

# Restoring Your Passion for Christ - Part 3

by Teresa Conlon

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*Teresa Conlon's sermon emphasizes the need for restoration and unity in ministry marriages through God's guidance and biblical principles.*

**Duration:** 56:14

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 16:1-4, Genesis 20:16, Genesis 21:1-2, Ephesians 5:22-33, Hebrews 11:11

**Topics:** "Marriage And Forgiveness", "Trust And Unity"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the story of Abraham and Sarah, highlighting the struggles and growth in their marriage as they navigate through betrayals, bitterness, and forgiveness. It emphasizes the importance of trust, forgiveness, and unity in ministry marriages, showing how God can work through couples who choose to align their hearts with His will.

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## Transcript

We've got a reason to praise him. Hallelujah. He has come in power.

He is here among us. And we thank him for that. Because where he is, he's liberty.

He's freedom. He's light. He's deliverance.

He's all we need. And he's going to show us this afternoon. He's going to come in delivering power.

Because he loves us and he is for us. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

This afternoon I'm speaking about ministry marriage. Ministry marriage. I've been married 25 years.

And I don't claim to be an expert in this field whatsoever. But I do know that the Lord has given me a word. And it's a word, I believe, that is especially prepared for today, for you.

So I bring it in humility. I bring it that it can do what the Lord wants to do in our midst. There is a word that begins in Malachi chapter 2. And if you would open there with me.

If you don't have a Bible, you would want to share with someone beside you. And I'm going to pray. Oh Jesus, I do thank you for being our midst so powerful.

I thank you, Lord, for why you have given this word. It is to bring a deliverance, Lord, to your people, your ministry, your ministry families. Lord, I thank you for what you're going to do in our midst today.

Lord, I release myself to you. I thank you, oh God, that except the Lord build the house, we labor in vain. So, Lord, we look to you now to build our house.

We look to you, oh God. We declare we have nothing except you build what you build in us. And what you build through us.

Lord, we don't have the wisdom, we don't have the capability to stand in a day, in an hour like this. Except you build the house, no house will stand. Lord, we thank you today that that's what you're going to do.

You're going to build, oh God. You're going to restore. You're going to put the foundation back.

You're going to cement, oh God. You're going to expose faulty foundations. Lord, that those that live in will not perish.

But that, Lord, you may raise up a testimony of godly families, a godly seed that can stand in the generation that we live in. Lord, we're going to give you all the praise and all the glory for this. For you alone are worthy.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen and amen. The message that I'm going to bring this afternoon is in two parts.

And the first part, when we read about what the Lord has to say to his ministry, to his priests concerning marriage, is when the marriage has reached a very arresting point. When ministry marriages get to a point where God can no longer restrain himself, but he must speak and he must say a word about it. Sort of when a marriage gets to the crisis point where God, to get our attention, has to paint it in the words he must use.

He's saying that what he's describing in Malachi is what happens to marriages in ministry. When it's built, that marriage, it moves away from the foundation of Jesus Christ. And then we're going to look into the life of a godly, God-fearing couple who almost lost everything they had concerning their marriage, except the Lord rebuilt their house.

And starting in Malachi chapter 2, verse 1, it says, And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. And so God tells us very clearly in Malachi 2 that this whole chapter is for the priests. This is a commandment for you.

He reminds them in verse 5 that my covenant was with him of life and peace. God says, this is my plan for you. And he said in verse 6, the law of truth was in his mouth.

He walked with me in peace and did turn many away from iniquity. He said, for the priests' lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Then in verse 8, he tells us clearly that ye are departed out of the way, and ye have caused many to stumble at the law, and ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi.

And the remaining verses up until verse 11 outline what God's grievance is against his priests. But then in verse 11, it's like he widens his horizon now, and he's saying Judah. He's now talking not just to the pulpit, but the pew.

He's saying there's something now that's prevalent. There's something that has been coming forth out of a ministry now, that has moved away from my foundation and my concept of what a godly marriage is, what a believer's marriage should be. And he said now it's spilled over into the pew.

And he talks now, he widens it to Judah. And he says, Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the holiness of the Lord, which he loved, and has married the daughter of a strange god.

Now in these verses, the Lord is telling us clearly, I'm now going to address people who love me. I have a word for those that love me and have known me, have walked with me. But now there is something I must say to those that love me.

He says, you have married the daughter of a strange god. Simply put, he's saying he has joined himself to another love. He's saying to the priests, he's saying to the men of Judah, those, that special tribe that Messiah himself will come forth.

He says, you've married yourself to another love. There is something first in his life. And it has no right, it has no right, it has no, that priority should not be there.

And he says it is defiling him. And this daughter of a strange god, beloved, we heard it so powerfully this morning. But the Lord here is referring to ministry.

It is referring to love of reputation and fleshly ambition. To the power and the love of money, to sexual fantasies, everything that has captured a man's heart and has supplanted his wife. Everything that now rules his mind and his spirit, where she should have had that first place and that priority, something other has.

He says you're married, you're joined with it. And in verse 12, it says the Lord will cut off the man that doeth this. He's saying that him that offereth an offering under the Lord of hosts, I'm not going to accept it.

And because this man loved the Lord, because this man has a history with the Lord, it tells us in verse 12 that there's an acknowledgement, in verse 13, sorry, when God begins to reprove him and begin to show that there's another love, another something gripping your mind and heart and spirit, this man is able to acknowledge it because the Lord is in his life. In verse 13, he says, and this have ye done again. He says you've covered, covering the altar of the Lord with tears and weeping and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, receiveth with good will at your hand.

God is saying there's a man, there's a ministry that loves me and I'm reprovng them. And in the verses that went off before, God detailed what his grievance was. And so this man comes to the altar and he begins to cover the altar with his tears.

But the Scripture says that there is this seeming repentance has no relief. There is a repentance, but there seems to still be a barrier. And beloved, that's how God is getting this man's attention very deeply.

He's stopping this man because as far as he knows, he's doing everything he knows to do to clear what is the barrier between him and his God. And then he cries out and he's saying, yet ye say, why? Why, God, is there this barrier? Why does my repentance seem to have not found its mark? Why do I still feel there's something unsettled? And verse 14 says, yet ye say, wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously. Yet she is thy

companion and the wife of thy.

You have dealt treacherously with the wife of thy youth. Treacherously, you have defrauded her of your heart companionship. You have defrauded her of her rightful place, and another marriage is in your heart.

You know that word treacherously means betrayed secretly and deceptively. It means your heart does this secretly. God's saying, I see that heart, but I see that secretly in it.

That what she needs to thrive on, you have withheld. She is thy companion. The Lord said, I gave her to you as a companion, and that word companion means knit together.

That means that I've taken two, and it's in my heart that they be knit together, and that you do not live in a lonely marriage. But she is thy companion, and my heart is that I knit you together. But he's saying secretly, deceptively, you are severing what is to be knit together.

In that deception, you claim, I don't know what is going on with this woman. But verse 14 says, the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of thy youth. And you can claim ignorance.

You can claim you don't know what's going on, that you don't understand her. But God says, I'm taking up her offense. God's saying, it's the wife of thy covenant.

Where covenant, where I gave myself to you, in my giving myself to you, I covered your weakness. And I said that your enemies will become my enemies, where the strong gives to the weak. She is the wife of thy covenant, and your weaknesses are to be covered by each other's strength.

But he says that you have despised her weakness, not regarding your own. You've broken covenant. Says, I'm taking up her offense.

We can hear the cry of so many today, Lord, yes, yes, that's true. I have been busy. I have been preoccupied by the demands of ministry.

God says, no, you have shut her out. You have broken covenant, and it's a light thing to you. You won't regard it.

You won't look at it. You won't deal with it. You won't see what I'm trying to show you.

But he's saying to his ministry, it's a light thing to you. And there he says in verse 15, therefore, take ye heed to your spirit, and let none of you deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. And then it tells us why.

It says in verse 16, for the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away. That word putting away says that God hates the casting away. God hates the giving up on.

God hates the pushing away from, the forsaking. God hates the violence of the separating that has to happen. When your companion, that that I've knit together, you are separating now, and you won't own up to it.

You won't face it. You'll cover it. You'll call it by another name.

You'll say it's ministry. You'll say it's busy. But I see another thing.

God's saying, I'm bringing it before the eyes of my ministry. He says, take heed to your spirit, that you don't deal treacherously. You can't deceive me.

God's saying, I will not receive your offering anymore in verse 13, except that this begins to be made right. Except that I can begin to open your eyes and show you what I see. Except that you stop pretending it's just her.

Verse 17. The last line of that says, where God gets weary of words, there's a cry. The last few words of verse 17 of Malachi 2. Where is the God of judgment? And beloved, in this I hear a cry.

This time I hear the cry of a wife. Where she knows that nothing is coming to light. There are things she knows there's a separating.

She knows that there has been a betrayal of sorts, but when everything's covered, when everything is done in the name of ministry, when everything is done, couched in that, what can you say? There's nothing you can say, but I tell you, beloved, the battle becomes not words, but the battle becomes bitterness. When a defiling root of bitterness begins to take hold and spread. Where that bitterness many times becomes contempt, and it's hard for her to hear her husband preach.

Where the issues that is between them is no longer the real issues. Where the husband can often say, you know, my wife has a very limited spiritual life. My wife gets easily sidetracked.

Or she can say, my wife loves the Lord, but she's so very easily offended. Beloved, it's because the spirit in husband and wife has been separated one for another. And God says, I cannot build my church in separation.

I do not bless disunity. I do not come apart where there has been a tearing apart. He says, my blessing comes down and I work in and I work through those that say there has to be, as Christ loved the church, a joining together where the two become one.

Oh, and so beloved, I feel today that God wants to show us how a marriage that ends up looking and being described in Malachi 2, when it comes to that desperation point where a wife now rooted with a bitterness that seems to focus on what not the issues are, but she can't really, she can't say what's going on because there's treachery. There is a no brain to the light. What's going on in the husband's mind and spirit will not be admitted to.

She's been displaced. She's been replaced. God says, I see it.

I'm going to judge it. And how does a relationship get to that point? Well, beloved, I believe that that relationship found in Malachi 2 is first described and first shown in Genesis 12, if you would turn there with me. This marriage of Malachi 2 has its roots in Genesis 12.

I want to talk to you about the journey, the marriage journey, the hidden journey, although it is embedded in Scripture, it's here. The journey of a very godly couple. The journey of a called man and a called woman.

A journey of those that God loves and God brought together sovereignly, that he could use their lives for his glory, that they could start something in their generations that would affect the lives of generations through them. It's the life of Abram and Sarai. And in Genesis 12, it tells us that God calls this man at this

point called Abram.

God gives him a tremendous promise, unlike any promise he's ever given to any man in the Bible before his time. And he says, separate yourself and your family. I'm going to take you out of where you have lived, and I'm going to bring you to a new place.

I'm going to reveal myself to me. You of all people are going to be a chosen people, and you, Abram, are going to be a father of faith. So typifying, so speaking of a pastor of a congregation.

The spiritual leader of the group, the father of faith. The father of faith to many that sit under his ministry. And God says, I'm calling you out to this man, Abram.

I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to make you a great name. And he obeyed, and he went into the land of Canaan.

And God says, everywhere you look, everywhere the feet of your feet trod, that's going to be your land. And it's going to be your children's land. It's going to be your seed land.

And that was incredible to him. And it was a direct word, and it was an incredible word to him. At 75 years of age, no child, and yet God's saying, I'm separating you to myself, and I'm going to teach all the world through you what faith looks like.

And through you, I'm going to raise up a godly seed, and it's going to bless all the nations of the world. And so Abraham sets out to the land of Canaan with this incredible word. And, beloved, the word creates faith.

And the Bible says that he believed God, and it was accounted for him for righteousness. And he travels into this land of promise. And, beloved, he was given the word.

And it's his job. He must communicate it. Because those that are around him, his wife and his family and those that follow him, they only have his word.

They did not receive a direct revelation. They don't know this. And they're depending on him and his word.

He's God's word to them. He's God's revelation to them. And so they go into the land of Canaan.

And after there, as all true faith deposited by God, what happens to true faith is that it gets tested. And the Scripture tells us that a grievous land rises in the promised land. A grievous famine.

And Abram journeys south. And he is now, we have to remember, beloved, that he is young in faith. Though 75 years old, he is still young in faith.

And this tremendous test of his faith comes up. Because everything he owns and everybody connected to him and all those he has loved has uprooted themselves and now by faith are following him to the faith land. And now in this faith land, something that surprised him, something that he could never see coming, a grievous famine comes into this promised land.

And I can begin to understand maybe some of the confusion of, God, you've led me here and this? Because there seems to be no sustenance, no provision, it seems, anything but the promised land. So the Scripture tells us he picks up everything and he goes south. And when he gets there, the Scripture tells us

when he enters Egypt, he says to his wife in Genesis 12 and verse 13, he says to her, when we enter here for my sake, he says, say you are my sister.

He says that it may be well with me and that my soul shall live. Say you are my sister. And she does.

But beloved, I want you to understand what a sea bed of distrust and confusion is happening because of this law. Because he is now man, God's man. He's God's man that represents a seed of great and mighty faith to come.

But now he turns to her in a foreign land and he says, I want you to lie for me. And we're going to trust that that lie is going to keep us safe. He who is now the man of faith has said, now I want you to lie for me, that it will be well with me, that it will go well for me.

Because you see, my ministry is at stake and my call is at stake. I don't understand what's going here. And we've got to keep faith.

We've got to make this look good. And I can't be taken in this. I'm the indispensable one.

I'm the one with the call. So I want you to say that you're my sister. He's saying, I want you to deny the relationship we have.

He's saying, when you call me sister, when you are called sister to me, you know, beloved, a sister means someone you lead around and give away to another man. Deny the relationship. Don't say that you're my wife, that you're the one that I am committed where I have to pledge my life for your life.

Don't put me in that position. Say you're my sister, that it may be well with me. Beloved, I can begin to sense the incredible fear and confusion in this woman.

God, are you speaking this to this man? I'm following and I'm trusting and he's all I know of faith. That's the only word I have. And he says if we're to go into this foreign land and that I'm to lie and then I'm to make myself vulnerable and unprotected.

All right, I will. And I don't believe that Abram was absolutely intentional in making her so vulnerable. I think he was absolutely oblivious to the message he was sending her and he had to have been blinded to the real danger he was putting her in.

But he put her in there because his first thing, his first focus was in self. His first protective instincts were for him and his ministry and his reputation and all that God had entrusted to him. And now all he could see that that was in jeopardy and that which he was supposed to commit it to protect, that which was dependent on him, he offers it first.

And the scripture tells us that she was taken into Pharaoh's house. She was taken into Pharaoh's house, Genesis 12, 15. Pharaoh's house.

Think with me now. A place of fear. A place of insecurities.

A place of betrayal. A place where Abram was not at her side. A place where faith seemed so far away from you and your understanding of faith.

A place where somehow you feel that in the building of this ministry where you need to be forsaken, where you need to deny the true relationship that you have, where you have to call yourself sister, where you begin to get the message now, I'm just one of a few to keep this show on the road. Lie. Keep up the front.

Abraham's telling her, I need a sister right now, I don't need a wife. I don't need you, I need what you're not in order for me to stay safe. I need you to be someone else.

There is a pressure to be what you are not, Sarai. For my sake. For what we're about.

For our growing ministry. For the call of God. And beloved, this insensitivity and this selfishness early on in a ministry where the wife is taken to Pharaoh's house is the seedbed of much heartache, much distrust, much betrayal in a marriage.

Well, the scripture tells us she's rescued from Pharaoh's house. And it goes well with Abraham. He's blessed.

And I believe, oblivious to the trauma, he has no idea what has happened in his wife's spirit. You see, it all worked out well for him. When we read in the scripture, he was blessed by Pharaoh and he returned back to Canaan land.

But beloved, I tell you something. When she returned from Pharaoh's house, there was a lack of trust in the husband's words. There is a fear built into her.

He was not the one abandoned and forsaken. He was not the one that got the subliminal message where she really was in his heart. Where she really was in this ministry.

She came out completely different woman than when she went in. She read him all right more than he realized. And beloved, she came out with fear and a desire to control.

I'll show you that in a moment. She's now going to have to try to control things because she might be sent back there. Because that lack of trust that produces fear always produces the heart of the woman, a desire to control.

If you won't take care of me, I'll have to. Beloved, let me put this question to you. What if she liked it in Pharaoh's house? What if she liked the makeup and the perfume and the exotic dress? What if she came out of Pharaoh's house with a new focus? A new idea? But you know, it was very confusing because they came back out.

And it looked like there was no harm done. But beloved, she takes Hagar out with her. And Hagar represents everything that is brought into a marriage when betrayal and loss of trust and pride begin to weave its way into the bedrock of the relationship where the unspoken things that are there and are real but never dealt with begin to happen in a marriage, begin to happen in now a wounded marriage.

And Hagar becomes part of the marriage. Beloved, that's crowded. Three in a marriage is crowded.

Hagar is the contention that comes in. But she's not that easy to see, Hagar. She's just the servant.

She's not that easy to detect right away. She's in the background, but unspoken, wrapped around Hagar. Because of that presence and what she symbolically means in a ministry marriage is that she ends up being a plan.

She ends up inserting herself into that marriage, and she seemingly can give what's needed. Because Sarah's getting the message because of the words that Abraham is speaking, this man of faith, she gets the message. Now, I know what it is.

This ministry needs a son. This ministry, I'm hearing it, needs a son. And I don't know why God is withholding a son.

And I can't give what this ministry needs. So we'll have Hagar. And she'll be the person I'm supposed to be.

But beloved, the wife's insecurity is deepening. And she becomes needier. She becomes, she gets easier to push away what she's needing.

And now the flesh can begin to dominate this marriage. The anger and the accusations and the seething resentments, the selfishness, the desire to escape, the two solitudes being built up, living under the same tent, the wild schemes will take Hagar. Here, here's a solution.

Abraham agrees with it, and you can feel the contempt. And Sarah, of course, he'd agree with that. And oh, what happens now is there's an Ishmael born.

And all that Ishmael represents, when the flesh begins to take over the plans of God, when it tries to interpret faith for us, when flesh tries to lead us in the ministry, when flesh from both sides now are battling, and what seems a call on our lives now becomes this incredible, inscrutable journey where there is this anger and these resentments and these things being built up, where a child is now born and it all represents to Sarai is her barrenness, but all the while this couple is leading the flock, the group, through the land. Here's the stress of a public marriage. You know, beloved, we think we can handle Hagar.

Sarai thought she could handle Hagar. She's just a servant. But you can't control her, because she's not supposed to be in the marriage.

And in a public marriage, when you live life in the fishbowl, where you try to deny that she's there, where you try to deny the relationship and the fruit that it's bearing and what's coming into your home, that you never intended to be there, but now it's there. And you cover and you cover and you cover, because you live in a fishbowl and it's a public marriage. And so layer upon layer is built up and the issues are never really dealt with.

Because if they had, beloved, I'll tell you, Abraham would never have fathered Ishmael, had he understood. He would have said, God has promised me a son. Let us believe God.

It's very difficult in a fishbowl, beloved, to watch Ishmael grow up while your husband is preaching faith. Sarai would not have offered Hagar if she had realized how insecure and bitter the presence of this woman was. And so the complaining started.

And what's spoken about in the issues brought forth are never really the issues. But beloved, God has his hand on this one. God chose them.

The call has not changed. The word still stands. God will be faithful.

And I believe that in Genesis 16, 5, we begin to see something that's happened in this marriage. And all of a sudden, I believe that Sarai, finally, after living years in this marriage and living with Hagar and the

bitterness that is rooted in her now and is bearing not just the root but the fruit of bitterness touching everything around her. Scripture says she explodes in frustration and despair.

And she says, the Lord judge between me and thee. She comes to Abraham one day and the contention between her and Hagar has now got to the unbearable point. And beloved, the name Sarai means hostile contender.

Hostile contender. This is what this marriage has brought her to now. This once beautiful woman is now a hostile contender and she doesn't even know why.

That name Sarai means dominator. And there is a part that she feels she needs to control and manipulate and she doesn't even know why. And finally, in her anger and her frustration, she blurts out to her husband, the Lord judge between me and thee.

I say, beloved, that was an incredible wake-up call to this. Why would God have to judge between us? What is going on? What is between us? Why does God have to be for one or the other? Aren't we supposed to be together? Yet I believe her words had that ringing, stinging point. The Lord judge between me and thee.

Beloved, I believe it was a dawning to him how deeply divided this marriage was. But this was a man of faith that God had truly called. And in Genesis 17, the Lord appears to him again.

And it may just have been at one of the lowest points of his life. He's now living with an Ishmael. He's living with a hostile contender.

Yet he knows God's called him. He knows he didn't make that up. He knows there's a call.

He knows God has appeared to him. God has spoken to him. And in Genesis 17, God appears to him again.

And he tells him in verse 5, he says, My covenant, Abram, is with you. You shall be the father of many nations. And the Lord changes his name from Abram to Abraham.

And he speaks of the covenant that he is, that they are in. I'm going to cover your weakness, Abram. Trust me.

He speaks about the circumcision and the cutting off of the flesh. He's saying, You trust me, Abraham. I know I've got a Holy Ghost knife.

I know how to remove the flesh. Do you trust me? He says he speaks to him of his seed. And then God says something incredible in verse 15.

He speaks of his wife. God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai, thy wife, thou shalt not call her name. Sarai, hostile contender, one who wants to dominate.

But Sarah, queen, noble birth. Princess Sarah shall be her name. And I'm going to bless her, he tells us in verse 16.

And you're going to have a son of her. And then Abram fell on his face in verse 17. And there again is that promise of the son.

And he cries out in verse 18. He says, Oh God, oh that Ishmael might live before you. Lord, do you need a son? I have a son.

If the issue is the son, you've given me a son. Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. God tells him in verse 19.

No, Abraham. My plan, my promises go through Sarah. My call, my plans, my promise fulfilled to you goes through her.

You don't bypass her. Your ministry, your wife are not two separate issues. She's not a sidebar.

She's not a side issue to your ministry. She's never independent of your ministry. Beloved, ministry is not something we use.

Ministry is what goes through us. It's Christ formed in us and then through us. And Abraham, all the promises I made to you go through her.

God and his promises and his call to us as married ministers runs right through our marriages together. Ephesians 5 says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Ephesians 5 says, Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

This is a great mystery. But I speak concerning Christ and the church. He's saying that our marriages on the earth in the New Testament are to be mini-churches.

Our marriages are to be mini-churches. That when people look into our marriage and see what we have, they see Christ and the church. They see that love.

They see that respect. They see that honor. They see that unity.

And that is our testimony. And if we separate in our marriages, we've separated ourselves from the testimony of Christ. Now Abraham, with this renewed promise, he now has no hope in the flesh when God appears to him at age 99.

And I believe now he has a new appreciation from that word that God has spoken to him about his wife, about his ministry, about his seed, about the circumcision. He's now a man with his eyes open. And his faith now, he has no more confidence in the flesh because the flesh can do nothing for him.

He's seen what the flesh can do. He saw where the flesh takes him. He saw how it corrupts his ministry.

He saw how it's ruining his marriage. And now Abraham, with a faith burning bright, turns away from the flesh. And the Lord appears to him in Genesis 18 and in the form of three men plainly tells Abraham and Sarah in a year they would have a son.

And in verse 14, Sarah laughs when she hears this news in Genesis 18. And she says, and when they hear her laugh, it is the Spirit of the Lord speaking to her, and it rebukes her, and it says, is anything too hard for the Lord? And I believe now Sarah herself is receiving that stinging word, that one that's able to cut right to the joint and marrow, right to the thought and intents of the heart. And God is speaking to her, Sarah.

I've given you a new name because I have something. I'm speaking over your life if you can receive it by faith. He says, is anything too hard for the Lord? And I believe, beloved, that this marriage looks like it's turning a corner.

I believe on one way it's Abraham's spirit is turned to his wife. He now knows that she is to bear the son, the promise. There's a new understanding of her.

There's a new love and respect for her. There's a new turning to her in his spirit, and she would have to know that. And Sarah, with a new name and a new role, I can see as if this marriage now is seemingly put on a firm foundation.

But, beloved, after they appear to them in Genesis 18, God and his representatives, we don't hear from them again until Genesis 20. We pick up the story in Genesis 20. And in Genesis 20, once again, the Scripture says, Abraham journeyed south again, out of the promised land.

Goes south, meets another king. And when it started, this whole thing starts up again. He says to her, say you are my sister.

That's what happened, and the Scripture says, the king sent and took Sarah. Beloved, I believe now something dark has taken hold of Sarah's spirit. I'm going to prove that to you in Genesis 20.

Something dark is taking hold of this woman now. It looked like a turn in this marriage. It looked like some things were getting resolved in this marriage.

It looked like now there was an understanding and a light coming into this marriage. But now we have Genesis 20. And this time something very dark is happening to this woman.

And the Scripture says that, in a dream, God reveals to Abimelech that the woman he has is the wife of a prophet. You have the wife of my man, and you are to release her. And so he does.

But a very interesting verse in Genesis 20 is 20:16. Because as this king Abimelech releases Sarah to Abraham, he blesses Abraham. And then he says in verse 16 a word to Sarah directly.

And he says to her, Unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver. Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other. Thus he was reprov'd.

Beloved, when I read that Scripture, I was stopped in my tracks. God, surely you can't mean at this point that Sarah is to be reprov'd. Isn't this after one more journey south again? Out of that land of faith? Isn't this man blowing it one more time? God, why is it that Sarah is reprov'd? What is the rebuke? What is the reproof? Why to her? Why now? It's because, beloved, something is getting a hold of her heart.

There is a bitterness that was never dealt with, a deep-seated bitterness that wanted to spring up. And, beloved, when bitterness is not dealt with, when it is allowed to stay rooted in the very core and fabric of who we are, it turns to a hardened heart. And I could see now when she was taken into Abimelech's court, I could see something rising up in this woman now.

It's like, oh, no, Abraham, not again. I'm never trusting you again. I will never trust you again.

I don't care what you say to me. I can't believe I'm back here. It's like nothing has changed.

God has given us such great and precious promises. God has promised you and me a son. God has said every word he ever said to you would come through me and us.

And you've given me away again. And now I'm open again and vulnerable. And when she was brought back, there was a hardness in her, a decision.

And the Scripture, God knowing that, and loving this woman, and loving this man, the Lord speaks to her and reproves her. And his word to her is, I've changed this man, Sarah. He is going to be a covering to you.

He is a covering to your eyes. He is a covering unto all that are with thee and with all other. I have changed this man.

Yes, he will make mistakes. Yes, in trying to find me and my will in this ministry, and what have I entrusted with him, yes, he will make mistakes. But I tell you something, I have worked in his heart.

I have changed that man. And the word was to her, you are to forgive him and trust me. He's saying to her, forgive him, Sarah.

He's my man. You must take your hand off his throat, and you must take your hand off the pen that writes every grievance, because I'm going to do a work in you now. I'm going to expose that root of bitterness that has got a hold of you from where? What's been denied, I have seen, I know.

I'm here to defend you, but I defend you first by exposing the root. Beloved, bitterness is the only sin in the Bible that is described as having a root. And when it gets down deep, and it begins to spring forth and have branches, it's so defiling.

And every bitter life, every life that it touches, it begins to defile. It asks everyone to eat of its bitter fruit. That's all it can offer those around them.

And say what you like, and pray like you like, and do all you have to do. There is still no denying the taste of bitter fruit. It can't be stomached, and it can't be hid.

And God's saying, Sarah, I love you so much, but I say you must forgive him. You must forgive him. You must let me go down deep.

I have done a work in his heart. I'm not asking you to trust him. I'm asking you to trust me.

And I'm telling you that he's called, and I've called you together, and I've ordained that life come through you, and I've ordained that life come through you both. But you must forgive him. You must take the sword out of your spirit.

And the scripture says she took the reproof, because in Hebrews it says that Sarah was given strength to conceive. She was given strength to do what she could never do in the natural. She was given strength to bear life, because she took that reproof, because she heard that word, that my call on you, Sarah, is not to be a defiled, bitter woman.

I know the beginning from the end. I know the reason. I know the betrayal.

I know the seed. I know it all. But also know I've called him, and I've called you, and I've ordained that life and true faith be shown through you and in you as a couple.

And, beloved, she heard, and she took that sword out of her spirit. She let the Lord minister to her fear. She called her husband, Lord.

There was no need to manipulate and control for fear any longer, because she was reprovved. She was saying, God, I'm going to cry out to you. Beloved, when something is a root, you know, many times it's not just a one-time dealing.

If husbands today are dealing with a bitter wife, you need to let her pour out her spirit. You need to hear one more time what it was like in Sarah's house. But as you listen to her, and you give her that tenderness, and you hear her, God will work through you.

God will minister through you to her. And God will allow her to take that sword out of her spirit and break it over her knee. And God will begin to bring life.

She will begin to bear life. Together you'll begin to bear life. She chose life.

She was given life, and she gave life. In Genesis 21, it says, And the Lord visited Sarah as he said. And the Lord did unto Sarah as he was spoken.

And when she cries out, when God begins to reprove her and she says, That's me, I see how the seeds of this defiling thing have gotten into me. And God, I don't want it. And God, you're going to give me the grace to fully forgive, a deep forgiveness.

God, you're going to give that to me. God, open both their eyes, beloved. God, open both their eyes.

For his glory. There are many husbands today. You would have to say, that's me.

That's what I did. I did it unknowingly. I did it in my youth.

I did it in my self-focus. I did it in the days when I was so consumed with me, my ministry, my deacons, my board, my reputation. What people would say.

And I offered those closest to me to be unprotected and wounded by my hand. But know today as surely as the change, the call on Abraham's life did not change. So for every true man in this place, the call has not changed.

And their eyes are now being opened. And God is giving understanding to his ministry. He's saying, I'm no longer going to have men treacherous against the wife of their youth.

But I'm going to do something in every man that is humble-hearted and will agree with the word. God is going to make you a true Abraham to your flock. God is going to use you and bless you as never before.

Because the power of two become one will now be in your ministry and in your home. And for every Sarah that says, Lord, I see where the roots, where something wants to get in. Where something not of you is at me.

Lord, I take the reproof as a sign of your love. And the call on my life. And your word that through us you're going to have, we're going to bear fruit.

A son that's going to bless generations starting in our own home with our own seed. Now, beloved, I believe that God just wants to give us a minute. I'm going to be silent for a few moments.

Let us do that now. Lord, I thank you for your word. I thank you, Lord, how you come and you bring such light and hope.

I thank you, Lord, for the call on the ministry couples here. I thank you, Lord, that your word and your call does not change. But, God, you show through your word how the foundations can be so moved off you.

Our Lord, we can create a seed bed. Oh, Lord, forgive us. Lord, let everyone in this place be convicted, oh, God, where you want to speak.

God, let the searchlight now enter our own hearts. God, let us open up to you fully and completely. God, our Christ, search us, oh, God, and know our hearts.

Lord, we come to the light that we may be healed and not turned away. And I thank you, Lord, for the healing that is flowing in this place. I thank you, Lord, for the new understanding that you are granting to ministry couples and to couples, Lord, that have laid their lives down for your purpose.

God, I pray, oh, God, that where that repentance for husbands who have other loves, where there's been a displaced life, Lord, that you will cause that repentance, a deep and full one, to come forth. And, Lord, I pray, oh, God, for every Sarah in this place that fights a defiling bitterness. Oh, God, go to the root.

Oh, God, grant the patience. Grant the perseverance. God, grant the honesty and the grace.

Let forgiveness flow freely between the couples, oh, God. Let there be a true union, a true knit together. End the lonely marriages in ministry, oh, God.

Only you can do this. End the loneliness in marriages, oh, God, that they may join hands and in spirit. Lord, I pray that you would multiply this word.

I pray, oh, God, that you would use this word to bring light throughout your whole body. Sow it in light, and the Lord will give you the glory for it. In Jesus' name, amen.

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