

Public Promise

Why Your Marriage Is Somebody Else's Business

June 26, 2016 // Trevor Atwood // Genesis 2:18-25 // Friends & Family

We are going to spend the next 5 weeks talking about the Risk and Reward of family and friendships.

I need to warn you. The things I say in this series, come from the Bible. They are going to challenge what may be some long standing beliefs that you have absorbed through culture...about marriage, about divorce, singleness, parenting & friendship....but Remember, being offended is not a bad thing....its what you do with that offense that makes all the difference.

All change, all growth is painful. But if it yields the delicious, beautiful fruit of love and joy and peace...in you and in the relationships you have...its totally worth it.

So, I'd like to start today by praying for a Spirit of unity, and charity and patience, as we begin to look into God's design for all these relationships.

Well, Its wedding season.

...and being a pastor, for better or worse, I have become a necessary part of most people's idea of a successful wedding.

(Well, not me personally, but the part where I'm a pastor...)

That means that over the last 8 years and the 20-some odd weddings I've officiated, I've gotten an inside look at this relatively new thing that's called "The Wedding Industry".

Weddings generate about \$50 million a year in our economy.

What in the world are we spending all that money on?

Recently, I read a great little book called "You Are What You Love".

In it, the author paints a pretty spot-on picture of a stereotypical wedding in our culture today.

Let me share it with you

"Tis the season to make weekend forays to events that will light up Facebook and swamp Instagram with a deluge of sepia-toned photographs. Years of hopes pinned on Pinterest will become a reality as we dance long into the night. It's not Lollapalooza or Bonnaroo: it's your cousins wedding.

The Excitement has been building ever since that first Facebook post – the one with the video of him proposing to her against the industrial-chic backdrop of the Brooklyn Navy Yard while a band whose members have beards and lots of banjos “surprised” them with a serenade. The video went viral, of course, so the bar was raised for the wedding itself. The invitations arrived encased in 1950s cigar tins and featured overlapping images of their tattoos on handmade paper, complete with vintage postage stamps for the RSVPs. The wedding reception will be catered by Korean taco food trucks, and the band from the engagement is going to play an encore, only with more mandolins, under candlelit canopies draped with hops as everyone enjoys the groom’s craft beer. The wedding has its own tumblr and, of course, its own hashtag. And everyone goes home with their own mouth organ inscribed with the bride’s and groom’s names. No one will forget this day, mostly because it will be scrupulously photographed, posted, shared, tweeted, and uploaded. And we all know: the internet never forgets.

So, does all this prove that our society values marriage more than ever?

Not exactly. In fact the revenues of the divorce industry closely follow those of the wedding industry.

See, its not that our culture really values marriage. I think the very opposite is true.

The truth is, we love the spectacle of the wedding. We love for our weddings to be seen.

We need our weddings to be novel, exciting. Super-trendy and special.

We want people to remember our weddings...for all the wrong reasons.

Most of us, at some level, want people to remember our weddings for our sake, for our glory. We want our weddings to stand out from the crowd so that people will say, “THAT...was a SPECTACTULAR...wedding.”

In the words of James K.A. Smith, “What’s important [to us] is being seen. It’s why we spend more time fixated on the spectacular flash of the wedding event than on the long slog of sustaining a marriage.”

See, the problem is that the way we approach a wedding is exactly our expectations for marriage.

Our Weddings center on two lovers who are coming together because they can’t deny their feelings for each other...as if marriage is year after year of gazing into each other’s eyes.

In the vows we speak, we talk about another person “completing” us, as if they are there simply to help us fulfill our dreams, and desires.

Essentially, weddings have become expressions of how we better love ourselves.

...and then, we begin marriage with a honeymoon....which is the furthest thing from what the next 50 years will be like. We carry this idea that REAL LOVE, DEEP LOVE, has to get away from life in order to happen...instead of happening right in the middle of it.

...and then, GOD FORBID, you have children too soon. Because if marriage is romance, Kids will absolutely keep you from that...and your marriage will be dead.

So, we think the first years of marriage should be an extended honey-moon filled with a lot of sex and no kids (even though the two are connected by God's biological design)... and then later, when you're tired of having sex as sport, you can go through the drudgery of doing it to have kids...if you even want to burden yourself with such relational and marital buzz-kills.

We see our weddings as spectacles, so the people we invite are SPECTATORS...instead of participants. And that's exactly how we treat the marriage that follows. We invite people to "watch our marriage", but rarely to "participate in it".

I know what you're thinking.

"Wait a second, Trev...wait just a second. What do you mean participate? Marriage is a private institution that happens between two consenting adults. Its none of anybody's business what happens in my marriage!"

Look, here's where we are with marriage today, ...we are begging people to "Look at the spectacle of my successful marriage" on every avenue of social media we can find...while behind closed doors...where the stuff is hitting the fan...we're saying "Stay out of our business".

Hell has never laughed so hard as when husbands and wives deliver its favorite punch line, "This is none of your business!"

Today, I'm going to show you from the Scripture, that from the very beginning of marriage...God's design is that your marriage is VERY MUCH SO everyone else's business... and...it is VERY MUCH SO a Spectacle...its just not "YOU" people are supposed to be looking at.

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens 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. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens

and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Preaching one sermon on marriage is kind of like giving someone 5 minutes to explain how a car works. You have to pick and choose what you are going to say, do you explain what goes on under the hood like the firing of pistons and sparking of plugs, or do you talk about the more practical things like pressing the gas pedal and using blinkers?

Well, I'm not going to teach you how to drive your marriage today...at least not much. We aren't going to talk about communication or date nights or best practices...those are driving lessons. Instead, I'm gonna take you under the hood. Because the epidemic of broken marriages happening now in our culture...and by the way, in our church...the problems there are not mainly a lack of communication. The problem is we have opened the hood up and removed the engine of marriage because we thought it unnecessary...and now we're surprised that the car won't go very far when we push the gas.

Today, I'm going show you what's under the hood of marriage...I'm going to show you what needs to be there so that when you push the gas...your marriage ACTUALLY goes somewhere. First...

1) Marriage is Public Mission, not Private Feelings.

There is no doubt the way that the majority of our culture thinks about marriage is based on a feeling you have for someone. That's one reason so many of us see our marriages as private. We think, "well, my feelings are private things, so this institution that is based on those feelings should be something that nobody else really has any business speaking into."

But God's design for marriage is very much a public thing...that though it has feelings involved...they are not at the heart of marriage. The heart of marriage, from the beginning, is MISSION.

This passage we read this morning is the most important statement on marriage in the history of the world. Period. When Jesus talks about marriage, he quotes it. When Paul talks about marriage, he quotes it.

Did you see what happened in this passage? First, Remember, God created man with a purpose. A mission. A goal. SOMETHING TO ACCOMPLISH.

Genesis 2:15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

God creates man and puts him in a perfect garden in the middle of a wild untamed world and says “work” or “cultivate”. That word means to take the raw materials that God gave them and make something out of it that serves others. It means to make culture. To take sounds and arrange them into music that people can enjoy. To take a tree and make it into a canoe that helps people travel to and from each other and to enjoy God’s creation as you float down the stream.

To take the raw ingredients growing up from the ground and make something delicious to eat from it. That’s what cultivate means. Cultivating means having a vision for what something could be that is good for others...and then taking the action to make it happen.

The other word, “Keeping” means to protect. That means that man was put into the garden to be sure that everything that he cultivates stays on its mission...to benefit and serve other people...and glorify God.

In other words, Keeping means that humans are supposed to always be looking at our lives, and the world, to see that we are constantly in line with what God created us for... loving others, and glorifying God.

So, at this point in history, there is only a man and he’s supposed to have a vision for how to make culture that serves others and then keep it on track to glorify God.

Big Problem. He’s the only person.

He’s got a mission in this garden, but no other people to love and serve with the culture he makes.

That’s where Genesis 2:18 comes in. God says, for the first time, something is not good. It’s not good that the man is alone.

But notice THE REASON that God says it’s not good. It CAN’T be because he’s lonely.

Think about this. At this point, who is in the garden with this man? God is.

We can’t say that Adam is lonely. He is in the garden with God...in a relationship unhindered by sin or the curse. This first marriage is not created for Adam’s feelings. It’s not created to fill a relational hole he has in his heart.

His heart is full. He is with God and God is with him. Notice, the woman is created as a “helper”...but a helper to what? A helper to the MISSION...to cultivate and protect. To

work and keep.

Genesis 1 is a zoomed out account of what happens in Genesis 2. So look at the REALLY big picture of this mission for the man and woman. Its not just localized to the garden...its worldwide.

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

See, God creates male and female...in HIS Image... and he blesses them with a mission. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (that's cultivating) and have dominion (that's keeping), protecting the earth and all God's creation to be sure it continues to be used in a way that glorifies God.

And did you see how its worldwide...FILL THE EARTH...Have DOMINION OVER EVERY LIVING THING ON THE EARTH.

See God sets man on a mission...and gives the woman NOT AS A COMPLETER OF HIS HEART or a CURE TO HIS LONELINESS...He gives woman as a HELPER to the mission of Cultivating and Keeping, making culture and ensuring that we glorify God.

Now, there are certainly feelings happening here. No doubt.

Genesis 2:20

The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

First God parades all the animals in front of Adam, to show him “You need somebody to help you on this mission”...

He sees that in all of these animals, there isn't anyone who can help him on this God-given mission to be fruitful and multiply...to work and keep. Why does God show Adam the need for a woman first? Why doesn't he just start out with a man and woman from the very first? Why create man first...then go through the whole animal parade?

Well, because he wants Adam to genuinely be attached to her...he wants him to want her. But not because she has certain body measurements or because she makes him all twitter-pated... God wants him to want her, to be excited about their relationship, he wants him to want marriage because she will finally be a partner he needs for this global mission to

love God and Love others by cultivating and keeping.

Genesis 2:23

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

This is why I call verse 23 the first R & B Song. This is an expressive, excited song coming from Adam about this woman. It's charged with emotion.

But not like most R&B songs, that talk about a woman's bodily features and a man's desire to get sex from her. This emotion is flowing from the mission.

“AT LAST...FINALLY...after looking at all these animals...I have another person, who is like me...human, not animal...bone of my bone...flesh of my flesh” In other words, another image bearer of God who has the same mission...someone I can work with...instead of have dominion over.

“BUT, she is also different from me...she is woman, not man...which means that in a unique way that I can't, she can help me obey this command of God to make culture that glorifies God and serves others. “

Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And it is on that basis that marriage is defined. A man leaving his father and mother and clinging to his wife...and in that the two separate individuals become ONE FLESH...sexually?...yes...and also missionally...to accomplish a mission that is for the purpose of the public glorification of God and the Public good...so that others are blessed by it.

So what does that mean? Well it means that on a very basic level, one purpose of marriage, one part of this mission IS for procreation. For having babies, more worshippers and image bearers of God.

That is a PART of the way marriage serves a public good. It is a basic building block to society and culture. We have babies (Cultivate, multiply, fill the earth) and we bring them up to know and worship God (that's protecting and keeping).

But there's more to it than that. Remember, this is about “Imaging” God. See God is a God who even though he didn't NEED us, Created us and put us on an Earth that was for our good and flourishing.

Likewise, as marriage partners on a mission, we are to go about creating culture that

benefits others and shows off God's character. It's a public mission.

So husbands and wives should be cultivators working to bless others and show off God's love...instead of consumers simply seeking to drain their communities and cities of its resources to please themselves.

If our marriages are about satisfying our feelings...then we will only take from our spouses...and take from the world. BUT if our marriages are about blessing others, about Public Mission, then we are going to be outward focused for the good of our neighbors.

See, your marriage IS my business and my marriage IS your business...because it is the very building block by which cultures and societies are made, protected and blessed. So I should be interested in the strength of your marriage and you should be interested in the strength of mine.

Marriage is not something we should tell other people to butt out of, it's something we desperately need each other to speak into. Because our marriages are not simply something that happens in our bedrooms, they are part of God's design for blessing the world.

BTW, this is exactly the reason Paul says in the New Testament that a Christian shouldn't marry a non-Christian...because if marriage is about mission, and one person has a mission to glorify God while the other person is going a different direction...you'll never get anywhere. If you aren't on the same mission...glorifying God by serving and loving others...then it makes as much sense to get married as it does to hook up 2 horses to a carriage and then send them in opposite directions.

So, how can you make your marriage for someone else's good? First, married couples, don't use your home as a way to hide from the world, use it as an outpost for mission. Invite people into it. Invite people to have dinner with your family often. ...and not just other families...invite college students, single folks, divorced folks,...invite in young men and women who never experienced a mom and Dad who both deeply loved God. Invite your neighbors over.

Have kids. Foster kids. Adopt kids. Then bring your kids up to love the Lord and serve other people. There are about a thousand ways you can use your marriage to serve others...but whatever you do, don't hide yourself away in your home living for yourselves.

Likewise, don't hide away the problems you are having in your marriage. Let someone else in. Seek godly counsel. What you keep in the dark will grow bigger...and eventually snuff your marriage out. And for those of you who do talk about your marriage with people, do those people know what marriage is created to be? If not, you probably won't get good counsel from them.

Let people in to counsel you in your marriage who see it as a public mission...instead of private feelings.

But there's something else going on here, too. These verses are also showing us that...

2) Marriage is Covenant, not Contract.

In 2012, there was an interesting article published in the New York Times by Meg Jay, a clinical Psychologist at the University of Virginia.

It was called "The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage".

She is not a Christian (or at least not writing as one). Listen to what she says her research study revealed. "Couples who cohabit before marriage . . . tend to be less satisfied with their marriages-and more likely to divorce-than couples who do not."

That result of her research flies in the face of public opinion about marriage. In a nationwide survey, about 2/3 of 20-30 yr olds believed that living together before marriage was a good way to avoid divorce.

But this scientifically not true. Why? Well, there are many factors that Dr. Jay identified, but one of the greatest factors was the lack of explicit commitment involved in making the decision to live together before marriage.

Most cohabiting couples, when asked why they moved in together, replied that "it just happened." According to Dr. Jay, "Moving from dating to sleeping over to sleeping over a lot to cohabitation can be a gradual slope, one not marked by rings or ceremonies or sometimes even a conversation. Couples bypass talking about why they want to live together and what it will mean."

One of Jay's clients told her that she "felt like [she] was on this multiyear, never-ending audition to be his wife." They eventually got married in their thirties, but not because they finally developed a desire to commit to one another, but because "We had all this furniture. We had our dogs and all the same friends. So Breaking up seemed more difficult than getting married." But a year later, they were divorced.

Listen, we have this idea about marriage that we should just kind of ease into to it. We should try each other out sexually...then we should try each other out financially....then we should try each other out emotionally by living together to see if we work together.

But don't you see? That's not unconditional love that's focused outward. That's LITERALLY a tryout.

...and you end up feeling like you are in this never-ending audition to be someone's spouse.

But God doesn't design marriage that way. He gives you one question to ask to know if you should marry someone... "Is this person on the same mission as I am?"

Once that question is answered, marriage starts with an unconditional commitment. That's what a covenant is.

Take a look at Genesis 2:23-24. This is covenantal language.

All throughout the Bible, Covenants carry 4 earmarks. First, they involve an intimate relationship. It doesn't get more intimate than being naked together with the woman who used to be your rib. Second, Covenants have a Public Oath. Marriage is for the good of the Public, so the public should know that you are married. When Adam says "Bone of my Bone" he's using a phrase that will be used in other places in scripture to set up similar covenants. This is not just a poem or a song...it's a public declaration of ongoing relationship. For us, that's our vow's at a public wedding ceremony. You know, often times, in the Old Testament, when people made covenants, they used to cut an animal in half and walk between it as their public oath. What they were saying was, "I'm in this for life. If I turn my back on you and break my promise, may I be ripped apart like this animal." Actually, that's why we have a tradition of walking down a middle aisle at a wedding.

The third mark of a covenant is a Coordinating Sign. The sign here? Leaving old family, making a new family, by becoming one flesh. In other words, they consummate their marriage with sex.

In the ancient Hebrew context, people would actually wait outside the tent for the couple to consummate their marriage....the wedding wasn't really over until that happened.

That would be a little awkward. Can you imagine the whole wedding party following you to your hotel room. No thanks.

We also have other coordinating signs. Rings. Making our last name the same. And of course...sex. Becoming one flesh physically as a sign that we are one flesh spiritually.

The fourth mark of a covenant is Perpetual Obligations. Adam and Eve were supposed to populate the earth. And rule over creation as they kept their promise to each other. That means sex is not only the coordinating sign of the covenant, it becomes a perpetual obligation. Not just a way to have kids, but a way to remind each other over and over that you are married to each other. Truthfully, every time a married couple has sex, it's a renewal of the covenant. It's a re-promising that we are one flesh...that God has joined us together and we can't separate that.

See, Marriage is designed by God to be entered into intentionally at a definite period of time. Its supposed to have a public oath that is followed by coordinating signs and perpetual obligations. But our culture has tossed that to the side. We've made sex not about promise making and keeping...but we've made it about simply feeding a desire. We are giving coordinating signs without the promise they are supposed to coordinate to. In other words, our bodies (and souls) are making promises to each other without our minds and

hearts ever actually making those promises. So we are broken, confused...and ultimately...ridiculously unsatisfied.

See, sex is supposed to be in the context of a covenant that serves another person...but we've cheapened it to simply satisfying an urge. Once again, what was intended to be selfless mission, becomes selfish consuming.

See, we've looked at marriages not as covenants...but contracts. You know the difference between a covenant and a contract?

A contract is what you have with your cell phone carrier. They keep up their end of the deal to provide you with good service, and you'll keep up your end of the deal to pay your bill.

But think about that. Despite what their commercials say, your cell phone provider doesn't care about you. They care about the money you give them. And you, God bless you, you don't care about your cell phone company. If Verizon doesn't provide good service, you'll jump over to Sprint in a heart beat. If they don't hold up their end of the contract...you'll go somewhere else.

Think of the difference in a covenant and a contract like this: In a Contract, I make a promise and then constantly look at you to be sure you keep your end of the deal so that I am served. In a Covenant, I make a promise and then constantly look at ME to be sure I keep my end of the deal so that YOU are served.

Marriage is designed to be a covenant. And yes...there are blessings when covenants are kept and curses when they are broken...but the strength of a covenant comes from its UNCONDITIONAL commitment.

You never have that if your spouse is in a constant state of trying to prove himself or herself to you.

So why does God make design marriage this way? Why does he make it for the public's good...and why does he design it to be an unconditional promise?...well, because

3) Marriage shows off God's love, not yours.

We have been so obsessed with this idea that marriage's deepest purpose is to show our love off for another person. But that is not the deepest meaning of marriage.

See, Marriage is NOT about showing off your love for another person...its about showing off God's covenant keeping love towards us. Its about showing off God's public mission to bless the world.

Look what the apostle Paul is writing about when he quotes these verses from Genesis 2.

Ephesians 5:1-2 & 31-32

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul says that we are all created to be imitators of God...more specifically, to walk in love... and to love like Christ loved us. Sacrificially dying in our place for our sin so that we would not be separated from God.

Then, he says, marriage is a reflection of this. The way a husband and wife love each other should reflect the way Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...and the way that we respond to that love.

Listen, if you are asking today “What do I do if I’m in a broken marriage?” Maybe one that you broke. Maybe it was your sin, your selfish pursuit of yourself that broke it.

Here’s what you do. You look at where your marriage was supposed to point. In Christ, you are forgiven. You don’t have to carry the weight of that sin.

You have a covenant keeping God who even though you cheated on him, you disobeyed and rejected him, laid down his life so you could be forgiven. He was publicly shamed on a cross...to pay for the sins you committed against him. He was stripped naked and humiliated, so like Adam and Eve in the garden, you could be completely naked in front of God... totally honest and vulnerable...and totally safe. FORGIVEN.

Or maybe someone sinned against you. Maybe you’ve been cheated on....hurt. The gospel tells you that out of the forgiveness you’ve received for your sin, you can now forgive others. Including your spouse. You can mirror God’s love by keeping your covenant even when your spouse has broken his or her promise.

But you’ll never do that by sheer will power. You have to believe the gospel. You have to see that God has kept his covenant with you, by laying down his life to keep you in a relationship with him. If you know that this life is short term...and that everything you lose now for Christ’s sake...that you’ll get it all back for eternity.

Die to live. Give to receive. Find happiness and joy not in selfish consumption...but in sacrificial cultivation...especially in your marriage.

To love like God loves in marriage is risky...you’ll probably get hurt...but the reward is incredible.

Turn your eyes off of what your spouse is doing wrong...and lift them up to see Christ seated at the Right hand of God...completely finishing the work of saving you...so that as you love your spouse...and as the two of you together pour yourselves out for others...you can know that you have absolutely NOTHING to lose. Jesus has already guaranteed eternal life with the God you were created to know and love forever.

Jesus attended a wedding once. At this wedding, the wine ran out and the master of the feast was afraid that he would be embarrassed. It was shameful to run out of wine at a wedding. See, wine represented joy in that culture. So Jesus took water that was supposed to be used for a religious purification ceremony and turned it into not just better wine than they were already serving...but MORE WINE than they could ever drink. He took the stuff that could only wash religiously wash your outsides...and he made it the stuff you drank down inside of you as an expression of deep joy.

So the master of the feast, instead of being shamed...was honored. On the night before Jesus died, he drank wine with his disciples. Strange...to drink something that represented deep joy on the night before Jesus would endure such deep pain.

But Jesus knew what he was doing. He was sure about his public mission. He knew that his broken body and shed blood would mean that all of us who would stand shamed in front of God, would now be honored. And that as he shed his blood, he was forgiving our sin and making us new...not from the outside in...like jars of holy water...but inside out. And that gave him deep joy.

Matthew 26:27-29

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

He told his disciples that night, “I’ll drink this cup with you again when I come in my Kingdom.”

See when Jesus returns to make all things new, he says there will be a wedding feast of the lamb.

IN other words, at that feast, the lamb who was slain for us, Jesus Christ, the one who was shamed...we will all once again honor. We will celebrate that day and into eternity...the gospel. The truth that Jesus laid down his life for his bride the church...and we will never run out of days to eat and drink with the God who kept his covenant with us. .

In fact, for those of you who have put your trust in this gospel...this good news that Jesus died in your place and resurrected to make the way for us into new life...we start that now with the Lords Supper.