

WEEK 7 | CREATED HUMAN | FOR THE OTHER

GENESIS 2:18-25

¹⁸ The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:10-13

¹⁰ My beloved spoke and said to me,
'Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, come with me.

¹¹ See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.

¹² Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.

¹³ The fig-tree forms its early fruit;
the blossoming vines spread their
fragrance.

Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me.'

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6-7

⁶ Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its passion unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,

like a mighty flame.

⁷ Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of one's house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

MATTHEW 19:1-6

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

⁴ 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," ⁵ and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

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Commentary

Read together these three passages give us the beginnings of a scriptural theology of sex, marriage and gender. You might enjoy reading them together as a group, and then talking more specifically about the Genesis 2 passage

It is vital to note the significance of the passage in Genesis. This was the place Jesus turned to as the foundation for his vision for sex, marriage and gender. Here we find a story of how things were designed to be and an understanding of our place within the ordered creation.

Talk together well

As a church, it is important to recognise that talking about sex, marriage and gender is increasingly contested ground, but we also know that it is personally and pastorally sensitive. We have been guilty of not talking about them at all, or talking about them badly, careless, simplistically, judgmentally. When talking about this subject we are touching people's identities and lived experiences at a deep level.

We are the post-revolution generation

We live in the aftermath of the sexual revolution - arguably the biggest and most significant revolution the world has ever seen. Making sense of things is hard. How we see sex, gender, marriage, divorce, sexuality, reproduction has completely changed in our lifetimes.

Our guiding north star

Genesis 1 and 2 are our fixed points to guide us forward in our post revolution context.

Over the last month as we have travelled through Genesis 1 and 2, we in **Genesis 1** we have already learned **five key things** about ourselves – about the purpose and design of human beings.

- We live in a world of order and purpose – God has created a home for us to live in with him

- We have learned that all of us are made in the image of God to bear his image together – such an honour!
- We have learned that we have been made distinct – male and female – differentiated in sex and gender. There are two ways of being a body, says Pope John Paul – two incarnations of being the image of God
- We have already learned that we have been made for reproduction – for fruitfulness, for generation. Indeed, our genders are related to our potential for generation and foundational to our commission to “be fruitful and multiply”
- And lastly, we have already been reminded that we have all been made subdue and rule the earth – together as male and female icons of God – his vice regents – overseeing and ruling and shaping the world he gave us all to live in.

While we are distinct, we have designed for a shared purpose.

In Genesis 2 we are given seven more vital truths about what it means to be human - our role, our purpose and our meaning.

1. We are body and soul

⁷ Then the Lord God formed a man (Adam) from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being

2. We have a priestly role to tend and care – not just subdue and rule

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man (adam) and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

This is a priestly role of serving and honouring the gift we have been given

3. We are designed for freedom but given limits

In the garden there is purpose, permission, and prohibition all together teaching us that our truest identity, our greatest fulfilment, comes when we pick up our purpose, when we enjoy the permission we have been given, and when we understand and submit to the limits of God’s prohibition on us. We are most alive and free when we live *within* God’s design.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you”

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’

And then in Genesis 2:15-25 another 4 points

4. We are designed for connection. “It’s not good to be alone”

¹⁸ The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’

We all know this. It not good for man to be alone – we have a hole within us. We are designed for relationship, for connection, for interdependence. We need others – people to accompany us, to partner us, to strengthen us. No man is an Island.

5. We ache for ‘complimentary’ or suitable partners

The animals are paraded in front of Adam – one by one – but each time Adam is disappointed. None of them satisfy. None of them are 'suitable partners'. Adam names the animals but ultimately, he remains alone. He just sees difference – he is longing for complimentary partnership

The words 'suitable helper' in Hebrew is '**neged ezer**'

- **Neged** is the Hebrew word translated 'suitable' and it means, "in front of, in sight of, or opposite to". A suitable helper is opposite us, but one that matches us. 'complimentary' to us – different but complementary.

Suitable also carries the sense of being advantageous – a suitable leader is a *good* leader – equipped for the role. A suitable chair is one which is a *good* chair – right for the purposes needed. A suitable outfit is one which matches the needs of the person and the activity that they are involved in. A suitable helper is one which fits us, and which makes a difference!

- **Helper** is a translation of the word "Ezer". Ezer is used 21 times in the Old Testament. The first two times it's used in the Bible it describes woman, but the majority of cases after this it is used to describe God. In the New Testament Jesus tells us that he will send us a 'helper' for us – the Holy Spirit.

In many passages, it's used in military contexts (Deuteronomy 33:29, Psalm 115:9, Exodus 18:4, Ezekiel 12:14). God describes himself as Israel's *ezer* in times of conflict.

So, when the word *ezer* is used to describe woman it's not a term of inferiority or weakness. It's quite the opposite. Just as God is our helper, Eve was Adam's helper. It's a position of strength, not of servitude. To be a woman is to be a warrior, not a servant. Adam needed a complementary, suitable, helper – woman.

6. **Woman and Man are meant for each other** – they are a delightful gift to each other

Notice that God gifts man a woman – similar, different – who comes from *within* him - *of* him, but not completely identical.

The story is strange but full of meaning. Man is put into a deep sleep. Pope John Paul describes it as the sleep of *non-being* – of nothingness.

First there is man – a unit – then there is sleep – and then after this there is man and woman – a duality – longing for union

The story tells us that woman is created from the side of man - *Ishshah* from *Ish*. The point being that they belong side by side and yet when they stand in front of each other they know they are made for each other.

Adam is delighted! He see's woman – and as Milton puts it in Paradise Lost – when he first sees woman, he sees himself for the first time

"At last! Here is flesh of my flesh – different and yet complimentary, distinct and differentiated, but the same – bone of my bone."

And off they run and make love to each other

²⁴ *That is why a man (ish) leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife (be-ish-to), and they become one flesh.*

Man and woman fit each other. They are complimentary, suitable partners.

7. Marriage and sex is designed for union

The story tells us that the man is drawn to the woman – his opposite number – facing him openly and vulnerably in front of him. Together they are naked and not ashamed. Vulnerable and yet both strong. Both created, both image bearers together, both embodied souls, both identifiably male and female – and they both know that their bodies fit, and their souls fit too. They are soul-mates. They are designed for union, for marriage.

This is the first mention of marriage in the bible. The first mention of a wife and a husband. This is the first mention of parenting – or being a father and mother. And it is to this story, this narrative, that Jesus returns when questioned about divorce. Why? Because he wants us to know how it was designed to be. He wants us to know that it's all about union.

For Jesus, divorce is the ripping apart of what God has joined together. It is not the mere ripping off of a plaster stuck to the skin – it is the ripping apart of two entities that have become one. And that's why it hurts. We are designed for union.

Questions

Bible reflection

- What does Genesis 2 tell us about people and how we are designed and made?
- What is the significance of being male and female?
- What is the significance of woman being made out of man's side
- What does it mean for woman to be a suitable helper? How do you feel about this?
- What does this passage tell us about marriage? Why did Jesus create a synthesis of Genesis 1 and 2 when questioned about divorce?
- What does the Song of Songs have to add to the picture of sex and sexuality?
- What does it mean to say that marriage and sex are for UNION?

Cultural and personal reflection

- How does this passage (and the talk from Richard) help navigate ways forward for us individually and as a church on these issues?
- Where do we feel inadequate or uncertain about it all?
- What are the biggest challenges for us about this subject?
- How do you feel about living with difference and different perspectives on this issue within the church?
- What are the biggest issues for you personally?
- How do we deal with failure and shame in this area of our lives?

A extract from Richard's talk

All of us, especially our post-revolution generation, need to know we were designed for union. It's the meaning of sex, of marriage.

- Some of us have slept with partners before marriage and then broken up – and we've experienced the sadness and the pain of this pulling apart. Sex was not designed for this. It was designed for union
- Some have got married and been fully united with another in our bodies, and souls, and lives – and then been divorced or become divorced – and we are still carrying the scars of broken vows and deep sorrows. Marriage was not designed for this – it was designed for union.
- Some of us (maybe?) have been abused by others – terribly so – and we carry the burden, the cost, the shame and deep sadness of being used. Sex was never designed for this – it was made for union.
- Some of us have been told the lie that sex is about pleasure – about physical feelings of excitement and release and self-expression. We may have experienced a one-night stand, or used pornography, or celebrated the freedom of contraception in order to avoid the complete giving of ourselves away. It's way more than that – it's about union
- Some of us have been told the lie that sex is about romantic love – about the emotional enjoyment and thrill of sexual delight and emotional attraction – an idealised version of relationships without responsibility. It's way more than that – it's about union
- Some of us have been told the lie that sex is nothing really – it's just a need, a hunger, a desire – a base instinct of no deep meaning or essential purpose. All it needs is consent. It's way more than that – it's about union.
- Some of us have been told the lie that sex is about self-fulfilment, the expression of your truest self – a fundamental human right to express who you are and what you like. It's way more than an expression of ourselves – it's about union – the emptying of ourselves for the sake of another.

This is our plumbline. This is our fixed point. This is our guide to lead us through these crazy, reckless post-revolution days. This is what our scriptures reveal about the nature of reality. This is where Jesus wanted us to return to when we were confused about our ethics, disappointed in our relationships or needing a vision for sex. Sex is about union – the means by which God joins together a man and woman – to become one flesh.

This is a deep mystery – and it points to the ultimate mystery of us being united to God, united to Christ. We are designed for union and God made us the way he did to carry this truth around in our bodies. Christopher West calls this the Theology of our bodies.

All of us have experienced some brokenness in this area of our lives. Bad sex, inappropriate longing and lust, masturbation, adultery, sexual immorality, pornography and more. Looking for union we reached out for it in inappropriate ways. And many of us have suffered as a result of others – broken relationships, being touched up, being let down and betrayed, being dishonoured.

The story in Genesis 1 and 2 tells us, just as Jesus reminded us, that **it was not always so**. In the beginning things were designed to be very different. It was not always so.

And so, we take our guidance from this blueprint. If we really want to live in sync with our design, we need to allow this pattern to shape our approach to sex, to sexuality, to singleness, to gender, to marriage, to divorce. And the world needs a community who take this seriously like never before.

The world has nothing to offer us sexually. We have much to learn, much to talk about together. We all have many questions to ask. But let us start here – in the beautiful and strange story of Genesis 1 and 2, just like Jesus did, as we seek, post-revolution, to define our humanity and discern how to express our sexuality once again.