

FORMED FOR GOD'S FAMILY

The Purpose-Driven Life (Part 3)

Text: Genesis 2:18-25; John 14:15-31

Wendy's Story

Wendy was an engaging 14 year-old. She had that sort of outgoing personality that some people read as bossy and others see as self-confident. She got decent grades at school. She wouldn't have won any beauty contests, but was cute in a wholesome sort of way. And in spite of the fact that her parents had been recently divorced and she'd just moved into town, Wendy seemed like a very average, well-adjusted person.

Maybe that's why it was so hard to figure out the note. I'm talking about the note that her mom found one afternoon, lying on the living room floor, beside an empty bottle of pills, and Wendy's motionless body. The note said, "I just can't take it anymore. I'm just too different. I'm going to end it." And so Wendy had tried. Hours later, I sat by Wendy's hospital bed and listened as she told me a story of quiet hell... of going through the motions of life, without ever really feeling intimately connected to anyone... of being deeply down or very up at times, but of knowing no one who would really care about this. "I realized that you've just got to go it alone in this world, and so I wanted out of this world."

Few of us, if any, may have been driven to a point of depression and despair like that but, nonetheless, we know the pain. It can be hard to admit at any age that you have a need that work and play just can't fill. A lot of us, a lot of the people you know, don't want to go there. Maybe that's why, in the story that Genesis tells about the origins of humanity, we never hear Adam saying: *"God, I'm so lonely; isn't there anything you can do."* Perhaps he just kept telling himself: *"Buck up, buddy. You've got this whole garden to yourself. What are you moaning about? Real men don't need anyone else. Just face the truth: In the end, you've got to go it alone."*

But is life meant to be like this? The Bible says that the Lord God of the Universe looked into the heart of the first human being and saw there a primal need which moved His heart. The Lord God -- who forever dwells in the all-sufficient triune community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- looked at lone humanity and, before Adam could even voice the longing within his heart, God thought, as Genesis 2:18 reports: **"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."** God, who was love and relationship personified and perfected in himself, wanted to give Man what He is and has. And so, as absolute Love is prone to do, God moved to help. He moved to express his love for people by creating TWO crucial circles of relationship still so needed today.

The Nuclear Family

In the FIRST place, God helps humanity by creating the covenant – the committed relationship -- of marital life – the covenant that makes possible what we call “the nuclear family.” Let me underline here that it is abundantly clear from the counsel of Scripture that God greatly blesses the lives of single persons. Contrary to the *DaVinci Code*, there is every historical evidence that Jesus himself remained single all his life, as did Paul the Apostle, Mary and Theresa and so many others. Singles often live with a passion for God and his family lost on others.

At the same time, Genesis makes clear that one of God’s primary channels of blessing is in the context of a family formed by a marriage. In this sense, whether you are single, married, divorced, or widowed, there is something to be gained from a better understanding of the Biblical view of marriage -- for that covenant (as you’ll see) exposes something of the nature and purposes of God for an even larger form of family too.

The first thing Genesis tells us is that new kind of family is going to be formed by the union of different parts – in this case two different genders – “**male and female he created them.**”¹ I can only speculate on the basis of the Bible’s consistent prohibition against union between the same sexes that there is something deeply significant to God about the distinctiveness of men and women that He does not wish lost, despite all the attempts to blur those distinctions in our time. From the beginning of recorded history, the institution of marriage between these two different genders was regarded as so essential to the created order that, in ancient Hebrew, the words for "man" and "woman" actually meant "husband" and "wife."

As much as the distinctiveness of male and female mattered, Genesis 2 makes clear that marriage is to be a relationship between equals. Genesis makes it clear that man already had a supervisory or caretaking relationship before God ever created woman. Genesis tells us that God put Adam over the animals of Eden, to take care of them and give them names. Yet that kind of relationship was not enough to quench man’s loneliness. *Man hungered for a peer*, and so God created woman. Genesis tells us that woman was “**bone of [his] bone, and flesh of [his] flesh**” – created for a rib-to-rib, side-by-side relationship. While each gender retains their distinctiveness and unique gifts, woman is no more intended to be subservient to man simply because she came from his rib than man was intended to be subservient to the h simply because he came from its dust. On the contrary, in woman, God gave man a formidable friend.

Genesis 2 also tells us the nature of that friendship. Woman is to be a “helper” to her spouse. Sometimes that word "helper" has been interpreted as a sort of fairly earnest but clearly weaker assistant working alongside a master. When the Old Testament uses the term "**helper**", however, it has an entirely different meaning. In almost every occurrence of this Hebrew word (*ezer*), it describes a creative agent (usually God himself) shaping the life of an individual or a nation in the direction of God's intentions for them. God’s vision in marriage, therefore, is that wives and husbands be vessels of

God's presence to one another, helping the other to become all that he or she is called to be.

God intended marriage to be a relationship between a man and a woman... a bond of rib-to-rib equality... a relationship that helps each partner grow toward God's purposes... and lastly, a covenant of total interdependence. Genesis 2 says that a husband and wife are to become "**one flesh**" -- people united not simply sexually but also spiritually, so that they became like spiritual Siamese twins for life, separated only at great pain and peril. In this new relationship, husband and wife were meant to share their secret hurts, their precious dreams, their vulnerability, and resources so regularly and completely with one another that they would begin to think and move as one gracious new creation -- a family under God.

The Church Family

Does this describe your marriage or the marriage you want to have, the kind you're working toward? Distinctiveness, equality, helping influence, and interdependence? It is a wonderful grace to be part of a family formed or seeking to form itself by this vision of relationship. It's hard for loneliness to survive for very long within the warmth of that circle. But what I want to leave you with today is that whether you're married or not, the good news is that God has designed a second kind of family, an even larger and more permanent circle of helping relationships into which He has invited every one of us. Listen to the words of Jesus, as recorded in John chapter 14: "**Do not let your hearts be troubled...I will not leave you orphaned...I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.**"

The God we meet in Jesus Christ understood Wendy's heart, as he understands yours and mine. He knows that it is not good for us to be alone, unless that loneliness pushes us toward him and the gifts He longs to give. That is why, nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus sent "**another Helper**," his Holy Spirit, to form a new kind of family -- one which would transcend even the marriage bond and the nuclear family in its power to provide a permanent identity and home. The convictions by which this new family -- the Church family -- lived were fundamentally the same ones by which God had called the first man and woman to live eons before.

This family Jesus has formed believes in the essential equality of people and that no person ought be judged by the color of her skin but by the content of her character. We believe that no matter how high any of us stand before the eyes of this world, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Those who kneel in humble need there before the reality of their sin and the wonder of God's grace... those who pass through the same birth-waters of baptism through which we have come -- those persons are each brother or sister in Christ to us, "**bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.**"

This family also believes in the value of distinctiveness -- that the Body or family of God is "**made up of many parts... and different gifts**"² and that this is good, so long as Christ remains the Head from which the parts take their instruction and remain obedient.

If you come join this church, we will not jam you into the same mold as everyone else, but seek to understand the way God has gifted you to be a blessing to this family.

Our fellowship believes as well in God's power to work through ordinary people to exert a helping influence in the direction of His purposes. As Christians, we are hospitable to newcomers to our circle because any one of them might be a "helper" sent from God to help us in some way, or else one to whom we are honored to BE a helper in the name of Christ. We try to look at each person as if, by our response to them, we may be "**entertaining angels unawares**"³ or Jesus himself without knowing it.⁴

And we also believe that we are interdependent. Though we may look like husband and wife, Democrat and Republican, senior adult from Oak Brook and teenager from Chicago – we know that we are "**one flesh**" in Christ.⁵ We seek to live as though the sorrow or joy of one of us is the pain or pleasure of us all.

You know, the truth is that not every marriage and family stands up to the pressures of life from without or from sin within. But this remains the truth, there is a family formed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ whose life and love will last forever. God's desire is to adopt you into that family.

You and I have been called by God to be a part of his forever family.

Let us pray...Great God of Creation and the Church, pour into our homes and our hearts that same helping Spirit which moved across the waters at creation and into the body of believers at Pentecost. Just as you filled Eden and the early church with the resources necessary to reflect your glory, fill us: with enough love to help others become what you want them to be; with enough humility or confidence to treat others as peers deserving our respect and support; and with enough grace to bond ourselves to one another as one flesh, one Body, one witness to your redeeming Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Go home and read 1 Corinthians 12 and you'll notice how the Church was to be a place where the distinctiveness of people and the differences between people were actually celebrated as bringing value to the whole. "**The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.**"⁶ God doesn't want a single gender church, a single race church, a single personality church. God wants the makings of a family made up of intentionally different parts, different perspectives, different gifts.

"But it's the same Spirit who is in all

At the same time, God's vision for his family is that we esteem each other deeply valued... where each Describing the church as the Body of Christ, Paul said,

“The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" [22] On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable

Introduction to the Scriptures

No matter what Madison Avenue tells us, our life's journey and this whole world is not really all about us. You and I are here for a much more interesting reason than to develop abs like Britney Spears or a fortune like Warren Buffet or a following like "you name him or her." Life's not about stacking up a bunch of diplomas or photographs of the places we've been. It isn't about amassing a hard disk full of data, or reading your way through that stack of books, or fighting off aging.

You and I, and all human beings have been created for one supreme purpose -- to reflect the glory of God. As King David tells us in Psalm 8, human beings are dust God has squeezed in his hand and made into diamonds. Our mission in life is to develop and display the facets of character and commitment that allow our lives to reflect the radiance of God's nature.

One of those facets is the capacity and commitment to worship God in spirit and truth, in body and soul, all the time and everywhere. Worship is simply the practice of seeking to "Celebrate God's glory" as we often say here. It is seeking to please God with our speech, our service, and our surrender to all his desires. As Paul says in Romans 12, worship involves laying all that we are on the altar and offering ourselves as a "living sacrifice" for God to do with as He chooses. We do this not to earn favor in his sight, but rather as a response to God's grace – "in view of [His] mercy" to us in Jesus Christ, who laid his life down as a sacrifice upon the cross, that you and I might be spared from paying the penalty for our sins.

This morning I want to explore with you another facet of being this diamond in God's hand. You and I will also come to reflect God's glory the more we are polished by the truth that God has formed us for his family. As Rick Warren observes, "we are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, formed for a family, and none of us can fulfill God's purposes by ourselves."⁷ That's idea finds its roots not just in our own experience, but at the very start of the human story. Let's read together from the book of beginnings, the Book of Genesis, chapter 2, beginning at verse 18 and reading responsively through verse 25...

The Church is not a building or an organization, but a living Body, an interconnected web of people who draw their guidance for life from Christ as their head. The Church is a community of people who seek to love one another as Christ first loved them... Who belong to one another, the way the parts of a body or a crew team make up one glorious whole. The Church is a circle of people committed to encouraging one another through life, leaning on the promises and power of God which enable us to live not fearfully but faithfully. The Church is God's forever family –

¹ Genesis 1:27

² 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:3-8

³ Hebrews 12:2

⁴ Matthew 25:31-46

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27

⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:21-22

⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, p.130.