

Session 2: Marriage According to God (Couples Conference)

by Stuart Briscoe

Stuart Briscoe emphasizes the divine significance of marriage and the importance of commitment and accountability in maintaining healthy relationships.

Duration: 50:09

Scripture: Malachi 2:14

Topics: "Marriage Counsel", "Spiritual Accountability"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of calling things by their real names and knowing oneself when faced with temptation. He encourages building accountability and support systems to resist temptation and listening to God's guidance. The speaker references the story of Nathan confronting David to illustrate how God can speak to individuals through others. The sermon also highlights the need to guard one's heart and keep it clean, using the example of Isaac as a well digger in Genesis 26.18.

Transcript

Do you know why men always like to hold women's hands? Because if they let go, they'll go shopping. That's from that book that we were talking about before. If you'd turn in your Bible, please, to Malachi.

Malachi chapter 2. That's not really fair. I'll wait a little while. I could find it before I got up here.

Malachi chapter 2. I want to talk about making marriage work. Making marriage work. And as I was sitting listening to Stuart before, I was thinking to myself, does marriage matter? And I think it behoves the Christian community to wrestle with that, specifically at the moment, and ask ourselves that question.

And if so, how much does it matter? And does it matter to me? And if so, how much does it matter to me? And Stuart has been laying out the reasons, the theological reasons that marriage matters, we believe, if we believe that the Bible is the Word of God. And I want to draw your attention to an Old Testament passage to complement those things that we've just heard, to layer on top of them, truth upon truth, so that we all get it, that marriage does, indeed does matter, because it matters to God. If we turn to chapter 2 of Malachi, God is complaining about His people's behavior, and in this small passage, His people's behavior where marriage and family is concerned.

And He starts in verse 13, another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears, you weep and you wail, because He no longer pays attention to your offerings, or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why? Well, it's because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you've broken faith with her. Though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant, has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit, they are His.

And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourselves, guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel.

I hate a man's covering himself with violence, as well as with his garment, or covering himself with violence as a garment, putting on violence, says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. I don't know if you've ever come across that passage before.

It's Stuart coming from Marriage According to Jesus. This is, in a sense, Marriage According to God, back in the Old Testament, building upon what Stuart has already said, that marriage is a creation ordinance. Marriage matters to God, so it should matter to me, if God matters to me.

What matters to Him should matter to us, right? And so this matters very, very much to God, and He hasn't changed His mind. Now the context of this passage was that the Israeli, or the Israelites, the men, were divorcing their older wives, and marrying younger women. That is the context, apparently, of this passage.

Let me read you just a few verses in a modern paraphrase, using Peterson's The Message. Same passage of Scripture, listen carefully. God was there as a witness when you spoke your marriage vows to your young bride, and now you've broken those vows, broken your faith bond with your vowed companion, your covenant wife.

Now listen to this. God, not you, made marriage. His Spirit inhabits even the smallest details of marriage.

And what does He want from marriage? Children of God. That's what. So guard the spirit of your marriage within you.

Don't cheat on your spouse. NIV, keep faith. NLT, remain loyal to your wife, the wife of your youth.

Now yesterday, those that were here heard a little story about how Stuart and I got engaged, and he gave me the ring, and I thought some wonderful poetry was going to come out, and he just said, that's that, remember? That's that. And yet how in our 46 years of marriage those two little words have been the bedrock of our marriage, as that was that. Till not divorce did us part, but death did us part.

That's that. No argument. Unthinkable to think any other way around this.

If you have two people in a burning building, and their place is on fire, the idea is to throw away the key to the fire escape, so that you both have to fight the flames. And the problem is, people get married holding firmly to the key to the fire escape. And until we say that's that, as far as we are concerned, in this marriage, whether it be your first marriage or your second marriage, where you are now, or where you are just about to be if you're engaged, until you get married and make sure there is no fire escape key, you will not fully commit to fighting the flames.

And there will be flames, for all the reasons that Stuart was saying. Opposites attract. As soon as you get married, they begin to irritate to death.

And it's how we handle those differences that matters. So I think it's a very striking passage of Scripture that I think affirms and layers on top, truth upon truth, precept upon precept, as it were, about this whole concept of marriage. Has not the Lord made them one? Did you notice that? Is this a human institution? Or is it the Lord that is making us one? These mysterious things that happen.

I was listening to a black preacher not too long ago and he told a wonderful story and very vividly and wonderfully. And he was talking about his grandfather and he was looking after his little two-year-old. And that's hard when you're a grandfather.

And he kept up with him so long and then he just had to get himself a cup of coffee. So he left the little guy charging around the flat and he went to make himself a cup of coffee and sort of got lulled into fake peace. Because he didn't hear anything.

Of course, those of us that are grandparents know that's the danger signal, not being lulled into peace, silence. And suddenly there's this crash and so he dropped his cup of coffee and he ran into the room and there was the little chap standing among smithereens of a piece of very nostalgic, precious porcelain that had been on the coffee table and that he had not seen in time to remove. And the little guy was looking at what he'd done, what he'd broken, and he looked up and saw his grandfather's face and he turned around and he ran as far as he could.

And his father went after him and he said, I have to say that I was angry, I was upset. And he said, I just went after him and he turned around at the door, he couldn't go anywhere and he looked at me and then he said, Papa, Papa, Papa! And he ran to him, holding out his little arms and he said, of course, I picked him up and I just melted and I held him and I said, it's all right, it's all right, it's all right. Even though he'd broken something precious to me.

And he said, in that moment, holding my child against my heart, God said to me, why don't you do that more often? When you break something that's precious to me, why don't you do that? Why don't you say, Papa, Papa? And run into my arms. And I believe that when we break something precious to God, whether it be the vows of our marriage covenant or whether it be many, many, many other things that we can break during the course of the day that are precious to God, we need to learn how to make quick amends and to turn and run into the arms of our Heavenly Father and repent and ask Him to redeem the mess, whatever that mess may be. So, marriage matters to God, it should matter to me because God matters to me.

What is one of the reasons that it matters very much to God isn't just for our sake, for the man and the woman's sake, but is for the godly offspring, for the children's sake, for the children's sake. And as Stuart was mentioning, our daughter did her PhD and actually she did her work in the effect of divorce on adolescent behavior. And so in those days, as Stuart was saying, we were with interest talking to her about her studies and there was a book written by a man called Fink and he said, 20 years ago, there is a continual moral transition by accepting sexual relationships with one person at a time.

Serial monogamy, the civilized and moral way to behave. Serial monogamy is the civilized and moral way to behave. So we should not consider it at all unusual to be married two or three or even four times during the course of one's life.

Example, have a partner for the first part of your life, another for the child-rearing time, another for middle age and old age. Evolutionary relationships. In Time magazine last year, I don't know if you remember, on

the front cover, who needs a husband? And there were three single women on the front.

Embracing the single life as they look at it is very attractive to single people at this time. They look around and they vow not to make the mistakes of their single friends. One said, my mother is married to her first boyfriend.

All my relatives stayed in their marriages and they're really tough. Another said, I'm an accountant. I'm looking at the unhappiness in my parents' life and saying, I can't do that.

They're looking at their closest friends who've outgrown each other. One can't get over the husband's affair two are sleeping in the same room, aren't sleeping in the same room as their husband. Their kids know they're miserable.

So let's just stay single. And so the confusion grows as we come out of this broken nest that has been part of this society certainly in 30 years since we've lived here, the downhill trend. In this age of two mummies and two daddies, what are we going to do? We have 13 grandchildren.

And not too long ago, I was with my daughter in Chicago when her two, I think they were then eight and 10 year olds came running in from school. And one of them said, I'm just going over to Bruce's house. And Judy said, Okay, I don't really know Bruce's house.

Where is it? I don't know Bruce's mommy and daddy. And he said, Bruce doesn't have a mommy and daddy, he has two mummies. And since then, and that was a few years ago now, Drew is now 14.

Since then, Drew said quite casually, I do know a couple of kids who don't live with, who, in other words, let me start that again, hardly any of his friends have intact home situations. And amazingly, too many have two mummies or two daddies. And this was in a sort of high upper class Chicago suburbia.

And so, what are you going to do? The teacher said to my daughter one day, I'm the teacher, I'm in the classroom. I'm not going to have one kid getting on another because they have two mummies and two daddies. What am I to do as a Christian teacher in a secular situation like this to make my Christian statements and yet help these children that are in this situation? It's a mess.

And it's getting more of one. The last Sex and the City thing that was going on last year when it stopped for a little while, it said with all the laughs of Sex and the City, why, now this was the TV that asked this question, why at the end of another episode is the heart still a lonely hunter? And that caught my ear. They were debating which direction to take that show and one of them said, well, we're supposed to depict the good things about relationships like this.

And yet every single episode ends with the characters making some statement and one of them had said, my heart is still a lonely hunter. How come? She had three or four men in and out of her life. She was in and out of their beds every episode.

What is it? Because what ought to be is not. That's what's wrong. So it's God's idea, as Stuart has said, it's a good idea.

But if faith has been broken, it's a bad idea for everyone. Everybody gets hurt. God says, that's why I hate this.

There's so much violence connected with the whole thing. And I love you. And I hate it when the violence that is connected with the breakdown of family and marriage as God intended it to be spills over to those children, spills over to the spouse, spills over and the ripples, let me tell you, from my own experience, the ripples spill over and go out and out to siblings and relatives and churches.

How can someone that could say other alternatives must be right see the effects of this merry-go-round on everybody and say it could possibly be right? What are the effects of the breakdown in marriage? So it's a God idea and it's a good idea and if we do not guard our own hearts and our own marriages and teach other people and help other people to do the same, then we will be guilty of putting asunder somebody else's marriage or putting asunder our own. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder, let no woman put asunder, let nobody put asunder. What are we doing going around putting asunder people's marriages and relationships and breaking, causing to break something that is precious to God.

And so, the reasons are myriad. We all agree in this room, I'm sure, what the reasons for God's marriage, God's way is. But what happens when we find ourselves in temptation? What happens when we find ourselves with love running out in our own marriages? Where do we go? And what do we do? And I believe that we have to take responsibility for our own attitude and actions that we take when temptation comes.

You know, Psalm 51 was written by David, and you all know the story of David, and so many things could be said about David, a man after God's own heart. But one day in his middle age, he should have been out fighting wars, and he didn't. He stayed at home.

And it tells you a little bit that in his middle age, he let his disciplines go. He didn't go to the deep place where nobody goes and find Christ there and enjoy the communion with God anymore. And he didn't write a psalm, hadn't written a psalm probably for a year or so.

And he allowed himself to get out of shape, not only physically, I'm sure, but spiritually. And he was in bed by evening still. Everybody else was fighting the war, and he got up and he walked in the evening.

Lazy man. He'd let all his spiritual and other disciplines go, and he saw this beautiful woman. And what did he do? He didn't guard his heart.

He wasn't guarding his heart. Do you remember? Malachi said, so guard your heart. Guard your heart.

And he quit taking responsibility for his eyes and his mind and his body. And he didn't get off the roof. Didn't get off the roof.

Didn't guard his own heart. Didn't guard his own spirit. Guard your heart, says Proverbs 4, 23.

It's the wellspring of life. It's the wellspring of life. And our responsibility is to keep the well clean.

Our responsibility is to keep the well clean. Genesis 26, 18, this little story of Isaac. He was the well digger.

Abraham had come and gone. Now his son had followed him. And in Genesis 16, 18, he comes to an area of the land and brings all the flocks and herds.

By now he's a very wealthy man. And he finds that the wells have been choked with dirt and stones. And the Philistines have done it.

They've come along and said, well, the best way we can get rid of this guy is just to fill up all the wells. And all the cattle will die at first. And they'll die at first.

And it says, Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stocked up after his father Abraham died. And that's why perhaps in the scriptures we know Isaac best as a well digger. And the water was cleansed and they got rid of all the stuff that the Philistines had bunged up the wells with.

And the water came up from the spring wells underneath and flowed out into the area again. And the cattle were saved and the people were saved. And I don't know which Philistine has come along and dumped a whole lot of dirt in your well or somebody that you know, whom you love.

But when I think of this picture, it's a good picture. And what God wants us to do, take responsibility for cleaning up our own wells. If they ever get in that state.

And don't let somebody, some Philistine, come and stop the flow of that water of life coming up into your heart. What sort of dirt? Porn? There's an organization called Link Care in America that cares for pastors and their clergy family, missionaries, all over the world. And they tell us an enormous amount, enormous percentage of men in the ministry are struggling with porn.

This blows my mind. I know it's true. And that's at the top echelon we would have thought of Christian leaders all the way down.

Maybe it's anger. That's what's bunged up the well. Don't let the sun go down in your anger.

If you're married, never go to sleep at night without something that's really serious resolved. I don't care if you stay up all night. Put the flames out.

Get the well clean. Do not let the sun go down in your anger. Don't go to bed angry.

Unresolved anger takes off into hurt. The well gets more and more choked. Bitterness.

Unforgiveness. And let me tell you how you'll know if you haven't forgiven anyone. You'll nag.

Nagging is unforgiveness showing. Hasn't been dealt with. It hasn't been forgiven.

And so it comes up. Up and up. Over and over again.

Floating. Here he is on the roof. If only he would have thought of Job's words, which he would have known.

Where Job is asking all those why questions and saying, why have bad things happened to this good person? I've been faithful to my wife, says Job. I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully upon a maid. Have we made a covenant with our eyes? I think it's part of our marriage covenant.

I remember as a student after I got saved, kneeling down by my bed and making a covenant with my eyes that I would look upon men differently than the way I'd been looking upon them. It wasn't very bad the way I had. I used to look them under my eyes instead of looking straight in the eye.

Floating. And we have to take responsibility for this. You'd be like a moth around a flame.

Fascinated till you get too close. If you do not guard your heart, violence to people around you is on the horizon. We're not clear if this passage means there were two sins, violence and not being faithful to your wife, or if the two are in one.

But we know one thing, he hates violence when anyone gets hurt. I don't know if he hates divorce and violence or the violence that goes with divorce. But I do know he sits in heaven saying, I hate that.

Don't you hate that? As we break things that are precious to him. And yet he gives a reluctant concession to protect the women who had no rights, to protect the women. That if it could not be resolved, then divorce was permissible in that society.

So how do we get off the roof? Some of you are on the roof. Yes, you are. You know it.

Well, you call things by their real names. If you read Psalm 51, David says what you want is the truth from the inside out. What you want is truth in the inward parts.

What he wants is truth from the inside out. And what we do is try and call things by their real names. If you're a parent, I've heard young mothers say, I was righteously angry with my children today.

No you weren't, you lost it. Call it by its real name. I lost it.

And that's what we all do. And we have to know what it is to stand naked and open in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do and call things by their real names. I'm attracted to Him.

There's chemistry. Yes, He's leading the missions team. And that's my excuse, to do something with God so I can be in His orbit.

Call it by its real name and get off the roof. So we need to call things by their real names. And we have to know ourselves that every single one of us is capable of what David was capable of.

Not one of us is exempt. Let he that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Talked to a beautiful Australian girl years and years ago when I was in Australia.

She was a pastor's wife. And after I'd been speaking about Bathsheba and I called my talk how to commit adultery when your husband's out of town. And that had intrigued her.

And she said, what a strange... I said, well, that's what David did. Her husband was out of town. She knew it.

She's just as culpable as David. She came. Yeah, he was the king, but even Vashti said no.

She could have said no and stayed where she was. But she didn't. And what you have to know is that you might think you would never say yes when David turns to you.

But you have to know yourself enough to know that out of the heart come adultery and fornication. Every heart. Not your heart and not my heart.

Everybody's heart. We're all capable of doing it. So I'd been giving this talk on the story of David and Bathsheba years and years ago and she came up to me afterwards and she said, I can't relate to you at all.

She said, I have a wonderful marriage. I have three beautiful children. This is our first pastoreess.

She said, I just can't. And I looked at her and she was gorgeous. She was a great, big Australian girl, beautiful girl.

And I said, she said, murder, yes, but adultery, no. There was some honesty there. And I said to her, have you ever had a chance to commit adultery? And not surprisingly, she said yes.

I said, tell me about it. Do you remember it was a guy that came into the church. He was sort of lay leader and began to talk and I realized that there was interest in his path.

And I said, what do you do about it? And she said, oh, it's easy. It was easy. I could never do that.

I said, no. She said, tell me about this man. I said, was he like a King David or was he like King Lear? And she laughed and she said, well, actually, he was a bit like Lear.

I said, oh, that's easy. You can always say no to Lear. But wait till David moves in next door.

Never say never. You're in great danger. And I had this inkling in my mind that I should keep in touch with her, which I did for about two years.

And one day, she wrote to me, days before email, and said, help, pray, please, David moved in. And she didn't get off the roof and he didn't get off the roof and the marriage fell apart and they were divorced. He's out of ministry.

Mess. And I said, what a mess. So never say never.

Never say never. Out of the heart of man comes evil thoughts, adultery, sexual immorality, Jeremiah 17, 9. And know that, know yourself, yes, call things by their real names, but also know that laziness and loneliness are a lethal mix. And those two things are endemic in our society.

Even if you live among people, you can be lonely in the crowd. And I said, And as we are intimately lonely inside, for whatever reason, and as we allow our disciplines to get lapsed, then we will be in danger of breaking faith. So we need to listen to God.

Call things by their real names. Know yourself when temptation comes along, that you are capable of this. Build into accountability and health and people around you so that you have support so that you so that you can listen to God.

And in Psalm 51, David has been willing to listen to God. How did God come to David? Through Nathan. And I don't know how God will speak to you.

He might speak through a person. He might speak through somebody that walks up to you and say, I can see what's happening, I can't believe my eyes. Can I help you? Can we pray together? Can we talk? Nathan came to David, told him this wonderful little story about a man stealing the only little new lamb this farmer had.

And even though he had lots and lots of lambs, he just chose this one man's lamb. And David was furious and he said, he's going to take this punishment. Let me get my hands on him.

And Nathan said, you're the man. And whether God comes through a Nathan, or whether God comes through a book, or whether God comes through somebody getting to him in the end, or just the whisper of the Holy Spirit saying, this is unholy, you're grieving me, you're resisting me. Whether it is God alone that brings the conviction, it matters not.

Do we listen to him when he comes? It was a year since this event. The baby had been born. Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, had been in the grave for a year.

Job, his mighty commander, lost faith at that point when he was asked to take Uriah, sit him in the heat of the battle, withdraw from him and make sure he was killed. Job! And from that point, Job began to turn against his master, and the whole disaster in Israel began militarily and politically. Why? Why? Because he said, well, this master of mine is no better than anybody else.

And he lost faith in his king. And all the repercussions began and began and began and began. And David, yes! I've sinned! He wrote Psalm 51.

I don't know where he wrote it. Where was he that day? That terrible, terrible, terrible day. And he confronted his sin.

Against thee the only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. A sin against God. Terrible thing.

Against thee the only. I would have thought he'd sinned against Bathsheba. I would have thought he'd sinned against Job.

I would think he'd certainly sinned against Uriah, got himself killed, murdered by other people. David didn't even do it himself. And God said, yes, he sinned against all those people, but a sin against man is a sin against God, first and foremost.

Against thee the only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. And if you read all the way through the psalm, and I use it many, many times with people to help them step through the confession, the confession, and then to be able to say, cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. And the picture is of the cleansing of a leper who has mysteriously been healed, and he comes to the priest to make sure that he's healed, and he shows him his skin.

And if the priest sees that the man's skin is healed, he takes a little plant that you pluck out of walls in the Holy Land called hyssop, sort of a spongy little plant, and he dips it in the blood of the sacrifice that is there, that the man has brought. And he springs the man. And David said, you know what I feel like? I feel like a leper.

I feel dirty. I feel filthy. Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Is it possible that all that guilt and all that shame and all that muck we've been living in can be forgiven, can be cleansed? Yes, I shall be clean. I will be washed whiter than snow. And it isn't that God forgets the sin.

It's that he treats us as if he's forgotten it, as if we never did it. Only God can do that. And only God can take the guilt and take that terrible worminess that we feel and make us clean again, so that when we get to heaven, we're going to be able to look him in the eye and know that it's dealt with.

And then David said, if only that can happen, now I shall treat and teach other people differently. And I shall I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners shall be converted to you. There's been a year's barrenness, make no mistake about it.

If you have something in your heart that needs to be redressed, something from your past that you've simply brought into another marriage, you've never dealt with it, you're just hoping if you bury it deep enough, it'll go away or get better or feel different. Then there will not be that flow through your life. And you won't be able to communicate to each other, to other people that don't know Christ the things you need to.

And David says, now he's cleansed me, now he's going to restore me, restore me, revitalize me, renew me. I shall teach transgressors your ways. Transgressors like me.

I'll be able to go to people that have sinned as badly as I have and say, you know, there's a way to be clean. Failure's never final. There's a way of beginning again.

And sinners shall be converted to you. God's going to give me back my ministry. And so there's repentance and restitution and renewal.

And he prays, renew a right spirit within me. Remember in Malachi it said, look after the spirit within you. Nurture it.

Keep it clean. And David says, clean me up. Renew my spirit.

Let's get on with what I'm here to do, to be your king, to be your servant, and to win my world in my generation. And God's restoring him to service. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

You know, when these things haven't been dealt with, you just lose your joy. How long is it since there's been real joy, the smile of God, deep in your soul? A long time? Well, God can restore it. He restores my soul.

Then I shall teach. I went right to the end of David's life out of interest the other day. And if you just look very quickly with me, in 2 Samuel, the last words of David, there's a couple of interesting things.

Could he ever recover? Would it ever be possible for David to recover from what happened? Terrible, terrible thing that he did. Well, listen to these last words in chapter 23 of 2 Samuel. These are the last words of David.

This is the oracle. The word is burden. I want to tell you what's on my heart.

The son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the most high, the man anointed by the God of Japheth, Israel singer of songs. The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me. His word was on my tongue.

The God of Israel spoke. The Rock of Israel said to me, when one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth. The pictures are fabulous.

He said, I want my life to be like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning. I want my life to be like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth, clear shining after rain. Is that a picture of your life? Is that a picture of mine? Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an

everlasting covenant arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire? And then he goes on, evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, etc.

etc. And what I love about this is it tells me that God restores the years, the locusts have eaten. Yes, he does.

And at the end of our life, it's possible to say, is not my house right with God? But now, if you read what happened to David's family after he messed up, you'll realize there are repercussions and consequences to breaking God's covenants and laws. But it's a question of living well and taking the responsibility for the consequences of your own actions. And in all of that, God begins to redeem and forgive and bring blessing.

And I believe at the end of your life, you If we have truly repented, if we have truly said, I am committing myself to the situation that I'm in now and I'm going to live God-willing, God-helping, God-empowering the way you want me to, I'll be able to get to the end of my life and I'll be able to say, make me a fresh blessing. Make me faithful. I can be faithful to my wife, to my God, to the end.

Like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth. Fresh, fresh, fresh, fresh, fresh. And I believe if we get fresh people in fresh marriages, that the world will watch and they'll say, I want that.

I don't think I want that. And I've got a lot of questions about this. But, oh, I see what God can do when each individual partner is keeping short accounts with God and keeping plans together and their life becomes this fresh blessing and their marriage, for they are one, becomes a place for people to look and say, that must be right.

Look what's happening in that marriage. That's what our marriage is supposed to be, an example of God's relationship with man, of Christ's relationship with the church. Something in the middle of disintegrating society that's going to make disintegrating society say, I think that's a whole lot better alternative than what I'm going through, what I'm contemplating, what I am in.

Is not my house right with God? Well, some of his kids made a terrible, terrible, terrible mess. And David didn't seem to be able to say much. I mean, how could he? When Absalom was doing all that stuff on the top of the palace in full view of Israel with all David's wives.

Absalom got himself killed. And at this point David is able to say, as far as I know, everybody in my orbit in my life. What grace.

And David ends the whole piece by talking about evil men and saying there are forces of thought diametrically opposed to all that God is and wishes to do in the world and our churches and our marriages and our families. He advocates strength and resistance using the weapons of our warfare, not to underestimate our enemy, not to treat our enemies with benign neglect, but to realize we're in a battle. And I can tell you as a Christian leader that the devil is ever around the sheepfold of the shepherd looking for the lambs.

I can tell you that. How are we praying? Are you praying for your pastors? Are you praying for your elders? Are you praying for your leaders? Are you praying for your Sunday school teachers? Because I believe they're our particular target of Satan today. And when I look at David in Psalm 51, and I look at him in this passage in his last words in Samuel, he is praying.

These are prayers. This is the way David prays. Doesn't that make you jealous? I wish.

But he is in prayer. And I want to end by saying this is where it's all going to happen. What do you do with all this information you've got that you know you need to apply? You go to the deep place where nobody goes.

And you meet with God. Even sitting in that pew. And you say, I need to do some business with you, Lord.

You have spoken to me today. And I need to do some business with you. Prayer is the most powerful weapon that we have.

And prayer isn't something we do anyway. It's somewhere we go. And meet with the one who does the most powerful things that we need.

You need to pray. It says in 2 Peter 3, that we're heirs together, partners together, of the greatest gift of eternal life. And the men ought to understand their wives.

And live in harmony and considerateness as the women understand their husbands. And together in partnership we're submitted to God, we're submitted to each other, we're submitted to the servanthood that we're supposed to be about. Lest your prayers be hindered, says Peter.

And your relationship with God will be affected if you and your wife aren't getting on together. Your relationship in your own heart to God will be affected. Everything will be affected.

Your prayers will be hindered. But I see at the end of this, at the end of David's story, that his prayers were not being hindered anymore. And in prayer, he found the way to pray about his family and pray about his world and pray about his kingdom.

And God was using this man after his own heart mightily again. I just finished a book that's probably the only book I've ever really been excited about writing after many many books. Maybe I'm misjudging it, but it's simply my poetry and some of my heart conversations with God.

And it's called God's Front Door. And coming off Lewis saying there is a door in the world, and one day we shall get in. That marvelous quote from Weight of Glory by C.S. Lewis.

And I'm And so I sit on the steps of my soul outside the front door and I talk to God. And some of it's experiences and some of it's my prayers. But there's one I want to read to you in closing.

And I read, I wrote this. The poem, not the piece. The day our eldest son was divorced.

I ran to the front door. Sitting on the steps, I waited. And today was a terrible day.

It was dark and cold outside. And the weather matched my heart. And he whom I loved came quietly outside and sat on the steps with me.

Lord, someone I have loved is divorcing our firstborn today. I know, he said simply. Lord, I'm in so much emotional pain, I can hardly breathe.

I can't imagine how our son feels. I hate divorce, he said quietly. I had something so much better in mind.

So much pain. And then he added, if the father wills, the firstborn drink a cup of sorrow. Remember my nail pierced hands.

Hold the goblet. He helped me pen a poem then, after a time. And I gave it to our firstborn later when the dark day was over.

And he helped me put the words on the paper wet with tears. And he promised me, he would be waiting in the courtroom. Dear son, this cup of sorrow must be drunk.

It is for thee. But be sure he holds the goblet. Dear son, it is he.

Hurting one, he is your father. Saw his son upon the cross. Understanding pain and parting, know so well your loss.

Bruised was he but never broken. Dimmed the flask of the storm. He will strengthen you with power.

He will lead you home. Firstborn of beloved children, joy and pride, we have indeed. Father, hear this mother's heart beat.

Father, hear this mother's heart beat. Cradle him for me. Cradle him for me.

Father, hear this mother's heart beat. Cradle him for me. Cradle him for me.

Father, hear this mother's heart beat. Cradle him for me. Lord God, we are not responsible for other people's decisions, reactions.

We are responsible for our own, and we would step up and claim those responsibilities and ask you, what would you have me to do? What would you have me to say? What action would you have me to take? And I thank you for the restoring power of grace that you make available to us, for healing, for forgiveness. Thank you for the hope that Psalm 51 gives us. Touch us, Lord.

Walk among us. Hear us. Cradle them for me.

Thank you, Lord. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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