

# FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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## Asking the Right Questions

Guests: Bill and Pam Farrel  
From the series: Before-You-Marry Questions (Day 2 of 2)  
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**Bob:** There are a lot of ways in which marriage is countercultural. Bill Farrel says marriage is also supernatural.

**Bill:** What I find in our society is—we are so focused on “me.” In a funny way: “Did you hear about the narcissist who said, ‘That’s enough about me. Let’s talk about you. So, what do *you* think about me?’”

**Bob:** Right.

**Bill:** So much of that goes on; and yet, we know that marriage is really a selfless pursuit. Jesus said: “If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, you need to be the servant of all.” Well that’s a fun message preach—when you actually live it out and you actually are serving another person—it requires you to be selfless.

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today* for Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup>. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. The time to cultivate the right perspective on marriage is not after you’ve said, “I do”; it’s before. We’re going to talk about the importance of premarital preparation today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking this week about the importance of premarital preparation. Our host is somebody who was engaged 56 days before he got married. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Just thought we ought to blow those credits! [Laughter]

**Bob:** I’m just trying to explain to our listeners—

**Dennis:** Hey! I just did a crash course! [Laughter] Think of all the training we have to get before we’re trusted to drive a car.

**Bill:** Yes.

**Dennis:** How much training do you have to get to get married?

**Bill:** All you have to do is have a heartbeat!

**Dennis:** And have some blood.

**Bob:** Wasn't it about seven or eight weeks from the time you said, "Will you?"—

**Dennis:** Six weeks.

**Bob:** —until the time you said, "I do"?

**Dennis:** Yes. And it took me about 20 years to get out of the doghouse with Barbara's mom. She loves me now.

**Bob:** She has come around?

**Dennis:** She has come around. We have a couple joining us today. Bill and Pam Farrel, welcome back to the broadcast.

**Pam:** Thank you.

**Bill:** Thank you. We were 13 weeks—so you have us beat.

**Bob:** Oh, so you—

**Pam:** We believe in short engagements. We believe in longer dating—and really, a whole calendar year—getting to know somebody, and their family, and everything about their life—but once you feel called, then, "Let's—

**Bob:** —"Go for it!"

**Pam:** --"go for it!" Yes—just go!

**Dennis:** Bill and Pam are prolific writers. They've written a book called *Men are Like Waffles, Women are Like Spaghetti*. Okay, now, just—

**Bob:** No, no, no. We can't unpack all of that right here. If you can't figure that out on your own—

**Pam:** It is our best-seller, yes.

**Dennis:** Do men waffle? Are you saying that?

**Bill:** The short version is—men think in little boxes—one thing in each box / one thing at a time. We just separate it all out—do one thing at a time.

**Pam:** Compartmentalize.

**Dennis:** And the women?

**Pam:** Our minds are wired like spaghetti—we integrate everything. So, it looks like one noodle laying on a plate of spaghetti. If you follow that noodle around that plate, it touches *every other* noodle on the plate. That's the way our life is wired.

**Dennis:** Yes, I get it.

**Bill:** Because guys get food.

**Dennis:** Another book—and I'm not going to go all the way through these: *Red Hot Monogamy*, *The Marriage Code*, *The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*, *The 10 Best Decisions Every Parent Can Make*—and that's not all they've written, by the way. But their most recent is *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*.

I'm going to ask both of you to do something that's not fair.

**Bill:** Okay.

**Pam:** Okay.

**Dennis:** Here you have a book that is really very, very practical—very helpful for an engaged couple—that's almost 230 pages long.

**Pam:** Actually, even just dating—the earlier the better—you can get that book in their hand—it's going to help.

**Dennis:** Yes, that's a good idea. I want you both to pick one of the questions in here that you would want to make sure a couple dealt with before they tied the knot. Who wants to go first?

**Pam:** I'll go first because I believe this *so much*; that is, “How far am I willing to go in my sexual relationship before a commitment?” We live in a world with lots and lots of broken hearts, and people cohabiting—it's on the increase. In 1960, it was about 400,000 people. Now, it's like seven-something million. The hard part is—I just see a wake of broken hearts.

The average couple that cohabitates—48 percent of the women have experienced some kind of violence. The ones that make it to marriage—which isn't very many—because three out of four that are cohabiting rate their relationship as “on the rocks”—in serious trouble. So, most people who live together don't even make it to the altar. And then the ones who make it to the altar are twice as likely to divorce.

So my heartbeat is: “Make some good choices,”—like: “Talk about it. Don't just let your emotions, and your testosterone, and your hormones drive you into a decision that may have long-term consequences.” We wrote a book called *Red Hot Monogamy*. The book

is all about intimacy behind bedroom doors. The big question is: “Do you want a red-hot monogamy for a lifetime?” Then, make good choices now; and make choices to protect your hearts now.

**Bill:** I appreciate Pam bringing that up because most people I meet don’t respect the *power* of the sexual side of our lives. Most people treat it like it’s just an expendable commodity—that it is not that important: “It doesn’t really matter. So, engage in it all you want.” When, in reality, it’s one of the most powerful forces for drawing a couple together.

The picture that’s always in my mind—I had opportunity to go over to Germany. I was sitting at a table, just like this, with a family that we were staying with. I noticed, when we went into the house, that there was a MINI Cooper sitting in the driveway. I said to the dad: “Hey, I noticed there’s a MINI Cooper in the driveway. We’re not far from the Autobahn; when are we going out?” His 18-year-old son said, “I’ll take you out after dinner.” As we were walking out the door, he said something to his son I’ve never said to any of my sons. He said, “Son, no going over 130 miles an hour.”

**Bob:** Wow.

**Bill:** So we got out on the Autobahn. We’re trailing along at 130, and we were passed by two Porsches that acted like we were standing still.

**Bob:** Wow.

**Bill:** And ten minutes later, we passed one of those Porsches again that was in a big fiery heap on the side of the road. And it hit me—the driver didn’t respect the power of what he was driving. That’s what too many people do with the sexual side of their lives. They don’t respect the power, and so they use it up rather than learning how it operates best.

**Pam:** Yes, like in the Bible—a lot of times people will say, “What’s the best decision that we can make?” And then [they] read a little section, that’s not even a paragraph, that simply says, “This is God’s will, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality,” and then the paragraph goes on—*why* God would say something like that—to protect you. They’re like, “Isn’t there something else?” But that’s the *core* of who we are. So, you really want to protect the *core* of who we are. When you protect, then you get the kind of relationship that you want.

For example, our oldest—we always did relationship contracts with our kids when they grew up. In their youth group, we had them; and with Student Venture, we used them. Our whole community became familiar with making some choices and writing it down: “How far should we go before we say ‘I do’?”

When Brock and Hannah started dating, it was kind of a unique situation because Brock had just gotten a scholarship to Liberty University to be a quarterback. I did a book

signing in Phoenix, Arizona—and I was sharing some stories out of *The 10 Best Decisions Every Parent Can Make* book that had to do with Brock and the choices that he made to stand alone for his faith. The bookstore owner said, “Where did you say Brock was in college?” I’m like, “Liberty.” She’s like, “My Hannah’s at Liberty!” We exchanged pictures and phone numbers of the kids.

I got this phone call from Brock, a little while later, and said, “Hey, Mom, do you remember Hannah?” I said, “Yes, did you ever introduce yourself?” He said, “Yes, we’ve been dating.” I said, “Really?—how long?” He said, “Six weeks.” I’m like, “Why didn’t you tell me?!” He said, “Because I knew you would say, ‘See, you should listen to your mother!’”

**Dennis:** Matchmaker, matchmaker.

**Pam:** That’s right. The kids dated for about 18 months, and then they took a week apart to pray and ask to see if they were God’s will for each other. At the end of that week—unbeknownst to Hannah / she went back to Virginia—Brock had a ring designed in Los Angeles and flown to the football office. Then he stopped to ask for her hand in marriage in Phoenix—where her parents owned that Christian book store.

Then he went back to Liberty and was sitting in a football meeting. The secretary called and said, “The Eagle has landed!” He picked up the ring, picked up Hannah, and took her to the place where they had first met on campus—handed her a nail. Then he took her to the place that they had—

**Bob:** Wait, wait, wait—handed her a nail?

**Pam:** Yes.

**Bill:** It’s a guy-thing.

**Bob:** Okay.

**Pam:** And he took her to the place that they had said good night on the park bench every night outside the dorms, and handed her another nail. Then he took her to the chapel at Liberty, where they prayed together, and handed her a piece of board. Then he took her off campus where she shared a home with her friends, and handed her the other piece of board. Then he took those nails and those boards and he hammered them together into the form of a cross.

He hammered the cross into the ground, and he got down on one knee. He said: “Hannah, I want our relationship to start and stay at the foot of the cross. Hannah, I love you. Hannah, will you marry me? Hannah, will you kiss me for the first time?” To which, Hannah replied, “Yes; yes!” There is just something precious—Bill got to do the wedding ceremony—and to hear the daughter-in-law, that you have prayed for since before she was even born, hold your son’s hand and say in her personal vows: “Brock, you’re such

a man of integrity. You can be my Knight of the Year every night of the year.” One of the awards he had won was called Knight of the Year.

They’ve been married almost nine years. For an anniversary present—she put—for their 84-month anniversary, she wrote down 84 reasons she’s glad she married Brock Farrel. They were taped all over the house when we walked in. That’s why you make those choices—so you can have a *long-lasting* happy love.

**Dennis:** There are those who are listening to that story and they can’t identify with that at all because they’ve lived—they’ve gone a different route—they may be cohabiting. What I’d say is: “Whether you’re cohabiting and thinking about getting married or just cohabiting and marriage is not on the radar, I would invite you to come to a *Weekend to Remember*®.”

**Pam:** That’s right; that’s right.

**Dennis:** “Come and join us for the *Weekend to Remember* and go through the conference. Hear about the blueprints for how you turn a relationship into a marriage—into a covenant-keeping relationship for a lifetime—without being scolded or beat up.” They’re going to be encouraged, I think.

I have to turn to you, Bill, and ask you what your question is that you’d want to ask a couple and interact with them about before they got married.

**Bill:** My question would be—I’d look them both in the eyes and say, “Are you willing to share common struggles with the person you’re thinking about getting married to?” We are all used to carrying our own personal struggles. As men, we struggle with issues of our ego and a strong desire to be successful, and we’re always wrestling with lust. I would say to the woman, who’s getting ready to marry this young man, “Are you willing to make those struggles *your* struggles so he can be open about these and he can talk honestly with you?”

And to the men, I would say: “You’re getting ready to marry a young lady who is going to have issues with PMS. She’s going to have a different emotional approach to life than you are; and she’s going to feel emotionally deeper than you, probably. Are you willing to make those *your* struggles?”

“And both of you probably have triggers from the past. There are probably some experiences you’ve been through that were unpleasant. Depending upon the kind of family you grew up in, you may have minor issues or you may have major issues. Are you willing to make the struggles of the other person *your* struggles?”

**Pam:** That’s really important when you think about how much hurt and pain there is in the world—how much imperfection there is in the world. When you come from homes of origin that are imperfect, there is going to be hurt and pain. Are you *willing* to walk that person through their pain on to healing and victory? A lot of people have been abused.

If that person has been molested or raped, there are going to be issues. Are you willing to *walk through* and help that person? Are you willing to handle even the idiosyncrasies?

We had only one premarital counseling session. That is one of the reasons we wanted to write *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions* because we think there might have been a few other questions that should have been covered. The one question that was asked was, “Okay, what’s one thing about him that irritates you?” I am like: “Oh, I can’t think of anything. He’s so wonderful!”—it’s like idealistic. He’s like, “There has to be something.” I said: “Well, actually, he’s like usually 10 or 15 minutes late everywhere he goes because he loves people. He doesn’t look at his watch.” The pastor wisely said, “So, if he never changes, are you willing to live with that?” I’m like, “Yes, I can live with that.”

And then Bill was asked the same thing, “What’s something about her that irritates you?”

**Bill:** The thing that occurred to me, at that time: “She’s so spontaneous that it’s hard to figure out what she’s going to do next. So it’s hard to plan around her.” He asked me the same question: “If that never changes, are you okay with that?” It’s easy, at that point, to go, “Oh, of course.”

**Dennis:** Reading between the lines—because she’s spontaneous and you’re late—you’re going to be really late. [Laughter]

**Bill:** Fortunately, personal growth is possible!

**Pam:** That’s right.

**Bill:** What I find in our society is—we’re so focused on “me.” In a funny way: “Did you hear about the narcissist who said, ‘That’s enough about me. Let’s talk about you. So, what do *you* think about me?’”

**Bob:** Right.

**Bill:** So much of that goes on; and yet, we know marriage is really a selfless pursuit—when Jesus said, “If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, you need to be the servant of all.” Well, that’s a fun message to preach—when you actually live it out and you actually are serving another person—it actually is difficult on you because it’s service to another person. You really are carrying someone else’s burdens. It requires you to be selfless.

The reason I chose that question is—if I look at our marriage together—the times in our marriage when I’ve been *really* satisfied being married to Pam are times when I’ve said, “I’m willing to let her struggles be my struggles, and I’m in this with her.” The times when I’ve not enjoyed our relationship is when I’ve expected her to be different, and I’ve

expected her to be better at those struggles and to have more victory in her life in those areas than what she was currently experiencing. I can trace my own happiness, if you will, in marriage, back to *my* answer to that question. When the answer's been, "Yes," it's been good.

**Dennis:** What you're talking about is anchored in the Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 13:7 it says, "Love bears all things."

**Bill:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It's a load-bearing bridge between two people. I think it's really good—what you just said—about it's okay that she's different. It's sad that there are struggles and that there is baggage from the past, but you're not going to reject the person because of the baggage.

**Bill:** That's good; right.

**Dennis:** You say: "Your baggage is my baggage, and I'm carrying it. I'm going to help you carry it for the rest of our lives." You wish you could promise couples, who are starting out, that that baggage would go away after a few years, and love would just conquer all, and that everything would be okay. I think there are some bags you end up carrying for a lifetime.

**Bill:** All I can say to that is—I've watched my boys play sports their whole life. The people that they're closest to in life are the ones they've struggled with the most. So, the ones that they've conquered obstacles with—the ones they were together when they overcame difficulties, whether it was in practice or in a game setting—they consider them their best friends. The people they went Christmas shopping with—they don't talk about much. I think marriage is the same way. The people that you struggle with and the people that you overcome with tend to be your most valuable relationships.

**Bob:** So the couple that's listening right now, and probably not listening, as a couple—he's in his car / she's in her car—but they're thinking, "This might be the one." Maybe they're engaged; and they're reconsidering that question, "How can I be sure this is the one?" Is there a way that somebody, ahead of time, can know: "This is the person for me"? How do you get that determination?

**Bill:** I'm not sure you can get the kind of finality you're asking—like: "Absolutely, definitely, this is the one,"—but there is a way to have high confidence because there are really two lists everybody ought to be working with.

There's a subjective list because all of us are attracted to: a certain type of body type, a certain type of personality, a certain type of cultural leanings.

**Bob:** Right.



**Bill:** And we ought to be attracted to those things. So, the subjective list—

**Bob:** Some compatibility on that stuff; right?

**Pam:** Chemistry.

**Bill:** And then there's an objective list: "Does this person have a commitment to building character in their life—that 5, 10, 15 years from now, when life has gotten bigger—that this person can keep up with the demands of life? Is this person committed to learning how to communicate with somebody they don't necessarily understand? Is this person committed to walking with Jesus, in the reality of their life, so Jesus can speak into their heart and give them direction along the way?"

**Pam:** "Is this person healthy in the way that they manage conflict?"—like, Bill and I wrote out a conflict covenant—even when we were dating. In it—it had things like: "When we are angry, we're not going to use words—like swear at each other. We're not going to use domestic violence. I promise I'm not going to run over you with the car! We're going to hold hands, when we're in conflict, so I don't throw things!"

"How are they managing conflict?" because the couples that make it are the couples that choose a healthy way to manage their conflicts.

**Dennis:** I'm glad you mentioned that because there are a lot of couples who underestimate that the home they came from and how they solved conflict—swept under the rug / not dealt with—like they're going to move into a marriage relationship and know how to do it. That's not going to happen.

Frankly, we spend really a couple of hours, at the *Weekend to Remember*, equipping couples, practically, in terms of how to admit you've hurt someone, how to ask for forgiveness, how to grant forgiveness, how to ultimately reconcile and begin to rebuild trust. As human beings, we're going to betray each other in this most intimate of relationships. But that would be one of the most important questions I'd want to ask.

**Bill:** What you just described—we can *guarantee* is going to happen. People are asking, "Can you make any guarantees in life?" Well, we can guarantee you are going to be in conflict with the person you marry because you both have vibrant lives, you both have convictions, you both have opinions—they are going to collide.

**Bob:** And you're both sinners. Let's throw that in, too.

**Pam:** So, imperfect.

**Bill:** And I tell people, all the time: "Perfection is not a great goal because, if you did become perfect, we would crucify you. So, it's not really the goal of life. Growth and intimacy are the goals." Of course, you're going to face conflict. The good news is conflict resolution is a skill—so it can be learned.

**Dennis:** It can be learned.

**Bill:** It can be learned.

**Dennis:** Ultimately, marriage is a covenant between three—

**Pam:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —a man, a woman, and their God. It's a spiritual decision—is what Bob was talking about here—but it doesn't stop there. I think a good marriage demands good preparation. What you guys have done, in putting together this book of questions that really peels the onion and gets to some pretty gritty stuff, I think can do wonders for a couple as they date—as they're contemplating the question: "Is he the right one? / Is she the right one?" And begin to grapple with these questions, in advance, and learn to see if you can laugh with one another,—

**Pam:** Exactly.

**Dennis:** --forgive one another, and love one another for a lifetime.

Bill and Pam, I appreciate you guys being on the broadcast. Thanks for the work on this book. It's going to help a lot of folks.

**Bill:** Thank you.

**Pam:** Hey, thanks for the premarital that you gave us—it's working 34 years, now. I appreciate it.

**Dennis:** I think Bill owes me on that—

**Pam:** At least a dinner; huh?

**Dennis:** --on that marriage preparation.

**Bob:** But the cool thing is—now, you guys have turned around and you're helping other young couples with the book that you've written called *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out how you can order a copy of the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the title of the book is *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*. You can order, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-"F" as in family, "L" as in life, and then, the word, "TODAY."

This is also the last opportunity I have to mention to you the special offer that's being made this week on *The Art of Marriage*® small group material, which is another way you can help young couples or couples your age. You get the kit for *The Art of Marriage*

small group material. It has the DVDs in it / it has workbooks in it. FamilyLife, this week, has a special offer where—if you will get the kit, with the DVDs and the workbooks, we'll spring for two sets of workbooks for the couples who will be joining your group; alright?

Let's say there are going to be a minimum of five couples joining you. You cover the cost for the DVDs and the workbooks for three of the couples—yourself and two others. We'll cover the cost of the workbooks for two other couples; okay? All you have to do is go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper left-hand corner that says, "Go Deeper." You'll find the information there about *The Art of Marriage* small group kit.

This is something you could do over the summer. It's a great get-together. You get together six times with a group of friends and go through this material together. Maybe you have a small group from church that wants to use this material, or maybe you just want to gather together a group of four or five young couples and take them through this material and help coach them—help mentor them on what marriage is all about.

The DVDs make it simple. The workbook is pretty self-explanatory. You don't have to be a genius to make this thing work; and you don't have to have a perfect marriage, either. All you have to do is have a desire to help others—and maybe get a little help for yourself—and you can go through this material. The reason I mention it is because the special offer ends this week. So, again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click in the upper left-hand corner, where it says, "Go Deeper." The information about *The Art of Marriage* small group special offer is available there, along with Bill and Pam Farrel's' book, *The Before-You-Marry Book of Questions*. You can also call if you have any questions: 1-800-FL-TODAY is our number.

As we wrap things up this week, a special shout out to those of you who are faithful friends of *FamilyLife Today*. We appreciate you listening regularly and very much appreciate those of you who have been able to help with financial support for this ministry. We are listener-supported. Your financial support makes these daily radio programs possible. It covers the cost of producing and syndicating this program on radio stations, via the worldwide web, through our mobile apps, through all of the ways that folks are connecting with *FamilyLife Today*. We couldn't do it without friends, like you, who donate from time to time. If you can help with a donation today, we'd like to say, "Thank you," by sending you a set of three prayer cards designed to help you pray more effectively for one another, as husband and wife, and pray together more effectively for your kids.

You can ask for the prayer cards when you make your donation, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button in the upper right-hand corner that says "I Care," and make your online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. You can make a donation over the phone. Or you can mail a donation and request the prayer cards when you write to *FamilyLife Today*. Our Post Office Box is 7111, Little Rock, Arkansas—Arkansas is AR; and the zip code is 72223.

Now, we hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family can worship together this weekend, and I hope you can join us back on Monday. We're going to talk to a mom who has learned how to find God in the middle of the ordinary moments of everyday life. You'll meet Gloria Furman on Monday. Hope you can tune in for our conversation together.

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. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas.  
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