

In the Bedroom 3:

You're in Now What

Paul Bailey

Over the last few weeks we have been using the bedroom as a metaphor to help us understand how to build God-shaped relationships, particularly God-shaped marriages. We have spent some time looking at the prerequisites for healthy relationships, we have also explored how to build the kind of relationships that allow us to be ourselves (good, bad or ugly) through confession and then last week we explore some themes relating to the kinds of persons we must become in order to have loving and lasting relationships.

Today I want to go a step further by exploring what couple do after the wedding day and wedding night. What is marriage all about? What happens in between those intense romantic moments that are supposed to punctuate a healthy relationship?

Unfortunately, our culture is big on romance. According to online news source UK News:

“More than 25 million Britons plan to spend £2.36 billion or £93.5 each spoiling their partners this Valentine's Day, according new search published today. According to Sainbury's Bank, nearly one-in-four people (23%) in relationships are not planning to spend anything on Valentine's Day, but there are 727,000 people who expect to spend over £1,000. The most popular choice for spoiling loved-ones is to take them out for a meal, which 45% of people in relationships plan to do. This is followed by buying them a present (38%), giving them flowers (25%), cooking them a special meal (24%) or buying them chocolates (16%), the study found. When it comes to how much people are planning to spend, men intend to be much more generous than women, according to the bank. They expect to spend £135 on their partners as opposed to £36 for women.”

Britons also like to splurge on the old nuptials. The average cost for a wedding in the UK is somewhere between £15,000 and £20,000.

The question I would like to ask is how much time, energy, money and effort are we willing to invest in our relationships beyond the wedding day and night and beyond St. Valentine's Day, birthdays, anniversaries and other celebrations? How much are we willing to invest in building a life together? What do we do after the wedding and in between those romantic moments?

This question goes to the very heart of our concept of marriage.

Let's look at the first marriage in the Bible:

²⁶God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature; So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.” ²⁷God created human beings; he created them godlike, Reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. ²⁸God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.” Genesis 1.26-28, The Message Bible,

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ¹⁹So 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. ²⁰The 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. ²¹So 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. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then 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.”, Genesis 2.18-23, NRSV

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The first thing to say is that the first wedding was considerably cheaper than the average wedding today! However, it was more purposeful, the purpose of the creation of human beings as male and female is explicitly stated in Genesis 1.26 and 28,

Firstly in Genesis 1.26, God creates human beings (male and female) to have dominion (KJV). The word translated as dominion means to rule, to subjugate, to dominate and to scrape out. The implication of the word is that life is not going to be easy, that nothing is to be handed to you and that you are going to have to be forceful and take control of your environment so that you are able to get from it the things you need to scrape out a living. I know in our culture words like dominate and subjugate are not considered to be politically correct. However I challenge you to stand out in the wilderness of southern England in January or February with nothing but the clothes on your back and a warm beating heart and I guarantee that after an hour or so of the wind and rain lashing against your face, the urge to dominate or subjugate will drive you to get out of the cold, find some food and shelter and take some control over your environment.

Whilst not being politically correct the drive to control is overwhelming in fact it can be considered one of our most basic human needs. The reason why we love some people and leave others, why we choose some careers and reject others, why we give our best in some work settings and simply collect a salary in others; in fact job satisfaction is directly linked to the level of control we have over our work. The more we are able to control how we work is the better we do.

God created us to have dominion for the male-female human beings to have a sphere of control and influence. This is why an important indication of the health of a relationship is the level of personal freedom and control each person in the relationship is allowed to have. The worst, most violent and abusive relationships are relationships where control is centred in the other, where one is dominated by the other to such an extent that one ceases to be treated as a human being. The most loving and supportive relationships are those relationships where one gives freedom to the other to grow and develop into the person that they were designed to be. In other words being a dominion-haver necessitates that a healthy relationship is an empowering relationship.

Empowering relationships include trust, sharing information so that informed decisions can be made, having an active and equal role in decision-making, planning and execution. Being able to decide what is being done and how it is to be done. Having dominion has to do with being empowered to take an active role in the shaping of your destiny.

“²⁸God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible...” These are the four imperatives Prosper, reproduce, fill the earth, take charge by being responsible.

The first imperative is to Prosper or to be fruitful (Hebrew: *parah*). Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions define the word translated as ‘prosper’ in the Message Bible and ‘Fruitful’ in the KJV as “to bear fruit, be fruitful, branch off, 1a) to bear fruit, be fruitful”

The idea is that God has created us with the freedom to develop and grow according to potential. This freedom and potential to grow is inherent in every relationship and should be what marriage is all about: namely harnessing and releasing your freedom as a couple to grow and become who you are and to extend that growth into succeeding generations.

The next imperative is to reproduce or to multiply. This means to become more than you are and a couple is supposed to do that for each other. You are supposed to love each other until you multiply. At its most basic level multiplying involves producing children. However, children are the fruit or the external, physical manifestation of an invisible spiritual energy at work in the couple. So that children are simply one sign among many that this couple is really working. In the natural

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process the couple exist before children are born and children are an outworking of their love and relationship with each other. In other words the love a couple shares allows them to be fruitful relationally, socially, financially, professionally and then physically with the gift of offspring.

Part of the problem we have today is that unproductive, unfruitful people are getting together simply to bump and grind pelvises and then very accidentally producing children they have not planned and more importantly not prepared for. So when that child is born there is no ecosystem for that child to live and grow in so that child begins to show signs of FTT (failure to thrive a physical and psychological disorder where children fail to develop normally). Healthy reproduction requires a balance ecosystem. Loving relationships create a balanced ecosystem.

The third imperative is fill or replenish the earth. This is the command to be abundant, to be full-filled or to fulfil your mutual destinies. This is the command to be all we can be and to allow the world around us to be all it is supposed to be. This is very missional. It is God co-missioning with the human couple to make a difference by being abundant.

The final imperative is a repeated call to dominion and responsibility.

All human beings are created with a human shaped void that not even God will fill. In fact, God said, **"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him."** (Genesis 2.18, NLT).

Notice in the creation narrative in Genesis 1,

- God calls the light out of darkness and declares it to be good (3);
- God then separates the waters for land and declares it to be good (10);
- God creates plants and vegetation and declares that this is good (12);
- God creates the sun, moon and stars and declare these to be good;
- God creates living creatures to live on land, in the sea and in the air and says that all these are good (21).

However, when God creates humanity, he says, **"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him."** (Genesis 2.18). What is wrong? There is unity or oneness, but there is no community.

Please understand the context of this statement. This was before the fall, where God and Adam lived in perfect communion. There was no wall of sin or guilt to separate God and his creation, but God describes, Adam as being alone and this is not good.

God's solution to Adam's alone-ness is to "make him a helper as his partner." The Hebrew suggests a helper who is equal and a companion who is appropriate. The Genesis 1.26-28 and 2.18 vision of marriage is not an all singing-all-dancing church wedding with all the trimmings; it is not a St. Valentine's day blow with a weekend in Paris staying at 5-star hotel. It is a vision of a partnership which includes complementariness and cooperation in the enterprise of living.

It is in this context that Adam, the male sings to Eve the female

"[You are] at last ... bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; [you]... shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."