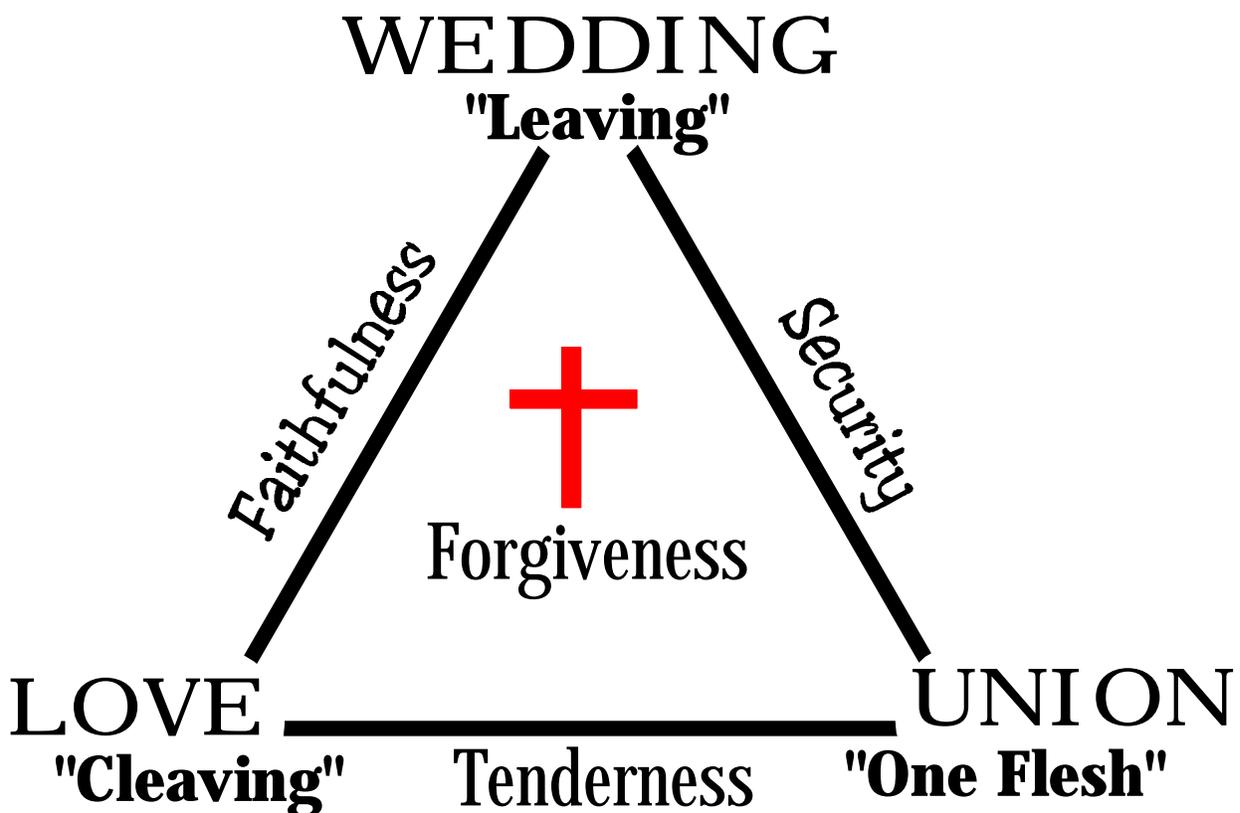


# The Marriage "Triangle"

a man shall leave his father and mother  
and be joined to his wife and they shall be one flesh



It is not good for man to be alone . . .

A helper suitable for him

Be Fruitful and Multiply . . .

and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed

# The Garden of Eden Wedding

(From *Magnificent Marriage* by Gordon MacDonald)

THE STRETCHING OF ONE'S WILDEST IMAGINATION could not produce a picture of what the Garden of Eden must have been like. We have some basic facts; beyond that, the whole thing defies the ability of words to express its reality. The garden was Adam's world when God created him. Adam had everything. He lived in a creative order in which nothing made waves. His work was the work of discovery and exploration. It was the opportunity to use "the stuff of creation" to make things, identify things, and join things together in an infinite number of combinations and varieties which could in turn glorify the prime Creator, God himself. Adam had everything but a special human relationship. He could look upward, in a sense, and have a relationship with God. He could, in effect, look downward at the animals and have a relationship with them. But something was missing! God put that "something" into words when he said, "It is not good for man to live alone."

The significance of those words is highlighted by the fact that God said the opposite thing about all that he had created. After each phase of creation, the Bible says that God saw that it was good. The word "good" seems to imply the idea of being complete and whole. Each thing in creation was good, but there was one thing that was not good, and that was Adam's aloneness. Aloneness is the most hostile idea in the universe. It is a word of isolation, and it is alien to the nature of God. God is not alone. Even though he is one, the Bible goes out of its way to point out the fact that God communes with himself. It would be too simple to suggest that God talks to himself; anyone could do that. But God in his triune personality communes with himself: his self communion is thoroughly satisfying. But man is alone, God says, and therefore he does not have the opportunity for such communion.

It is worthwhile to meditate on Adam's predicament. He has everything imaginable at his disposal: complete command over the world of nature, the world of animals. He has something to occupy his time, and he has an infinity of things to explore. But one thing is missing: he is alone. The aloneness is highlighted by what I believe is a deliberate act in the order of things in Scripture:

*Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast 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. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. (Genesis 2:19, 20).*

I am captivated by that exercise. What is God helping Adam to see in this strange parade? Is God not approaching the doctrine of relationship from a negative perspective? He is out to convince Adam that there is nothing in the universe that can quite assuage the void in his heart for communion. God must have paraded a type of horse past Adam. Adam may have said to himself, "There is a fine specimen of animal—great for a trot on Saturday afternoon. But while we understand each other on basic matters of riding, we do not commune together." Adam may have seen feet-warming possibilities in the furry kitty-cat, but no communion! Perhaps he mused for a moment on the best friend of man, the dog. Hunting? Yes. Communion? No way!

What Adam needed was a helper: someone to come alongside and share the challenge of life. Someone who would feel as he felt, exude joy at discovery, problem-solve with him in a time of puzzlement, create with him offspring who would follow in their steps. There was no one like that in the garden. I'm quite confident that God brought Adam to a complete sense of relational vacuum in order to demonstrate dramatically to him that there was nothing in the world which could meet his human need to have a relationship. He was created to work best under relational conditions. It might be well to note the fact that Adam was the perfect picture of individuality that day. You are

reading the description of a man who fulfilled the fantasies of every person who has wanted to escape to a South Pacific island and be alone. Adam had it all: he was history's most enviable individual, the original nature-boy with not so much as one irritating mosquito. But he was alone, and God saw that it was not good.

The 21st and 22nd verses of Genesis 2 are among the most mysterious to me in all the Bible. I know what they say, but I keep thinking that there are some ponderous and precious truths behind them. For example, why a deep sleep? Is that simply for the purposes of surgical anesthesia? Or is it important that the production of a woman be a work entirely of God, having nothing to do with the man at all? Woman would be decidedly inferior to man if it could have been demonstrated that Adam participated in the creation of his wife, Eve. But he didn't, and she wasn't.

Then again, I wonder what God was doing when he took something out of Adam and used it to create a woman. Are we being introduced to an amazing fact here? Was God, in effect, dividing Adam into two? Is it possible that the original Adam was more than what we presently mean by the word "man"? I am inclined to be comfortable with that possibility. Recreating the possible scene leads me to think that the original Adam, a kind of man-woman, is now two: a man and a woman. Adam now has a counterpart with whom he can commune, a helper of his own mindset. And that is why he would cry out when he awoke from the sleep: *"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."*

**T**HE WORD "WOMAN" IN THE HEBREW is a complementary word to man. It hints at the idea that the two together form an even larger whole. Genesis 2:24 has to be removed in one sense from the preceding verse. It is a verse of commentary on that which has gone before. The writer, whom I believe to be Moses, says under the enlightenment of God's inspiring Spirit that these are the events through which Eve and Adam met. That is why (*therefore*): *"A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."*

The author is actually explaining a present-day phenomenon thousands of years later than when he was writing. He is telling the reader why there is a constant desire on the part of a man to leave the family in which he has grown up and to seek a member of the opposite sex. In each generation a man recognizes in a woman his true counterpart. He seeks to cleave to her and return to the "one-flesh" experience which Adam enjoyed when God gave him and Eve to each other. I'd like to suggest that there are some even deeper secrets in this text. Moses sees the marriage relationship as a progressive one: two people become one flesh; it is a relational process, the product of cleaving. And this generates a number of theological ideas.

First, Adam was excited about his counterpart, Eve, and he was one flesh with her in every way: intellectually and spiritually. There were no secrets between them, and they could discern each other's thoughts. Their one-flesh experience was complete. They did not need to communicate via words; they could enjoy a nonverbal communication which we can scarcely imagine. They could share instantly because, not having sinned, they had no shame, nothing to hide.

When Moses writes his *"therefore,"* he is talking about a later period of time in which there was sin. Now, after the garden setting, there were barriers and obstacles to relationships. Now, a man had to do something that Adam did automatically: he had to cleave. *"To cleave"* is rooted in the idea of an adhesive; something has to be stuck together. If two things have to be stuck together, it implies that they would not originally have come together unless there was a glue to hold them together. What has changed?

Sin! Rebellion against God has upset the whole design of human living. Sin creates a false hunger not for communion and relationship but for individuality of a destructive sort. Now, in this day, Moses writes, a man has to leave, cleave, and progressively he becomes one flesh.

I believe that the phrase "*one flesh*" means decidedly more than just the sexual act. The sexual act is just one way in which the two become one flesh. The result of cleaving in relationship is that two human beings progressively overcome the barriers that sin has erected and recover more and more of the one-flesh experience.

Where have these observations brought us? To the suggestion that marriage in Genesis 2:24 is a faith-commitment to recover as much as possible of what communing man had before the fall into sin. Biblical marriage in its most profound sense is a stepping off into the recovery of the original state of humanness, when men and women were not *exploiters* of one another but *helpers* of one another.

**M**OST PEOPLE ARE CONTENT TO RETRIEVE only the physical experience: to be one flesh on the physical plane only. But the very absence of satisfaction, resulting in the quest for more lovers and varieties of experience is testimony to the fact that one-flesh means that communion between persons is not only physical but also mental, emotional, and spiritual. We are not being incurable romantics when we observe a happily married couple who have been wed for thirty-five years and say of them, "Each seems to know so much of the time what the other is even thinking." We may be simply observing that men and women who have made deep, abiding commitments to one another may indeed be in the process of becoming more and more one flesh, that they do experience a tiny piece of the kind of communion and communication which Adam and Eve had before the fall and sadly sacrificed in their rebellion against God.

What was a natural flow of communal process before sin must be a deliberate process after the fall. And Moses outlines it to us in three simple verbs: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. My friend Walter Trobisch has done more than anyone I know to outline the significance of these three verbs. He has suggested that *leaving*, something Adam didn't have to do, is that act of breaking away from the original ties of parents. It is a negative ceremony which is important.

*Leaving* must be done not only geographically; it must be done psychologically. And that is exactly what many young people in the process of getting married fail to do. Socially, they may enter into a wedding ceremony, but psychologically they are not prepared to make the great leap of faith into commitment to another person. When crises arise, or great decisions must be made, or resources must be provided to meet the needs of an emergency, by instinct they look over their shoulders to their parents. What they have failed to realize is that leaving should have meant that they cut off the authority and lines of provision in order to begin an entirely new family.

Those who question the value of a wedding ceremony today miss the point that relationships must have a psychological starting point. Relationships which are ill-defined breed many things, including trouble. The value of a ceremony is that it drives a stake into a point of time and says, "Here, at this moment, loyalties and authorities changed hands. Things are different now."

Only those who have the opportunity to treat troubled marriages know how serious is the problem of leaving. When one member of a new marriage keeps looking back at former parental ties, the entire new relationship becomes uneasy. The husband of a wife who wants to continue cultivating a kind of emotional authority relationship with her parents will feel inadequate as a leader. The wife of a husband who has failed to dissolve his ties with parents feels insecure in her ability to trust her husband. A study of the biblical teaching of a child's relationship to his parents seems to

indicate that we are required to honor our parents for a lifetime. To obey parents, however, seems to be a command which changes at the point of a child's marriage.

Just as destructive are parents who will not let their children leave. Unable to relinquish their influence over their children, they unconsciously weave ties of obligation about the lives of their offspring. "Why not come and live in the basement of our home until your bank account is large enough for you to afford a home of your own?" one parent says. Another insists that the families get together every Friday evening. A third directs a constant stream of gifts and cash into the new marriage. Often there is a series of unmentioned strings tied to these offerings, and they are usually pulled just as the couple begins to seek independence.

Many young couples who have visited with me before their marriage have smiled at my counsel concerning their ties with parents. But a year after the marriage has been sealed, the smiles turn to frowns, and still another year later, the frowns to tears of frustration. Leaving can be a problem after all.

I F THE WORLD *LEAVING* IS A NEGATIVE word of parting from former obligations, *cleaving* is a positive one. It symbolizes the exercise of asserting the new relationship and responsibilities. It is a word describing a continuum, a growth experience. In marriage one is always cleaving—holding on and advancing against forces which would seek to divide the loyalties and fidelities that marriage has to have. I want to emphasize this progressive thrust. Many couples misunderstand. They think the love they shared on their wedding day is a sure guarantee that there would be love in the years to follow. In one sense, one can cleave only enough for today, and then he must cleave for tomorrow on that day. That we have successfully cleaved today in our relationship will certainly make cleaving tomorrow a bit easier, for now we have accumulated experience. On the other hand, it does not allow us to relax and cleave less tomorrow.

The more one cleaves the more "one-fleshed" he becomes. Now it is important to remember that he can become physically one flesh with his wife virtually any( time the two wish. This of course is the sexual act. But the "one-flesh" of Genesis 2:24 is more than something physical. It is descriptive of the full dimensional return of woman to man. That means that one-flesh will be not only physical, but mental, emotional, and spiritual. Together a couple will progressively tear down the barriers which sin has created, and love their way to wholeness. Cleaving is the process; one-fleshedness is the result.

The world has achieved much insight in this business of cleaving. Rarely, however, has it managed to put it all together. Some feel that cleaving on the emotional level is adequate; others are content to cleave on the intellectual level, the level of the mind. Christians would like to emphasize their cleaving on the level of the spirit, that area in which we formulate our values and convictions and hopefully act upon them. There are many who are content merely to cleave on the physical level; in fact they usually end up cleaving to many different people if they are content with only the physical or the emotional. There is a deepening process of cleaving. Set in the context of what biblical data I can turn up, it seems to begin with our emotions (romance), move to our intellect (companionship), and finally to our spirit (servanthood). The process of cleaving on these three levels is symbolized in the physical act. This side of heaven, only on the physical level will we ever be totally one-flesh. On the other three, we can only hope to achieve deeper and deeper experiences of one-fleshedness. It is a lifelong pursuit, this business of the pursuit of one flesh.

# BEING MARRIED

## Worksheet 1

At the start of this class, we are asking you to take a good look at your marriage. In a way this could be uncomfortable. You may see yourself and your spouse in this questionnaire and begin to squirm. But that's all right. The class hopes to help you as individuals and couples change *in a positive manner*. What is marriage? You have your own thoughts and beliefs about marriage. Let's consider them now. Please answer these questions in brief written form individually without consulting each other. Whether you want to share and discuss your answers with your spouse at this time, or at a later time, is up to you and your spouse to decide together. You will not be asked to share any of your answers with the class.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. If you had to explain marriage to another person, what would you say?
2. What do you feel are the ingredients of a successful or fulfilling marriage?
3. What needs did God intend a marriage to fulfill? List at least five.
4. Think back now to the days of your courtship. What month and year did you meet your mate?
5. Where did you meet, and what was your first impression?
6. What were you thinking the first time you kissed your spouse?
7. In what way did you think your spouse was similar to you before you married?

8. Do you have a five-year plan for the development of your marriage?

9. When was the last time you told your spouse that you love him/her?

10. List six loving acts you performed toward your spouse in the last month.

11. List six loving acts your spouse performed toward you in the last month.

12. When was the last time you gave your spouse a compliment you had never given him/her before?

13. What three words would you use to describe your marriage at the present time?