

Marriage: A Gift From Eden



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:18–25, Mark 10:7–9, Eph. 5:22–25, Matt. 5:27–30.*

Memory Text: “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him’ ” (*Genesis 2:18*).

Think of the blessings of a happy marriage and a loving home. How fortunate are those who have such an experience! Unfortunately, for too many people marriage has been an experience of mostly pain and anger rather than of joy and peace. This is not how it was intended or how it should be. The sad state of so many marriages is a powerful expression of the degradation that sin has brought to the human race.

“God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. ‘Marriage is honorable’ (Hebrews 13:4); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

What a wonderful ideal. This week’s lesson looks at some of the principles behind it.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 2.*

Lo Tov

Out of a primeval abyss God created our world through the supernatural power of His Word. All through the Creation account, everything was “good” until the work was completed, at which point everything the Lord had created was pronounced “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*).

In the midst of all this, however, one thing was *lo tov*, “not good.” Read **Genesis 2:18**. What was “not good,” and why? What are some of the implications of this text?

God had declared all aspects of the Creation “good” up to the time that He created Adam. At that point, Adam was the only human. Although he was made in the image of God, in his aloneness he could not reflect the full image of God, who exists in relationship with other parts of the Godhead. The Godhead, of course, is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Adam needed someone like himself with whom he could form a relationship of mutual love and cooperation, reflecting the loving relationship exemplified within the Godhead.

Read **Genesis 2:19–21**. After what act does God cause Adam to sleep and then, from his flesh, create a wife? How might the previous act be related to God’s creation of a wife for Adam?

Perhaps the key here is found in the last phrase of verse 20. As he named the animals, Adam must have noticed that they came in pairs (male and female) unlike himself, who was a singular creation. We can be sure that the Lord all along intended for Adam to have a wife. Perhaps the Lord intended to create a longing in Adam, the sense that something was missing in his own existence, which would make him that much more appreciative of the gift that the Lord was going to give him in a wife.

Consider the contrast between the “good” of the rest of the Creation and the declaration of “not good” in regard to Adam’s solitude. What does this indicate about the value of relationships? What can you do to help to strengthen whatever valuable relationships that you are in now?

A Companion for Adam

Genesis 2:20, in which Adam names the animals, helps to reveal the great gap between humans and other earthly creatures. There was no animal that was comparable to Adam. Not even among the apes was there any creature like Adam, because Adam was not like an ape. This is an important point for us to remember because so many in our society promote the idea that humans are nothing more than advanced apes. We are not apes, and an ape was no more suitable as a companion for Adam than it would be for one of us.

Read Genesis 2:21, 22. What significance is found in the method by which God created a companion for Adam?

As God had personally crafted Adam's body from the dust of the ground, so He personally crafted Eve's body, using one of Adam's ribs. God did not need Adam's rib to create Eve; He could have created her as He had created Adam or even spoken her into existence.

But God had a reason for forming Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. If the two had been created completely separately, it could indicate that by nature they were completely independent individuals. But the sharing of flesh in both persons indicates that the two were to be united and were intended to be "one flesh."

After being created, Eve was brought to Adam to be his helper (*vs. 18*). She was made from Adam (*vs. 22*) and given to Adam (*vs. 22*). The process by which God created Eve showed clearly that God could provide any companion that Adam needed. This point became important later when Adam faced the temptation of whether to join Eve in the eating of the fruit or to trust God to take care of the situation. Adam had ample reason to believe that God could take care of him, and this made his sin the more grievous.

Read Genesis 2:23. What was Adam's response to Eve?

Adam was so excited when he saw Eve that he sang out in poetry. This is the first poem in the Bible and reflects Adam's regard for his wife and the closeness of their relationship. She was to be his equal, another aspect of Creation that was damaged by the Fall.

Ideal Marriage

Author William Faulkner once called marriage a “failure” and wrote that “the only way to get any peace out of it is . . . to keep the first one [wife] and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her.” What a sad commentary on the state of many marriages.

Read Mark 10:7–9. What texts did Jesus quote in this passage? What characteristics of a good marriage can be found in the words of Jesus here?

The benefits of leaving one’s parents in order to create a home with one’s spouse are so well known that they hardly need to be mentioned. Problems with in-laws are one of the leading causes of marital discord. One of the first steps to take when establishing a happy home is to respect the independence of the marriage partners by the establishment of a home separate from their parents when at all possible. In cases when it is not possible, the privacy and intimacy of marriage should still be respected.

Unity is another feature of a good marriage. Unity does not mean that the two partners should give up the use of their separate brains but that they should be united in their purpose to do the very best for each other and for their union.

Jesus also emphasized the lasting nature of marriage. Marriage is not a casual relationship to be entered into or dismissed at will. It is a lifetime commitment. Those who are not prepared to commit themselves for life should postpone such a step until they are ready.

Read Ephesians 5:22–25. In what way do these verses reveal the principles of a good marriage?

It is the husband’s privilege to give himself to his wife in loving service, as Christ gave Himself for the church. In turn, the wife is to respect her husband and to cooperate in their work toward their mutual goals. Here is the solution to the discord that sin has brought into the marriage relationship. Self-sacrificing love will be met by loving respect and mutual happiness. Our homes can be a foretaste of heaven.

Protecting What's Precious

One of the greatest examples of God's love for humanity can be found in human sexuality. It is truly a wonderful gift from God. Yet, as with all the gifts that we have been given, it doesn't come unconditionally. That is, it's not something we can just do with as we please. God has set some rules. Indeed, He is very clear: sexual activity is to be between a husband and wife, male and female, and only in the context of marriage. Anything outside of that is sin.

Read Matthew 5:27–30. Look at how seriously Jesus takes the issues with which He is dealing here. What is, ultimately, at stake?

However much we like to focus (and rightly so) on all the grace and forgiveness that Jesus bestows upon sinners, we can't forget the high standards of morality that He lived and preached. It's hard to imagine how Jesus could have expressed more strongly the warning against sexual immorality as revealed in these few verses. Plucking out your eye? Cutting off your hand? If this is what it takes to be pure, then it's worth it; otherwise, you are in danger of losing your eternal life.

"If all who profess to obey the law of God were free from iniquity, my soul would be delivered; but they are not. Even some who profess to keep all the commandments of God are guilty of the sin of adultery. What can I say to arouse their benumbed sensibilities? Moral principle, strictly carried out, becomes the only safeguard of the soul."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, pp. 621, 622.

However strong Jesus' warning is here, we must not forget the story about the woman caught in the act of adultery (*John 8: 1–11*). How do we strike the right balance between the upholding of the standards that Jesus talked about in the above verses, while at the same time showing grace and compassion to those who fall, as revealed in this story?

Marriage as a Metaphor for the Church

It is well-known among students of the Bible that, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, marriage is used as a symbol of the relationship between God and His covenant people. That's why, for example, on numerous occasions the Bible uses the image of an unfaithful woman to symbolize the apostasy and backsliding that were prevalent in ancient Israel. For instance, back in Exodus, the Lord said to His people that they should not enter into any kind of close relationship with the pagans around them because the pagans were a very perverse people who could lead Israel astray.

Read Exodus 34:15, 16. What image does the Lord use in this specific warning? How can this be understood in the context of God's people being "married" to Him? See Jer. 3:14.

At the same time, the image of the church as the bride of Christ points toward unity among believers and with Christ, especially when understood in the context of the biblical ideal for marriage: one man and one woman in a loving, self-sacrificing relationship.

Read Ephesians 5:28–32 and Revelation 19:5–9. What are these texts teaching?

In these texts, the relationship within the ideal marriage is compared with the relationship of God and His people. God invites His people to join with Him in an intimate relationship. This is an amazing picture of God's interest in His people and His desire to bring us into His fellowship.

What choices can you make that will draw you closer to the Lord and closer to the ideal represented in the biblical concept of marriage? Why is it a matter of the choices that you, and you alone, can make?

Further Study: In many ways a proper understanding of morality, especially sexual morality, is clearly tied to a proper understanding of our origins. For example: evolutionary philosophy does not provide an objective basis for any link between sexual activity and morality. Animals have many different types of “mating systems.” Some species are polygamous; many are promiscuous. A few species are mostly monogamous, but genetic studies have revealed that many species that appear to be monogamous are not actually so. In many species, a female may give birth to a group of offspring that are not all fathered by the same individual. Without the objective standard of morality given by the Creator, we would have no basis for the evaluation of sexual behavior as morally good or bad. The current push to approve homosexual partnerships illustrates this point. It is only in the light of Creation that marriage is properly understood.

“In both the Old and the New Testament, the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father’s house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Darwinism denies anything like the biblical Creation. What rules for sexual behavior, if any, does Darwinism provide, and how do they contrast with the biblical ideal?
- 2 What are some biblical examples of good marriages and happy homes? Name some biblical examples of unhappy marriages and homes. What can we learn from both?
- 3 Review the description of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31:10–31. What should be the character of the husband of such a wife?
- 4 In what ways can your local church be a place that can help to affirm and strengthen the ideals of marriage? What practical things can your church do in order to accomplish that goal?

Small Projects Make Big Impact

Part of our mission offerings are set aside to fund specific small outreach projects around the world. These are separate from the larger Thirteenth Sabbath Offering funds. Two recipients report on how they used these special project funds to reach out to their communities.

Egypt has fewer than 750 Seventh-day Adventists among a population of more than 80 million people. The vast majority of Egyptians are Muslims. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, observant Muslims fast during the day and break their fast with an evening meal after sunset. In a gesture of goodwill, the Seventh-day Adventist Church hosted an evening meal during Ramadan for members of the Muslim community. They invited a number of Seventh-day Adventists and prominent Christians to mingle with their Muslim guests.

More than twenty non-Adventists attended the meal, including government assistant ministers, a general, a police colonel, representatives from two political parties, leaders of an Egyptian human rights organization, and journalists. After the meal the guests expressed appreciation and good will toward the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some indicated that they had been unaware of Seventh-day Adventists before the occasion.

Egypt Field President Llewellyn Edwards spoke to the guests, expressing how living among Muslims had changed his understanding of Muslims from one of fear created by Western media to one of friendship and hospitality. “Muslims are people to be loved,” he said.

The small projects mission offering helped to build a bridge of understanding between Christians and Muslims in an important political center of the Muslim world.

Halfway around the world lies the tiny South Pacific island nation of New Caledonia. The easternmost island is Mare, only about 20 miles (30 kilometers) from shore to shore. It lies almost 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) east of Australia and is home to about 6,000 people.

In July of 2011 Pastor Jean-Noel Adeline led in a series of evangelistic meetings sponsored in part by the small outreach project funds. As many as 200 people from across the island attended the evangelistic meetings. Following the meetings a small group numbering ten people began meeting on Sabbaths and preparing for baptism.

The islanders and the New Caledonia Mission are moving forward to build a place of worship so that these tender new seeds of faith can grow strong and root deeply in one of the farthest corners of the world.

The new believers on the island of Mare in New Caledonia thank you for sharing your mission offerings and helping them to discover God’s plan for their lives.