

What God Has Joined Together

Genesis 2:18-25

“You complete me.” “You had me at hello.”

“I may not be a smart man, but I know what love is.”

“I’m just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her.”

“You have bewitched me, body and soul, and I love... I love... I love you.”

If you are not familiar with any of those quotes, let me fill you in that they are from classic rom coms like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Noting Hill*, and *Jerry McGuire*.

Movies that fill our screens because as humans, we are crazy about love. So crazy about love in fact that it is estimated that up to 700 new rom-com movies are made and released each year.

We can’t even make kids movies without a random, often confusing love interest... Woody and Bo Peep in *Toy Story*, Donkey and Dragon in *Shrek*, Lightning McQueen and Sally who are cars in *Cars!*

And why? Because we are crazy about love. But as you look at what’s filling our screens you might also conclude that we’ve gone crazy about love. Every year there are shows with seemingly willing participants trying to find love. But gone are the wholesome days of *Farmer Wants a Wife* or the *Bachelor* where one guy dates multiple women at once and expects them to be ok with it...

We now have *Love is Blind* where people seek to fall in love from within a box, not seeing anyone but only talking to the point where someone should propose. Or *Temptation Island* where several couples are isolated on an island together to see just how committed they really are to each other.

Or *The Ultimatum*, where couples temporarily date other people to see if it will prompt them to commit to marry the person they are actually dating in the first place - and if they won’t, they break up! Are we crazy about love or have we gone crazy about love?

If there is an area of life we need to come back to our origins and be grounded in truth and what love is by our loving creator, it is love, relationships and marriage. Which is what we have in Genesis 2.

But as we look at God’s Word today or even has you heard it read already, I want to acknowledge that lots of will come at this passage and topic from different perspectives and experiences. Some of us will be happily married or happily single. Some will be unhappily married or unhappily single.

And we won’t be cover everything or say something to address every situation. But at the same time, wherever we are at: hearing, trusting, and responding to God’s Word is always good for us.

In Genesis 1 we have been given the big picture of God the creator, who in the beginning made the heavens and the earth in an ordered, purposeful, and beautifully designed way - culminating in the creation of humanity, made in God’s images as male and female, to dwell with God in paradise.

But if Genesis 1 is the big picture, the wide lens perspective like Google Earth, Genesis 2 is the on the ground street view version. The story both slows down and zooms in to expand on what it means to be made by God, to live in his world, flourishing under his loving rule.

Genesis 2 shows us there is an order, beauty, and design to God making us male and female, men and women, that is foundational and picked up in the NT to shape our understanding of the roles of men and women especially in the home and in the church (1Cor 11:1-16; 1Tim 2:11-15).

But to our shock, after hearing God declare 7 times his creation is good in chp 1, in 2:18 he says that something is not good. Before the fall and sin enters the world, in paradise, there is something not good: it is not good for the man to be alone. Which is the first point, we are made for relationship.

Adam is in the garden, commissioned by God in v.15 to work and watch over it, but he is alone, which is not good because central to being human is that we are made for relationships: with God and with each other. And this was actually anticipated in what we heard in Genesis 1:26.

When God makes humanity on day #6, male and female in his image, he says, *Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness*. God himself exists in relationship – in community – one God in three persons. We call this the Trinity.

And so as those made in the image of the Triune – relational – God, we are made to be relationship not just with God but with each other. Adam is in paradise, with God and without sin, yet it is not good for him to be alone, part of his and our design is to be with others.

To which God says he will fix by providing a suitable helper. Yet before he does this, we have a deliberate pause in vv.19-20 as God brings all the animals to the man for him to name them – which he does. And it's a picture of his rule over the created order that God gave humanity in 1:26.

Yet God has a purpose here. Adam's naming of the animals was not randomly assigning sounds as if he went giiiraffe that's a long neck. Names were meant to capture meaning, to recognize and identify distinctions in the created world. It was a process of analysing and classifying.

This whole process brings Adam to the conclusion that there is no one and nothing like him. No one suitable to share in the task of working and caring for the created world as an image bearer, he has no companion or equal. To which God says he will make the woman, a *helper corresponding to him*.

This language of helper for some of us is jarring and uncomfortable. It immediately conjures up an idea of inferiority; an assistant. Yet we know it does not and cannot have that meaning as the most common usage of this word *helper* is to describe God himself as the *helper* of Israel (Ps 33:20).

God is the helper and he clearly is not inferior to us! The focus of the term helper is that Adam needs help. On his own is inadequate, he cannot live out his God-given purpose without help. The woman is his helper as she uniquely provides what he lacks because she suitable.

Which is what we see play out and even be celebrated in what happens in vv.21-23. God causes the man to sleep, takes one of his ribs and closes it over, and literally builds the woman and brings her to the man. And as the meeting is emphatically celebrated as he bursts out in poetry.

Finally! At last, he says! He delights in her, celebrates her because, as we'll unpack more shortly, she is same, same, but different.

Not a rival or a replacement, not a competitor or a clone. A partner and helper as one humanity in the image of God. So what was described in 1:27, humanity as male and female, is now lived out and celebrated in relationship and as a community.

Each has a unique and non-interchangeable glory that the other does not. Each one can see and do things that the other cannot. A difference that is good, a God-given good!

And although this is not the main point being made here as we'll see, it is worth pausing and reflecting on. Here we see the beauty and importance of being part of a community. Especially as we live in a time when loneliness is so common, it was declared in 2025 to be a public health issue.

Beyond Blue reports that 1/3 of people are experiencing persistent loneliness and half of 18-24 y/o's say being isolated is a significant concern for them. In fact, half of Australians surveyed said they experienced loneliness even while among others!

And while statistics and surveys don't always give a full picture and can be taken with a grain of salt, it is showing us something important. We are made to be in relationships, to know and be known, and it is not good when we aren't. Community is not to be taken for granted but invested in.

As God's people, shaped by God's Word, there should be an intentionality and authenticity and depth about our time together and our investment in knowing others.

So hopefully you can see that things like growth groups, prayer meetings, weekly church, being hospitable, serving on teams and even cleaning bees are not simply to keep us busy – but opportunities to enjoy and go deeper into community: knowing others and being known by them.

Which is something that social media and digital communication can never provide us. As one article reported, with social media we have optimised connection for the largest scale while accidentally destroying connection with any depth.

And wouldn't it be awful if our church life was described that way? Plenty of people but I can't say I know any of them. Constant small talk but no depth. Meeting regularly but not actually known by anyone. So do we value and invest in community so that this can never be said of us?

But the interplay of man and woman, of how we need each other, is most profoundly seen in marriage. In v.24 we have an abrupt pause in the story to comment on what is happening: that the creation of woman to be with the man is the first marriage – and why we have marriage.

As God brings the woman to the man the focus is on how the beauty of her complementary nature and their companionship will be expressed in marriage. ²⁴ *This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.*

And so, the bible is clear from the beginning that marriage is the lifelong and exclusive union of one man to one woman. Of two who are equal yet complementary.

Twice we are told that the woman will be a helper *corresponding* to the man, literally “like-opposite” to him: equal in status, worth, and dignity in the image of God, but not identical to him. Just as God’s creation in days 1-3 were complemented by what God made in days 4-6, so the man is complemented in the creation of the woman from his rib.

As Matthew Henry puts it, she is “Not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, near his heart to be beloved.”

Key to the way she helps is that she brings sameness and difference. Which is what Adam celebrates in v.23 and his love poem: *Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh*, but not another man, she is a woman.

Like two puzzle pieces fitting neatly together, it is precisely this equality and difference that makes the union work. Marriage depends on two people united who are sexually different.

This is exactly the point Jesus makes when he is asked about divorce and he quotes Genesis 2:24.

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning **made them male and female**, ⁵ and he also said, **‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?** (Matthew 19:4-6)

We’ll see in a moment that Jesus is not saying that everyone should be married, but that God made us male and female is an indispensable aspect of the marriage relationship as the two become one.

One in marriage that is exclusive and lifelong as it requires leaving and bonding (v.24). By leaving parents the focus is not merely on moving out of home. The point is that marriage brings a new allegiance, not simply a new address. Marriage declares that a new family unit has been created.

Which means marriage is not simply a private arrangement but to be publicly enacted and recognised as exclusive. Although Genesis and other parts of the bible give accounts of polygamy, it never commends it. In fact, the accounts of polygamy in the bible are so messy they commend monogamy.

Marriage is exclusive and lifelong. The word ‘bond’ or often translated unites or cleaves in v.24, means to be glued, to hold fast to something and not let go. Or as Jesus says, *what God has joined together, let no one separate* (Mt 19:6). It is to have and hold, forsaking all others until death does us part.

And it is this exclusive commitment of one man to one woman that makes marriage the only proper context for sex and bearing children as *the two will become one flesh*. Sex in marriage is a sign and expression of being one flesh, but not the entirety of it.

To become one flesh is to say that all of who they are is now bound together, profoundly knitted together at the deepest level. It is the deepest intimacy we can experience in human relationships as everything is now shared with another. In marriage a new entity, a new person, a new connection is formed that is closer than the family they leave or even between a child to a parent.

As Claire Smith puts it, “One flesh in their sexual union, one flesh in the children they produce, one in their spiritual and emotional bond, and one flesh as a new social entity, a new family relationship that supersedes all previous ties.”

Only together as man and woman, one flesh in marriage can humanity be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth in having children as God commanded them in 1:28. It is their complementary nature as man and woman that makes children possible and the overflow of their joyful marriage intimacy.

Now this is not saying that all married couples will be able to have children or that it’s a requirement of marriage. Yet it does highlight why infertility or being unable to have children is often so grievous.

And although childbearing is clearly at the forefront of their union to be fruitful and multiply, what the man cannot do alone, that is not all marriage is or all the woman is to him. She is received and celebrated wholly as his equal companion: valued for who she is, not merely what she provides him.

God made marriage and sex for our good and enjoyment. It’s why we have the book of Song of Songs!

Sex in the context of the marriage commitment makes intimacy and self-giving mutual and safe.

So for those of us who are married, this one flesh reality is not simply a description of our status but something that should be shaping the expression of our marriage.

That our priority and commitment to our spouse, as well as our intimacy, should never be left to passively drift by. The delight of marriage is something to be invest in and pursue (references).

It will be seen in decision making and communication, in our self-giving for the good and needs of the other, in organising time – quality time – together, and perhaps especially in conflict resolution and reconciliation. It will mean guarding and protecting your marriage, being self-aware and proactive with regards to temptation, destructive habits and patterns, or competing priorities.

The depth and beauty of this one flesh relationship is meant to leave us thinking it would be unimaginable to break it, compromise it, or let it drift into mere cold co-existence. Which is captured in the harmony v.25, ²⁵ *Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.*

The relationship between the man and his wife and between them and their creator is unclouded by sin, there is no need for them to cover up or hide anything from each other or God. A picture of the fullness of their relationship. Here is truly paradise.

Yet instinctively we know that is not us, right? Nothing to hide? No shame or the desire to hide or retreat from others. Especially when it comes to the area of relationships and marriage.

And we’ve heard regularly in series in Genesis already we are acutely aware that we do not live in the Garden. Paradise has been lost. The beauty and harmony of v.25 almost sets up with a ‘too good to be true’ response as we painfully know how far our life in this world is from that picture.

As Gordon Wenham says on this verse, “The exquisite charm of the story so far serves only to deepen the tragedy of what is to unfold in the fall.” We live outside the garden, in paradise lost as we’ll unpack in Genesis 3 over the next few weeks.

So unpacking the beauty of God’s design here this will be a difficult subject for some of us. An area of much hurt, regret, and sadness. Often the source of frustration and grief due to unfulfilled longings, painful experiences, or the loss of a loved one.

The bond of marriage has often been broken, even needed to be broken. What was designed as beauty and harmony is often hurt and chaos in a world that delights to reject, replace, & ignore God.

Because what should we expect when we take God out of the picture of relationships – and especially when it comes to the area of intimacy, sex and marriage?

Over the past few years, I’ve been quite invested to social research and really understanding our culture by a rigorous commitment to watching Married at First Sight.

If you’re not familiar with it, people who apparently have had no success in finding a committed partner try their luck by meeting someone for the first time in a phony wedding ceremony. They seek to fast-track a relationship by honeymooning, living together, and going through a series of tasks.

But over the years a certain pattern emerges... 1) Each person usually begins by telling the story of how great their life is except for having someone to share it with. Which usually leads to their new relationship breaking down because they don’t want to change anything about their life.

2) The couple, despite having almost no knowledge of each other, rapidly advance their physical intimacy in sex to overcome the lack of emotional connection, which it doesn’t, which then results in one being especially hurt and full of regret as the intimacy meant and implied more to them than it did the other.

And I think this pretty consistent with a lot of brokenness and confusion all around us when it comes to relationships. In the ‘be true to yourself’ world relationships are seen only the lens of self-fulfilment. Sex is reduced to nothing more than an appetite or craving needing to be fulfilled.

Which inevitably leads to using others for our own benefit or gain. Is it any wonder that as we have removed sex from its God-given context of exclusivity and commitment in marriage, we have a trail of destruction and hurt and especially with issues of consent?

Where we objectify and view others purely from a perspective of what we can gain from them so awfully captured in the culturally accepted and celebrated use of pornography.

And this is not to say that Christians are immune to these problems or always live in relationship in the way God commands. We don’t and so often we are acutely aware of this. The problem is not ‘out there’ in the world but in the sinful human heart that prefers be God rather than obey God.

Which really should do two things for us: Firstly, it should show us the goodness of God's vision for marriage and sex. Where exclusive commitment enhances our intimacy as it makes honesty and vulnerability safe, without the need for proving ourselves or putting up a façade.

Tim Keller beautifully captures it, "To be loved but not known is comforting, but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God." Love from God defines and shows us what love really is, and how it is to be expressed.

Which, secondly, is where Genesis 2 is pointing us. No matter where we are sitting on the topic of marriage today, that Genesis 2 is pointing to and anticipating something bigger and better. The exclusive and loving union we all need has been revealed in Christ.

After discussing the roles of husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, Paul finishes by quoting Genesis 2:24. ³¹ ***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*** ³² *This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Paul is saying that this beautiful picture of harmony and love as two are united is a picture of Christ and the church. Marriage was given from the start, even before the fall and sin, to point to something bigger: the work of Christ to reconcile us to our creator.

That's why Paul describes it as a *mystery*, something that had to be revealed – it's true meaning was hidden but has now been made known in the coming of Jesus. So notice he is not saying marriage is a nice way of thinking about what Jesus has achieved in his death on the cross.

No. Christ and the church is the reality from which marriage is drawn. Which is why when discussing the roles of husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, Paul's focus is not on Adam and Eve but on Christ and the church. Husbands are to love like Christ loves the church, laying down their lives, serving for good.

And in view of that loving headship and initiative, wives submit to their own husbands just as the church submits to Christ – a submission that is voluntary and joyful.

Now much can and should be said here that is beyond what we can do today. And much evil has been done in the name of headship and submission to justify or excuse abuse and domineering behaviour or insist upon silent endurance, especially on the part of a wife.

And I hope you can see what an abomination that would truly be as marriage is drawn from and is to embody the loving self-sacrifice of Christ for his bride so that she will flourish. And so, if you are in need of help and support or just someone to talk to please, can I encourage you to reach out.

But this means as we see marriage as a gift from God in the beginning pointing to the redeeming work of Jesus, it shows that the relationship of exclusive loyalty and deep intimacy we all need – what we were made to have and enjoy as God's image bearers – is with Christ.

The bible starts with marriage in creation and concludes with marriage in the new creation in Revelation 21. The return of Christ is called *the marriage feast of the lamb* (Rev 19:9). Hence there

is no marriage in heaven because what marriage points to is fulfilled and enjoyed in our relationship with Christ as we dwell with him face to face (Mk 12).

We are made to know and enjoy Christ – that is the ultimate relationship every one of us needs – because as we sit here today we are the gathering of sinners - including sin the area of sex and relationships – and we need a saviour – one who take away the penalty, guilt, and shame our sin brings. Which is exactly what we have in our crucified and risen Lord.

Listen to Paul speaking to the Corinthians: ⁹*Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,* ¹⁰*no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.* ¹¹*And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Which is important to clarify because it means that getting married is not an obligation or need for every person. Marriage is good, but so is singleness. The bible speaks positively of *both*. Our Lord Jesus, the image of God and perfect human, was single. Human marriage is not ultimate or necessary.

Which also means marriage can never be a substitute for our relationship with God as the source of our identity, security, and fulfilment. It's our union with Christ that is ultimate, not with another human. In fact, to rely on a person for your identity, security, and fulfilment is just cruel and crushing.

It is to set them up to fail because it is to put them in the place of God and they will never be enough. Life is not incomplete in singleness just as life is not completed by marriage.

Whether in singleness, marriage, or even in singleness again, there will be struggles and challenges. Which actually takes us back to where we started in Genesis 2:18: we are made for relationship. With God but also with each other. Every stage and season of life we will need each other.

Which is why it shouldn't surprise us that as Christ saves and unites us to himself, we are also united to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. It's as we are known and loved by Christ – secure in him - we are freed up to know and love others as a community, that is centred on Christ.

Jesus says in John 13:³⁴ *"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.*

And as we live outside of paradise, outside the garden where the good and very good of God's creation has been marred by sin and subject to frustration, this kind of authentic and caring community – a Christ-shaped community - is so vital for us.

This is the community that God has joined together and is vital for us to live faithfully in every season and status of life while we wait for the return of Christ who is our life.

We need each other in every season of life simply because every season of life has challenges and needs, that will include temptation and vulnerability to sin. Especially in the area of sex/relationships.

Marriages flourish in community. Wives and husbands, as well as those single or dating will need support and encouragement, to be part of a rich, word-centred, Gospel shaped community.

It's why I've given you so many references in the handout to see what this looks like. Whatever our relationship status is, *is being known and loved by Christ overflowing in your love for others?*

Overflowing in your marriage and your love for your spouse, overflowing in your singleness or your approach to dating, and overflowing in your approach to community. In all stages of life, we have the need for people to pray for us, to open their homes for us, to open the bible with us, to ask us questions, keep us accountable and challenge us.

We need to learn from each other, the wisdom and perspective of those around that God has placed in our lives. We need that from them, and others will need that from us.

The Christ-centred community is the gathering of the needy and the needed, united and being transformed by the beautiful love of Christ.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Let's pray.

What God Has Joined Together

Genesis 2:18-25

Crazy about love or gone crazy about love?

1. Made For Relationship (vv.18-23)

- i) It is not good (cf. 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 24, 31; Gen 1:26 + Jn 15:9; 17:23-26)
- ii) The Unsuitable & Unsuitable (cf. 1:26-28; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 118:7; 1Cor 11:11-12)
- iii) The need for and beauty of community (cf. Ps 133; 2Jn 12)

2. The Marriage Relationship (vv.23-25)

- i) Equal & Complementary (v.23, cf. Matt 19:4-6; Rom 1:24-27; 1Cor 6:9-11)
- ii) Leaves & Bonds (cf. Mk 10:1-12; Mt 19:4-6; 1Cor 7:10-16)
- iii) They will become one flesh (v.24; cf. Prov 5:15-23; Song of Songs 3:6-5:1; 1Cor 7:3-4)
- iv) The World We Know: Paradise Lost (v.25 cf. Gen 3:7, 16)

3. The Ultimate Marriage

- i) Christ & the Church (Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:6-9; 21:1-4; Mk 12:18-27; cf. Hos 1-3; Isa 54:5-6)
- ii) The relationship & union we all need (cf. 1Cor 6:9-11; 7:7-9; Col 1:19-23)
- iii) The Christ-Shaped Community We Must Be (Jn 13:34-35; Rom 12:9-13; Col 3:11-17; Tit 2:1-8; Heb 3:12-15; 1Jn 4:10-11, 19-21)

Is being known and loved by Christ overflowing in your love for others?