FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Choose Your Community Well

Guests: Peter and Kelli Worrall

From the series: 20 Things We'd Tell Our Twenty-Something Selves (Day 2 of 3)

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Bob: Do you think living today in a text, Twitter[®], and Facebook[®] world—that kind of social media—is having some kind of impact on our human relationships? Kelli Worrall thinks it is.

Kelli: Well, we've lost the ability, to some degree, to actually sit down and have a real conversation about anything that matters at any depth. We're just so used to texting, Twitter, and Facebook—and that's a relationship to us / that's connection. "I can put just a little bit out there and I can back away as needed,"—it's on my terms. I just go back to a biblical understanding of love, and I think: "How do we learn to love? Where are we learning to do that in a way that is self-sacrificial?"

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Thursday, October 6th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife[®], Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. There are some things, when we're living in the moment, that we just can't see as clearly as we can see from a distance. We'll examine some of those wisdom lessons today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. If you could go back and tell yourself, in your 20s, just one good piece of advice, I know what mine would be. Do you know what yours would be?

Dennis: That's a great question. Since you've been asking yourself the question for some time now and know your own answer, why don't you go ahead while I think about mine? [Laughter]

Bob: Well, I would tell myself that the Spurs are going to win the championship in 2014. That way, when I got into my later years, I could go ahead and bet on them and get rich.

Dennis: Oh!!!

Peter: That's like a *Back to the Future* thing.

Kelli: Yes!

Dennis: Yes; it really is. I guess what I might say to myself is—I might give myself a quote that I have given many single women, and a few single men, because I don't think

men panic as much as women do, in their 20s and maybe into their 30s, if they're still single. It's by Martin Lloyd Jones, a great English preacher, who said, "Faith is the refusal to panic." I think that singles need a walk with God that brings about stability in their lives—where they're placing their refuge in God and in Jesus Christ and the Bible—that is true, regardless of how you feel and how lonely you are. Don't panic. God's got everything under control.

And we have with us the authors of a new book called 20 Things We'd Tell Our Twenty-Something Selves. Peter and Kelli Worrall join us on FamilyLife Today. Kelli, Peter, welcome back.

Kelli and Peter: It's good to be here.

Dennis: Both are professors at Moody Bible Institute. They told about your corny Moody Bible Institute jokes.

Bob: Moody *Bridal* Institute.

Dennis: And what's the one about a ring?—which is—

Peter: "A ring before spring or your money back." [Laughter]

Dennis: They are the parents of two and have been married all the way back to 1999. They shared earlier just about their own 20-something journey. I want to go back to the story that we talked about earlier, with you going to Kelli's house at Christmas to tell her that things are too serious / that you enjoy her too much; and therefore, you need to break the relationship off.

Peter: Yes. Well, it was just because that I thought I needed to focus on God 100 percent. I thought that this was kind of diffusing my attention. So I needed to break way from relationships because it was one or the other—it's God or a woman. The idea that God and women could be in my life at the same time—that was a hard one.

Kelli: Because, in your past relationships, that hadn't been the case; right?

Peter: Right. In my past relationships, they had this really tremendous high of: "Oh, wow! We are going to serve God together"; and they would be based on some kind of superficial initial attraction. And then, within about four months, they would just fade away to nothing. Also, there would be other things in the relationship which were really ungodly and not really what I wanted in my life.

Bob: So you work with students today on a college campus, who are meeting and falling head over heels pretty quickly. How would you tell—one of them who comes to you and says: "Mrs. Worrall, I think he's the one. How do I know?" What do you tell them?

Kelli: I think time is important, especially when they're just young 20s / some of them are even 18/19.

Bob: Like a couple of *weeks*?

Kelli: No—[Laughter]—like months. I get really concerned—some students will come to us and say: "You know, my boyfriend and I…" or "My fiancé and I are arguing, and that concerns me. Maybe we need to break up." I get even more concerned. I tell them—when a young couple comes to me and says: "We *never* fight. It's perfect! We're so much *alike*,"—"You haven't been together long enough, and you haven't worked through some of the hard things."

Peter: Yes; one of things about them saying, "Oh, we're so alike!"—"I like pizza," / "I like pizza too," "I like this movie," / "I like it too,"—I mean, there is a signal there that maybe the one that you are really dating is a reflection of yourself—that actually—because in your early 20s, Erik Erikson tells us we are trying to work out who we are. It's very affirming if the other person is just a lot like us. Really, I'm completing my image of myself, and I haven't celebrated that I am actually with another person.

Bob: I want you both to comment on this because we were talking earlier. We live in a culture that exalts narcissism to a level we have never seen in my lifetime. I mean, we've always been self-centered—that's our genetic predisposition / that's our Adamic predisposition; right? But in this culture, it's almost as if the sense of self has been magnified and glorified to a level we've never seen before. Even Christian kids—this is in the water they are drinking; isn't it?

Kelli: Right.

Peter: Oh, yes. J.P. Moreland writes about this in his book, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*—he talks about the empty self. One of the aspects he gives of the empty self is that it is narcissistic.

But actually, talking to my colleague Nancy Kane, we talk about developmental stages. One of the stages of developmentally-appropriate growth is to bring things to yourself. I'm thirsty, and I need a drink; so I cry; and Mommy brings me some milk. I graze my knee. I don't know how to take care of it. I make a fuss, and then somebody takes care of my knee.

What happens is—that because we've coddled people to some degree—when they get into their 20s and they graze their knee, they're still thinking [whimpering]: "Well, somebody else should take care of it. Who is going to take care of my knee?" And when they need a drink, they think [whimpering]: "Well, somebody else should be paying for my drink. How do I get it?" They become other-centered as if they are a way of taking care of them, rather than taking care of themselves.

Dennis: Comment on what you see happening among the 20-somethings today, especially with the proliferation of social media. I just want to contrast it with what Bob said about the fixation on self, coupled with very shallow Twitter-based / 140-character relationships.

Kelli: Yes. We have lost the ability, to some degree, to actually sit down and have a real conversation about anything that matters at any depth. We're just so used to texting, Twitter, and Facebook—and that's a relationship to us / that's connection.

There's a great book by Sherry Turkle called *Alone Together*. She's done a lot of research on how technology has affected our ability to truly connect with one another and have any sort of substantive relationship. She says—you know, because of social media and such—we can engage at will and we can disengage at will / that's kind of relationship for us. "I'll put just a little bit out there, and then I can back away as needed,"—it's on my terms. I just go back to a biblical understanding of love; and I think: "How do we learn to love? Where are we learning to do that in a way that is self-sacrificial?"

Dennis: Love isn't just a word you type on Instagram.

Kelli: Right!

Dennis: I mean, you can put photos of love on there and have all these terms; but it's not instant—it's a lifetime commitment.

Peter: Love prevails / love *endures*. And to endure, you have to be there for the long haul. And that isn't happening. Also, another thing that Kelli and I have read is "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" With that one, it talks about the way that we're communicating in the mass media causes a *browsing* mentality, which rewires the mind. Actually, what's happening over time, is that we lose the ability to do deeper relationships because our mind is firing in a different way. It can't concentrate long enough to endure. It's can't stay there for the long haul / that endurance is diminished.

Dennis: So what would you say? Your book is about 20 things you would tell 20--somethings about ourselves. What would you say to a 20-something today who wants to be married but isn't and isn't dating?

Kelli: Yes. Well, there are several things / we tell them 20 things. [Laughter]

Peter: "That sounds like a good idea."

Kelli: "That's a great title."

Peter: "Let's write that!"

Kelli: Yes. Well, just with the community things, as we were talking about community. I think sometimes that desire to get married is a desire for connection. We're thinking that is the only way that we can meet that desire for intimacy that we have. We can meet that desire—obviously, we should be meeting that with our relationship with God—He's the first place to go. I think we lose that. There's an intimacy with Him that satisfies beyond even what a marriage relationship can satisfy. And that has to be first.

But then there are other ways to develop community and be in relationship, apart from being married—and so to be seeking that out / be intentional. One of our chapters is "Choose Community Carefully" and to be intentional about building into that.

Bob: Peter, explain a little bit more about that idea of choosing community carefully. What should somebody in their 20s be looking for; and do you have to get aggressive in forming community, or should it just be a natural organic fit for you?

Peter: Yes, there have been some studies done in the last 20 years that maybe the people we hang out with form us more than some of the key individuals that we hang out with. That community relationship—if you are *immersed* in an environment—you are going to reflect, naturally, the environment that you are in.

Bob: I heard somebody say recently—and I thought this was brilliant—they said, "You are a reflection of the five people you spend the most time with."

Kelli: Absolutely!

Bob: And I thought that was very interesting and very *true*. So those five people are critical; aren't they?

Peter: And you said the *most* time with—there is a law of exposure there: "How much time am I exposing my heart to God? How much time am I in the Word, having God expose himself to me? How much time am I around Christians in *true* fellowship, equally yoked with them, so that we are all pulling at the same speed towards God?" and "How much time am I spending my time with unbelievers who are pulling in a different direction?" We *should* evangelize—we *should* be with people who don't share the faith—but we shouldn't do it at the expense of our other relationships.

Dennis: I want to get back to the story of how you proposed / how you ultimately—[Laughter]

Peter: Oh, dear.

Bob: We're going from community to—

Dennis: Well, I just want our listeners to know we haven't gotten how he sealed the deal with Kelli.

Bob: That's true.

Dennis: He's just a pile of ashes on her coffee table. She burned his name on the sheet of paper.

Bob: —in effigy. [Laughter]

Dennis: Yes; that's exactly right. But I want to talk about the elephant in the room that I think is a big one for 20-somethings today and the parents who raised them; and that is, is community equal to the church?

Peter: No.

Dennis: Because a lot of 20-somethings are giving up on the church.

Kelli: Right.

Peter: Yes.

Dennis: So the question is: "Can you experience community without the church?"

Peter: Unfortunately, a lot of people are making that choice in that direction. Kelli and I, actually, were serving the church together—it was a ministry that we were serving with over the summer that we were doing together. The community in that group and the community that Kelli and I were part of—we were plugged in, we were being ministered to, we were ministering to others—and it became an idea of what should endure. This is the way that it should be—that we should be plugged into a church together / we should be plugged in with each other—and this whole thing is God-centered. It was very different.

You asked about the proposal. The proposal was, as Kelli puts it, a non-event. I didn't know how you Americans do things. I didn't know that you go out for a fine dinner and you put the ring in a fish's mouth that happens to be brought to the table and then there is a choir singing in the balcony. [Laughter]

Dennis: Now wait a second! You're the James Bond with the accent.

Kelli: Right. [Laughter]

Peter: Well, that's about all that I have, because—

Kelli: The accent was there.

Peter: —this is what happened. We had been ministering together, which was the important thing, because we saw life / on life how this was going to work as an alliance serving God. We were out on a jog, and I was thinking the same thing—I was thinking: "Wow! I'm out jogging with this girl. We are just doing so much of life together in the right way. It's all healthy. It's all good." So I thought, "I can do it now," because quite frankly I was scared. I thought, "I can do it now." So on the jog, I dropped down on my knee; and I said, "Kelli, will you marry me?" And she looked at me, and what did you say?

Kelli: I said: "Are you serious? [Laughter]This is it? Great!"

Dennis: "You can't do any better than this?!"

Peter: And there was no ring or anything.

Kelli: No ring. I was a sweaty mess.

Peter: I said, "Yes; yes, I am." And then she said—

Kelli: And I said, "Of course."

Peter: And then we finished the jog. [Laughter]

Dennis: So how many days did that night last? [Laughter]

Peter: It was a good thing. And I mean, the engagement and the wedding—those aren't really the focus—they were good times / they were good things. Really, we saw the enormity of what God had brought together for His service for the long haul. I think not getting married until our late 20s gave us that perspective: "This is forever. This is until death do we part," and "This is not about us. This is about how we can serve God as a team." That just all came together so that I had the courage to drop down on one knee, in the middle of a jog, and ask her to marry me.

Dennis: So I want you both to comment on this—again, we're talking about 20-somethings and how they think today. There's a bunch of 20-somethings that are giving up on marriage, and they're just living together. A lot of them are going to church, and they're living together; but they've given up on marriage as a whole.

Peter and Kelli: Yes.

Dennis: Talk to that person, who is listening to us right now, who is going: "I don't know what you're talking about the need for a ring / the need to make a commitment. We're good."

Kelli: I just go back to Genesis and God's creation for man to leave and cleave. It's not good for him to be alone. There's a commitment, as a commitment before God; and it's a commitment before the people who love you, who are going to hold you accountable. I think it's a matter of obedience really.

Bob: And for a man and woman to be together, to be in the most intimate relationship two humans can experience, without that full commitment to one another—that's actually a very risky, a very dangerous, a very questioning place. There's always, in the back of your mind, an uncertainty about what's going to happen. It has its moments certainly, because any good relationship will have its moments. But the lack of commitment has got to keep people up at night—I would think.

Kelli: I think especially women. I can't pull up an exact study; but I think from what I've read, men are more comfortable with it than women are generally.

Peter: Women are more depressed because of that lack of commitment, statistically. Men end up thinking that it is okay.

One of the things is its like looking at your horse before you buy it. There's that kind of idea that "We have to try out this kind of thing to find out if we are compatible in intimacy and every way." So you end up "Trying this out to see if we're going to be okay together." The idea is then that intimacy, in a very physical close way, is seen as the essence of the relationship. It's what the movies sell to us / it's what everything gives us—on the second date, you're in bed with each other; and this gives you the basis for your relationship—whereas, biblically, we see it the other way around: "I have a strong relationship, which may be able to encounter a marriage night that isn't bliss."

Bob: Right.

Peter: But that's not the basis of everything. The intimacy with each other is an *expression* of our marriage—it isn't the *basis* of our marriage. I think that that's been reversed in today's culture, so that we don't have that security of relationship first. That's why—even these relationships—as they progress, are really quite insecure.

Dennis: You touched on it, but I want you to expand further. You talked about intimacy without the commitment. It's one thing to cohabit. It's another thing for college students and young 20s today to just hook up—to just go get a Coke[®], a cup of coffee, a glass of wine—and go to bed.

Peter: Yes. Unfortunately, that's the case on many, many college campuses. I would say that at Moody, where we teach, I hope it's less at least. But there's that urge / that physical desire, and people are coupling that with identity: "I *feel*; therefore, I am,"—and so: "I *feel* this urge to get a Coke. I get a Coke. I *feel* this urge to take this woman, and take her back to my room, and be with her in this way. I see and I take."

Because I study a lot of media with my students—and we listen to *The Billboard Hot 100*—what does *The Billboard Hot 100* preach again, and again, and again? These people are telling us what we're meant to do. They are saying in these songs that we're meant to go to the dance floor, we're meant to find somebody whom we think is hot / they think I'm hot, and I take them home. We're not preaching the gospel and we're not preaching the biblical truth with the same fervor and with the same eloquence. Most of all, we're not preaching it with the *same* passion.

Dennis: And where's that going to take us, as a country and as a nation?

Kelli: It already has.

Dennis: Exactly; a family was meant to be a place where there was security—

Peter: Yes; yes.

Dennis: —between a man and a woman, called husband and wife—raising children who feel that same security. Yet, what's happening in some of these hook-ups is—young ladies get pregnant. We've got an unwed pregnancy rate that is skyrocketing at an all-time high in our nation's history. We're not ready for it as a nation. These kids are being brought up in homes where there isn't a mommy and a daddy who are committed to each other.

Kelli: There's an inability to wait too. We don't understand delayed gratification at all. We have an urge / we have a desire, and we're going to fill it *now*; and we're going to fill it in all the wrong ways—and "I want to feel good; so I am going to take this, whatever it is,"—whether it is with a partner, whether it is a substance, whether it's with money/shopping, you know—whatever our culture has shorter and shorter ability to wait.

Bob: So one of the things I know you would talk to 20-somethings / your 20-something self about is the whole issue of patience. And there is a bigger story behind that so I don't want to dive into that too much, but it's something you have written about in your book, 20 Things We'd Tell Our Twenty-Something Selves, which is available at our FamilyLifeToday Resource center. You can go online at FamilyLifeToday.com to request a copy, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get a copy. It's a great book, Dennis, to pass on to somebody who is in their 20s.

Dennis: Yes; it is. We've been talking to Kelli and Peter about what 20-somethings are going through today and how to communicate with them. What would you say to parents, who have got a 20-something, and its causing them to scratch their heads? They don't understand—but they're looking at this single woman/this single man—it's not about the right stuff. Coach them / you're parents—I know your children are younger.

Peter: At our children's ages—they are very little—you can *tell* them things. You have to be careful what you tell them, because they'll repeat those things. But children in their 20s—they are still our children—but it's been found we are meant to be influencers, not so much tellers. We need to be listening and asking the right questions.

In Chapter One of the book, its talks about examining your foundation. There are eight key questions there, which can generate a conversation. You can find out what the person is basing their life on. This also comes into the other areas that we examine, where you are asking the right questions; and you're drawing it out, and then, when you draw it out, you'll find that the 20-something is revealing their heart. They'll say their own contradictions, and you can ask them a follow up question—it's relationship—and the kinds of questions that you ask, lovingly, in that relationship.

Dennis: Take a look at the gospels and notice how Jesus talked. He asked a lot of questions.

Peter: "Who do people say that I am?"

Dennis: Maybe that's the way best to reach your 20-something today.

Bob: Or maybe just get them a copy of 20 Things We'd Tell Our Twenty-Something Selves, and slide it under their door / have it show up on their doorstep. You can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, to request a copy; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. We'll get it sent to you. Keep in mind there is a study guide to go along with this book. You'll find that on Peter and Kelli's website—we've got a link to that at FamilyLifeToday.com

Now, a couple of anniversaries to highlight today—we want to say, "Happy anniversary!" to Ron and Angie Olsen, who live Dearborn Heights, Michigan. They're celebrating their 32^{nd} anniversary today. And on the same day, 32 years ago, Tom and Cyndi Passmore, who live in Dallas, Texas, got married. So "Congratulations!" to the Passmores and the Olsens, both celebrating 32 years of marriage today. That's a big deal!

We think anniversaries matter—your anniversary matters. We've been celebrating our 40th anniversary this year, as a ministry, and we're doing it by reflecting on all the anniversaries that have happened over the years because of how God has used FamilyLife in the lives of so many couples.

We appreciate those of you partner with us to make this ministry happen—those of you who are monthly Legacy Partners and those of you who will, from time to time, make a contribution in support of the ministry of *FamilyLifeToday*. It you are able to help with a gift today, we'd love to say, "Thank you," by sending you a banner that Barbara Rainey has recently created—a banner that declares that your home is an embassy / an embassy of the kingdom of heaven. That banner is our gift to you when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and make an online donation today, or when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation. Or you can mail your donation and request the banner.

Send your contribution to *FamilyLifeToday* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we're going to continue to pass on some of the lessons we learned later in life. Hopefully, some of you, who are younger listeners, can take advantage of some of that wisdom. 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 tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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