

**REMAKING A BROKEN WORLD**  
The very bumpy road  
to marital joy  
Genesis 2:18-25

<sup>18</sup> The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> 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.” <sup>24</sup> That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

In this series “**Remaking a broken world**”, we are trying to take a look at the whole Bible in one series of teachings by tracing out the central story line. So far we have been looking at the book of **Genesis**. We have come now to this very famous passage about the first wedding. Indeed, you cannot understand the story line of the Bible unless you understand something about marriage because the Bible begins in **Genesis 2** with this marriage and in **Revelation** at the end it ends with a marriage – the wedding supper of the Lamb. In some ways you can understand what the whole Bible is about and what the Gospel is about in terms of marriage too. There is so much in the text, therefore let us be practical and ask the text the following question – although some of you are not married, but you are open to marriage; some of you are married – what do we need to be successful in marriage seeking and in being well married? According to the text, we need at least three things:

1. Attentiveness toward the danger of idolatry,
2. Patience for a very long journey,
3. Supernatural humility.

**1. We need to be attentive toward the danger of idolatry**

This is a wedding. You know how it goes. The father brings the bride down the aisle to the bridegroom. In this case, the father is God. God is doing the honours and He is bringing the wife to the husband. When Adam sees Eve, he literally explodes into art. This is the first piece of art in the history of the world according to the Bible. Look at **Genesis 2:23**. This is Hebrew poetry, using parallelism, word play. It is a song. Adam is saying two things. *First of all* – the first Hebrew word in the poem is – “**at last**.” I realize that in our text it says, “**This is now...**”, but that word “**now**” which can be translated with “**at last**” or “**finally**”. In other words, Adam is saying, “This is what I have been looking for all of my life.” Some of you may say, “It has not been a very long life, yet. Hasn’t it?” Alright! But the point is that Adam says, “**At last**” or “This is what I have been looking for all of my life.” *Secondly*, he says, “**... bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...**” That is weird. What is that? Realize that this is a poetic way of saying, “As I see you, I know now who I am.” Or, “I found myself in you. I am not just coming to another. I am coming to someone who is helping me see who I am.” Or, “By discovering you, I have found out who I am.”

That is powerful. Let us realize for a moment that here we are in paradise where Adam has a perfect relationship with God and yet he is responding to romance and marriage like this.

What that means is that **John Newton**, who you know probably as the hymn writer **Amazing grace**, who actually was a great pastor in the eighteen century in Britain, he was right when he said – which he regularly did to newlyweds – “You may think that your biggest problem – spiritually speaking – is the prospect of a bad marriage. But ever as big a danger is the prospect of a good marriage.” He is saying that marriage can be so fulfilling that unless you deliberately stop it, this is going to happen. You will look to your spouse to give you the things that only God really can give you. You will look to your spouse’s love, to your spouse’s respect, your spouse’s affirmation to give you meaning in life, to give you a foundation for your own sense of value, all the things that you should only be getting from

God. In other words, you will be looking to your spouse to save you. This will slip you back into the “covenant of works” or in other words, you will try to save yourself through your good performance. Of course, you will not say that to yourself or to other people, but you will be doing it. In fact you will be doing it, unless you know that you are doing it and stop. Why? Marriage is this powerful. It is such an attractive thing. It is such a great thing. “O Lord”, John Newton says, “save us from the wonderfulness of marriage.” Because if you do it – and you will do it to some degree, in fact idolatry happens even if you have a bad marriage – realize that no human relationship can bear the weight of such kinds of expectations. You will crush your marriage with those expectations. Nobody can bear the weight of the expectations and the hopes of ultimate joy. The criticism of your spouse will crush you. The problems of your spouse will crush you. They will devastate you much more than they should because you are looking to your spouse and to your marriage to save you, to make everything right in your life. *There are many ways in how this plays out in a marriage.* Let me just give you a couple. When you are married, the way it plays out is that you just feel that your spouse is not perfect and your marriage is not perfect and therefore you do not like it and you cannot live with imperfection. You cannot settle ever for anything other than this incredible picture that you have in your mind of just an absolute blissful love. You have to have it because you are looking to it to give you what only God can give you. When you are not able to actually handle mediocrity in marriage and you just become totally out of balance about the imperfections of your spouse and your marriage and you refuse to be content with the good things that you have: that is idolatry.

*How do unmarried people do?* There are a lot of ways. One of the ways that unmarried people make an idol out of marriage and think that it is going to save me and fix me is by being incredibly picky as you evaluate spousal prospects because you say, “Oh, I want a marriage, but it has to be like this and this. This person has to be so and so.” So you are looking virtually for a perfect spousal prospect, but there aren’t any out there. And you are not a perfect spousal prospect – you hypocrite – because you want something that you are not and that is idolatry. Or maybe the most frequent way of idolatry that I know is a single person who wants to be married and who so desires after marriage that you cannot enjoy your present condition. What are we going to do?

Some of you may say, “So, you are trying to say that I should not love my spouse too much?”

**C.S. Lewis** says – and this is just plain common sense – “It is probably impossible to love any human being too much. You may love him too much in proportion to your love for God. But it is the smallest of your love for God and not the greatness of your love for the person that constitutes the inordinacy.”

Do you know what that means? Marriage will strangle us unless we have a really great true existential love relationship with God. Realize, you must not try to demote your love for your spouse or the person who you think that you will marry. You cannot do that. Nevertheless, you have to promote your love for God. Otherwise marriage will strangle you. Don’t you see that?

Therefore, married people, you have to do that or you will not be able to settle for the imperfections of your marriage and of your spouse. Single people, you have to remember that Christianity is the only major religion that was started by a single person. Do you know that? Traditional societies believe that you are nobody unless you are somebody’s spouse. But our faith was started by a single man.

Another great leader of Christianity says in **1 Corinthians 7** the following, “You want to be married? Great! You are not married? Great!” That was unique in Antiquity because in ancient times and traditional cultures you were nobody unless you were married. But Paul says, “The relationship that every single Christian has with God through Christ is so intimate and so great. And relationships that Christian brothers and sisters have inside the church community, the family of God is so great that no one who is single should be seen as been a second class person. You are fully human as a single person. After all, the person who saved us was single.

– All of this works against idolatry. So, use it!

## **2. We need patience for a very long journey**

That is only the first thing we need. The second thing we need besides being attentive toward the danger of idolatry is that we need patience for a very long journey. **Genesis 2:18**, “**The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”** Let us look at this little word “**a helper suitable**”. Let me show you why I am telling you that marriage is a long journey. *First of all*, the Hebrew word that is used in the text and that is translated with the word “**a helper**” is regularly used in the Bible, in Hebrew to refer to “**military reinforcements**.” Imagine here an overwhelmed little army. You are outnumbered five to one and you are about to be destroyed and

in comes what? Reinforcements! That is help. In fact, God uses that term several times for Himself and says to the Israelites, "You were about to be wiped out, but I came in and saved you. You would have been destroyed without My help." The word **"helper"** is a military word. It is a strong word. **"Helper"** is a word that is used for God and God has the audacity to use it here in order to refer to Eve. What a woman brings into a man's life is strength, but it is a certain kind of strength. *Secondly*, do you see that word **"suitable"**? There are actually two Hebrew words there that the word **"suitable"** is trying to translate. The Hebrew word literally says, **"I will make a helper like opposite him."** What do you mean: **"like opposite"**? Can you not make up your mind? Is it **"like"** or is it **"opposite"**? It cannot be **"like opposite"**. Oh yes, it can if it is a complement. See, two pieces of a puzzle fit together, not if they are identical. On the one hand, if they are identical, they do not fit. On the other hand, they cannot be different in general. They have to be rightly different. They have to be **"like opposite."** They have to be perfectly complementary. This is what we are being told in **Genesis 2:18**. God is sending Eve into Adam's life and therefore God is sending by definition somebody with enormous power, but a power which is very different: **"like opposite."** This helper does what? The poem tells us what is happening. Into your life, into your marriage comes a person of a different gender, a person with mysteriously profound differences that really are almost impossible to define. As soon as you start to define the differences between male and female, it just never really fits and yet – there it is – and it is irreducible. Into your life, into your marriage comes a person with a very radical different view of you and of the world, a person of a different gender, of equal power, of equal resources, but incredibly different and you are thrown into an incredibly tight close relationship. Do you know how close? **"One flesh!" Genesis 2:24, "... a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."** The word **"flesh"** is not what you are thinking. It is not just talking about sex. What God is saying is that marriage puts you into the same space. You literally occupy the same space. You hold things in common. You are raising your family together. Two people, very different, like you, not you, opposite of you, put together into the same tight location. What is going to happen? There will be "creative" conflicts! It has to be. Let me put it like this. I hope that this will be helpful. My wife and myself have been married for more than forty years now. You get into marriage and you discover that you see the world different. You see each other differently. I see things in her and she sees things in me that I would never see, but she sees because she is a different gender and she is in close. I see things in her and I see things in the world. After forty years of "creative" conflicts, of arguing, now every single day when I get out into the world and things happen to me, I have a split second to react. What am I going to say? What am I going to do? What am I going to think? For years, even half way through my marriage, I only thought like a man. But now after years and years of "creative" conflicts, this is what is happening. Something happens and for a split second, you do not only know what you would do or what you would think or how you would respond, but I know how my wife would think and I know what she would do. Now, for a split second, because it is so instilled in me, I actually have a choice: which of these approaches would work better? My wisdom portfolio has been permanently diversified. I am a different person and yet I am me. I have becoming more feminine and probably in many more ways I have become more masculine as time has gone on. So, what is going on? She came into my life and now I know who I am. I have become what I supposed to be only through these "creative" conflicts, only through having a person who is like me, not me, opposite to me, in close.

Listen, this is what worries me a great deal about marriage in our culture. We are all consumers. We are conditioned to be consumers. Consumers do a cost-benefit analysis. You do it in your head automatically. You do not realize how much you are conditioned to do it. You want a product that satisfies. You do not want a product that fights back. You want a product that does exactly what you want, customized. You do not want someone who is like you, not you, opposite you.

I am afraid that we are getting into our marriages and say, "This is not right. This is supposed to be blissful. This is supposed to be beautiful. This is supposed to be wonderful. Why are we always having these confrontations?" Why? Because marriage is meant to be like that or you will never become the person that God wants you to be. You will never finally get there. It is not just Eve who is brought into Adam's life with her gender resources to help him to become who he is supposed to be. Go to **Ephesians 5**, it is the same thing as in **Genesis 2** reversed. **Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."** Give yourself up for her. Help her to become who she ought to be. Make her a radiant person. Find ways to help her overcome her flaws. It is the same thing. He is using his gender differentiated resources to bring her to who she should be. But, it is a long journey. Will you have the patience to stick with it?

**Stanley Hauerwas**, a theologian and ethicist puts it like this. “There is an assumption out there in the culture that there is someone just right for us to marry and if we look closely enough we will find that right person...” Realize, that is the consumer mindset. He continues, “This overlooks a crucial fact about marriage. It fails to appreciate the fact that when you get married, you always marry the wrong person. We never know who we marry. We just think we do. Or even when we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage being the enormous thing that it is means that we are not the same person after we entered it.”

Do you understand that? You look at it and you say, “Oh I want to marry. I want to marry the right person.” So you are trying to evaluate who that person is, but how do you know what that person is going to be like when you are getting in there? Because once you get in there, marriage is so incredibly powerful that it is going to change the person. You always marry the wrong person as it were. You are always marrying someone who is going to have “creative’ conflicts with you.

Where will you get the patience to stick with it and understand what the confrontation is there for?

Marriage is not designed to bring you really so much into confrontation with your spouse. It is actually designed to bring you in confrontation with yourself. To show you your sins, to show you what is wrong with you, to show you ways to change, to show you things that you otherwise would not find.

On the one hand, you will have to learn to steer clear from idolatry because that is romantic naiveté, this incredibly beautiful high view of marriage, which is so unrealistic. On the other hand you will have to steer clear from the disillusionment of actually finding out what marriage is like and therefore being afraid of it and being cynical about it because it is always so much work. How are we going to get what we need to have, *on the one hand* a vaccine against the idolatry and *at the same time* patience so that marriage in the end will bear fruit? That leads us to our next thought.

### 3. We need supernatural humility

We need a kind of humility that only the Gospel can give you. It is indicated in **Genesis 2:18** where we read, “**The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone...”** Most commentators will tell you that this is a very surprising statement. It is first of all surprising because it is a departure of what God has said up till now. Up till now God has said, “**It is good.**” This is the first time He says, “**It is not good...**” Everything else was a benediction, a good word. This is the first malediction, the bad word. This is bad. So that is surprising. But what really is surprising about it is that it is inexplicable. How could you be unhappy in paradise? Why would Adam be lonely? There is really only one possible answer. God deliberately made him to need someone besides God. Do not get me wrong. We all need God and He made us to need Him. That is the most foundational relationship. But think about it. This is the most humble act you can imagine. This is the most un-self-centred act you can imagine. God made human beings to need not just Him, but other human beings, other relationships, other selves, other hearts. How humble of God. How un-self-centred of God. How other oriented of God. How sacrificial in a way from God. Oh, it is nothing compared to what we see later. And this is what we see later. When God says in the Bible repeatedly in **Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea**; when He repeatedly says to us, “**I am the bridegroom and you My people are the bride.**” Do you know what that is teaching? This is teaching two things.

*First of all*, it is teaching that you need to have God in your life, not just as someone who you believe in, not as someone you just try to obey. You need God in your life as your spouse. He is the ultimate helper who can meet your needs. He is like you, but not you. He is like you because you are made in His image. This means you are personal, relational and He is personal and relational. But He is not like you because He is holy. There is no other helper that you need more in your life like God. You will never become the person you are supposed to be unless He comes into your life not just as an abstract kind of principle of love or somebody you kind of obey in a general way. He has to be in your life as your lover. He has to be in your life intimately. There has to be interaction. There has to be prayer. There has to be listening to His Word. All this has to be there. Why? You need Him. That is the main help you need. He is the ultimate spousal relationship we need.

*Secondly*, it is teaching us that He has given us His heart. You know that. A bridegroom does not ask a woman to marry him unless he has lost his heart. His heart is bound up with her. This is God’s way of saying, “I have given you My heart and how you act and how you live and how you treat Me now hurts Me.” Think about this. You may say, “Oh, I believe in God”, but you really live for your career. Or you really live for this or that. That is called: spiritual adultery. You are giving the deepest passions and love of your heart to someone besides God. The Bible says that God has a sense of betrayal and grief far greater because His love is perfect. He is holy. God has a sense of betrayal and grief far

greater than you would feel if your spouse was unfaithful to you, your human spouse. By the way, to those that this has happened to or is happening, you know how bad it is. Therefore, you know how incredible it is for God to say, "What you have felt so far is nothing in comparison to the grief I feel when I look at everyone of you every day. This means, "We are the spouse from hell and God is in the longest lived worst marriage in the history of the world."

Maybe, you now can understand the whole history of the Bible. Why did God come to earth in the form of Jesus Christ? **John 1:11** says, "**He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.**" He was trying to get us back. He was trying to get His wayward bride back. But we did not just reject Him, we nailed Him to the cross. Some of you may be in bad marriages and you are saying, "Oh, my spouse is crucifying me." But, realize, in God's case it really happened. When He was on the cross, looking down, realizing what it would take for Him to stay and love us to the end, guess what He did? He stayed. Here is the ultimate spousal love. Here is the man; here is the spouse who has no illusions. He does not expect us to be perfect. He knows that we are not perfect. He is loving us, not because we are lovely. He does love us, not because we are going to give Him so much affirmation. He loves us to make us lovely. He loves us for our sake and not for His sake. So, He is the perfect spouse. He is the perfect helper. He was going to the cross to die for our sins. If you know that our spouse Jesus Christ died for us, that He had the patience to stick with us to the end, that He did not come and love us because we were lovely, but to make us lovely, that is everything you need and this for two reasons.

*First of all*, there is the patience you need for the journey because the main thing you need to really stick with a marriage is that you need to look over and over again to your spouse and say, "You wronged me, but my great spouse Jesus Christ, I wronged Him and He kept covering me. He kept forgiving me, so I am loved enough by Him that I can offer the same thing to you." That is the only way that you will have the patience for the journey.

*Secondly*, it is the vaccine against idolatry because if you look at your spouse and you say, "He or she is not very incredible, is he or she?" Or, if you look at your own life as an unmarried life and say, "Why can I not be married?" Now look at this spouse. This spouse is the only spouse – Jesus Christ – who really is going to save you. He is the only one who can really fulfill you. The great wedding day in which we fall in His arms is the only wedding day that really will make things right in our lives. And it awaits you if you put on the wedding ring of faith.

So, do not get too upset about the flaws in your current life. If you are single, you may wonder, "Well, how am I ever going to become myself? How will I figure out who I am if I am not married?" Look, think about this. When you get married, it pulls you away from all the brothers and sisters out there in the Christian community. It does. There are a lot of men and a lot of women who can be your friends, people of the different gender as well. When you get married, it gets you into a deep relationship with one person of the other gender and it pulls you away from all kinds of other relationships with men and women. Therefore, there are a lot of ways in which God can get you help through the body of Christ that you cannot get once you are married. It is up to God to know what you need to grow in grace and what you need in order to grow into the person He wants you to be. Only He knows if you should be married. Only He knows if you should not be married. So, let Him rule your life.

The Bible begins with a wedding and this wedding's original purpose was to fill the world with children of God and it failed. It failed. Why? Because the husband in that marriage failed to step in and help his wife when she needed him. But at the end of time, there will be another wedding, the marriage supper of the Lamb. And its purpose is to fill the world with children of God. And it will succeed where the first marriage failed. Do you know why? The first husband failed, but the second husband will not. The true Adam, Jesus Christ, He will never let His wife down. He hasn't. He won't. Let us love Him for that.

### **Prayer:**

"Our Father, we thank You for giving us insights into the Gospel through the metaphor of marriage. We long to get closer to You and grow in our love with our true spouse Jesus Christ so that we can be in all of our relationships who we need to be. We ask that You will meet us as now. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen."