



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“Men and Women and Marriage” Genesis 1:27, 2:18-25, 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

June is a traditional month for weddings. Just try to find a reception hall with an open date in this month! But as we conclude our series of Bible messages aimed at men, and the women who love them, I thought this would be a good question to ask God today: What is marriage for?

Counselor and author John Eldredge has suggested men have a battle to fight, a beauty to win, and an adventure to live. I’m going to suggest that marriage provides the battlefield for all three tasks of a man.

We start, as usual, with God’s Word on the subject. There are several scriptures to digest today, beginning again at the beginning. So open your Bibles to the first book, to Genesis. Here’s chapter 1, verse 27, from Today’s New International Version: **So God created human being in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**

And in the Second Creation account, in chapter two, starting with verse 18-25, we read, *[text]* and continuing into chapter 3, we read *[text]*

Wow! There’s so much here, as our men are discovering on Friday mornings. In that Bible study, we can really go deep with this. But we need to focus today on what we are hearing about men and women and marriage.

From the Genesis 1 passage, we learn that men are not made in the image of God. Men and women together is what it takes to live fully up to the image of God. Thus there is no different value for women in God’s sight than there is for men. We learn, the man (as well as the woman) has to ‘leave home’—leave the parents behind emotionally, not just physically—and join with his wife. Together, the husband and wife have the potential for living in the image of God. Men and women have so much in common. They are to be “helpmeets” for each other, to use the old King James English; they are partners, side by side, rib-to-rib, facing the world together.

Then, from the Genesis 3 passage about our fallen nature, we see that acting on our own, without God, debases the image of God in us. “Deciding for ourselves”—something we are soon fighting for as children—severs us from our Creator in a deep way. Once we’ve decided to decide on our own, we have abandoned God. In that moment the woman has become a functional atheist. She could have used her freedom to ‘check in’ with God, to consult with God. But she wouldn’t wait; she didn’t think of God at all. She went ahead on her own.

And what about the man? He's right there. He says nothing. He is passive. He's right there, but he's not all there. He's a functional atheist, too. This whole project God has started is not going well. The woman and the man have left God out, and that choice—even before reaching for the forbidden fruit—severs their relationship with God. Everything becomes harder now. They still have God's care, but the intimate relationship they've enjoyed—talking with God in the cool of the day—is gone, only to be restored in Jesus. (That's another part of the story we have to leave aside for today.) So we learn that we cannot “be all we can be” without God present to and in us. We have to exert ourselves to overcome this relational deficit we carry, and that's a huge change of the habits of our hearts.

These accounts of creation and abandoning the Creator are right in the front of “The Book”, and it's clear most people not learned these lessons yet!

Marriage is God's answer to the “not good” of being alone. Just as God's very nature is relationship, because we are made in God's image, our nature is relationship, too—connection with God, connection with a partner, a mate.

It's not that a man can't function, or a woman can't function, alone. But that's not how we were made. We were made to enjoy each other; but because our relational ability is damaged, what happens so much is that we annoy each other, instead.

I'll just give you one Biblical example, for time's sake: Samson. This is a story from the book of Judges that all the boys in Sunday School latch on to. I trust you know it, from Judges 14-16. Samson is a big, strong dude, and gets victory over the Philistines—that's how young boys get it. But as adults, we can see more here. Samson was raised as a Nazirite, dedicated to God from birth. But he doesn't live like it. It looks like that was his parents' thing, as I read the text; these external grooming and nutritional habits never seemed to connect the boy's heart with God. Samson's main claim to fame in the first part of the story is his weakness for women, his emotional immaturity, his bad choices. He lets himself fall for Delilah (one of the bad girls of the Bible, a member of the Philistines who had constantly been trying to push Israel out of the Promised Land). He gets himself into a terrible fix, bound and tortured by Israel's enemies, and looking like his whole life is going to serve as entertainment for these cruel people. So as a last resort, he calls on God. God grants Samson his desire for revenge on these tormentors who are also the enemies of God's people. In an early version of a suicide bombing, Samson collapses the structure of the sports palace they used as a temple to their god, and thousands of Philistines die, as well as Samson himself.

Samson didn't know God from his rear end. Is this a model for manhood? He's alone—he has no partner, just a “sex buddy” from time to time. He's separated from God, too, almost his whole life long. For those wrapped up in the politics of tribal warfare, this sounds like a story of glory. But from the perspective of God's design, it's a pitiful example of failure to fulfill the design God has for men and women and marriage. “Relational impairment” is written all over this.

And it's not as though just getting married overcomes this relational impairment automatically, as if by magic—whatever the wedding industry would have us think. A husband and wife will not automatically enjoy intimacy. Think of all the stories of “disappointments after the honeymoon”.

[fun and frank video of “adjustments in marriage”, BlueFish TV]

People have to become partners by intention; they have to make space for intimacy in their marriage. I tell couples they have to think of their marriage as if it were their first child. They have to feed it and care for it, and take time to change the diapers regularly.

I’ve included in your bulletin today a little self-test I give couples, six months after I perform their wedding service. This is from an organization called, “Marriage Enrichment”, and I recommend their events highly. We get together, and I have the man and the woman rate each of these qualities of the marriage from 1 to 10, and I get them to talk to each other about their ratings of that part of their relationship. The talking is the most important part, and I get to coach them in their communication. This is a great tool, and I don’t know another pastor who does this with wedding couples—it’s built in to the contract I make with each pair. After we complete this sharing, I invite them to use this form on every anniversary—they fill it out in pencil, so they can erase it and re-use it—to take the time to look at the health of their marriage. It may be the only time these couples intentionally examine their relationship deficit, and see what they can do about it.

In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus’ opponents lay a trap for him, trying to make him look stupid. They set out a hypothetical situation of a woman who marries a fellow, but that fellow dies. As the Jewish Law of Moses required, the husband’s brother was to marry her. And if that man died, the next brother would become her husband. And so on, and so on. Now, after the resurrection, they challenged Jesus, whose wife will she be? Jesus answered, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” So marriage is not forever; it IS “until death do us part,” as most vows have it. If marriage is not forever, what is marriage FOR?

Marriage is the moral proving ground of life, a “character camp” that stretches us and gives us opportunities to grow to be our best—and together, to reflect more of the image of God that God gave us at creation.

Marriage cannot become an idol. Paul writes to his friends at Corinth, saying, “I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:32-25 TNIV)

The image of God that God gave us at creation we see when we look at Jesus. He is “the visible image of the invisible God,” as Paul says in Colossians 1:13. Together, with solid, intimate marriages and families bound together as the Church of Jesus, together we can look a lot like Jesus.

So we can’t “be all we can be” without God, without knowing God now as Jesus did then. Marriage relationships that have God in their midst as a presence and not just a concept are

even closer to God's original design. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—relationship. The man, the woman, and the relational God—an earthly Trinity!

Yeah, we've got a long way to go. But what a dream God has for us—men, and women, and marriage!

Here's an event you might like to attend, to learn more. (Cloud-Townsend/August/Elk Grove)

Here's my hope for you today, men, as we close our series. I hope you have a greater grasp on who we were created to be—there are printed copies of the earlier two sermons of the series on the back table, if you missed them. I hope you understand your potential, your purpose, and the possibilities you have yet ahead. I hope you will live these out, and pass these on through your life to younger men as a mentor. I hope those of you who are married appreciate your mate more fully, and can take your marriage to a much higher level than before you walked in the door today—you, your wife—and so help you, God!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on June 24, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]