

“MAKING LOVE LAST A LIFETIME (#1):
VENUS AND MARS IN THE BEGINNING”

(Genesis 2:18, 21-25)

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[PROPS NEEDED FOR END: MLLL books for congregation to purchase]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-14-07]

--I--

1. Read Text: Genesis 2:18, 21-25. Pray.

A--A young couple engaged to be married.

B--An elderly widow sleepless at night because her grown children's marriage is falling apart.

C--A middle aged couple whose marriage is “on the rocks” because of infidelity.

D--A single youth or young adult who wants follow God's will in their dating.

E--A couple whose long-time marriage has, over the years, grown stale and dull.

2. These are just a few of the types of people that I believe God wants to help in a new 5-week sermon series beginning today called Making Love Last A Lifetime in which we're going to explore the connection between Christian faith and the most intimate of all human relationships – that between a man and a woman. ¹

A--And my hope is that whether we're single or married, ² young or old, as we together explore the biblical teachings about love, marriage, and sexuality, we'll discover keys to developing healthy, satisfying and successful relationships with members of the opposite sex, both now and in the future.

B--Now, let me begin by confessing that I've felt very inadequate in preparing for this series.

1--There are many of you who've had successful marriages a lot longer than me.

2--As a result, I don't presume to preach these sermons as a “marriage expert,” but as one who's on a journey with you, sharing what I've learned from my own 17 years of marriage, as well as my experience as a pastor.

3. Some of you, of course, are wondering if this is even an appropriate focus for church, because in some circles it's not considered “proper” to talk about a subject like this.

A--But from the opening story in Genesis we read today, to a whole biblical book (The Song of Solomon) dealing with romantic/sexual love, to Jesus' first miracle at a wedding, to many of the apostle Paul's writings (read more biblical examples in my transcript notes) ³,...

B--... it's clear from the frequency with which discussions about love, marriage, and sexuality appear in the scripture that this topic is important to God, and therefore should also be to us.

C--What's more is that probably the most common counseling I've done over my years as a pastor involves helping people who's marriages are falling apart.

1--Some of you here have talked to me or Jim about struggles in your marriage, ...and some of you NEED to talk but keep putting it off.

2--So it's not just a problem "out in the world" – we struggle in the church, too.

3--And if we don't learn how to deal with them at church, then we tend to learn from Hollywood, from Romance novels, from Mens and Women's magazines (*like Redbook, GQ, Cosmopolitan*), from health classes, and so on. ⁴

C--So I believe its not only *appropriate* for the church to talk about these issues, but that it's absolutely *essential* and *encumbent* on us to do so!

–II–

4. Let's begin by first acknowledging that having a successful marriage or dating relationship is not easy, but can be extremely difficult and challenging. ⁵

A--The statistics in fact bear this out. You may have heard that 1 of every 2 marriages ends in divorce – the reality is that, according to the most recent data, 43% of all marriages end in divorce before the 15th anniversary. ⁶

B--Of course, in an effort to improve these odds, many people today choose to live together to sort of "try it out" first.

1--Now, I'm not judging anyone's who's done/doing this, but you need to know that statistically, couples who do have a higher divorce rate than those who don't.

2--In other words, contrary to *helping* like we might think, pre-marital cohabitation more often than not backfires and causes even more problems in the long run. ⁷

C--So clearly then there are challenges to having a successful relationship with a member of the opposite sex. And why is that?

5. Well, there are many reasons, but a primary one has to do with the fact that men and women are so very different! (Some of you are saying "No, duh!")

A--When I was very young, I remember my mom and dad asking me if I knew what the difference was between a boy and a girl. And in my naivety, I answered, "*Sure. Girls have long hair.*" (Of course this was in the 1970s when *everyone* wore long hair!)

B--Now, we can chuckle at that, but the sad fact is that there are even many adults who haven't learned that our differences are not purely anatomical and biological, but go much deeper. ⁸

1--Men and women think differently, look at life differently, deal with emotions differently.

2--And all of these differences cause great frustrations in our relationships.

C--In 1992 author John Gray published a best-selling book that captured the essence of this truth in its very title: Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.⁹

D--The problem is that just reading popular books and knowing these differences won't solve our marriage difficulties – not unless we also address the *spiritual* dimension by understanding God's original plan and purpose for all of this.

–III--

6. So let's take a brief look at God's big idea behind it all. **What's the purpose and reason He created marriage to begin with?**

A--Well, to answer that, we've got to go back to today's story from Genesis 2, where we read about God's creation of the first human beings.¹⁰

1--We're told there that His first try was given the form a male (the Hebrew word is *adám*, who we've since pronounced "Adam").

2--The creation story says that God placed this man in the midst of paradise, providing for him all sorts of wonderful things to eat and drink, and amazing things to see, and even walking and talking face to face with God daily.

3--But over time God noticed that the man had a need that not even He could supply: the man was alone, and needed companionship. God created the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, and it still wasn't enough.

4--So Verse 18 says that "*The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper [a companion] as his partner.'*"

B--Keep in mind that God could have done this simply by replicating Adam – by creating another male.¹¹

1--But can you imagine a world populated only by men? I mean, there'd be nothing on TV but football and NASCAR, the house would never get cleaned, and the only verbal form of communication we'd need would be grunting!

2--It's a scary thought! Luckily, though, God didn't think it was such a good idea, either.

3--So instead of another male, God created (wait for it)... a new and improved model: "*Human Being Version 2.0*" (if you will) – called **Woman!**¹²

4--And when Adam saw her, he said, "*Wow! Now THIS at last is what I've been looking and waiting for! She's flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, and yet she's mysteriously, marvelously, maddeningly different from me!*" And the institution of "marriage" was born.

C--Now from this story, there are three things that I believe lay a foundation for all else we'll be talking about in this series – lessons we can learn about God's purpose and plan for marriage (i.e., for "Venus and Mars In the Beginning," if you will):

–IV--

7. First of all, this story teaches us that **GOD CREATED MEN AND WOMEN TO BE DIFFERENT.**

A--He designed those differences *on purpose*, not by accident. As such, they're meant to be a gift, not a curse; to be valued and understood, not hated or despised.

B--Speaking of spouses, evangelist and seminary professor Dr. Bob Tuttle once put it this way, "*If both of you are EXACTLY ALIKE, then one of you is unnecessary.*" ¹³

C--So when my wife Trish does something that just totally frustrates me, but which I know is part of her nature as a woman, I'm learning more and more how to try to honor her for simply being who God created her to be – even though at times it drives me nuts!

8. The second lesson comes out of this first one: **MEN AND WOMEN NEED ONE ANOTHER..**

A--We were created to be *different* so we would not be complete by ourselves.

1--Now, I'm NOT saying that everyone needs to be married.

2--On the contrary: the New Testament teaches that Singleness is one of the highest callings from God because it frees a person to devote their whole life to serve God.¹⁴

B--But even if we're single, today's story reminds us that we still need friendships with members of the opposite sex who see the world through a different set of eyes, who can therefore bless and help us through the unique gift of their differentness.

C--This is one reason why in our UMC we welcome both male and female pastors – because we believe that the Bible teaches that even pastoral ministry is incomplete until the unique, differing gifts of both men *and* women are represented.

9. The final lesson I want to mention from today's story ¹⁵ is that **MARRIAGE WAS DESIGNED BY GOD AS THE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM** (some think that marriage *IS* the problem!) – He created it as a way of meeting Adam's (and our) basic human need for companionship and help. ¹⁶

A--And when we remember this, we can learn that marriage is not about us having euphoric, happy, butterfly feelings all the time towards our mate.

B--Instead, **it's A SACRED CALLING from God to serve, give to, and sacrifice for our spouse on God's behalf.**

1--For example, when I serve and care for Trish, in effect I'm being the hands and feet of Jesus to her on HIS behalf.

2--This means my attitude *shouldn't* be "Gimme, gimme, gimme; Meet MY needs", but "Lord, what can I do to serve YOU by loving and serving Trish?"

3--Now, she'll tell you (& I know) that I'm not perfect at this yet– but I'm continually working towards it, even when it's hard, and even when I don't *feel* like it.

C–But the idea is that if BOTH partners are serving each *other*, then our own individual needs will be met, as well (marriage is NOT 50%-50%, but 100%-100%).¹⁷

–V--

10. You see friends, marriage is not simply the next step after falling in love, but is instead a lifelong mission to and with our mate – a calling from God to be their companion and helper not just when things are going well, but even when they're not, because that relationship is part of God's plan for the growth and development of OUR lives.¹⁸

A–For these reasons, then, great marriages and dating relationships (and for that matter great friendships with members of the opposite sex) don't just happen; they require discipline, and sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance.

B–And the very BEST marriages, in fact, are developed only after we discover and apply GOD'S principles to our relationship.

C–When we do that, it opens the door for us to have the kind of love that can last a lifetime.

11. [PRAYER: "O God, we're grateful that you designed human beings, and that you made us different as men and women – as frustrating as that sometimes is, we're grateful for those differences, and that they reflect your love for us and your design for our lives. We're grateful that you created us in such a way that we can enter into an intimate, romantic relationship with another human being, and that we can become partners for life. Thank you for creating marriage as a tool to accomplish this.

Lord you know that there are many in the service today who are Single but who hunger for a relationship just like this – whether to be married or just have a close friendship with someone of the opposite sex. During this series, please give them the tools and help them see your plans for their lives.

God, there are also many here today who are Married, but their marriages are painful and a daily struggle. They feel a wall that's been built up between them and their spouse. We pray that you would help them to tear down those walls during these next 5 weeks, to find ways to repair the breach and heal the brokenness, and take them to heights they never knew existed before.

And Lord, thank you for the blessings of those who currently have good marriages. Help them to see how you want them to use their experience and wisdom to help others who are may be struggling now. And regardless of our current circumstances, help us ALL to grow deeper in our capacity to love our spouse and friends of the opposite sex, so that we might be all that you call us to be. We ask these things in the holy name of Jesus, Amen."]

12. [ENCOURAGE congregation to pick up transcript and purchase a MLLL book (\$8)]

13. [HYMN:#408, "The Gift of Love"]

ENDNOTES:

1. All the main points of this sermon closely follow those found in the book this series is based upon: Making Love Last A Lifetime, by Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

2. For those of you who are single, recent studies indicate that about 90% of singles have the hope for an intimate relationship with another person sometime in the future. So if that fits you, then this series is aimed at helping to prepare and encourage you for what lies ahead. For those of you who are married, this series is geared at helping to improve your relationship with your spouse, however long you've been married – at helping you be able to experience marriage as God intended it. Some of you already have great marriages. But I've yet to hear about a marriage that doesn't have at least SOME room for improvement.

3. Remember that one of the very first stories in the Bible itself is the one we read in today's scripture from Genesis 2 about the first marriage. And throughout the Old Testament, we find numerous writings addressing these issues, including the "Law of Moses," the prophets, and the wisdom writers (Read for example, Ezra 9:12-14; Nehemiah 13:25; Proverbs 5:18-19; Proverbs 31:10-31; Jeremiah 29:6; Malachi 2:13-15). The entire "Song of Solomon" (also called "Song of Songs") is devoted almost exclusively to romantic and sexual love between a husband and wife.

In the New Testament, Jesus performs his very first miracle at a wedding (John 2:1-12), likens himself to a bridegroom (Matthew 9:15), uses a wedding in parables (Matthew 25:1-13), and offers a variety of teachings about marriage and the relationship between men and women. In the early church the apostle Paul calls marriage a "mystery" that portrays Christ's love for the church (Ephesians 5:31-32), and he frequently addresses issues of how men and women are to relate together, including matters of sexual intimacy (Read 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5:21-33).

The bottom line is that throughout the Bible, we find that when God chooses to communicate something about his relationship with us as human beings, the metaphor He most often uses to do this is that of a marriage. Throughout scripture, HIS relationship with US (first through Israel, and now through the church) is similar to a husband's relationship with his bride (Isaiah 54:5; Ezekiel 16:8; Hosea 2:14-20; John 3:28-30; Revelation 19:7-8). *"As marriage is a metaphor for the church, so the church is a metaphor for marriage. The church has a unity we are to preserve. The church has a diversity we are to value. The church has a selfless task in which, together, we are to engage. This is marriage"* (James Long, Marriage Partnership, Vol. 7, no. 3.).

4. I believe that when we try to learn about love, marriage, and sex from a source other than the church and God's Word, then we're settling for less – we're missing out on the very best of what God has in store for our relationships.

5. Author Helen Roland said that *"Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handsprings, or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it"* [Helen Roland, cited in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 335. In the words of another author: *"Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult. [And] staying happily married for a lifetime... rank [s] among the fine arts."* [Roberta Flack cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entry# 7615. Along this same line, Dr. Frank Harrington, Pastor of Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA (the largest church in that denomination), once remarked that *"A Wedding is an event, but a Marriage is an Adventure."*

6. 2001 survey of 10,847 women by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, online at www.cdc.gov/nchs/releases/01news/firstmarr.htm.

7. Statistics taken from an article by Felicity Barringer of the New York Times, cited in Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997). Another survey indicates that 38% of previously cohabiting married couples divorce within 10 years, while only 27 of married couples previously living separately divorce within the same time span [APA Monitor, cited in Psychology Today (Nov-Dec. 1995). "To Verify," Leadership]. See also article "New Report Sheds Light on Trends and

Patterns in Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation” on the Center for Disease Control’s “National Center for Health Statistics” website at www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/02news/div_mar_cohab.htm.

8. We even joke about these today. Consider an email I once received in which two groups were asked to decide if a computer was masculine or feminine, and give four reasons for their decision.

The first group was all women, and they concluded that computers were male because of the following reasons: 1) In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on. 2) They have a lot of data but are still clueless. 3) They are supposed to help you solve your problems, but half the time they ARE the problem. 4) As soon as you commit to one, you realize that, if you had waited a little longer, you could have had a better model.

The other group, of course, was all men, and they naturally decided that computers were female, based on the these reasons: 1) No one but their creator understands their internal logic. 2) The language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else. 3) Even your smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for later retrieval. 4) As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

9. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992 – this title was the inspiration for today’s sermon title.

10. Don’t get caught up in the details of the story – it’s not meant to be a science book telling us HOW humanity came into being, but WHO did it, and how our current spiritual condition with God came about.

11. Some same gender in nature that reproduce asexually – God could have done the same here.

12. It was the man (not God) who named the woman “Eve” (Read Genesis 3:20).

13. Robert Tuttle, Professor at Garrett Seminary, spoken at the March 1992 United Methodist Men’s Couples Retreat, Simpsonwood Retreat Center (Norcross, GA). His point is that we *need* our differences as men and women – they’re essential to God’s plan and purpose for our life.

14. Remember that Jesus, Paul, and many other great leaders of the church were single (Read 1 Cor. 7).

15. In addition to the first three lessons from today’s scripture, there is a fourth that we will spend the entire 3rd sermon dealing with, but don’t have time to cover today. It is that is that within the context of marriage, **SEX AND SEXUALITY IS MEANT TO BE BEAUTIFUL**. It’s true that in today’s culture we’ve turned it into something shameful, lewd and unholy. The reference in Genesis 2:24 to clinging to each other and becoming one flesh is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. So Verses 24-25 tell us that it was originally designed by *God* as a *good* part of creation– to be something profound and beautiful, even spiritual.

16. Read Genesis 2:20-25. In fact, when we view marriage as was intended, our mate is in fact God’s primary vehicle for perfecting our own faith – they’re given to us to help us become a better person, a more noble human being, a stronger Christian.

17. In the book that this series is based on, Pastor Adam Hamilton puts it this way, “*Choosing to marry is choosing to answer a calling from God toward the person you are marrying, although you may not always feel like answering that call. ...In fact, you cannot answer[it] unless you allow the power of the Holy Spirit to work through you, helping you to rise above your [own] self-centeredness. ...[But] to the degree that you focus on this mission, you will find joy and meaning in your marriage, even when things are not perfect.*” (Adam Hamilton, Making Love Last A Lifetime, p. 20; The citation also includes excerpts from the “Pastor’s Study Notes” in the “Pastor’s Guide” of the study series packet).

18. And it’s God’s Holy Spirit who gives us the courage and grace and strength to see this through. “*Marriage is not an end--it is a beginning. It is not a destination, but rather a method of travel.*” (Ed Young, “Romancing the Home,” Marriage Partnership, Vol. 12, no. 1).