

March 2021

Two equal persons become one flesh: Genesis 2, Psalm 8

The book of Genesis took its current shape and found its place at the beginning of Israel's sacred literature, while Israel was in the midst of its greatest national tragedy: exile in Babylon. The people of Israel had lost their land and their temple; they had again been reduced to being slaves in a foreign land. It was in the crucible of exile that they finally came to grips with the revolutionary fact that there was in fact only one God. He was the creator of the whole world and he was their redeemer (see, for example, Isaiah 43:14–15). Since there were no other gods, he could not have a wife or a consort, which was common for other “gods” in the ancient world. Rather, what God desired was a relationship with his people that would be like that of a husband and wife. He desired that we would leave our former gods (who were not even gods) and become one with him, in just the same way that a man would leave his former family and create a new reality with his wife.

Having only one God leads to the second truly revolutionary concept: the man/husband and woman/wife are **equal**. This was a scandal in the ancient world. As in any wonderful story, the author of Genesis builds tension, and then the tension is resolved in a surprising way. In this process, he makes clear the equality of the sexes.

As the creation of the universe is recounted in Genesis, we hear the word “good” repeated over and over, followed by a resounding “very good” when humans are created. Then we hear the description of the beautiful garden, filled with fruit that is pleasing to the eye and good to eat. The man has an important job. All of these aspects of the man's life also seem clearly to be “good.” However, God himself declares that something is amiss: it is **NOT GOOD** for the man to be alone. Thus begins the search for a fitting partner. God had made all creatures from the same ground from which he had fashioned the man. And he presented them to the man—but there was not a suitable partner to be found. There is indeed tension in the story, and it needs to be resolved. What to do?

God removed the rib of the man and fashioned another person out of it. This one was equal (“bone of his bone” and “flesh of his flesh”), but different. She was a **woman** who had come from the **man**. It is a pun in Hebrew that works in English as well. Now the tension of the story is finally eased. One could say that man is not complete until there is woman.

Humans do not come generic or “gender fluid.” It was the will of the creator that they be *either* male or female. Human persons are sexual beings, and every cell of one's body is either male or female. For the ancient world, the truly revolutionary concept was that males and females are fundamentally equal. For us progressive moderns, the truly revolutionary concept is different: that our sex, our being either male or female, is based on will of the creator. It is a reality that we are not free to determine. Still, despite the differences of our modern challenges from those of the ancients, humans have always had the same basic problem. Much as we want to, we cannot usurp the prerogatives of the creator.

Another one of the most important insights of the creation stories is that human beings are relational. By design, we are social beings; it is not good for us to be alone. Marriage can be understood as an icon of our relational nature. We are designed to be in relationship with other persons.

Chapter 2 of Genesis describes marriage as a privileged society; it is a part of ordinary human life, and yet it also reflects the inner workings of the godhead itself. This chapter sets the stage for Scripture's later unfolding of the implications of this union. Farther on in Scripture, we will come to see marriage, this relationship of love between two persons, as a symbol of the relationship between God and man—first in the covenant with Israel, and then in the one life shared by Christ and the Church. Finally, Scripture will show that marriage reflects our ultimate destiny: to be one with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—in an intimate union of persons forever.

We have come to believe that the one God of Israel is a society of equal persons. These distinct persons are also so united that they are truly one God. We call this the Trinity. Marriage is also a society of equal persons united into one. To see a good marriage is to catch a glimpse of the triune God. Likewise, to reflect on the relationships of love within the Trinity is to gain an insight into the relationship of husband and wife. In fact, as husband and wife participate together in the personal relationship of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, they experience real power. Their marriage is healed and transformed. They become a light to the world.



Genesis 2:4b–7

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:4b–7

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Meditation

On the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens, there were no plants or living things, because the Lord had not caused it to rain. He then caused the mist to come and water the earth. Then, out of the ground he formed man. This is a wonderful piece of storytelling. In addition to recounting a breathtaking story, the author loves to play with words. Here, we have a Hebrew pun. The word “ground” in Hebrew is *`adamah* and out of it the Lord fashions the “man,” “the human”: *`adam*.

He breathed into the man and he became a living being. This man is made out of the same stuff as all the rest of creation. He is clearly not God. All of creation is different from the creator; it is not part of him or of the same stuff. This is different from other creation stories in the ancient world. In those stories, creation is the result of a great battle between the creator god and the primeval waters out of which that god came. The waters are then the stuff of which the world and ultimately mankind is made. In those stories, the creator god slays the personified waters (understood to be female), kills her consort, and out of the slain enemy of the creator, fashions mankind. It's violent and bloody. Not so in our story. Humanity is fashioned out of the good earth and filled with the breath of the good creator.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 2:8–9,15

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:8–9,15

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Meditation

God now plants a garden and fills it with all the best trees and plants. Everything is beautiful and good for eating. God also plants the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. God places the man, a male whose name is Adam, in the garden and charges him with taking good care of it. Meaningful work was not a result of the fall of mankind, but part of God's original intention for us, his creatures. After he charges the man to keep the garden, he tells him that he may eat of any of the trees and plants in the garden—except, of course, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The picture is idyllic. The garden is beautiful, there is meaningful work for the man, and God keeps saying that everything is good. (Of course, there will be a little problem if he eats of that one tree—but that has not happened yet.)

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 2:16–17

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:16–17

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Meditation

One can fairly assume that Adam and Eve were familiar with the concept of death. They must have observed the cycle of life and death of all living things, including plants and animals. The experience of death was another matter. What God is offering here is access to all the good food of the garden, including the tree of life. Within his offer is embedded a warning: their freedom is not the freedom of the creator. It is not absolute. To live will require humbly living within the parameters that the creator has set, and they can trust that his provision for them is good. This simple obedience will bring life; disobedience will bring death. But as we know, the temptation to "know good and evil" will prove overwhelming. As married couples, our invitation is to live life in Christ according to the good provision of the creator. This provision now includes the power of the Holy Spirit to resist the wiles of the enemy of marriage.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 2:18–20

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:18–20

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

Meditation

The story turns at this point. God himself introduces the tension in the story. Something is not right in creation. It is not good for man to be alone. How will the tension resolve? God will make for the man an *ezer ki negdo*, a helper "fit for him," "just like him," or perhaps in a closer translation, "corresponding to him." Where better to get such a helper than out of the very same ground? So, God proceeds to fashion all other living creatures out of the ground, the *`adamah*. He brings them all to the man to see what he will call them. It is interesting that man participates in the creation and exercises his dominion by giving names. He is not guessing what God wants to call them; they are what the man says they are. However, the tension in the story does not resolve. There is no "helper just like him" to be found. What now?

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 2:21–23

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:21–23

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Meditation

Again, the author plays with words to good effect. "Bone" and "flesh" have the dual meanings of "strength" and "weakness." Woman is necessary for man, and complementary to him. She shares his strength and his weakness too. The word that is translated by "man/male" is *ish* and the word for "woman/female" is *ishshah*. They are also the words for "husband" and "wife." In English it would be something like "out of the *man* he made the *woman*." The closeness in these terms is obvious in both languages. Now at last there is a helper just like him, yet different as well. She is not another male, but another person, who is female.

There is a flow to the story. The man is created first, and the woman last. They form the bookends of creation. The creation of woman signals that creation itself is finished. The message is much like that of the line in Genesis 2:1, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." The creator's intention is expressed in both stories. He is finished. It is complete. He has made what he wanted. The woman is not an afterthought, and in chapter 2, God did not "mess with" creation or not know what he was doing. He intended to have the man and his wife be two distinct persons that somehow would become one. They would form a society of equal persons, because she is truly just like him—and yet not the same.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 2:24–25

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 2:24–25

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Meditation

The Lord then charges the man to leave his father and mother and join his wife. Here, too, are words that do double duty. The word *'azab* means "leave." The word *dabaq* means "join" (or "cleave" in the RSV). These are words the Scriptures will frequently use to describe the relationship of God and man. The two words evoke forsaking foreign gods and exile on the one hand, and coming into covenant renewal on the other. The word *'azab* is elsewhere used to describe Israel *leaving* her covenant with God (Jeremiah 1:16; Hosea 4:10), and also to describe God *abandoning* his unfaithful people and sending them into exile. The word *dabaq*, by contrast, describes Israel as *being faithful* to her God (Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22, 13:5; Joshua 23:8; 1 Kings 11:2). In a culture where it was common for a man and his wife to live with his parents, we have a surprising and, one could say, revolutionary turn. The man/husband *forsakes* his father's home and *forms a covenant* with the woman/wife. The new loyalty of the man to his wife takes precedence over his duty to his parents.

The man and the woman are naked and not afraid. They are living in union with each other and in harmony with creation. Yet we see in our world a very different picture: broken relationships and the exploitation of creation, power struggles that lead to oppression, subservience, and abuse. If that is not at all what the Creator had in mind, what went wrong? The harmonious story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 will be followed by the story of the first sin.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Psalm 8:1, 3–9

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Psalm 8:1, 3–9

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; ⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? ⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Meditation

Before we move to the first sin, we pause to reflect on the magnificence of creation. This psalm always reminds me of the time we took a group of students on a field trip to the shore of one of the Great Lakes. We were away from the light pollution of the city and it was a clear night. I had never looked at the Milky Way through a pair of binoculars, but that night I did. It was breathtaking. I was overwhelmed by the vast number of stars. It was awe inspiring, and I felt small and insignificant. Then I remembered this psalm. I prayed with the psalmist, “What are human beings, that you are mindful of them?” Then I prayed, “What and who am I, so insignificant in the grand scheme of things and the vastness of the universe, that you would send your son Jesus to die for me?” Now keep in mind that that God has deigned to make our marriages signs of his majestic glory and the mystery of the Trinity itself. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name, and mysterious your ways.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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