

# ***Covenantal Relationships***

***Genesis 2:4; 7-8; and 15-25***

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Happy Mother's Day. It's an honor to preach the second chapter of Genesis today, as even though this passage isn't specifically about motherhood, the essence of Genesis really is. This chapter is about our covenantal God bringing forth life with steadfast faithfulness to those whom he loves and the blessings that come from that life.

Mothers know something about life and faithfulness. For the last two months our family has been fostering a beautiful two-year old boy. His mother, even in the throes of very difficult circumstances and separated from her children, was thinking outside herself enough to make her son an Easter card and send an electric tooth brush. Mothers know something about committed, lay-down-their-lives steadfastness for those whom they love and the blessings that come from that life.

We live in a culture where many want to ignore God's design for relationships. Whether it's marriage or singleness, many opt to define relationships to whatever pleases them in the fleeting moment rather than trusting that obedience to God's revealed will found in the scriptures will bring joy forever more.

Today we are going to glean from Genesis three points about God's design for companionship. We are going to see that because God exists in inter-connected covenantal intimacy, he has designed us for companionship that bears his image, companionship that holds fast, and companionship that never leaves us isolated and alone.

We are designed to have companionship that bears God's image. We see from our text the words, "these are the generations of the heavens and the earth." This is a succinct summary of chapter one. It is laid out like a pyramid that builds and builds: heavens, earth, light, dark, the dry land and the waters, the vegetation, birds and animals. All building toward the pinnacle of God creative glory - man - made in God's image. Throughout chapter one, every time God is mentioned saying this thing or that was good, the name he is identified by is Elohim. This Hebrew name for God is the most common, occurring over 2,500 times in the Old Testament; with the basic meaning that Elohim is one of strength or power of effect. One who is infinite, all-powerful, transcendent, and shows by his works that He is creator, sustainer, and supreme judge of the world.

In chapter one, Moses uses this name for God thirty-five times, five times seven, the number of perfection. Elohim, the mighty and transcendent one said...., and it was good! It is a careful, rhythmic, majestic portrayal of the omnipotent deity bringing forth the pinnacle of his creation - those that would be his image bearers to the world.

God had made a beautiful garden for his image bearers, but the rest of the earth was still uncultivated. He told them to fill and multiply throughout creation. He told them to subdue and have dominion over creation, bringing order from the chaos that God's image might be

reflected. Chapter one shows us that God created Adam and Eve to be image bearers, little mirrors, reflecting everywhere the Mighty One who is - glorious, beautiful, powerful, and majestic.

In chapter two we see a switch in how God is described. “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth in the day that the LORD God created them.” If chapter one shows like a pyramid the pinnacle of God’s creation, chapter two shows the relationship that Elohim has with his creation by adding the personal name of God, YHWH. Every time in our Bibles where we see the LORD all in caps, it is denoting this four-lettered name that God revealed to Moses. In Exodus 3, after being told to remove his sandals due to standing on holy ground, the first place in the Pentateuch that the word holy is mentioned, Moses is spoken to by God through a bush engulfed in flame yet was not consumed. Moses is told to command Pharaoh to let God’s people go and, once liberated, to follow him as their leader. Moses asks God, who shall I say has sent me? What is his name? God answers in a three-fold response, “Tell them ‘I AM WHO I AM,’ ‘I AM’ has sent me, and finally ‘The LORD,’ the God of your forefathers has sent me to you.”

In pagan worship the gods had names. The Egyptian’s called on Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, and others. To call on the gods for favor, one had to distinguish one from another by their names; gods were useless without a name; for to know the name of god was to have some power to make that god respond. Yahweh, in contrast, who is utterly self-determining, self-subsistent, who cannot be constrained by anything other than himself, who chooses to be who he is, chooses to identify himself on holy ground that Moses might be in relationship with him. He even makes a promise to Moses in verse 12, “I will be with you!”

*Yahweh* is the personal covenant name of God who relates to and redeems his people. It is this name that is used to describe God breathing life into the nostrils of Adam. (Gen 2:7) This relational God, who has always existed in community within the godhead, intimately bends down and fashions the dirt into a man. When he breathes on him, commentators depict the action not happening from a distance, but up close and intimately, breathing life inches from Adam’s face. Made with intentionality, intimacy, and tender care, what must have it been like for Adam to open his eyes and behold the covenantal personal God, disclosing himself inches from his face? The glorious transcendence of chapter one has transitioned to the immanent presence of the intimate God.

Adam was placed in a beautiful garden teeming with food and had the privilege of naming all the animals, but for the first time in God’s creation masterpiece, something is said to be not good. There was no helper fit for Adam and so God declared, “It is not good for man to be alone.” God who has forever existed in the relational delight of the trinity sees that Adam has no one like him to have companionship with.

Taken from Adam’s rib, God brings forth Eve. Bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, Eve is the exact compliment to Adam. Together, male and female, that they might be the mirrors of God reflecting his glory throughout all the earth. Adam alone could not bear the image of the relational God, he needed a companion. Equal in status and worth, together they are mandated to work in intimacy and harmony to subdue and have dominion over the earth.

What does the relational nature of God, which is revealed by his personal name being used when forming a male and a female, have to do with us sitting here today? You

were made intentionally. God did not create you at a transcendent unknowable distance when he formed you in your mother's womb. He is immanent. Making his presence known, God has spoken life into your being from an up-close and intimate distance. He knows every intricate detail of the body he fashioned for you, and he creates good.

The relational nature of God that is imprinted on your soul also means that you cannot live this Christian life alone. As a culture, Americans value our independence. We want to stand on our own and not need anybody else. This trickles into our spiritual lives as well. A popular country song by Luke Bryan is titled *Prayin' In A Deer Stand*. The lyrics state:

I do my prayin' in a deer stand  
 On my back forty church  
 Thinkin' 'bout life on a cold sunrise  
 Yeah, that's my Heaven on Earth  
 Me and God in a cornfield  
 Gotta think He understands  
 I might miss a Sunday from time to time  
 But I get there when I can

This isn't how God has formed you to relate to him. Alone in a deer stand in a cornfield is good for a time, but God has made you to mirror his glory in relationship - not alone.

The second thing I want us to see from Genesis two concerning God's design is that we are intended to have companionship that holds fast. Verse 24 reads, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Something amazing has happened since God took a rib and formed Eve. In verse 22 it states that he formed the rib into a woman and now three verses later this woman is called Adam's wife. In Genesis 2:22-25 we see the first marriage ceremony. The text describes what happened: leaving one's family of origin and holding fast to one's wife. In the KJV translation, it is written as leaving and cleaving, with cleaving giving a more robust description of the Hebrew verb. Elsewhere in the Bible "cleave" means to unite someone through a covenant which is a binding oath that has blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Inherent within a covenant are strong horizontal and vertical aspects. Tim Keller notes in his book, *Meaning of Marriage*, that the literal meaning of the verb is to be glued to something. (Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, p 124)

I don't have the time to glue something together to illustrate the bond that God designs into marriage, but I do have duct tape. Because God has created man to bear his relational image and made us such that one man is supposed to be married to one woman to wonderfully complement each other, He has designed marriage to be so binding that he says the husband and wife are no longer two, but one. What God has joined together, let man not separate. (Matt 19:6) In marriage, a husband and wife are glued together.

God has designed marriage to be a permanent contractual union for the sake of mutual love, protection, and procreation. What this is supposed to look like day to day is a mutual bond to help each spouse subordinate their individual impulses and interests in favor of the greater good of the relationship, family, and society.

My wife, Barat, and I just celebrated 21 years of marriage last weekend. While on our honeymoon, the facade of wedded bliss came crashing down. You see, I thought I had

married a female version of me, just much, much prettier. I thought married life was going to involve one perpetual adventure of doing all the things I liked, just now with my forever companion faithfully by side. We were honeymooning at a resort in Mexico, and they had organized beach volleyball for all of the tourists. I saw what was happening from our hotel room and encouraged Barat to go down with me. She happily agreed and immediately I had visions of the two of us crushing it together on the sand courts like Goose and Maverick. However, reality set in as we walked up to the courtside, she proceeded to find a beach chair and take out her book to read. When I asked her, "Aren't you going to play?" She told me, "No, I want to watch you play and also read my book." I felt like I had been punched in the gut. Not because I was going to be defeated by Ice-man, but because I couldn't understand why she would want to read instead of playing volleyball. It was my first glimpse into understanding that she was my compliment, not my clone.

Fast forward 21 years and we can testify that we've been through some hard times. Health concerns with our children, the passing of my mother, the loss of a job, and just this weekend there was sobbing throughout our house as we said goodbye to our first foster child because of the prayed for reunification of him returning to his mother. Through it all, I am so grateful for God's design and God's provision that we might hold fast. As my kids mature and we even watch the older kids head off to college, we can testify to the greater good of laying aside our personal interests, learning to love the spouse God has given us rather than the façade of who we thought we wanted in a spouse, all for the benefit of others.

The challenge today is that I don't have to tell you how culture is shifting regarding marriage. Once seen as a permanent contractual union designed for the sake of mutual love, submission, and sacrifice, marriage is now drifting into a 'terminal contract' designed for the gratification of the individual parties. The world says that marriage is good if it makes you happy. To make sure one is going to be happy in the marriage, couples cohabit to check to see if they are "compatible" rather than committing their lives to each other by marriage.

In all my years of collegiate and church ministry where I've counseled and officiated numerous weddings, never can I say that pretending to be married was good for a couple. Intimacy outside of marriage is destructive because God has designed us to bond with those we are joined to. When one has become one flesh with another, the duct tape can be pulled apart, but it is always going to come with enormous pain.

On a slightly different note, if you're in a difficult marriage, the world will not tell you to hold fast. Because of the pain, many will encourage you to leave and that things would be better if the marriage was dissolved. I'm not saying there isn't Biblical understanding for marriages to end. Yet, I want to encourage you that there is so much beauty when God enables you to persevere and breakthrough to the other side. Reconciliation and harmony is possible; God is in the business of doing the miraculous.

The last point I want to address from this chapter is how to square God's pronouncement that it is not good for man to be alone with Paul's statement in I Corinthians that it is better not to marry and instead be single. I know when preaching to a church of our size that many people listening today are single. Whether by choice not to get married, divorce, or being widowed, many find themselves reading the words of Gen 2:18 alone and wondering, "What about a helper fit for me?" My dear brothers and sisters, my third point is that God's design is

that you have companionship that never leaves you isolated and alone.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul writes, “Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean is that the time is short” (7:27–28). In the first century, pagan female widows faced great social pressure to remarry, for the man was often the financial provider, land was passed down through the male, and children would be necessary to support one in their latter days. Augustus even had widows fined if they failed to marry within two years because he wanted the tax revenue a household would produce.

Paul telling the widows they were highly respected and that the church would care for them was revolutionary and shattered the expected norms of society. By telling them time was short, singles could focus unhindered in their service to God. Christians who then remained single were making the statement that our future is not guaranteed by the family but by God.

That seems straightforward enough, but Paul later writes, “From now on, those who have wives should live as if they had none. Those who mourn as if they did not. Those who are happy as if they were not. Those who buy as if it was not theirs. Those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:29–31) What is Paul saying? When married, I’m to live like I’m not married? I don’t think my wife would like that very much. To those who buy, live as if it was not theirs? I would imagine my family would be quite confused if I told them, “Hey, I’ve spent all of your education money and your inheritance on this new house on the beach, but we’re not going to use it.” What is Paul summarizing when he says, “For this world in its present form is passing away.”

The prophets of old had prophesied that the Messiah would come and then usher in God’s kingdom. What they weren’t expecting was the two-phase kingdom that Jesus was bringing. Jesus told the people God’s kingdom was at hand and then instead of ascending a throne, he went and suffered on a cross. He healed the leper and the lame, but then stated that his real purpose was to bind up the brokenhearted. This is the already and not-yet reality of God’s kingdom. Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand, but one day it will be ushered in fully when sin is removed fully from the earth. Until then, we live in a world whose present form is passing away.

What this means for relationships is that we aren’t to make an idol of married life or of singleness. One shouldn’t be overly elated by getting married or over disappointed by not being so. Why? Because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfill us and God’s family the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us.

I give leadership to the small group ministry of our church. One of our groups this past fall gathered couples to study and discuss God’s principles for parenting. Everyone in the group had children in the home and were thrilled to seek and struggle together to raise kids in a godly way. One person connected to the group was unique. She intended to simply bring the group dinner each week and then slip out because she was in a different stage of life. Her children were already grown adults. She was recently widowed, and she simply wanted to help serve young families because she now found herself with time to give and a burden to help the next generation. What the Lord did in that group was nothing short of miraculous. This single widow not only ended up staying each week for the discussion and encouraging the

young parents, she also became like family to many in the group. Long after the group had ended, she continued to bring the families meals. She offered to drive kids to practices, attended their kid's recitals and even celebrated at graduation ceremonies. Those families gained a desperately needed godly surrogate grandmother, and I believe she would even testify that she has gained not only brothers and sisters in the Lord that love and care for her, but children that think she hung the moon. It is a mutual companionship of love and sacrifice that finds the whole small group, not alone, holding fast to one another, and mirroring God's image of love to an on-looking world.

In closing, dear church, you are the image bearers of God. I love being one of your pastors for so many reasons, but what I love the most is seeing God in you. When I look out at you, I see your desire to know more of God's word that you might cherish Him more and more. I have listened to several of you tell me stories of how God has brought your marriages back from despair and ruin by enabling you to hold fast to the wife/husband of your youth. I have walked alongside several of you that have seen your marriage dissolve or your loved one leave this world and yet you did not wither and retreat. Instead, you come to this church Sunday after Sunday to heal, find fellowship, and be a brother or sister to those you sit next to in the pews.

First Pres, by God's grace, you emulate the Father in bringing forth life, treasuring it, and sharing it with others. It is my delight and pleasure to be your pastor while we wait for Jesus to fully usher in his kingdom and make all things new!