

Genesis 2-4-25

When we listen to Bible stories there are some things we need to toss out.

We need to get rid of our watches. We North Americans are too worried about having our stories happen in chronological order.

We need to get rid of our linear thinking tools, our straight lines. Those two things can get us into trouble here in Genesis. There are two creation stories. Some people try to make them fit together. Bible translators have their ways too of smoothing out the bumps for us.

We need to respect them separately and listen to them separately or we will miss the point of both.

They say that people who watch a lot of movies will 'get' the stories more than those who don't because they are used to sitting back and taking it in. It will also help us to know what other stories of the day are saying.

When Genesis was written the story was that people were created by the gods as an afterthought to supply the gods with food.

Now let's listen to Genesis 2.

(read, using the New American Standard translation)

Who '**does**' everything in this story?

(the Lord God does)

The Lord God made earth and heaven.

Then the Lord God formed man, like a potter shaping clay.

The Lord God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden.

He placed the man in the garden.

The Lord God caused every fruit tree to grow.

Doesn't the garden sound amazing? People have always been fascinated by the source of rivers. That great garden is the source, the headwater of the 4 mighty rivers.

God puts the man there to cultivate it and keep it.

The man has work.

He is blessed with food.

He has clear limits from God.

Life is good. What more could anyone want than to be in paradise, with work to do and food to eat?

Well, a golf course would be nice.

Maybe some dirt biking trails.

God knows something is missing in that picture. He knows that we can have just about all there is to have, but we are social living beings.

Loneliness takes the shine off, no matter how much we have.

Loneliness is one of the most painful things we can experience.

God has made us to need others in our lives.

Some of us more so than others. For some of us, after a day at work it is really nice to come home to a quiet house to do our own thing. Our needs for social interaction are met quite well with colleagues, neighbours and friends and church family. We need to say here at the beginning of a series on marriage, that while the Old Testament is so focused on marriage that Hebrew has no word for bachelor, in the New Testament things have changed. Both Jesus and Paul are quite clear that marriage is not the answer for everyone.

But we **are** social. We are made to be with others.

And so, the first words of critique come from the Lord God.

“It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make him a helper suitable for him.

A “suitable helper?” Does that mean that women are the ‘suitable helpers’ for men and that wives are the ‘suitable helpers’ for their husbands?

Hmmm, this is a phrase we need to dig into.

The Hebrew words for suitable helper are: **ezer kenegdo**.

‘Ezer’ is often translated ‘help’. We used to sing an old hymn that had this line in it, “here I raise my Ebenezer” It means, “stone of help”.

But ézer” ‘s root meaning is “strength” or “power”. (strength or power that helps us)

“kenegdo” or “suitable” has a root meaning of, “corresponding to” him, or as one professor at seminary said, “equal and opposite” or “complementary” to him.

God sees that the man needs someone who can match him. The man needs someone who is a power equal to him, who corresponds to him in every way, who is his partner in strength.

The ideal marriage in the Bible is the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, two people both described as 'strong'.

We are to be suitable helpers for each other.

We have strengths that we need from each other.

Some make a lot of the differences between men and women. I think you will agree that we are different.

There is a reason that most of the GPS voices are women's voices. The woman gives nice, crisp clear directions. "Left turn 500 metres." "Approaching left turn". "Left turn now".

The man's voice says, "Hey, I know a short-cut". There's a road on the right. It's not even on the map. Turn NOW!

Men and women are different. "New boyfriend comes over, mom's not impressed, she lets him wait by himself while daughter gets ready.

Dad sits down beside him and says, "My daughter is the apple of my eye, she is the light of my life. Before you get any ideas at all in that dark movie theatre, remember these words as I am speaking them to you now." "I have no problem going back to prison". (both jokes, as heard on satellite radio from a comedian whose name I did not catch)

We are different, but as soon as you say, "men are stronger physically", remember that women tend to live longer.

As soon as you say, “this is a manly quality of strength”, you run into a girl who plays rugby or builds houses.

As soon as you say, “this is a womanly nurturing kind of strength”, you bump into a guy who loves to cook and teaches kindergarten.

As soon as you say, “men need to be respected and women protected”, you run into a situation where that too is blown out the window.

We have had times in our marriage where Audrey was in tears and needed to be comforted by me. And we have had times where I have been in tears and needed to be comforted by her.

We were made to be suitable helpers for each other.
Suppose that in our discussions about how men and women relate to each other we would start by admitting that we are glad God saw fit to make two genders?
And suppose that we would focus on the strengths we receive from each other?
And reflect for a while on how much better and more interesting this world is and our lives are because some of us are men and some of us are women?

Back to the story.

God sees our loneliness.

He sits the man down.

Then he creates animals and brings them to the man to see what he will name them.

It’s a lot of work: “Long eared hoppers”, “slithering ropy things” “ones who will fetch my slippers”, but not one of them is a match for the man.

He is exhausted. The Lord puts him right to sleep.

He takes a rib, closes up the place with flesh, makes a woman and brings the woman to the man, who says, "Whoa, man!!"

"At last, bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken from man."

When do you think the people of God would tell this story?

What occasion?

What ceremony?

My guess is that it would be told and read on wedding days.

It was the time of arranged marriages. Every young Hebrew couple would be presented to each other like the first couple.

He sees her and is stunned and amazed.

She sees him looking at her with admiration and love.

And from that day forward as they get to know each other, they are to strengthen, help, befriend, enjoy and love each other. They will be 'one flesh' physically, and their lives will be joined together.

"They were both naked and were not ashamed". What an awesome blessing from God for the couple and every couple to enjoy each other completely.

Here is what I think God is saying to us today. Especially to husbands and wives. "Keep this story in your mind as you relate to each other".

Remember the story that was going around when Genesis was written?

People were made as an afterthought to supply the gods with food. The big story going around today is that all of life started with a completely random big bang. In that story we too are random. We make decisions and choices based on what we feel works for us. When something does not work for us anymore, we move on.

There is a different story here. It is a story of a loving God who supplies someone for us. In our culture, we have a lot to do with choosing our spouse. That can be a good thing and it can work out well. It often does.

While you are dating, ask yourself, 'do we have **strengths that complement** each other?

'What are this person's strengths'? If I was ever stuck or in trouble or hurt, or if I was spiritually hurting, is this the person I would want to call to come and take care of me? Use your imagination. Do you see her being a faithful friend? Does he help you to trust in Jesus, or do you have to do all the work in that area? The days will come when you will need the help of your partner.

Where does this person find his or her spiritual strength?

Pray that God will guide you and ask the people in your life whose judgment you respect what they think of your relationship.

Am I willing to be this person's helper? What goals and hopes am I willing to help them accomplish?

Am I willing to help raise children, especially to help the children follow Jesus? Raising children as Remco and Kim are learning every day, is one of the most basic places that we need each others help.

If you are married, think of your spouse as God's 'ezer kenegdo' for you. God's gift of strength that you need. God calls you to be 'ezer kenegdo' to your spouse. Maybe it would be fun to call each other, 'ezer kenegdo', then add 'ma cherie' to it. It even sounds romantic, especially if you roll the 'r's and drop the 'g' sound deep into your throat.

And tell each other which strengths you really appreciate in each other. And ask for the help you need.

Ask your spouse, "what do you need from me?"

"What strength do I have that you need?"

The key here is to see each other as God's gift to us, God's strength for us. God's blessing to us as husband, as wife. It can make all the difference in the world to us, to our children even more, if we can remember that God made us for each other as suitable helpers, ezer kenegdos.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said,

Amen.