

## **Family Foundations**

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Genesis 2:18-24

Man, I was frustrated! I was convinced that there was something wrong, probably with the stupid drill. This was several years ago in the middle of a 100 degree-plus Kansas July afternoon the day before my best friend and I were supposed to go on a fishing trip. I needed to do one simple thing: Drill a hole in the frame of my Johnboat, so I could add a fishing rod holder. You wouldn't think it would be that complicated. It was a Coleman Crawdad boat, made out of what appeared to be plastic and aluminum. So I didn't think it would be rocket science to add a rod-holder. I thought I would just dash out, drill the hole, attach the rod holder and then go to work. A five minute job.

Except I couldn't get the drill to drill through the frame. I tried everything! I tried using a large drill bit, thinking it might be more powerful. That didn't work. It just walked all over the frame and wouldn't go in. So I tried a smaller drill bit, thinking I would drill a guide hole. Nope. I tried a different kind of bit to see if it would be sharper. Then I tried adjusting the speed. I tried it fast. Nothing. Slow. Nothing. I tried looking at the manual on the drill and the manual on the boat. Now I'm 45 minutes into this thing, my entire body is drenched with sweat, I am late for work, and I'm in no shape to go there, but I am not going to lose! So I keep drilling and pushing harder and harder and it just won't penetrate!

Finally, I decided I was going to call the manufacturer of the boat to see what kind of space-age material they have made this thing out of. So I call and they put me on hold, which is par for the day and while I'm waiting, I turn the drill over and I see something I had not seen before. It was a switch with six letters: FWD REV. It was set to REV. The problem wasn't that the material was too hard or that the speed wasn't right or that the bits weren't sharp enough. The problem was that I had the drill in reverse! That drill was designed to operate according to certain principles. The drill bits were made to cut in when they turned clockwise. I had the drill in Reverse, so it was turning counter-clockwise. And yes , you can have my man-card. That drill was designed to operate according to certain principles!

Today we are returning to our study of the New Testament book of Ephesians. We are heading into a section of the book that deals with relationships: husband/wife relationships, parent/child relationships, employer/employee relationships. As I thought about this section of Ephesians, it occurred to me that many of these relationships are a lot like my drill. They are actually designed to operate according to certain principles! Now that's something we don't hear a lot. We live in a society that kind of says there are no principles, that we're totally on our own to figure relationships out, that it's up to us to define what marriage is, what family is, what relationships are, and that it's up to us to just try to make them work any way that we can. That can be really hard. Look at the state of our marriages and families in our society: many are struggling and some are giving up on the idea of family altogether.

I don't think we are on our own. I believe with all my heart that God designed marriages, and families, and relationships and that he designed them to operate according to certain principles. So over the next few weeks I want us to discover just a few of those principles. It's my prayer that as we do that, as we listen to and think about and work on these principles in our small groups and our marriages and families, that it will put the drill out of RVS and into FWD, that we can stop trying harder the things that don't work, that we can stop being frustrated at the idea of marriage and family and understand how it was designed to operate.

We're going to mostly be working in book of Ephesians as we talk about relationships. We're going to have a few sermons from other places in the Bible, just so we get some of the Bible's foundational ideas about relationships. We're actually going to start today at the very beginning of the Bible, at the place where God first invented marriage and family and the first human relationship. Let me invite you to turn in your bible to Genesis 2:18-25.

Here's what we are going to do today. First, we are going to walk through this story of the creation of Eve, and marriage, and family, and the first human relationship. Then second we are going to see two very basic principles that come from this story. One that relates to marriage and one that relates to families. This second principle especially relates to everyone that's here today, no matter where in the family life cycle you are. Whether you are looking to get married or just having kids or becoming empty nesters or whether you're to the great Grandkids stage everyone here comes from a family and everyone here knows families in our church. This principle will help you understand and help your family and the families around you. Everyone needs to know what we're going to see today.

*The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. 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. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.*

*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 closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

*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." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

- Genesis 2:18-25

## The Story: God Invents the Family

So let's start off this morning by looking at this story of Adam and Eve, this story where God invents marriage and family and the first human relationship. The writer of Genesis tells this story in three parts, and the first part is what we might call God's Promise.

Now, let me just bring you up to speed on the story of Genesis. At this point in the book, God has created the world. The Bible says God spoke all of creation into existence. He made light and earth and water and fish and birds and animals. Then as the pinnacle of God's creation, he made Adam. The Bible says he fashioned or crafted Adam from the ground the way you would craft a clay vessel or a work of art. God made Adam in his own image.

He loved Adam so much that he put him in a perfect environment. He placed him in a garden called "Eden," which in Hebrew means "delight." It was a perfect environment. It was full of useful resources. It was nourishing, with all kinds of fruit trees. The Bible says it was beautiful. Didn't you just love seeing all the flowering trees just explode this week in our beautiful city? Didn't that just make your heart sing? Well, imagine being completely surrounded by that all of the time?

It was perfect! In the first chapter of Genesis, every time God creates something, He declares "It is good." At the end of the chapter, it says "God saw all that he had made, that it was very good." It was perfect! Well almost perfect. In Genesis 2:18, the beginning of our passage God says two words that he has never put together to this point in the story look at verse 18.

*The LORD God said, "It is (here's our 2 words) not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

- Genesis 2:18

"Not good." God made man in his image. God is relational. Genesis says "Let us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in our image." But man is all alone, so God promises to fix the problem. He says "I will create for the man", what our translation calls 'a suitable' helper." The Hebrew words are "etzer kenigdo." There's really not a good English translation. Some have translated it "a matching companion" or "corresponding partner." The basic idea is that there will be a partner who will complement Adam. So that's God's promise, but there's a second part of this story. I call it: God's pause.

God sees man's loneliness. Then He says He is going to create a corresponding partner for Adam, so we expect God to do what? Create a woman. Do the whole McRib thing! Make Eve! But that's not what he does! Look at verse 19:

*Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. 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. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.*

- Genesis 2:19-20

OK, that would have taken a while! What's going on here? I thought God was going to fix Adam's problem. Why does He have him do this Dr. Doolittle scene and name all the animals? Did God get distracted? Did the writer want to mention that Adam named the animals, and He just didn't know where to work it in? What's going on? The answer is:

*But for Adam no suitable helper (no etzer kenigo, no corresponding partner) was found.*

- Genesis 2:20b

What is God doing here? He's not confused. He's not distracted. He's building suspense. He's highlighting. He's emphasizing. God wants Adam to recognize the incredible value of what He's about to create for him. So he lets Adam try to solve the problem on his own. He lets him look through all the animals, all the birds, all the livestock to see if he can find a suitable companion, and he can't. There is no suitable helper.

So God provides. God responds to the situation:

*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 closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

- Genesis 2:21-22

So God recognizes the problem of Adam's aloneness. He lets Adam take a good long look at creation. Then after Adam has looked high and low and seen that there's no matching companion God says "Adam why don't you just take a nap, and let me see what I can come up with." While Adam's asleep, God makes a woman, not an aardvark or a zebra but a real live woman, who is like him because she's human, but not like him. She's got nice hair, and she's soft, and she has no whiskers, and she's attractive. Notice what God does: With everything else in creation, God would make it and then God would declare that it was good. But with Eve God lets Adam do the declaring:

*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."*

- Genesis 2:23

Let me translate that for you in the Hebrew. What it says is "Hubba hubba." "This is now" or literally "At last, after going through all these animals and birds this is bone of MY bones and flesh of MY flesh! At last, there's someone like me someone who can truly be with me someone who can understand and complete me." He says "She'll have a name that is like my name, but different because that's what she is. She's like me, but she's different. She's my suitable helper, my corresponding partner!" The writer finishes the story with:

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

- *Genesis 2:24-25*

So that's the story of God's invention of marriage, of family, of human relationship. Now what does that teach us about relationships?

## **Two Principles About Relationships**

### **1. The Treasure Principle**

If you are married, “You were meant to treasure your spouse, with their similarities and differences.” You were meant to treasure your spouse with their similarities, the ways they resemble you, the ways they are like you and with their differences, the ways they are unlike you, the ways they are opposite to you. You were meant to treasure both parts of your spouse.

Everything about this passage teaches us to value the spouse that God has provided. Did you notice that? That’s the point of the whole Garden of Eden story to treasure what God provides. God provides this garden and in that garden is everything that man needs: rivers and food and beauty and intimacy with no shame. But outside the garden outside God’s provision, things get rough! There’s weeds, and pain, and shame, and death. The writer is saying “Treasure what God provides!”

That’s why we have the delay in the creation of Eve. God wants her to be treasured. The other animals were created with their partners. But with Eve, God waits because He wants Adam to know that Eve is his special, thoughtful, individualized, equal gift. She is to be treasured as is he.

God wants that to be replicated in our marriages. That’s why the story ends with a saying: “For this reason (because God made it that way), a man, not just Adam, any man shall leave his Father and mother and cleave to stick to be united to treasure his wife. We are to treasure the spouse God gave us.

Can I ask you a very basic question today: Do you treasure your spouse? Do you treasure the companionship of your husband or wife? Do you see them as “bone of your bone,” as someone that can understand you, and encourage you, and commune with you, and attract you, and build a life with you like no one else on earth can? Do you see them as someone that God has specially provided for you? Someone with just the right passions and personality and abilities and even just the right wounds to be your companion “Flesh of your flesh and bone of your bones?” Are you able to see your spouse in that way? Are you? Because they are.

There is probably a plethora of responses going on in your hearts this morning as I ask that question. For some of you, that is an encouraging question. You are going “Yeah, I do and I’m so glad I do.” For others of you, that may be a wake-up question. You are going “Wow! Thanks for the reminder. I’m going to need to find a quiet spot this afternoon and do a little thinking about that.” For some of you, that may be a lonely question. Maybe you are saying “Yeah, well, if I do that I’ll be in it alone. There’s no way my spouse will reciprocate.” That’s OK. It’s OK.

But there are some of you today that as you hear that are just thinking one thing: You don’t know my spouse! Seriously, you’re thinking “You don’t know us. We have so much conflict. We’re like opposite to each other. We disagree about everything. Like one man said my wife and I were happy for 20 years, then we met. Seriously you may be saying “Treasure my spouse? We just seem

to come at everything from opposite sides. How can I value someone who is opposed to me in so many ways? Can I just show you something from this passage? Look at:

*The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him"*  
- Genesis 2:18

There are our words again “suitable helper,” etzer kenigdo. Remember how I said that phrase doesn’t have a good translation in English? Do you know what it literally means in Hebrew? It literally means “opposite according to.” In other words, it was part of God’s original plan that Adam and Eve, that man and wife, be different, be opposite, be complementary. In many ways, this is the key to treasuring the spouse God gave you.

As Kelley and I have counseled couples over the years, we see every single time, again and again, ways in which God made them to be “opposite according to.” One partner will be a spender and the other will be a saver. One partner will be very emotional, the other is more reserved. One partner is adventurous, the other plays it safer.

And do you know what we see? Those differences are intentional. If you treasure each other, those differences truly become life-giving. You know the adventurer? They know that they are better, healthier, more whole if they are little more grounded, and they hunger for that. And the safe person - they know they need to be stretched a little on some level, even though it’s scary to them, they actually want to be drawn out. And on and on it goes. The spender knows he needs to save. The reserved person knows they would be healthier if they were in touch with their feelings. If we are treasuring each other, our differences become life-giving.

But if we’re not treasuring each other, they become toxic. Suddenly, all we can see is the opposite, not the according to. We tell couples “Those complementary differences are like gears on a machine. If they are lined up, they make the whole thing work beautifully. If they’re not, they grind and rattle, and it seems like it’s worse than we have them.” But we’ve never seen a couple that didn’t have those areas of opposite / according to. We’ve never seen one where they didn’t have these differences that could be life-giving or infuriating.

I wish I could say more. I wish I could sit with you guys and help you see the beauty of the opposite/according to’s in your marriages, but we need to move on. So the treasure principle is that “You were meant to treasure your spouse with their similarities and differences.” Now there’s a second principle and I call this :

## **2. The Connection Principle**

The connection principle is this: “Marriages were meant to grow together. Families were meant to grow apart.”

I think this is one of the greatest unstated truths. One of the greatest truths that people don’t preach or talk about in the whole Bible. Maybe you’ve never heard this principle, but it’s so

important that we know this and come to understand it and build it into our marriages and families. This is probably the #1 truth that I wish I could get into Christian families. Because if you build your family on this foundation really, good things tend to happen. But if you don't, there is just no limit to the kinds of things that can go wrong.

I don't say that to scare you. Every family struggles at times to live this principle out. This is a something you have to fight for. When this principle gets backwards in a family, I've seen individuals and families develop deep problems, problems that can be really hard to understand and to fix.

So this is very important. In fact, could we just say this principle out loud together, just so that we can remember it? "Marriages were meant to grow together; Families were meant to grow apart"

This principle comes from verse 24 of our passage where the writer finishes the story of the creation of Eve by giving us a maxim or principle. He says:

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Leave his Father and Mother, and be united to his wife.*

- Genesis 2:24

He gives us the principle. Notice that he gives it in reverse order that I gave it:

1. He says Families were meant to grow apart. A man shall leave his father and mother.
2. He says Marriages were meant to grow together and be united to his wife.

It's our principle: "Marriages were meant to grow together families were meant to grow apart." By the way, it's not just for men. The text uses the masculine, because Adam has been the focal point of the story, but both partners are to leave and cleave. So there's our Connection Principle. Now what on earth does that mean? Well, let's just think about the two parts.

First, "Marriages were meant to grow together:" We just talked about that. We were meant to treasure our spouse. The marriage is meant to be the most invested relationship in the family. It's meant to grow together. We were meant to grow over time in spiritual, emotional and even physical intimacy. Marriages were meant to grow together.

Not too long ago, I was talking to my Dad who is 80 years old, and he just made this offhand comment: "Man, I just love your mother so much! She is so special!" After 62 years of marriage, I was like "Yup, that's the goal." Marriages were meant to grow together.

Then there's the second part: Families were meant to grow apart. Not fall apart, not blow apart, but to grow apart. That doesn't mean we shouldn't honor our parents. The ten commandments tell us to honor our parents. This doesn't mean we shouldn't love our parents. There should always be love between a child and their parents. But families were meant to grow apart. We are to leave our father and Mother. By the way, that word "leave" is a very strong word in Hebrew. It's

usually translated “forsake.” What the text is saying is this: God designed the family so that it operates best when the strongest relationship in the family, the most invested relationship in the family, is the marriage. Marriages were meant to grow together. Families were meant to grow apart.

That means that, husbands, you should strive to build your family in such a way that the marriage is invested in. You want to pursue your wife. You want to build your marriage so that over time it grows together. You always want to build it in such a way that when your children leave, you and your wife aren’t looking at each other going “Who are you?”

Wives, that means you were meant to get your primary emotional connection, not from your Mother, not from your friends, not from your children, but from your husband. Now, I know that can be tough. I know that some of you (husbands and wives) are going “We’re never going to get there.” Maybe your spouse is never going to want to be that for you. But listen, this is the way God designed marriage to work best. You’re not in control of what your spouse does, but you can do your best to play your part, to love your spouse, to invest in your spouse, to choose your spouse day in and day out.

This choice to honor the principle of leaving and cleaving, to let marriage grow together and family grow apart, this shows up at every stage of family life-cycle. We always have to choose it. When we’re first married, we have to answer the question “Are we going to be a unit?” Are we going to let family and friends know that we are a package deal? That we stand together? We have to choose.

When we have kids, kids will just suck up all the time, and life, and energy that you will give them. They can’t be reasoned with. There’s no off-switch. I know, because I get to see John Maiden stagger into work every morning! He and Sarah have two under two and, I think, they’ve gotten a grand total of 36 hours of sleep in the last three months. You have to choose to keep your marriage a priority.

When you get to the empty nest stage where Kelley and I are at, you have to choose are you going to help your kids launch or are you going to hold on to them? When your kids get married, are you going to support that new union? Are you going to see them as the unit? Are you going to help your family grow apart? Or are you going to see your child as someone you support and their spouse just as someone you tolerate? My parents made it clear to me long ago. They said “Now John, you know that we love you and Kelley. She’s part of our family now. So don’t ever forget that if you guys have a fight, and it’s too much and you need to take a break from each other that Kelley always has a place to stay.” Seriously, we have to choose.

When you have Grandkids or Great Grandkids or when you look at your extended family or your church family, are you going to encourage marriages to grow together and families to grow apart in a healthy way?

It matters. Both these principles matter. They certainly aren't the only principles about relationships in the Bible. Next week, we are going to look at a principle that relates to every relationship. These are two principles that can help our marriages and families to be built on a healthy foundation. They can help put the drill out of REV and into FWD. If you're married, are you treasuring the spouse that God provided for you with their similarities and differences? Is your marriage growing together, so your family can grow apart in a healthy way?