

FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

References to conferences, resources, or other special promotions may be obsolete.

Are You Ready for Marriage?

Guests: Bill and Pam Farrel
From the series: Before-You-Marry Questions (Day 1 of 2)
Air date: April 24, 2014

Bob: There are a lot of young couples today who have a desire to get married but are nervous about the prospect, at the same time. Pam Farrel understands why.

Pam: The same summer that I was dating Bill, and deciding whether to marry, my parents were actually getting a divorce. It was vital that I dealt with: “What do I even feel about marriage, and can it really last? Is it possible to have a love that lasts?” I really was at a place I needed to hear: “What does the Word of God say? What’s the truth, and how can I build a strong foundation?”

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Thursday, April 24th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to spend some time today examining some of the questions that couples, who are dating, ought to be asking one another before they decide to say, “I do.” Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. Okay, so I have to tell you about these two couples—two young couples that I’ve been in contact with recently. The first young couple came up—

Dennis: Married?

Bob: Well, the first couple came up, Sunday morning after church. She was flashing the ring; okay?—so, brand-new engaged couples.

Dennis: Got it.

Bob: We visited a little bit. We talked about their pre-marital—they’re going to a *Weekend to Remember*® to get ready for their marriage. We told them, “Have a short engagement.” You know—we just coached them on some of this stuff, but they’re both so excited.

Then that afternoon, I had a conversation with a husband, who—Mary Ann and I were at their wedding—they’ve been married for about five years. They’re not in a happy place in their marriage; okay? They’re in conflict—they’re struggling. I thought to myself, “What can I say to the first couple, that I met this morning, with the engagement ring, so

that, five years from now, they're not the second couple?" I wish there was some magic thing, you know, that you say, and it would all be taken care of; but it's not that simple.

Dennis: Well, by sending them to the *Weekend to Remember*, that's a good start—

Bob: Right.

Dennis: —because there's a series of preparing-for-marriage break-out sessions that are really going to help them prepare for marriage to avoid where the other couple ended up. But there's also some questions that you could ask that couple—who are just starting out their engagement—that I think would be very appropriate. It's a book called *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*, written by Bill and Pam Farrel, who join us on the broadcast.

Bill, Pam, welcome back.

Bill: Hi, it's great to be with you.

Pam: Thanks. It is great being here.

Dennis: It's been a long time since you guys have been on *FamilyLife Today*.

Bill: It's been awhile.

Pam: Yes; too long because we sure value you all and your great ministry.

Dennis: Well, we appreciate you guys. You guys give leadership to a couple of organizations—Love-Wise and Farrel Communications. You're speaking, and teaching, and writing books, all over the country. You've been married since 1979—have three adult children / three grandchildren.

You wrote this book to prepare couples who are getting ready to start the most important human commitment two people ever make to one another. You talk about how couples need to be prepared for love. We're really not ready for this thing called "marriage" when we get engaged; are we?

Bill: And you know, so much of what we share with other people comes out of our personal experience. I remember when Pam and I—we met each other / we fell in love. We both came from homes that should never be repeated. So, the only thing I knew when we got married was: "I love Jesus with all my heart. We love each other desperately, and we *really* don't know what we're doing."

Bob: Yes.

Bill: Out of desperation, I used to take us to church. We would stand in the back, waiting for couples to come in and sit down. I would scan the crowd, looking for couples that looked like they still liked each other. We would go sit right behind them. During the greeting time they had to meet us. As they met us I would look at the guy and say: “Now, you look like you’re in love with her. Is this thing real?” Of course, he said, “Well, yes.”

Bob: He’s at church—he has to say that. [Laughter]

Bill: Then I would ask: “Well, how did you do it? What are the things you do to keep this thing going?” Well, because it’s the greeting time at church, they don’t have time to answer it there. So that usually led to an invite to lunch after church.

At lunch, we got them to disciple us in how relationships really work. I’d ask him questions: “What do you say to your wife, on a regular basis, that works? What have you done that you would never do again? How do you treat her in a way that makes her glad she’s married to you?”

Dennis: You were married, back in 1979. You have kind of a Campus Crusade for Christ[®], currently known as Cru[®]—

Pam: Right; right.

Dennis: —kind of a story there.

Pam: Yes. It connects back to you, actually. One of the reasons that we’re so excited about *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions* is—I took a summer off of our dating, where we didn’t write and we didn’t speak—we just wanted—it was back before texting, and email, and Twitter[®], and all those things—“We just want God to speak to our hearts.”

I went to the Institute of Biblical Studies. There was this young, vibrant teacher. He was talking about marriage; and he kept talking about this beautiful woman, named Barbara, that he was married to and these cute kids. I’m like, “That’s the kind of marriage I want!” Every day—listening to, yes, Dennis Rainey—I got some good training before I came back and Bill got down on one knee and said, “Hey, will you marry me?”

Bill: So, I was praying you’d do a good job, Dennis. [Laughter]

Dennis: It was kind of a marriage preparation course; wasn’t it?

Pam: It was! It was terrific—wish that everybody could have that kind of information, and now they can.

Bob: But you know what's great about your story is—two things—first of all, you both loved Jesus; but you both recognized, “We're not sure what we're doing.” Because I think there are a lot of people who: “We love Jesus. We figure that's going to take care of everything.” You need more than just, “We both love Jesus,” to make a marriage work; don't you?

Bill: Well, most of the people I meet still think it's magic—that if your heart's with the Lord and you love this person—it's all just going to work out. We don't approach anything else in life that way.

Bob: That's right.

Bill: You know—I meet men, all the time, that—they love their cars! That doesn't mean they think it is magic—that it's just going to run.

Bob: Yes.

Bill: And yet, we somehow think, in relationships, it's going to work that way—and the disappointment that sets in when I think: “Oh, it's not working out. Maybe I didn't meet the right person.”

Bob: Yes. Bill, how does answering the questions that you two have put together in your book really help a couple move toward marriage—dealing with their fears and also getting on the same page, as they look toward beginning their lifetimes together?

Bill: Well, as couples, work through questions that are in this book and other questions related to relationships—every time you get an answer, your confidence level goes up. I like to compare it to—we live near a number of military bases, down where we are in San Diego—and I tell men all the time: “If I took you down to the Marine Corps air station, stuck you in a jet, and told you to ‘Fly this thing,’—well, if you don't know *how* to fly it, I'm going to get some really strange reactions from you. You're probably going to cry, you're going to yell, scream / get angry—but if you go to training, and you learn how to fly that jet, you get to go for the ride of your life.”

Pam: Yes.

Bill: That's the way marriage is—that when you get training / when you learn how this thing works—and I honestly believe the missing question is “How?” The first time I was told, “You should listen to your wife,” my reaction was: “I agree! How do I do that?” When I was told: “I should be committed for life,”—what I thought that meant was, “You need to be committed to be miserable with somebody for the rest of your life,” because that's what I saw in my home.

Pam: “I want something better than that.”

Bill: The thing I *admire* about my parents is—they have a simple sense of integrity, that: “We said this was for life. We meant it.” What I was frustrated with my parents about was that they didn’t commit to a quality relationship. So, I thought commitment meant you just kind of put up with each other and you’re miserable. But then I started learning that: “No, you can actually learn how to make decisions well together. You can learn to set priorities together. You can pray for one another. You can share your struggles with each other. You can share your victories with each other—

Pam: —“learn to romance well.”

Bill: “And you can grow personally together so that, five years from now, you’re stronger than you were when you started; and ten years from now, you’re stronger than five years into it. It can be this great journey. All of a sudden, it became attractive.

Bob: So Pam, Dennis started off by asking the question that you start off with in the book: “Are you ready for love?”

Pam: Right.

Bob: How does a young couple—the couple that I met in church, on Sunday, with the ring—how do they answer that question? How can they figure out, “Are we ready for this?”

Pam: You know, one of the things we wanted to do in *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions* was to make it natural. You know, we’ve always wanted to write a pre-marital, pre-engagement, dating kind of book. When our own children started dating and started getting serious—we started: “Well, you might want to take this test together,” and, “You might want to have this kind of a date,” and, “You might want this kind of an experience.”

We thought, “Maybe we should put it all in one place.” So, we had “Dates to Decide” in there because there are just certain dates that you should always go on—like, you know—take the person that you think you’re in love with to church. See where your faith is—if it’s similar and if you’re growing well together. Take them home to meet Mom and Dad, you know, because it’s really two families that marry. And borrow the whiniest kid that you know, all day, and take him to the zoo—[Laughter]

Dennis: Yes.

Pam: —see how they might parent. Or the Home Depot® Day—and go to the department store and hang wallpaper together. If you can hang wallpaper and still be in love, you know, you might have what it takes. And the Third-World Date—you know—go on a mission trip and some place where you’re not really showering regularly and things are kind of dusty and dirty. If you still like that person when they have bad hair, you might have what it takes.

So, we made it kind of a fun / interactive. Every few pages, you stop and you dialogue. There's "his" and "hers" worksheets. There are questions, and there are dates to decide, and there are coffee-cup activities. We tried to make it as interactive as possible because we really think that's how people date. They date very organically, but they want some kind of path to follow and some kind of wisdom to listen to so they can avoid mistakes. Most people don't like pain; so, "What can you do to help me not hurt my heart?" is what they're looking for.

Bill: What I've discovered is—people are asking questions, but they don't have permission to ask the strategic questions. So, we're asking questions like: "Am I attracted to this person?"—which we hope you are. We hope you—if you're going to think about getting married to somebody, we hope you're attracted to that person and think that they're stunning.

Dennis: Right.

Bill: But, there are some other strategic questions we need to ask. For instance, "Do you have the ability to be curious about each other?" I'm amazed at how many men I meet that actually think they understand the woman that they're with. What I have found—we're 34 years into marriage; and I'm still on this curiosity journey—trying to learn how Pam's wired, and how Pam approaches life, and how she processes the information. When I stop being curious, I start getting demanding. So: "Do we have the ability to be curious?"

Also, if men are asking, "Am I attracted to somebody who shares my purpose in life?" If I look back and say, "The thing we did right—is the one question I knew to ask is: 'Is Pam committed to ministry?'"

Pam: "Are we going in the same direction together?"

Bill: I didn't realize, back then, how strategic it was; but I knew—

Dennis: Oh, absolutely.

Bill: —I knew God had put a desire in my heart to serve Him, professionally, for the rest of my life. I knew that if I didn't get attracted to somebody who shared that, it wouldn't work.

Dennis: Over the years, I've counseled a lot of young couples who are at the point of getting engaged. The guy had one mission and one direction—one purpose in mind—and the young lady had another. They weren't in the same direction. That's not going to make for oneness.

Pam: No.

Dennis: That's going to begin the marriage with isolation and could ultimately end it five years later—like Bob was talking about—two people who are in a mess.

One thing I want you to comment on, in terms of questions to ask early-on, and that is: "What do your parents say about this relationship?" I think every couple, who are contemplating engagement / getting engaged, need to know what their mom and dad think—truly, honestly—about this relationship. How do you guys handle that?

Pam: Well, especially, the healthier that mom and dad are. If they come from a strong, Christian home, and there's a good value system, that just makes sense—check in with your most important spiritual mentors. For Bill and I—my mom was in such a broken place. My dad was an alcoholic. Bill's mom struggles with mental illness. We actually went to our spiritual mentors and said, "What do you think?" because they had strong marriages. They were in a place of strength and could speak into our life.

Sometimes, you have to go even—not just to your family—but aunts and uncles—your extended family—the people that are mentoring you / discipling you—your pastor / your small-group leader. Really, you want a good sounding-board—a lot of people speaking truth into your life, at this really important juncture, because who you marry—if you come to know Jesus in a personal way, that is the number one decision in life—and who you marry—that's like number two! So, this is vital.

Bill: And all of us are parents, here, at the table; right? Most parents have their kids' best interests at heart. But I remember kind of a shocking experience I had. I was getting my hair cut, and we were talking. I was talking to the lady, who was cutting my hair. She mentioned that she had an arranged marriage. I looked at her and said, "Well, that's really unusual in this culture." I said, "Did it bother you or did it scare you that your parents were going to choose your spouse?" She very sincerely said to me: "Oh, no, my parents love me. They would make a good choice for me."

It kind of hit a place in my heart, where I realized: "You know, as parents, we really do have our kids' best interests at heart. So, our opinion matters." It makes sense that those who are getting married would want to check in with their parents and say: "Dad, what do you think? Mom, what do you think?"

Bob: Right.

Pam: It also puts some responsibility on Mom and Dad: "Is it my issue or is it their issue?"—because, sometimes, moms and dads just have a hard time letting go—especially, if it's your firstborn. We have to reel it back and say, "Okay, before You, God, what's going on here?"

Dennis: There's a line in the wedding ceremony, where the pastor asks, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

Bill: Yes.

Pam: Yes.

Dennis: I think, frankly, it has kind of become this checklist deal—where Dad makes the handoff, go sit down, and “Let’s get on with the marriage.” It’s more than just symbolic and a ritual.

Pam: That’s right.

Dennis: It really needs to represent a father, and for that matter the mother, blessing the union of this woman, being given to this man—and for that matter, the parents of the groom also blessing. My encouragement to any couple, who are in a serious relationship, don’t engage your parents so late in the process that you can’t hear what they say.

Pam: Yes.

Dennis: You really want to maintain a teachable spirit and make sure you truly do heed what they say and don’t rush by it. But Pam, I really like what you said, “If you have parents who may be spiritually—

Pam: —broken—sometimes, it’s just brokenness.

Dennis: Yes. You know, it’s just a tough situation. I do like your idea, though, of going to maybe some leaders in your church—mentors—people who have spiritual maturity. Don’t go select someone who will tell you what you want to hear—[Laughter]

Pam: That’s right.

Dennis: —“Oh, yes! You bet!” You know, “Have a good time.” No, this is such a serious decision. You need someone who’ll tell you what you *need* to hear.

Pam: Right. Exactly what Bob said: “If you do go ahead, these are the consequences of that choice,” when the family of origin is not so excited about this relationship so that they give you the full picture.

Bill: Well, we recently had an experience with a young man, who was wondering, “Is she the one?” As part of his decision-making process, we encouraged: “You probably should go spend a weekend in her hometown so you can interact with her parents, and get a read on how the family operates, and how they’re feeling about this relationship.” He did, and he discovered that her family did not want her with him. It was an eye-opening experience for him. He began this whole process of, “Do I *really* want to force this?”

Dennis: Yes.

Bill: He started to do a different type of evaluation and realized, “This probably isn’t going to work.”

Bob: Yes. I have a friend of mine who fell hard for a guy—young lady—fell hard for this guy. It was a whirlwind. They thought, “This thing...”—I mean, it was jet-sledding. And then she went and met the family. Just spending the weekend with the family and seeing the family dynamic caused her to go, “I’m not so sure that this is the right direction.” I do think that’s an important factor that has to be a part of your pre-marital evaluation.

Pam: Oh, exactly—and looking at both of your families of origin: “What are the strengths that we bring in? What are the weaknesses?—things that we need to replace?”—and doing an honest evaluation of that family of origin. When you do that, the most important thing is that you do look honestly at your family because every family’s imperfect. Where the rub comes, oftentimes, is when one person sees some unhealthy patterns in that family of origin but the person they’re in love with is like: “No, no, no, no, no. I don’t want to know. Don’t tell me.”—you know?

Bob: Right.

Pam: That relationship’s going to stall-out because we both have to deal with all of our stuff, honestly, and decide, “What kind of a *new* family are we going to develop?”

Bob: Yes.

Bill: I remember when Genesis 2:24 really came alive for me, where it says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” When I realized that—when that was written, it wasn’t really a physical leaving. Most people stayed around and worked with Dad. They continued to work the farm. What it really was—was an evaluation: “What are the things in my family that are worth hanging onto because I have instincts in those areas?” It was really big for me because, you know, I grew up in this home where some of the stuff I was taught was worth repeating; but a lot of what I learned at home wasn’t.

I would go to conferences and hear about family legacy, and the importance of family, and how three and four generations—it reaches deep. I had mixed reactions to that. I was like: “Well, that’s good for some stuff. I hope this other stuff doesn’t have so much horsepower behind it that I can’t undo it.”

Dennis: Right.

Bill: When I realized that it's the evaluation process of saying, "The good things in my family I'm keeping because I have instincts for those."

Pam: Keeping and honoring.

Bill: "I'm going to honor the legacy of my family by identifying the unhealthy things and replacing them with better."

Pam: Yes.

Dennis: And if you're going to leave a great legacy, really, you have to prepare. Preparing for marriage is, I think, one of the most important training projects we can ever undergo—whether it's a couple like Bob talked to, who just got engaged and were contemplating their lives together.

Frankly, a book like yours—coupled with a weekend experience like the *Weekend to Remember*—I think is really needed for couples today to really overcome some of the obstacles / some of the baggage, some of the stuff from the past of their own families of origin, maybe some of their fears—and go do the very best thing you could possibly do for your future marriage. Or, if you're already married—and maybe you'd like to make a good marriage better or take a marriage that's struggling—like Bob talked about earlier, who'd been married for five years—the *Weekend to Remember* is a great way for couples to invest in that relationship.

Bob: When I mentioned to this engaged couple that I thought they should go to a *Weekend to Remember*, they were kind of like, "You mean, before we're married, we should go?"

Dennis: Oh, that's the best investment you could make.

Bob: I explained to them that when the *Weekend to Remember* first got started, it was exclusively for engaged couples. It was only later that the married folks said, "Can we come and listen to what you're telling the pre-married folks?" And we still have breakouts for engaged couples at the *Weekend to Remember*.

You can find out more about upcoming *Weekend to Remember* events when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com. In the upper left-hand corner of the website, there's a box that says, "Go Deeper." You click on that box. There's information about the *Weekend to Remember*. There's information about Bill and Pam Farrel's book, *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*, which would be a great book for every engaged couple to go through together—to talk through the questions that Bill and Pam outline in the book.

Have I told you what Mary Ann and I are doing? We're getting together, right now, with a couple who are getting married in September. Here's what we're doing—we're going through *The Art of Marriage*® small group study with this couple. That's what we're

using for their pre-marital preparation. Mary Ann and I get together with this other couple. We get out our workbooks. We watch the video for the evening, and then we have a great conversation around what we've watched in the video. It's really going well!

It does not have to count as official marriage counseling because you may know a young couple who is already getting official marriage counseling; but you could take a young couple through this material, either as part of their pre-marital preparation or, if they've just gotten married, invite them over to the house and watch Session 1 of the small group study for *The Art of Marriage*. Take this newly-married couple through *The Art of Marriage* material.

You can find out more, again, at FamilyLifeToday.com when you click the button in the upper left-hand corner that says, "Go Deeper." I should just mention here—this week, we have a special offer for anyone who would like to take—well, if you'd like to take yourself and four other couples through *The Art of Marriage* small group material, when you buy the kit—that has the DVDs in it and has workbooks—FamilyLife is going to spring for workbooks for two of the couples you take through the material.

You buy the kit, and we'll cover the cost of workbooks for two couples. We're trying to do this just to encourage folks, during the summer, to get together with your small group and go through this material; or get a group of young couples together during the summer—go through the material with them. Find out more when you go, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button in the upper left-hand corner that says, "Go Deeper." The information about *The Art of Marriage* small group material is available there, along with Bill and Pam Farrel's book, and the information on the *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway.

Let me wrap up here with a quick word of thanks to the folks who help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*. This month, when you make a donation to support the ministry, we'd like to send you, as a thank-you gift, a set of three prayer cards designed to help you pray more effectively for the members of your family.

You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button that says, "I Care," in the upper right-hand corner. Make an online donation. We'll get those prayer cards to you. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. You can make a donation over the phone, and ask for the prayer cards when you make that donation. Or mail your request for the prayer cards, along with a donation, to *FamilyLife Today* at P O Box 7111, Little Rock, AR. The zip code is 72223.

And we hope you can join us back tomorrow as we continue to look at the subjects that ought to be explored before a young man and a young woman say, "I do." For that matter, before any man and any woman say, "I do," these are the kinds of conversations you ought to be having. I hope you can tune in tomorrow.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. 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.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you've benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](#) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2014 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com