

Ha-adam's recognition of a sexual partner

Genesis 2:18-24

An Ujamaa Centre

Contextual Bible Study

1. Listen to Genesis 2:18-23. What is this text about?

2. Re-read Genesis 2:7 in as many different translations as you have in your small groups. How do your different translations translate this verse? Focus on the words used for the Hebrew *ha-adam* ('the man', 'the human', 'the earth creature', 'Adam' etc.)?

In Genesis 2:7 there is a play on words in the Hebrew: God creates an earth/ground creature (*ha-adam*) from the earth/ground (*ha-adamah*). So a good translation might be 'earth-creature' or 'ground-creature':

7 And Yahweh God formed *ha-adam* (the earth-creature) of dust from *ha-adamah* (the earth)
and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life
and *ha-adam* became a living being.

Do you think this translation is useful for your church and community?

3. Re-read Genesis 2:18-20 in your small groups, using this translation:
And Yahweh God said,

18 "It is not good for *ha-adam* to be alone;
I will make for it a companion corresponding to it".

19 And Yahweh God formed from *ha-adamah*
every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens
and brought each to *ha-adam* to see what it would call each one.

20 And whatever *ha-adam* called each living being,
that was the name.
And *ha-adam* called the names of all domestic animals
and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field.
But as for *ha-adam*, it did not find a companion corresponding to itself.

What is the relationship between verse 18 and verse 19?

Who decides what the animals names are?

Who also decides whether there is any among the animals that might be an appropriate partner?

4. Re-read Genesis 2:21-23 in your small groups, using this translation:

21 And Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall upon *ha-adam*
and, while it slept, took one of its ribs
and closed up flesh at that spot.

22 And Yahweh God built the rib

which Yahweh God took from *ha-adam* into woman (*ishshah*) and brought her to *ha-adam*.

23 And *ha-adam* said:
This, finally, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh.
This shall be called woman (*ishshah*)
because from man (*ish*) was taken this.

Having tried the animals, what does God next do to find a partner for the earth-creature? Who decides that this new creature made from the body of the earth-creature is now the appropriate partner?

5. Re-read the whole text again, Genesis 2:18-23.

There are two emphases in this story. First, there is an emphasis on the human 'finding' or recognising its appropriate partner. It is the human creature who recognises its partner, using poetry to say: "This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh". Second, there is an emphasis on the gender and sexual identity of the two creatures made from the one creature (*ha-adam*): a man (*ish*) and a woman (*ishshah*).

Why have our churches made the second emphasis (the product) the main emphasis of the church's theology on sexuality?

What would change if our churches placed an emphasis on the first emphasis (the process), recognising that God gives us as humans the right to identify an appropriate sexual partner?

6. Read Genesis 2:24, using this translation.

24 Therefore, a man (*ish*) leaves his father and this mother
and cleaves to his woman (*ishshah*)
and they become one flesh.

Verse 24, which we have not yet read, suggests that the story has a third emphasis, an emphasis on sex. In biblical cultures it is the woman who would leave her family and move to the man's family in marriage. But here it is the man who leaves his family!

So the story is not about marriage, but about the power of love, sexuality, and sex. Such is the power of love, sexuality, and sex, the story seems to be saying, that a man might even leave his family in order to be with his chosen partner.

How can we help our churches to take sexuality and sex seriously?

How can we help our churches to understand that sexuality and sex is a God given gift?

How can we help our churches to recognise that God grants us the right to identify our sexual partner?