

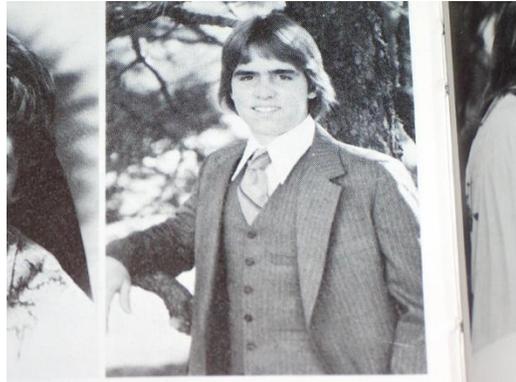
The Image of God and God's Sneaky Way to Get a Person Crucified

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25

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Several years ago, I shared with some of you that during the late 70's at the age of 16, I experienced some chest pains. Doctors took x-rays and discovered that my heart was a trophy room (the kind big game hunters have). My ego was sitting in the middle of this trophy room in a big stuffed chair humming the 007 theme song and smoking a pipe. Over the fire place, stuffed and mounted, were the head and shoulders of Erin McGuinly. I held her hand in 9th grade. Robin Davidge was stuffed and mounted in a disco pose over in the corner. She was a Liberty Bell Pom-Pom and she talked to me in 10th grade. Next to me, Becky Tucker had been made into a beautiful floor lamp. In 11th grade I had kissed her for 30 minutes straight – I know because I watched the clock in the bank building across the street so I could tell my friends. When I shared this several years ago, Becky's sister happened to be at church that Sunday, and she told Becky. Fortunately Becky was forgiving; I think she had her own trophy room.)



Erin, Robin and Becky and a few other trophies like these. I had won their affections, consumed and conquered them. I was at least a nominal Christian – so that didn't mean sexual conquest, it mean they'd fallen for me – liked me – at least a little. And yet, once I picked the fruit, it no longer tasted sweet. Actually, I'm not even sure I had the capacity to taste it.

You see, it wasn't really the fruit I craved but the conquest of it. To make a better me, to fill my trophy room. So if they fell for me, they weren't so valuable to me, for indeed, they fell for me and I was still "me." They hadn't fulfilled me.

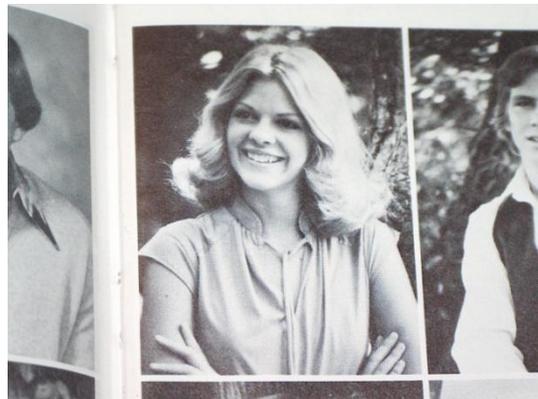
My prize trophy was Lisa, because she had a cheerleader uniform and because she dumped me. But soon I declaring a mutual dumping and prized her above all others, because I knew she was too good for me.

If I had 'em, I didn't want 'em.

If I wanted 'em, I couldn't have 'em.

Currently I was dating this girl – she was like: "Chantilly lace and a pretty face, a ponytail, hanging down..."

She was gorgeous. Until, of course, I thought I'd conquered her, captured her, consumed her, and then the song would stop. Then I'd call it off and she'd say "Ok," and then the song would start, and I'd hunt her again. I'd go trophy hunting. But a trophy is a thing and to "bag a trophy" is to turn a person into a thing and that leaves you lonely.



And so it really wasn't them mounted and stuffed on the wall of my heart, just my image of them. In fact I really didn't know any of them and they didn't know me. They could only know the image I presented of me, and that image was a lie... Easy-going, confident guy on the swim team. I couldn't let them see I was totally stressed and insecure. Almost every night I'd pray that this new girl I was dating, named Susan Coleman, would not come to any swim meets because I always came in last, and I sure didn't want her to see my flabby abs in a Speedo.

I was an actor impersonating my image of myself, trying to impress other actors impersonating their images of themselves. And no self could ever afford to truly be naked in front of another self... in any serious emotional and spiritual sort of way. You see, it really does make sense to play "hard to get." It's just that no one can ever afford to be gotten. I wanted to "get," but was afraid to be "gotten."

So in a way, my trophy room felt safe – a fortress all about me. But that me was terribly lonely and getting scared. I was scared that I could never be married. For as soon as I had a wife, I'd no longer be attracted to that wife. In fact, I had just told Susan Coleman that I was "tired of our relationship," and she told me "Ok, we'll break it off"... And all at once she became attractive again. It was a pattern with me, but on this spring evening in 1978, I really hurt her. And this time I was really scared and really alone: a taker, a consumer, unable to love and so always alone.

You know, the very first thing in all of Scripture that God declares "not good" is "being alone." And I was "alone." Sometimes single people are the least alone, and married people are the most alone. I was alone, surrounded by love. Alone, and that's not good – it's not the image of God. And that would explain the chest pains. It was a heart ache.

On the 6th day of creation, in Genesis 1:26, God says "Let us make man (Adam) in our own image, after our likeness" Theologians argue over exactly what that "Image of God" entails, but it appears to be at least three things.

First: God says "our image." God is a trinity. He is so "not alone." He is three persons and one substance and that one substance is love. God is love. So Adam (which means "humanity") is to be made in the image of love – a communion of persons. That communion creates life. When God says "let us make man in our image," he has been doing nothing but creating.

Second: Adam (humanity) is to be "a creator in the image of the Creator." The image is to be a creator, not a consumer.

Third: Scripture is very clear that the image of God is not perfected on earth, until 3pm on a Friday, the 6th day of the week, just before Easter, along about 30AD, as Jesus, the ultimate Adam, hanging naked on a tree, lifts His head and cries out before God and His Bride "It is finished."

Scripture says He is "the perfect image of the invisible God." "The first born of all Creation." So the image of God is a creative communion that looks like Jesus.

On the 6th day "God created Adam (humanity) in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." As the 6th day ends, God sees "everything that He has made." And behold, it's very good. Our human eyes have not yet seen the end of Day 6. On the 7th day, God rests, for everything is good and finished.

Genesis 1: 1-24 is like the "index to all reality – the History of all time." We've preached on that extensively... But by Genesis 2:7, we're back in time in Day 6, for God is making Adam. In verse 18 God says "It is not good that Adam should be alone." It's the first thing declared "not good" in all of Scripture.

And now this is immensely important:

- Adam's situation is declared "not good" before the fall.
- Adam is incomplete before the fall.

The situation is "not good" on the 6th day. Everything is good on the 7th day. And for all who are in any way alone, it is still the 6th day.

God says "It's not good for Adam (humanity) to be alone. I will make a Helper fit for him." When God says that, Adam is a he/she named "Humanity," not yet divided into male and female. And that Humanity (all Humanity) needs a "Helper." Now check this out, that word "Helper" is a masculine word and in Scripture that word "Helper," "ayzer," is almost exclusively used for God. Twenty-five times in the Psalms we're told "God is our "Helper," our "Ayzer"."

Adam doesn't seem to get it.

Well, God has Adam name all the animals. The Talmud describes how all the animals parade past in pairs, and Adam says "Every thing has its partner, but I have no partner." See, Adam doesn't get it – we don't get it. We've been made for God.

Adam is "alone" in the presence of God. In other words, Adam is "alone in the presence of Love himself." That means Adam's loneliness is a subjective reality, not an objective one. Adam is like trapped inside of his own heart. Alone in the presence of Love... as if he's trapped in darkness, surrounded by the Light. He is "not good" standing in the presence of all good.

Adam is not yet in "the image of God," just as I was not yet in "the image of God" sitting alone in the dark trophy room of my heart.

Adam doesn't "get it." How is God gonna help Adam get it? Get love, light and goodness? How's God gonna create Humanity in His image? Well, God puts Adam to sleep and divides him in two. He takes from Adam's side and forms it into Eve. God brings Eve to Adam, and Adam exclaims "Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh... Chantilly lace and a pretty face..."

Genesis then reads as follows:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Two persons, one substance. Marriage. Scripture refers to marriage as a covenant.

Throughout Scripture, God redeems relationships through Covenants. And Marriage is a covenant. When people get married, they take vows and enter a covenant. They are vows to love no matter what. They say "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

It was Jesus, the Lamb of God, who quoted Genesis 2:24, saying "the two shall become one flesh." "Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man tear asunder."

Marriage is a Covenant.

In ancient times when two people would cut a covenant, they would take an animal like a lamb, cut it in half, and walk between the halves saying something like "May it be done unto me as it was done unto this animal, if I break the terms of the Covenant."

Marriage is a Covenant, and breaking Covenant is tearing a body in two.

So in Matthew 19, when Jesus quotes Genesis and explains marriage and divorce, the disciples say “Well, it’s better not to get married!” “It’s crazy to get married!” And they’re right. It’s a Covenant with no escape clause, save some type of death.

You see, when you Covenant yourself to fallen people, you can get crucified. When you let them, it’s called forgiveness. Getting married is giving someone permission to crucify you.

The legislature in West Virginia once considered putting warning labels on marriage licenses. I think it’s a good idea and whenever I marry a couple I put a warning label on the groom’s chest. When Bill and Frances got married, this is what I taped on Bill’s chest:

WARNING: Marriage is a covenant ratified by God. The surgeon general has determined that there are certain hormones in the bloodstream at the time of your wedding which may cause dizziness and poor perception. These hormones can mostly subside on your honeymoon. Use extreme caution. The person you are about to marry is a reprobate.

In all seriousness, marriage is profoundly dangerous and once you understand it, you really should ask: “Who is crazy enough to actually do such a thing?”

I know a fellow named Josh. For years he’s been absolutely consumed with a woman. He rescued her from an impoverished and abusive family. She married Josh for his power, money and good looks. And yet she was so intimidated by him, she never gave him her heart. Actually, she gave her heart to anyone that would pay. She became a prostitute. Josh would walk the streets at night, find her and buy her back from pimps. She gave herself to vile men, but was frigid with Josh. She grew ugly. The counselor said that she was “hiding her shame.”

Still, Josh thought of her, dreamed of her, followed her everywhere. When she wept, he wept. When she laughed, he laughed. He wouldn’t forsake her and he told me that if he had it to do over again, he would in a heartbeat.

Eventually, one Friday (with the help of some corrupt politicians) she tried to kill Josh.

People argue about if and when it’s ok to get a divorce... If anyone ever had a valid reason for divorce, his name is Josh. Joshua is his Hebrew name. Yesus is how you say it in Greek. Jesus in English.

He would do such a thing. He did do such a thing. He is crazy. He is crazy with love for you. We are his unfaithful bride and he is our “Helper.” We are His Bride who has prostituted herself with idols. And we did kill him... with every sin we nail him to the tree of the law.

Never forget that in our faith, the picture of love is not a poem, a Hallmark card, or a scented candle. No, the very image and the likeness of love – and God is love – the image of love is a beaten, scourged, naked man, drenched in blood...nailed to a tree of dark knowledge, crying out “Father, forgiven them!” He is hanging there because He vowed Himself to an unfaithful bride whom he will not forsake.

- On that cross, His very body is broken in order to ratify an eternal covenant of grace in which He fulfills all terms.

- On that cross, His blood is shed to buy us back... to pay for all the ways we've already broken covenant with Him... the covenant of Law

His body broken and blood shed are covenant communion for His bride.

He is God's Grace fit for His bride's shame.
 He is God's Truth fit for our lies.
 He is God's Life fit for our death.
 He is God's Vow fit for our Unfaithfulness.
 He is the Helper fit for Humanity – His Bride.

And He is the perfected image of God – the Ultimate Eschatos Adam... the image of God “made perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10).

Think about that: “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (for his wayward Bride) is the perfect image of God.

On the 6th day of creation, before the fall, God said “let us make man in our image.” That means Christ crucified is not Plan B, but it's always Plan A. And that means that to make you in His image and teach you of your helper and his love, God needed to arrange for your crucifixion from the foundation of the world.

And now listen to Paul in Ephesians 5.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...”

Then he quotes Genesis.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Marriage is a picture of Christ's love for His People. And marriage is to be a means of shaping us into that picture – that image. The image of “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” ... crucified willingly and freely in love... Well, how could God ever get a “self-centered frightened trophy hunter” like me to sign up for such a painful procedure?

“Chantilly lace and a pretty face... a pony tail hanging down... a jiggle in her walk, and a giggle in her talk...” All designed to suck me in.

Male and female... Romance and hormones... Barry White... All designed to suck me in. All designed to lure me into forming a covenant without conditions. So I'll be forced to love, even when it hurts; forced to forgive even as he's forgiven me; forced to sacrifice myself for another. It's a trap... binding me to that which will kill me. A trap set by God before the foundation of the world.

A guy said to his wife “How can someone so stupid be so beautiful?” She said “Well, God made me beautiful so you would marry me. And God made me stupid so I would marry you.” See? It's a trap.

Marriage is God's sneaky way to get a person crucified.

Like U2 sings, “I can’t live with or without you.”

1. Not “with you” – for you shatter my idolatrous image of you.
2. Not “without you” – because “it’s not good for the Adam to be alone”... “I’m so lonely I could die” “I can’t live with or without you”

And a voice from heaven booms “Exactly! That’s the point. You can’t live.” You, sitting in your stuffed chair, smoking a pipe, humming the 007 theme song and staring (like an idiot) at the trophies of your own selfishness. You... ego, flesh, sinful self alone in a hell of your own making. You must be crucified.

And you see, it’s exactly then that my marriage is working as designed. When she takes most and gives least. And yet because of this crazy covenant, I must bear her shame. It’s then that I find myself looking like “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

You know, people get divorced based on the grounds of “incompatibility.” That means they don’t get it – at all. Who’s compatible with a cross? If you’re perfectly compatible, your marriage is perfectly pointless, because it will never make you into the image of Jesus.

Marriage is God’s sneaky way to get a person crucified.

And now some of you are confused, because you were thinking “Gosh I really wanted to get married, and now I don’t know that I do. Or maybe now I really do, because I want to look like Jesus.”

Well, take heart, because marriage isn’t the only way to be crucified. It’s not the only covenant that one can enter. In Christ, you enter a covenant for which marriage is only a sign. He tells you up front – “pick up your cross.” And when you enter that covenant with Him, you also covenant to everyone in this room. You’re covenanted to the church. And take it from me... She is a bride entirely capable of crucifying you and shaping you in God’s image.

But for those of you that are married, please understand... the purpose of your marriage is not to fill yourself with the trophies of your selfish desires. The purpose of marriage is to destroy that old self-centered self and prepare you for the glory of Jesus.

Marriage is God’s sneaky way to get us crucified.

But now listen clearly... Crucifixion is God’s sneaky way to give us new life. His life. Real life.

And so, I broke up with Susan that spring evening in 1978 (around Easter). But as soon as she said, “Ok, we’ll date other people,” the song started once again. “Chantilly lace and a pretty face....”

So the following morning I drove to her house. I wanted to possess her beauty once again. She wasn’t home. Her mother told me that she’d gone to the park to feed the ducks. It was a grey day, damp with a steady drizzle. As I drove down Gallup Street in Littleton, I saw her in the distance. She didn’t see me, but I watched her. She was walking alone in the grey rain, holding a bag of crumbs. And she was weeping. I just watched her.

Her heart was naked, exposed by the broken walls of her throne room. And as I stared at her, I was captivated by something I hadn’t seen before. Not “chantilly lace and a pretty face,” but love. Bleeding for me. A heart that had allowed itself to be crucified... by me. I was captivated by the image

of God in her. Then the thing I sought to possess, began to possess me. It possessed me all the way to the altar, and four kids and 25 years of marriage.

We've all tried to possess the beauty of God... His goodness and His glory. That's why long ago we took the fruit from the forbidden tree. But now we look to that tree and what do we see? Love bleeding for me and for you. The heart of God, crucified for us. We see the image of God. "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

It possesses us. He romances us to His table...

- where we're bound in an eternal covenant of grace
- where we commune with His body broken and blood shed
- where we die with Him and rise with Him to new life

In this life, marriage is a picture of that and a place for that.

I need to tell you that the trophy hunter still roams my heart. He wants to possess my wife rather than love my wife. And even more he wants to possess God rather than love God. But bound in a covenant, he is forced to see beauties he doesn't possess... but that begin to possess him and kill him. It's a process. It doesn't happen all at once. Through marriage, God kills the old me and gives birth to the new me.

As we grow older, physical beauty fades. But there is a greater beauty that grows. It's the image of God in us. Jesus in us. Love in us. Two bodies, one substance: LOVE.

Robertson McQuilken was the President of Columbia Bible College. It had been his dream since he was 16. His office, his position, was his trophy room. And then one day tragedy hit. His wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. And what was once a little piece of paradise began to look like a desolate wilderness. Paradise lost. Muriel lost her memory... even her memory of Robertson, her groom.

Robertson resigned from Columbia Bible College to care for his Bride. His friends told him not to... they said he was "called to train pastors for the kingdom," and that someone else could care for Muriel. But Robertson believed that a covenant was stronger than a calling, or actually that his covenant was his calling. So instead of running a vast religious empire, Robertson now spent his time feeding Muriel, walking Muriel, changing Muriel's diapers... bathing the wintered, incontinent body of his once beautiful bride. At times he lost his temper. At times he's failed. Yet now he says he likes it. It's changed him. He says he's far happier than most, and that he adores Muriel.

Some things are loved because they are valuable. But the best things are valuable because they've been loved. Robertson had loved Muriel for a long time.

One day a former student asked him, "Do you miss being president?" He said "I never think about it." But that night he did. Finally he prayed: "Father, it's OK. I like this assignment and I have no regrets. But something has occurred to me. If the coach puts a man on the bench, he must not want him in the game. You needn't tell me, of course, but if you'd like to let me in on the secret, I'd like to know – why don't you need me in the game?"

Robertson didn't sleep well and he woke contemplating the puzzle. On their morning walk around the block, Robertson held Muriel's hand in order to steady her as she shuffled along. A familiar form came walking up behind them. He was a local drunk. He staggered around Muriel and Robertson out into the street, then back onto the walk where he stood directly in front of them. He looked them up

and down and then he said “That’s good. I like ‘at. That’s real good. I like it.” Then he turned and headed off down the street. Robertson chuckled.

When they returned to the garden, they sat down and the words came back... Robertson says he realized then that God had answered his question through that inebriated drunk standing on the sidewalk. He prayed, “It’s you Father, whispering in my spirit. ‘I like it. It’s good...’ I may be on the bench but if You like it and say it’s good, that’s all that counts.”

Well, Robertson was not on the bench. Out of the old game, yes... but he was at the top of God’s game. He is God’s trophy.

God’s trophies are turned from things into persons (not the other way around), and they are never alone. Robertson is God’s trophy. A man created in His own image and likeness... and God Himself is captivated by the beauty.

And now if you’re thinking “Oh man, I hate it when Peter talks about marriage. I want to have a marriage like that...” Listen really, really, really well.

You do.

Your name is Muriel. You’ve forgotten who you are. You have the greatest of all bridegrooms. You’re bound to Him by covenant. And He’s making you new. He’s making all things new – especially you.

Just before they returned to the garden, Jesus took bread and He broke it saying “Take, eat. This is my body.” And in the same way He took the cup saying “Drink of it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.”

- All of our marriages are broken...
- All of our singleness is broken...
- All of our relationships are broken...

...Because they are all designed to make us hungry for this.

YOU are the Bride.

GOD is your “Helper.”

THIS is His heart and covenant.

And now he invites you to commune with Him at His table, as He makes you in His image.

If you come to this table, what you’re saying is “Yes... I do.” Come to the table, tell him again. Worship Him, because you’re His trophy.

Prayer: So we say “Glory to you, Joshua, Jesus, our Bridegroom... high and lifted up on a cross, bleeding love for each and every one of us.” Oh Lord, we praise you and we thank you.

Lord, I praise you and I thank you for the lives in this room. Giving communion is an amazing experience, because people come forward and I know some stories... people struggling with gender

issues, people who have been through a divorce, people who have been remarried, people who have been married all their lives, people who desperately want to be married, people who are in relationships that are falling apart, people who are getting crucified, and Lord Jesus, they all wonder “what is it all about? Why are you letting this happen?” It’s because you are making us in your image... and you are teaching us the depths of your love. You teach us through the pain and longing, you enlarge our hearts so that one day they would receive you. Lord God, you create us in your image through the covenant love of Lord Jesus our Christ, who loves us from this dead world into your Kingdom. For the people in this room are Muriel.

So listen, Muriel, this is just Peter talking now: Sometimes I really struggle with my job. I wonder “God, what am I doing? Does this matter at all?” Well, I think this is my job, Muriel. Every week you’re to wander into this place, and I’m to whisper into your ear “*Muriel... In the name of Jesus, I love you. And Muriel, I know who you are even though you don’t know who you are. And I will do it, Muriel. I will finish our story. Very soon, Muriel, you’ll have a new mind and a new body, but right now, I’m giving you my heart. I am the groom and you are my bride. And everything is going according to plan.*”

Thank you, Jesus, that that is your word to us. You are the Father’s word to us. And so “Glory in the highest,” to you. In Jesus name we say it, Amen.

And now if you’d like prayer, we have a prayer ministry team in the Chapel. If you’d like to stay here and worship for a while, Jesus really likes that. This isn’t about learning a bunch of formulas and lists you can check off. It’s about a relationship with Him. So if you want to stay and sing to Him for a while, that’s great. If you want to go out to dinner, He likes that, too.

Muriel, he loves you. In Jesus name, believe the gospel. Amen.