



FRIEND WITH BENEFITS

Part 2 of Real Marriage

Pastor Mark Driscoll | January 22, 2012

MARTIN LUTHER AND KATHARINA VON BORA

Well, it was Easter morning, and you would've thought that the twelve nuns would be preparing for Easter services; instead, they were climbing into twelve fish barrels, trying to get smuggled out of their convent. So, this entire scheme was devised by a man named Martin Luther, the great German Protestant reformer.

He lived from 1483 to 1546, and he is one of the most prolific and influential men, outside of the Bible, in the history of the world. The story is that he was walking along, nearly struck by lightning, and he took it as a revelation from God that God was displeased with him. And so he then committed his life to going into ministry as a monk.

He took a vow of celibacy and poverty. He was a brilliant legal mind. And he drove himself almost mad studying the Bible over and over and over, looking at all of God's commands and decrees, and realizing how woefully short he, in fact, fell. Now, this led to severe depression, him spending hours in the confessional with a priest, actually harming his own body, trying to pay penance and to pay God back to atone for his sin, by his own suffering.

And then Martin Luther had the most amazing moment. He was studying the Bible, and he went to places like Habakkuk, which is quoted in Romans and also in Galatians, where it says that the righteous shall live by faith. And it dawned on him—it's like the Holy Spirit dropped on him, and he realized, "I'm not saved by my works and what I do. I'm saved by Jesus and faith in his works, his sinless life, his substitutionary death, his bodily resurrection."

And that was, in some regards, the real beginning of what we now call the Protestant Reformation. And he took his convictions and nailed them to a door in a place called Wittenberg, and it was the 95 Theses, as they are called, and it was kind of like a bulletin board or a Facebook wall today. It's where you would post something that you wanted others to discuss. And that led to this massive alteration in how Christians were viewing the salvation that God gives, and this is all in the context of a time in history with Johannes Gutenberg and the printing press, and Copernicus, and Galileo. It's this season of massive, global change, and Martin Luther is on the forefront of that, spiritually.

And one of the things that he concludes is that marriage is a good thing, and children are a blessing. And in that time, the basic teaching of the Catholic church was primarily that the best life of all was the life of a monk or a nun, to be celibate, and to give oneself to poverty, and to live in simplicity, and that marriage and children, well, those were sort of base instincts and for those who couldn't withhold their passions and were, to some degree, spiritually less mature. Maybe they needed to choose that course, but the holiest people of all would be chaste virgins for their lives, living in poverty, devoted only to God.

And Martin Luther decided that's not true, and he started reading the Bible, and he decided, "I'm going to quit being a monk. I'm going to go enjoy my life." And he wrote a little tract called *On Monastic Vows*, and in it he renounced his vows, and he encouraged other monks and nuns to renounce their vows, and for a priest to leave the priesthood, and for nuns to leave the convent.

Well, this tract found its way into one particular convent, where there were a dozen nuns, most of them young, and they got their hands on this little tract from Martin Luther, and they started reading, "It's a good thing to get married. It's a good thing to make babies." And they decided, "It's a good thing for us." So, they wrote a letter to the great Martin Luther, basically asking, "Please break us out of the convent," which was illegal.

And then Martin Luther devised this scheme where a man who was supposed to be delivering food into the nuns on Easter, brought with him twelve empty barrels and snuggled—and snuggled—wrong word. [*Congregation laughing*] This is not a Mormon story with polygamy. [*Congregation laughing*] He didn't snuggle twelve women. He smuggled twelve women out of the convent. (Don't worry, the Holy Spirit will show up eventually, and it'll get better.) He smuggled twelve nuns out of the convent.

Now, many of them went back to their families. The other women were quickly, generally speaking, married off, with one exception. There was one woman that no one would marry. Her name was Katharina von Bora, and she, at one point, actually was engaged to a man that Martin Luther had connected her with, and he, at the last minute, backed out. The reasons we find, historically, are many. She was unattractive and unpleasant. Those would be the two primary reasons.

Martin Luther said she was stubborn, and she had pride. Let's just say she was a colt that was hard to get a saddle on. That was Katharina von Bora. And so she was finally brash and bold enough that she actually approached the great Martin Luther, and she told him, "You know, my mom died when I was about six. I went into the convent when I was around nine or ten. I became a nun when I was sixteen. Now, as an adult woman, I have read your biblical teaching. I've renounced my life as a nun. I have fled from the convent, and you owe me a husband; and if you don't find me a husband, since you're single, you're going to be my husband." That's pretty bold for a gal in any age, but especially, especially in that day.

Martin Luther said, quote, "Good Lord, they will never thrust a wife on me." He did not want to marry. He was forty years old and a virgin—the original forty-year-old virgin, the great Martin Luther. No one would marry Katharina. And he was not attracted to her or interested in her, but on June 13, 1525, he basically asked her—I think, in part, so she would leave him alone, "Will you marry me?" She said yes. They were married that day, quick.

His friends wept bitterly. [*Congregation laughing*] Some of you go, "This is sounding very familiar." When they came to the great Martin Luther and asked him, "Why did you marry her?" he said, quote, "To spite the devil," which is the least romantic reason given in the history of the world, why one man would marry one woman. It's theologically correct, but no woman wants to hear that.

And then she got pregnant, and this was quite a scandal, because there was a bit of an old wives' tale and folklore in Germany that the Antichrist would come from union between a rebellious nun and a renegade monk. So she got pregnant, and everybody was thinking, "Here comes the bride of Chucky. This is going to be the end of the world." She did give birth, and they ended up going on to have six children—three boys, three girls—and their thirteen-year-old daughter tragically died, and they write of this as a devastating season for them.

They were very socially awkward, because they'd not been around members of the opposite sex, since, well, for her, since she was a little girl. So, the stories are told that she would be sitting with him, as a married couple, and not have any idea how to talk to a man, so she would just throw stuff out like, "Who's the King of Prussia?" Just trying—and he would be like, "What is this weird woman, addicted to *Jeopardy*, who I am married to?" She would just throw out these random statements. And they were very socially awkward.

And when she moved into their home, it was a complete bachelor pad. It was an old monastery, and guys were coming and going, and she'd have up to one hundred people over for dinner a night, because the Reformation was sort of exploding out of their home. And he was such a nasty guy. He really was a bachelor. He slept in straw, but hadn't changed it for years. Yeah, nasty. And so she cleaned up his house, threw out a bunch of stuff—I'm assuming burned the rest—and she turned it into a lovely home, and then she planted a garden, because he had a horrible diet, destroyed his digestive tract. He had legendary flatulence. Actually, there are many stories in the Reformation just connected to that particular fact, that I would share with you, but we won't. And she was a bit of a naturopath, so she started growing vegetables and helping him to heal physically.

And do you know what happened, over time? They really built an amazing friendship. And you don't get this from reading the theology of Martin Luther. He's usually just railing against the pope, which is fun, but— [*Congregation laughing*] But when you read their letters—and I think there's a few dozen remaining letters that we have between them—the tone, over the years, gets really affectionate and sweet.

There are occasions, too, where she saved his life. She had a dream that he was going out to preach, and men were lying in wait to murder him, and so she told him, "Honey, I don't think you should go," and he didn't go, because he trusted the Holy Spirit in his wife. And he got a letter, saying, "It's a good thing you didn't come. It was all true. You would've been killed."

She became a great confidante and ally. As he's writing letters, and books, and treatises, oftentimes, she was literally just sitting at his side as his friend. And so she's included in some of his correspondences to others, you know, "Katharina's here. She says hi." They were friends. In the letters, he calls her "Lord Katie," "dear rib," "the empress," "my true love," "my sweetheart," "gracious lady," "wise woman," "doctor," "your grace," "holy lady," "dear wife," and "a gift of God." He's got nicknames for her. I call Grace, "Beauty." That's what I've called her for years. He had a lot of nicknames for his lovely wife.

And what I love about her, as well, is she had a really strong sense of humor, irony, and sarcasm, which was necessary for a big personality like Martin Luther. So, once in a while, he would start to pick at her a little bit, and she would just look at him and say, "Obviously, you didn't pray about that sermon you're about to preach," and she would really sort of hold her ground.

And there was one occasion, where he would get very melancholy, very depressed. He would go into serious bouts with depression, and she knew how to snap him out of it. One occasion, the story is told that he was away and returning home, and she dressed in all black like a mourning widow, and opened the door, and he was sort of shocked. And she was standing there, and he asked her, "Who died?" And she said, "Well, if the great Martin Luther is this depressed, I just assumed that God has died." She had a flare for the dramatic and the comedic.

And what happened to Martin Luther is that what started out as, "We're not really friends. We don't really like each other. I'm not really interested in her, but I kind of need to marry her, because I did jailbreak her out of a convent," turned out to be one of the most glorious marriages, outside of the Bible, in the history of the world. I would go so far as to say that their marriage is the most important marriage, the most influential marriage in the history of the world, outside of the Bible, because now the view of Christian maturity was a husband and wife loving one another, and they had a friendship in a day when marriage was primarily functional.

And as I've read and studied Martin Luther on this issue, and as Grace and I were working on this book together, she was reading the biographies of Katharina von Bora, and I was reading the biographies of Martin Luther, and we were studying together and sharing notes. But one of the things that we noticed is that through the course of their life together, his thinking about marriage and his teaching on marriage changed. It went from, "Well, it just exists to keep us from carnal passions and to give us legitimate offspring," to it really being about friendship. And the laws were changed, and the view

of marriage was changed, and life, as we know it, regarding a healthy biblical view of Christian marriage can, in large part, be attributed to the Lutherans.

And here is a statement that he gives a little later in his life about his wife: "There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage." What he's talking about is friendship. This sermon is titled, "Friend with Benefits." Unlike the culture, we don't have friends with benefits—one friend, married friend, with non-medical or dental benefits. That's what we're talking about.

MARRIAGE IS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

And when it comes to marriages, Grace and I were working on this book and we sort of hit an idea that has been revolutionary for our marriage. As we've shared it, it's really, I think, been an encouragement to others, and so we're really excited to share it with you. Marriage is about friendship. It's about a lot of things, but it's about friendship.

And as we were studying for this series, and campaign, and book, we read all or part of 187 books on marriage; most of them Christian. Not one had a chapter or a significant portion of a chapter dedicated to friendship. It's as if all the Christians went to the Bible and looked at all the verses on marriage, which is wonderful, but then skipped all the verses on friendship, in places like Proverbs, as if friendship and marriage were in altogether different categories and unrelated.

I started studying it historically. I couldn't find a major theological work written on friendship of any kind, all the way back to the 1100s, when a monk wrote a commentary on Cicero's work on friendship. Going back, there's only been one theologian in the history of the church who's done any really robust work on friendship. That was Augustine in his *Confessions*, in about the fifth century.

And so we started talking about it. We've come to the conclusion that friendship is incredibly important for our marriage and yours. John Gottman, a sociologist and researcher, who, with more than 90 percent success rate, can predict divorce, says that men and women want the exact same thing. Men and women are very different, but there's one thing that they hold in common, and that is by 70 percent, the most important thing to men and women is that their spouse be their nearest and dearest friend.

It is possible to have a great theology of marriage and not a friendship. It's possible to know all the verses on headship, and submission, and roles, and gender, and not have a friendship. We want you to believe all that the Bible has to say about marriage, and in your marriage, we want you to be friends.

This starts when you're single: only dating someone who's friends with Jesus, and then becoming friends with them, and building that relationship on those two friendships.

Augustine defines friendship in this way in his book, *Confessions*:

It is to make conversation, to share a joke, to perform mutual acts of kindness, to read together well-written books [what else would you expect from a theologian], to share in trifling and in serious matters, to disagree, though without animosity, just as a person debates with himself. And in the very rarity of disagreement, to find the salt of normal harmony, to teach each other something, or to learn from one another, to long with impatience for those absent, to welcome them with gladness on their arrival.

Let me talk to you about friendship. God is one God, three persons. We call it the Trinity. Another way to look at it is that God is a friend and has friends. God himself is a friend and has friends, and God makes us in his image and likeness for friendship with him and with one another.

That's why, in Genesis 2:18, before sin even enters the world, God declares one thing to not be good. God says to the man, "It is not good for a man to be alone." Because the man has God above him and creation beneath him, but he doesn't have a partner, a friend alongside of him to journey through life with. And so God's answer is a wife. And so the first friendship, the first human friendship in the history of the world was between a husband and a wife.

Picking this up in the Song of Solomon 5:16, the wife says it this way. She gives this amazing definition of friendship. She says, "This is my lover, and this is my friend." I can't think of a more beautiful definition of marriage: lover and friend. Or to use our language: friend with benefits. For the woman, she sees her husband as her lover and friend.

How's your friendship, if you're married or engaged? On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself as a friend? How would you rate your friendship? What can happen is sometimes those who have good intentions will go to the Bible and make a list of all the things he's supposed to do, and a list of all the things she's supposed to do, and you try to do everything on the list. But here's the truth. If you're not friends, it's very sad. It may be "biblical," but it's not reflective of the loving friendship that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have with one another.

We want you to work on your friendship, by the grace of God, first with Jesus and then with one another, and we want you to start to hear, when the Bible talks about love, that another way to look at that is friendship. So, the classic line that most Christians are aware of, "Husbands—!" what—"your wives as Christ loves the church"? "Love." And we can hear certain verses and certain words so often that, all of a sudden, we don't really hear them anymore. And that word could be translated in this way: "Husbands, be friends with your wives, like Christ is a good friend to the church." Sounds different, doesn't it?

Men, let me submit to you this is how your wife hears the word "love." In the context of marriage, she hears it as "near and dear friend." And friends, this is why also emotional adultery is so treasonous and treacherous. Do you know what emotional adultery is? A close friendship with someone of the opposite sex. Your nearest and dearest friend, your first human friend, your closest friend, your best friend is supposed to be your spouse. God said

it's not good to be alone, and his answer was marriage.

Now, what happens in our day? Friendship is a completely overused word. You go to Facebook, you've got a lot of friends. No, you don't. They don't all get a kazoo and show up at your birthday party, and, you know, know all the intimate details of your life. We use the word in a way that is too cavalier.

Let's look at the life of Jesus. In John 15, Jesus calls his disciples his friends. Jesus says that he lays down his life for his friends. So, to some regard, anyone who's received Jesus as God and Lord is a friend of Jesus. But if we look at Jesus' earthly life, the truth is he only had really three near and dear friends: Peter, James, and John. They're there at the Mount of Transfiguration. They're there at the Garden of Gethsemane. They're there for the most intimate moments of Jesus' life. They have privileged access to him.

And so we can learn from the life of Jesus that we should be friendly toward all and friends with a few, because a friendship is expensive. It takes money, time, energy, emotion. You can't have tons of friends. Some of you are very extroverted, or you're in helping professions like counselors, or teachers, or pastors, and you might think, "I have a lot of friends." No, you don't. You have a lot of relationships, but not all those relationships are friendships.

A friendship is a specific kind of relationship. You can only have a few friends. Jesus had three. Your first friend has to be your spouse, and maybe then a few people, whom your spouse agrees, are holy and helpful, and you can be in community as friends with them.

And some of you would say, "That's what I want. I want a friendship." But let me say this. People can walk into the church and judge everyone: "They're not very friendly." Walk into Community Group, "not very friendly." Walk through life, "People aren't very friendly. I don't have any friends." Here's the key to having friends: being friendly.

I've got a verse. I don't write the mail. I just deliver it. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly." I've never seen a friendly person lonely. I've seen a bitter person lonely. I've seen a judgmental, self-righteous person lonely. I've never seen a friendly person lonely. If you want to have friends, learn to be friendly. If you don't feel that your spouse is a good friend, don't use this as an opportunity to point out their failures, but ask them and God, "How could I be a better friend?" and see if they don't respond in kind by being a friend to you.

F-R-I-E-N-D-S

I'll spend the rest of our time talking about friendship. Hugely important. And in our day, where we talk about community, and isolation, and connectivity, what we're really talking about is friendship. So, I've got an acronym for you (FRIENDS).

FRUITFUL

We'll start with fruitful, that your marital friendship is to be fruitful. God says it this way to our first parents in Genesis 1:28: "God said to them, 'Be—' What? You know this was coming— "fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion.'" God looks at the couple. He says, "Be fruitful."

So, the marriage relationship, like everything else, exists to the glory of God. So, the primary function of the marriage is not your glory or their glory, but his glory in both of you. And the marriage exists to have fruitful multiplication. This can include having children or adopting children. This includes culture making. This includes living lives together that are fruitful. They are effective, that they produce God-glorifying results, that the world is a better place, and that people are better loved because of your God-glorifying friendship.

See, God wants you to open your home. God wants you to do ministry. God wants you to have children. God wants you to raise those children to glorify him. God wants you to lead a Community Group. God wants you to counsel others, singles and couples. God wants you to learn from the sins you've committed and the sins that have been committed against you, so that you can be fruitful in bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear in the lives of others. God wants you to be fruitful. And marriages that exist for the glory of God are the happiest of all. Marriages that exist solely for their own pleasure are the most miserable of all.

RECIPROCAL

Number two, it's to be reciprocal; meaning, you both need to work on your friendship. If you have a marriage in which one person is unfriendly, and the other person is unfriendly, do you know what you get? Conflict and coldness. If you have one person that is unfriendly and one person that is friendly, you get selfishness and sadness. If you have two people who are friendly, you get love and laughter.

And some of you may say, "Well, my spouse is not very friendly." Go first. Go first. Be a good friend and see if, in the grace of God, they don't become a better friend. It has to be reciprocal, though. You need to both be devoted to working on your friendship.

Oftentimes, even when we're having struggles in our relationship, we get all of our friends involved. So, we'll call them, e-mail them, text them, invite them in, want them to take our side, or maybe even seek counsel, but at the end of the day, are you talking to your spouse? Are you working on your friendship? Are you drawing one another out? Are you building that nearest, dearest friendship first that God gave? It has to be reciprocal.

I dare you to answer this question for your spouse. "How good of a friend have I been?" I dare you to ask them this dangerous question. "On a scale of one to ten, ten being I'm the best friend ever, one being your life is very hard, how good of a friend have I been?"

You can get overwhelmed when it comes to marriage. Where do we start? Communication, family of origins, abuse issue, budgeting, scheduling? Do

we work on our theology? Where do we start? Here's where you start: friendship. And everything else will work itself out in time, by the grace of God, if the two of you together are reciprocating intentional effort to build your friendship.

Now, what I often hear from couples is, "Well, but the problem is we've fallen out of love." People don't fall out of love. They may fall out of repentance, but they don't fall out of love. And people will say things like that because they want to abdicate themselves of their responsibility to love their spouse. "Oh, well, if you're not feeling loving, what can you do?" It's another way of saying God's a liar, because God says we can even love our enemies. And the love that we have for our enemies is not a love that resides in us, but a love that resides in God and comes to us and through us. And even when we're not feeling particularly friendly toward our spouse, we could still love them with the love that God gives.

I'll give you a few reasons. Well, I'll start in Proverbs 4:23. Some of you will say things like, "I just want to follow my heart." Don't. Guard your heart. Proverbs 4:23, "Guard your heart." Your heart isn't always right. Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart can be deceptive, and deceitful, and wicked. Sometimes you don't need to follow your heart. You need to guard your heart.

Some of you will say, "Well, I just don't have love for them. We've fallen out of love." First John 4 says repeatedly, quote, "God is love." You know what that means? Love doesn't begin with us. It begins with him. Love doesn't emanate from us. It emanates from him. The love that we can have for our spouse is a divine love. It's a supernatural love. It's a grace-oriented love from God, because, though sinners, God loves us. And even if our spouse is in sin, or we're in sin, God has love for them through us, and God has love for us through them, and it's the love of God through us.

See, Christians, we have access to the source of true love, the love of God. That's why, in addition, Galatians 5:22 says that the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit is what? Love. So, God the Holy Spirit has love for God the Son and God the Father. They are friends. And as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of the believer, he brings with him the love of God, so that we can be friends with God, and we can love and build a friendship with our spouse. It's a miracle, and it's something that God makes available to all Christians.

That's why in Matthew 5:43-47, again, Jesus says you can even love your enemies. Now, let me say this. Your spouse is not your enemy. Your enemy is your enemy, and your spouse is supposed to be your ally in the war against your enemy. Never think that your spouse is your enemy. Your spouse is your friend and your ally in your war against your enemy.

Do not, do not, do not say you've fallen out of love. Do not, do not, do not say, "I'm unwilling to work on my friendship." Instead, say, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, through the love that God gives me, I commit myself to being your friend," and see what God does in their heart.

INTIMATE

"I," it's intimate. It's intimate. It's intimacy. Intimacy literally means, "into-me-see." It's knowing one another. It says that of our first parents, that Adam was with his wife, Eve, and he, quote, "knew her." It's intimacy.

And I'll explain this. When it comes to marriages, as Grace and I have been studying this and talking about this—and let me say this. We're really excited about this. This has transformed our marriage. We call each other "friend." "Hey, friend." We're silly. I won't use the voices. It's cute, at least to some, but, like, it's playful, and it's fun, and we're friends.

And friendship is so important, because one old proverb says it well: "Friendship doubles the joy and cuts the grief in half." That's what it does to life. It doubles the joy, and it cuts the grief in half. It doesn't matter what you're going through, it's better if you're with your friend. And so it's supposed to be intimate.

So, there are three kinds of marriages: back to back, shoulder to shoulder, face to face. And what's true of marriage is true for all friendships, so this is a principle that applies more broadly. But for the specific application of marriage, back-to-back marriages are really where they're adversaries and enemies. They have turned their backs on one another. They're bitter, they're hostile, they're not loving, they're not working on the friendship. It's in a bad place. How many of you are there? The bitterness seeps out. The anger seeps out. The disgust seeps out. It's back to back. You're not friends. Maybe for some years, you could fake it. Any more, everybody sees it. It's obvious.

Most marriages are shoulder to shoulder. You're basically coworkers. And I think what happens is you start off as friends, and then you become coworkers. "Okay, we've got to finish college, or pay off our student debts, or buy our first home, or what about the career?" Or, "Oh, my gosh, now we're pregnant. Oh, my golly, what are we going to do now? We've got a bunch of kids. Our parents are sick. How are we going to pay the bills? I lost my job. We've got to start something else." You're working on life. "We've got to go to Little League. We've got to go to soccer practice. We're so busy. We hardly know each other. What are we doing?" It's shoulder to shoulder. Work, work, work, work, work, like business partners. Let me submit to you that a lot of marriage is shoulder-to-shoulder work, but if that's all you've got, it will not last, and it will not be a friendship. It's going to be lonely, strangers.

So, we want you to have a marriage that's face to face. This is actually looking one another in the eye, putting down your phone, turning off the TV, being alone together. This is date night, and evenings together, and holidays, and vacations, and sacred moments that God gives throughout the course of the day, like even a minute or two to just look at one another in the eye, and see love, and connect, and be face to face.

And face to face is the language of the Bible for friendship. I'll give you a few examples. In Genesis 32:30, we read, "So Jacob called the name of the place," where God met with him, "Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face.'"

Exodus 33:11, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." That's the Bible's language for friendship, face to

face.

Judges 6:22, “And Gideon said, ‘Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.’” That’s Jesus. It’s not an angel of the Lord, it’s the angel or messenger of the Lord.

And I love how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 13:12. He says, “Now we see like through a dim fogged mirror,” or it’s like looking through a dim fogged window, “but the day will come when we’ll see Jesus face to face.” It’s the language of friendship.

Now, let me say this. As you work on your friendship, you need to know that men and women generally build their friendships differently. Men, true or false? We build our friendships shoulder to shoulder. That’s how guys do it. True or false? True, right? I’ve never seen guys who were, like, “We need more quality time. I feel like we never talk. I think we should just, you know, we should go out for coffee a couple hours. You look at me, I look at you, and we get to the feelings.” If one guy does that, there’s an unwritten guy rule that the other guy has to kill him and hide his body. We don’t do that, okay? Guys tend to build their friendships shoulder to shoulder.

So if you ladies ask your husband, “Tell me about your friends,” they’ll be like, “Well, growing up as a kid, I played sports with those guys, and then I went to school with those guys, and I worked at the job with those guys, and I served in the military with those guys.” “Oh, so you guys were always doing something?” “Yeah.” Because that’s how guys build their friendship. They’ve got to shoot something. They’ve got to play a sport. They’ve got to be turning a wrench. They’ve got to be doing something.

Now, women are different. They build their relationships face to face. In observing Grace with her friends, which is fascinating to me, it’s like this cross-cultural experience. She’ll be like, “I need girl time.” “What is this?” “Well, we’re going to all go out.” “What are you going to do?” “We’re going to talk.” “For how long is that going to go?” “It’s going to be a long time.” “What are you going to talk about?” “We don’t know.” “Is this punishment for something horrendous that was done?” “No, we need to talk.” “Oh, okay. All right.”

My guys have never said that to me. We never talk. We never sit in a circle, and look at one another in the eye, and get to the heart. No, but we will watch a cage fight, standing shoulder to shoulder, eating chicken wings. And at the end, we feel like, “That was quality time.” True or false? It’s totally true.

So, ladies, if you want to get closer to your man, your husband, figure out what shoulder to shoulder looks like for him. And, men, if you want to be a better friend with your wife, you’ve got to grow in face to face. You’ve got to learn how to ask questions, how not to always try and fix her problems, how to love her, how to let her get emotional, to turn off the phone, to not turn on the TV, to be present for a long period of time, and ask good, heartfelt questions, and build a friendship. Ladies, do you want that? Yeah.

I was reading a book on friendship, and it says there are actually three levels of communication. There’s—make sure I get this right—facts, opinions, and feelings. Most of our conversations are facts. “It’s cold out, today.” “Yes.” Right? “This stinks. Do you want to smell it?” “Yes, it does stink. That is a fact.” I still don’t know why people do that. It’s just facts, right? “Oh, the sports teams in our town are horrible.” “Yes, they are.” Fact.

Now, what happens then is as a relationship moves deeper into the face to face, you start giving your opinions. Okay? So, it’s now your opinion about politics, or your opinion about theology, or your opinion about issues.

And then the third level where it gets deep is your feelings, your feelings. Most of our conversations are just about facts, few of them are about opinions, rarely do we get to feelings.

So, you know, with Grace and I, something happened yesterday, and we were talking, and I just asked her, “Well, how—the fact is, what happened?” The opinion: “What’s your verdict on this?” And then the feeling: “How do you feel about that?” She opened up, and I got intimacy, “into-me-see.” “Okay, okay, I think I can pray for her here, and encourage her here, and how could I be a good friend?”

And sometimes that’s even the question. “How do you feel?” And then the other question is, “How could I be a good friend to you right now?” That’s face to face. Let me say that marriages that are face to face, they’re enduring, and they’re endearing.

ENJOYABLE

“E,” a marriage should also be enjoyable. I don’t know if you know this. It’s okay to have fun together, right? You should. It’s going to be a long time. You may as well put a few memories in there.

Ecclesiastes 9:7–9, “Go eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments always be white,” your sin’s forgiven. “Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain—” or some of your translations will say, “meaningless life that he has given you under the sun, because this is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”

Here’s what he’s saying. Life is short. The word there for “vain” or “meaningless,” it appears some thirty-eight times in the book of Ecclesiastes. In the Hebrew, it’s *hebel*. The book starts with that word, “*Hebel, hebel*,” says the teacher. Life is *hebel*.” The question is, “What is life?” I think, in this context, the word is best rendered, “fleeting.”

You wake up in the morning. You take a breath, and it’s cold out, and you see your breath, and then it’s gone. He’s saying life is like that. It moves really fast. How many of you have been married for a while, and it’s gone fast? Be like, “Man, the kids are growing up. We’re getting old. It’s moving

fast.” The holidays come, and you think, “Didn’t we just have the holidays last week?” It’s fast!

And what he’s saying is life is so fast, you just need to get dressed up, forgive one another’s sin, go out, find something to eat, find something to drink, have some fun, make some memories, laugh a little bit, blow some dough to the glory of God. It’s true, because one of the attributes of God is joy, and he wants us to enjoy marriage and life with our friend.

So, he says here, “Get dressed up, go out, eat something good, drink something good, have some fun.” Okay? So, hear me in this. If you’re going to be legalistic about anything, make it this. Right? We’re legalists about having fun. We have very strong commitments to spending money, going out, eating good, drinking good, laughing good to the glory of God. Should be enjoyable. Make memories. And here’s a key. Take photos to remember the memories. And sometimes just go back over them. “Oh, that was hilarious. That was fun. You look great. Let’s do that again, twice.” Revisit the enjoyable memories.

NEEDED

In addition, marriage is needed. Again, Genesis 2:18. Before sin even entered the world, God looked at the man and said, “It’s not good to be alone.” If you’re married, you need one another. You need one another. And to say, “No, no, no, I have a relationship with the Lord.” It’s the Lord who told you, you need each other. Some of you say, “Well, no, no, no, I don’t really need you.” You do.

And here was one of my sins—I have many, but this is one that I’m willing to share—in our marriage, and that was I gave the impression to Grace that I didn’t need her. The truth is I needed her desperately. I needed her encouragement. I needed her friendship. I needed her presence. I didn’t need her to do a whole lot for me. I just needed her to be there with me. So, she started asking me, “What can I do?” “Just be my friend. Just be there with me, be there for me, be my buddy.” And I want you to communicate to one another how and why you need each other.

DEVOTED

“D”, devoted. Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Proverbs 17:17, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Devoted. A devoted friend, particularly a devoted marriage friend, they’re there when times are good, and they could celebrate, and they’re there when times are bad, and they can comfort.

Matthew Henry, the great Puritan, he says that some friends are swallow friends. They leave when winter comes. See, when you were younger, maybe you had drinking and party buddies, but they weren’t really friends, because if something went bad, they weren’t there. Some of you have relationships with your spouse in which, unless you have cancer or are struggling, or are dying, they ignore you, because they’re only there for crisis.

A true, devoted, marital friendship is there for all seasons of life, good and bad, rejoice when it’s time to rejoice, weep when it’s time to weep, hang in there when it’s the time of adversity, whatever that means. Devoted. How’s it going? How’s your friendship?

When Grace and I were dating—I’ll tell you a story of her Uncle John. They never had children. He was married to Gladys. They’re both departed now. I’ll just say that Gladys was a very difficult woman, by all accounts, to be married to, and John was very deeply devoted to her. She got Alzheimer’s, had to be institutionalized, had no memory of him whatsoever. She had no idea who her husband of many decades was. And he rented an apartment near her, and as a very elderly man he would get up every morning, go to the Marriott, have breakfast, and then he would go visit her and take her the fruit, and he would spend hours with her every single day. He would sit with her. He would make sure she was cared for. He would visit with her. He would brush her hair. He would bring her treats and gifts, and she would just look at him and ask over and over and over, “Who are you?” And he was devoted to go visit her every day for many, many, many years. She had no idea who he was. And the night before Grace and I got married, I stayed at Uncle John’s house, and he told me, “I want you to be devoted to Grace. I want you to be her friend.” And I knew exactly what he meant. If she gets old, be a devoted friend. If she gets Alzheimer’s, be a devoted friend. If she gets cancer, be a devoted friend. If life gets hard, be the one born for adversity. Devoted, devoted.

SANCTIFYING

And lastly, “S,” it is sanctifying. Sanctifying means that marriage shows us our sin. And if we repent of it and bring Jesus into it, we become more like Jesus together. Some of you, your spouse hasn’t changed you; they’ve revealed you. You say, “I wasn’t like this until I got married.” Oh, you were. There were just no witnesses, right? Okay? And as your sin is exposed, some of you will say that, “I want to get rid of my spouse, either push them away emotionally or spiritually, or leave physically, or divorce legally.” “Why?” “Because they’re showing stuff about me that I don’t like.” Repent of it. Give it to Jesus, who died for it. Ask their forgiveness for it. Become more like Jesus.

There are occasions where the Bible does allow divorce. I believe there’s way too much divorce. And what tends to happen is people will have sin in their life, be married to someone and think, “That’s it. I’ve married the wrong person.” They never think, “I’m the wrong person.” And so then they will divorce someone and marry someone else, and the percentage of divorce in the second marriage is higher than the first, because if you’re not being sanctified, you’re just going to blow through one relationship after another. And if you’re being sanctified, you can get a new marriage with the same spouse, because you and your spouse, by the grace of God, become new people. That’s sanctification.

Gary Thomas says it this way, “What if God designed marriage to make us holy, more than to make us happy?” And I hear this from couples all the time, “Well, you know, God wants me to be happy!” You know, God wants you to be holy. You worship a guy who got betrayed, flogged, crucified, and he didn’t hang on the cross and say, “The Father wants me to be happy.” The reason Jesus died was to make us holy. The reason Jesus rose is to make us holy.

And here's the truth: holy people are happy people, and sometimes people who pursue happiness are the most miserable of all. Pursue holiness, and if God should give you happiness, praise be to God, but if God does not give you happiness, you will find happiness in the holiness.

And in your marriage, you need to know that you will expose their sin, they will expose your sin, and you both need Jesus, so that his death can be the life of your marriage and that you both can become more like him. That's our story.

Proverbs 13:20 says it this way: "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." We become like those whom we choose as our closest friends. That's why some people choose horrible people as friends. They really do want to sin with them and become like them. Your nearest and dearest friends, your confidantes and your counselors, beginning with your spouse, should be wise. So, what that means for you, you want to be a wise friend for your spouse, so that they would grow to be more like Jesus. And you should want to, in every way, see them grow to be more like Jesus.

And I just feel inclined, I don't have this in my notes, but I feel inclined of the Holy Spirit to say this. Some of you are married to people who are very difficult, and life is hard, and them being sanctified is incredibly painful, and it's arduous, and it's not easy, because they're stiff-necked, and they're hard-hearted, and they're stubborn, and they're tough. And some of you would look at God and say, "God, don't you love me?" He does, and he loves them. And he's not punished you, but he's sent you on a divine mission to serve them, to love them, to pursue them, to forgive them, to help them; not in a self-righteous, smug, holier-than-thou way, but in a humble, sacrificial, affectionate way. And as you do, by the grace of God, you will realize that they're not the only sinner in the marriage and that God is using them to sanctify you, as well.

That being said, if Grace and I could give you one big idea: friendship. How's your friendship with Jesus? How's your friendship with your spouse?

Q&A WITH GRACE

That being said, I'm excited to introduce you to my friend and answer some of your questions. Hi. You wore the boots. Those are so cute. Do you want to answer some questions?

Grace: I will.

Do you have a microphone?

Grace: I do.

Okay, good. Why don't you sit right over here, sweetie pie? Hi.

Grace: Hi, friend.

Hi, friend. You want a water over there, baby?

Grace: Okay.

I'm going to have a sip, and then we'll answer some questions. I really like the boots.

Grace: You bought them for me.

Hey, I wore boots, too. That's what friends do. All right, if it's cool with you, we're going to answer some questions that folks have got. And so we'll start right here:

"I greatly desire to be led by my husband, but often I feel like I am not easy to lead. I'm not sure if I'd want to lead me if I were a man. Grace, do you have any pointers?"

Grace: Oh, I've definitely been difficult to lead, at times, as well. I think probably a first step is repenting of that to your husband and saying, "I've been difficult to lead. What are some ways that would be helpful for me to step back a bit and be a humble learner?" And have him pray about that maybe before he speaks into that. Give him an opportunity to have a patient response. I think, for me, repentance was always the key first; and if I repented, then the Lord was able to open my heart to see new ways of responding. Usually, if you are hard to lead, it's because there's fears in there somewhere or maybe lies. So, asking the Lord to show you where your fears are, why you don't—maybe if you don't trust your husband to lead, or if you want to control a situation, asking where that fear is and asking your husband to help pray over you, through that fear. Those can be some helpful ways to kind of get into reasons why—reasons behind why you're struggling with that.

What are some of the common lies that women believe that cause this conflict? Because she sounds conflicted, like, "I want him to lead, but if he does, I'm not going to follow." I mean, she's very conflicted. Under that, there's often a lie that she's believing that's really keeping her constrained.

Grace: I think it can be from previous relationships, that sometimes we believe that if we've been hurt by previous relationships, that we believe a lie that our husband is going to do the same thing, even if he doesn't or hasn't. Sometimes we put that on him. We believe lies that maybe, "He doesn't really care, or maybe he doesn't really love me as much as he says." I know, for me, you continued to tell me you loved me, but then just because we weren't interacting well and communicating in a loving way, I really, I didn't want to believe that, and I believed the lie from the enemy, too, that you were too good for me, and because I had withheld certain sins from

you, you were going to someday find out, and you were just—you're not going to be there anyway. So, I started to believe lies and set myself up.

You're serious? You thought I'd—"He's going to leave anyways"?

Grace: Yeah, and so you start to sabotage certain things in your life, because you think, "Well, I've got to protect myself, if this happens." But those are all based on lies that had no truth to it. So, I think, yeah, I think, just, I started to actually journal out lies that I was believing, and it helped me see, okay, that's a lie, and then I would put either a Scripture or a truth. I would ask you and say, "This is a lie. What's a truth? What's a counter response to this?" And so then I started journaling those out, so that I could actually look and see, "Okay, I'm believing this lie again. What's the truth?" And for a while, I had to do that until God renewed my mind in certain areas, because I was so prone to believe certain lies. So, I think it's good to see it on paper and see that we actually are believing in certain lies.

I'm really sad you thought I would leave, right? I'm sorry.

Grace: I'm sorry.

No, it's okay. We'll answer another question before I cry. Okay. "If two people meet—"

Grace: Just being honest.

I know. That makes me so sad for you to think—I mean, but for me to think that, that you would actually just assume at some point I would leave. But if that's the kind of lie that a woman believes, I could see where that totally paralyzes her ability to trust.

"If two people meet and immediately start dating, what are your beliefs on how long it takes to build a solid friendship before moving into marriage?"

I mean, I'd want to unpack this like "immediately," like, "Oh, you ordered a cappuccino. I ordered a cappuccino. What size dress would fit?" I mean, you know—I mean, how fast are we moving here?

But part of this sometimes is the idol of dependence that I talked about. When I see people that are, like, "We love each other, we're soul mates, it's amazing, we're going to be together forever," it's like, how many times have you had this euphoric first commitment?

And if it's habitual, then what you've got is an idol of dependence. You cannot be single. You have to be in a relationship. And as soon as you meet someone, you're like, you're like a drowning victim grabbing a life ring. If that's the case, then I don't know whether or not you should be together, but you shouldn't be together for those reasons or under those circumstances.

And so I think this is where you bring in godly counsel. This is where you meet with a pastor. If you've got godly parents, you seek the consultation of your parents. If you're in a Community Group, you invite this person to your Community Group to get to know your circle of friends and to be known in your community. And you don't make those massive life decisions instantaneously and alone. Proverbs says, "In the counsel of many, there's wisdom." It's good to get a lot of counsel.

And the truth is, too, it can take a while to really get to know somebody, because people can put on their best impression for a bit. And if it is moving toward marriage, we would always encourage a strong premarital process. And I do believe, in the grace of God, that we have one of the best in the country at Mars Hill Church. It's very thorough, biblical, practical, pastoral; and even that will take some months to go through. And so, you know, that may slow it down, but it's intentionally created to not just have you get married, but be the right person, who marries the right person, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons.

"What do you do if you are not satisfied with the state of the marriage, the friendship, et cetera, but your spouse sees no problem with things as they are?"

Well, I could tell you what not to do: nag, browbeat, threaten, because that doesn't invite. But I think humbly communicating, "I love you. I need you. I need more of you. I want to be closer to you. I want our affection to grow over time. I don't want us to be, in a few years, the same place we are today. And I'm not saying that where we are is horrible, but I really do want to be closer and closer and closer to you." I think finding humble ways to articulate that need and to invite your spouse in could be helpful.

Grace: Sometimes that's a cover for not wanting to deal with conflict is to say that, "I think things are fine." I know that I would've said certain things that I thought were fine about our marriage, but I was—I didn't want to deal with certain issues, and so that was just my way of avoiding that.

It's good enough.

Grace: Mm-hm, and being, just being content, when I shouldn't have been, because there's always room for growing in joy and maturing in a marriage. And if we're not doing that, no matter how many years we've been married, that's not a good sign. So, I think

—
Yeah, and sometimes it's covering up sin. The spouse is drawing near, saying, "I want to get to know you, I want to talk," and the other person is like,

"There's stuff I don't want to talk about, I don't want you to know, I don't want you to see. It's good enough. Let's keep a little distance, because if you get too close, we're going to talk about the things that I don't want to talk about."

And so sometimes, yeah, it can be hiding of sin. And that's what you see with our first parents in the garden. As soon as sin happens, what do they do? Cover themselves and hide. And if you're saying, "How come I can't get close to you? How come you keep hiding? How come you keep covering up?" I'm not saying it's the case, but I'm saying that often it is, based upon Scripture and experience, sometimes there's sin there. There's something that they don't want you to find out.

And if that's the case, then you've got to pray for the Holy Spirit's conviction to lead them to a place of confession, saying, "Okay, here's really what I've done, or what I'm doing, and here's why you feel distant from me, because the sin has come between us." And at that point, you may have a crisis in your marriage, but the truth is you already have a crisis. You just may not know it yet, and making it known at least provides you the opportunity to, in the grace of God, through Jesus, to deal with it.

And so this is where, too, if it really is ongoing, this may be where you bring in godly counsel; not your family, but maybe a good, godly couple, or you bring in a pastor or a biblically based counselor, and you say, "You know, I'm not willing to settle for just distant parallel lives. I want us to be one, because the Bible says that we should strive to be one, and I want to be friends, because the Bible says we should be face to face and not just shoulder to shoulder." And so part of it, too, is not just making your demands to your spouse, but saying, "Man, God said some stuff in the Bible, and we want to, in the grace of God, pursue what God has for us and not settle for anything less."

We'll do another one.

"How do you work out differences in how you manage and organize your home?"

You know, the opposites always marry. Like, the night owl marries the early bird. The neatnik marries the slob. The saver marries the spender. The highly organized person marries the artist. I mean, it happens. So, thankfully, we're exactly alike. No, we're not. Maybe you could speak to this. We're different. Maybe you explain that.

Grace: I think we're still working through how to figure out differences.

Upon the resurrection of the dead, when all things are perfect, this will be nailed.

Grace: Yeah, I'm not a highly organized person, and Mark's a planner, and organized, and likes things organized, and I'm chaotic, and legalistic about weird things and not others, and so this has been a long process for us and will continue to be probably. I think just being willing to talk about it and not be serious about it so much. Just be willing to laugh at yourself about it.

Okay, then give an example.

Grace: I don't know if I can think of one.

There are a lot of them. *[Laughing]*

Grace: Like what? Be nice.

You like stacks.

Grace: No, I don't. I just don't know how to get rid of them.

Okay. *[Laughing]*

Grace: We have a lot of paperwork that comes into our house, with five kids, and mail, and everything. And I've gotten better, but, yeah, I didn't see it as a problem at all before. Now I see it as a problem, but I don't know how to resolve it, as well as I could.

That's progress.

Grace: So, I'm asking people to help me with systems, which was humbling, because people kept telling me I was organized, and I'm really not. And so just first recognizing that it was an issue was a big, long process. I'm sorry.

Did I used to freak out about it, mess, disorganization, stacks?

Grace: Yeah.

And how would I freak out?

Grace: Just by freaking out and saying, "Get rid of those stacks. I'm sick of the stacks." *[Laughing]*

Encouraging things like, "How come we can't sit at our table?" It was just covered in things.

Grace: It wasn't that bad. *[Laughing]* Before kids maybe—oh, you mean the—oh, the—okay, I know what table you mean.

Let's just say, right now, I could call, and they could send us a photo of the table that we can't sit at.

Grace: We have a bigger table that's always clear.

I know. I just keep buying tables. That's what I, like— So, there you go. Buy more tables. That's the answer to the question.

Grace: Okay, so seeing the problem, being reminded of the problem, yeah, and I think laughing about it, having a sense of humor, but being willing to change. And I think, for me, I have several friends that are highly organized, and so I need to be—

I couldn't live like that, though. I mean, if I had to live with a librarian, you know, and everything was—

Grace: No, no, no, but they can show me systems and ways of— and so I have, even with the, like, with the lockers, with the kids' stuff, just buying used lockers that I keep all their coats and shoes in now, instead of all over the house. And so it's just a matter of figuring out systems that work for us and—

And part of it is, in the marriage, just figuring out, is this something that is really a big deal, or is this one of those things I need to let go? Because if you can let it go, let it go. If it's not a sin, it's just how God wired your spouse, you know, let it go. But if it's something that needs to get worked on, then, yeah, work on it together. Don't just stand back and shame the other person, as I've done for decades. But at the same time—

Grace: And consider seasons of life.

Yeah, if you've got little kids or something's going on, yeah. But I would say this. I still don't like all the stacks, but I can honestly say I'd rather have you and your stacks than anybody else and no stacks.

Grace: Thank you.

And so it's worth it to have the stacks.

Grace: Thank you.

Yeah. But if you did pick up the stacks, I would be fine with that.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.