



February 3, 2013
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Puzzling Marriage: Putting the Pieces Together The Friend

Genesis 2:18-24; Various

Pastor Megan:

We are currently in a series of marriage, because we as a church want to proclaim Jubilee over our marriages—recovering what is lost and restoring the family. We're saying that there are four corner puzzle pieces to marriage that will help fill in the rest of the mystery of marriage. With *The Vow*, we have commitment to God and one another as a puzzle piece. With *The Other*, we have the will-full determination of service. Up to this point, with commitment and service covered, you might imagine your marriage looks like this. [*image of American Gothic painting*] But what's missing? Intimacy. Deep knowing. Friendship. Any marriage with only commitment and only determined service is a dull marriage. Marriage God's way is intimate and life-giving. So we can't talk about marriage without talking about friendship. Let's read about Scripture's first friendship pairing.

Genesis 2:18-24

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.

This is the word of the Lord.

Pastor Larry:

We know intuitively that a healthy marriage is more than just commitment and service. Deep in our guts we know that there's something more to marriage, and indeed something more to any relationship, than just commitment and service. I think before we go on, it's important to understand why this is... why the need for intimacy goes so deep.

We desire intimacy because we are made in the image of our creator. Let me explain this just a little bit. As Christians we have a unique understanding of God as a trinitarian being. He is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but He is one being, God. One way of thinking about this is that God is a fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since before the beginning of time, before time even existed, these three persons of the trinity have danced in perfect unity and fellowship. What this means is that God is never lonely. He is never alone, because He is a fellowship! All of these three persons of the trinity are perfectly and intimately united as one being.

So then God decides to create mankind, and when he does he says something peculiar. In Genesis 1:26 he says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Christian scholars over the ages have come up with a number of ways of understanding what it means for mankind to be made in the image of God, but one of those ways is that mankind is a relational being. We are made for relationship! And not just any kind of relationship, but meaningful, intimate relationship. This is why, not too long after God creates Adam He says in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." It is not good that man should be alone! We reflect God by being creatures of relationship. And the first relationship we see in the Bible is the most intimate relationship that you can imagine, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, marriage. It is, in fact, the most intimate of friendships.

But friendship and fellowship extends outside of marriage too. This is one of the reasons why we push LifeGroups so often here at Chapel Hill. If you just float in and out of here on Sunday morning you miss out on something important: living out your faith in close friendships. And in terms of friendships, this is something we could do better at Chapel Hill. There's a desperate need for new LifeGroups here. We still need leaders to step up for LifeGroup University. That's not something that your pastors can do for you. You guys have to step up to serve each other and meet that deepest of need that is inside all of us, to know and be known in intimate friendships. And LifeGroups are one of the ways that we try to make that happen as a church.

Pastor Megan:

The idyllic picture of marriage and friendship with Adam and Eve was broken in the garden when they disobeyed God and sinned. Ever since, we've had a hard

time with the elements of friendship we're going to talk about. But Jesus died to cover our shame. He lived the life of obedience that we could not, and his Holy Spirit will enable us even when we mess up our friendships and marriages to forgive one another and to continue building to deeper levels of intimacy. We recognize that when the first two puzzle pieces are broken, especially when covenant has been broken, divorced individuals may not be able to move into more deep levels of intimacy with one another. But you, and they, are forgiven by Jesus. And the call is to continue to risk intimate friendships. We reflect who God is with this kind of redemptive intimacy with one another. We exercise this intimacy muscle by being vulnerable, sharing, and moving in the same direction.

Pastor Larry:

The first characteristic of Biblical friendship we want to touch on is vulnerability. Vulnerability means that you open yourself up to someone so that your weaknesses are exposed. Take a look at 2 Corinthians 6:11-13:

¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. ¹² We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. ¹³ As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

As Paul is pleading with the Corinthians to be in relationship with him, he uses this image of opening his heart wide to them and asking them to open wide their hearts as well. This is vulnerability! One of the maxims I've used about relationships is that openness begets openness, vulnerability begets vulnerability. This is true in small groups, its true in friendships, and it's certainly true in marriages. Once we put ourselves out there, often others will reciprocate because it helps establish a safe environment to be vulnerable.

But of course this is hard, even in marriages... maybe especially in marriages. Opening wide your heart is scary, and it can result in deep wounds. A marriage may not be a safe environment. Please hear me: I'm not asking you to cast your pearls before swine. We are sinful people, and when we see an open heart sometimes we end up poking holes in it. But ultimately, as Christians we are able to open our hearts because we can take our wounds to Jesus and in Jesus we find healing. A vibrant relationship with Jesus is the safest place we can go and works as a buoy that allows us to dive into sometimes scary places with other people. And when we can take that risk we will often find treasures in the deep.

Pastor Megan:

Paul also talks about the value of sharing his very self with other believers. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 he talks about his motivations to serve the church in Thessalonica, and he says, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." Sharing is a practical way to flex the vulnerability muscle.

Biblical friendship develops through times of sharing. Even Jesus spent time fishing, hiking, and eating with his friends. Sharing is usually the first natural step to even becoming friends. You share a church pew, so you learn the others' name. You share a running route on Saturday so you start pacing together. As you progress in sharing outward things, you have space to share heart-level stuff. If you've been married for many years but you are hearing this thinking, my spouse and I aren't friends, it's here in intentional sharing that I would encourage you to re-start the friendship in your marriage. And you might just have to begin by embracing how different you've become from one another! Start by sharing your differences. At some point in the first years of marriage, Larry and I swapped our favorite fiction books. He had me read the science fiction book, *Dune*. [Larry interrupts, you mean the science fiction CLASSIC.. and she loved it...] I'll admit it, I did. And you'll never believe what book Larry had to run out and immediately get the sequel for... Francine Rivers *Mark of the Lion* series. Super cheesy and a beautifully awesome Christian fiction novel. He loved it. [Larry interrupts, saying I loved it might be an overstatement... but I needed to find out how the story ended!] Give your spouse's differences a shot. Share them. You will likely find a new way to connect, and you will connect on deeper and deeper levels, getting right into the core of who you are, being more vulnerable, and sharing values.

Pastor Larry:

This last element of friendship can be the easiest element of friendships or it can be the most difficult part of marriages. I'm talking about going in the same direction, or sharing values. It's easy to get why this makes for good friendship. Think about any buddy movie you've seen where two or more very different people get thrown into a situation. When they have a common goal or common values, they put aside their differences and actually become good friends. One of my favorite movies is the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and there you've got an elf and a dwarf, Gimli and Legolas, becoming friends. An elf and a dwarf! So crazy! There's one scene in the movie where Gimli growls, "I never thought I'd die side by side with an elf." And Legolas retorts, "How about side by side with a friend?" And then they go and slay some orcs. They're friends because they are going in the same direction!

Here's the painful part of this: Many marriages don't feel like this at all. Somewhere along the way, the values changed. One spouse wants to do this and the other wants to do that. It's why as pastors we highly discourage Christians getting married to non-Christians. And it's why those who become Christians after they get married and have a non-Christian spouse often have a difficult time of it. The Apostle Paul calls it being "unequally yoked" in 2 Corinthians 6:14. The image is actually an agricultural one of two oxen under one yoke. If one of the oxen is weaker than the other, they would pull the cart in their direction. This is what it feels like in a marriage: two oxen, yoked together, but trying to go their own ways. And it's an incredibly painful experience.

Practically speaking, you have to find somewhere to pull in the same direction. Even if you can't agree on spiritual matters, is there something else you can agree on? How will you raise your children? What project do you want to save up to complete? Where do you want to be in 10 years? I mean, it can start small, but find those things that you agree together on, and move in the same direction as much as you can. And then pray. Pray, pray, pray that God will bring unity, and in that unity, intimate friendship.

Pastor Megan:

The Apostle Paul gave us all these passages we have read about friendship. And he wasn't married! But he had these elements of friendship going for him because being vulnerable, sharing, and going in the same direction are calls for all believers. Tim Keller expounds upon more Biblical pictures of friendship in marriage in *The Meaning of Marriage*, and we encourage you to dig in to revive the God-given friendship in your marriage. There is a lot at stake in the particular witness of the friendship in your marriage. Paul harkens back to the idyllic picture we first read in Genesis when he writes in Ephesians 5, verses 31 and 32, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." God made this man and this woman in marriage to reflect Christ's love for the Church. So we as the Church need to be about protecting and supporting marriages.

Pastor Larry:

When we talk about intimate friendship, we can find no better friend than Jesus. Jesus himself says in John 15: 13, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." And as we move into a time of communion, think about what a friend we have in Jesus. A friend, who was so vulnerable, whose heart was so open, that it was filled with holes a million times over for our sakes. Who shares with us everything so that we can have life. Who died for us so that we could be moving in the same direction with Him. Jesus, our friend, gave us His body, His blood, so that we could be His friends. It's in the very nature of God to pursue intimate friendship with us, and communion is our celebration of Christ's sacrificial, intimate friendship with us.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. What are ways that married couples can foster intimate friendship, even if they have been married for a while?
 2. Reflect on Song of Solomon 5:17. Can a spouse be both a lover and a friend? How? What does this look like for you?
 3. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. How do you see intimate friendship reflected in this passage, either through the husband-wife relationship or the Christ-Church relationship?