

# FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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## Building a Relationship

Guest: Ernie Baker  
From the series: Marry Wisely, Marry Well (Day 1 of 3)  
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**Bob:** The common path for a couple today getting to marriage: you date first, have sex, move in, have kids, and then get married. In fact, even Christian young people have begun to wonder: “Is marriage still relevant?” Here’s Dr. Ernie Baker.

**Ernie:** Just a few weeks ago, I spoke to a college group. I got the question: “What is an apologetic for why we need marriage? I’m being told marriage is obsolete—that it’s not needed anymore.” All of that is shaping the 20-somethings right now, with all of their fears about marriage—whether it’s the family they grew up in, and the failed marriage that they saw; or maybe their parents stayed together, but they knew their parents were not happy.

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today* for Monday, May 8<sup>th</sup>. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. Before you start thinking about who to marry, it’s important to stop and think about what the Bible has to say about marriage in the first place—its purpose and its priority. We’ll talk about those things today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. The average age for a man getting married today is—it is 29; right?

**Dennis:** Correct.

**Bob:** Twenty-seven-and-a-half for women.

**Dennis:** Correct.

**Bob:** And that’s much later than it’s ever been.

**Dennis:** That’s also correct.

**Bob:** Why?! Why are they waiting so long to get married?

**Dennis:** Well, I think it’s become a bit of a subculture in our culture—that singles are encouraging other singles just to delay this commitment—that’s for a number of reasons. I think they—a good number of them—have come from homes that were—

well, they don't want to replicate what they've seen in their mom and dad's marriage or their family.

I think, secondly, there are a lot of fears. They've seen a good bit of their friends from high school / college—from the single years—make the commitment and, within a few years or a few months, break that commitment. So they've got a good bit of questions about: "How does this thing work in the first place?" I think, as single people get older, the fears increase. They're in need of someone coming alongside them and laying out the blueprints of how they can make this commitment.

And we've got a guest today who can do that. He has written a book called *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*. Ernie Baker joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Ernie, welcome—welcome to the broadcast.

**Ernie:** Thank you very much. It's a privilege to be here.

**Dennis:** You had an advantage as you raised your six children. You taught at the college level for a number of years; right?

**Ernie:** That's correct.

**Dennis:** What were you observing as you watched college students date and develop relationships with the opposite sex? What conclusions did you come to that ultimately ended up in you writing your book, *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*?

**Ernie:** Well, one of my biggest concerns is absentee parents, not really disciplining their children. One of the biggest compliments I ever got about the book—and I'm just very grateful for it—is one young lady reading it. She said, "I felt like a father was talking to me and giving me advice about relationships." I was really hoping that that would be the tone of the book.

**Dennis:** So you're saying that you observed kids, at the college-level, who didn't know how to establish a relationship with the opposite sex on an on-going basis—and just have a friendship at the friendship level—and then they begin to date. That's really where you run into trouble—when you see young adults, who don't know how to establish a relationship that's healthy—that is centered around Christ—and that knows how to deal with conflict.

**Ernie:** And all of the attractions are kicking into gear—just very strong attractions to the opposite sex. They don't know what to do with all of that.

**Bob:** So what's typical? Give me a typical profile of a 20-year-old girl, who's been raised in a Christian home. What does she know? What doesn't she know? What are her insecurities and fears? When she thinks about relationships—I mean, in her heart, most 20-year-old girls want to get married; don't they?

**Ernie:** I think so, and that's what the statistics are showing—is that, eventually, people are going to end up—especially coming from a religious background—they're going to end up getting married / typical 20-year-old girl.

Every semester, I taught Marriage and Family class at The Master's University for 12 years. Every semester, I would ask my classes—and typically, there could be 40/50 students each semester—I would survey them at the beginning of the semester: “What are your fears or concerns about entering marriage?” I was hearing the same things, whether it was a guy or a girl—I actually put some of the quotes in the book. They said things like this, just semester after semester: “What if I wake up one day and realize that I don't love him any longer?” “What if she leaves me?” “What if he turns out to be a big weirdo?” [Laughter] Those were echoed semester, after semester, after semester. That was part of the motivation for writing the book.

**Bob:** So, as you're talking with young people on a college campus today / a university campus today, the thing that has them backing away from the idea of marriage is: “We've seen how this doesn't work so well for so many people. We're just not sure we can safely go in that direction.”

**Ernie:** And culture is saying to them—I just heard this just a few weeks ago. I spoke to a college group and I got the question: “I'm being told marriage is obsolete—that it's not needed anymore. What is an apologetic for why we need marriage?” All of that is shaping the 20-somethings right now, with all of their fears about marriage—whether it's the family they grew up in, and the failed marriage that they saw; or maybe their parents stayed together, but they knew their parents were not happy.

**Bob:** It was an unhealthy relationship.

**Ernie:** It was an unhealthy relationship. And now, the culture is saying: “Marriage is a thing of the past. You just don't need to be married.”

I was writing, trying to give them hope that “You do not necessarily need to be a statistic,” and that “Biblical wisdom will speak in the midst of all this darkness going on. We have the light of God's Word that will give you wisdom in making a choice of a spouse.”

**Dennis:** So give some parents some ammo right now. I don't want you to quote the Bible; but I want you to give parents a rationale, and a reason, and an apologetic for why marriage and family matter today.

**Ernie:** I'm just going to speak from my heart—why I love marriage. Rose and I have been married for 36 years. The Lord has blessed us with six children—thirty-six years of ministry together. I've started calling Rose, in the last year: “She's my adventure buddy.” We have traveled, internationally, together / done ministry together. Even while I'm here

with you, my wife is mentoring a younger pastor's wife, right now. While I'm doing this, my wife is my partner in ministry. That doesn't come just overnight. That comes after 36 years of living life together, and just the bonding / the intimacy that occurs, just like Scripture says.

My apologetic would be: "The Bible says you can become one flesh, and I really believe you can become one flesh. I cannot imagine life without marriage." So one thing I would say would be the intimacy that occurs in that you can't have that in a co-habiting relationship—the same level of intimacy does not occur—it's between "a man and a woman."

**Bob:** Why not?

**Ernie:** Well, the bottom line there is—there is no commitment. I address that in the book as well—is why co-habitation is *not* a wise methodology. In fact, it's just a *horrible* methodology for establishing a relationship.

**Dennis:** And it's a great predictor that things aren't going to work out someday if you do get married; isn't it?

**Ernie:** The divorce rate among cohabiting couples—and of course, people debate these statistics; but from what I've done the research on—it is somewhere between 40 and 70 percent higher risk of divorce for couples that cohabit. Right now, it's appalling to me—50 percent of couples will cohabit before they get married; but yet, there's a 40 to 70 percent higher divorce rate.

**Bob:** We have to acknowledge that, since the time I was growing up, one of the reasons why marriage is being delayed these days is because more and more people don't think there's any need to wait until marriage, and that includes Christian kids; right?

**Ernie:** Yes.

**Bob:** How do we deal with that, as parents, in a culture where—well, I'll tell you a story. I was at one of our *Weekend to Remember*<sup>®</sup> marriage getaways. We were meeting with the pre-marrieds, which we always do at a *Weekend to Remember*. A guy comes up to me and he says, "My buddies at work are telling me I'm crazy." I said, "Why?" He said: "Because I haven't had sex with my girlfriend. They're saying, 'You may marry somebody you're sexually incompatible with. You've got to try this out before you get married, or you're stuck for a lifetime!'"

He's thinking, in the back of his mind: "What if they're right? What if I'm stuck with a lifetime of a bad sexual partner? That's not—nobody wants that!" So he asked me for my answer. I'll tell you what I said, but I want to hear what you'd say to him first.

**Ernie:** I would say: “Because God’s ‘Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path,’ that God’s ways are always best.” It takes faith to believe that in the midst of a sexually-promiscuous culture. So I try to say to young people: “Sex is at the end of the intimacy chain—that if you are building a healthy relationship—friendship, you have good communication skills, you learn conflict resolution skills—the fruit that comes out of that is a wonderful intimacy—sexual intimacy—in your marriage. Sex is at the end of the intimacy chain, but it takes a lot of faith to believe that—“to believe that I’m going to do what God’s Word says, even though everything in my body is telling me to go after this person, physically, and the culture has removed all barriers.”

We need a whole new generation of young people, who are people of faith, like Hebrews 11—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ernie:** —and believe the promises of God and that what God says—He’s the Designer!—and what He says—that must be the best way. But I’ve got to fight against my tendencies and my desires and suppress them; and out of love for the other person that I’m pursuing, say: “No. What God says is best!” That takes a lot of faith.

**Bob:** You talk about having to do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world’s screaming.

**Ernie:** Yes.

**Bob:** The flesh is screaming.

**Ernie:** Yes!

**Bob:** And the devil is going, “This is where I thrive—is when I’ve got these both aimed in your direction.” I understand the temptation that a 22-year-old is facing.

**Ernie:** Yes; so do I!

**Bob:** I looked at the young man—and by the way, I agree with everything you said. I just said: “Let me address sexual compatibility. She’s a girl; right?” He said, “Yes.” “You’re a boy?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “You are sexually compatible; okay? [Laughter] I will just tell you that that’s about all you’re going to have to worry about there.”

Now, I know that there can be challenges that couples face, but that’s not something you try to figure out in a dating relationship. That’s something that God can help you address after you’ve formed your bond and your covenant.

**Dennis:** Well, you’ve got the rest of your lives to become good at something that, frankly, is not going to be achieved without commitment.

**Bob:** That's right.

**Dennis:** It is an *incredibly* intimate connection of two human beings—two imperfect / two selfish human beings. Honestly, I don't know how people who cohabit make it work; because you'd always have the fear of, "Somehow, I'm going to disappoint, and he's out of here," or "...she's out of here," —

**Ernie:** Yes; yes.

**Dennis:** —or perhaps the fear of cheating on one another. I mean, you've got so many issues that—instead of being removed by commitment—because it's tough to keep your covenant—let's be honest!—keeping your covenant / remaining pure after marriage. There are a lot of temptations out there; but you've got to do it—you have to be men and women of the promise, as you said, and believe what God has said.

And I think you ought to go all the way back to the Garden. If you look at how the devil tempted Adam and Eve, he asked a very simple question: "Has God said...?"

**Ernie:** Yes.

**Dennis:** And this is a generation, unfortunately, that is questioning what God has said / what God has designed—how He said we should do marriage / how we should do life and family. As a result, we're doing it our way; and the reality is that's not a good way.

**Bob:** Ernie, let me ask you this, because I've just been through this—our youngest son just got married. He was 22 when he got married / his bride was 20 when she got married. A lot of people said to them: "Twenty and twenty-two! That's pretty young!" The implication was: "The maturity level necessary, just in terms of being a mature human being—at 20 and 22, you're still pretty immature. Maybe you just need a few more years of growing up before you're ready to take on that kind of a commitment."

I remember those kinds of discussions, you know: "At 22, am I ready to shoulder this kind of a burden?" You dealt with this with college kids, who were falling in love and wanting to get married. Did you cheer them on in the younger years; or did you say: "Hang on! You'd be better off if you'd wait until you're 24 or 25"?

**Ernie:** My answer to that is to take that on a case-by-case basis, of how mature—I mean, you could have a mature 22-year-old.

I do counseling for a living—I'm a Pastor of Counseling. I have met immature 45-year-old men. [Laughter] I actually said to a man one time: "I wish you hadn't gotten married. We wouldn't be facing all of these issues right now. You need to take responsibility for being a man." That's really the issue: "Is this person ready to take on the commitments of what it means to be a man?" or "...take on the commitments for being a woman?"

That's something that's addressed in the book as well: "What is biblical manhood? What is biblical womanhood?" I sure wish we had parents, who were discipling their teenagers with: "Okay; I want to be a godly father, and I want to shepherd you. Now, what does it mean to be a man?" or a daughter: "...What does it mean to be a godly woman?" Because that seems, to me, to be the better—not waiting until 29 or 27, which is, statistically, what culture is saying: "Wait longer, because then you grow up."

"Are you ready to take on the responsibilities?"—not perfect—"But are you ready to take on the responsibilities of biblical manhood and biblical womanhood?" I say to young people: "When you're looking for a spouse, what's the trajectory that the person's on? You can't look for perfection, because that's impossible because of Genesis 3;—

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Ernie:** —"but what's the trajectory that this person is on?"

**Bob:** I just have to comment; because, as you were saying that, I thought, "Okay; here are the options: 'We can wait longer, until you're 29 and you're really grown up; or maybe you could just *grow up* before you're 29!'" [Laughter]

**Dennis:** You're assuming that, by the time you're 29, you will have dealt with—

**Bob:** Yes!

**Dennis:** —the issues you should have dealt with when you were 20, 21, or 22.

I want to go back to something you just said, Ernie, and have you unpack it. You had three sons.

**Ernie:** Yes.

**Dennis:** You had three daughters.

**Ernie:** Yes.

**Dennis:** So you have some experience, because you're an empty-nester; right?

**Ernie:** That is a *new* part of life; yes.

**Dennis:** Okay. I want you to answer the question for a mom and dad who've heard you talk about this repeatedly in this conversation about: "What is the essence of being a godly man? What's the essence of being a godly woman?" Talk to us about what womanhood and manhood looks like in a culture that, increasingly, is blurring the lines

of masculinity and femininity. Let's go back to the basics. Answer the question from the Scriptures: "What is a man? What is a woman?"

**Ernie:** And we don't even know if there are two genders anymore.

**Bob:** In our culture; right.

**Ernie:** Yes.

So if there was ever a time that parents need to be experts on telling their children, "What is manhood?" and "What is womanhood?" Scripture is eloquent in answering those questions. I'll just say that the book that you need to look at or think about if you want to do more reading on is *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. It's just an excellent resource. Mine is falling apart—I've used it in so many conversations with young people.

In essence, I would say manhood is lovingly leading, lovingly providing for, and lovingly protecting. The imagery—when I was teaching Marriage and Family class, I would keep talking to the young men about: "You are to be the shepherd of your home. If you can just get that in your mind—shepherds lovingly lead, lovingly provide for, and lovingly protect." I address that in the book.

Then, in the book, what I do with womanhood is—I thought, "What better example?"—because the Book of Proverbs—the word that is used for wisdom in Proverbs is feminine. Proverbs says things like, "Wisdom builds *her* house."

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ernie:** And then it all culminates with Proverbs 31: "What is the excellent wife?" So what I do in the book with womanhood is—I trace, throughout the Book of Proverbs: "What does Proverbs say a wise woman is?"—that's a little bit more lengthy than what I can give you right now—but "What are the characteristics of a wise woman?" Well, obviously, she has—according to Proverbs 31—she has a proper balance between inward and outward beauty. Proverbs 31 talks about that.

So manhood / womanhood are just absolutely crucial topics to be teaching our young people, because they are really confused about that.

**Bob:** You know, this is something that, a few years ago, we felt burdened about. We have a resource we created for pre-teens—parents and pre-teens—called *Passport2Purity*®, where a dad or a mom can take a preteen son or daughter for a weekend away and talk about the birds and the bees, and about what's coming up in adolescence, and help get them ready for it.



Then, we realized: “You can’t stop the conversation there. Thirteen- and fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds are starting to ask the questions: ‘Who am I? What am I good at? What does it mean that I’m a man? What does it mean that I’m a woman? How am I supposed to live that out?’” In our culture, particularly, that’s a challenge; so we created a resource called *Passport2Identity*<sup>™</sup>. This is part of the discipling of children that you’re urging parents to do. We just thought to have a tool like this might tee up the conversations and make it easier for moms and dads to do it.

**Dennis:** And when I talk to parents about this, they get confused, thinking we have a conference that they go to. Well, you know what? This is better than a conference!

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It’s something that you lead, ladies/moms, your daughter through. And, dads, it’s something you lead your sons through. It’s actually a kit with CDs and a workbook, and we tee it up so mom and dad are the heroes.

**Bob:** If you go to our website at FamilyLifeToday.com—if you have pre-teens or junior high-aged kids—there’s information available there about both *Passport2Purity* and *Passport2Identity*.

Of course, there’s information about the great book that Ernie Baker has written, called *Marry Wisely, Marry Well: A Blueprint for Personal Preparation*. This is a book that our sons and daughters ought to be reading, really, before they start to form any romantic relationships—so high school / early college—this is a book to read *before* you think you’ve found the right person, because it’s to help you know how to begin that process—what to be looking for and how to make sure that your approach to marriage is the right approach.

Again, the title of the book is *Marry Wisely, Marry Well: A Blueprint for Personal Preparation*. You can order it from us at FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to request your copy. Again, the website: FamilyLifeToday.com; or order by phone at 1-800-358-6329; that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

It is a busy season, here at FamilyLife. We are just back from being at the Christian Alliance for Orphans Summit that was held in Nashville last Thursday and Friday. We had a chance to see a number of our listeners. It’s always encouraging to hear from you about how God uses the ministry of FamilyLife in your life. We’re grateful for those of you who partner with us. Our goal is to provide practical biblical help and hope for marriages and families all around the world.

We’re currently working on a number of new projects that we’re hoping we can continue working on, at full speed throughout the summer months; but we’ve been doing some calculating recently and, if we’re going to be able to do that, we need to see if, this

month, we can raise \$1.1 million. We're asking listeners to pitch in and help us in the month of May with the funds necessary to keep this ministry moving, full-speed ahead, in the months ahead. Let me first say, "We don't want to do anything that takes away from your giving to your local church. We think that ought to be a priority."

And I also want to say a "Thank you," to those of you who are Legacy Partners, who contribute on a monthly basis. Thank you for your *consistent* financial support. If you can pitch in a little more this month, that would be great. Or if you are not a Legacy Partner—maybe you've never made a donation to *FamilyLife Today*—this would be the perfect month to call or go online and make a \$25- or a \$50-donation. Whatever you can afford, we're grateful for that contribution. Again, you can do that, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Or you can mail your donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about what we can be doing, as parents, to help our young people think wisely about the whole subject of marriage and, particularly, how they can develop certain relationship skills that they're going to need to sustain a healthy, vibrant marriage. We'll talk more about that tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru<sup>®</sup> ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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