

Marriage, Singleness and the Kingdom of God

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[0 : 00] I'll turn to Genesis 2. And you'll see that there's an outline. I think the outline will really help you. It's pretty long. But what you'll see is that each week the structure is going to be the same for each passage.

And so if you're online, I think that the outline is in the service sheet there too. And so you can follow along. Genesis 1 tells the story of creation, the beginning of all things but one. God himself is there but one. Genesis 1 does not tell the story of God in the beginning because God did not begin.

He was there, wasn't he, before all else began. His spirit, Genesis says, hovered over the waters. And God's word gave life to all that is.

He spoke and everything came to be and then he rested. And then when we come into Genesis chapter 2 and verse 4, the author of Genesis zooms in on mankind.

[1 : 03] Effectively, what you get in Genesis 2 is a partial retelling of chapter 1, although in a less structured way. And the focus here is on the creation of mankind.

If Genesis 1 is like the wide-angle lens of creation on the grandest possible scale, Genesis 2 zooms in to show what it looks like when God created male and female.

And so one of the key questions that Genesis 1 invites you to ask is, what about the goodness of creation? So all through Genesis chapter 1, if you know the chapter, there's a refrain, God saw what he had made and it was good, and it was good, and it was good, it was good, it was very good.

And Genesis uses the word good to describe what is in the heart and the mind of God. When he looked over all that he had made, he was saying, it's just right. It's exactly as I intended it to be. But then you come to Genesis chapter 2 and verse 18. And there suddenly isn't there a kind of discordant note. God said, it is not good that the man should be alone.

[2 : 19] And at that point, at the point at which God had created a male but not yet a female, everything was not just right. It was not exactly as God intended it.

It was not good, not yet. And Genesis 2 invites you and I to think about why that is. It invites us to see that what God had made wasn't good.

And that is what we're going to focus on this evening. And so secondly, look with me at what the text actually tells us. I'm going to talk this exposition, really it's exposing what's in the text.

So you need a Bible. Look at verses 4 to 7. And you see a transition from no one to one. Verses 5 and 6 are really reminiscent of chapter 1 verse 2.

They describe the emptiness and the formlessness of the earth before God began to create. And then verse 7 tells us about the very first person God set upon the earth.

[3 : 23] Let me read it to you. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living creature. It's a really striking reminder of the power of God.

That God doesn't just go down with some nails and bones and industrial strength skin. God is not assembling raw materials. He's forming a person from next to nothing.

He takes dust and he creates a man. With all the intricacies and all the complexities of a personality that every human being contains.

And then he breathes life into the man that he's made. And the Lord God is not just the one who formed the human body. He is the life giver. And man becomes a living being.

A living being in the image of God who's formed and enlivened him. And then having told us about the man, the author of Genesis tells us about the garden where he placed the man. Look at verse 8.

[4 : 25] The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east. And there he put the man whom he'd formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the

sight and good for food. And verse 9, take note of two words there.

Just understand first the word pleasant, pleasing and good. And what God made for the man is both those things. It supplies his fundamental need.

But it does so in a really delightful way. God provides pleasure as well as basic necessities. And I think that's a really fascinating detail in chapter 2.

Because it obliterates right at the start of the Bible any notion of God being in favour of some kind of monkish existence. Of God being in favour of monkish deprivation.

As if to honour God in this world you and I need to live a really basic and frugal existence without any hint of enjoyment. No, God is the inventor of pleasure. God is the inventor of good food.

[5 : 26] God is the inventor of art. He creates aesthetically as well as functionally. Which is why we can look around at the world all around us. And find them as Genesis says pleasing to the eye.

Because God is the creator of beauty and beauty matters. And not only is the garden pleasing and good it's also fruitful. I suspect that's the main point of verses 10 to 14. Describe rivers that flow through and from the garden of Eden to many other places.

There's richness, there's bounty of the garden. And it's not just for Adam. God's provision is so abundant it flows out to other places. And in time to other people.

But the garden is also full of possibilities. Look at the second half of verse 9. The tree of life is in the midst of the garden. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Well that's what we're told in verse 9.

But in verse 15 if you see there we hear that God has placed the man in the garden. And he's given the man a purpose. And the purpose is to work it.

[6 : 35] And to take care of it. And in verse 16. God underlines to him you've got great freedom to enjoy the fruit of the garden.

Including the fruit which grows on the tree of life. Verse 17 avoid the ominous sounding tree.

Because if he eats from that tree there will be terrible consequences.

And so can you just see in Genesis chapter 2 God places a limit on man's freedom. But the limit, the divine command that God gives him is for his good. And so it is with all of God's commands.

Always. And it's at that point we come to verse 18. It's telling me at this point that God declares that something about this man's life in the garden is not good.

He is alone. And I think it's really important that we understand this aloneness. You need to notice that it doesn't say he was lonely.

[7 : 37] It's really important. It doesn't say Adam was lonely. Verse 18 is not describing a subjective experience.

That we think we know well. No, it's describing an objective reality. Adam was alone. He was with God, yes. And that was wonderful.

But in terms of human companionship or society, he was on his own. He was the only human being. There's an aloneness in Genesis 2.

Unlike anything you or I have ever experienced. In fact, I think it's quite hard for us to even imagine it. Let's go to one of the, you know, the giant nature reserves in Africa.

Let's go to the Kruger National Park. You know that giant national park in South Africa? And you can drive through it. I'll go to the Masai Mara in Kenya. You can drive through those parks and you can see these massive animals, can't you?

[8 : 43] Up close. But I want you to imagine that you're on holiday there. And you get left behind. And everybody drives home.

And then the park is closed up for the night. And all the staff go home. And imagine for some reason the staff have taken a few weeks off. And I'm locked in and I just can't get out.

And I'm just wandering around the park. And the only living creature that I come into contact is some kind of animal. And if you can imagine that, that was the only life I'd ever known.

If you begin to picture that, you start to approach Adam's aloneness. He's the only human in the world. And it is utterly unique in history.

So God resolves to find for Adam something or someone that will bring his aloneness to an end. And in particular, God determined to find him a helper.

[9 : 48] As I've studied this this summer, I've been really struck by that word. It's really important for you and I to understand that word.

When God says it's not good for man to be alone, does he mean that he seeks companionship for him? Is it that man is created for intimacy, but he doesn't yet have that intimacy?

Until he's got a mate. Is it that God is implying that this man longs for some deep connection deep inside with another human being?

And there may be truth in all of those things, but I think it's really significant that God uses the word helper. Because the search for a helper for the man is not just about companionship or intimacy.

It's not primarily about the search for a soulmate. It's a search for someone to share the work.

Because remember verse 15, God put the man in the garden not simply to enjoy its goodness, but why did God put him in the garden to work it and take care of it?

[11:03] And verse 18 identifies that Adam needs a partner in the fulfillment of that purpose. And so God is not trying to find someone for the man that he can simply come home with at night and cuddle up to.

God is wanting to find someone who will go to work with him, labor through the day. He doesn't just need a friend or a lover, he needs a helper.

And once God articulates that it is not good for man to be alone, the search for a suitable helper is on. And so God brings to Adam all the animals and Adam names them.

So the man is sitting there coming up with titles like hippopotamus, aardvark, giraffe, hamster, crocodile.

None of them, though, prove to be a suitable helper. That's the conclusion you get in verse 20. So God decides to create again. And this time he takes one of Adam's ribs and from the rib he creates a woman.

[12:09] And so one becomes two. And the rib that the Lord God had made, verse 22, from the man he made, he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

And then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, and she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. And so God presents the woman to Adam.

She's a gift to him. Note, the woman is not a result of the man's initiative. God is the author of this good thing. And the man, as he looks at Eve and all her beauty, is deeply satisfied.

And here we see God creating human intimacy and human fellowship for the first time. And what we're seeing is God creating at the most fundamental human level community.

At this point, we're introduced to the whole concept of society, of friendship. Here in this verse, I think we see the germination of what will become the church.

[13:15] Adam is no longer alone. Now, the rest of the Bible does see this moment not just as the beginning of a human relationship, but as the very first instance of a particular kind of relationship.

It's the first instance of marriage. Because into the drama of this scene comes verse 24. We've just seen one person, one human person become two.

And now, verse 24, we're told that the two have become one. And verse 24 really stands out as you read it.

We're so familiar with it, we don't spot it. It really interrupts the flow of the story. It's a verse which steps back and causes you and I to stop and to reflect on this historical moment.

The coming together of the first man and the first woman. And the verse looks to the future of such occasions. It sees this moment, Genesis 2, as the first of many marriages.

[14:26] The world will know. And it sees in this first marriage a pattern for all future marriages. So verse 24 tells you three key things about what God intends marriage to be.

First of all, marriage involves a leaving. At verse 24, he will leave his father and mother. He'll leave his family home. There's a clear break in the generations.

There's a fresh start when every new marriage begins. But there's also, secondly, a uniting. A man doesn't simply leave his family behind. He leaves his family in order to form a new one.

He's united to his wife and a new family unit has begun. And they will unite by sharing the same home. They will unite sexually. And if they're thinking rightly about their marriage, they will unite in that desire to fulfill that responsibility that God has given.

To help each other. And then thirdly, they will become one flesh. And so the one become two, and then the two become one.

[15:36] And such is the power of their unity that there's a very real sense in which they are no longer two but one. Now that word flesh is partly sexual.

It is. In connotation. But I think we're really foolish to reduce it to only being a sexual thing. The phrase one flesh is really an attempt to express a union, a uniting of two people which affects every area of life.

Not just a sexual relationship. He is not saying that all independent personality and life is sucked up into some completely indistinguishable oneness.

But nevertheless, he is saying that there's a merging of lives to such a great degree that there's an inseparable and a permanent unity established. So at the end of chapter two, that's how we find Adam.

Adam. No longer alone. No longer without help. And God has supplied his needs. And of course, it ends, doesn't it, in verse 25 with a wonderful picture of everything being well.

[16:48] Adam and his wife were naked and they felt no shame. Sadly, as you know, by the end of the next chapter, that shameless vulnerability has vanished.

But here, for the moment, is a beautiful openness and innocence. So let me turn to teasing out some implications of this. Firstly, marriage.

And I want to say four things about marriage from Genesis 2. Number one, we see in this chapter that marriage was part of the answer to Adam's aloneness. Of course, it's only part of the answer. Because the creation of the woman was not primarily about the creation of marriage, but about the creation of a human. Relationships in general.

So it's not only in marriage that God meets the need for humans to have meaningful companionship. There are many other kinds of relationship that are the fruit of this moment that Genesis 2 describes.

[17:53] I want to come back to that. And yet it is saying something particular about marriage. It is true. It is not good for people to be alone like Adam. Like he was alone.

And in order to satisfy that need for another or others, part of what God has provided is the gift of marriage. So those of us who are married, we ought to be very thankful for this aspect of God's provision.

Which leads me to say the second thing I want to point out here about marriage. It's about complementarity. Marriage is about complementarity. So God identifies that Adam, not just that Adam needs a helper, but he needs a suitable helper.

So did you notice that word in verse 18 and verse 20? What's being relayed is that Adam needs a helper that is both like him and unlike him.

And so you notice in verse 23, Adam celebrates the way in which his wife is like him. She's bone in my bone, she's flesh in my flesh. She's like him. But I also think it's really clear that for him to be suitably helped, he needs someone different and somebody similar to him.

[19:11] In his commentary on these verses, John Calvin calls the woman in these verses Adam's counterpart. I think that's really helpful. It captures marriage.

Marriage is coming together of two people who can help each other because they are not exactly the same as each other. Thirdly, we see that marriage is about an intimate unity.

Verse 24 describes the two becoming one flesh. And there's something really profound that's being said. Then verse 25 tells us they were shamelessly naked. And there we're hearing something of the kind of intimacy that God hoped would characterize every marriage.

That intimate unity is what the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 calls a profound mystery. And it's a profound mystery that God has stitched together with another profound mystery, that intimate unity of Christ and his bride, the church.

And so the merging of two lives in body and in spirit and purpose is a merging designed by God and accomplished by God.

[20:30] And it brings two people into a united oneness that's so profound that the apostle Paul can't really explain it and I can't really explain it to you tonight. And that is definitely something that is to be prized and it is definitely something that is to be protected.

The fourth point about marriage, and the one I particularly want to stress tonight, is that it is not ultimate. Marriage is good.

But it is not, theologically speaking, an end in itself. Marriage is not a good thing just to be enjoyed. Rather, it is something that is to be used for God's purpose.

And that's why I think understanding the word helper in this chapter is so important because it will help shape our thinking about what marriage is about. Because if you think that the creation of the

woman was just about the need for an intimate companion, then you will conclude, as lots of marriage books, that the important thing is companionship and intimacy. They are the great purposes of marriage. And so you will invest yourself in marriage where intimacy and companionship are the highest priority. But if, on the other hand, you grasp that the creation of the woman for the man was about his need for a workmate, that it was about the fulfillment of a God-given responsibility, then we'll conclude that there is a purpose for marriage that is beyond the couple itself, themselves.

[22 : 10] And so then we will invest ourselves in marriages where the highest priority is the fulfillment of our God-given purposes. And I think the distinction between those two outlooks makes quite a bit of a difference on the ground.

It's a really important perspective. I don't want you to mishear me. I am not saying that God is not interested in intimacy and companionship, all right?

It's obvious from Genesis 2 and the rest of the Bible that he is. That we ought to regard intimacy, including sexual intimacy, as a beautiful thing and a really precious gift from God.

And there is companionship and intimacy to be enjoyed. But we mustn't just reduce it as if that is all there is. It is not. Because when chapter 2, verse 5, describe what the world was like before God created the man, he said there was no one to work the ground.

When God did make man and placed him in the garden, verse 15 says, he did that so that he might work it and take care of it. And so when the woman comes along to help the man, Genesis 2 could not be clearer about what the partnership is for.

[23 : 26] It is for doing God's work that God has given them. Together, it is obeying God. Together, Adam's helper comes not just to be with him, but to do life with him, but to assist him to live well.

To partner him in living to please God. I am really aware, as I prepared this, that this idea is a long way from what quite a lot of people think.

And the way people naturally think about marriage, even amongst Christians, there's lots of confusion about this. Partly because I think we've read Genesis 2 really carelessly. Largely because we're so strongly influenced by our culture.

Because we live in a culture that so often does treat marriage as the ultimate. Do you know the children's book, *Is This the House of Mistress Mouse?*

Do you know this book? I thought it was very well known, but nobody's known it. But I'm going to read to you the story of *Is This the House of Mistress Mouse?* It's a children's book. This is the house of Mr. Mouse.

[24 : 41] He lived all alone, and he was very lonely. One day he received a letter from Mistress Mouse. The letter said, Dear Mr. Mouse, I'm very lonely too.

Will you please come and visit me? Love and kiss is Mistress Mouse. Mr. Mouse said to himself, I would very much like to visit Mistress Mouse, but I don't know where she lives. However, I will just have to get into my little car and go and look for her.

There is a house just ahead, said Mr. Mouse. Perhaps that is where Mistress Mouse lives. He knocked on the door. Is this the house of Mistress Mouse? He asked. Mr. Mouse was very frightened, for that was the house of Mr. Cat.

What a cute little mouse, thought Mr. Cat, as he watched him speed away in his car. I wonder why he was so frightened. But Mr. Mouse knew better than to go into Mr. Cat's house, didn't he?

Soon he came to a bright red barn. He knocked on the barn door. It was the house of Mrs. Hen and her baby chicks. Please don't bother me. I'm teaching my chicks to scratch, he said.

[25 : 46] And so Mr. Mouse travelled on until he came to a big white castle. He knocked on the castle door. It was the castle of... Mr. Lion. He was in a very bad temper because he had bad toothache.

Mr. Mouse raced away as fast as he could. Finally he came to a cute little house in a lovely country lane. He knocked on the pretty yellow door. Is this the house of Mistress Mouse?

He asked. The door slowly opened. Sure enough, it was the house of Mistress Mouse. Mistress Mouse was so happy to see him and Mr. Mouse was happy to see her.

Will you marry me so that we will never again be lonely? asked Mr. Mouse. Why, yes, said Mistress Mouse. And so they were married by Father Mole. Mr. Mouse gave Mistress Mouse a golden wedding ring with a bright diamond on top.

And from that day on they were never lonely. They went on picnics. They took rides in the country. They went rowing on the lake. And then one night after they'd finished their supper they heard something.

[26 : 48] It was a tiny squeak, squeak, squeak coming from the bedroom. What do you suppose it was that was squeaking? It was their baby. He wanted to be kissed goodnight.

Goodnight, Daddy Mouse. Goodnight, Mummy Mouse. Goodnight, Baby Mouse. Goodnight. That's the end of the story. You say, well, it's only a story for children.

Seems quite harmless, doesn't it, and cute? But an article I read referred to this story, the story of Mistress Mouse, as one of the kind of cultural influences that there is. Not on this congregation because none of you have run it.

But it shapes our view of marriage along with Disney princess films, the music of Taylor Swift, and the TV show The Bachelor. And I do think that story is actually a really good example of the kind of formative cultural norm about marriage that we invite.

We really do receive lots of messages from popular culture, from the values of our family and friends. We see marriage and having babies as the ultimate, the ultimate achievement. We see having a happy marriage as the destination that we all want to arrive at.

[28 : 03] The soulmate, the happily ever after marriage, the kind of marriage that Mr. and Mistress Mouse had. And so in our culture today, sex and marriage and family life are valued with a kind of ultimacy that seems to be very seductive.

And our society, in one sense, seems to believe that that is what life is really all about. Meaningful relationships, family, leaving a legacy for the next generation. But honestly, it's ludicrous.

So stupid, I don't know where to start. So many people have embraced this vision of life and Christians have bought into it. In fact, I think Christians have often endorsed it from a misreading of Genesis chapter 2.

You know the story goes that Adam and Eve's marriage, that is the crescendo, the pinnacle of the creation account. But you've got to read Genesis to really carelessly to think that.

Yes, it's true that Adam and Eve come together in a complementary way and intimately. It's true that it is part of the answer that God provides to Adam's aloneness.

[29 : 12] Yes, it is true that their marriage at the end of chapter 2 is a profound and a beautiful thing, but it's not the ultimate thing. because their marriage serves a bigger purpose, a much bigger purpose than the enjoyment of their own relationship.

In God's wisdom, Adam and Eve are brought together to help each other in the work that God has called them to do. They're married in order to serve God and obey God. And we might think that the defining moment of a marriage is when a couple are alone in their bedroom, but Genesis 2 tells us that the defining moment of a marriage is when a husband and a wife serve together in their society.

And so what this means is this. If you are in a marriage this evening that is currently rich and fulfilling, then you mustn't let that lull you into some kind of dreamy confusion about what your marriage is for enjoy it.

Praise God for it. By all means. But remember that your marriage is a gift from God to be used to serve God. And so we need to keep asking ourselves those of us who are married, is my marriage orientated to the purposes of God?

And of course this means tonight if your marriage is at the moment disappointing or difficult, it reassures you that a happy and easy marriage is not the main point of life.

[30 : 47] And so by all means do pray for better days ahead in your marriage and work hard at the issues that need to be addressed. But don't put all your eggs in the marriage basket for happiness. Get on with helping each other to serve Christ and his gospel.

And you can be grateful for the ways that God is shaping you and sanctifying you by your marriage. And of course this means something if you are single and you desire to be married.

It means that you must work very hard to understand the thing that you're seeking. Don't get sucked in by Mr. and Mrs. Mouse's marriage.

That if you get married all your dreams will come true. you won't have found a soul mate that completes you. You won't have satisfied every longing that God made you with.

And if you think you're never going to feel lonely again you are seriously misguided. And if you think that it's all diamond rings and tiny squeaks from a cute baby in the next bedroom you're nuts.

[31 : 51] If you're looking for something ultimate that this is what life is really all about you will be deeply deeply disappointed or worse you'll shipwreck your own soul trying to create your own happiness.

And what God offers you when he offers you in marriage is not what the world we live in thinks marriage is. God is offering someone to come alongside you to help you work for God and obey God.

And if you want something other than that marriage is not your answer. But if on the other hand you want to spend all your life in the service of Christ by all means pray for a spouse to help you. But you might also pray for singleness because there's many advantages in serving God in this world. And we'll talk more about that next week. But I do want to pause for a moment and see what perspective Genesis 2 gives you and I on singleness.

I think this is helpful. When I use the word singleness over the next few weeks I'm talking about anyone who is not married. Whether they've not been married or whether they have been married and they're not now and they're single again.

[33 : 09] I want to say there's two things that Genesis 2 shows us about marriage. That shows us about singleness. Firstly Genesis 2 reminds you and I that singleness is the absence of a good thing.

So it's really clear isn't it from this passage that marriage is a good gift from God. And it's designed to be a blessing to the husband and the wife. It's part of God's answer to Adam's aloneness.

Marriage does draw people into an intimate unity with one another. It does provide the married person with a like but complementary person as they serve the Lord together.

Those things are good. So Genesis 2 is a reminder that a person who is not married does not enjoy those blessings in the same way.

The Bible says some remarkably positive things about singleness which we'll cover over the next few weeks. books. And sometimes books are written at the moment where it is possible that the impression given is that a single person isn't missing out on very much.

[34 : 19] And it might be possible for Christians reading those books to think that someone who grieves being single is making far too much of it. But I don't think the Bible allows us to make that conclusion.

I think Genesis 2 dignifies the grief of those who would love to be married but aren't. And I use that word carefully. if they grieve because they see what a good thing marriage is and because they recognize within themselves a righteous desire for a husband and a wife then I think we have to say that their grief makes perfect sense in the light of God's word.

Yes there are some other things that God's word would urge them to think and feel about their singleness. But for now I want to remind us that those who grieve not being married grieve the absence of something good.

And those who desire marriage desire a good thing that comes from the hand of God. But there's also a second thing that Genesis 2 reminds us of when we're thinking about singleness. That if marriage is only part of the solution to the aloneness that Adam felt, then there must be other parts to that solution that God gave which can be enjoyed by single people.

And that comes back to the point I made earlier about the unique nature of Adam's aloneness. Because I do think that one of the problems in reading this passage is that we confuse Adam's aloneness with loneliness.

[35 : 52] There's a daft book published a couple of years ago which made that big error. It's so important to see that the loneliness as we experience it is not the core of Adam's problem.

He was actually alone. He was the only human. Just like me living with the animals in Kruger National Park. None of us have experienced that aloneness. And in fact Genesis 2 reminds us that none of us have been totally alone precisely because of what God did here.

And when God gave the woman to Adam he was prefiguring marriage in a very real way. but in a more fundamental way he's creating human community and friendship so that no human being ever had to experience what Adam did.

So I think it is correct to say that Genesis 2 is less about marriage and more about what it needs to be human. Of course it is about marriage but primarily Genesis 2 is making a simpler point.

God saw that Adam was alone and it was not good for Adam to be alone. So God ensured that from the end of Genesis 2 onwards human beings would have the opportunity for relationships with other

human beings whether married or single.

[37 : 11] And Genesis 2 wants to draw our attention tonight not only to the blessings of marriage but the blessings of family life and of friendship and of community and particularly the community of Christ, the family of God.

Genesis 2 I think seems to celebrate, all of those things. It's a huge mistake when we just take it as a celebration of marriage. Genesis 2 is a celebration of all that is good in human relationships. Adam is so much more than a husband here. By the end of chapter 2 he is someone who looks forward to being a friend, a father, an uncle, maybe even a grandfather. Eve is so much more than a potential wife.

She's a friend, she's a future mother, she's a future aunt, she's a future grandmother. She's literally the one who along with her husband will produce new human beings in order to perpetuate the vision of God.

And Genesis 2 reminds us really clearly, and I want you to hear this, that the choice between marriage and singleness is not a choice between intimacy and aloneness. Genesis 2 reminds us, for example, that the special intimacy that exists between friends is precisely because what God did in this moment.

[38 : 30] Our society sexualizes everything, isn't it? So it's got to the point, isn't it, where two women enjoy an intimate friendship and people start to wonder, well, are they gay? It's got to the stage where two men develop a deep affection for each other, and we call that a bromance.

It's got to the stage where a man and a woman have a non-romantic relationship, and people expect it to be more than meets the eye. Or at the very least, it'll inevitably turn into something more.

And those are terrible instincts. They're not right. And Christians, we should have no part of them. Our society has taught us to think like that. We need to get back to the Bible and think differently. We must say no to that desire to sexualize everything. It's possible, isn't it, for two women to be very close to each other without having a lesbian thought.

It's possible for two blokes to love each other deeply in a totally non-romantic way, and that is not a bromance. It's friendship. It's even possible for men and women to be friends without sexual desire getting in the way.

[39 : 45] It's a beautiful thing. It's a great gift from God for all to enjoy. And if that's true of friendship, how much more does that need to be true in the church? It's a stunningly beautiful thing.

Relationships in the family of God are a special gift from God for all to enjoy. And so in the church, both married and single have eternal brothers and sisters. They also have mothers and fathers.

And within the family, there's that possibility, isn't there, for single and married to be spiritual parents through discipleship. In Mark 10, 29 and 30, Jesus says this, truly I say to you, there is no one who's left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, lands with persecution and in the age to come eternal life.

That's a stunning promise. And one I fear that we so often fail to believe. But remember, it would never have been possible from the lips of Jesus if it were not for what we read in Genesis chapter 2. Now let me finish. What does this passage teach us about the kingdom of God? It reminds us of this. It reminds us that God's kingdom is the ultimate thing. Marriage is not ultimate.

[41 : 11] The enjoyment of friendship, the enjoyment of community is not ultimate. All human relationships have a purpose beyond themselves. And that purpose is found in relating to God the king and doing what he asks.

And I think we see three aspects of that. Firstly, work. We've seen that what the earth lacked before man was created was someone to work the ground. And what God asked Adam to do when he was created was to work it and take care of it.

God did not create you without a purpose. God did not create man without a purpose. Yes, he made the world good and pleasing and there was much and is much for man in the world that God made.

man's purpose is to serve the God who made him. And now that Christ has come, that purpose is deeply shaped by the gospel.

Our lives are about doing the work in the world that God has called us to do. But of all else, it's that making disciples, our families, friends, church, throughout the world, that's what life is for.

[42 : 24] And if we're married, that is what marriage is for. Because whether we're married or not, that's what God calls us to do. Now secondly, teaches us about obedience. It's another thing that Genesis 2 makes clear, isn't it?

about how the man and the woman are to live their lives. They are to live their lives recognizing the kingship of God and submitting to it. And in the middle of the chapter is a commandment, you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And from the outset it establishes that man is made to listen to his maker. And life will be best for men and for women and for boys and girls and for you when you obey his word. They don't know everything.

God knows far better than we do how to live in the world he's created and how to live well. So the people God has made must listen and trust his good commands. And then thirdly and finally, relationship.

Because the man and the woman who were created were not only told to listen to the king's word and do the king's work, but they were invited actually to know the king and to be loved by him.

[43 : 31] Think with me about this thing for a minute as we finish. It's a really striking thing isn't it? Verse 2, the Lord God talks to the man. It's a striking thing that he makes the world that the man inhabits.

It's good and pleasing. It's a striking thing that God sees the man's deepest need and he wants to meet it. Genesis 2 is not a picture of a God who is distant.

It's not a picture of a God who is disinterested. God is not that kind of ruler. It's a picture of a God who cares deeply about the people that he's made and that hasn't changed.

I wonder if I asked you what is the most intimate moment in Genesis chapter 2? What would you say? I think naturally our eyes go to the end of the chapter where they were naked and not ashamed and that is real intimacy for sure.

But I wonder, actually as I've studied this, I wonder whether verse 7 is the chapter's most intimate moment. Just think about that.

[44 : 39] In that verse, God forms a man with his own fingers. He cradles the man's lifeless face in his hands. He kneels down and he places his lips over the man's nose and then he breathes and he shares his own life with the man that he's made.

And he brings him to life in the process. As you think about that moment, it's a stunning moment. It's incredibly beautiful and I think it stands in this chapter as an emblem to the kind of relationship with God that you, that human beings were created for.

It reminds you and I that God offers to people whether you're single or married a far greater joy than any human relationship could ever provide. God offers to single married people a far greater joy than any human relationship could ever provide.

I hope you believe that. That is the ultimate thing. Brothers and sisters, this is the gospel we proclaim to the world. This is the truth we live and experience every day, that God formed the man from the dust of the ground.

He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.