

Marriage Matters: God's purpose for Marriage

Genesis 2:18-25

It's good to be back preaching again after a holiday away with family. And it was as I began my holiday that made a wonderful discovery: My two-week vacation coincided with the two weeks of the Olympics! That wasn't planned but I'm glad it turned out that way, two weeks of sport without having to turn my attention back to work. I think I might do the same in four years time: holiday during the games!

And so I was able to watch the Australians perform in various events and while we didn't have the same success as previous games we did see some great performances, including a gold medal performance by these athletes: our Womens' Rugby 7s team won the first ever Rugby 7s Gold medal.



Like every great performance there's an interesting backstory. This team has only been together for 4 years, and they came together from a wide variety of sports: some of them were touch football players; one came from basketball; one was a sprinter in track and field. But they were all brought together in a plan to win gold, And they proved to be quick learners, didn't they? The plan was a success! Here we have a truly great Australian Team.

Today we are starting a new sermon series here at Waitara Anglican, a series called *Marriage Matters*. If we are talking about marriage, why on earth am I talking about Rugby? Well, I want us to think about what it means to be part of a team. We're starting our series looking at the first ever marriage recorded in the Bible, the marriage between Adam and Eve as described in Genesis Ch 2. And what strikes me most from this description is the team-like quality of the relationship between Adam and Eve. So when we think about the Bible's view of marriage, the first image I want us to have is the image of a successful team.

Now, from the outset I also want to stress that marriages aren't the only teams that we humans can find ourselves in. We humans are connected in all sorts of different groups, and for some of us marriage isn't one of them. If marriage isn't something we are involved in at the moment then I appreciate that there is the temptation to switch off. But can I give a couple of reasons why this topic is important for everyone.

1. There's every chance that we'll be asked for an opinion about marriage in the proposed plebiscite. Regardless of marital status, the fact that we are Australian citizens is enough to warrant us thinking seriously about this.
2. We all know and love people who *are married*, or who *will be married*, or who are

experiencing marriage difficulties or who perhaps have experienced a marriage breakdown. How do we speak and relate with them? How do we pray for them?

In addition to these two very practical reasons we could also add that verse in Hebrews 13:4 which says that marriage should be honoured *by all*, and part of honouring marriage is having well-formed biblical ideas about it. So I invite you to have your Bibles open at Genesis Ch 2.18, where we read first of all that marriage is a team *with a purpose* The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Why does God say that it's not good for Adam to be alone? Is God concerned about Adam's *loneliness*: "Poor Adam has no one to watch TV with while he eats bad takeaway". Or maybe God is concerned about Adam's *helplessness* "Poor Adam has no one to whip him into shape so he needs a wife!" Adam's isolation is a problem because of neither of those things. Let's go back and have a look at the context of this verse. The setting is the Garden of Eden, And what role does Adam have in the garden? His job is to (v15) work it and take care of it. Our task as humans is to get working and bring order to the world! But it's a big job! God recognizes this, and creates Eve—not primarily as a lover, not primarily as a friend—but primarily as a helper. I will make a helper suitable for him Marriage is a team with a purpose; it has a very practical aim: It's a tool to help us be productive in the world.

This productivity can take all sorts of different forms. One of the most obvious is the raising and training of children; marriages are places where children are brought up to take over from us. Other families see their household as a place where they can provide shelter for vulnerable children through foster care. Either way, as they look after children husbands and wives are working together to care for God's world. The classic family business is perhaps a more old-fashioned way of putting this concept into practice. Jas used to work for a man whose 90 year old mother would cook him a hot lunch every day; it was her way of contributing to her son's work. This is the fundamental reason why families exist in God's creation, we are there to help each other to care for God's world as we labor along.

It also follows that the purpose of Marriage is not about self-fulfillment. It's interesting that for every aspect of marriage described in the Bible our society is able to produce a distortion. One distortion is thinking that marriage is about fulfilling a personal need. We think that happiness will come with the wedding, or with the grandchildren that our children's marriages will produce. Marriages can be great sources of joy, but that's not the ultimate aim.

When our Gold medal winning Rugby team came together, they had one aim – to win the competition. The camaraderie and health benefits of training were some enjoyable extras, but they were secondary considerations. And so it is with marriage. For those who are married, what purpose are you working towards? If your purpose in being married is simply to not be alone or to fit in with everyone else, then can I encourage you to look beyond that and to think about what kind of mark

your union is going to leave behind.

So Adam needs a helper, and God's first attempt to provide a partner doesn't quite hit the mark. All the different animals are marshaled before Adam but we read at the end of verse 20 for Adam no suitable helper was found. God's next action is to take one of Adam's ribs and to mold a new creation; to create a new being who *will be* a suitable partner. From verse 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." The Bible never gets boring. Even familiar stories can reveal fresh insights, and one fresh insight for me in recent times is how Adam sees something of himself in Eve: This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. The animals in the garden were nothing like Adam, but with Eve it's like he's looking into a mirror; this is a pairing of equals.

Over the last 18 months or so our society has become increasingly aware of a great disease that exists within our culture. Domestic violence is in our news in a new way, and on one level it's a good thing that we are learning more about what is going on in some households, although the stories themselves are horrendous. Domestic or family violence is not just physical but it can be emotional and financial, it can affect men and women, adults and children, even grandparents, although statistically it's the wives and kids who are bearing the brunt.

At its center seems to be a unhealthy desire for one partner to control the other, and that's a horrible distortion of marriage as it's presented in Genesis 2. One of the things that makes the marriage relationship unique is the equality that's involved. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. In the NT Paul picks up on this in Ephesians 5 when he commands husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. He says He who loves his wife loves himself. So I think this aspect of marriage is one we need to remember now more than ever because our wider society seems to have left this behind. Spouses are not there to be dominated over, rather God's design is for you to treat them as an equal.

Having said that, it would also be a mistake to say that men and women are *exactly* the same. Men and women are equal in dignity but there is a complementary nature to our genders as well. Genesis 1 speaks of two types of human, together reflecting something of God's image but distinguishable by their different genders: male and female. Here in Genesis 2 we have *man* and *woman* in verse 23, *fathers* and *mothers* are mentioned in verse 24. There is also a difference in the way Adam and Eve are created. Both are formed out of the created order, but not in the same way; Adam out of the dust, Eve out of Adam's side. Even when we move outside the Bible we see from basic observations that there are important differences, not only in terms of our physical appearance and biological functions but also in the different ways we process information. Men and women are different, and it seems that God intends for that diversity to play a part within marriage.

One of the strengths of our gold medal winning rugby team is that many of the players came from different backgrounds; they each brought something different to

the table. It's the same with teams at work, isn't it? You're a fool if you just employ people who are the same as you, you just don't get the same breadth of knowledge and skills needed to succeed. And so it is with marriage; while men and women are equal in dignity their differences are also a great strength as they work towards a goal.

This leads us right into another hot issue, doesn't it? Right now as a society we are asking whether we should change the marriage act to include same sex marriage. If we're going to follow the Bible consistently then we'll have to conclude that gay marriage is also outside of God's design. God's design is for a husband and wife to *complement* each other as two different genders. The best teams embrace some level of diversity, and the team of a husband and wife is no different.

In verse 24 we see another characteristic of this theme: A husband and wife is a team that ;'leaves and cleaves'. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. What do the husband and wife leave? They leave their families of origin; they leave one team in order to start another. My observation is that sometimes this is hard to do; sometimes it's hard for parents to let go and it's hard for children to establish their own independence. But the generations need to be giving each other space. We still need to honour our parents as the commandment tells us but ongoing interference from parents with children or ongoing dependence by children upon parents is not God's design. And once the leaving happens the cleaving begins. To *cleave* to something means to be joined to something; The husband and the wife are a team that sticks together! Sometimes I come across couples that spend long periods apart, sometimes on the opposite halves of the globe! That's not a healthy pattern for our marriages.

This is also where love, affection and sexual intimacy become important. Biology tells us when two people make love certain hormones are released that help us bond together emotionally. Sometimes we Christians can talk about getting married in order to have sex, but the truth of the matter is that we have sex to serve our marriages. Sex is the bonding exercise that helps the marriage function well as a team. A team that is actually all about working together to do God's work.

And as we do God's work in this team we are reflecting something of God himself. We'll see more of this next week, but our picture of the purpose of marriage wouldn't be complete without mentioning that marriage is designed to reflect something of God's relationship with us. In Ephesians 5 Paul speaks of marriage being an image of Christ and the church. Out of the characteristics we've seen today I think it's the particular characteristic of cleaving together that's most relevant; when we place our trust in Jesus we are unified in him, our sins are transferred to him and his status of being God's son and heir is transferred to us. We become one, and marriage is meant to be a reminder of this great truth. So let's not join in with the great distortions that are so common today. When we distort marriage, we are distorting a reflection of God himself.

I'd like to leave you with a picture of a marriage that gets it right. Good models of marriage are so important; this is why intergenerational relationships are so vital to our church life. We saw this when we were looking at Titus 2 not long ago. But there are good models in the Scriptures themselves. The one I want to draw your attention to is a subtle example. Priscilla and Aquila don't make lots of appearances in the Scriptures, but I think they embody much of what we have spoken about today. We first read about them in Acts 18 where, because of their Jewish heritage, they have been expelled from Rome. They meet the apostle Paul in Corinth and they team up with him. In Romans 16 Paul calls them his "fellow workers". They weren't full-time gospel workers, they were tent makers by trade, but they knew that God had a job for them to do. Their job as to work with Paul, and they did it together. They leave Corinth and follow Paul to Ephesus where they have a very important ministry; they meet Apollos who was a very gifted speaker but who didn't quite have his theology right, and so they become his teachers. They head back to Rome and then they head back to Ephesus again. At one point we read that they were hosting a church in their house. They were a well travelled couple, but wherever they found themselves they applied themselves to the task of serving God's church, be it through teaching or through hospitality. Their marriage has a purpose and a goal. What might your goal be?

