and the fact that she was clearly part of the man. While the man and all the animals were formed from the ground (see 2:7,19), only the woman was formed from the man, emphasizing the uniqueness of her creation. God intended her to be the man's special partner, similar to the man but at the same time different from him as well.

[Verse 22] God **made** the woman out of the man's rib. The Hebrew word for *made* is another term related to construction. It is used frequently to describe the construction of a building. The term is used to describe Cain as the builder of a city (see 4:17) and of Noah's building of an altar to the Lord. (See 8:20.) It is also used of God constructing His sanctuary on Mount Zion. (See Ps. 78:69.)

The woman was carefully created by God, the master builder, and uniquely crafted by Him to be the perfect helper for the man. She was similar to him (of the same type—a human being) and yet distinct from him (a different gender—female). After He fashioned the woman, God brought her to the man, presenting her as a special gift to him. It was, in effect, the first marriage ceremony, officiated by God Himself. God's presentation of the woman to the man calls to mind the long standing practice that continues in many marriage ceremonies today, where a pastor asks, "Who presents (or gives) this woman to be married to this man?"



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Genesis 2:23-25

23 Then the man said, *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”* **24** Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 2:23-25 on page 107 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: **Question #4** on page 107 of the PSG: **“What principles can we learn from this passage about God’s design for marriage?”**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the biblical principle of “one flesh.”

RECAP: Culture wants to muddy the waters concerning who completes whom. The world wants us to endorse the false idea that it doesn’t matter who “completes” you. Men can marry men; women can marry women. The Bible doesn’t show marriage as anything but a relationship between a man and a woman—and it is a covenant relationship. Covenant is a powerful theme throughout the Bible; it is most strongly seen in the various covenants God established with His people. Of course, the ultimate covenant is the eternal covenant through Christ.

DISCUSS: **Question #5** on page 107 of the PSG: **“What are some ways our group can help others who are trying to follow God’s design for gender and marriage?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Marriage is between one man and one woman for life.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why is separation from parents an important part of God’s design for marriage?

Genesis 2:23-25 Commentary

[Verse 23] From the beginning God designed marriage to be a permanent, lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. As the man witnessed the special gift God had created for him and given to him, he exclaimed, **“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”** The words of the man indicate the unique nature of the relationship between the man and woman.

The man exclaimed she would be called **“Woman”** because **“she was taken out of Man.”** In Hebrew there is a play on words between the word for “woman” (*ishshah*) and the word for “man” (*ish*). The man explained the play on words when he stated, “she was taken out of Man.” Yet while this new person was like him in one respect, she was a human of a different gender from him—the perfect mate and helper he needed.

Though the man had been given the privilege of naming the animals because of his dominion over them (see Gen. 2:19), this act of naming the woman was not a show of power or domination. Even so, the man’s action, coupled with his status as the original human of creation, gives a picture of God’s design for the marriage relationship. The biblical standard is that of male headship in the home, in which the man has responsibility to lead and the woman has responsibility to submit to his leadership. (See 1 Cor. 11:7-9; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.) These responsibilities are not to be abused or rejected, but are to be exercised from a perspective of love and respect. (See Eph. 5:33.)

[Verse 24] The marriage relationship involves both disconnecting and connecting. Marriage requires a break with the initial dependence and primacy of relationships that first existed between a man and his parents. (The first man obviously did not have parents to leave.) In its place would come a new priority in which the man bonds with his wife. Today, it is best to view this leaving in a symbolic way—representative of the emotional separation from parents that must happen in order for a marriage to thrive. While the language in this verse speaks of the man leaving his family, it certainly relates to the woman as well.

This new covenant relationship is portrayed as the couple becomes **one flesh**. The most obvious reference is to the sexual union of a man and woman in marriage, which for the first couple would have been essential for them to be fruitful and multiply. (See Gen. 1:28.) However, a true “one flesh” mindset means more than just sexual fulfillment or procreation. It develops from genuine love that brings about an emotional union and a commitment to each other. (See Eph. 5:25,28-29.)

Marriage is not a requirement or even an expectation for everyone. (See Matt. 19:10-12.) God has gifted certain people to remain single. (See 1 Cor. 7:7-9,32-35.) However, the general traits of masculinity and femininity apply to all men and women respectively, whether married, unmarried, divorced, or widowed.

[Verse 25] The purity of the first couple’s relationship was expressed in the statement that both the man and the women were naked, yet they were not ashamed. They had nothing to hide from each other, which is the essence of intimacy that is the ideal for every marriage.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 108 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray.** If you are married, pray for your spouse daily. If you're not married, pray for those who are. Pray marriages would be lived in ways that honor Christ.
- ▶ **List.** Make a list of the strengths and qualities your spouse brings to your marriage—those traits that make for a strong marriage. If you're not married, list the qualities you would look for in a mate or those you appreciate seeing in a marriage you admire.
- ▶ **Respect.** Respect all individuals as created in the image of God, and show grace and compassion to those who disagree with the biblical definition of marriage or who are confused about gender issues.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 108 of the PSG:

We often laugh at things we've seen in weddings or the funny dynamics in some marriages—including our own. But we should make sure whatever we do, we honor this blessed "first institution."

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for the wonderful gift of marriage and our distinctive perspectives as men and women. Ask the Lord to strengthen marriages in the church and help us be encouragers toward that end.



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