Ten Commandments E10

Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins and Tim Mackie

Jon: We are in a series on the 10 Commandments or, as the Bible calls them, the 10 Words. These are not rules to check off a list. These are an invitation to rethink how we relate to God and humanity in a way that creates life and flourishing. Today, we'll look at command number seven: Don't commit adultery.

Tim: That's two words in Hebrew, *lo' tin'aph*, which means to violate another couple's marriage covenant, breaking it, shattering it. That's what *na'aph* means.

Jon: Flip this command over, and it's a unique invitation.

Tim: Even if it comes at great cost to yourself, protect the covenant-marriage partnership of your neighbor as if you were protecting their life.

Jon: So why is the marriage covenant so important in the Bible? Well, the answer starts in a place that if you're a regular listener to the show, you might anticipate.

Tim: Where would I go if I want to meditate on the nature and purpose of a marriage partnership between a man and a woman? Oh yes, it happens to be a subject of much focus in the seven-day creation narrative and the Eden narrative.

Jon: Near the end of Genesis 1, God declares that humanity—male and female together—are the image of God, his representatives to rule and care for the earth. God tells them to multiply and fill the earth. But this leaves some things pretty open-ended—like, how should we multiply?

Tim: Do we just multiply like rabbits? Is that how this works? The Eden narrative comes along and paints this kind of more intimate personal portrait of God providing this specific delivering ally for this one particular human. And then you get this little meditation: "This is the reason why man leaves his father and mother and then joins"— literally, clings, grabs onto—"his wife, and they become one flesh."

Jon: Why is God so devoted to this idea of a lifelong union between two people? Well, the Bible says it's a great mystery, one that symbolizes God's commitment to all of humanity.

Tim: Marriage is a symbol of the creator's relentless focus, love, and loyalty towards creation, specifically his human image-bearing partners. God has a lot of ways that he could express his creative potential.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But that he would relentlessly commit himself to the dirt creatures and pursue them, to love them as God loves God's own self. That's what a human marriage is meant to symbolize.

Jon: Marriage is a place where humans train to sacrificially love and be devoted to each other, just like how God is devoted to us. And all of this is what the seventh command is trying to protect.

Tim: Don't shatter the marriage of another couple because of your sexual desire. But if you see a married couple in your community, their marriage is the most important context where they're learning to become fully loving human beings towards each other. Protect that, help them, honor that.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I explore the wisdom of the seventh commandment. And it's a wisdom that's not just for those who are married. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (3:13–3:15)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jonathan Collins. We're in the 10 Commandments.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: We're doing the 10 Words. And we have set the stage that all of these are for life. How do you know how to connect to true divine life? To also just to have life on the land?

Tim: Hmm. Mhm.

Jon: How do we treat each other with respect and dignity? And how do we flourish?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's what God wants for us.

Tim: Yeah. That is why God commands anything to anyone in the story of the Bible.

Jon: Because he wants us to be able to know the good from the bad and to choose life.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so that's what God's commands are all about. These 10 are really set apart, inscribed in stone, as it were.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And they become this foundational opportunity to reflect pretty holistically on: What does it mean to be the image of God, to live in a way that seeks life? So we've been going through these, slowly. And covered a lot of ground. We're in this little triad.

Tim: Yeah. Commands six, seven, eight.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And these are deceivingly short.

[Laughter]

Tim: Two words each.

Jon: Two words each.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Don't kill, don't … no adultery, no stealing.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, I guess in Hebrew, it's *lo'*—no.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: No killing, no adultery, no stealing.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so we spent last conversation really digging into this “don’t kill” thing.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm.

Jon: So now we’re going to move on to the second one.

Tim. Yup. The second one, which is, “Don’t commit adultery.”

Jon: One of the big takeaways from the last one—and I don’t know how important this will be for this one—is that this command, “Don’t kill,” is really an invitation to consider how valuable human life is. And not just human life.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Like, all life.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And that’s what the Bible—the story through Genesis—has been putting in front of us, the readers, is: just how significant life is. And that God created life, and he sustains life, and he can rule over life. And that we’ve been given the opportunity to also take care of life. But what does it mean to, like, end the life?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: God can do that.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: He has the right to do that.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: But do we? And here it just comes out, and it’s like, “Nope. You don’t.”

Tim: No.

Jon: And then a thousand questions spiral out of that.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. It's—

Jon: But at this, like, baseline, it's like, "Life is just so sacred." And then you turn that over, it's like, "How do you preserve and protect life?" So these two words, "Don't kill," open up a whole world of … it's like a sense of, like, real honor and respect towards just—not just all other humans but towards all life.

Tim: Yeah. I can tell you're still thinking about it.

[Laughter]

Tim: Clearly. You want to have another conversation about it?

Jon: No, we have to leave that. We have to leave it.

[Laughter]

Jon: I do. I need to.

Tim: Yeah. We're gonna stay in the same ballpark as we move on to, "Don't commit adultery." Two words in Hebrew, *lo' tin'aph*, from—the Hebrew root is *na'aph*, which means to violate another couple's marriage covenant, interfering in the covenant partnership of—uh—another man and woman. Breaking it, shattering it, ruining it. That's what *na'aph* means.

Jon: *Na'aph* means not specifically adultery?

Tim: That is what it means.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Yeah. Adultery, what it means is, to have sex with someone that is in a marriage covenant with another person, such that you introduce a huge rupture into that covenant partnership.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm. That's what *na'aph* refers to. I didn't draw attention to this in our last conversation. I'll do it now. This little triad—don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal—you can discern—there's all about relationships to your neighbor in the community, to other people in your community. And think about what's being violated in each of these three. The first, it's their life.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: In this one, we're going to talk about now, it's their covenant partnership.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then with "do not steal," it's their stuff.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So there's almost kind of like a descending scale of value. What's the most valuable thing to any human? Their life.

Jon: Right.

Tim: What's the second most valuable thing? Well, if they enter into a covenant partnership, such that they join their life in the closest possible bond to another human life, well, man, that partnership, then, becomes pretty much the next most valuable thing.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: And then there's their stuff. The stuff they have earned or accumulated to make their life work.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That's kind of interesting. I'd never noticed that before.

Jon: Yeah, that descension.

Tim: That descending scale of value. And it makes sense why they're bound together in the triad that they are. Because the one after that is, "Don't bear false witness." And you're like, "That's

important, too, but in a different way." These three are all about things that belong to your neighbor that are not yours.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Their life, their marriage, their stuff.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And you need to honor that—honor that in a really significant way. Okay. So let's start with some basics. When it says, "You shall not" or "Thou shall not commit adultery," all of the you's—I've been saying this throughout—all the you's in the 10 Commandments are second masculine singular. In other words, it assumes the first, most basic level of application or audience was male heads of household in the Israelite community. So it's talking, on that level, to men. "Don't commit adultery," meaning, don't sleep with another man's wife.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But what we are also told within the Torah is that when the Torah is supposed to be read aloud to the people—which Moses talks about in Deuteronomy, they're supposed to do regularly—what we're told is that all of the people, young and old, men and women and children, are all supposed to stand there and hear themselves addressed by the words of the Torah. So in that sense, the second masculine singular becomes a default for the whole community.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Another way to think about this is that, in Leviticus, this command gets repeated and developed in Leviticus 20. And it puts it this way: "If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer"—the male—"and the adulteress"—the woman—"will surely be put to death."

Jon: Jeez.

Tim: Capital punishment. So let's think: Capital punishment, per our last conversation, is the consequence for taking another human life.

Jon: Yeah, and even there, we had this whole reflection on how complicated that is.

Tim: Mhm. That's right. So—

Jon: So it's kind of shocking in a way that it would be, then, the consequence of adultery.

Tim: Right. So one whole set of questions, which is important, that I don't want to necessarily pursue, unless you think we should—maybe we should—is how and when and if these capital punishment consequences were carried out in ancient Israel. We just have virtually no evidence to work with of whether that's the case, very little. But what we can do is say, when we see capital punishments in the laws of the Torah, then we're being invited to compare and contrast, like, what—capital punishment is the ultimate statement about the value underneath a certain command.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So the fact that preserving the marriage covenants in my community by not violating them—that is so vital. It's actually as vital as protecting the human life of another human in my community.

Jon: Okay, so if you're treating this as meditation literature, I see how you're making that move.

Tim: Yeah. And whether and how adultery was assigned the consequence of capital punishment, we would need to do kind of a separate type of project to see.

Jon: We'd have to find the actual law code they were using?

Tim: Yeah, find the actual law code, find narratives or other forms of evidence that referred to this consequence being carried out for adultery, basically.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And you just don't have a lot to work with.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: And then what's interesting is, the one instance that's relevant here in the New Testament is the woman caught in adultery in John chapter eight.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And what's interesting in that story is that the community is going to put the woman to death, but not the man.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: And then Jesus says, "And not even that."

[Laughter]

Tim: So the one prime narrative.

Jon: Oh, Jesus says, “Don’t do it.”

Tim: Yeah. “The one who is without sin cast the first stone.”

Jon: Right.

Tim: Famously.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So not only does the community not enforce capital punishment the way Leviticus says—because they just bring the woman, not the man. And that—

Jon: But then Jesus—

Tim: —that feels pretty predictable, actually, for a patriarchal—right?—patriarchal context.

Jon: Right, right, right.

Tim: And then Jesus, you know, goes even against that. So this is a bigger set of issues about how the laws of the Torah have been removed, in one sense, from an actual, like, constitutional context. And they form now a literary collection through which the biblical authors are doing meditation on the issues and the life issues and the human complexities that face us in life. Like, that’s what’s being worked out here in these laws.

Jon: And so you’re saying, the rhetoric of “you commit adultery, you get killed” is saying, “If it’s law code, now you’re just, like, okay, well, that’s what we got to do.”

Tim: That’s the consequence. Yeah.

Jon: That’s the consequence. But if you leave that aside for a second and go, “That’s a whole ’nother rabbit hole of”—like, what—"how was the law code used?”

Tim: Mhm. How was it implemented?

Jon: How was it implemented? All that stuff. But you look at it as meditation literature to wrestle with and to find God’s wisdom in it.

Tim: Right.

Jon: By saying, “Committing adultery forfeits your life,” is saying, “Screwing this up is of highest importance.”

Tim: Yeah. That’s right. Yeah. Getting this wrong. Yeah. So something that I invited us to start doing back when we started going through the commands is to flip them over.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So if it’s a positive command, to flip it over to the negative. And if it’s a negative prohibition, flip it over to the positive. So for murder, that came before, “Do not kill,” flip that over: At the greatest cost, if necessary, value and protect the life of your neighbor. So here, it would be the similar thing about your neighbor’s covenant partnership: Even if it comes at great cost to yourself, protect the covenant marriage partnership of your neighbor as if you were protecting their life.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That would be a way of—

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: —equating the two.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: Protecting their marriage or creating an environment, a community, that fosters flourishing covenant partnerships is as important as fostering a community where the dignity and value of human life is really valuable. Something like that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that makes it pretty darn open-ended. Like, wow, this really matters. So—

Jon: Right.

Tim: And then it raises the question of, “Well, man, why? Why does that matter? Why is this relationship so central that these partnerships should be valued like a human life?”

[Musical Break (15:55–15:57)]

Tim: This explains a handful of moments throughout the Hebrew Bible where adultery is viewed as another one of these, like, cosmic ruptures where you're breaking the universe when you violate someone else's partnership. So the first time this really comes to the fore, in the book of Genesis, is well-known—the story of Joseph. And he's down in Egypt, and he has this Egyptian slave master, Potiphar, who's elevated Joseph. He trusts him a lot. And so Joseph is, like, you know—what do you say?—a lead manager?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then—

Jon: Head of household.

Tim: Yeah, head of household. Yeah. And then Potiphar's wife, like, starts—

Jon: Flirting?

Tim: —having some feelings for Joseph. So she, you know, wants to have sex with him and invites him to do that. And he resists her—what do you say?—her invitation. But then the reason that he gives is, first of all, it would dishonor Potiphar.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: He says, "He hasn't withheld anything from me except you."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You're his wife.

Jon: I want to respect your husband.

Tim: Yeah, I want to respect your husband. And then he says, "How could I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" So it both dishonors Potiphar, but then it also dishonors God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So there's a whole world of implications underneath that.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Why is God somehow invested in the marriage partnership between Potiphar and his wife? Apparently, Joseph thinks so.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: When David—mmm—when King David both murders and commits adultery.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I mean, he breaks both of these.

Jon: Yeah. Double whopper.

Tim: Mhm. With Bathsheba, and then he both commits adultery by sleeping with her, gets her pregnant, and then tries to cover it up. He can't. So he ends up having her husband murdered. In response to being confronted about both of those, David says, "I have sinned against Yahweh." It's in 2 Samuel 12. That's so interesting, because it seems to me—or at least, I think the thing that I would say is, "I have sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And certainly David thinks that.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But it's almost like he kicks up the value scale, even to the one in whose image Bathsheba and Uriah are made—which is, to God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "I've sinned against God by sinning against Bathsheba and Uriah." Another angle into this is—and this one was kind of surprising and forced me to think—was, this same value is underneath the fact that within the Bible's kind of moral imagination, sex work, prostitution, is viewed as wrong within the biblical imagination. Narratives take it for granted. Prostitution in the prophets is always a negative image, in the Proverbs. And this was not taken for granted in the ancient world.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: It was not.

Jon: That wasn't a common view?

Tim: No, no, nope. Nope. That is something that definitely comes from the Jewish-Christian tradition. And I'm not saying there weren't other cultures that also maybe would have thought of it negatively, but in the ancient Near East, and then especially in the Greek and Roman world, no problems with prostitution. Because the assumption is that men ought to have as many opportunities as possible to gratify their sexual desires. Like, that's what's acceptable.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And so whether that's with your spouse or with the slaves in your house or with hired sex —like, that's all okay. That's cool. You should do it in moderation. You should be wise about it, but there was a lot more freedom given to men than to women. Women were, for the most part, expected still to be faithful to their spouses, but it was definitely—

Jon: You're referring specifically to Roman culture?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. But it was also true in the ancient Near East.

Jon: So women weren't allowed to do that, but for men, it was like, yup.

Tim: Yup.

Jon: Moderation meaning, like, don't …

Tim: Yeah, you could ruin your life if you're stupid about it.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But it was viewed as legitimate.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, so I mean, this comes out in stories like in Genesis, where Judah, in Genesis chapter 38—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —you know, and he's going to a sheep-shearing festival, you know, and there's going to be a lot of drink, a lot of food. And he sees who he thinks is a prostitute. And he's just like—

Jon: He has no problem.

Tim: —"Sounds great to me."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Looks great to me." And so he just—many cultures have operated with the assumption that men should be allowed a wide latitude of freedom to gratify sexual desire. And so it is interesting—

Jon: So to that degree, prostitution as a vocation is also—

Tim: Right. That's right.

Jon: —totally fine. But you're saying, then, here, that this is an anomaly, then.

Tim: Yeah. Yes. So, back to the Hebrew Bible as the minority report within Israel, biblical authors stemming from Moses and the prophets, they have this vision of the value of human life that was unique and a genuine contribution to the development of human moral thought. And then, also, here, about the sacredness of a marriage partnership, the sacredness of sex and reproduction and then, like, sex outside of that marriage covenant is viewed as actually being out of line with, like, the weave of the universe.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that has not been how most humans think about sex for most of human history. It's not how most people think about sex in the modern Western world today.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But that is a contribution of the biblical story. And it's being brought into really precise expression—dense expression—in this two-word prohibition, *lo' tin'aph*, "do not commit adultery."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's kind of just the basic point.

Jon: That's the basic point. Can I say about the prostitution thing? We reflected in a recent series—I just love how nuanced and self-reflective the Hebrew Bible is—that when Israel gets into the land, the promised land, the first hero—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon:—in any of the stories who, like, trusts God and knows God's, like, character and then makes the right, wise decision how to, like, help Israel, is a prostitute.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. Rahab. Rahab.

Jon: Rahab.

Tim: Yeah. No, it's fantastic.

Jon: So the same book that's, like, "Look, prostitution, like, is bad, shouldn't be happening," can make you as, especially in a patriarchal society, start to really demean women.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Especially women who have resort to prostitution.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then, so the same Scriptures pull this move of just like—

Tim: Yeah, it's good. That's good.

Jon: —elevating this woman in this surprising way.

Tim: Yeah. That's important to flag, also, because it is often the case, the reasons why a woman ends up in a situation where she's doing sex work, there's many different ways that could happen. And often it's because their own freedom has been limited or compromised by the men in their communities.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: It's probably, more often than not, the result not just of their own decision, on the woman. And that's super important. And then you get the story of Rahab, yeah, who—she's the heroine. And so the biblical authors are definitely pulling a move. Like, people are not who they are on the surface.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: There's a lot more to humans than what you think is their stereotype. And God can see through all that to the heart.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Absolutely. That's great. I'm really glad you brought that up. But that suspicion against both prostitution and adultery as somehow being a sign of a human life going in the wrong direction, that assumes this baseline reflection on the value of a marriage covenant partnership. So where does that come from?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And what is that? So, similar to the last conversation on murder, we go back and then, all of a sudden, it's like, "Oh, man, all of this is really worked out in a pretty sophisticated way in the early chapters of Genesis," that I think illumine what's coming to expression here in the—the seventh command. It's the seventh!

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Seventh command.

Jon: Seventh command.

Tim: Yeah. "Don't commit adultery." So, where would I go if I want to meditate on the nature and purpose of a marriage partnership between a man and a woman? Oh, yes. It happens to be a subject of much focus in the seven-day creation narrative and the Eden narrative. And then in the narratives that follow that. So, let's take a tour of that, and then come back to both the seventh command and then, also, I think it illumines forward what both Jesus and Paul the apostle—moves that they make when they're talking about the marriage covenant and why they think it's somehow a cosmic key to the meaning of the universe.

[Laughter]

Tim: Okay.

[Musical Break (26:04–26:07)]

Tim: So, man, if I had a dollar for every time I've had us look at this little section of day six of Genesis 1, I'd be a rich man, I guess.

[Laughter]

Tim: I feel like I already am. So God says, "Let us make human in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, birds of sky, cattle, over the land, over every creeper on the ground." Then you get a little three-line poem, Genesis 1, verse 27: "God created *'adam*"—human—"in his image, in the image of God, he"—that is, God—"created him"—that is, humanity—"male and female, he created them." So we've meditated on this many times over the years. Humanity is both one and more than one at the same time.

Jon: Yeah, "human," *'adam*, that's a singular.

Tim: Singular noun.

Jon: Singular noun.

Tim: Referring to the species, collective species. Mhm.

Jon: It can also refer to a single man.

Tim: Can also refer to a single male human, that's right. Yep.

Jon: So you could think of, then, all of humanity as a single—

Tim: As a single—

Jon: —kind of—

Tim: Yeah, organism.

Jon: Organism.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. The—humanity, *'adam*.

Tim: A single body with many parts.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Many individ—

Jon: God created that.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And *that* is in his image, the whole shebang.

Tim: Whole, yep, the whole human family. Yeah.

Jon: And so the second line just kind of reiterates that.

Tim: Mmm. It restates it but swaps the word order.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So instead of "God created human in his image," it flips it and restates it: "In the image of God, he created *'adam*."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then the third line of the poem: "Male and female, he created them." So the phrase "image of God" has gotten swapped out for "male and female."

Jon: Mhm. So you could think of humanity as a single organism.

Tim: Yup.

Jon: Humanity.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Now that's referred to as "male and female."

Tim: And female. Mhm.

Jon: And then, now it's called—

Tim: Them.

Jon: —"them."

Tim: Them, yeah.

Jon: And so humanity is male and female.

Tim: Yeah, and is one and many. We're meditating on two interesting features of the human family.

Jon: Mmm. Do you think of the family as a singular?

Tim: They're both one, and they are many.

Jon: And the many has a diversity to it.

Tim: Mhm. Yes, that's right. And those many are not just replicas of each other. They are, also, themselves have a fundamental difference within them. And there's lots of differences. You and I are both males, but we're different.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So there's a difference there. And the biblical authors know about that, obviously, but they're trying to draw attention to a fundamental difference that's relevant to the thing that God is about to say next.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Which is to bless them and say, "Be fruitful and multiply."

Jon: Hmm. Yeah. How do you multiply?

Tim: How do humans multiply?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Well, it's when the …

Jon: Yeah, the two genders get involved.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. But—then also, and this is—I know this is controversial territory in our time and place.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: To talk about this.

Jon: Totally—I just wondered if I used the word "gender" correctly—that's how controversial it is.

[Laughter]

Tim: Oh, that's right. As opposed to biological sex.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So let's just acknowledge that.

Jon: Try—yeah, we're trying to be respectful.

Tim: Yeah, but also we're trying to respect the biblical authors and understand them and what they want us to see here. So what they want us to see is humanity is one and many. And the many is made up of many who are different from each other, but also there are some sub-unities within the many.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And one of those is male and female.

Jon: And this one's called out in particular, because it's vital to the role of reproduction.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. And reproduction is what's on the brain.

Jon: Here.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: “Fruitful and multiply.”

Tim: Yup.

Jon: “Fill the land.”

Tim: “Fill the land.” Because that’s the gift of God’s blessing is that a creature can be both one and many and then auto-generate more of itself coming from the ultimate one who is auto-generative within God’s own self. That is, God is the source of all life. Now, there’s a great mystery here, because if male and female—if that unity within difference or difference within unity—is a part or somehow speaks to the image of God, a cosmic mystery opens up in that. A creature that is both one and many and those many are different from each other, but the different actually speaks to how they go together. Here, thinking of, like, the reproductive anatomy of a man and a woman, clearly they’re different, but they match each other.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And that constitutes their oneness. The difference of—what? And that’s almost a paradox. The thing that makes these two different is also the very thing that speaks to them—

Jon: That makes them one.

Tim: —makes them one.

Jon: Allows them to become one.

Tim: Yeah. That’s almost like a little puzzle.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And this is set in relationship to the image of God. “In the image of God, he created humanity. Male and female, he created them.” So that difference in unity is set in relationship to the image of God. One of the ways humans image God is that we are different but yet also one.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So there you go—that’s the first meditation.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That’s Genesis 1.

[Musical Break (32:15–32:17)]

Tim: The second story that really focuses on this is, then, in the Eden narrative, where you have a singular human, an *'adam*, formed out of the—God forms *'adam* from the dust of the ground, brings it to life by breathing divine life into it. And the man becomes *nephesh khayyah*, a living being. But then when God puts the human in the garden to work it and to keep it, God says something quite surprising at this point in the narrative, Genesis 2:18: "It is not good for the *'adam* to be alone." So this is the first thing that's not good in the story so far. And this is very puzzling because—right?—Genesis 1, as it were, introduced humanity as a whole and male and female onto the scene already.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then you're back here. You're like, "Wait, now it's just a singular *'adam*?"

Jon: Right.

Tim: It's like, "Where did the two go from—right?—page one?"

Jon: Yeah. Because these aren't, like, chronological stories.

Tim: Right. And so now we're back to how the seven-day narrative and the Eden narrative are put next to each other, but they don't actually work seamlessly as, like, the Eden narrative happens as day eight—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —of the seven days. There's a whole bunch of things that don't work like that.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And the timelines are different, and the order of events are different. And this is one of them. So here it's—you have a human alone who's been given a job that a human alone cannot accomplish.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: I mean, I guess a human alone could work and keep the garden.

Jon: Yeah. Small little patch of garden.

Tim: Just—that's right. But it's going to be limited.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then when you think, "Oh, yeah, the purpose of the human was to image God by there being more than one, and to be fruitful and multiply."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Well, that's not going to work.

Jon: Yeah. You need more than one human.

Tim: More than one. So what God says is, "I will make a delivering ally."

Jon: The *'ezer*.

Tim: Which is my translation inspired by the translation—uh—the work of Carmen Imes in *'ezer*. *'Ezer kenegdo*, which we've talked about many times about the story, but just a little refresh on that right here. So the word *'ezer* is—it's hard to find a good English word—but let's just—

Jon: Is "ally" a good English word?

Tim: I think so.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think it's pretty close. Here's some other examples. When Moses names one of his sons Eliezer—this is in Exodus chapter 18.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And what he says is, "God was my *'ezer*. He saved me, rescued me from the sword of Pharaoh."

Jon: Hmm. Yeah.

Tim: So Eliezer means "my God is *'ezer*."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So, “he came to rescue me. He’s my rescuer.”

Jon: Yeah. It’s a—yeah. This is the rescuing ally, the delivering ally, kind of thing.

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Jon: Not just an ally who’s like, “Oh, I got your back, and I’ll send 11 prayers.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This is like, “I’ll go in, and I’ll pull you out of danger.”

Tim: Yeah. So the *‘ezer* is the one who brings about deliverance from the bad situation.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Psalm 20: “May the Lord answer you when you’re in distress. May the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May he send you *‘ezer* from his holy place.” You’re like, “Oh, yeah. Alright. If I am in distress and need protection, *‘ezer* is the thing that comes along.” Okay, these are just two examples. We could go through many.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The point is, it sure doesn’t mean “assistant.”

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh, because it’s often translated “helper.”

Tim: “Helper,” in English.

Jon: “Helper” feels like an assistant.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. “I will make a helper suitable for him” is how many English translations go. Maybe there was a time in English where that captured the appropriate meaning, but—

Jon: There might be more going on there.

Tim: I think there's more going on there.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: A delivering ally—

Jon: Yes.

Tim: —is, I think, an excellent English rendering of the '*ezer kenegdo*, *kenegdo*. The phrase, *kenegdo*.

Jon: I mean, "savior."

Tim: Yeah, savior.

[Laughter]

Jon: Is kind of a wh—it kind of gets into that territory.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. The phrase *kenegdo* is where you get "suitable" in our English translations, and *ke* means "like" or "as," and *neged* means "opposite" or "in front of" or "corresponding to."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So, a delivering ally who is the opposite of or who is—uhm—

Jon: Corresponding to.

Tim: —corresponding to.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. Matching.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The essential other.

Tim: The essential other.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yes. Yes. Yeah. That's exactly right. So there is a not-good situation. A human alone cannot accomplish what God has destined the human to do. So he needs—the human needs—to be delivered from that non-ideal situation by someone who is similar to, matching or corresponding to. So, a delivering ally that matches, but not matches by being identical, matches by being precisely different.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So what God does is send some—uh, what do you say?—God becomes an anesthesiologist?

[Laughter]

Tim: Knocks the human out—

Jon: Puts Adam asleep.

Tim: —with a deep sleep and takes one of his sides, one from the sides of the human. And—

Jon: The one becomes two.

Tim: —and yes, God forms the woman. So—and again, it's very similar. The one becomes more than one.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then what we're told is, when the human wakes up, and he sees, and he's like, "Oh my goodness, this is bone of my bone, flesh in my flesh. This one shall be called *'ishah*"—wo-man—"because she was taken from *'ish*"—man. And then the narrator steps in, in Genesis 2:24, and says, "Okay, dear reader, this is the reason why a man leaves his father and mother and then joins"—becomes joined to, or literally, clings, grab onto—"his wife, and they become one flesh."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So we're meditating on "the one becomes two so that the two can become one."

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So that this new unity can produce life.

Tim: Yes, it can produce life. That's right. Now let's go back to Genesis 1. Here's a little thread that didn't get tied up there, because when it said, "In the image of God, he created human; male and female, he created them, and he blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" That can mean a lot of things. If you stop and think about it, how do the animals multiply? Well, man, they just—they just mate with as many partners as they can.

Jon: Oh. Sure.

Tim: Right?

Jon: Yeah, most animals do.

Tim: That's—yeah, that's right.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So …

Jon: Is that the vision of—

Tim: Is that the way forward?

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Genesis 1 leaves that totally open.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Unresolved.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Okay, so do we just multiply like rabbits? Is that how this works?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And the Eden narrative comes along and paints this kind of more intimate, personal portrait of, like, God providing this specific delivering ally for this one particular human. And then you get this little meditation on what we recognize more as, like, monogamous marriage, here in Genesis 2:24. And I think it's the biblical author's way of going from the abstract in Genesis 1 to a more particular portrait of monogamous—

Jon: Yeah, it does beg the question, though: Why?

Tim: Why? Mhm.

Jon: Uhm. Why? And what does it say in Genesis 2? Let no man separate—"the two will become one flesh."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: There's this unity.

Tim: Yeah, there's a unity that comes from when one particular man and one particular woman join together in this bond.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Those two become one in a way that it leaves quite open-ended. Ah, but "one flesh" is a way of talking about a family bond. When Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, goes into exile, because he tricked his father and brother later on in Genesis, and he shows up at his uncle's place, and he welcomes them in, and what he says is, "Man, we are—we are one flesh and bone together."

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: "We are flesh and bone."

Jon: I see.

Tim: "We're fa—because—"

Jon: We're family.

Tim: Literally, we come from the same, like, set of great-great grandparents.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So in that sense, we share flesh and bone.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And this is—this is actually remarkable, what Genesis 2, then, is saying. He's saying, "Listen, there's all these humans out here, and you might think you're not related, although we're all related back to—all the way up the chain, somewhere."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "But this far down the chain, we have all these humans, and you're not related. You're not flesh and bone with each other, in that way. But one guy can leave his flesh-and-bone parents —"

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: "—and then there'll be this woman who leaves her flesh and bone, and they be—join together, and they become one together."

Jon: I see. Okay.

Tim: It's a great mystery, actually.

[Laughter]

Jon: So it's talking about creating a family bond.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So this might be a big distraction, but I've heard it said that maybe, at one time in human society, especially maybe in some sort of tribal setting, would be that maybe some tribes would not have the value of creating these covenant bonds. And so it was much more free flow, like, the community raised children and didn't—like, what mattered was, the women got pregnant and the children were born within the community.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jon: But like, who was sleeping with who, and who was committed to—that didn't really matter.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: And you can imagine that kind of tribe existing, and there's all sorts of complex things to do with it.

Tim: Mhm. Uh—it would be like rabbits. It would be—

Jon: It would be like rabbits.

Tim: I mean, it's how many animal—

Jon: That's like how animals, yes.

Tim: —many animal species operate that way.

Jon: So what you're saying is, Genesis 1 leaves open like, "Yeah, how are we going to do this?"

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And so why, then, this value of Genesis 2, like, a man and a woman coming together, finding this unity, and through that, then, reproduction in life, this focus on that bond.

Tim: Bond.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The bond is the thing. Yeah, because here in Genesis 2, with this little statement, it actually doesn't mention reproduction and children that come from that. Like, that's not the focus here.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: The focus is on something really special, important, that God's behind when one human separates from their flesh and bone, joins that other human that is different from them in biological sex, and those two that are different become one. God is for that, like, mystery.

[Musical Break (44:19–44:21)]

Tim: What is very noticeable, in what the biblical authors draw to our attention, is that after the folly and failure of Adam and Eve in Eden, after the exile from the garden, and after the Cain-and-Abel debacle, when Cain murders his brother—Cain's lineage, he finds a wife—like, where and how?—and that's a whole rabbit hole. But you know, seven generations down the line—Cain's line—our attention is brought to this guy named Lamech, and he's the first one who's presented as somebody who's taking human life, like, casually, for the sake of his honor. So that's screwed up. He's also the first polygamist. He has two wives, and he is a negative figure. So the narrator doesn't come out and say, "It was evil in the eyes of the Lord that he took the life of this other man and took two wives." So it's not explicit in that way, but it's the Hebrew Bible. You're just—just supposed to ponder these things.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But it does, then, set, I think, this shadow over all of these polygamist marriages, arrangements, that happen in Genesis especially but also throughout the whole Hebrew Bible, with Abraham and with Isaac and Jacob. And it is interesting—they all go poorly. All of these points in Genesis where a man leaves his mother and father and then is joined to many wives, and it always creates problems and heartache, especially for the women. It's, like, the women who suffer from these men's choice to, like, have many wives. It's really an interesting part of that portrait. It is also interesting, then, when you get to the covenant between God and Israel that the exclusivity and faithfulness of Yahweh to Israel and that Israel is not to be married to any other god—marriage is one of the main metaphors to talk about God's covenant with Israel.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Such that when Israel does end up giving their allegiance to other gods, Moses and the prophets call it adultery and prostitution.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's really quite remarkable.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Maybe we're just kind of used to it.

Jon: Yeah, I think maybe I'm just used to it.

Tim: But Moses, for example, in Exodus 34, describes Israel going after gods as prostituting themselves after other gods. Or the prophet Hosea, in Hosea chapter three, describes how Hosea is supposed to go marry a woman who he knows and has before already—it's not fully

clear—committed adultery, and to be, like, really loyal to her and remain loyal to her. And this is all becomes a symbol for God remaining loyal to Israel over the centuries. So I guess, what would be the purpose of not doing the rabbit approach? Right? "Be fruitful and multiply." Like, what is the heartbeat of this bond between one man and one woman in a monogamous marriage covenant? And what's so fascinating is, the biblical authors don't come out and say, "What's the value underneath there for the humans?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It actually uses the marriage metaphor between God and Israel to explore the meaning of marriage.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And there really is no better place than what Moses says in Deuteronomy 7: "You are a people holy to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people of his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples. No, you were fewest. It's because Yahweh loved you and he kept the oath that he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out by mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of slavery. Know that Yahweh your God, he is God, the faithful God who keeps his covenant." So this is a long sentence, but if you follow the logic, it says, "The Lord didn't set his love on you for this reason or that reason."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "He loved you because Yahweh loved you. The Lord didn't set his love on you because you were more in number. No, rather, it's because Yahweh loved you."

Jon: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Tim: He loved you.

Jon: Because he loved you.

Tim: Because he loves you.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It was actually in a sermon by Tim Keller.

Jon: Oh. He pointed that out?

Tim: May he rest in peace. Yeah. Brilliant and amazing communicator, pastor in New York, who first drew this, that the structure of the sentence is, “The Lord didn’t love you because you were many, he loved you because he loves you.” Okay, let’s go back to this, like, anthropological question.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, what is the gain, or what’s the point, when humans do the monogamous thing instead of just being like rabbits?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: What’s the difference there? And it seems like the mirror for what that means for humans is actually what God is showing in this covenant with his people, which is that it creates the conditions where a human has to demonstrate some quality over the course of a lifetime of faithfulness to one covenant partner. And the word here to describe that is the word “love.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: What is it that’s of cosmic value that humans should operate differently than rabbits?

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: What are we in touch with? What are we connecting to? What are we modeling, when two humans dedicate their loyalty and affection and resources and bodies to each other over the course of a lifetime, and not to any others?

Jon: Well, it’s love.

Tim: Mhm. And faithfulness.

Jon: And faithfulness.

Tim: And loyalty and all that.

Jon: There’s almost this sense of sacrifice, too. That’s a sacrificial love.

Tim: Mmm. That’s great. Yeah.

Jon: Because, well, I can love—why don't I love a bunch of people?

Tim: Mmm. Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: More people, more love.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: So why restrain the situation?

Tim: Mmm. So the focusing of one's love and loyalty—

Jon: The focusing on one—

Tim: —on one other. On one.

Jon: —makes you then say "no" to many other things.

Tim: Mmm. Yes.

Jon: Which is a sacrificial way to live.

Tim: Yes. Hmm.

Jon: And so—

Tim: Hmm. In that sense, it's a limiting.

Jon: Yes.

Tim: The monogamous model of marriage—is about saying "no" to most other things so that you can say "yes" to the one thing. But I think the insight is, by saying yes to that one thing consistently over a long period of time, is actually—becomes the most rich discovery of—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —of like, something of cosmic, sacred value.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's so valuable, it's set on analogy to the value of a human life.

[Laughter]

Tim: All the way back to the beginning.

Jon: It's so valuable, it becomes the metaphor by which God talks about coming into covenant with humans.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Yes, yes. This has to be why the apostle Paul sees sex and marriage as having cosmic implications. When Paul's writing in his—uh—letter to the Corinthians about why a follower of Jesus, specifically male Corinthian followers of Jesus, should break their habit of going to temple shrines and engaging in the sacrificial parties and sleeping with cult prostitutes, what he says to them—he actually quotes the garden of Eden story.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: He says, "Don't you know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her, like it says"—and then he quotes from Genesis—"the two become one flesh." And then, what he doesn't say is, "You're one with your wives if you're married." What he says is, "The one who has joined themself to the Lord"—Jesus—"is one spirit with him."

Jon: Hmm. That's wild.

Tim: So his point is actually like, "Whether you're married or whether you're not married to another human, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're married to God, and you're one with God, because your body comes from God. So it doesn't belong to someone you're not in covenant partnership with."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Kind of a lot of leaps in logic there—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —but he's making them, you know.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that's one place where this thinking comes out.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And then the other place, most famously, is in his letter to the Ephesians, where he says, "Husbands are to love." And there's that word again, it's *agape* in Greek. "Because when they love their wives, they love their own bodies." And he's for sure meditating on the—

Jon: One flesh.

Tim: —the Eden narrative, that the two are one.

Jon: So to love your wife is to love yourself.

Tim: Mhm. To love your wife is to love yourself. And then he starts talking about the Messiah and the church. The Messiah loves the church.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And you're like, "What?" Which is his model of God and his people.

Jon: God and humans, yeah.

Tim: Yeah. He quotes from Genesis 2. And then he says, "Listen, this mystery that I'm speaking about is great. Now, I'm talking about the Messiah and his people, the church."

Jon: Wait, so he quotes Genesis 2. He quotes, "For this reason, a man will leave the father and mother. He will be joined to his wife. They will become one flesh."

Tim: That's right. And he says, "This is a great mystery."

[Laughter]

Tim: "Now, just to clarify, the mystery I'm talking about when I read Genesis 2 is about the Messiah and his people."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So he's reading Genesis 2 in light of its analogy with Yahweh and his people in the Hebrew Bible. And then he swapped out Yahweh for the Messiah and his people for the church. So he's doing a whole biblical theology.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He's reading Eden in light of the story of God and Israel. And now he's reading the story of God and Israel in light of the story of Jesus and his people.

[Laughter]

Tim: So the story of Adam and Eve becomes a story about Jesus and his people. Okay, I just made a bunch of steps there, but—uhm—I think this is how it works within the biblical story.

[Musical Break (55:44–55:46)]

Jon: Okay, I'm going try to do a flyover.

Tim: Yeah. Great.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I th—I need it. I need you to summarize what I think I'm trying to say to you.

[Laughter]

Jon: Genesis 1: "You are my image, all of humanity. You're both male and female, and you're going to reproduce, fill the earth. And you are my image, reflecting my goodness."

Tim: The one and the many, as an image.

Jon: "And you are one, and you are many."

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: “Go and fill the earth.”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: “Reproduce.”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay, well, how are we going to do that? Because other animals, like bunnies, they’re just—they’re just going for it.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then you get Genesis 2, that really limits things down.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Ver—really limits things down.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: And I’m skipping over the Adam becoming two.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But once the one becomes two, this idea of the two others that need each other, one person of a family can, like, join with another person, another family, and then create this new bond. And through that bond, create a new type of family. And here, when we think about family, we’re thinking about love, we’re thinking about the faithfulness—

Tim: Faithfulness, the one to the one—

Jon: —and—

Tim: —saying no to the many others.

Jon: Yeah, like, I’m going to protect you over others. Like, there’s a special kind of bond, a new flesh, a new familial bond will be made.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: And then the rest of the Bible shows all of these situations where that isn’t the case, and it is kind of going awry. Now that doesn’t mean that it’s always rosy.

Tim: For—

Jon: Right?

Tim: That's right. In a monogamous marriage.

Jon: In a monogamous marriage.

Tim: That's—of course not. Yes.

Jon: But when you get to Lamech, and he takes two wives, and now this becomes about, well, "Wives are now my property, and it's not about this union with the other," it just gets distorted. And so polygamy becomes this distorted reality. And so then, the question becomes, "Well, why? Why is God so focused in on this?"

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And one thing you pointed out was, marriage becomes the main metaphor or a pretty primary metaphor for how God relates with Israel.

Tim: Yeah. His covenant people, yeah.

Jon: His covenant people. And that whole story is about how God wants to have a relationship with all the people, bring blessing to all the people.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And so he's going to focus on the one.

Tim: Yeah. On behalf of the many.

Jon: On behalf of the many.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And he limits himself to the one.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So there can be, kind of, life for the many.

Tim: Whoa, that's great!

[Laughter]

Tim: I don't think I'd—I—quite thought of it that way or said it that way earlier. God dedicates himself to one family, Israel, and temporarily says "no"—right?—to all the other nations, but precisely so that through what happens with the one family—

Jon: Yeah, all of humanity—

Tim: —all of humanity can experience the blessing that comes out of—wow, okay, there's something to think about there, but keep going, sorry. I don't want to distract you. Keep going, keep going.

Jon: And the purpose of this relationship is—well, we just have the word "love."

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jon: And when you think, "What is love?" It's treating someone other than you like you.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And we only have so much of that ability to do that—

Tim: To offer.

Jon: —at any given day.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: To, you know, you can't go around and treat every person like you, you would just get exhausted.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But that's the ideal.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And so this becomes like a—I don't know, the training ground, but, like, by choosing one and focusing there and saying "no" to that, there's a special bond, there's a special thing.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: And saying “no,” you’re learning how to limit yourself, you’re learning sacrificial love.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then the—still the question becomes, “Well, why?” I mean, like, that’s a lot of effort and, like—

Tim: Yeah, it’s hard.

Jon: It’s hard.

Tim: Yeah. It doesn’t guarantee that it’s easy or even enjoyable.

Jon: It’s not even—or that it’s going to work.

Tim: Or that it’s going to work, that’s right, yeah.

Jon: How many marriages just end in a lot of pain?

Tim: That’s right. Yeah. And so then, Jesus, in a passage we didn’t even look at, in Matthew 19, or in these passages in Paul, what they want us to see is that this model of marriage is a symbol of the creator’s relentless, focused love and loyalty towards creation, specifically his human, image-bearing partners.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And that God could’ve—

Jon: God is the other.

Tim: Yeah, God is the other.

Jon: He’s the, like—

Tim: And God—

Jon: —most fundamental other.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And maybe just to work at almost, like, a parable, God had a lot of options. God has a lot of ways that he could express his creative potential.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But that he would relentlessly commit himself to the dirt creatures—

Jon: The humans.

Tim: —and pursue them, to elevate, to love them as God loves God's own self.

Jon: Hmm. To be faithful to the one.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: The humans.

Tim: Yep. So that God—

Jon: Yeah, who knows what other creatures in the cosmos he could have or might have created.

Tim: Yeah—or has!

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or—but that humility and dedication, the loyalty and love, that's what a human marriage is meant to symbolize, over and above its reproductive, like, capacity.

Jon: Yeah, because what we're not talking about is like, "Is that the best place to—for kids to grow up in? Is that the best way to create societies, are these family units?"

Tim: Yes.

Jon: That's a whole interesting conversation.

Tim: Whoa, right—apparently, a higher value is a human learning to love.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's above and beyond the value of just reproductive functionality of a marriage.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Whoa. That's a powerful thing to say.

Jon: That's interesting.

Tim: Because reproductivity is really important in the Bible.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But it, apparently, in this line of thought, it's not more important than love. And maybe this is why—whew—early Christianity innovated a culture where, because love really—learning to cultivate a loving character towards any other humans I come into contact with, this was why celibacy on Jesus' part and Paul's part and in the early Jesus movement actually became one of the most honored ways to live as a human being.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Because it's severing human value from your ability to reproduce. And it is a remarkable innovation within the Christian tradition that celibacy became honored as one of the most—

Jon: Not a disgrace, but an honor.

Tim: No, as an honor. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Well, you know—I mean, the thing that we haven't been talking about is, underneath all of this is the fact that our sexual desire is such a strong urge—

Tim: Yeah, yes. Yeah.

Jon: —that just generates so much interest and focus and desire.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's just—it's so strong.

Tim: The rabbit option looks pretty attractive to most human beings, especially when they're flooded with hormones.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You know?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's a strategy to learn how to truly love.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Whether you are entering this kind of marriage covenant or …

Tim: Where you—and you focus that desire.

Jon: And you focus that desire.

Tim: Just one person.

Jon: Or then, like you're saying with Jesus and Paul, you're just abstaining from it.

Tim: Yeah, you just say "no" to it because loving another human sacrificially and serving my community, forming the—the kind of character that lives that way, that's more important than satisfying your sexual desires. Yeah. That is a radical view of human value and sexuality that the Christian movement contributed to the history of human thought. It's remarkable.

Jon: Okay. And so with all of these 10 Commandments, we've been, like, turning them around.

Tim: Yeah. Yup. Yup.

Jon: Okay, so don't—don't mess with that—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: —is the prohibition.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Don't—

Tim: Whoa, whoa! Okay, so you flip it over. Flip over: "Don't commit adultery" means, if you see a married couple in your community, their marriage is the most important context where they're learning to become fully loving human beings towards each other. Protect that, help them, honor that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's where they're working it out. Now, you might be single. And so you're working it out in a different set of relationships and in a different way. And that—

Jon: Yeah, Paul actually says you're more free to work it out.

Tim: He—yeah, yeah, Paul says that you have a lot of advantages.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But for those of you who are married, your marriage—its cosmic value is that you are learning to become a more faithful mirror of God's love towards each other. And that is really valuable. Don't mess—don't mess with that opportunity.

Jon: You're saying the person who's honoring the seventh commandment the most is, like, a marriage therapist.

[Laughter]

Tim: I said most—oh, yeah. Yeah. Learning how to love is one of the primary goals of marriage, apparently.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Now, learning how to love is one of the primary purposes of being a human being.

Jon: And of course, I guess we're not saying, there in all the other relationships and then, love doesn't matter.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah.

Jon: But there's this focusing.

Tim: There's this focusing in a marriage covenant that is unique, significant. It's difficult. Don't shatter the marriage of another couple because of your sexual desire.

Jon: Or your own.

Tim: Don't shatter your own marriage because of sexual desire. Yeah. Yeah. Don't commit adultery. There is a great mystery here, as Paul says, in the seventh commandment, something

really worth pondering, whether you are married or not. So let us not just think on these things but discern what it means to live out the value underneath the seventh commandment.

Jon: Thank you for listening to BibleProject podcast. Next week, the eighth command: “Do not steal.” It’s a command that helps us rethink how we relate to other people’s stuff.

Tim: So everything that my neighbor has is God’s gift to them. One way of thinking about stealing, then, is it actually stems from this probably unconscious belief that God made a mistake because I think that that should be mine.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: That should be my gift. What does that say about my view of God and my relationship to the things that God has given to me?

Jon: BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Everything that we make is free, and that’s because it’s already been paid for by thousands of people just like you. Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.