

## *The Fourth Voice in the Garden! | Genesis 3:1 ff.*

Good morning OFN leaders from Trish and me. Our apologies for having to meet with you this way. Believe us! We wish that we were with you. Be that as it may. We appreciate OFN and we appreciate our couples who lead. A major reason we're meeting is to strengthen our good marriages. And to not take for granted the strategic importance that each of our marriages bear in the health of our churches whom we lead.

Trish and I have been married for fifty two years this year. We were together in relationship for six years before that. We met as kids. So we are kind of like old shoes. When we speak with young married couples I hesitate to give our history together. That is because our age and context can be used as an excuse by younger generations to excuse themselves from what we have to say. And the same holds true for some of you older couples here in the retreat.

So the area that we've been assigned to tackle has a strong biblical/theological grounding. But we're also going to be sharing a few very practical practices that we have cultivated that has allowed us to live a very long and rich married life in Christian leadership. We're going to try to be as authentic with you as possible.

The area of marriage and Christian leadership that we are tackling has to do with evil, the devil, our enemy and his influence on marriage relationships in leadership. As leaders involved with various networks and churches over the last forty five years, we have seen more than our fair share of leaders' marriages that have failed. What has blown our minds; however, is that in almost every case, the marriages appeared to be unassailably strong. Our thoughts were, 'This marriage can never fail.'

So in an age of endless books on leadership and marriage. In an age of incredible therapeutic resources in the church, coaching, counseling, etc., it's sort of ironic that we have pushed to the back burner our old enemy the devil and hell's strategic interest in toppling Christian leaders marriages. Gen Z'ers these days don't so much want to hear the dictums of old ministries like "Focus on the Family" where things seem to them distant and legalistic.

But when we consider even recently the number of churches and ministries that have been toppled by moral failures, it seems reasonable to say that all of hell has its focus on the family and especially families in leadership. So we're going to talk about an old and sometimes forgotten subject . . . Spiritual warfare within marriage. Or maybe it's just ignored.

We've entitled this message, "The Fourth Voice in the Garden." When I first read Genesis as a new Christian so many years ago. I was intrigued by what I expected to be the primal, perfect, ideal conditions that we all were created into. Although in the Torah Eden is never called paradise, later OT books allude to it as paradise. And by the time of Jesus, it was commonly thought to be paradise. So I was intrigued by what I assumed was perfection . . . paradise. Some of you can remember the Joanie Mitchell song *Woodstock*.

*We are stardust.*

*We are golden.*

*We are caught in the devil's bargain.*

*So we've got to get back to the garden.*

The English word, Edenic, means original and perfect.

Then I turned the page to what I still describe as a preposterous surprise. Genesis chapters one and two describe a perfect wedding in a perfect place with a perfect relationship with a perfect God and a perfect relationship with one another. There is the flush of these primal newlyweds, the seed plot of everything God intends . . . sublime innocence. I thought!

And then there is Genesis 3 verse 1.

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say,<sup>1</sup>

My head exploded with questions. Like . . . What out of hell is he doing there in paradise? How could it be paradise if he is slithering around? Where did he come from? Why is he talking to the woman and not the man when the man is right there with her (verse 6)? Why was the man witless enough to stay silent? Is there jeopardy in the nature of a man’s and woman’s relationship in marriage that makes them vulnerable to leading themselves and their progeny down the tubes. After all Adam and Eve were the first leadership couple.

And the biggest question is this. Why did God warn them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then NOT warn them about the serpent? Oh yes and there is this. Adam and Eve were taken out of the garden. But is the devil still there? If so, was it really paradise in the first place?

We are certainly not going to answer those very reasonable questions. That would take another conference. But what I really, really want to point out is that all of the theological and philosophical questions regarding the origin of evil, the nature of evil and perpetuation of evil arise in the first verses of Genesis, chapter three.

What I would like to do is posit a couple of truths that I think as couples we ignore regarding marriage and our relationships with one another.

***Humankind together was not created and placed in a morally and ethically neutral place. Paradise had an intrinsic problem.***

We were given choices. But the choices, even from the beginning, were not without destructive influence. There was an enemy seeking to destroy their relationship with God and with one another.

***The first human temptation took place in the first marriage.***

The devil approached them together. And his tactics were to lie, to accuse, to create shame, to destroy intimacy and to kill the first marriage relationship and the list goes on. But most of all he called into question their trust in God. And this leads to another truth.

***The existence of evil predates humanity.***

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ge 3:1). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

If you all were to poll your congregations I predict that you would be surprised at the number of people who think that the existence of evil is a consequence of the fall. Biblically that is not the case. Even we are born again into a stacked natural universe.

So the question arises. Why, from the beginning, is hell so focused on our destruction, especially generationally? Why does the first marriage seem like bait? We know the evil one has a beef with God. What's his beef with us? Why is he our single adversary as Peter tells us? (1Pet 5:8) And why is he constantly seeking to rapaciously devour us?

And while we don't have the time to do the theology now. The truth is that:

***We together were created to be, through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, the remedial creation to populate the new heaven and new earth. Rev 2: 7***

And the Book of Revelation tells us that it really is a paradise. (Rev 2:7) God has created and chosen us to be able to partake in putting all of the enemies of Jesus under His feet.

This leads us to the key truth for this retreat!

***The first orchestrated confrontation between evil and humanity was in the context of marriage.***

And I am going to say that it remains so today. Any Christian marriage has a target on its back. But any Christian leader's marriage has a most strategic target on its back. If that marriage fails, it opens up inroads for the enemy into a myriad of other marriage relationships in the church.

Ok! That's the theology part. From the outset of our marriage Trish and I were aware that, in terms of our relationship and the way we loved one another, there was a fourth voice in our garden . . . God, Adam, Eve, and the devil. Apart from all of the marital guides, the wonderful biblical instruction, pastoral guidance, there was and is a vigilance that we have to maintain on a daily basis. And the vigilance is spiritual.

Today, for some good reasons and some bad ones, spiritual warfare, prayers of authority, binding and loosing, being cognizant of the workings of the forces of darkness, has taken a back seat to human behavioral issues. But without being superstitious, we are conscious that the demonic is ever looking to insinuate itself into our relationship in anything from sexuality to child rearing to finances.

So we're just going to share some daily, iconic practices that characterize the way that we've lived together for fifty years and hope that they protect you all and your families as well. I need to add that we've shared some these things with countless couples who have gone on to ignore them. They ignore them because they are, after all, spiritual and spiritual disciplines are ignorable. But we believe that they are essential to the protection of our relationship as husband and wife. The first is this.

***Agreeing in prayer together formally, authoritatively, daily.***

It's amazing how many couples we've ministered to who brag about carving out date nights but find it impossible to maintain a prayer discipline together. I am putting this within the context of spiritual warfare for marriage and family. Here is the reason. Trish and I use the Lord's prayer as our disciplined template for prayer together on a daily basis and we've done it for years. One of the key pieces of the Lord's prayer is "Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil or the evil one." In that prayer we assess areas where on a daily basis we sense that we are facing an intrusion or possible intrusion of the enemy. And we deal with it.

We are cultured in praying authoritatively and where needed, prayers of binding and loosing. We look for patterns of confusion, children and/or grandchildren who are tethered to propositions of darkness. We believe that there are appropriate times to summon the help of the angelic. And we believe that it is biblical and effective.

Apart from the effectiveness that we've seen with authoritative prayer, it generates a certain confidence as we work our way through crises and just difficult days.

Egg. Trish – we exercise the gift of the discernment of spirits and pay attention to the spiritual atmosphere. This involves knowing the attributes of our enemy and knowing when he is afoot in a situation . . . unusual confusion, anger, uncharacteristic antagonism, irritability. Mostly we look for the absence of love.

***We give one another the right to challenge any relationships that we have, not exclusively with the opposite sex but especially with the opposite sex.***

Egg. Trish and the prophetess who was monopolizing my time. Look out for anyone who is receiving anything from your spouse even emotionally that belongs to your spouse. This can be subtle and manipulative.

***We give one another the right to challenge our paths of entertainment.***

While this may involve yielding a measure of liberty to one another. It certainly is always fodder for communication and understanding.

Egg. Trish can read when I am fatigued such that I am vulnerable to burnout behaviors. Be jealous for one another's sabbath rest.

Egg. The pastoral affair in NYC. "I became his adrenalin rush."

***Careful use of language. The language we use with one another is an open door for demonic attachments arising from miscommunication, corrupt communication.***

Egg. Using the D word. Demeaning expressions. Speaking in tautologies. Presuming we know what the other is thinking. Etc.

Jesus is the hearer of every conversation. So are forces of darkness. Our enemy is not omniscient. His minions listen. Egg. Screwtape letters.

Never lie. It is that simple.

***Never spiritually manipulate your spouse into following suggestions you have made or counsel you have given.***

Spiritual manipulation in actuality can sometimes actually engage spirits.

Egg. The deep resentment in spouses that we've encountered in spouses who feel as if they have been "spiritually" or religiously manipulated in a marriage.

Manipulative power is a door for the enemy to create resentment and to crush your spouse's identity. Power and empowerment is at the root of so many marital problems. Most sexual sin is tied up with power and empowerment.

***When you sense "enemy activity" in your household be instant in season to deal with it biblically and appropriately.***

Egg. My strategic phone calls to Trish from the field.

Egg. Middle of the night authoritative prayer.

The gift of the distinguishing of spirits is an essential, prophetic gift for leaders and spouses.

***See to it that the two of you together are walking in an active, revealed sense of what God is speaking to you together.***

We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,<sup>2</sup> **rhema not logos.**

***Always see to it that you end your day with an agreement to love no matter what disagreement you are facing.***

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Eph 5:25–26). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil.<sup>3</sup>

***Take Eucharist with one another regularly for spiritual intimacy, forgiveness, healing, and protection.***

A sacrament is a biblical practice which as we exercise obedience to it, we receive the grace to do what it embodies. Remember that each time we take Eucharist we're required to discern the presence of Christ and the quality of our relationship with each other.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Eph 4:25–27). (2016). Crossway Bibles.