

THE RELATIONAL HUMAN BEING

First in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Understanding and Repairing Our Relationships*, from Genesis 2:18-25

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’” Genesis 2:18

More than anything else, the things that satisfy us most are our relationships with others. At the same time, however, our relationships give us more trouble and concern than anything else in life. During the Protestant Reformation John Calvin wrote to his colleague, William Farel, about a great threat to the success of their movement. *“I entreat you, my dear brother (he wrote) ‘in so great iniquity of the time in which we live, that you strive to keep together all who are in any way bearable.’”* That’s the trick, isn’t it? To establish and maintain relationships. It is much easier when we are hurt or angry or frustrated, to conclude that the other person is no longer bearable, and then, having justified our actions, to walk away. And yet, to be alone is a horror in itself. Today I am beginning a series about relationships—how to maintain them and improve them. The place to start is with the principle that we are relational beings. Please turn to Genesis 2.

The first thing that I want us to see is that **God created us to have relationships**. The key word is *created*. You and I take creation for granted. It is at the heart of our Christian belief. Genesis 2:4 says, *“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.”* But that’s not the way everyone sees it. Darwinist Daniel Dennet in his book, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, makes a chilling statement about people like you and me. He says. *“If you insist on teaching your children falsehoods—that the earth is flat, that ‘Man’ is not a product of evolution by natural selection—then you must expect, at the very least, that those of us who have freedom of speech will feel free to describe your teachings as falsehoods, and will attempt to demonstrate this to your children at our earliest opportunity. Our future well-being—the well-being of all of us on the planet—depends on the education of our descendents.”* (*Cape Times*, March 14, 2006, 6)

Don’t let people like Dennet worry you. The theory of evolution—that things developed by chance--has one big, gaping hole in it, a hole so big you could walk an elephant through it. Some of you will recall the “pet rock” fad from the late 1970s. A fellow in my church in those long-ago days bought one. He was a confirmed bachelor who lived alone and he laughingly pretended that this stone was a key relationship for him. One Sunday he showed up at church with his new pet rock and introduced “Herman” to his friends. He pretended that Herman had feelings and he carried this little lump of granite around with him for several weeks until he’d squeezed all the laughs he could get out of it. The point is that inert matter like a rock can never produce life from itself, by itself. And something without life cannot produce relationships.

So where did life and relationship come from? Look at the Creation. It is full of life. It is full of relationships between beings. Barb and I spent a couple of days last week at a game preserve on a safari in South Africa. The ranger who drove us around told us about the relationships we find in nature. For example, many scientists speculate that even trees communicate with each other by releasing pheromones into the air that are

picked up by other trees. If too many leaves of an acacia tree are being nibbled by the animals, the tree sends out a signal and the other acacia trees start growing more thorns to protect themselves. Or, if insects invade a tree, it warns the other trees to take protective counter measures. We stopped early in the morning to observe a Crested Barbet singing from the top of a branch. The ranger said, "He's telling the other birds, "I have survived the night. There are no predators. I'm still here. This is my territory, stay out!" And we watched a lioness walk down the road we were on and call her two cubs to come out and follow her. And out of the grass they hopped and trotted after their mother. Where did these different beings get the ability not just to live, but to communicate with each other? Only from a personal Creator who endowed them with that ability.

When we read through the early pages of the Genesis account, we discover, just as we might have deduced, that the Creator is not only personal, but that he exists eternally as a relational Being. The doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated in Genesis, but you can find it there, nevertheless. For example, in the first verse of Genesis we're informed that the Father commanded the world to come into existence out of nothing. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* And verse 3 tells us, *"God said, 'Let there be light.'"* In verse 2 we have a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. *"The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters."* And then the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, appears in chapter 3, verse 8. *"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden."* The whole Trinity is implied in chapter 1 verse 26 when God says, *"Let Us make man in Our image."* The Creator is a personal God. He has a relationship with himself. And he has created us with the capacity for relationships.

Now, let's carry this idea a step farther by noting a second thing. **God created us to have a relationship with him.** This is really amazing when you get right down to it. He made us to be relational. It's part of our nature. But for human beings, the purpose of that relational nature is to know the Creator and relate to him as God. That's what he wants for us! That's what he made us for! You can see this in Genesis 2:16. God speaks to man in a way that a human being can understand: *"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely.'"* He used words that carry meaning. Have you ever tried to talk to a very young child? Barb and I returned from our trip and yesterday we talked with our granddaughter, Ashley. We had to use a limited vocabulary. We had to speak simply. But she understood. Her dad said she turned away from the phone with and looked at her mother and him with a big smile on her face. That's how God talks to us. He is certainly able to communicate on a much higher level than we are capable of, but he utters baby words to us, words that we are able to understand. He tells us that a relationship with him is conditional: We must obey his commandments. If we are not obedient to him, we break the relationship and communication with him is cut off. Verse 17 continues, *"From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."*

All the way through the Bible God expresses his desire for us to have a relationship with him. For example, God said to the Israelites in Leviticus 26:11-12, *"I will make My dwelling place among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk*

among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” The apostle Paul repeats the same promise in the New Testament in II Corinthians 6:16. And then quotes another Old Testament promise in verse 18, *“I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.*” The majority of people on our planet do not enjoy a relationship with God. But at the same time they cannot deny their human nature. Have you noticed that people always need to worship something or someone? So people invent gods to worship. In our culture we often hear people say, “I’m a spiritual person. I’m just not religious.” The longing for God is there. They just don’t know him. Let me ask, do you know the true God, the one who has created you? The very fact that you are here today is an evidence that you sense the need to know him. But it is only through Jesus Christ who died to take away the offense of our sins, that a person may fill the emptiness in his being. God is reaching out to you. If you don’t know him personally, I extend God’s invitation to enter a relationship with him. Fulfill your created purpose. Forsake your sin and trust in Jesus Christ to restore you to God. God will welcome any person who comes to him through faith in Jesus Christ.

But now, let’s consider a third thing from the second chapter of Genesis that flows out of our relational nature. **God created us to have relationships with other human beings.** In verse 18 we read, *“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’”* God created us with the capacity to have a relationship with him. Isn’t God enough? Doesn’t God fulfill all our basic needs? The answer is no. God made us to need other human beings.

While we were in Johannesburg, Barb and I visited the Apartheid Museum. The history of South Africa is a bit complicated. But from the 1930s through the early 1970s the ruling white minority kept the black and colored races entirely separate from them. To maintain its hold on power it clamped down ruthlessly as resistance to the apartheid laws grew. One of the ways employed to break leaders of the resistance was to put them in prison in solitary confinement. In the museum there is a display of a row of solitary confinement cells. They are about four feet wide by eight feet long—the size of a sheet of plywood—with a ceiling about ten or twelve feet high. A prisoner would be locked inside and the solid door would clang shut, and he would remain there without human contact, sometimes for years. An explanatory plaque on the wall tells visitors that many men went mad from the depravation of human contact. Why is solitary confinement such an effective punishment? Because, *“It is not good for man to be alone.”* God made us to need contact with other human beings.

See what God did to solve the problem of loneliness. God says in verse 18, *“I will make him a helper suitable for him.”* Verses 19-20 tell us that God created the various animals and brought them to Adam and told him to study them and then name them whatever he wished. So man interacted with the animals and called them cows and horses and birds and tigers and crocodiles. Some of you love your pets. You treat them as if they were almost human and imagine that they have human thoughts and reactions.

But there’s a problem with animals. Last Wednesday Barb and I and Bill and Sallie Fravel visited Cornerstone missionaries Tom and Ann Austin, who live in

Capetown. They generously took us on a tour of the Cape of Good Hope below the city. It is one of the most beautiful spots on earth. Rugged mountain peaks rise over the shimmering water of harbors and bays. We drove to the southernmost point on the African continent, where the Atlantic Ocean joins the Indian Ocean. Ann had graciously prepared a lovely lunch for us. She opened the cooler and spread out three kinds of sandwiches and a plate of tiny tomatoes and grapes and other delicacies, and we sat down on some rocks a few feet from the water, savoring our meal. Suddenly a large, hairy, brown baboon—or b’boon, as they say it in south Africa—leaped through our little circle and pounced on the food. He looked over his shoulder as he greedily rammed grapes and tomatoes into his mouth. Tom said, “Get back to the car. B’boons are dangerous!” But some of our group began trying to scare him away. This was our food after all! We threw pieces of wood and stones at him. He kept stuffing food into his mouth as fast as he could swallow it. Someone picked up a boulder about the size of a bowling ball and heaved it at the Baboon. He stood up, bared his teeth and hissed and growled at us. Finally he had enough and ran over to the next group of picnic-ers. But right behind him came the rest of the pack, eager for their share of our lunch. By this time, however, we’d gathered up the remains of our meal and clambered into the van.

Baboons are supposed to be our nearest cousins in the animal world. They even look like some people I’ve known over the years. You’d think that if there were any animal in the world that the first man, Adam, might have related to, developed some communication with, it would be a baboon. But that would never happen. Baboons are selfish, nasty brutes, who will steal your last bite of food and leave you to starve. There can be no friendship there, no satisfying relationship possible. Look at the end of verse 20. *But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.*” No wonder.

Now we come to the fourth and final thing to notice in this passage. **God created us to have our deepest relationships in marriage.** The story is familiar. God put Adam to sleep. He took a rib from Adam’s side, implying equality, and with Adam’s essential genetic code, the same DNA, if you will, he created a female to Adam’s male. The man and the woman are two sides of the same whole. And when Adam awoke, he recognized this at once. In verse 23, after he had looked her over and presumably spoken with her, Adam declared, *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!”* (v 23)

Think about this discovery of each other for a moment. Adam immediately notices that the woman is like him, and yet different in some interesting ways. But she doesn’t have a flat head like a baboon. She’s not covered with hair like a gorilla. She walks on two legs, like he does, not like the beasts in the field. He speaks to her, and wonder of wonders, she talks the same language—not like his horse or his dog. He asks her questions and discovers that she thinks like he does—well, sort of. He discovers that she has the same taste in food that he has, but—and oh, this is so grand!—she can cook. He no longer has to eat his meals raw over the kitchen sink. So he rushes out to gather a load of fruits and vegetables and he sniffs in wonder as she stirs all of it into a delicious smelling gourmet delight. He doesn’t quite understand how it is that she can pick flowers and turn their home into something nicer than the makeshift shack he’s been camping in. But he likes the results. The one thing he can’t fathom is how she can go shopping for

hours on end, and not get tired--as if that is the most enjoyable thing in the world to do. But he figures he can put up with it as long as he doesn't have to go with her. He's intrigued by how she combs her hair and dresses in pretty garments that make her look beautiful. And he likes it when she kisses him on the cheek and tells him she thinks he's so strong and handsome. Handsome? He'd never thought about that before. He's even willing to wear the ties she buys for him when she assures him that they go together with other things he's wearing. And liking this improvement in his life, he works hard to please her.

The bottom line is that the woman becomes part of him. Together they dream and plan and share their deepest feelings. In each other they are fulfilled. Loneliness is banished. And together they can do what by themselves they could not do. They can join in the act of creation. They can come together and make other human beings, children. And with these new humans they expand the circle of human relationships. This is why marriage is so sacred, so holy. It is the foundation for human society, the one relationship in the world that carries the possibility of truly fulfilling a man or a woman's deepest needs. It doesn't always work out that way, of course, and next week we'll begin to understand why. Not all human beings pair off, man and woman, in marriage. But this is the general pattern God has established.

God created us for relationships. We ought to be truly thankful, and work to make the most of what God has given us. Let's remember what we have learned today. God made us the way we are. He made us to have a relationship with him. He made us to have relationships with other human beings. And God created marriage to meet our deepest relational needs. If we are to be fulfilled in our relationships, we must act in the ways God has told us relationships are designed to work. You will never be happy and fulfilled in your life if you determine to conduct your relationships in some other manner. If your relationships need help, then the place to go is back to the instruction book God has given us—the Word of God. For today, then, ask God to forgive you for trying to live your life in a way he has not approved. Ask him to help you to change. He will, and your relationships will improve, for this is what he desires for his people.

Preached by Dr. Rick Perrin on March 19, 2006 at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, 5637 Bush River Road, Columbia, SC 29212 and Dutch Fork High School Tel. 803-772-1000 DiscoverCornerstone.com
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