

FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Building a Firm Foundation

Guest: Ernie Baker
From the series: Marry Wisely, Marry Well (Day 2 of 3)
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Bob: Does your fiancée lack certain relationship skills? Dr. Ernie Baker says, “If that’s the case, don’t let that relationship be moving forward unless those issues are being addressed.”

Ernie: You’re not going to be a different person 24 hours after you’re married than you were 24 hours before your marriage. You’re carrying who you were, as a person, into the marriage. Just because you’re married, you don’t—voilà—all of a sudden have good communication skills. So, start practicing now. I challenge college students: “Practice with your roommate,”/ “Practice with your parents,”—practice good conflict resolution skills.” I challenge young people with “Why not start now?”

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Tuesday, May 9th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. What are the non-negotiables that need to be in place before a couple makes it to the altar and says, “I do,” for a lifetime? We’ll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. You know, I wonder how many parents sit in a wedding ceremony today, watching a son or a daughter exchange vows with a young man or a young woman, and in the back of mom and dad’s mind is the question, “I wonder if these kids are going to make it”?

Our five are all married. I can tell you—I’ve never been at a wedding, where I sat there and thought, “I wonder if these kids are going to make it.” I was at the wedding, going: “These kids are going to do great. They’re going to do fine.” I just never had that doubt in the back of my mind.

Dennis: —never had a reason to ask that question. I’d agree, Bob—we went to our kids’ weddings, as well, and never wondered whether they’d make it or not.

Bob: So, the parents, who are wondering—because I think there are a *lot*, who do sit there and go, “Gee, I wonder if this is going to work out.”

Dennis: Well, I read somewhere, years ago, that upwards of 35 to 40 percent of the attendees at a wedding are sitting there, cynically thinking,—

Bob: “This will never last.”

Dennis: “This is not going to go the distance.”

There’s a reason for that. I think, one is—we don’t have a culture that honors commitment. Secondly, we’re not doing a good job preparing our young people to be able to get married. By the way, we need to be sending them to the *Weekend to Remember*[®] marriage getaway as an engaged couple / as a wedding gift. Send them to the conference to let them hear the blueprints before they begin building their marriage and family.

I just was having dinner the other night with a young man, who had been to the conference 30 years ago; and he’s still married. His sister was at the same conference he attended, as an engaged young man / [she] as an engaged young lady—their parents had brought them. And the parents came! I think there is a great model of that—in doing marriage preparation *before* you make the commitment.

Our guest today, Ernie Baker, I think will agree with us. Welcome back to the broadcast, Ernie.

Ernie: Thank you very much.

Dennis: Ernie and his wife Rose have been married since 1981. They have six children. He is now pastor at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. He’s written a book called *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*. This book is really written in three parts. It’s about the foundation. It’s about the first floor and it’s about the roof. So, it’s a ranch style house [Laughter] you’re talking about building here.

Let’s talk about each of those. First of all, the foundation—what is the foundation for a great marriage?

Ernie: Well, since we’re talking about the book, I’ll talk about how I tried to structure it in the book. The theme in the book is based on Proverbs 24:3-4. I’d like to read those if I could: “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” So those are obviously foundation verses. One of my desires in the book was for it to be rigorously biblical, because I believe college students can handle that—or singles can handle that. I wanted to substantiate my claims with biblical truth.

Another theme is: “What is wisdom?”—so: “How do you build a life on wisdom? How do you build a house on wisdom?” The first four chapters are all about foundational issues. Obviously, one of those is: “What’s your relationship with Christ like?” I believe that the days have come to an end where you can just settle for saying: “Well, this guy goes to church. So we’re going to be alright, because he claims to be a Christian.” I urge young people to look for: “What are the evidences that this person is not just claiming to be a

Christian but is this person a follower of Christ?” Because I believe in this principle—that your relationship with Christ is the source from which everything flows—that that has to be foundational. So that’s one of the foundational issues.

Bob: Let me just add to that, because I think this is critical for a lot of couples. I heard someone, one time, talk about the whole issue of spiritual yoking and that we’re to be equally yoked. They made the point that doesn’t just mean that you’re both followers of Christ, but that the level of passion / the level at which you’re pulling the yoke needs to be similar. You ought to be—have the same passion level for Christ—because it could be that one’s a believer but kind of lukewarm in what they’re doing / the other’s really on fire for God. That can be a recipe for real problems in marriage; can’t it?

Ernie: And I can hear in that, “Well, I’ll change him after we get married.” And that is so dangerous.

Bob: Right.

Ernie: You look for the people who are vigorously pursuing the Lord just like you’re vigorously pursuing the Lord. I can tell you numerous stories about premarital counseling. One of the things I do in premarital counseling is—I ask a couple to tell me their testimonies, *but* I don’t have each one tell me their *own* testimony. I say, “Tell me the testimony of your fiancée,”—whether they can tell me the testimony of their fiancée tells me a lot about their relationship and what this relationship has been built on. If they can’t even tell each other’s salvation story, I know we have some foundation issues in the relationship.

Dennis: Yes; I love your advice you’re giving singles at this point: “Look at the track record of the person. Look at the decisions and the judgment that they have: ‘Is it based on the Scriptures? Is it based like the Lord’s Prayer—“not my will be done but Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”?’” And then, finally, I’d ask the question about: “Are his passions / her passions under control? Are they honoring you and your desire for purity and to save sex until you get married?” I know that sounds like an old-fashioned idea; but I got to tell you—you have to trust somebody before you get married if you’re going to trust them *after* you get married.

Ernie: That’s right.

Bob: So, at the foundational level is this spiritual dimension of the relationship. What else is in the foundation?

Ernie: My favorite chapter in the book is about attractions. That’s just a very foundational issue: “Why are you attracted to the people you’re attracted to?” I love the theme in Scripture—by the way, there’s lots of theories out in culture about why we’re attracted to people; and I address a few of those in the book—but Scripture is very clear that we live out of our hearts—so: “Guard your heart; for from it flow the issues of life,”—

which is not a verse, by the way, about protecting your heart from people who want to hurt you. It's about: "You need to guard your heart, because your heart wants to lead you astray."

The theme of the heart in Scripture is about—as Jonathan Edwards would talk about the affections: "What are you loving? What are your hopes and desires?" That's my favorite chapter in the book—is trying to get young people to think about "*Why am I attracted to this person?*"—the wants and desires of the inner person. I don't want them to be naïve about their inner person: "Where's their inner person leading them?"

Bob: They could be spiritually compatible and yet the attractions are different enough that that can present problems in marriage?

Ernie: The wants and desires could be—could be ungodly wants and desires.

Bob: Or it could be—even if it's not ungodly—let's say that he's somebody who says: "I want to see the world. Man, before I die, I just want to—I would love to think that we would live in a dozen different places before we die." And he's marrying somebody who says, "I want to settle down—

Ernie: Right.

Bob: —and build a home."

Ernie: Right.

Bob: Those kinds of issues can *be* really challenging issues for couples after they're married; can't they?

Ernie: Oh, absolutely. What we're really talking about is wisdom here—just learning to ask good—wisdom is—Proverbs 2:6, I believe, is the best definition in the Bible of wisdom—knowledge plus understanding equals wisdom. And so, knowledge is gathering data / asking good questions. And then you—wisdom is: "Now, what do I do with this information?"—it's the word, "understanding," which is discernment—"How do I ask the right questions?" and "Now, I have to make choices between good, better, and best with the information I have."

The things that we're telling young people to consider here are really wisdom issues: Gather the information. Now, make the best decision, using biblical thinking, for the person that you're considering.

Dennis: There's one other thing you talk about in the foundation. Those are the purposes of God. God has a noble design for marriage. We talk about this, Bob, at the *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway. We talk about reflecting God's image—that

male and female were made to reflect the image of God to a culture. I think a marriage was designed to be a picture of Christ's relationship with the church—it's a mystery.

Secondly, we are to reproduce a godly heritage, not just children, but a *godly* heritage. By the way, when you talk about children, as you think about getting married / as you think about your foundation, make sure you're in agreement about children and about if you want to have them, first of all. And then, secondly, how you feel about the command of Scripture to have children and then raise them to become *godly* men and women.

And then the third issue is to reign together in spiritual battle—that's to be on a mission together of representing Christ in your generation. You've already mentioned it—you and Rose have a relationship where you enjoy going to the world together, ministering together, helping other people together. You are soul partners, of sorts, but you're also missional partners too. Just talk about that for a moment.

Ernie: I love God's design for marriage and putting two people together. I like to challenge young people to think about, "Can you serve the Lord better together than you could apart?" And that's been a blessing for Rose and for me is—I'm with a person who believes the Lord was leading her into ministry. She's my "adventure buddy." We get to do ministry together, and that's actually just gotten better over the years.

Bob: I asked some friends, a number of years ago: "If you were giving Scriptural counsel to pre-married couples and you couldn't use the traditional marriage passages, what verses would you share with them?" I remember two or three guys, who said to me—in fact, one guy said, "I'd use the verse I proposed with, which was Psalm 34:3 which says, 'Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together.'" I thought that should be a requirement for everybody, who's proposing—that you have to use that verse in order for it to be an official proposal—because that's *really* what we're *proposing*—that we would magnify the Lord together, and exalt His name together, and that two are better than one; right?

Ernie: Living as worshipers together: "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do"—which includes marriage—"do all to the glory of God [1 Corinthians 10:31]."

Dennis: And the way you become a couple that does that is—when you get in the process of being disciples of Christ / following Him—and you can't be a disciple without dying to self. And by the way, that's what makes a great marriage. What ruins marriages are two people who have to have it their way.

Ernie: Right

Dennis: Okay? Let's talk about the first floor. We didn't get past the foundation; but you talk about the first floor being the single years and how we're preparing, as single people, for when we will be married someday.

Ernie: That's a chapter that I don't think people really want to read, because I address the question of 1 Corinthians 7 in that chapter of, "Do you have the gift of singleness?" It's like they don't— [Laughter]—they don't even want to consider that chapter, but there's so much that could be done during your single years to not waste the single years.

I've seen young people—and in the book, I tell a story of a young man who had, yet again, another broken relationship. He came up to me after church one Sunday—and this was the girl that he was *absolutely* convinced was God's will for his life. Well, she wasn't convinced; and she had just dumped him. He had only been talking for 30 seconds and tears just started to gush as he was thinking: "How could this be? I've invested so much in this relationship. I was absolutely convinced that this was the girl I was supposed to marry."

The thing that I noticed about his life is—he was so focused on getting married and so focused on relationships, it was just dominating everything else. It was like—instead of thinking, "I need the Lord to be my stability and refuge," he was thinking, "I need a woman to be my stability and refuge." I believe the Lord was actually working sovereignly in his life to help him see: "You think you need a woman, but you actually need Me. And until you get that right, I'm going to keep you from making that mistake." I think the Lord was actually being gracious.

Dennis: But your point in the section of your book that talks about first floor is that, as a single person, you need to be involved in relationships and doing relationships God's way—practicing how you resolve conflict / how you ask for forgiveness, how you grant forgiveness, how you get to know another person.

I had a friend of mine who told me that he was watching a group of single people relate to each other at a party. He said: "I was astounded! The guys were frightened of the women. They were terrified to initiate a real relationship that went beyond the surface." And he said, "I think we have a generation of young people, in college and coming out of college, who may be skilled, professionally, and getting ready for a job and a career; but may not know how to do the fundamentals of a relationship."

Ernie: I agree totally. And because of all the technology and seeing people on their iPhone®s—and your head is buried in your iPhone—just knowing how to start conversations / how to resolve conflict—"What is good communication?" I challenge young people with: "Why not start now? Why wait? You're not going to be a different person 24 hours after you're married than you were 24 hours before your marriage. You're carrying who you were, as a person, into the marriage. Just because you're married, you don't—voila—all of a sudden have good communication skills."

Dennis: Right.

Ernie: “So, start practicing now.” I challenge college students: “Practice with your roommate,” / “Practice with your parents,”—“practice good conflict resolution skills.” My favorite resource there is—and of course, you know who it is—Ken Sande with *The Peacemaker* or the book, *Peacemaking for Families*. That is an absolutely *wonderful* resource to use to *learn* relationship skills.

Dennis: I totally agree.

Bob: Years ago, we had the opportunity to sit down with Elisabeth Elliot and talk with her about counsel that she had given to singles over the years. I’ll never forget her saying, “People always want to know, ‘Do I have the gift of singleness?’—like, “Do I have the plague?” / like, “Doctor, do I—am I going to live?”

And she said, “I would always look at these people and say, ‘Are you married?’ and they would go, ‘No.’ And she said, ‘Well then, you have the gift of singleness.’” And she said, “They would always say, ‘But I want to know: “Do I have it *forever*?”” And she says, “Well, goodness; nobody knows whether you have it forever. All we know is you have it *today*. If it’s the gift you have today, then embrace the gift you have today, live it out to its fullest until God gives you a different gift,”—right?

Ernie: Yes; Psalm 27: “I would have despaired unless I’d seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” I am teaching young people that: “Your job, right now, is hope in the Lord. The Lord’s your rock / the Lord’s your refuge—not: ‘Am I going to be married?’” That’s not going to be my rock and my refuge.

Bob: And in fact, if you are obsessed with that, you’re showing neediness in your life that makes you less ready for marriage than the person who can confidently say, “I’m single, and I’m okay until God provides.” That doesn’t mean they’re not going to be sad, or lonely, or that they’re not going to face challenges. There is a difference between the guy you described earlier, who had to have a wife and kept coming up short and was lamenting every time, and somebody who says, “Okay; this is the Lord’s will, and I’ll press on.”

Ernie: Yes; so: “Don’t waste your singleness.

Bob: There you go.

Ernie: “Use it for the glory of God.”

Bob: I think I heard somebody say something about that—[Laughter]—Piper?

Dennis: Yes; no doubt about it.

Well, we talked about a foundation / first floor. Briefly talk about the roof—what is that?

Ernie: Well, the whole book is based on the idea of sowing and reaping—that’s wisdom in Scripture. The Book of Proverbs is about wisdom. Generally speaking, the tendency is that: “If you sow this way, more than likely, this is what you’re going to reap.”

I like the imagery of the roof pointing to heaven: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” So, a husband and wife coming together—that our mission in life is to live as worshipers of the true and living God. We want to be God-glorifiers. We want to be worshipers together—not perfect—because Genesis 3 precludes that.

You can’t have a perfect spouse, which is one of the lies of our culture—that you can find your perfect need-meeter—and that, instead of having that mentality, I have the mentality of: “I understand I’m living with another Genesis 3 person. The gospel’s made a difference in this person’s life. The gospel’s making a difference in my life; and now, we’re living together as followers of Christ. We’re raising the next generation of followers of Christ.” You can actually have a marriage that is a God-glorifying marriage in the midst of all the cultural confusion.

I like to think of it this way: “The darker the night, the brighter the light of God’s Word shines. You *can* have a marriage that is a light in the midst of all the darkness.”

Dennis: I would say: “Give me a better foundation / give me a better plan than the Scripture. Give me a better roof than honoring and glorifying God that pays off over a lifetime.”

I’m reflecting back, now, on our marriage of 45 years. I don’t know how people do it! I don’t know what the plan would be. I don’t know what the *purpose* of the relationship would be. Ultimately, I think it would degenerate into two selfish people, who try to get the other to meet their needs; and that isn’t going to work!

Ernie: No.

Bob: Here’s the point—I think a lot of people will hear the title of your book, *Marry Wisely, Marry Well* and they’ll think, “Well, that’s a book for couples who are thinking about getting married.” It’s a book for people long before they’re thinking about getting married; isn’t it?

Ernie: Yes; I’ve been told that it’s really a pre pre-engagement book. My target audience is actually the young person, who’s not even in a relationship.

Bob: You’d want a high school student to read this—

Ernie: —older high school

Bob: —young college student to read this—and to really start thinking, now, before you think about: “Who’s the one?”—think about what the process needs to look like and how you manage that skillfully.

Ernie: —before all the emotions get stirred up.

Bob: That’s right.

Dennis: No doubt about it. And speaking of the process, I would add to the book—I would add the *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway as a *great* marriage preparation weekend for any couple who are contemplating engagement / who are engaged and even have the date set. Get to this conference—go through it together. You will understand why it’s so important, 20 years from today.

Bob: And hopefully, you read Ernie’s book, years ago, before you even started dating; but I think you’re right. I think to have a weekend at a *Weekend to Remember* getaway prior to marriage is *great* marriage preparation for couples, who are engaged, or couples who are just wondering if this is the direction their relationship ought to be going in. We’ve got information about the *Weekend to Remember* getaways that are still ahead during the month of May and into June. We take a little break in the summer and then we’ll be back in September with our fall getaways. You can find out when a *Weekend to Remember* is happening in a city near where you live by going to FamilyLifeToday.com.

You can also order a copy of the book, *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*. If you have high school juniors or seniors or college students in your home—or maybe there is someone you know who fits that description—and you’d like to give them a gift, this is a great book to pass on to them—*Marry Wisely, Marry Well: A Blueprint for Personal Preparation*. Order, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order at 1-800-358-6329. That’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Here, at FamilyLife, we are committed to providing practical biblical help and hope. Our goal is to effectively develop godly marriages and families, because we think godly marriages and families can change the world. We are grateful for those of you who share this passion with us and who are partners in this ministry.

During the month of May, we’re hoping to raise \$1.1 million. That’s a goal we’ve set to provide the necessary funding to continue working on some projects that are underway currently. We’d like to see those continue, full speed ahead, during the summer months. So, we’re asking listeners—those of you who give occasionally / those of you who have never made a contribution to FamilyLife: “Would you make an online donation today?” Go to FamilyLifeToday.com and do whatever you’re able to do to help us reach that \$1.1million goal. Or you can call to make a donation at 1-800-FL-TODAY. You can also mail your donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we have a lot of hard questions that we want to pose to Ernie Baker about marriage and about marriage preparation—things like “Does God only have one person in mind for you to marry?” and “How do you find that person?” That’s just one of the questions we’ll pose 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 back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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