

## Building a Great Marriage

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

If you have a Bible, you can open to Ephesians 5. We'll spend the majority of the time there. The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, dealt with marriage. Then, he moved into child-parent relationships and parent-child relationships. Then, he moved from there into master-servant or, as we would understand, employer-employee relationships. But before he dealt with any relationships, both here in Ephesians 5 and in Colossians 3, directly preceding the instruction on relationships, we're told to seek God's will for our lives, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to have a personal growing relationship with the Lord, and to always have a thankful heart continually before God. Then, he moves from that into relationships. In other words, if you want your horizontal relationships to flourish—marriage, business, friendship, and family—your vertical relationship needs to flourish first.

There was a gentleman in the church who, well, he was honestly one of the kindest, most generous, thoughtful people I think I've ever met. I mean, soft-spoken, and was the real deal. There was nothing fake about him. I came to know him and his wife quite closely and spent a lot of time with him. He and his wife have been in heaven for many years. I knew his kids as well. I was talking to the kids and the wife one day. I said, "What was he like before he got saved?" They said, "Pastor, you don't want to know." I said, "What? Tell me." They said, "We were all terrified of him. He was violent, he had a short fuse, and he was extremely selfish. You never knew what was going to set him off. We just walked on eggshells around the house, and the slightest thing would set him off. He would hit us, kick us, scream at us, berate us, and belittle us. We literally lived in fear every day of him." In fact, he told me one day, "Pastor, my own family doesn't know this, but I had a guy do me wrong in a business deal one time. I hired a hitman to kill him. I'm there meeting with a guy." I think he was going to pay him \$10,000 to kill this other man. He said, "I didn't pay the guy. I didn't go through with it. The only reason is because I figured it would be traced back to me, and I didn't want to go to prison. I cared nothing for that man. I cared nothing for his family. I was filled with bitterness and hatred. I had no compunction about having him killed." Then, he gets saved and becomes a completely different man. He got this one sorted out, and it influenced all of these other relationships here. It's amazing what can happen when you have a flourishing, growing relationship with the Lord. In Ephesians 5:21 NKJV, it says this,

<sup>21</sup> Submitting to one another in the fear of God.

The Message Bible says,

<sup>21</sup> Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.

Listen, in all relationships, all relationships, there is a horizontal, but there is a vertical as well that comes into play. If you're struggling in any relationships at all, your answer is going to be found this way. Now, God will give you wisdom on what to do this way, but you need to look at the vertical first. So let's talk about marriage. We're going to begin by looking at the wife's role biblically. Verses 22–24 NKJV say,

## Building a Great Marriage

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Now, Scripture says that when a couple marries, the two become one. The problem is that some for the rest of their lives fight over which one. Which one is going to get their way? Which one is going to dominate? Which one is going to give in? But that, my friend, is not the ideal. You don't want to be like the woman who promised to make this guy a good wife, but after they got married, she figured it would be easier to make him into a better husband. No, the truth is, the only one we can change is ourselves by the help of the Holy Spirit. Now, as we look at this, where it says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands," within the framework of that word submit, in the Greek language, it carries the idea of adaptation. In fact, the Amplified Bible says, "Be submissive and adapt yourselves to your own husbands," not to somebody else's husband. Don't always be looking, "Well, if my husband was like him..." You keep looking over the fence and think the grass is greener over there. If you hop the fence, you're liable to find out that it's all artificial turf on the other side of the fence, or it's been spray-painted green. Some of you ought to be more thankful for what you have. You don't realize how blessed you are.

So, don't make the mistake of comparing your spouse to someone else. Adapt yourselves to him. In other words, discover his uniqueness and his giftings and encourage him in those things. You have a key in your hand that no one else has, to be his greatest encourager and his greatest cheerleader. The truth is, wives, you can put your husband in chains or you can give him wings. Those things that God has wired him up to do and the gifts that he has, you can encourage him in those things. Now, the Scripture declares in 1 Peter 3:7 that the husband and wife are joint heirs together of the grace of life. Joint heirs together. But as all things in the kingdom, there is a God-appointed order in the home. Hence, we come to this word submission. I want to read a verse to you because it says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands as the church submits to Christ." Listen to this. First Corinthians 11:3 AMPC.

<sup>3</sup> But I want you to know and realize that Christ is the Head of every man, the head of a woman is her husband, and the Head of Christ is God.

So, we have the head of Christ is God. The head of the husband is Christ. The head of the wife is the husband. The head of Christ is God. My friend, Jesus, and God the Father are absolute equals. He sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus said, "The Father and I are one. If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." There is an absolute equality there. In God's eyes, the husband and wife, there is an equality. It doesn't have to do with superiority and inferiority. Biblical submission only works when a couple realizes that they are equals before God. The word submit is a military term. It means "to set yourself in rank under." Again, not about superiority or inferiority. It doesn't rob the wife of her voice, her opinion, or her influence. Now, are there any guys here married to a strong-willed wife? Come on, lift your hand. Some wives are going, "Do not raise your hand." Yeah. My wife is at the head of the line for strong-willed women. She is, and I appreciate that about her. That's the way that God has wired her. But amazingly, in 43 years of marriage, we have never disagreed. Yeah. No, we seriously butt heads sometimes over things. There is some stuff, to tell the truth, it's not that critical. I may see it differently, but I'll just go, "Babe, just do whatever you want. This is not a hill I want to die on. It's just not that big a deal." But there are some things that I won't budge on.

I remember when we first got married. She was working at a hospital in San Bernardino. I was an assistant pastor in a church, and she was going out one night to a mall in San Bernardino by

## Building a Great Marriage

herself. I stood in front of the front door. I said, "You're not going." She said, "Get out of my way." I said, "You're not going. No." There had been some rapes in the parking lot. I said, "No, absolutely not." She was so frustrated, but then she realized that I was doing it for her welfare and that I had her interest at heart. So, there are some things that I'm just going to say no to, and I'm not going to budge about it. And she knows. Maybe I've got a look in my eye, or whatever it is. So, we'll discuss things. She says, "Will you pray about it?" And I will. Then, if I come back and say, "Babe, I prayed about it. I just still don't see it that way. No." She'll yield out of reverence for Christ, because it's the biblical thing to do. She doesn't throw out an anchor of moodiness and say, "Okay, I'm going to submit, but you're going to pay. You're going to suffer." You see, submission is not just doing the things you agree with. There is no such thing as submission until your will gets crossed. That's worth thinking about.

But I will say this. It's not just open-ended. She needs to yield—"Be submissive to your husband in all things"—unless it causes you to sin or violates your conscience. It's submission as to Christ. Christ is not going to ask me to do something sinful. So I say to my wife, "We're going to go rob this bank. You need to submit." No, she doesn't. Or I say, "You need to sign this tax return. It's fraudulent, but you need to sign it. I need your signature on there." She doesn't have to do that. I can't compel her to do something sinful or to violate her conscience. Paul wrote in two different chapters in Corinthians. He said, "I've lived in all good conscience before God and before man." In other words, "I haven't violated my conscience. Not this way and not that way. Not vertically or horizontally." He went on to teach the Corinthians that conscience is a sacred thing. When you violate your conscience, it is sin. So, let's say I say to her—her folks are in heaven. My folks are in heaven. But let's say her folks are still alive and I'm hacked off at her family for whatever reason. I say, "Okay, you can never contact your family again. I'm not talking to them anymore. I don't want you to call them. I don't want you to see them." She's not going to submit to that. She would say, "My conscience won't allow me to do that. I'm supposed to honor my family, and that wouldn't honor them if I can't talk to them."

So there are limits to this. You can't make your wife do something sinful or something that violates her conscience. Now, the wife always does have a higher court of appeal to turn to, heaven and prayer. Prayer changes things. It even changes men's minds. Listen, what I'm talking about has no similarity to the "I'm the emperor" syndrome that some guys have. "You just need to do what I say, regardless. I am the boss and the emperor in the home." No, that is forced subjugation; that is not biblical submission. Biblical submission is a voluntary submission among equals done out of reverence for Christ and reverence for the husband in the order that God has established. I remember when I was a young Christian, I was hanging out at some friend's house, and the next door lady came over. Now, I had met the next door neighbor and his wife. They are Christians, and he was an elder in his Pentecostal church. She came over late one night. Listen, it was a seedy area of town that they lived in. It's not a place where a woman would want to be out by herself after dark.

It's late at night, and she comes over. She's at the door crying. She says, "Can I come in? I don't have anywhere to go." My friend's wife says, "Yeah, come in. What's going on?" She says, "My husband kicked me out." She took her in the other room. She says, "Why?" She said, "Because I wouldn't submit." The wife had the conversation with her, but I kind of got the gist of it. It was some line she wasn't willing to cross in the bedroom because of conscience. He said, "You submit to me or get out." He kicked her out on the street. That is so far from the biblical standard. Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church, which is what we actually come to now, the man's responsibility. We can't take the principle of submission out of its setting. It can't be divorced from the husband's role because guys, frankly, if we don't do our part, the whole thing falls apart. Ephesians 5:25–30 NKJV,

## Building a Great Marriage

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. <sup>30</sup> For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

Guys, we are told to love our wives like Christ loved the church. There are a number of different Greek words for love. It's the word eros. It's "erotic love, sexual love." There's the word phileo, it means "brotherly love." Philadelphia comes from the word phileo, the city of brotherly love. There's another word, storge. It's "familial love." It's "the love of blood, the love that family members have for one another." But then there's this word that the apostle Paul uses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it is agape. It is a "self-sacrificial love." It's the kind of love that Jesus loves the Church with. This word, agape, is not based on feelings. It's based more on the decisions we make. It literally is saying, "Husbands, you need to continually decide to put your wife first. You need to continually decide to sacrifice in order to put your wife first and what will benefit her first." Jesus didn't say, "Well, when people change, I'll give My life for them." He gave His life for us when we were in our worst state. For a husband to say, "Well, I'll put her first and love her when she changes or when she meets me halfway," that's not loving your wife like Christ loved the Church. You need to love her sacrificially and put her interests before your own. That's the kind of love we're to love our wives with.

Guys, here's the truth. When we obey God's Word, grace and power are released. Grace and God's power will be released into your marriages, not the words you know or you can recite; it's the words you do. It's the word that we obey. If we will do what the Scriptures tell us to do, God's grace will come on the scene and help us. Now, interesting analogy he uses, that the husband is a type of Christ and the wife is a type of the Church. Just like the Church submits to Christ, so the wife is to submit to the husband. Well, Christ is perfect, isn't He? He is perfect in all of His dealings with us, but as the Church, we are quite imperfect. We are imperfect in our response to Him, which tells me, just by way of the metaphor he uses, that the greater responsibility lays upon us men than on the women for our marriages and our families being stable and being good. Listen, I know any one person can torpedo a marriage. If somebody chooses to, they can wreck a relationship, husband or wife. But generally speaking, the husband carries the greater responsibility for the success of the marriage relationship and to see that it flourishes and goes forward. Christ is perfect. The Church is imperfect.

So, why do I want to submit to Christ? Why? As a member of the church—and honestly, I long to hear His next instructions for me. "God, speak to me through Your Word. Show me what to do. I want to submit." Why is that? Well, He always has time for me. He never says, "I'm too busy." He has always been kind to me, even when I haven't deserved it. He is always honest. He doesn't throw my past failures in my face. I've been saved for almost 50 years. The Lord has never said to me one time, "You always do this." He never said that once. He never reminded me of my past failings. He is forgiving. He provides security, protection, and unconditional love. And come what may, I always know He has my best interest at heart. When a husband loves his wife like that, and she has a genuine relationship with the Lord, submission really is not an issue at all. Then he says, "Just like Christ washes the Church, washes His bride with the Word, husbands need to do that as well." It's interesting because the word that he uses there is a Greek word, rhema, and it means "the spoken Word." It specifically means "the Word when

## Building a Great Marriage

it's spoken." So, Jesus washes His bride, gets rid of the spots and the wrinkles, and sows into her life by speaking words to her. The words we speak are so important.

In the book of James, it says, "The power of cursing and blessing are in our words." I still remember 57 years ago, I was 13. I'm with my mom, my dad, and my little sister. She's nine, and we're in a restaurant. It was one of these restaurants that had picnic tables. I think the only thing they served was beans and steaks. We're there, and at the table next to us, there are two couples. I remember it like it was yesterday. This guy is berating his wife. I remember looking at him and looking at her, and she's absolutely withering under his verbal assault. As a 13-year-old, I thought, "Somebody needs to go hit that guy in the side of the head. Does he not see what he is doing? He is crushing this woman's soul." I can still tell you, 57 years ago, I can still tell you what they looked like. It broke my heart to see her wilt under the bitter, angry words that he was speaking. But here it says we need to wash our wives with the water of the Word. I like that verse. Ephesians 5:26 from the Message Bible, speaking about Jesus, says,

<sup>26</sup> His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her.

I thought a lot about this. What kind of words does the Lord speak about His bride, the Church? What kind of words does He speak before the Father? What does He say before the angels? What does He say to us? What does He say before the enemy? So, I actually went through the New Testament, and I looked at every single reference of something that Jesus said about His bride and to His bride. These are just a few of them. You'll get an idea. In Matthew 16:18, He said, "I will build My Church." In Acts 9:4, He said, "Saul, why do you persecute Me?" He took it personally when someone was attacking His bride. In Acts 20:28, He bought her with His own blood. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, He sanctified her and called her to holiness. In 1 Corinthians 11:22, He warned against despising the Church. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, He gave her gifts. In 1 Corinthians 14:4–5, He speaks of His desire to edify her. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, He speaks of His desire to strengthen her. In Ephesians 3:10, He displays His wisdom through her. First Timothy 3:5, or excuse me, in Ephesians 3:21, He displays His glory through her.

In 1 Timothy 3:5, He only wants qualified people taking care of her because she is so valuable. In 1 Timothy 3:15, she is the pillar and the foundation of the truth. In 1 Timothy 5:17, those who direct the affairs of His Church should get double pay because of her value. In Hebrews 12:23, its members' names are written in heaven. In 1 Corinthians 12:22, every member is necessary. In 1 Corinthians 12:24, God has composed her and given honor to her. In Colossians 3:15, we should be thankful to be a part of her. Then, if you look at the Song of Solomon, written by Solomon, it is a love story between him and his Shunammite bride. Yet, some people take it as a metaphor or an analogy of Christ and His love for the Church. If we take it that way, listen to what the Lord says about His bride. Song of Solomon 1:15, she is fair. In Song of Solomon 2:2, she is like a lily among the thorns. In Song of Solomon 2:4, his banner over her is love. In Song of Solomon 2:14, she is lovely and sweet. In Song of Solomon 4:7, she is beautiful from head to toe, beautiful beyond compare, and absolutely flawless. In Song of Solomon 6:8, there is no one like her on earth, never has been, and never will be; a woman beyond compare. So ladies, listen to me. Just from a gentleman's point of view, I want to tell you something. You're intriguing. You're fascinating. You're mysterious. You're unfathomable to us. You're hard not to look at. You're magnetic. You're motivating. You have influence. You're wondrous. You're attractive. You're appealing. You're capable. You're significant. You're persuasive. You're engaging. Sometimes, you're quite frightening. You're adorable. You're captivating. You have influence. You're amazing. You're enchanting. You're remarkable. You're extraordinary. You're puzzling. You're habit-forming. You have influence. You're astonishing. You're beautiful. You're

## Building a Great Marriage

mind-blowing. You're unique. You are baffling. You are spell-bounding. You are the highest pinnacle of God's creation. You are the highest form of His genius of design, and we think you're valuable. We think you are precious. We come to the next verse, Ephesians 5:31 NKJV.

<sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

That's actually a quote from Adam in the Garden of Eden. Verse 32 NKJV,

<sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

I'm going to circle back to those verses in a minute. Verse 33 NKJV,

<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Husbands, love your wives. Wives, see that you respect your husband. Absolutely critical, and perhaps the most basic of principles for a marriage, but unfortunately, in some cases, it's the least understood. Now, we've talked a bit about husbands loving their wives like Christ loved the Church. Husbands need to be admonished and encouraged along those lines. Generally, the wives don't need too much coaching on loving their husbands, but they do when it comes to respecting their husbands. Love comes naturally to a woman. Respect comes naturally to a man. Now, in most cases, what men want most, what they need most is respect. In most cases, what women want most and what they need most is love. Now, you get what you want and what you need by giving your spouse what they want and what they need. Listen, women, the way to get your husband to express more love to you is not by loving him more. It's by respecting him more. If you want him to express love to you, you need to express respect to him. Now, that is a command to be obeyed, to love our wives and respect our husbands.

Now, the wife that says, "There is nothing that I can respect." She's probably too angry or too discouraged to think about what she can respect in him. Chances are, your man is not purposely trying to be a thorn in your side or to destroy your soul through his words. More than likely, he is fighting an unseen battle or two in his soul, and he doesn't know how he is coming across. We're living in an upside-down world. Spiritual warfare is real, my friend. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and of special target are the men in the Church. A lot of women have no idea the assault that comes against a man's soul. I remember Janet and I were fishing with some friends in Alaska many years ago. We're out on a boat, we're catching some halibut, and we're having a lot of fun. The fish are like 20–30 pounds. Then, my wife hooks this halibut, and she starts groaning and straining. She sounds like she is having a baby. And honestly, I was embarrassed. I'm thinking, "Babe, the fish are not that big." She is like, "Ughhhhh," and she is cranking this reel. I'm standing over here thinking, "Oh, this is so bad." Then, she is taking a long time. I'm just going, "Hurry up." Everybody is watching her. I'm thinking, "Oh." Then, that fish hit the surface, and it was as big as a barn door. It weighed 125 pounds. I had no idea. You have no idea what other people are fighting below the surface.

You don't know. Don't be so quick to judge them. And women, rather than criticize them, you ought to pray for them. There is a lot of pressure. I realize that women are under pressure, too. We're swimming upstream in a downstream world. But the Scripture says, "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter." The devil is after the men more than anything else, because if you take the man out, it does more damage than anything else. Do I have some men in here who

## Building a Great Marriage

will stand up for Christ and lead their families like God has called us to do, to make a decision to love with that kind of a love? It is so important. Most guys are not filled with evil intent. The fact is, they're probably just as frustrated with you as you are with them. He is made in God's image. He has God-given attributes that are worthy of respect. Try to see in him what God sees in him, and begin showing him respect.

In fact, here is just a little test if you'll do it. Sometime when your husband is not distracted—don't do this if he's watching the playoffs. Just don't. If he's watching an action movie, and right when the whole story climaxes, you watch it, you walk in and say, "Honey, there is something wrong with this sink." Not a good time. So, when he is not really distracted, and you need to pray about it. Think about it ahead of time so you're ready. Just come up to him and say, "Hey, Babe, I've been thinking about you a lot. There are some things that I really respect about you." Then say, "I have to go take care of some things." Turn around and slowly start to walk out of the room. See what he does. "Like, what things? What? What do you mean?" You just watch and see. Most of us are starved for respect and to be honored. In fact, just another little thing that might help you. We looked at those verses about washing the wife with the Word. And guys, we do need a lot of encouragement in that area. But ladies, you need to understand too that you didn't marry your girlfriend. He is not supposed to chatter away with you like your best girlfriend does. We're not wired up that way, generally speaking. There are always exceptions to the rule.

If you go back to the Garden of Eden, the first thing that God gave Adam was a task. "Guard the garden and work in it." Nobody else was there, except in the cool of the day when God would walk with Adam. Adam could talk with God. But if he had a challenge, he'd just have to internalize it. Work out a solution inside and then implement. That's what he did. So, he has a challenge. He just works it out. If God is there, he can talk with God. Otherwise, he just has to sort it out and implement what he's done. Then, God takes one of Adam's ribs, forms Eve, and brings her to Adam. The first thing God gives to the man is a task. The first thing He gives to the woman is a relationship. So, when a woman faces a challenge, the first thing she wants to do is talk. I'm a little bit embarrassed to tell you this, but it took me 20 years to figure out that when my wife would make statements, it wasn't, most of the time, because she had reached a conclusion. She was working her way towards a conclusion. I'd be thinking, and I'd kind of get mad sometimes. "Like, what?"

For me and most men, we don't want to say anything until we have it worked out in here. We've thought it through, we've reached a conclusion internally, and then, we're going to say something. So, ladies, you need to give and take a little. Guys, we need to give and take a little. Guys, we need to get better at communicating. Women, you need to understand that this has to do with the way God has wired us up. Don't expect us to be like your girlfriends. That's just not going to happen. In fact, sometimes you get the wife, she has this thing and wants to talk. So, she starts talking about this problem, and the guy, generally, just listens long enough to get enough information. "Okay, that's enough to solve it." Then, she's still talking. We've left the conversation. We're in here and we're sorting out. "Okay, if she does this and if she does that," we don't hear a thing. "Okay, here Babe, this is what you need to do." Then you tell her, and she keeps talking. It's like, "What?" Maybe we think, "Well, maybe something is wrong?" So I'm back inside again. "Maybe I left something out?"

It really has to do with all the way back to the way that God made men and the way He made women. Now, we both need to get better at understanding one another. Women need to get better at respecting the men. Men need to get better at loving our wives. Part of that has to do with communication and speaking the right kind of words to them. It is just so important. Oh,

## Building a Great Marriage

and by the way, if you do that little test, “So I’ve been thinking about you and there are some things I really respect,” you’d better be prepared. Don’t go do that if you haven’t thought it through first. Even if it’s like, “Okay, I love the way that you put our daughter to bed, read her a story, and you pray with her.” Or “You keep my car clean.” Or whatever it is, “The way you take care of the yard.” Or “The fact that you’re honest,” whatever those things are. Maybe you’re going to have to dig a bit to find something, but find it and accentuate it. I just want to circle back on those two verses, 31–32. I’m going to close with these. Quoting Adam in the Garden of Eden, verses 31–32 of Ephesians 5,

<sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Amazing. He quotes Adam. God, in the very beginning, before things ever went wrong, before sin entered into the garden, God knew what was going to happen. He is already making a type in a shadow. He is making a symbol of Christ’s redemption in the very beginning. Now, He puts Adam into a deep sleep, opens up his side, takes out a rib, forms the woman, and then God brings the wife to Adam. It’s a type of Christ. As He died on the cross and His side was opened up by the Roman lance, and out of His bloody death on the cross, the Church came forth. And just like God brought Eve to Adam, Jesus said, “No one comes to Me unless the Father draws them.” The Father brings the bride to the husband, Jesus. What a thought.

Do you know, with some, the way that God has drawn you to the Son, it’s been a gentle wooing of the Holy Spirit. Just a quiet knock on the door of your heart and you’ve known that it’s God. It’s been oh so gentle and oh so subtle, but you’ve recognized it. The same word when Jesus said, “No one comes to Me except that the Father draws him,” that same word draws translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “to violently drag.” Some of you, God has brought you kicking and screaming to the cross. His dealings with you have not been subtle. It has not been gentle. God knows what we need. He knows what each of us needs. If I have a child who is about to walk off a cliff to their death, I’m going to grab them in a bear hug, and I’m going to pull them back. They might kick and scream. “I think you’re trying to control me. I don’t have to do what you say.” I love them enough to rescue them. Now, they may, because of their own stubbornness, at a later point, go back off and walk off the cliff. I can’t stop them from doing it. But listen, whether God has been gentle with you or whether He has been dragging you kicking and screaming to this moment is because He loves you. God said in the Word, “My Spirit will not strive with men always.” You ought to be so thankful that God has not left you alone. You ought to be so thankful that He has not ceased to convict you of your sin and keeps bringing the gospel up in your face. That is His love.

But the day will come if you say “No, no, no, no, no” enough, He’ll let you walk off the cliff if that’s what you choose. But you don’t have to. You can choose Jesus. Adam’s quote, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother to be joined to his wife.” That literally means he’ll stick like glue; the two become one. Jesus left His Father in heaven. He left the glory world. He came down and joined Himself to the human race so that He could win us. But it’s not settled until the bride says, “I do.” You need to say “I do” and mean it. I want to pray with you. Outside on the plaza, in here, or wherever you might be listening or watching, whatever language this might be in in your particular region of the world. I want to lead you in a prayer. No one else can say “I do” for you. I had quite a surprise. I got saved, and no one in my family was happy about it. My sister was the first one who came to Christ. I took her to the early days of Calvary Chapel to hear some of the early bands. If any of you have seen the movie Jesus Revolution, well, I took my sister there, and actually, Greg Laurie was preaching. He was just kind of a kid at

## Building a Great Marriage

the time. My sister and her friend Bobby Sue walked forward and gave their lives to Jesus. My mom came next. My dad came into the Kingdom after that. But initially, none of them were happy with my salvation experience.

God sees you. He sees your situation. He sees your family. As I was going to say, with that whole thing and my family, I was so surprised I found out later on. My dad said, "I used to go to church as a kid." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, I went to the Methodist church. Your great-grandfather was a Methodist pastor." I said, "What? You're kidding." He said, "Yeah, and his daddy was a Methodist pastor as well. Your great-great-grandfather." Then my mom pipes up and says, "Yeah, there were some Methodist circuit-riding preachers on my side of the family as well." I thought, "What? Why did I never hear about this? No one ever told me." But the thing was, is that relationship with God that they had, didn't automatically get transferred to their kids or their grandkids. I had to say "I do." I had to say "Yes." We each have to personally say "Yes" to the Lord. If it helps you to bow your heads and close your eyes, you can do that, but only if you want to. May I ask nobody moving around, nobody leaving, unless you have to get to an assigned position as serving somewhere in the church.

The wonderful news is that God sees your heart right now. He knows you, and He loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His own Son, who willingly left the Father in heaven to rescue you. Some of you have been that kid kicking and screaming, insisting that you're going to go over the cliff. Others, it's just been a gentle whisper. God is speaking the language of your heart. Right now, if you'll pray with me, I can give you words, but that's as far as I can go. They can be helpful, but to just speak words without a sincere heart tied around them will do nothing, nothing. But if you'll tie your heart around the words, and if you'll mean it and speak them to God, He'll meet you. All through the house here, outside, wherever you are, let's just talk to God right now. Just say it out loud. Say,

Oh, God, thank You for sending Jesus. Thank You for loving me so much that You would allow Your own Son to die for sins that I've committed. Jesus, thank You for taking my place. Thank You for suffering for my sins. I believe You've paid my debt in full. I believe You were raised from the dead and that You alone have the power to save. Save me, Jesus. Rescue me. Give me a new heart. I give my life to You, and I confess You as my Lord. It's in Your name I pray, amen. Amen.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley