

Origin Stories, Genesis 1&2, Man and Woman, 1/28/24

Welcome to Origin Stories, a series through the Book of Genesis that is exploring the most fundamental questions of existence, whether you are religious or not religious- Who is God? Who are we? Why are we here? What went wrong? Is there hope for us? And we are exploring the origin story from Genesis that forms the foundation of a Christian worldview against the backdrop of the dominant story of western culture today, Modern Secularism, so that if you aren't sure what you believe about God and the Bible- I hope to persuade you that Genesis has a better story to tell. And if you follow Jesus, that we grow in our resilient discipleship to Him. We are 4 weeks in and we still haven't made it out of Genesis 1...and you might notice that there are 50 chapters and you are doing some quick math. But we are going slow in the beginning and will speed up as we get past Gen 3. One of the reasons we haven't gotten out of Genesis 1 yet is because we have been studying the past 2 weeks the **Imago Dei- the Image of God** from verses 26-28. What does it mean for mankind to be made in the image of God? The answers to that question form the very foundation for why we exist. Remember Pastor Terry brought his mirror from home and said that the Imago Dei is kind of like looking in the mirror displaying aspects about us that reflect the image of God. Summarize: **1) It tells us that we created for a relationship with God 2) To Join God's Mission to Bless the World 3) We have Inherent Dignity and Worth.** Today we are going to hold the mirror one more time and see how the Imago Dei speaks to the topics of gender and marriage.

Now some of you are wondering, "Does Pastor Nate not have enough drama in his life that he wants to talk about this topic?" But we cannot study Geneses 1&2 with integrity and not talk about these topics because of their prominence at the very beginning of human relationships. Of course gender and marriage are topics freighted with confusion today. I grow up at the base of Hawk Mountain in PA, my friends and I used to do a lot of hiking growing up. **[Title Slide]** Occasionally, we would be in the situation where we start out on a trail, but a few miles in, the trail would disappear and was all overgrown. The signposts or paint marks on trees that once marked the path were gone. And we found ourselves having to make a decision to hack away the brush and hope it opens up back up, or turn around. It's a very disorienting feeling. This is how many of us feel about these topics today.¹ Some of us have marriage wounds and have sworn off the institution, or the opposite sex altogether. Some of us don't feel at home with the body were born with or experience gender confusion. And many of us just feel like we lost the trail in our culture. Listen in on the next conversation you hear touching on the possible differences between women and men or if Gender is binary or fluid, if the conversation is at all public, its tone will likely be sheepish and measured, as if the words themselves are looking over their shoulders, many of the conversations go in circles, self-contradictory, or end abruptly in confusion or fear.

How we lost the trail is a sermon for another day. But the blurring, bending and erasing of gender distinction and relationships between men and women is indeed from the playbook of Modern Secularism. To continue the metaphor, Modern Secularism tells us to grab our hatchet

¹ Thanks to Sam Andreades in *EnGendered* for this illustration.

and make your own path, wherever you feel is right for you. But from a Christian worldview, all these questions about gender and relationships are rooted in the Imago Dei, the image of God, here in Genesis, and provide us a way through the thicket, to rediscover the ancient path that God intended us to travel. We don't have time in this message to explore all of our questions, nor do I have answers to all the modern-day questions, but I do want to explore one question that I believe Genesis 1 & 2 speak to, "Why did God design gender?" When we look in the mirror of the Imago Dei we learn 2 Reasons for Gender. Let me frame this message with one more important comment- today we are looking at God's Intention which does not always align with our experience. And the distance between God's intent and our human experience has everything to do with Genesis 3's fracturing of mankind's relationship with God. Which is where we are going with this series, so we will have to live in that tension for a little while.

1. Displaying the Equality and Diversity of God

Genesis 1:27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

It's popular today to peg the Bible as misogynistic, but this could not be further from the truth. In reality, it is the Judeo-Christian worldview that built the platform for equality between men and women. When Moses first put reed to papyrus and wrote down the words of Genesis 1:27, it was big news in the ancient world. The ancient world surrounding the Jewish people had a clear hierarchy that went like this: Kings were made in the image of the gods. Nobles were a little lower. And all the way at the bottom of the cosmological order were slaves and women. To say that all people, even slaves and women equally bear the image of God as much as the King, was scandalous, more than that threatened the very social fabric of nations. Contrast the Bible's equality with ancient philosophers and sacred writings, and you will find the ancients either denigrate women or ignore them. Take Plato for example...everyone loves Plato...did you know he locates the origin of women in men who had previously led cowardly or unrighteous lives? The Bible's insistence on equality, and it's influence is the origin of equal rights that we enjoy in Western society. There is a reason the Bible insists on this equality, because without equality, we would not be able to bear the image of God. Why? Human equality mirrors the relationship within the Godhead, the Trinity. "Let US make mankind in OUR image." Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. And so he made man and woman as equal image bearers of God. To live this out it means that we treat people with dignity. As the philosophy Martin Buber once said, therefore every relationship among humans ought to be an "I and Thou" relationship, never an "I and It" relationship.

[1st Reason Slide] The Imago Dei does not only speak to equality but also the Diversity of God. In making Man and Woman- two distinct differentiated beings biologically and functionally. Modern secularism cheers for the value of equality between the sexes, although it struggles to value the diversity and differentiation of man and female. Treating men and women the same in every way or going as far as erasing gender distinction altogether has massive implications that it appears even some proponents fear may be going too far. Whether it's in sports, locker rooms, the proliferation of pronouns, hormone therapy among girls who just beginning puberty, questions of transitioning and detransitioning, many feminists realizing they are losing grip on the distinction of womanhood and women's rights altogether. The Bible would content that

when we remove gender distinction, we lose a vital part of what it means to bear the image of God. Into the woods, the Bible cuts a clear path: God intended binary gender that are directly tied to our biological sex, male and female from the beginning. Why? Because we bear the image of God, the diversity of the Godhead. All equal in essence, power and glory, but they are not the same- they are distinct persons with distinct functions. They are not interchangeable, nor do they change in their essence. Just as we marvel and celebrate the equality and diversity of the Trinity, so we ought to marvel and celebrate the fundamental distinctions and functions between men and women. Dr. Sam Andreades, who wrote *EnGendered* says, "A man, properly oriented toward the giver of his life, should arise in the morning singing loudly, in gratitude that he is a man, the image of God. A woman should exalt in being a woman, as if it is the best thing in the world to be, the image of God."

This is what it would mean to receive what we've been given as the weighted gift of God's self."

Well, you might say, OK but what does it mean to be a woman or a man? It is just biological sex, chromosomes and body parts? Or is there more to it? Does being a real man mean that you have to like sports, cigars and shooting guns? Does being a real woman mean that you like wearing dresses, sipping tea and watching lifetime movies? What about the sensitive boy who enjoys show tunes and drama? Or the rough and tumble little girl who would prefer wearing a football helmet than a tiara? When I was 8 my favorite movie was the musical *Annie*, and I remember my brothers making fun of me for dancing around the house singing the sun will come out tomorrow. And growing up even though I was into sports, I wanted to be in on the drama team, but in my backward hometown in the 90s I would have had to turn in my "guy card" to do that. What are these? We will are in the thicket and have lost the trail if our framework for what is a man or woman are shaped by either by modern gender-fluid ideology or the rigid traditional cultural hyper-masculine or feminine constructs and stereotypes. To explore this question we need to look Genesis 2. While Genesis 1 is primarily focused on the equality of man and woman, Genesis 2 highlights their distinct functions designed for each other.

And this brings us to the second reason for gender in light of the Image Dei. I would argue, that the primary way God designed gender distinction to be on display is in vital relationship with the opposite gender, most profoundly in marriage. (say 2x) This is Dr. Andreades thesis and I agree. In studying Scripture what you will find is that almost every time the Bible addresses gender it is in relationship with the opposite gender, mostly in marriage. Now let me say, that if you are single that doesn't mean that gender doesn't matter, but we learn most about gender distinction by looking at the design of marriage. **2. Displaying the Purpose of God in Marriage.**

One of the stories married couples love to tell is how you met and fell in love. Who chased who? Was it love at first sight? How did he pop the question? Well Genesis 2:18-25 is a love story, albeit a short love story of how Adam and Eve met and got married. Let me highlight some aspects of the story that reveal God's purpose for gender in marriage. Notice that among the resounding refrain "behold it was good" in Genesis 1, in **Genesis 2:18** the jarring statement that one thing was not good. It was that man was alone. God was there, he had the creatures

and good work to do...and yet something was incomplete and missing. God knew something was missing, but Adam had to realize it for himself. Notice in verses 19-20 God brings all the animals to Adam to name- goat, chicken, cat, platypus, even dog "Man's best friend!" he didn't find a partner who fulfilled his longing, what is God doing? God is helping Adam see that he was built for relationships, companionships with his own kind, that he needed an intimate ally for the life.

Now while Adam is sleeping God gets to work, taking out from Adam's side to create woman. And then we get to peer into the first wedding ceremony right there in the garden. Did you see it? **verse 22**- God walks Eve down the aisle of the garden to Adam, back to his side and Adam breaks out in song...**verse 23**-at last! Someone fit for me!

What did God make? He made a "**helper suitable** for him." Now this is an amazing, often misunderstood phrase. "Helper" is not the intern you hire to grab you coffee while you do the important work. Not a denigrating term...This word is a military strength term to describe reinforcements sent to the battlefield. God even uses this term to describe himself as Israel's helper. Eve is created to be a strength, but a certain kind of strength.² A helper "Suitable" this comes from two Hebrew words that literally are translated "like opposite" him. Well what in the world does that mean? Which one is it? Both. It's a complement. Two puzzle pieces. If they are identical they don't fit. But they can't be completely different either. Similar but different, complementary. This is God's design for marriage, and its intention is clear ²⁴ ***That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.***

God made male and female, husband and wife for Complementary Oneness. This is not just speaking of one flesh in terms of intercourse, although it is a clear display in the complementary equipment God gave us, but profound complementary oneness emotionally, helping each other in areas of strength and weakness and functionally in ways that are even hard to fully describe until you put them into a healthy marriage and you see it in action. In our better moments we see this so clearly, that while we are so different...at times frustratingly different, we need each other like bread needs butter. Why would God be so intentional about this complementary oneness? Because it images who God is! **The Godhead displays complementary oneness.** They don't have all the same function, put it this way- they are all love- but the action and function of their love is shaped differently- in our Salvation in love the Father decrees his plan for salvation and enacts the plan, in love the Son is the instrument and embodiment of providing salvation, and in love the Holy Spirit secures and sustains our salvation until we obtain it. A loving display of complementary oneness in form and function.

Now we don't have time to fully explore this in marriage, but let me just say that love is designed to be displayed in complementary functions of husband and wife. **Ephesians 5:22-33. Husbands are called to the loving function of sacrificial leadership of their wives** that is directed toward what she needs and desires most (protect, secure, provide for her emotional and spiritual flourishing). Now this is a broad function that can be fulfilled in traditional and less

² Some ideas from Tim Keller sermon on Genesis 2:18-24. www.gospelinlife.com

traditional ways. Every husband needs to ask questions like, “Where am I leading my wife and family? What makes my wife secure? Is my leadership helping her thrive?” Find out what that means for her. If security means that you know Judo then go take Judo classes. If security means a big hug and a listening ear, then do that. For my wife that might look different than for yours.

Wives are called to the loving function of strengthening the honor of their husbands who he needs and desires most (respect, encouragement, motivating, and comforting). Again, broad functions fulfilled in many ways. Wives should ask questions like, “What encourages my husband the most? Where is he vulnerable that I can help comfort and strengthen him? What ways can I help him feel like a man?” Find out what that means for him. If that means telling him you love that his arms are really strong, do that! If it means reminding him why you married him, do that. You know one of the greatest things my wife does for me? When I’m feeling overwhelmed and incompetent at work- She comes and puts her arms around me and says, “I know it’s hard, but I can’t think of a better man for the job! What can I do for you to help?” Husbands and Wives- you want to start having better sex? Stop reading technique books and start focusing on fulfilling your complementary oneness functions in relationships with each other.

Unmarried young men: shooting a gun or a basketball isn’t what makes you a man, masculinity is not found in chasing pleasure whether it be pornography, money, fame on social media, or sexual conquest. We are not most manly we are holed up alone playing video games for hours. We discover our distinctly gendered purpose, our manhood in relationship. You want to display your masculinity? Whether single or desiring marriage, work on your honor, do hard things, stand up for what is right with courage and practice self-sacrifice, protection in relationships with the women in your life now- your mom and grandmom, sister, your friends.

Unmarried young women: lipstick and fashion are not what makes you a woman, femininity is not found in chasing followers on Instagram with perfectly filtered pictures of your body or in getting attention from the boys. You discover womanhood in relationship. You want to display feminine strength? Practice strengthening the honor of the men in your life. Your father, grandfather, brother, friends. Be at peace with body God gave you and use it to honor Him. Help the men in your life by making up for their weaknesses with your complementary strengths.

We are men and women, made in the image of God. Whether single or married, young or old, male or female- may we work to align the beauty, equality, and diversity of our gender to the glory of God’s good intent.