

THE TRUE ROMANTIC

Scriptures: Matthew 5:27-32; Genesis 2:18-25

I am struck by the number of books, movies, and TV shows that portray romance without ever mentioning God. I suppose we would be shocked if they did. If some character on *Sex and the City* or *Days of Our Lives* stopped in the middle of a passionate love scene and said, “You know, we should pray and thank God for giving us sex,” we’d fall out of our chairs.

But the truth is sex was God’s idea. In Genesis, chapter 2, God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” So God takes a rib from the man and forms a woman and brings her to the man. And the man says, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Verse 24 concludes, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The last verse says, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” Sex was not created by Hollywood or *Playboy*. It was created by God. And its purpose was to make two people one.

On occasion at weddings in our church I have shared the story of my grandparents. I had a special set of grandparents who lived to celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary. My mother said they were more romantic in their 80s than they had been in their 20s. Maybe that is because of all the things they went through together. Their marriage survived 15 presidents, 2 world wars, and a great depression, not to mention raising two daughters and some livestock. But after 70 years they knew they had something. They were even starting to look like each other. They really weren’t two people anymore. They were two people who had become one.

That, the Bible says, is the point. Sex was God’s idea. But the goal of sex was more than just momentary physical pleasure. The goal was to make two people one—to create a dependable human relationship in which each could become more whole and more complete through a lifetime of joys and struggles together. That is the theological meaning of marriage: to create a dependable human relationship in which each can become more whole and more complete through lifetime of relating to each other and creating a family together.

The apostle Paul develops this theme in the New Testament. In Ephesians 5 he quotes the verse we read earlier from Genesis: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Paul has that verse in mind when he says, “Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes it and cares for it....”

Loving your wife or your husband is like loving your toe. You may or may not think your toe is attractive, but you still want to keep it. You protect it. You try to keep it from being stubbed or stepped on, and you would not want to amputate it if you could save it by any other means. That is the kind of bond sex was made to create. It was given to make two people one.

But that is also why sex can be dangerous. In I Corinthians 6:15-16, Paul makes this observation:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall become one flesh."

Do you see the implications of this? Sex makes us one with another person whether we want to be or not. There is an old movie some of you might have seen starring Michael Douglas and Glenn Close called *Fatal Attraction*. A married man has what he thinks he is a casual affair with another woman. He tells her plainly that he has no commitment to her, and she nods in agreement. But it isn't that simple. After a one night stand she begins to phone him and stalk him. She begs, curses, and threatens the husband in order to see him again. She even tries to threaten and intimidate the man's wife to get her to leave. At the end of the movie the man's wife has to kill her to stop her from harassing and threatening their family.

That, of course, is Hollywood. But here is a bit of real life. Several years ago a husband and wife who do not attend our church asked me to visit them. They had just received a phone call from a woman in Tri-cities who claimed that the husband was the father of a child to which she had just given birth. The wife, who was obviously distraught, turned to her husband and said, "That isn't possible, is it?" The husband froze, like a deer in the headlights. Then he stammered, "She ... she didn't mean anything to me. It was a one-time thing." Now here is the striking thing about this story. At that moment they did not really know if the child was his or not. The other woman may not have known for sure who the child's father was. Or she might have been trying to extort money from him. No one had proved paternity at this point. But it did not matter. The damage was done. Their marriage, which included two young children, never recovered.

The Bible warns us about that over and over. There is no such thing as casual sex. All sexual relations create a bond which has the potential to affect people for the rest of their lives. Because of this, the Bible insists that sexual relationships take place in the context of marriage. You should not enter into a sexual relationship without preparing for its lifelong implications.

Which brings me to our second scripture lesson. When it comes to adultery Jesus says, "Don't go there. Don't even think about it." In fact, Jesus says, it would be better to pluck out your eye or amputate your hand. Do you now see the connection between adultery and amputation? If sexual relations and marriage are intended to make two people into one flesh, then unfaithfulness to that relationship ends up ripping apart your own flesh. Adultery means tearing out pieces of your soul and giving them away.

If you have read the last two Harry Potter books, it is like creating a horcrux. A horcrux is one of the darkest of wizarding's dark arts. A horcrux is a magical process by which you implant a part of your soul in an object. Lord Voldemort, the dark lord in the Harry Potter books, puts part of his soul in different objects in order to assure his immortality. If Voldemort should be killed, a part of his soul would still exist in these various objects and could be re-grown under the right circumstances. The problem is that each time Voldemort puts part of his soul into a horcrux, he becomes less human. He has less and less of a soul himself.

As the Bible describes it, that is what happens when we have what we think are casual sexual relations. We are joined to the other person as one, whether we intended to be or not. We deposit a part of our soul, and if we leave that relationship we leave a part of our soul behind.

This also explains why Jesus is so concerned about divorce. If marriage makes two people one, then divorce is like amputation. Now sometimes, in dire cases, amputation is necessary to save a life. No one would willingly amputate their leg, but if it was necessary to save the body from a deadly infection, one might do it. Even Jesus recognizes that there are some cases where that might be necessary, as in a case of marital unfaithfulness. But most of us would go to extraordinary lengths to save our leg if we could.

That is how Jesus feels about marriage. In marriage God wants us to become not less whole but more whole. In the strains and struggles, the joys and heartbreaks, of marriage God completes us, making us more into the people God wanted us to be all along.

There is a wonderful description of marriage in a book by Michael Lindvall, a Presbyterian minister, called *The Good News from Northhaven*. He writes,

Life together is hard. There are no perfect husbands, no perfect wives, no perfect children, no perfect mothers-in-law. Life in family—life in any community—is both our sorest test and our sweetest joy. Life together stretches us, pulls us, strains us, but in it we are nourished by the struggle itself.

It is the best chance Providence gives most of us to grow out of ourselves and into something more like we were meant to be. Life together is the welcome tether that kindly but relentlessly binds our ravenous egos. Life together is where most people get their only chance to be heroes—local heroes, yes, but giants of spirit nevertheless: courageous and well-tempered souls who return again and again to brave the rigors and savor the delicacies of loving the same people for a long time. For the only thing harder than getting along with other people is getting along without them (p.108-109).

God, not Hollywood, is the true romantic, and the life God wants for us through the commandments and through his Son is far richer and far more lasting than anything we could find on our own.

- Ken Onstot
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