

## Faith & Marriage Part 2

### Genesis 24

#### Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, what we're talking about on these evenings is walking by faith and it's very easy to clarify what is the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight. Walking by sight is the way the whole world walks. You do everything by your own power, by your own ability, by your own ability to influence people or to bring things about by your own efforts. Really, you depend on other people and their responses to you, on the circumstances that happen in your life, and on the things that you possess. You depend on those things and your faith is in those things.

That's what we mean when we say, "You've faith in the world." It's not so much faith in the big, big bad world of Las Vegas, it's just the ordinary world round about us -- this dear old world of things, and circumstances, and people. It's depending on them and putting your faith in them as opposed to putting your faith in God, your Father and particularly in the fact that he has changed all the situations, all the circumstances, all the things, and all the people in your life and has changed you yourself and has made you as you would have been if you had never fallen out of his fellowship. That's what walking by faith is.

You may find that if you walk in that faith, lo and behold, heaven comes to earth because that is really the situation. All the circumstances that bother you, all the people that get to you, all the selfishness in your own life and heart have been removed and replaced with all the holiness, and the purity, and the victory of heaven and the only reason God is allowing the apparent evil to continue is so you'll see what you've been saved from. That's why he allows it to continue, so that you'll see what he has saved you from.

Now, it is true that if you don't believe that, right up to the end of this life, then it will be unto you according to your faith and you will in fact live in a hell, a needless hell but you will live in a hell of deprivation and of failure. So that's the difference, one is living by faith; the other is living by sight. One is living by faith in what God has done in Jesus and the other is living by faith in what you can do yourself or what your circumstances are doing to you, or what other people are doing to you.

Now what we're going to talk about tonight is the place of faith in marriage. So, would you just look back to the father of all of us who believe Abraham, who you remember in Genesis 24 saw that his servant had to go out and get a wife for Abraham's son? Abraham was concerned that he find the right wife for his son. You remember, he sent his servant out, and it might be good just to read that chapter in Genesis 24:1, "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham had said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.' The servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?'

Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and

swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.' So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac.

By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master.' Before he had done speaking, behold Rebekah, who was born of Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, and filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, 'Pray give me a little water to drink from your jar.' She said, 'Drink, my lord'; and she quickly let down her jar upon her hand, and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, 'I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking.' So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not. When the camels had done drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, 'Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?' She said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.' She added, 'We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.' The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord, and said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen.'

Then the maiden ran and told her mother's household about these things. Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. When he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, 'Thus the man spoke to me,' he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. He said, 'Come in, O blessed of the Lord; why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.' So the man came into the house; and Laban ungirded the camels, and gave him straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, 'I will not eat until I have told my errand.' He said, 'Speak on.'

So he said, 'I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, manservants and maidservants, camels and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father's house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' But he said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and prosper your way;

and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father's house; then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; and if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

'I came today to the spring, and said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now thou wilt prosper the way which I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Pray give me a little water from your jar to drink,' and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,' let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.' 'Before I had done speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Pray let me drink.' She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Micah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsmen for his son.

Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.' Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.' When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. And the servant brought forth jewelry of silver and of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, 'Send me back to my master.' Her brother and mother said, 'Let the maiden remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.'

But he said to them, 'Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way; let me go that I may go to my master.' They said, 'We will call the maiden, and ask her.' And they called Rebekah, and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will go.' So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said to her, 'Our sister, be the mother of thousands of tens of thousands; and may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them!' Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and rode upon the camels and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was dwelling in Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, and said to the servant, 'Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?' The servant said, 'It is my master.' So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

And it's interesting, almost boring, the way the Bible keeps repeating it but God is so anxious that you and I will see that it actually happened that way and that you are meant to marry the same way. That God has somebody as definite planned for you to marry as he had for Isaac and he will lead you as surely to that person as he led Isaac. And no difficulty or no obstacle will prevent God's will being done for you if you exercise faith in that.

Loved ones, that's vital to remember that. You who aren't married, God has it organized -- God will lead you to that person -- almost whatever you do to avoid it if you have faith. If you have faith in him it doesn't matter what country you go to, it doesn't matter how far you travel, if you believe that God takes care of your life and especially, this most important part of this life, he will lead you to the right person. There is just no way you can avoid it. So that's what we talked about several weeks ago, that many of us of course, did not marry our wives that way at all.

We married them by sight -- by the method that we were taught in high school and college. You watch out for the good looking girl, you watch out for the good looking guy, you look out for the nice looking cheerleader, you look out for the good football player. You watch out for the person that you think will give you a good home and make you comfortable. You look out for the man who will earn good money and provide security for you. Or, at the lowest, we said you take anybody so that you won't have to live alone.

For all kinds of reasons we grab at some person and many of us end up married who shouldn't be married, who have been given the gift of celibacy and many of us end up married to the person that may be God's second choice for us. And as with the Israelites, you remember, when they asked him for a king, "Give us a king. Give us a king. Give us a king." And he said, "No, no, no." Eventually he said, "Alright, I'll give you a king." So God is often forced to give us his second best.

Now, if you have married that way what attitude are you to take towards your marriage? And indeed, even if you've married the right way, even if you've found your partner by God's guidance through your faith in him, what attitude are you to have towards your partner? Well, you've to see that God is bent on making that marriage what he wanted it to be. It doesn't matter if it's the first best, or the second best, God is bent on making that marriage what he planned marriage to be. All the movements and the powers of his Spirit and of his grace, all the life that comes from Calvary is bent on making your marriage what God intended it to be. There is absolutely no place for saying, "Well, we married when we were drunk. We married when we didn't even know God, when we didn't even believe in God. We married because we had to marry." It doesn't matter, there's no place for saying, "We married outside God's will so really the best thing I can do now having disobeyed him once is disobey him a second time and divorce." There's no place for that.

God is the God who works all things according to the council of his will. God is the God who promised us that all things work together for God to them that love him. God can work in our lives if we say, "Alright love, we're in this situation. This isn't ideal but we are in this position and God wants us to make this marriage what he planned it to be so let us commit ourselves to each other in his name now and let us go forward."

Now, what is God after? Well, loved ones, first of all he's after bringing us back to the only real basis for marriage and you'll find that in Genesis 2:18. "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" You marry because it is God's will for you to marry a certain person. God is working to bring you back to that in your marriage. Too many of us, even those of us who call ourselves Christians, married because the girl was good looking, or married because we thought the guy would be a good provider or good company for us. We marry for all kinds of reasons. Many of us married because we wanted to get into bed and we wanted to have satisfaction and we wanted to get some answer to the lust that we felt. Many of us married for all kinds of different reasons because it was our will. We wanted to marry that person.

Now, God is working from the very moment you married to bring that right around to the point where you are married because it is his will for you to be married to that girl or that guy. In other words, the Father will lovingly and graciously remove from you all the great reasons that you had for marrying that girl or that guy. And as the years pass, you'll eventually come to the place where you wonder, "Why did I ever marry him?" Or, "Why did I ever marry her?" And when you get to that place you're beginning to get to the start of marriage. You're beginning to get to the beginning of a godly marriage. You're just getting to the start of it.

When you begin to lose all the satisfaction that you yourself had in being married to this girl, or being married to this guy, and you wonder why you ever ended up married to them at all, it's then that God is beginning to get you to commit yourself to that loved one for the one reason that you should be married to her and that is it's his will.

Loved ones, that's not a lower level of commitment. That's not a lower level of marriage. I would encourage those of you who have had beautiful flawless marriages to see that God is still working that way with you and he will lovingly bring you around to that. And then to all of you who have cried and thought you should divorce and have just got worn out with each other, have courage God has to bring you through that. God is working to replace your personal will and all the reasons you had for choosing that girl or for choosing that guy, he is bringing you to the end of all those stupid, foolish, selfish reasons, and he's bringing you to the place where you commit yourself to this person not because they're loveable, not because they're the great provider you thought they would be, not because they're great fun in bed the way you thought they would be, but because God wants you two people together. And then there's a chance of you having something beautiful for God in your life.

There's a real chance of your marriage becoming something beautiful for God. But it does mean that the Father works to take away a lot of your own satisfaction. He does it lovingly to us. So some of us need some of the satisfaction from encouragement for a while. Some of the rest of us can't bear to do without it for five, or six, or 10 years and so he lovingly allows us to have it. But sooner or later the Father must bring you to the point where you see your partner in the right light because, of course, the tragedy is that most of us wanted the husband, or the wife to supply us with what God alone can give us. We either wanted him because he would supply us with the security that we wanted, and, lo and behold, he loses his job or his career breaks up in bits and we think, "Oh, the whole thing is falling apart." No, the whole thing is just coming together.

It's just beginning to come together because God is taking away all your selfish reasons that make you look upon that person as a substitute for him himself. He's making you lean heavily upon him himself for security, and for provision for your old age, and provision for your present age. He's bringing you to the place where you can look at that dear man of yours and love him unselfishly because God wants you to love him not because you'll get something from him. It's the same with us men who marry the girl because we think she'll give us all the sense of importance that we ought to have that our mother's gave us. She'll take care of us, and she'll look after us, and she'll make a whole show and a whole fuss of us when we come home at night and she'll have everything exactly right.

And, lo and behold, she stops doing it after two or three years and we begin to find we're not king of the castle and maybe the children are king of the castle, or the dog, or somebody else but we aren't. And we think, "Oh, the very reason for my marriage is going." No, the marriage is just beginning to come into something of God. God is taking away from you what you thought you'd get

from that girl, your sense of importance, and significance, and recognition. And then you have to go to God only and suddenly you begin to break into love. Not that kind of mutual adulation love, that you pat my back and I'll pat yours, but a love because this is the girl that God wants me to have.

And it's the same, you know, with the whole business of happiness. We are just little dogs. If somebody gives us a cookie, we'll beg all day. We just love cookies and we'll do anything for cookies. If you just give us cookies, we'll do anything. God allows us to start that way, you know, we get cookies, we get our happiness at the beginning of the marriage. Either it's the thrill of the physical thing, or the thrill of the emotional thing, or it's just the thrill of moonlight and being together. God gives you all of that at the beginning. But he knows that you're nothing but just a little cookie monster. If he lets you continue that way you'll be useless for anything. You'll move away from danger, or trouble, or burdens, or hardship the moment you see it.

You'll be no use to him at all because his disciples must bear the heat of the day and must bear the heat of the battle. So gradually he begins to remove those things. You don't know what's wrong with the girl, you don't know what's wrong with the guy, and then you read all the books and you wonder how do you get to orgasm both at the same time, or how do you manage to keep love? And it's not love, it's lust, how do you manage to keep lust in the marriage? You'll read all the books and go through all that silly circus and eventually you have to finally come to the place where you see God is taking away from you all the false reasons for marrying. He's beginning to bring you into the beginning of marriage where you remain married to the girl not because she gives you all the fun in bed you want, or not because he gives you all the satisfaction that you want as a woman, but because God wants you together.

And then a great stability comes into the partnership. A great stability begins to come in. It's probably after you've cried yourselves past the point of divorce and you see this guy or this girl is going to stay with me whatever. It's then that you begin to sense this is until death does us part and you start to feel some stability in the marriage. Of course, it brings great peace and great rest. Suddenly it takes away from you the need to impress the other person. It takes great strain out of the marriage, you don't have to keep up an appearance, you don't have to keep up giving him all that he wants, or giving her all that she wants. You begin to be free to love them for Jesus' sake and to love them in the way that he loves us.

So, loved ones, that's one of the things that God does in marriage. But it does, those of you who are married will know, it requires a steadfast faith that that's what God is doing. It requires a steadfast faith in season and out of season, a sure faith that what God is doing here is through the agonizing crucifixion of Calvary and through the glorious resurrection of Calvary, he is taking away from that marriage all of the personal will that made you marry that girl or that guy. And he is bringing you, carving you away, to the place where you are married to them because it's his will.

Of course, that's the best basis for marriage. All the old people knew that. It wasn't just chance, it wasn't just a dictatorial thing that they chose the daughter for the son, or chose the son for the husband. It wasn't. Under God they knew that really the big thing is to get God's man or God's woman. And in many ways one of the least qualified people to find that out is a young man or a young woman who has little of God in their lives and has little thought of his guidance in their hearts. So it wasn't chance, you know, that in the old days they choose sons and daughters because actually it's your commitment to each other that makes a marriage.

It's a lot of foolishness, "Oh well, if I got a different one." Eh, if you had got a different one, you'd have had the same trouble. The problem is not this one or that one, the issue is: Have you accepted that God has allowed this person to become your wife, or this person to become your husband and have you committed yourself to them because it's his will? That's what makes a marriage. It's really not very much whether it's this person or that person. That's why it's so foolish to keep trying different cakes and this one you didn't like so you go to the next one. It's foolish. In that sense, they're all the same it's simply which one God wants you to marry and if you are married at this time then the Bible is very clear, do not seek to be free but allow God to bring you into that place where you are married to this loved one because it is God's will.

Now the Father does the same loved ones, in the second purpose of marriage. It's there in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." God's purpose in marriage is to reproduce his own image in two people who have become one. Now that's not why most of us marry. Most of us marry either because we want lots of little faces like our own, though why we want that I don't know, but we want lots of little faces like our own, lots of little images like our own or lots of little bodies like our own. But we want to stamp our image on the marriage. We want to stamp it through our children and most of all we want to stamp it on the marriage.

No, we don't want to browbeat our wives and we don't want to henpeck our husbands, but we certainly do want to have our image on the marriage. And God is bent right from the beginning in weaning us away from that, in wearing us out of that, in destroying us so that that is no longer the aim of our marriage. He is anxious to bring us into a place where we begin to allow Jesus to use the marriage as a frame in which he can paint a picture of himself. Now that's when marriage becomes exciting.

When you cease to want to impose your image on the other person, or you cease to want other people to think that the marriage has your character, or your image stamped upon it. Then you begin to see that God is lovingly, through the working of Calvary, working something of the other person into you and something of you into the other person. He is using some of the other person to blot out you and is using some of your irritability and your bad traits to blot out the other person. Marriage begins to be real marriage when, believe it or not, you start bowing before the Lord Jesus and saying, "Lord, I don't know where this marriage is going. I don't know what kind of image it has. Lord, I commit it into your hands and I trust you to paint the picture in both our lives that you want to paint."

Then loved ones, marriage begins to be exciting. Marriage is very boring if you got it all lined up and all worked out, and you know exactly where the girl is, and you know exactly where the guy is, you know exactly what each is contributing to the thing. That kind of marriage gets very boring. But when you begin to bow before Jesus and say, "Lord, I just did not believe that some of these traits that I have inside of myself either needed to change or could ever change. But Lord, I thank you that you are changing them and I thank you that that's what's happening here, that I'm not losing my own personality, I'm not losing my character, I'm not losing my direction in life, but you are lovingly using this marriage at times to grind me out and to replace me with yourself and at times you're using me with my loved one to make her like yourself."

But that's what's happening, loved ones. God is painting an image of himself in your marriage that is better than you, and better than your partner. Here's the miracle of it, better than the sum total of the two of you put together. Jesus plus two people equals more than just the two people themselves. Something miraculous is created -- something beautiful is created when two people begin

to realize that they were brought together by God so that he could recreate his image in them. If you're sitting there you know, and think that I'm describing something that is kind of nice, you got the wrong end of the stick. It is not nice, it is not easy, it's not a relaxing situation at all, it is a grueling, grinding situation and I think most of us who are married for any length of time would say marriage is a workout.

It's a workout but it is God's will for us and it is his blessing that enables us to grow into his likeness through it. But it is a workout and it's not a simple easy thing and it's when you've cried beyond the point of crying that then God begins to work something beautiful in your partnership. Of course, you see the tragedy of our society, The tragedy of our society is the first little pain anybody feels they bail out fast because we can't put up with pain in our society, can't put up with sadness, and can't put up with unhappiness. Actually, the most beautiful things that God does are done through a lot of unhappiness, and a lot of sadness, and a lot of pain.

So, it's a beautiful thing when God begins to replace your image not with hers, or replace your image not with his but with a new image, a new likeness of his Son Jesus that comes about through each of you acting upon the other and very often through each of you trying each other beyond the point where you can bear it until you cry out to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, I do not know where this is going but I know that you are in control." That's why I called it the place of faith in marriage.

Faith is constantly steadfastly seeing that this marriage has been put into Jesus and has been destroyed and utterly remade but if God did it all like that it would kill us. So he's revealing it to us gradually over the years. And that's what he's doing. He has done it all. It's all complete but he's lovingly revealing it to us day-by-day and week-by-week. That's why there's no place for despair and unhappiness in marriage, no place for sadness in marriage, because God is doing something beyond what you understand and you are always right to say that to him. "Lord, I don't feel it, I don't see it, I don't understand it but I believe that you willed us to be together and that your will for us is to reproduce your image in this world and Lord, I believe that's what you're doing."

Loved ones, it's miraculous but as you take that attitude not only are you able to live in happiness in marriage but you're able to begin to see that come about. Then just the last reason that we've so often talked about for marriage in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" Of course, for those of us in Jesus that means be fruitful. Be fruitful, have many children that you beget in Jesus. Bring many people into the kingdom. Be fruitful and bring the world under God's will.

Well, of course, for most of us that isn't the purpose of our marriages at all. The purpose of our marriage is a two car garage, and three of our color TV sets, and the right age of car, and the right stocks and shares, the right bank account, the right job, two children one boy one girl, and going to the right school, and on, and on, and on. And so the whole society is contorted. It has created this as the purpose for marriage, children, happy home and a nice house, and a good retirement. Of course it's utterly opposed to this. So, you can see that there is a painful process of reeducation for any of us who want our marriages to be used for the purpose that God originally created and that's what God is bent on.

Loved ones, it is hard for God to take out of all our hearts and out of every part of our

personalities all these desires that have been nourished inside us for years. You might almost say for generations because our great grandparents and everybody else treasured these things. We have been taught to think that this is the purpose of marriage. So God, for anybody who is serious about him, God begins right from the beginning of the marriage to replace this counterfeit purpose with his purpose which is to bring you into a place where you see together that the only thing worth doing is to bring people into the kingdom of Christ so that they'll live forever.

The Father lovingly works on that. If you're blessed by God, you'll find that he allows all kinds of financial difficulties to come to you, all kinds of problems so that your wonderful ideal of a smooth financial future and a house paid for by the time you're 45, all of that is beginning to fall apart and you begin to realize that half the things that you were hoping were going to come about, they aren't going to come about. Gradually God draws you back from all those false purposes. He may of course, in his goodness, he may give you children, he may give you all those other things but his aim is to take that away from center stage as the main purpose and the main concentration of your marriage. His desire is to wean you around, and bring you around to the place where you love men's souls and where you care for the souls of the lost. God will work on you to bring that about.

Now, what's painful and agonizing? As you lose a job, or as the bank account goes down, or the house is lost, or other things happen that seem to spoil your dream, that is hard going and all of us who are married know that. But that's what God is after. If you look back over the history of the church, you'll find that God's kingdom progressed not so much by husband and wives who were sitting in a comfortable home with children and the two cars and colored TV sets. It progressed by husbands and wives who hardly owned a bed between them, who seemed to have no career worth talking about, who were here one year and there another year. But God used these people, the things that were not to bring to naught the things that are. These people that were regarded as the nobodies of the earth, God used them to build his kingdom.

God is bent in our marriages on replacing the false purpose of our marriage with the only real purpose for a marriage at all because of course, you all know that the marriage doesn't really last very long. It doesn't. It goes so fast. Even 40 years goes so fast and then sooner or later you, the lady, or you, the gentlemen are on your own. You are. The memory is dear to you but you are on your own and you're back as if you weren't married and you have to go through the gate of heaven like that. And that's why Jesus said, "Look, in heaven there is no marriage or giving in marriage. What I have given you here is a temporary partnership that is very dear and precious to you but it is just a temporary partnership. When you come to heaven you will know each other and you'll be delighted to see each other but in some amazing way you'll feel that about everybody in heaven."

So marriage itself, loved ones, is really a very temporary thing. That's why it's very important for us to see marriage is not the be all and end all of anything. It is what God calls some people to for a short time. And on the whole, it's an extra workout. It's a great blessing but really do you see, God has arranged it so that you will never get as much out of it as you put into it. Do you see that? God has arranged it that way because he does not want you looking to something other than him. So everything he does he lovingly arranges so that you will give more than you're actually conscience of getting. Marriage is a dear plan of God.

But loved ones, it's a plan to bring us into the likeness of his Son Jesus. It's not a plan as is the thought of our society today, to give us an easy soft life with all the company, all the friendship and the comfort that we think we deserve. It's not that. It's a plan to bring us into the fullness of Jesus' image. So you can see what is the place of faith in marriage? Oh, every day

to exercise it. Every day to exercise faith that God is bringing you to the place where you love that dear one because it is his will for you to be together not because you want to be together. Exercise faith every day that he's reproducing his own image, blotting you out, blotting her out and reproducing the image of his Son in both of you. Then having faith every day that God is steadily bringing you both around to the place where you care for the only thing that matters. That Jesus sees the travail of a soul and be satisfied and that you too can stand at the gate of heaven at the end and welcome into it hundreds, and hundreds of God's children who came to know him through you and your ministry.

And so that's something of the place of faith in marriage and you can see that it's utterly different from the world's and it's utterly different from walking by sight. But I guarantee you this, your marriage will stay together for life if you walk this way and in heaven, you'll have something to rejoice over.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for your view of things that is always so different from the world's view. We thank you, Lord for the stability in that view. We thank you for the reality in it. We thank you for the way that it matches our own experience. We thank you, Father, for the way it makes sense of this fallen world and of the way you are redeeming it day-by-day and year-by year. So Father, we thank you for our marriages. Lord, we would not miss them for the world because you have used them to draw us closer to yourself. So Lord, each of us who have partners would thank you for them, for their dearness, and then we thank you too Lord, for the things that we think aren't so dear but that are equally dear to you.

Lord, we thank you that you take away from us any feeling that we know what is right and you bring us to a place where we both look to you and say, "Lord, only you know what is right, will you show us?" So Father, we thank you for that. Then we thank you for those of us who aren't married. Lord, we thank you that you have the right partner for us and that as we exercise faith in that you will bring us to that partner. And Lord, if we ever get anyone else it will always be an uphill battle. So Father, we would trust you to lead us as you led Isaac to the right wife. We trust you to lead us to the right husband, or to the right wife.

Then Father, if you want us to be single, thank you. Thank you for the beauty of the family you have given us here. Thank you, Lord for the wonder of love that we can have together. Thank you for pictures such as we get in London there where the brothers and sisters live together really as husbands and wives in all kindliness and yet in physical purity. Lord, we thank you for your whole vision for what the society calls an extended family but what you alone can make family. You make us family because we're together in the one Son and we thank you for that, Lord.

Thank you for this evening. We trust you for this coming week that we'll walk more surely and more firmly because we're exercising faith in what you're doing among us for your glory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.