

**BORDERLANDS:** *the district near a border, an intermediate state or region  
the space between two boundaries; an intermediate district*

## THE GENDER QUESTION

Series: Borderlands

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Scripture: Genesis 2: 18 – 25

Key sermon points :

- Your inner compass: it lies to you all of the time
- The spectrum of brokenness
- Male and female: we need one another
- The masculine soul: take initiative through self-sacrifice
- The female soul: protect the heart
- God wrote his story of redemption into the framework of gender

*God in heaven, we come to you today and we come aware that we need you, aware that we need your insight. God, your word tells us that if we lack wisdom, we just need to ask. We're here today because we lack wisdom and we need to ask. In a crazy world where there are so many things going on that we don't have a grid for don't fully understand, I pray for a divine grace today to discern the heart of God in the midst of all the noise. In Jesus name, amen.*

## THE GENDER QUESTION

Today we're going to be in Genesis Chapter 2, starting in verse 18:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone. I'll make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock and all the birds of the heavens and every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord caused the deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man." 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.

1976. Bruce Jenner was an American hero, a gold medal winner in the Olympic games. He won the decathlon, which has ten track and field events and is arguably the most challenging area of the Olympics. The decathlon winner is known as the world's greatest athlete and that was what Bruce Jenner accomplished in 1976. This launched him into the spotlight of American culture. He became a spokesperson for Wheaties; he was a famous racecar driver; and later a TV star. Then,

on April 2015 in an interview with Diane Sawyer, Bruce Jenner shocked the world. With tears in his eyes and torment in his tone, he explained that, for his whole life, he's felt like he's actually a woman trapped inside the body of a man. He tried to put language around his feelings and struggle. Just a few months later, in July 2015, after a number of different surgeries and hormone replacement therapy, Bruce Jenner was featured on the cover of Vanity Fair magazine, no longer in the appearance of a man, but with makeup and lingerie. The title said, "Call me Caitlyn." Overnight, Bruce Jenner, now known as Caitlyn Jenner, became the most famous transgender person on earth.

This has pushed the question, "What is gender?" to the forefront of American culture. How do we wrap our mind around the concept of gender? The American Psychological Association tells us that gender is: *attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex*. For the majority of human history, gender was what you would call a binary reality. What do we mean by binary reality? It means that there are two biological sexes, male and female, and that male and female are two distinct genders, with attitudes, behaviors and feelings based upon each of them.

Over thousands of years, the ideas of male and female have developed. And we live in a world now that those two words carry stereotypes. Today when you think of male and female, of man and woman, there are different ideas that culture has attached to those words.

For example, when you think of a man, you might think of a manly man, a cowboy like Clint Eastwood. "I carry a gun. I smoke a cigarette. And I never cry." Or perhaps your idea of a man is like the one popular in the 80's and 90's, the Homer Simpson man. "I'm detached. I'm not connected to my family. I'm not really relevant. I'm doing what I want to do."

There are also different stereotypes for women, such as the *Betty Crocker* woman who stays at home and cooks incredible meals. That's one stereotype of woman, but then there is the stereotype of the *Ice Queen*. "I am powerful. I am manipulative. I am clawing my way to the top so that I can have control."

In the last generation these stereotypes have begun to crumble and become less powerful in our society. If we're honest, this has been a benefit, in some ways, to both men and women. At the same time, a new American ideology has been developing. It gained strength over the last 100 years and has especially manifested in the last 10 – 15 years. This new American ideology begins with the very American ideal of individualism. What is individualism? It's the idea that you are called to write your own script, to blaze your own trail, to find your own way. It's the idea that your individual need should be primary in your life.

Adding to the concept of individualism came the idea of relativism. Functionally, relativism says that there's no absolute when it comes to morality or truth. It says that truth is malleable and it must fit the individual. These two ideas are cousins: individualism and relativism. This is the world we live in, the air we breathe, the thinking of our society.

With individualism and relativism, came a sexual revolution in the 60s and 70s. The sexual revolution taught American society that sexual expression in various forms is part of your personal journey for self-fulfillment. It said, if you're ever going to discover yourself, it's critical that you

experiment sexually.

We see these three ideas — individualism, relativism, and sexual expression — intertwined and growing one upon another. And it's in this context that the concept of gender has begun to be redefined. No longer is gender seen primarily as a *two-distinct-sex reality* — male and female — but many now perceive gender as a *spectrum*. In other words, there's not just pink and blue, there's not just male and female, there's teal and beige and cyan. There are all these different flavors of life and gender. For example, the state of New York recognizes 31 different gender identities. And Facebook has 50 different gender options that you can choose from.

Laverne Cox, a famous transgender individual, said:

Folks want to believe that genitals and biology are like destiny! All these designations are based on a penis . . . and then a vagina. And that's supposed to say all these different things about who people are. When you think about it, it's kind of ridiculous. People need to be willing to let go of what they think they know about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. Because that doesn't necessarily mean anything inherently.

Does it mean anything inherently? And who gets to decide? Is that something that an individual decides or is that something that is decided for an individual? Is it possible that male and female are interchangeable; that there are aspects of our maleness or our femaleness, or maybe all of it, that is interchangeable? Is it possible that it can all be viewed on a spectrum?

One challenge to this thought is our obvious biology. Male and female have some significant biological differences. Males have denser bones; males have 50% more muscle mass; males have 30% greater lung capacity. Studies have shown that the brains of men and the brains of women are wired differently. Women have a more acute sense of touch, taste and smell, and a more accurate view of color.

Woven into every chromosome of every individual is not just their particular DNA, but also their particular maleness or femaleness. A recent study found 6,500 genes that are different between a man and a woman. Your biology impacts how you process information; it impacts how you feel. It is not just about a certain region of your body, it's your fingernails and your toes. Every aspect of your body is influenced by your maleness or femaleness.

So what happens when someone's biology doesn't match their psychology? What happens when your biology is one way, but you're internal compass is another way, like Bruce Jenner? He says, "I feel feminine. I feel like a woman on the inside and a man on the outside." Psychologists call this tension, this confusion, gender dysphasia. This is a real thing. But how do we respond to it? What do we do? The most common cultural response of our day is to say, *it's right to make the body align with the inner compass*. So maybe we have hormone treatments or an operation. This response comes from a particular ideology, the idea of individualism that says, "I'm going to blaze my own trail" and the idea of relativism, which says, "Your truth is your truth. Your truth is malleable. There's no fixed set of truths."

## YOUR INNER COMPASS LIES

These ideas lead us to a particular conviction that pervades our culture. It's a conviction that your inner compass (that inner sense of you, that inner knower), cannot lie to you. And that you have to follow your inner compass if you are ever going to be truly free. Individualism, relativism, sexual revolution, they all add up to say, "Discover true freedom by discovering the inner you, and then follow that with all your heart. That's the best way to be happy, to be fulfilled, and to be you."

Maybe some of us have never really thought about the fact that that's how our world works right now, but when we pull back and consider the framework for how we're thinking about these things, are we really sure that our inner compass will lead us to what's best about us and who we really are? Is this true? Is it possible that our inner compass doesn't always lead us to the best view of who we really are? For example, think about the person struggling with anorexia. They weigh only 72 pounds and they're barely hanging on physically. Yet in their mind, they're convinced that they're grossly overweight. Are you going to say to that person, "You should really consider liposuction. You should really go on a stricter diet. You should stop eating as much as you do." You would never do that. Or a person whose battling thoughts of suicide, saying, "My inner compass tells me I'm not worth anything. It tells me that I should just end my life." Would you go to that person and say, "Well, why don't you go get a gun permit? Why don't you..." No! No! You would never do that! That would be cruel and heartless. See, our inner compass lies to us all the time, regardless of what our struggles or issues are.

If you step back and think about yourself, you'll discover that your inner compass has tricked you more times than you can remember. Your inner compass told you that you could have one more drink. That wasn't true. Your inner compass told you that you could spend one more dollar. That wasn't true. When you look at the history of your story and mine, we see that our inner compass lies to us all the time.

## THE SPECTRUM OF BROKENNESS

Maybe we are looking at the wrong issue on a spectrum. Maybe it's not our gender that we should be viewing on a spectrum, but rather our brokenness. Maybe we should be considering the spectrum of brokenness that exists in every one of us. Every one of us has this thing inside of us that is inherently broken. Maybe for you it manifests in addiction; or maybe for you it manifests in uncontrollable lust; or maybe for you it manifests in a thirst for approval that can never be satisfied; or maybe for you it manifests in confusion about the core of your gender. What if, rather than celebrating the shattered image of ourselves, we stepped back and asked God if there was a better story to inform our understanding of ourselves? That's what I want to do today.

Just after Genesis chapter 2, comes Genesis chapter 3. If you're familiar with the Bible, you know that Genesis chapter 3 is a big deal in the scriptures. It's the chapter where we hear about the first woman, Eve, who is deceived by a serpent. She believes a fundamental lie: that autonomy from God (being able to make her own choices, not having God over her thinking) will lead to great liberation, personal freedom, satisfaction and fulfillment. And Adam follows right along. The man just follows along and yields to her. Together they make this decision and they disobey and rebel against God. And as soon as they do it, they discover that they're naked and they become ashamed.

It's interesting that the very first thing the devil attacks is the roles between male and female. And the very first thing that sin does is bring shame regarding sexuality and gender. That is the first manifestation of sin. They're naked and they're ashamed. Their rebellion against God brings a curse against humanity and against the world.

We read the curse in Genesis 3:16:

He says to the woman, "I'll surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

This is the brokenness of the world in which we live. Did you notice that the first thing it says is there is going to be pain from the moment a child comes on Earth? Some people talk about predispositions, saying, "I think an individual is predisposed to feel this way, or think this way, or follow this path, or do all these things." This passage seems to infer that they are, and so are you; that you have a predisposition towards certain areas on the spectrum of brokenness; that every one of us is broken in various ways; and that came all the way from day one. In the very beginning, there was pain.

Then it says that the male-female dynamic is going to be corrupted. The verse says that her *desire will be for her husband*. At first we might look at that and think, "That's not a bad thing." But that word "*desire*" in Hebrew means: *to manipulate, overpower and overcome*. So her *desire being for her husband* is not a good thing. She's going to try to take him down.

The verse also says *he's going to rule over her*. In other words, he's going to use his physical strength as an opportunity to dominate. There is going to be a constant battle between men and women vying for power. She's trying to take him down. He's trying to take her down. It perpetuates this cycle of brokenness and blurs the roles that God intended.

## WE NEED ONE ANOTHER

Just before this brokenness, we get a picture of the original intent of God's plan for flourishing. "The Lord said it's not good that man should be alone. I'll make him a helper fit for him." (Genesis 2:18). It's not good that man should be alone. God creates all of the earth and on the sixth day he creates a man, a single male individual. Throughout the cadence of this story, we find God constantly saying, "It's good." He makes the animals; they're good. He makes the sun; it's good. Good. Good. Good. And then BOOM, the story slams on its brakes and says, "Not good." It is not good that man should be alone. This is important because it tells us something fundamental about male and female. It tells us that there is something central to both of the genders, and that human flourishing occurs when we understand that we need both. We need men and women. Both play an important role. Some people say, "Yes, that's true in marriage." But it's not just true in marriage; it's also true in all of life. Men need women in their life. Men need moms. Men need sisters. Women need fathers. Women need uncles and brothers. This is part of how God planned society to work: *we need one another*. And that's the groundwork in which we should begin to understand gender: *that there is a necessity for both male and female*.

## THE MASCULINE SOUL: TAKE INITIATIVE THROUGH SELF-SACRIFICE

Now out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock and the birds of the heavens and every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. (Genesis 2:19-20)

"There was not found a helper fit for him." Why would God do this? I believe he did this because he was creating context for Adam. He was saying, "See all these animals. You are to rule over them. You are to lord over them. These are all the animals, but none of these animals fit as a partner. You don't need someone to rule over, you need someone to rule with. So I am going to create a contrast between the animals and the female. I'm going to show you that she's not a servant, she's a partner. Now let me bring her into your life.

So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21)

There's a million different ways that the writer of Genesis could have recorded this early interaction between male and female. Yet he gives us this particular story because he's trying to show us the essence of both masculinity and femininity. If God really did make male and female in His image, then these are the most complex creatures ever created, and we can't do justice to the totality of male and female in a sentence or even in a sermon. But what we can do is boil it down to the essence, because the essence of male and the essence of female is captured in this story and throughout the scriptures.

The scripture says that, *first the man is created*. God puts an attitude of leadership upon the man. "You were created first. You were created to name. You were created to lead." But he shows right away that the type of leadership the man is called to is not one of dominating or suffocating. Instead, look at the very first act of leadership that the man has with the woman. What does he do? He lays down, he gets cut open, and he gives of his own substance so that she may be formed.

This is the essence of what we'll call the masculine soul:

***Take initiative through self-sacrifice.***

This is the essence of what it means to be a man — married, unmarried, old or young — *take initiative through self-sacrifice*. The essence of masculinity is not tyranny or passivity, but rather what many through generations have called *chivalry*. Chivalry. Take responsibility. Take initiative. How? Through self-sacrifice.

## THE FEMININE SOUL: PROTECT THE HEART

Then God creates woman. He creates Eve. And there's a nuance here in the original language. When he creates man, he uses a word that means *he formed the man*, like a potter would form clay. But when he creates woman, it says, *he fashions the woman*. It's a word that you would use

for an architect who is building a great cathedral, or the building of a temple or altar. That's how the word is used in other passages in the Old Testament.

So there's a difference: one was formed, the other was fashioned. God takes a different approach to creating each of them. Then he calls the woman, *the helper*. Through generations, this word has been used to oppress women, but it's actually a military word that means: *one who surrounds*.

God also says she's a helper who's *fit for him*. In Hebrew, this is a very awkward phrase. *Fit for him* literally means: *like him, opposite him*. God wants to make someone who is like him, opposite him. And that is what He does. To make her, God doesn't take from the man's head, as if the woman were to rule over the man. And he doesn't take from the man's feet, as if the man were to trample over the woman. Instead, where does He take woman from? He takes her from the man's side, because he's creating a partnership between male and female.

To create Eve, God takes something very specific from Adam's side. He takes a rib. A rib is the bone that is closest to the heart, and the ribcage has three basic functions.

- The ribcage protects vital organs, specifically the heart and the lungs.
- The ribcage supports the entire frame of the body.
- The rib cage is critical for respiration. It is one of the bones of the body that is flexible. It can move as the individual breathes. It has to or the person suffocates.

Just as we understood the essence of man through his laying down and sacrificing, now we see the essence of woman. She is someone who causes the environment around her to breathe. She is someone who surrounds. She is someone who protects.

This is the essence of the feminine soul:

***protect the heart***

Protect the heart. Whose heart? Protect the heart of a man. Protect the heart of a child. Protect the heart of a friend. Protect the heart of society. Protects the heart of the church. Protect the heart.

It's true that women sacrifice; and it's true that men protect. These are not mutually exclusive things. What we're trying to do here is get to the essence of how God made both male and female complimentary. There is a complementary dynamic between the two.

And then God gives this picture of the first family:

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man." 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. (Genesis 2:23-25)

He creates this blueprint, this order, with Adam and Eve coming together in this thing He calls marriage. They're naked and they're not ashamed. The result is they are fully seen, but they are not ashamed. So the question then becomes, *why?* Why does God do all this? Why does God

give us this unique and particular story? One obvious reason is to give us a pattern for us to understand ourselves. In this crazy world, where we're just not sure *who we are* or *why we are*, he says that the essence of male thinking, feeling and living is this *initiative and self-sacrifice*, and the essence of a female and her soul is this *surrounding and protecting of the core and heart*. This plays out in a thousand different ways in our culture, but overall it gives us this sense of, *which I am*.

## GOD WROTE HIS STORY OF REDEMPTION INTO THE FRAMEWORK OF GENDER

But there's more going on here. God did not just give us this story, revealing to us the essence of male and female, so that we can understand ourselves. It goes deeper.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

When you discover what it means to be a man or woman, you understand, not only yourself, but you also catch a glimpse of who God is. His nature has been revealed through this design. How did he reveal his nature through this design? Paul, quoting Genesis chapter 2, gives us some insight.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound and I am saying it refers to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

What if this whole thing is fundamentally about something else? What if the physical makeup, the DNA, the molecules and the muscles of humanity are actually referring to something deeper, something spiritual, something eternal? God wrote into the genetic code of a man, a desire to rescue, a calling to initiate and sacrifice, an ache for adventure, a pursuit of beauty. God wrote into the fabric of female, a longing to be pursued, a thirst for shared adventure, a call to surround the heart, and a desire to express things that are beautiful.

What if He did all this so that when you heard the most important story in life, something at the core of your being, deep inside your soul, would resonate, reverberate, and respond?

God came as a man, as a male. He put on flesh and blood and he took initiative. He lived a perfect life. He never married on earth, because he was already engaged in heaven. He embraced a life of sacrifice, giving of himself when he hung on a cross and substituting his life for a broken world. He did all this knowing exactly what he was doing. The Centurion, who stabbed Jesus when he was on the cross, making a gaping wound in the side of his body, had no idea what he was actually doing. But in that moment, he was lining Jesus up with the original design. He was giving him the same scar that Adam had. Just as God opened up Adam and took a rib from his side to form his bride Eve, so God opened up Christ and took from him to form his bride, the Church, the Glorious Church. So that we, the Church, could become a ribcage that surrounds the very heart of God, protects and supports the purposes of God on earth, and, with



Him, makes all things new.

I pray that this starts to stir in your soul today. I pray that something starts to bubble inside of you and that you begin to realize that male and female are not arbitrary social constructs that we can manipulate. Male and female are God-breathed divine assignments.

### **God wrote his story of redemption into the framework of gender.**

What does this mean for you and me? For some of us, this is not a truth we want to embrace. For some of us, it may put us at odds with someone we love very much. For some of us, it may put us at odds with ourselves.

What does it mean for us that God wrote the story of redemption into the framework of gender? Fundamentally it means that *I choose a life where I trust God more than my own inner compass.* That is not easy and that often doesn't feel natural. That is because it's not natural, it's supernatural. Proverbs 3 says it like this:

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do and he'll show you the path to take. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

For men, what does this mean? For men, it means confronting your selfishness. You might be a male, but you can't be a man until you embrace self-sacrifice, taking initiative through self-sacrifice. It means that you put your family, your friends, your loved ones ahead of yourself, consistently. It also means strangling passivity. It means looking, not to the Marlboro man or Homer Simpson, but looking to Jesus as my model of the essence of what it means to be a male.

For women, what does it mean? For women, it means facing your shame. It means facing your fear. Recently I was struck by something Stasi Eldridge wrote about women. She said:

Every woman I've ever met feels it — something deeper than just the sense of failing at what she does. An underlying, gut feeling of failing at who she is. I am not enough, and I am too much at the same time. Not pretty enough, not thin enough, not kind enough, not gracious enough, not disciplined enough. But too emotional, too needy, too sensitive, too strong, too opinionated, too messy. The result is Shame, the universal companion of women. It haunts us, nipping at our heels, feeding on our deepest fear that we will end up abandoned and alone.

For women it means facing that shame and discovering your Heavenly Father.

What does it mean for us as a community? It means that we are a compassionate, listening community. It means that we all acknowledge that we are on the spectrum of brokenness, that we all have our challenges and our struggles. And that when we meet someone who has a different struggle than us, we are not quick to condemn, but quick to embrace. Did you know that a person that struggles with gender identity is nine times more likely to commit suicide than one who does not? Nine times. This is a reality. People are fighting for their lives. It is absolutely possible and absolutely necessary that *we welcome all people*. That doesn't mean we affirm all lifestyles, but it does mean that we have open arms and open hearts and a whole lot of love for

every single person.

Church, this is who we are.

This is who we are called to be.

This is who you are called to be.

July 2015. Bruce Jenner on the cover of Vanity Fair. It was his moment of freedom as he introduced himself to the world as Caitlyn Jenner, but the pose on the cover of the magazine is strange. In fact, when the magazine came out, photographers instantly began commenting on the awkwardness of the pose. In the picture, Jenner is leaning forward on a stool, hands behind back, wearing lingerie and makeup, looking clearly feminine. But there's something strange about the image. Professionals questioned why there was such a strange and awkward pose in the photograph.

It's because Caitlyn Jenner didn't want anybody to see her hands. She still had large manly hands and so she hid them. In her moment of freedom, she's still hiding. I don't know your story. I don't know the areas where you struggle or what you're confused about. But I do know this. If you follow this idea of individualism and relativism and sexual revolution all the way to the end, until you reach your place of supreme liberty, you'll discover that, in your moment of supreme liberty, you still have to keep your hands behind your back, you still have to hide. That's not freedom. But if that's you today, there is someone who did not hide His hands, who does not hide His hands. Someone whose hands are reaching out towards you. Someone whose hands are not folded up, not hidden behind him, but reaching for you. This is what it says in John 20:

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20: 26-27)

He's saying, "I'm not hiding from you. And if you would come to me, I'll teach you how to live a life unashamed."

Where are you on the spectrum of brokenness? Our tendency in these moments might be to think of someone else. That's noble, but right now let's examine our own hearts: *where am I on the spectrum of brokenness?* I can promise you that you're on that spectrum, and so am I.

Maybe you're a man and you avoid responsibility. Maybe you're battling internally with conflicting feelings and you don't even understand yourself. Maybe you're an addict and you've buried your issues again and again and again. Maybe you're a woman and you've been taken advantage of by a man. A man used his physical strength to take your freedom and you've held on to that because he hurt you. (There's a man whose hands are open to you today. He won't hurt you like that.) Maybe you're afraid to be alone. Or maybe this issue of gender has been always a confusing struggle for you. You might say, "I don't see any easy answers." And there aren't any easy answers, but there is one true answer and it's a relationship with God through Jesus.

Where are you on that spectrum of brokenness? Take your brokenness to him.