

You don't know love, unless you lose yourself through it. So, I am a big-time blog reader, feel free to judge accordingly! There's just something about reading perspectives from "ordinary" people who make extraordinary observations about life. I came across one last week from a guy named Tim and his blog title was: "How I Screwed Up My First Chance at Real Love." He invites the reader into this majestic, awe-inspiring romantic episode of his life. This beautiful moment in time when the future burst with hope and commitment. Everything was rosy, until what he called a "poison" ripped that all away. What was that toxin? Selfishness. He looked back and saw how he was too selfish to go beyond his own needs and goals, and take a look at hers. He pretended to care about what she was interested in and yet never took the time to ask the simplest question in the world: How was your day? This self-focused kind of love, and illusion of commitment masked the deepest fears that Tim had: fear of past shame being exposed, fear that if she knew exactly who he was, she would leave him in a split-second. God has so much more in mind for commitment, for relationship, for family. He hard-wired into each of us this longing for authentic love, for deep connection, for belonging. So, how do we find that? How do we avoid the "poison" of selfishness? Why did God establish family in the first place?

He did so, because something "**wasn't good.**" God had been having so much fun in creating the universe. After each day of creation, he'd look over the result of his creativity and evaluate it the same way every day: **God saw all that he had made and it was good.** But on day six, that evaluation wasn't the case, not at first. He examined all he had made. He zeroed in on Adam, the crown of his creation, and makes a stunning remark: "**It is not good for the man to be alone.**" In this world of perfection and joy, God saw even still something was missing. Even though Adam had the deepest of relationships with the Lord, even though psychologically he had the wisdom of God, even though physically he was the most physically capable man not named Jesus who ever lived, he wasn't complete. Then, God does something really cool. Instead of just telling Adam this fact, instead of just creating Eve right away, he wants Adam to realize what he's missing. The most self-sufficient man who ever lived, needed to see the interdependency he was built for.

So God becomes the grand marshal of the largest parade of animals ever until Noah came around. One by one they go past Adam, who gives them a name. Not just any name, no, a name perfectly describing the innate qualities of each animal. This guy was smart! He knew the biology, the temperament, the nature of each creature, he had a relationship with creation that none of us can even imagine. But after hours of witnessing every creature, Adam comes to a life-draining conclusion: "**But for Adam no suitable helper was found.**" He discovered what God already knew. In a way, he was an inmate of paradise. On his own, he looked like he had it all, but he knew he was missing a part of himself. He wasn't whole.

That lack of wholeness, is there a more lonely place? The feeling that there is no one who could understand you, who "gets" you, who's there for you. I don't know of a darker loneliness than when a relationship ends. You feel like a part of you is gone. It gets harder when that loneliness sets in even if on the surface the relationship is still at least superficially intact. You long to feel at home, to feel like you belong, but it just doesn't happen.

Now, I know Adam at this point in his life was perfect, but as I think about how I would feel if I was in his place, I know the temptations that would be all too willing to give advice. The temptation that the Lord messed up. "Where's that person for me, Lord? Do you love animals more than me? Each of them has a partner, a confidant, but I'm alone." The next temptation that I'm sure would come crashing into the scene would be the thought that it's on me to find that commitment and love I long for. This unfortunately is the road more traveled in every human being's passion to experience true, real, love.

This avenue is constructed with buildings of fake homes. The fake home of pornography that lures you into thinking you can find an outlet for the sexuality God has placed in you, only when you walk into its house, you only find a bottomless emptiness filled with shame. Or the fake home of casual sex, thinking this physicality will fill the void for togetherness and commitment you feel, but after each encounter, you feel the need for more, you feel used. Or maybe the fake home of what I like to call "My Get-Outs." This dangerous place where all you think about when it comes to the relationships you have with your spouse, your kids, your friends is what do I get out of it. This fake home where often you feel unworthy of anything to give, or inadequate to the commitments you've made.

Make no mistake, God crafted you with this longing for connection with him and this longing for connection with others. Adam had a perfect connection to God, and yet he knew something was missing. You and I, as sinful people, often fear commitment, we fear being exposed, and in the process, God's creation of family becomes cloudy and even forgotten. But our God doesn't stand idly by. He is a romantic. He is a family-God.

After Adam makes this saddening realization, God gives him something stronger than benedryll and makes him fall into such a deep sleep, that Adam doesn't even feel the extraction surgery that God performs. He takes out a rib, something close to Adam's heart, to build the grand finale to his entire creation. He saves the best for last. The crescendo of creation's song hits its climax: a woman. Beauty incomparable, intelligence undeniable, love incomprehensible.

Don't miss the romantic wedding scene God paints. I told you he is romantic at heart! The garden of Eden blooming, the animals pausing and watching, God arm in arm with Eve, walking her, his first daughter, down the aisle, and Adam can't contain himself. He reflects the romantic nature of his Father and spills out the first poetry in human history: **"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man."** God, in true selflessness, chose his final act of creation to serve his creation. This loving service of the God of free and faithful, covenantal love, filled the void like only he can do.

It's that selfless love of God, that romantic at heart, the creator of relationship and friendship, who longs to give the same service to you. Your loving Father sits down with you, and hears your fears, your longing for family. He smiles at each of his daughters, and tells them the story of their great x 1000 grandmother Eve. And he says, "I saved creating women until last for a reason. I wanted every man to know how needed you are. I wanted you to see that you are the most beautiful creation I've ever made. I wanted you to see your role in this world, not as

inferior, but as equal. I crafted you in such a way to be a helper like me, in fact, most of the time you see that world in the Scripture I wrote to you, it's talking about me. I know right now you might not feel whole or loved or wanted, but you are my daughter. Never forget the love I have for you, and I promise to put the people in your life that you need to be connected to, who will always keep you close to me."

That same Heavenly Father turns his head, puts his arm around the shoulders of each of his sons, and he recounts the story of your great x 1000 great-grandfather Adam, and he tells, laughing as he says it, "Do you really understand how incredible women are?" "DO YOU?" Do you realize that I took a part of you to make her? She's so much more than a release, or a tool, she is a part of your very heart. Cherish her, love her, because you know your Brother's love. Your Brother Jesus who understands how you might feel inadequate to being a Christ-like husband, your Brother who knows the longings of your heart, your Brother who showed you what self-sacrifice looks like. Your Brother who knows your need, and will strengthen to be like him in every way.

Then, he looks at all his daughters, and his sons, and he tells them the reason why he created marriage and family: "**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**" This is the joy of marriage! This is the commitment you never saw coming! First, the commitment of a God who despite us giving absolutely no reason to be committed to us, he committed his very life to forgive us, restore us, and bring us back into his family. Jesus left his parental home in heaven, and was so united to his bride, the Church, that he gave up his flesh to make her "**radiant, blameless, holy.**" This is the grace he has given each of us.

The commitment we never saw coming! We see this grace in husbands and wives who put each other first. You unite in every way physically, emotionally, spiritually. Husbands who love their wives with selflessness, putting aside pride, and building up their wives so that they always know the treasure and joy they are, leading them with prayer and devotion to God's Word. Wives, who respect their husbands even if they don't deserve it, encourage him to keep after his pursuit of Jesus, to restore him with forgiveness each and every day. It's for single people too, to be so connected to Jesus and his vision for family that you joyfully follow a different kind of commitment that you never saw coming. The commitment to future love, a commitment to selflessness, a commitment to love God and trust that he will fill all voids and loneliness. To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.

It's this commitment that you never saw coming, that dissipates all shame, all fear of vulnerability. Verse 25 has always hit home with me. The shameless relationship of Adam and Eve who **"were both naked, but felt no shame."** They were naked in every way. They saw each other for who they were, and they didn't need to hide anything. First of all, when it comes to your heavenly Father, you don't need to feel any shame. Bare your soul to him. He will bring restoration and empathy. When it comes to your spouse, don't hide who you are. Yes, that includes the embarrassing things, like me having an unhealthy obsession with reading everything Abraham Lincoln has ever written, it's a problem, but I have a loving wife in Abbie who understands me and doesn't shame me for it, even though she would have every right! It's the vulnerability of parents to confess their sins against their kids, teaching them confession and forgiveness along the way. This vulnerability includes past sins, past abuses felt, the skeletons in the closet you never thought you'd open for someone to peer in and see. This **"becoming one flesh"** involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits, it involves the most fulfilling and transcendent sexual experiences ever, it involves the total unity built on the foundation of Jesus. This is all a part of the commitment you didn't see coming. But it doesn't stop there.

As you reflect on the people God has placed in your life for you to commit to, the most unexpected commitment ever will always follow you. Your God, who just like with Adam, knows your needs before you do. Your Jesus, who sometimes like with Adam, has you see everything that can't satisfy your longing for human love and friendship just so you can appreciate and marvel at your prayer answered in the most unexpected kind of way. As you consider your God who committed everything to call you, "Son, Daughter, Brother, Sister," marvel at the joy you can have as you selflessly commit to the ones you love in your life. Even if those loved ones leave that love unreturned, you don't lose the excitement of the opportunity. You look at them with one mentality: I want to follow in my heavenly Father's footsteps, and I want you to see his love through me. That's the heart of the commitment you never saw coming. That's the kind of commitment you want to pass on to your kids and grandkids. That's what losing yourself through love is all about. That's who your Father is. That's what his family is all about too. How unexpected is the love of our God! Amen.