

## **Family Functions: BEING MARRIED**

### **Ruth 1:16-17**

Our text for today is one that we often hear during wedding ceremonies—in fact, some of you probably had it read on your special day. Interestingly, though, it's not about a husband and wife at all, but a woman named Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi—which makes the statement all the more remarkable!

Naomi was an Israelite. Ruth was from the land of Moab. Naomi, along with her husband and their two sons, had moved there during a time of famine back in Israel. While they were in Moab, Naomi's son married Ruth; but within a few years, Naomi's husband and both of her sons had died.

So, old Naomi, and young Ruth, were now widows. Naomi decides to go back home, so the question arises as to what Ruth should do. Naomi assumes Ruth will stay in Moab, her homeland; but Ruth insists that they are family now...and she will remain with Naomi. The words she uses to express this decision to her mother-in-law are among the best known in all the Old Testament:

**Ruth 1:16-17 (KJV) ...Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.**

Last week, we talked about the need for loyalty if relationships are to be strong. Well, it would be hard to find a more powerful expression of loyalty than this. And while this verse is not about marriage, it certainly sets the stage for Ruth's marriage to Boaz.

When you think about it, if a young woman can be that committed to her mother-in-law, this should give us hope for marriage as well. Still, I think we all realize that "Being Married" can be challenging:

A young man, a newlywed, came home from the office and found his bride crying. "I feel terrible," she told him. "I was pressing your suit...and I burned a big hole in the seat of your pants."

"Forget about it," he said, trying to console her. "I've got an extra pair of pants for that suit." "Yes," she said, "and it's a good thing I remembered. I was able to use that other pair to patch the hole."

Choosing a mate is one of life's most important decisions—and most of us make it when we are relatively young--and in love, to boot! I heard about a young woman who brought her new boyfriend home to meet her parents. His appearance concerned them: leather jacket, boots, several tattoos, and a nose ring.

When he left, the parents expressed their concern. "Honey," said the mother diplomatically, "he doesn't seem very nice." "Oh please, Mom," the daughter responded, "if he wasn't nice, why would he be doing those 500 hours of community service?"

God designed marriage to be the most fulfilling, exciting, and satisfying human relationship possible. For many couples, it is--thankfully. But for so many others, marriage seems to consist of one problem and conflict and hurt after another---until somebody decides to end it. Sometimes it seems that about the only news we get concerning marriage today is bad news.

But marriage is still at the heart of a well-functioning family; so how can we get our marriages to work better, to function as God intends?

Today we'll focus on the Bible's teachings concerning marriage. We'll discover some ways to meet the challenges—because there are sure to be some—and we'll hear how to make the most of the opportunities we have in this beautiful, God-given relationship.

Trying to understand marriage always takes us back to the book of beginnings—back to Genesis. This is where we discover God's original intention for marriage.

In the beginning, God designed marriage to meet one of our most basic needs--our need for companionship, for a caring, intimate relationship with another human being. It's a remarkable story—let's review it together.

God creates Adam, breathes life into his nostrils, and puts him in a beautiful garden. Then God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Think about this: six times in Genesis 1, after each act of creation, God looks at what He has made and says, "It's good." But now, for the first time, God says that something in his world is not good.

Something's wrong with Adam, the one creature who shares in the very nature of God Himself, created as he is "in God's image." God realizes that Adam is lonely—that just as this loving God Himself has a need for

companionship—so does the man, Adam.

So God says that He will create “a helper” for Adam—you know, someone who brings chips and dip when the ball game’s on and keeps the house nice and tidy. This is what Adam really needs. Right, men? (you’re being awfully quiet...)

Well, that’s not really the idea here. In Psalm 46, the same word used to refer to Adam’s companion (helper) is used for God: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present *help* in trouble.”

Think of a “helper” as one who supplies what is lacking in the other. God creates Eve, then, to do what Adam cannot do by himself. It’s not that the man is better than the woman, or the woman better than the man, but that each one is inadequate by themselves.

This is how God designed the marriage relationship. The husband and the wife need each other. They, in fact, complete each other.

Now, after God says that it is not good for the man to be alone, we might expect the next verse to say something like, “So God created Eve.” But it doesn’t. Instead of immediately making Adam a partner, God puts Adam to work on a major zoology project. Adam is told to give names to all the animals in God’s creation.

Why? Could it be that God is preparing Adam for marriage--that God is awaking Adam to his need for companionship and love? As Adam surveys all the animals, he sees Mr. Giraffe and Mrs. Giraffe, Mr. Llama and the Llama mama. Everyone else has a partner, but where is his?

It is as if God is creating within Adam a desire for a mate, a hunger that God would soon satisfy by providing Eve. The first part of the story ends with this: “But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”

So Adam discovers what God has already observed. He is living in a paradise where he has everything he needs, except this other person...who would be so much like him, and yet, different in ways that would delight, and fascinate, and complete him.

Everything else is a poor substitute. Even the beauty of the Garden of Eden, the joy of joining with God in taking care of it, and the blessings of God’s presence with him, could not fully meet Adam’s desire for companionship. He needs his mate!

So this loving God meets Adam's need. Genesis tells us "...the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.'" (Gen. 2:21-23)

God "brought her to the man," it says. In the 28 years I have been a Pastor, it has been my privilege to watch many a proud papa escort his daughter down the church aisle on her wedding day. Something like this must have happened in Eden as the Almighty God, in the role of "Father of the bride," brings His crowning act of creation, Eve, and presents her to Adam.

Listen, friends, God has designed us for love and companionship. For most of us, this will eventually lead to marriage. God first makes Adam aware of his need. Then He creates a partner for Adam and presents her to him. And he's very pleased!

Scholars of Biblical Hebrew tell us the phrase, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is a bit of an understatement. The real meaning is more like: "Wow! This is it, God. This is who I've been waiting for all my life!" Or something like that. At any rate, Adam knows that Eve is a "keeper." He won't be alone anymore.

If you're married today, do you remember that first time you looked at your future spouse and realized 'you are the one I have been waiting for all my life?' Some of us may need to refresh our memories a bit and rediscover the wonder and joy of that moment.

When I'm doing marriage counseling, I often have the couple tell me how they met, began dating, and when they fell in love. I get them to tell me about their wedding and honeymoon and their earliest experiences of marriage. Bottom line, I want them to see that this person is not the villain they seem to think they are, but someone whom they fell in love with—so what's happened???

Perhaps for some—even some here today—there have been so many hurts and disappointments in your relationship, you're not sure you can still remember those days. But TRY!

Try to remember those moments of discovery when you felt so blessed that this person would choose to spend their life with you. Memories of better

times may be the only thing that will get you through the dysfunctional times and give you hope for the future.

We also need to remember the things that strengthen and protect our marriages, keeping them from becoming so troubled. In the time remaining, I want to share with you four Biblical principles for marriage—and we actually find these in several places in Scripture.

#1: Let's call the first one SEPARATING. Ruth did not realize when she chose to leave her home and family in Moab, she was paving the way for a good marriage to Boaz. In Genesis, we're told that a man will "leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." Jesus later affirmed these words as he also spoke of marriage.

The point is that marriage changes our relationship with Mom and Dad. There is a separation that must occur for the marriage to be successful. Now, at first, this may sound a bit sad or even heartless--because, for most of us, the relationship with our parents is the closest one we have before we get married.

When we marry, however, the relationship with Mom and Dad must take a backseat to our relationship with our spouse. Other relationships don't end, of course. They simply become secondary to the relationship with our spouse—and everyone involved needs to understand and respect and honor this change in status.

This principle applies to all other human relationships as well. Friends are still important—but our spouse is more important. People at work are important—as is the job itself, and any hobbies we have—but our spouse is more important, and our actions must demonstrate this to be true.

We can still be loyal to our parents, friends, and fellow workers, as long as our first loyalty is to the person we married. Anything less than this will weaken our marriages and leave them vulnerable.

#2: A second principle is UNITING. Creating some separation between ourselves and others gives us the opportunity to grow closer to our spouse. "...Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge..." Ruth said. So there was separating and uniting; or as Genesis puts it, "leaving and cleaving."

The word "united" literally means "to form a permanent bond." The word "cleave" refers to a union that is so strong, it would take something extremely violent to ever break it.

Now this is important: unless a couple is willing to make a commitment to be with each other in good times and bad, and then live according to those vows, the gaps in the foundation of that marriage will be too wide for it to withstand much of anything. Put another way--unless the commitment is strong to make this marriage a life-long relationship—it probably won't be!!!

#3: BONDING. This is what I see in Ruth's statement, "...thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God..." This at least hints at what we find in Genesis: "the two shall become one flesh."

This is two people coming together and growing closer in every aspect of their lives. The Lord intends for this to include who we are mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. It's to be a loving relationship that keeps on growing closer...for a lifetime.

"Two becoming one" is not the result of a beautiful wedding ceremony or even the perfect honeymoon. It takes years of sharing every aspect of life together for any couple to begin to experience the "one fleshness" that God intends. This is bonding for life!

#4: KNOWING. We don't find this in Ruth's statement to Naomi, but only later between Ruth and Boaz after they are married. Here's why: God's plan for marriage includes sex--which in the Bible is called "knowing." Right after we find that word in Scripture, we usually read about the birth of a child; so it's obviously talking about more than just "a casual acquaintance."

The sexual relationship between husband and wife is celebrated in Scripture. In the Genesis account, we read, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." It's subtle, but we get the point! Go to the Song of Solomon, and it's not so subtle! It may make you blush! (Some of you may be reading your Bibles this afternoon after learning that.)

Sexual intimacy, nakedness without shame, means knowing the other person and accepting them as they are...when all the covering is stripped away. It means sharing openly and completely in every aspect of life.

Marriage is designed by God to be incredibly intimate—with no way to hide our flaws. It makes us vulnerable and transparent, needing to be loved by another person--sometimes because of who we are, but often in spite of who we are—sort of like God loves us.

Do something for me. If you are married, try to picture your marriage on a continuum. Every marriage is somewhere between Separateness and

Oneness. You are either moving closer together, or you're moving further apart.

If you think you can just coast along, I have news for you: you can't—not for long. The challenges are too many to just drift. There will be some kind of stress in your relationship almost every day. There will be time problems, and financial struggles, and children behaving badly, or moms and dads behaving badly.

So, which direction is your marriage moving in today—closer together or further apart? It is moving, I promise you; so are you moving toward oneness or toward separateness?

Whatever condition your marriage is in right now—even if you feel like it's heading in all the wrong directions--know that with God's help, it can be better. The two of you can be closer. Don't lose hope for your marriage. Jesus Christ is all about hope. He's all about overcoming the problems, and fixing what's broken.

- 1) If forgiveness is what is needed, then by all means forgive one another.
- 2) If time spent together is what's missing, find the time and invest it in each other. It will pay dividends!
- 3) If you just don't love your spouse anymore, then confess that sin to God—because it is sinful not to love your spouse—so confess it, ask God to forgive you and help you find the way to love again.
- 4) Make a commitment to God that you will begin right now to follow His plan and build a marriage that is strong, loving, and mutually satisfying—one that will be a joy to yourself and a blessing to everyone who is part of your home and family.